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Child Protection Minister Rachel Sanderson goes on the attack after inquiry reveals five girls in state care were pregnant

Child Protection Minister Rachel Sanderson and her department have refused to provide detail about five more girls who became pregnant while in state care.

[Elizabeth Henson](#) and [Lauren Novak](#)

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Child Protection Minister Rachel Sanderson has refused to answer questions about the circumstances that led to five more girls in state care becoming pregnant.

Her department has also refused to provide any detail about the age of the girls or whether the pregnancies resulted from criminal acts.

The new cases were revealed in a [report by former judge Paul Rice, released on Tuesday](#), which examined why Ms Sanderson was not told about two previous cases, both of which involved 13-year-olds who fell pregnant while in state care.

The minister only became aware of those cases after [two men were convicted and sentenced](#) for sexually abusing the girls.

Mr Rice's report revealed five girls living in state care were pregnant at the time of his inquiry, which began in December.

Under questioning by the Opposition in Parliament on Wednesday, Ms Sanderson said she would not discuss details of individual cases.

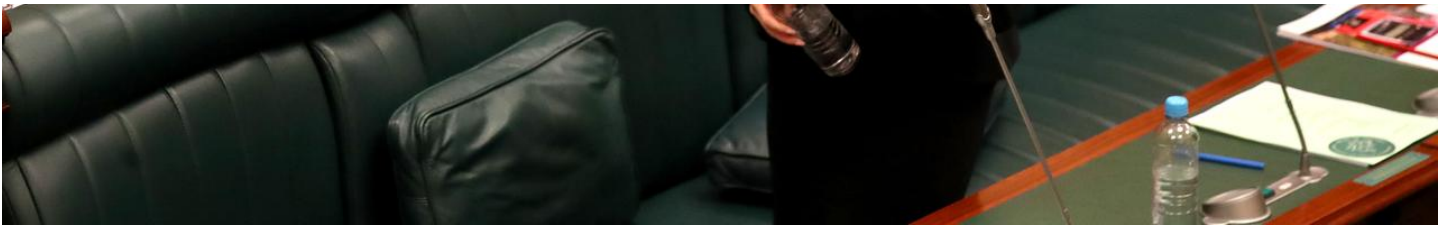
She labelled questions about the ages of the five girls, and when and how she became aware of their cases, as "disgusting" and criticised the "gutter depths that the Opposition has gone to".

In a statement later issued to The Advertiser, Ms Sanderson said any criminal matters were reported to the Child Abuse Report Line and police. The Opposition is calling for her sacking.

Labor's child protection spokeswoman, Katrine Hildyard, said the minister must explain if any of the girls were victims of sexual abuse and what investigations had taken place.

"There are so many unanswered questions," she said.





Child Protection Minister Rachel Sanderson leaves question time in parliament on Tuesday, after the report was publicly released. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Kelly Barnes

In a written response to questions from The Advertiser, Child Protection Department deputy chief executive Fiona Ward said: “To protect the privacy of young people who may already be traumatised and vulnerable, DCP will not talk about the specific details of any individual case.”

Department chief executive Cathy Taylor refused an interview request to discuss details of the Rice review, which found internal procedures for reporting serious incidents were a “mess”.

When announcing the review in December, Ms Sanderson said she [believed Ms Taylor had been “aware of the general incident”](#) but not the specifics” involving Philip Edwin McIntosh, the man convicted of abusing one of the two girls at the centre of the review.

In response to questions about this from The Advertiser, Ms Taylor issued a statement referring to findings of Mr Rice’s report that “there is no doubt the minister and chief executive did not know of the McIntosh matter until after the sentencing and media coverage”.



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focusing on is preventing these incidents in the first place”.

Public Service Association general secretary Natasha Brown said frontline workers “tell us they are constantly submitting critical incident and other relevant reports”.

“What’s done to address those issues at that point is the responsibility of management,” she said.

Mr Rice also asked the department for data on the number of pregnancies involving girls in state care over the past five years but was told this was not recorded “because ... children in care are no different to ... other children”.

However, Rob Martin, chief executive of peak body Child and Family Focus SA, said children in care were different “by virtue of their extreme vulnerability and their complete reliance on the state to keep them safe”.

Dr Martin said pregnancy among children in care, or those who had recently left the system, was “highly prevalent”.

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Guardian for Children and Young People Penny Wright said there was no formal process for notifying her about serious incidents, including pregnancy, but argued there should be. “Given my responsibility to monitor the circumstances of children in care ... and to give the minister advice ... I can only do that when I have proper and reliable information,” she said.

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