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Mr Jonathan Kaplan
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Dear Mr Kaplan

STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES REGULATOR

I am pleased to provide you with an update to the Statement of Expectations for the Social Services Regulator.

Since the previous Statement of Expectations in October 2024, the Victorian Government has committed to urgent reforms to strengthen child safety. The government has accepted all recommendations of the independent *Rapid Child Safety Review* (Rapid Review) released on 20 August 2025 and is working to progress national working with children check reforms as part of the Standing Council of Attorneys General. This statement should be read in concert with the October 2024 statement.

Alongside changes to national and Victorian law that came into effect on 27 February 2026, which enforced the paramountcy of the safety, rights and best interests of children in early childhood education and care, the Victorian Government's priority is ensuring all children are safe from harm, abuse and neglect where they play, learn and receive support and care. As such, following the Rapid Review, the *Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Act 2025* (Child Safety Act) brought together several child safeguarding schemes – the Child Safe Standards, the Reportable Conduct Scheme and the Working with Children Check scheme – into the Social Services Regulator. At the same time, it also enhanced the Working with Children Check, to create a flexible scheme that is responsive to risk and prioritises child safety.

With this expanded regulatory responsibility for several child safeguarding schemes, in addition to the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme, the Social Services Regulator plays a critical role in safeguarding children. The Victorian Government is committed to supporting the Social Services Regulator with the resources and authority to support effective regulation.

Within this context, this Statement of Expectations clarifies my expectations for the Social Services Regulator during the period of initial implementation of these reforms. I will issue a further Statement of Expectations following the commencement of the full suite of reforms.

Current legislative framework

As Minister for Children, I am responsible for administering the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, *Children's Services Act 1996*, *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* and the *Worker Screening Act 2020*. This Statement of Expectations should be read in the context of the objectives, obligations and functions outlined in these Acts.

Emerging risks and priorities

This Statement of Expectations outlines key priorities and expectations focused on urgent improvements to child safety and should be read alongside other legislative and non-legislative obligations on the Social Services Regulator.

Supporting implementation of Rapid Review recommendations

I expect the Social Services Regulator to ensure timely and effective implementation of the reforms in the Child Safety Act and Rapid Review recommendations. In addition, the Social Services Regulator must work closely and collaboratively with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority, the Victorian Institute of Teaching and other relevant regulators to monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of the reforms. The Social Services Regulator will:

- share data and information on implementation progress, and
- develop and monitor agreed measures of progress and impact.

Working with Children Check scheme and Reportable Conduct Scheme

In relation to Recommendation 6 of the Rapid Review, the Social Services Regulator must develop policies and procedures to support the effective implementation and operationalisation of reforms to enhance the Working with Children Check scheme. This includes reforms in the Child Safety Act which will enable the Social Services Regulator to:

- consider a broader range of information and intelligence to assess, refuse or temporarily suspend or revoke a Working with Children clearance
- reassess a Working with Children clearance if the Regulator receives or becomes aware of child safety risk information, including where relevant, unsubstantiated allegations or intelligence
- apply an interim bar or suspension to prevent an applicant or clearance holder from engaging in child related work if the Regulator receives or becomes aware of child safety risk information and is satisfied that applying an interim bar or suspension is in the interests of child safety while an assessment or reassessment is undertaken
- require organisations to verify they have engaged a Working with Children clearance holder
- establish an internal review process for Working with Children exclusion decisions in place of the current VCAT review arrangements, and
- ensure all applicants complete mandatory child safety training before being granted a Working with Children clearance.

Consistent with the legislative requirements in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*, the Social Services Regulator must give paramount consideration to the best interests and the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children in implementing and applying these enhanced Working with Children Scheme functions and powers.

In relation to Recommendation 7 of the Rapid Review, and changes to the Reportable Conduct Scheme regulatory framework, the Social Services Regulator must establish processes to share and receive unsubstantiated allegations with relevant regulators and recognise a finding or investigation under another state or territory's Reportable Conduct Scheme, where the reportable allegation is also captured under the Victorian Scheme.

In relation to Recommendation 8 of the Rapid Review and the establishment of an intelligence and risk assessment capability, the Social Services Regulator should develop and maintain a risk assessment framework to support decision-making in line with the legislative requirements in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*. The framework should:

- be informed by evidence and input from child safety and other relevant experts
- support decision-makers to consider and weigh all relevant risks and exercise professional judgement to determine whether an individual poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children

The Social Services Regulator should work collaboratively with DFFH, Victoria Police and other regulators to strengthen and expand its intelligence and risk assessment capability over time. This includes the Social Services Regulator working with DFFH to jointly review and report to the Minister on the implementation and operation of the risk assessment framework following the first 12-months of operation.

In addition, the Social Services Regulator must:

- establish internal policies, processes and other arrangements to support robust, consistent and effective decision-making, and
- work with the DFFH, Victoria Police, Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority, Victorian Institute of Teaching, Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority and other relevant bodies to establish effective agreements and processes to share information relating to child safety risk, and to support decision-making under the *Worker Screening Act*.

National Working with Children Check reforms

I expect the Social Services Regulator to actively support DFFH to contribute to relevant national reform work relating to the Working with Children Check scheme.

Education and prevention

I expect the Social Services Regulator:

- through the Reportable Conduct Scheme, to improve the response of organisations to allegations of child abuse by oversight and monitoring of allegations and investigations, and targeted and effective education and guidance to organisations
- to promote and regulate compliance with the Child Safe Standards, and act as system leader for sector regulators and integrated sector regulators, and
- to publish information and engage with peak bodies and other relevant stakeholders to support organisations to understand and comply with their obligations.

Planning, reporting and review

The Social Services Regulator should publish this Statement of Expectations as soon as practicable after receipt of this letter.

I request the Social Services Regulator to incorporate these expectations into its business planning processes, including milestones for when these expectations will be met. Progress in meeting these expectations should be reported publicly in the Social Services Regulator's annual report.

Yours sincerely



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