

**QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION  
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

Statement of witness Alex Scott, Together Queensland Industrial Union of Employees

Name of witness	Alexander Scott
Date of birth	02/04/1967
Address and contact details	Level 1, 27 Peel Street, South Brisbane
Occupation	Secretary, Together Queensland Industrial Union of Employees
Date of statement	27/08/2012


I, Alex Scott, of Level 1, 27 Peel Street, South Brisbane in the state of Queensland, Secretary, Together Queensland Industrial Union of Employees, solemnly and sincerely affirm:

1. The purpose of this statement is to outline recent initiatives that have impacted on child protection workers and also to provide a brief overview of relevant workforce issues as identified by union members.
2. That a more comprehensive written submission will be developed after further consultation with union members, including a survey in relation to key workforce issues and concerns for child protection workers.

**Union coverage**

3. I currently hold the position of Secretary of Together Queensland Industrial Union of Employees (Together) and have held this position since 2002.
4. Together is a union of approximately 40 000 employees working across both public and private sector industries.
5. Together is the industrial union with coverage of child protection workers in the government sector.

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6. In the child protection sphere an overwhelming majority of eligible workers are members of Together.
7. Specifically, the work groups covered by Together include, but are not limited to, employees from the following occupations or areas in the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services:
  - a. Child Safety Officers
  - b. Team Leaders
  - c. Child Safety Service Centre Managers
  - d. Senior Practitioners
  - e. Court Coordinators
  - f. Records Officers
  - g. Child Safety Support Officers
  - h. SCAN Coordinators and Administration Officers
  - i. Administration Officers
  - j. Business Support Officers (and teams)
  - k. Other officers working in Child Safety Service Centres
  - l. Regional specialist and support teams including office of the Regional Director, Placement Services Unit and Regional Intake Service
  - m. Central office specialist and support teams including practice improvement and program areas, complaints and review, and frontline units such as After Hours Support, Sexual Abuse Counselling Service and Adoptions.

#### **Recent staffing cuts and changes 2012**

8. Since the Queensland state election in March 2012, both temporary and permanent child protection employees have been either directly or indirectly impacted by decisions to cut Departmental budgets and staffing levels in the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (the Department).

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9. The Government's Establishment Management Program was established shortly after the election and was designed as a process to review and wherever possible, conclude existing temporary contracts within public sector agencies.
10. In the child protection context, the Establishment Management Program has impacted a number of temporary workers, including some sitting against vacant critical frontline roles, through not renewing temporary workers beyond the current end date.
11. Following the peak of activity during the Establishment Management Program, a separate process has been implemented through the Department to look at what will be the new staffing levels in a range of areas.
12. This Departmental review has not considered frontline child safety services based in regions, so no reduction in staffing should occur in these areas as a result, however a number of central office and state-wide support units have been significantly impacted by the organisational change process underway.
13. An audit of union representatives working in Together coverage areas (as defined at Point 7) is currently underway and interim data has found that a significant number of positions and/or employees have been, or will be, lost as a result of both the Establishment Management Program and ongoing organisational change processes noted above. At current count, more than 20 positions have been lost from frontline child safety areas.
14. Together is prepared to share more data and information with the Commission of Inquiry, based on consultation with members, as it becomes available.

#### **Budget cuts to central office units**

15. Further to the losses at the regional and service centre level, a number of central office and state-wide specialist and support areas have been significantly impacted by the Establishment Management Program and internal Departmental restructure currently being implemented.
16. Together understands that organisational change and budget pressures are also leading to changes in the learning and training branches and there is a high level of concern from members that this will lead to a compression of the entry level

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Child Safety Officer training program and that this may exacerbate existing issues with attraction and retention in frontline child protection roles.

17. Together understands that significant budget cuts to the complaints and review branch in central office (including the loss of approximately 13 positions) have necessitated the closure of the Matters of Concern Review Unit. Feedback from members suggest that this unit was effective and well functioning, and seen to play a positive role in the child protection system. Together contends that closure of the unit is a short sighted, purely cost driven decision that will negatively impact on child protection outcomes into the future.

**'Critical frontline' worker definition**

18. As part of the implementation of the Government's Establishment Management Program, each Director-General had the capacity to determine what definition of frontline and non-frontline work would be used.
19. The definition adopted by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, was more restrictive than the Public Service Commission standard classification at that time and this meant that an arbitrary distinction was made between groups of child protection workers within the Child Safety Service Centre environment.
20. Consequently, workers in this frontline context were deemed to be 'frontline' or 'non frontline', as well as then being further classified as either 'critical frontline' or 'non critical frontline'.
21. These classifications have not always been transparently identified and also had significant impacts on whether certain positions were exempt or not from job cut initiatives such as the Establishment Management Program.
22. The decision to split the frontline child safety workforce between those who are 'critical frontline' and those who are 'non critical frontline' will damage the ability of service centres and the system as a whole to deliver good practice and essential services to Queensland children and families.
23. In particular, the differentiation of some administration and business support functions in a Child Safety Service Centre as 'non critical frontline' has led to many of these jobs being left vacant or, through the Establishment Management

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Program, some temporary workers in these roles have not had their contracts renewed.

24. Previous reviews into the child protection system in Queensland have identified the importance of a strong network of specialist and support functions as a mechanism to strengthen the services provided by the Department. The classification of some roles in the system as 'non critical frontline' has not only led to personal impacts for the workers who have lost their job, but also a loss of corporate knowledge and skill in some areas and has further impacted on workloads. These factors will continue to increasingly impact on the ability of 'critical frontline' workers to do their roles.

#### **Longstanding workforce issues relevant to Commission of Inquiry Terms of Reference**

25. Over recent years a number of key industrial and workforce issues have been identified by union members as directly impacting on the ability of child protection workers to properly meet the requirements of their job.

26. These workforce priorities and issues include:

- a. Significant workload and caseload issues still exist for child protection roles
- b. The need to better recognise and link resourcing to achievable output levels for child protection workers
- c. De-valuing of the Child Safety Officer role
- d. Lack of professional development, particularly in rural and remote areas
- e. Role and functions of government versus non-government sectors, including capacity development needed for early intervention function to work
- f. Statutory thresholds and legislative requirements for child protection including the heavy administrative and court processes associated with some elements of child protection work
- g. Lack of parity for social workers in child protection roles when compared with social workers in Queensland Health, employed under *The Health Practitioners' (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement 2011*
- h. Added pressures and complexities of rural, remote and isolated work locations

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- i. Strategies for reducing overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care
- j. Maintenance and building on previously implemented positive workforce measures including: Rural and remote incentives, Accelerated progression arrangements for Child Safety Officers, qualification and training programs for Child Safety Support Officers.

27. Together intends to further consult with members about the detail of these issues and provide to the Commission of Inquiry a comprehensive written summary in relation to these matters over the course of the inquiry.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of the *Oaths Act 1867*.

Deponent



Alexander Scott

Taken and declared before me, at Brisbane this day the 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2012.

Witness



Solicitor / Barrister / Justice of the  
Peace / Commissioner of Declarations

