

Our Reference: CS/05/2327; CSM03130

7 November 2005

Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Parliament House
Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 6 October 2005 forwarding of a copy of Petition No. 543-05 tabled in the Parliament on 29 September 2005 concerning the Private Members Bill "*Child Protection (Recognition of Relative Carers) Amendment Bill*".

I wish to advise that this response also covers Petition No. 500-05.

As you would be aware, the Bill which was introduced into Parliament on 19 April 2005 by Mr Peter Wellington MP, Member for Nicklin, was defeated during its second reading (resumption) on 29 September 2005. The Bill which had called for inclusion under the *Child Protection Act 1999* of financial support to relative carers caring for children outside the statutory child protection system was opposed on the grounds of its incongruence with the legislative purpose and spirit for administering the Act.

In responding to the petition, I would like to offer my appreciation and acknowledgment of the legal, financial and emotional challenges frequently faced by grandparents who are responsible for raising their grandchildren outside the statutory child protection system. I do, however, reiterate that it is the Commonwealth Government's responsibility to provide income support to this group of relative carers.

In relation to the statutory child protection system, children and young people may be placed with grandparents/relatives through a custody or guardianship order under the *Child Protection Act 1999*. Under these legislative conditions, the Department of Child Safety assists carers with the costs associated with the child or young person through the fostering allowance. Additional secondary and contingency payments may also assist grandparents/relative carers. In addition to this support, the Department of Child Safety is developing for release later in the year an information kit that will assist grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren following statutory child protection intervention.

I can confirm that under existing Australian/State government and non-government programs/initiatives, relative carers caring for children outside the statutory child protection system are eligible for:

- family mediation services through Dispute Resolution Services and Relationships Australia during occasions of family conflict and/or when involved with the Family Law Act;
- advice and family support services through either the Family Court, Legal Aid and/or Centrelink;
- the Commonwealth Government's special grandparents child care benefit, covering the full cost of up to 50 hours of child care fees for approved carers; and
- access to the Queensland Government's Senior Inquiry Line, with expansion of this service through the provision of \$100,000, to ensure that information on services is made available to grandparent carers.

As an adjunct to this matter, the Honourable Peter Beattie MP, Premier and Treasurer, took the issue of increased Commonwealth Government support for grandparents to a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in June 2004. As a result of this approach and through ongoing championing on this issue, COAG continues its investigation into this matter.

It is anticipated that through the above programs/initiatives and the ongoing work being done through COAG, including the impending return to COAG of a report by the Community and Disability Services Ministers Conference, that further Commonwealth Government responses to this matter will emerge.

I trust this information is of assistance. Should you have any questions relating to the information provided in this letter, please contact Michael Power, Director, Strategic Policy and Research Branch, on 34043502.

Yours sincerely

HON MIKE REYNOLDS AM MP
Minister for Child Safety