

**DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH**  
**HON SARAH COURTNEY MP**  
*Children, Young Persons and their Families Amendment Bill 2021*

*\*check Hansard for delivery\**

Mr Speaker

The *Children, Young Persons and Their Families (Amendment) Bill 2021* introduces an amendment to the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* to strengthen the legal authority for Tasmania to participate in the national child safety data linkage initiative known as Connect for Safety by extending provisions for information sharing between child welfare officers to information sharing between State and Territory child protection agencies through direct system access under defined arrangements.

I will address the background to the proposed amendment.

Vulnerable children and their carers often cross State and Territory borders, and one jurisdiction may not hold all of the information which could be used to support decisions around child safety matters.

Safety and wellbeing information about children and young people is often held by multiple jurisdictions. Not having access to all relevant information can result in assessments and actions based on part information leading to increased safety risks or inappropriate interventions.

Current processes to support sharing of child safety information are slow, resource intensive and not always effective as they are done on a person to person basis and reliant on the manual processes. There is a strong desire across all jurisdictions to respond to the challenge of inadequate sharing of child protection information.

In August 2019, the Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS) agreed to purchase and implement a national child safety data linkage solution developed by an Australian company, following a request for tender process, proof of concept and three years of development in consultation with multiple jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, in testing, the new system has demonstrated an ability not only to match clients many times faster than manual searching by the relevant jurisdictions, but also to find matches that could not be found by manual searching.

The proof of concept testing process has also demonstrated that the level of overlap between jurisdictions' systems was far greater even than anticipated, with a significant proportion of clients or family members appearing in systems held by multiple jurisdictions. This means that cross-jurisdictional data linkage has potential to provide a much more accurate picture of client and family circumstances than was possible without the system and lead to better outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

A national Privacy Impact Assessment prepared by Salinger Consulting Pty Limited for the Children and Families Secretaries considered the legislative enablers and barriers to the participation of jurisdictions in this national project.

Key recommendations from the Privacy Impact Assessment were that:

- The privacy impacts were justified by the benefits in terms of child safety.
- All jurisdictions would require minor legislative change to enable them to participate; and
- A range of governance and other processes were proposed to ensure the proper management of the system and information and the minimisation of privacy or other negative impacts.

Mr Speaker, the Commonwealth has provided funding of \$3.867 million, which will support the establishment of the system and the first two years of implementation.

The Children and Families Secretaries has also agreed that implementation and use of the system will be guided by a framework, including policies and procedures, a scheduled program of reviews, and performance and audit reports, based on the recommendations in the Privacy Impact Assessment.

A new Inter-jurisdictional Governance Group, initially chaired by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) and comprising senior executives from all jurisdictions, has been established to govern the initiative.

The use for which the Connect for Safety solution was designed is to dramatically streamline the process of inter-jurisdictional data sharing on client children who may be known to more than one jurisdiction.

The information to be recorded and stored in the national database through Connect for Safety relates to identity only; that is, information such as name, date of birth, residential address, phone numbers, for example. It does not include the more sensitive health-related information, which is subject to additional legislative protections in relation to privacy and data breaches. Once a match is identified by the system, person to person contact between jurisdictions will follow to obtain the more detailed information; as is currently the case.

Mr Speaker, this is no different from the information that is shared now, however, the current delays in collating information or waiting for confirmation as to whether another State even holds relevant information, can affect the adherence to key timeframes, and vital information may not be located due to different spellings or aliases; all of which impacts on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families (Amendment) Bill 2020* will improve the sharing of information between State and Territory child protection agencies and other bodies dealing with child safety and family violence matters.

The Act needs to be amended to allow Tasmania to participate in this important child safety information sharing initiative. Several other states have already loaded data and are participating in the initiative. Failure to make the legislative amendment that allows Tasmania to participate in the sharing of important child safety information could result in criticism that Tasmanian children are not able to benefit from the safety initiatives that other jurisdictions are implementing, and which have already been funded by the Commonwealth.

I commend the Bill to the House.