

STATES OF JERSEY

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INQUIRY BY MR. ANDREW WILLIAMSON: REMOVAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 20th November 2007
by Senator S. Syvret

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to agree that the present inquiry by Mr. Andrew Williamson into various child welfare and protection issues in Jersey should be conducted in a manner that is free from the administrative and political involvement of any States of Jersey executive department; and
- (b) to agree that Mr. Williamson should be provided with sufficient resources, through reallocation of existing resources, to enable him to conduct and manage his inquiry in a manner which is completely independent of any States executive department.

SENATOR S. SYVRET

REPORT

Regrettably, I am forced to lodge this proposition by the failure of the Chief Minister to recognise the administrative conflict of interests which clearly exists in the administrative arrangements of the Williamson Inquiry being routed through his office.

Moreover, it is also plain that as a matter of general principle, any such inquiry needs to meet a public expectation of, and appearance of, objectivity. For public confidence to be maintained, no States department can realistically be involved in administering an inquiry into what may prove to be its own failings and deficiencies.

This principle seemed so obvious and uncontroversial that I expected the Chief Minister to accept it, and announce in his answer to an oral question asked by me on 20th November, that he would see that the arrangements for the conduct of Mr. Williamson's inquiry would be established independently of any States department.

Under normal circumstances, I would have been very surprised at the Chief Minister's refusal to accept this basic point. However, his answer was all-of-a-piece with the increasingly serious errors of political judgment he is making.

I would still hope that the need to debate this proposition can be avoided. It is to be greatly hoped that the Chief Minister can be persuaded to accept the principle of administrative independence before the date of the debate.

However, so important is this subject matter, that it cannot be left unaddressed.

Financial/manpower statement

Clearly, there will be a cost involved in providing Mr. Williamson with an office and a personal assistant. The sums involved will surely be slight given the importance of his work.