

Pioneer kids' advocate quits over no funding

KATHRYN BERMINGHAM

SOUTH Australia's first Child and Young Person's Visitor has resigned – and blames a lack of funding that prevented her from performing the role “even to a minimum standard”.

Penny Wright, pictured, said she made a budget submission outlining a program that would see her visit a “reasonable proportion” of the 600 children living at 200 residential care facilities in SA.

“As this was not successful, there is no ongoing funding for this scheme,” she said on Wednesday.

“I have now concluded that, in the absence of any dedicated resourcing for the Child and Young Person's Visitor, and no likelihood of resourcing in the foreseeable future, I am just not able to meet the obligations of this role.”

Ms Wright will continue in her roles as Guardian for Children and Young People and Training Centre Visitor.

The Child and Young Per-



son's Visitor role was created in 2017 to address a recommendation of the Nyland royal commission into the state's child protection system.

The two-year pilot scheme, which allowed the Visitor to conduct inspections and act as an advocate, involved 100 children and young people living in care facilities.

Ms Wright has unsuccessfully lobbied for further funding on several occasions after the conclusion of the program in September 2019.

She said she formally resigned from the role on Monday “as a matter of good

conscience and transparency”, despite a clear need for such a position.

“In principle, the South Australian community would take some comfort in knowing that there is a statutory position dedicated to looking out for these vulnerable children and young people,” Ms Wright said.

“However, a role in name only, without resources, does not enable me to fulfil its functions even to a minimum standard.”

A government spokeswoman said the Child and Young Person's Visiting Pro-

gram was “always intended to be a trial”. “In her role as the guardian, Penny Wright has independent statutory powers to visit all residential care facilities in the state and therefore can continue to advocate for children and young people,” the spokeswoman said.

“We remain committed to continuing to work productively with the guardian, with our shared aim of improving outcomes for children and young people in care.”

The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People receives about \$2m in annual state government funding.