

AT LAST, PROTECTIONS FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN THAT WERE TAKEN AWAY IN 2016 ARE RETURNED IN 2025

Amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act) introduced into the Victorian Parliament yesterday (29/10/25) will restore key protections for children removed from the Act in 2016 by the then Government.

The amendments will:

- *provide the Children's Court with greater discretion and flexibility when making Family Reunification Orders. This will allow more time for families to access the necessary supports to achieve reunification when it is in children and young people's best interests*
- *remove adoption as a case-plan goal*
- *replace the term 'permanency' with 'stability' and provide a more holistic understanding of stability. This will make clear that stability has multiple dimensions. This includes stability in the child or young person's care, physical stability, cultural stability, and relational stability.*

For a decade now, Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV) has lamented the fact that the scope of work of the courts in preservation of families and supporting reunification was narrowed in 2016. At that time KCV questioned the purpose of the Government in doing so. In the 1980s Victorian led the world in the way that it enabled the courts to ask a wide range of questions about the circumstances leading to a child being removed from parents, including what bureaucracies had done, or not done, to prevent this. KCV wanted this scope of work restored to the courts; it appears that it has been done!

If reunification is to work, the courts, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and agencies such as KCV need to work in harmony. This has been difficult since 2016 but will be measurably more possible from this point on. Victoria can now reclaim its place amongst the regimes that are prepared to be transparent, which is about truthfulness.

To include adoption as an option when making decisions about what is best for children in out-of-home care was an assault on children's rights that KCV never thought would be legitimised as it was in 2016. The lessons of history were clear: permanently removing children from their parents should be done with extreme caution. The consequences for the children, for the greater biological family, and for the community of doing so can be dire

The focus on stability rather than permanency in the amendments is as it should be. It forces the discourse to be about stability across all forms of out-of-home care, instead of equating stability with a permanent placement. This will liberate our thinking and usher in an era of more responsive solutions about how we support all families in protection situations.

Taken together, these amendments will strengthen the relationships between the courts, the government and the agencies working to protect Victoria's children and, hopefully, will lead to innovative solutions to reunification of children.

KCV commends the Minister for Children Lizzie Blandthorn for her leadership in requesting that the amendments be enacted and for her being steadfast since she first expressed concerns about this issue in parliament in 2016. Further, KCV compliments the Minister for making herself open to hearing negative feedback about the long-term consequences of not amending the act.

We commend these amendments to the wider community and urge all parliamentarians to vote for them. This is an opportunity for parliamentarians to act as one in protecting Victoria's children.

The KCV Board celebrates its 100th meeting in a few weeks. The safe passage of these amendments would give added depth to our celebration.

Further comments:

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