

Hon Steven Marshall MP

Premier

Hon John Gardner MP

Minister for Education

Thursday 18 October 2018

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children appointed

Ms April Lawrie has been appointed the inaugural Commissioner for Aboriginal Children, tasked with developing policies and practices that will improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

Key areas of focus for the role include improving health, education, child protection and justice outcomes.

The appointment delivers on the Marshall Liberal Government's election commitment, after the request was made by Aboriginal organisations in their submissions to the Nyland Royal Commission into the state's child protection systems.

The new position has been created to monitor, advise and advocate on systemic and individual issues for Aboriginal children and young people.

The Commissioner will work closely with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, engaging with Aboriginal children, families and communities, service providers and the Aboriginal community in South Australia to ensure better services for Aboriginal children.

Premier Steven Marshall welcomed the appointment and said that Ms Lawrie will play a critical role in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

"By almost any measure the outcomes of Aboriginal children fall below those of the general population and not enough has been done to close the gap," Premier Marshall said.

"Aboriginal organisations have long sought the appointment of a commissioner with specific responsibilities for Aboriginal children – despite this, the previous Government refused to make such an appointment in its response to the Nyland Royal Commission.

"In creating this new position, we have established a highly visible and powerful champion for a segment of our community which has been consistently underrepresented in the past.

"Ms Lawrie will be an effective and fearless advocate on behalf of Aboriginal children and young people."

Education Minister John Gardner said that Ms Lawrie was an exceptional candidate and will be effective in the role.

“Ms Lawrie has an outstanding track record of policy development and implementation across government and strong connections within the state’s Aboriginal communities and organisations,” said Minister Gardner.

“She has devoted her time and skills over the last 28 years to Aboriginal issues across government and at the community level, contributing to the formation of Aboriginal policy at the state and national level.

“Most recently she has been leading the development of the Education Department’s Aboriginal Education Strategy.

“I look forward to working closely with Ms Lawrie into the future to ensure that our policies and practices are sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal young people and effective in their implementation.”

The new Commissioner said she was looking forward to the challenges and privileges associated with taking up the new role.

“My job is to bring the voice of Aboriginal children and young people into how we are designing and delivering health, education, justice and child protection services,” said Ms Lawrie.

“The priority is not just closing the gap but preventing it from emerging in the first place.

“If we are to improve services and outcomes we need to recognise the solutions coming from our Aboriginal communities, families and leaders and act upon them in a meaningful way.

“That requires a much more highly responsive and culturally relevant service design which takes the time to understand why families and systems are in distress and draws the solutions from within communities.”

Ms Lawrie has previously worked in senior roles in the Education Department, SA Health and the Attorney General’s Department.