

Coronial Inquest Findings

27 June 2017

The Commissioner for Children and Young People Mark Morrissey has now reviewed Coroner McTaggart findings, comments and recommendations arising from her complex and difficult investigation into the death of BJay Johnstone.

Mr Morrissey expressed his deep sadness at BJay's untimely and preventable death. He urges that all of the Coroner's comments and recommendations are carefully considered and responded to by the agencies and organisations involved.

At the heart of the Coroner's Report is a reminder of the importance and intrinsic value of a vulnerable baby's life. This Report urges us all to carefully consider how responsible agencies and the wider community can do more to ensure other infants in similar circumstances are better protected.

Mr Morrissey said, "By learning from the death of this baby and robustly and promptly responding, we have an opportunity to reduce the likelihood of such a recurrence in the future. Going forward, there are important recommendations within Coroner Mc Taggart's Report that, if accepted and implemented, will strengthen the current responses to such challenging situations."

In addition to considering the circumstances surrounding BJay's death, Coroner McTaggart has very carefully examined the role of organisations involved with BJay and his family during his short life, including Child Protection Services.

Coroner McTaggart has found that there has been "a comprehensive failure of decision-making, action and systems in taking proper steps for BJay's protection".

"While it will take some time for me to thoroughly consider the details of the Coroner's report, it clearly emphasises to me the critical importance of prompt early intervention and robust support for families in order to protect infants and children," said Mr Morrissey.

"The need to further strengthen cross-agency and multi-service responses is very apparent. I am heartened at the strong engagement and leadership by all relevant key government agencies in the current child safety reforms. Responding to the complex needs of vulnerable children and their families requires a well-developed multiagency response."



“I commend the Coroner for her detailed analysis and the recommendations intended to improve the system and practices for protecting Tasmania’s children and to prevent the likelihood of other such tragic, deaths. In particular, I welcome the Coroner’s recommendation that the Vulnerable Infant Strategy and the current redesign of the child protection system incorporate her recommendations.

Whilst we can never with certainty prevent tragic events such as this, the inquiry into the death of BJay presents us with some very clear findings and recommendations that can lessen the chances of such deaths occurring in future. We will also be able to better support the workers who are faced with issues such as this, often on a daily basis. They deserve the highest quality supports and systems that can be brought to bear.

“I will continue to advocate strongly for the ongoing system-wide reforms required to improve our efforts to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of Tasmanian children.

“I offer my heartfelt condolences to all affected by the death of this baby.”

Mark Morrissey
Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas)

If you are concerned about the current safety of a child or young person, contact the Child Safety Service on 1300 737 639, or make an online notification via the below link:
http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/children/child_protection_services/what_can_i_expect_when/child_protection_notification_form

For 24/7 crisis support, call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 551 800.