



## Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc

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## NEWS RELEASE

### Aboriginal Community Leadership Reference Group advocates for a Co-commissioner for Aboriginal Children.

#### Child Protection Reform South Australia

14 October

*Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc (ALRM)* is pleased to announce the appointment of the *Aboriginal Community Leadership Reference Group (ACLRG)*. With the support of Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, Kyam Maher MLC, the ACLRG has been formed to provide crucial cultural advice regarding the Government response to the Nyland Child Protection Systems Royal Commission Report.

The ACLRG members are:

Brian Butler  
Sandy Miller  
Andrea Mason  
Melissa Clarke  
Emily Ware  
Craig Rigney  
Sharron Williams  
Shane Moher

The Ministers appointments were never to replace the wider established Community ACLRG. It was always expected by the ACLRG that the Government appointed group nominated by Minister Maher is the representative group to engage at Government level, and that the ACLRG take advice from the Community membership to inform Government. The South Australian Government, through working in partnership with the ACLRG and enacting their advice, are better placed to develop culturally inclusive practices and procedures, and embedded values which are important to Aboriginal people

#### Background

The Nyland Child Protection Systems Report, "*The life they deserve*" was released publicly on 8 August 2016. The report makes 260 recommendations to improve the policies, structure and culture of South Australia's child protections system. At a Child Protection Stakeholders forum on 10 August 2016 Premier Jay Weatherill commented,

*Government and child protection agency cannot deal with this by themselves*

*A vision to outsource lower levels notifications to community organisations as opposed to central intake service*

*Draw on strengths of Communities through community controlled organisations.*

Currently Aboriginal children make up nearly 40 percent of children in out-of-home care, and 50 percent of children in residential care.

The establishment of the ACLRG will ensure that the reforms in the Child Protection System are culturally responsive and are in the best interest of the Aboriginal child's wellbeing and safety. We are pleased with the State Government's response at establishing an Aboriginal specific reference group, recognising that the Aboriginal Community's input is invaluable to the social, emotional and cultural welfare of our children.

**Child and Young People (oversight and advocacy bodies) Bill 2016**

The ACLRG in collaboration with ALRM on 14 September 2016 provided a written submission advocating for the Bill to have provision for:

1. A Co-commissioner for Aboriginal Children.
2. Aboriginal inclusion across all roles and function of the oversight and advocacy bodies. The inclusion would look like: policies, practices and procedures to have clear values which are important to Aboriginal people at the centre, demonstrated by leadership throughout any Agency and structure and bodies relating to child protection matters.

More widely, the ACLRG and ALRM urges the Government to undertake;

3. Long-term (5-10) year planning and strategies in this area of child protection law
4. Include the South Australian Aboriginal Community in genuine and meaningful consultation during the long term planning and strategies stage in this area of child protection.
5. Make family preservation and not permanent removal (or permanency planning measures) as the primary focus of child protection:
  - a) Place the child as the central focus of all planning and strategy decisions, but also consider the preservation of Aboriginal family and communities as a high priority
  - b) Provide adequate resources and funding and provide more options for early intervention 'wrap around' services and supports for SA Aboriginal families.
6. Aboriginal Non-Government Organisations to be given adequate and respectful resources (time, space, people and funding) to enable them to carry out their work efficiently and effectively in leading family early intervention strategies and ongoing child protection services. Current competitive tendering and contract management processes with funders does not support and actually detracts from the important business of child protections services and programs. Where non-Aboriginal Non-Government organisations provide services and programs to Aboriginal children and families, that their policies and service delivery is informed by an Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Group and an accountability mechanism be adopted to ensure the policies and practice are Culturally safe and appropriate.

The Child and Young People (oversight and advocacy bodies) Bill 2016 will be before the Legislative Council on 18 October 2016.

Yours sincerely,

Signed: Melissa Clarke  
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