

# Media Release

**The Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP**

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers

Minister for Child Protection and Family Services



Tuesday, 21 February 2023

## LANDMARK NEW LAWS TO CLOSE THE GAP, KEEP CHILDREN SAFE

Landmark legislation introduced to Parliament today by the Andrews Labor Government will keep more Aboriginal families together by putting Aboriginal self-determination at the forefront of children and family services.

In an Australian first, the Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023 expands the role of Aboriginal agencies delivering children and family services to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in Victoria.

The new laws recognise that Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions and deliver services that protect the best interests of Aboriginal children.

The laws are a landmark step to meet the Closing the Gap National Agreement target to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in a way that is culturally safe and promotes the best interests of the child.

It includes a Statement of Recognition of the impact of past policies on Aboriginal people designed in equal partnership with Aboriginal stakeholder groups including the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance.

The Bill further embeds the Labor Government's commitment to self-determination in legislation. It will expand circumstances in which authorised Aboriginal agencies deliver child and families services under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

The new laws would also allow greater information sharing between the Government and Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations and builds the Government's commitment to the Wungurilwil Gagapduir partnership.

A Bill was originally introduced last year but it lapsed due to the state election.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Child Protection and Family Services Lizzie Blandthorn

*"This important legislation will help close the gap by expanding the role of Aboriginal agencies in delivering children and family services."*

*"We're taking that action to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal Victorians in the child protection system."*

### Quotes attributable to Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency CEO Prof Muriel Bamblett AO

*"The proposed laws represent what can be achieved when Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations work with their communities to demand better outcomes for children and families – and the Government actively takes up the challenge and commits to self-determination."*

*"The proposed Bill enables us to not just stop the cycle of higher rates of Aboriginal child removal, it will also help address the cycle of family violence. Strengthening the whole family is the only way forward."*

### Quotes attributable to Chair of the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance and Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative CEO Karen Heap

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*“The legislation contains principles that will guide decision makers to promote self-determination and healing for Aboriginal children and families. Aboriginal families can advocate for themselves and ask for accountability in a system that has historically contributed to creating trauma and disconnection.”*

*“The new laws are a first in Australia – they help keep Aboriginal children with their families by enshrining Aboriginal self-determination in child and family services.”*