

MEDIA RELEASE

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SNAICC Raises Alarm Over Narrow NT Child Protection Inquiry Scope

The NT Children and Families Minister's flagged inquiry into her child protection system has failed its first and fundamental test to keep Territory Aboriginal children safe.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry do not allow for an adequate examination of the systemic failures across the NT child protection system and the broader systems connected to this tragedy.

“The current scope provides limited opportunity to examine the broader child protection system and the interconnected issues that continue to shape poor outcomes for children and families across the Northern Territory,” Ms Liddle said.

“With such a narrow focus, it is difficult to see how the inquiry could deliver meaningful findings or recommendations capable of driving systemic reform across the department as a whole.

“Changes to the child protection system in the NT are urgently needed, with advocates, community-led organisations, multiple reports, and people with lived experience of the Territory's system calling for action and investment for decades.

“Given the overwhelming calls for a genuine inquiry into the system, these narrow Terms of Reference could reasonably be viewed as an attempt to avoid scrutiny of a failing child protection system and a government unwilling to undertake the work, reflection, and partnership necessary to ensure the wellbeing of the children in its care.

SNAICC is also deeply concerned there is no mention of, or scope within, the inquiry to investigate the leaking of private and confidential child protection information relating to Kumanjayi Little Baby, her family, or any other affected individuals.

“The leaking of this information is incredibly serious and has the potential to place families, particularly those fleeing domestic and family violence, at further risk of harm,” Ms Liddle said

“The fact that this breach occurred in the first place undermines trust in the very system designed to keep children safe.”

From the outset, the inquiry process appears fundamentally flawed. With almost 90 per cent of substantiated child protection notifications in the Northern Territory involving Aboriginal children, there has been no partnership with the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector, relevant Commissioners, or peak bodies in developing the inquiry or its scope.

“At this time, SNAICC, as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, along with the National Commissioner, The NT Children’s Commissioner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and experts, have not been consulted on the inquiry or its Terms of Reference,” Ms Liddle said.

“Neither have any of us been consulted about the proposed legislation to weaken the Child Placement Principle.

“SNAICC, and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across the country, remain ready to work with the Northern Territory Government on a serious, independent inquiry into child protection - one that is capable of delivering the reform children and families deserve.”

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