

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **New child protection legislation should be changed**

Community Legal Centres in NSW call on MPs to amend new child protection laws introduced to Parliament last week. Community Legal Centres are concerned that the child protection system will be sped up to make it easier to remove children irrespective of what's in the child's best interests.

'While we support greater emphasis on early intervention, this must be adequately resourced. Parents must have an enforceable right to services that are meaningful, available, accessible and at very low or no cost', said Anna Cody, Chair, Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCNSW)'.

Rachael Martin, Principal Solicitor, Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre said, 'Some parents need support to deal with the trauma they have experienced in their lives, before they can help support their kids. Parents need to be able to get support services that are tailored for their needs'.

'Before parents are asked to sign any agreement they must have access to free legal advice. Parents must also have the right to free legal representation in any alternative dispute resolution process. The removal of children from the care of their parents is a serious intervention. Parents must be able to provide input and fully understand what they are agreeing to', said Patrick O'Callaghan, Principal Solicitor, Western NSW Community Legal Centre.

Dr Margaret Spencer, Intellectual Disability Rights Service said, 'Parents and children with an intellectual disability will be further discriminated against by this legislation which does not make reasonable adjustments for people with an intellectual disability'.

'Carers will be assessed to be foster carers at the same time they are assessed as prospective adoptive parents – how does this encourage carers to have a genuine commitment to working towards restoration of the children to their biological parents? Non-government organisations will be able to work both with biological parents seeking restoration of their children as well as with prospective adoptive parents. These are competing interests and may not result in the best interests of the child', said Janet Loughman, Principal Solicitor, Women's Legal Services NSW.

'The Convention on the Rights of the Child states children have the right to periodic review of their placement in out-of-home-care. To remove such reviews, highlights that the government has not learnt from past mistakes', said Ms Loughman.

More information:

[http://www.clcnsw.org.au/cb\\_pages/child\\_protection.php](http://www.clcnsw.org.au/cb_pages/child_protection.php)

### **About Community Legal Centres NSW Inc.**

Community Legal Centres NSW Inc. (CLCNSW) is the peak body for community legal centres (CLCs) in NSW. It has 40 member organisations including generalist and specialist

CLCs. CLCs deliver legal services to economically and socially disadvantaged individuals and communities.

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