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MEDIA RELEASE

**Key social services leaders demand changes to crucial legislation**

A coalition of social services leaders are calling on the State Parliament to take immediate action to reform South Australia's struggling child protection and family support system.

The group, representing the largest block of community service agencies operating across the child protection and family services field in South Australia, are calling for key amendments to be made to the *Children and Young People (Safety and Support) Bill 2024*.

The Bill, which has been the subject of a recent select committee, will be debated by the Legislative Council in the coming days.

Uniting Communities Chief Executive and Leadership Coalition spokesperson, Simon Schrapel AM, said while the proposed Bill does not go far enough, some key amendments to the legislation would have a significant impact in making it more fit for purpose for South Australia's children and families.

"The Bill, in its current form, does not deliver the reform we need. To put it simply, we cannot support this Bill as it currently stands," said Mr Schrapel.

"However, this legislation is salvageable. Over recent weeks, our sector has been very clear on what needs to change. We have outlined the specific amendments required to reshape the Bill and help stem the unnecessary removal and retention of children in care,"

Mr Schrapel said these crucial amendments included:

- Elevating *Best Interests* as the Paramount Principle in this legislation
- The consistent application of *Significant Harm* threshold
- Expanding and amplifying *Active Efforts* within the Bill
- Prioritising and creating stronger provisions for *reunification* of families

"Without all four of these must-have reforms, this Bill will fail to deliver the transformation needed,"

"We need a Bill that is focused on supporting those children and young people at greatest risk of harm – and quickly. We also need a Bill that works with families – parents and caregivers – to better support them before they reach crisis," he said.

“Through key amendments, we can start to reform our overwhelmed system. This week represents a significant opportunity. Our sector simply needs to be heard – and we need our politicians to listen and act.”

“We stand ready to work with State Government, the Opposition and the crossbench to advise and improve this legislation. Doing so will have a huge impact on South Australian families doing it tough,”

“We are buoyed by the Minister’s willingness to accept amendments and look forward to productive discussion in Parliament to shepherd these changes through.”

“The reforms we have proposed will also have a huge impact on our state’s budget bottom line, which continues to hemorrhage with the disproportionate numbers of South Australian children in care.”

Last week’s release by the Productivity Commission on the performance of Australia’s child protection services has shown South Australia slipping further behind the nation when it comes to the number of children and young people caught in our care system.

“It doesn’t need to be this way for our children and families. We need strong and sustainable legislation that focuses on getting help to families who need it and intervention to keep children safe when needed,”

“For too long, South Australia’s child protection system has been overwhelmed and inundated. Now is the time for change.”

### **About the Leadership Coalition for Child Protection**

*The Leadership Coalition for Child Protection Reform comprises of Chief Executive Officer and senior leaders from key agencies and providers spanning child protection and family support services, including:*

- *Uniting Communities*
- *Lutheran Care*
- *Uniting Country SA*
- *Baptist Care SA*
- *KWY Aboriginal Corporation*
- *Junction Australia*
- *Infinity Community Solutions*

*Together, they are advocating for crucial changes to the child protection system, which will better support children and their families to remain safely together where possible, maintaining connections to their community and culture.*

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