



**Government
of South Australia**

15 August 2014

Hon Jennifer Rankine MP
Minister for Education and Child Development
GPO Box 1563
Adelaide SA 5001

**The Council for the
Care of Children**

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Dear Minister

Re: Review and reform of South Australian government boards and committees

Thank you for your letter of 11 August 2014 requesting initial advice by 15 August 2014 regarding the review of government boards and committees.

The Council for the Care of Children considered the specific matters to be addressed in your correspondence at an annual planning session on 13 August 2014 and the Council's initial response is attached to this letter.

The Council, as the only independent statutory body with a legislative mandate to advocate for all children and young people in South Australia (SA), fulfils its advocacy, advice, monitoring and reporting role and functions to inform policy and operations expediently and efficiently in a way which represents exceptional value for money. Abolishing the Council now would create a vacuum and disrupt the Council's well-established capacity to ensure the voices of children and young people, especially those who are vulnerable, are available to inform key policy and operational matters.

The Council hears from, and advocates for, children and young people including those who are marginalised and whose views need to be sought and presented to government. The Council also provides the only independent report which considers the wellbeing, development and safety of all South Australian children and young people, the most recent edition being *A Snapshot of Young South Australians* in June 2013. The Snapshot provides concrete longitudinal measures of how children and young people are faring in SA which helps to identify and highlight key areas for priority action and the next edition will be prepared by June 2015.

Because of the way in which the Council engages with children and young people and the way it is established in legislation, it is uniquely placed to continue to advise the Government and to influence government agencies to be accountable for their interaction with, and services for, children and young people.

The Council has also determined its work plan for 2014/15, including the strategies that the Council will *lead* eg hearing from children living with disability and their families about the National Disability Insurance Scheme Trial; those that it will *contribute to* eg Family Matters, kids safe in culture not in care and *one-off content specific matters* eg the Royal Commission into the Safety of At Risk Children.

As you are aware, the Council is planned to cease operation following the appointment of the new Commissioner for Children and Young People in SA and is supportive of being replaced by a Commissioner with a broad systemic advocacy mandate. Until that time, the Council has a key role managing the transition to the Commissioner to ensure a well-informed Commissioner can hit the ground running.

The Council has a role in promoting understanding of the functions of the Commissioner, helping children and young people to gain an understanding of the role of the Commissioner in terms of championing their rights, interests, development and wellbeing and in knowing how they will be able to access the Commissioner.

One initiative that the Council would like to lead in 2014/15, in accordance with the provisions of the Child Development and Wellbeing Bill 2014 introduced into the House of Assembly in June 2014, is to engage in broad consultation with children and young people about the proposed Commissioner for Children and Young People.

The questions that children and young people, especially those who are marginalised, might be asked to consider include:

- the appointment process for the Commissioner eg should there be children and young people on the selection panel?
- how should the Commissioner engage children and young people and specifically those groups who are less able to make their views known?
- what should the Commissioner's strategy to engage children and young people look like?

The Council would like to work collaboratively with the Office for Children and Young People in the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) to engage in discussions with children and young people about the appointment and work of the Commissioner. Ms Trish Strachan, Executive Director, Office for Children and Young People who represents the Chief Executive DECD on the Council is supportive of this proposal and is keen to work with the Council to consult children and young people in the lead-up to the appointment of the Commissioner.

I would be pleased to receive your instructions about how the Council, as the Government's key advisory body in advising on the rights, interests, social inclusion, development and wellbeing of children and young people in SA, can be of assistance, should you think the proposal to consult children and young people about the Commissioner would be of value.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond in relation to the proposal regarding government boards and committees and I look forward to hearing from you about the proposal to consult with children and young people about the Commissioner.

Yours sincerely



Prof Fiona Arney
Chair
Council for the Care of Children