MEDIA RELEASE

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Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc.

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NEW MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare – the peak body for child and family service providers – has welcomed the Victorian Government's new legislation and $10 million commitment to strengthen measures protecting children from sexual abuse.

The $10 million announcement comes in response to the parliamentary inquiry into child sexual abuse Betrayal of Trust, which has already led to new anti-grooming legislation and laws making it an offense to hide reports of abuse.

Most of the $10 million announced today will go to the Commission for Children and Young People, which Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare CEO, Deb Tsorbaris, said she strongly supports.

As well as strengthening existing reporting provisions relating to abuse of children, the legislation also requires organisations to report allegations of abuse and the outcomes of these allegations to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Ms Tsorbaris said "The Centre supports this centralised reporting scheme and looks forward to working closely with the Commission for Children and Young People and Victoria's child and family service providers to deliver more effective protections for children at risk of sexual abuse."

While broadly welcoming the Government's response, Ms Tsorbaris issued a note of caution and called for the operation of the new reporting legislation to be very closely monitored and if necessary amended. "The last thing we should be doing is criminalising victims of abuse for failing to report abuse of their children. While the legislation does contain exemptions, the jury is still out on whether they will be just and effective in practice. The community will need assurance that the new legislation does not humiliate or punish adult victims of family violence" she said.

The Centre for Excellence also welcomed new legislation introduced into the Parliament this week. The Children Youth and Families Amendment Bill 2014 introduces important new provisions relating to the operation of the Children's Court that should, as recommended in the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry report, result in less adversarial proceedings in the court setting and a much stronger focus on the needs of children.

The Bill also introduces important technical amendments to the existing legislation that should facilitate the eventual transfer of custody and guardianship of Aboriginal children and young people to a Principal Officer of an Aboriginal controlled organisation. "Too many Aboriginal children are placed in out of home care in Victoria and far too many are losing contact with their family and culture. These amendments are a small but vital step and I hope to see continued effort and commitment from all parties to address the needs of vulnerable Aboriginal children in Victoria" said Ms Tsorbaris.

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