



## Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Dear Registrar

### **Investigation into the passing of PJQ – COR 2022 1089**

I write in response to your letter dated 14 May 2024, which enclosed a copy of Coroner Ryan's findings into the passing of PJQ, and recommendation made to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department).

Coroner Ryan made one recommendation that requires a direct response from the Department. I provide the following response to the recommendation on behalf of the department.

### **Recommendation**

**That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing incorporate a guideline in its risk assessment framework which is directed toward the risk assessment process to be applied when considering the suitability of short-term accommodation options for children whose Care by Secretary Order is shortly due to expire, which:**

- a) promotes flexibility; and**
- b) recognises the importance of safe and stable accommodation during this critical transition period.**

The department accepts the intent of this recommendation.

The SAFER children framework (SAFER) provides child protection practitioners with policy, procedures and practice advice. SAFER launched in November 2021 and is the risk assessment framework utilised by statutory child protection practitioners in Victoria.

SAFER is designed to support practitioners in identifying and assessing risk and planning for the safety, development, needs and wellbeing of individual children and young people within their family, culture and community. The risk assessment then informs the formulation and enacting of statutory case plans. Case planning is inclusive of 15 + Care and Transition plans, which include considerations related to post-care housing options.

The department's Child Protection Manual (the Manual) contains detailed guidance outlining expectations of child protection practitioners and care team members in supporting young people's transition from care. This guidance includes procedures and advice relating to the development of 15+ Care and Transition Plans for young people aged 15 years and over and residing in care services.

The Manual recommends that preparation and planning for leaving care ideally commences two years prior to a young person's transition and must consider living arrangements post-care. The Manual states that practitioners must refer all young people aged 15 years and 9 months on a Care by Secretary order and residing in care services to their local Better Futures provider.

Better Futures provides individualised supports to transition young people from care across a range of life areas including housing, employment, education, health and wellbeing and connections. Support is designed to be flexible and responsive to individual circumstances, and increasing in support levels as the young person nears the age of leaving care.

Once a young person's statutory child protection order has ended and they have left care, they become eligible for Home Stretch support. Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures model and provides young people with access to case work support, flexible funding, and a Home Stretch allowance to support them to:

- a) remain living with their foster, kinship or permanent carer (allowance is paid to carer); or
- b) transition to alternative living arrangements (for example, private rental or sharing with a friend), brokered by the Better Futures provider. This is particularly for young people leaving residential care, or who cannot/choose not to remain living with their carer.

The department considers that the Coroner's recommendation in this matter can be implemented through strengthening the Manual in relation to leaving care procedures in respect of the assessment of the suitability of post care housing options. The expected timeframe to strengthen existing guidance is June 2025.

Should you have any queries, please contact Sudha Joseph, Director, Care Services at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



**Peta McCammon**

Secretary

06 / 08 / 2024