

## What is the Office of the Child and Family Official Solicitor?

The Queensland Government is building a new child protection and family support system that meets the needs of children and families, now and in the future.

One of the recommendations made by the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry in reforming the child protection system was that child protection court work needed to improve.

The Commission found that:

- there are often lengthy delays in finalising child protection orders, and too many interim orders are made over a long period of time, instead of applying for long-term orders in the first instance
- the quality of statements, affidavits and evidence provided by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services is sometimes not well written or easy to understand
- the court process is not open to the voices of children and young people
- children, young people and their families should have a lawyer with them at court, if possible
- there is not enough legal advice provided to families earlier in the process.

The Commission recommended changes to court processes for child protection matters to improve accountability, quality of applications made and timeliness of court decisions.

Child Safety has now established a new team of legal officers, headed by a Child and Family Official Solicitor, to provide legal advice and assist Child Safety Officers prepare for court.

This should improve the quality of the material prepared by Child Safety for Court, and improve decision-making about what should happen to keep children safe.

### Office of the Director of Child Protection Litigation

While the Office of the Child and Family Official Solicitor will continue to apply for temporary orders to keep children safe in emergency situations, a new independent body called the Director of Child Protection Litigation has been established by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to apply for Child Protection Orders (instead of Child Safety).

### A new approach to child protection matters

There will be a new approach to child protection matters in the Childrens Court in Queensland. This new approach aims to introduce a quicker timeframe to resolve matters and improve consistency across the state.

Most importantly, children and young people will have a greater opportunity to present their views in court, if they wish to, and access legal representation for themselves and their families, when they need it.

These new arrangements commence from 1 July 2016.

For more information about the changes to court processes for child protection matters, call the Office of the Child and Family Official Solicitor on **3405 4970**.