

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

### BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Child Support – fraud control

**Question reference number:** HS 17

**Senator:** Xenophon

**Type of question:** Hansard page 50

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 24 July 2015

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

Senator Payne: In relation to the recommendations in the Ombudsman's report of 2008, I will also ask the department, in putting together the responses to the questions that we have taken on notice, to put a summary of actions taken since then in the fraud area in particular.

Senator XENOPHON: That would be very helpful.

#### **Answer:**

The Ombudsman's report to the Child Support Agency in November 2008 made five recommendations. In summary, the Ombudsman recommended that the Child Support Agency:

1. review its fraud control plan;
2. develop new procedures for staff responding to customer fraud allegations, including better recordkeeping;
3. educate all staff about their role in identifying appropriate cases for referral to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution;
4. consider further action in relation to one of the complaints discussed in the report; and
5. provide further guidance to staff about authenticating documents and the circumstances in which it is necessary to investigate and verify contradictory evidence.

The department agreed with all of these recommendations. The department has also implemented responses to each recommendation.

##### 1. Fraud control plan

The department reviewed the Child Support Agency's Fraud Control Plan and its Fraud Strategy Statement. Since 2011, the department has integrated Child Support into the DHS Fraud Control Plan.

##### 2. New procedures for staff responding to customer fraud allegations

The department developed new procedures and training programmes to assist staff to identify, investigate and refer for prosecution, allegations of customer fraud.

### 3. Training for staff about their role

All Child Support employees have received training to assist them identify customer fraud and make referrals to the department's investigations unit. The training included face-to-face training for decision-makers involved in making assessments. In the report, the Ombudsman referred to these decision-makers as Senior Case Officers. Fraud awareness training is included in entry-level programmes for all new department staff and in the department's Mandatory Refresher Programme for all staff.

### 4. Further action regarding the complaint

An investigation of this matter found no fraudulent breaches in relation to payslips and the hiding of income, and no requirement to refer the matter to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

### 5. Provide further guidance about authenticating documents and circumstances

Current change of assessment procedures require staff to consider the validity of information provided by the customer before relying on it in decision-making. There is a legislative requirement to provide both parties with an opportunity to raise concerns about false, incomplete and misleading information before the department makes its decision. The department instructs staff to refer fraud allegations to the appropriate investigation area.