

Is Public Trustee ripe for a royal commission-style forensic review?

Scathing feedback about a top Queensland government agency's alleged financial mismanagement and poisonous office environment suggests an inquiry is needed.

Anthony Marx, The Courier-Mail

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IS THE Public Trustee of Queensland ripe for a royal commission-style forensic review and a top-to-bottom fumigation?

Based on the scathing feedback your diarist received about the agency's alleged financial dramas and poisonous office environment, as detailed in our column at the weekend, it sure seems that way.

Note to Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath: You might want to sit up and pay attention to the litany of horror stories. There's a lot of anger and bitterness bubbling away out there.



Queensland Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath.

Staff, both current and formerly employed, as well as long-suffering clients provided us with detailed accounts of what sounds like a deeply messed-up organisation.

“Your story on the Public Trustee is just the tip of the iceberg,” an ex-employee who spent more than a decade in multiple roles told us.

“Toxic environment is not the word for it. That place needs to be deconstructed and started afresh. If you need to know more about staff bullying, recruitment nepotism, estate interference for friends, undercharging favours etc. let me know. I can give you all the nasty underlying stories of that place.”

Another current worker stressed that a broken corporate culture was the source of the bulk of the problems.

“A crap culture results in the good, experienced staff leaving. There is no investment in the staff in any way,” he said.

LUCKY TO BE GONE

One former client said she felt “lucky to be out of their control” after the PT spent about 10 years managing a discretionary family trust.

She claimed that that “the depth of incompetence and financial negligence” perpetrated by some employees at the PT was simply staggering.

“It leaves me horrified to imagine how someone who is vulnerable, intellectually challenged or whose power of attorney is controlled by the PT could ever hope to track where their investments go,” she said.

A similar story emerged from a gent who said he spent five years and \$150,000 in legal fees fighting the PT over the treatment of his 93-year-old aunt, who is still alive.

“They referred to her as an estate and did the most unimaginable things to her finances and her legacy,” he said.

“My aunt had to pay the PT’s legal fees combating her family—me!—who was unhappy with the extremely poor treatment of her.”

BROKEN SYSTEM

Yet another client, Sunshine Coast resident Sue Nunn, said she has asked Shadow Attorney-General David Janetzki to raise the case of her late father during a Parliamentary Estimates hearing with D’Ath on July 26.

“On August 19, 2017, our dear Dad passed away after a long fight with multiple myeloma. Since then, we have been in a protracted and very expensive legal battle with the Public Trustee over his estate. We have tried our best to resolve this issue with them. We are getting nowhere.

“The story I have to tell is distressing and unethical. These practices have gone on for years and it’s simply not right.

“We are talking about policies and practices that are systemically broken in this organisation and it needs to be brought to light.”

CORRUPTION PROBE

This outpouring of angst follows D’Ath’s suspension of PT chief Peter Carne last month for what she claimed was “serious allegations that could amount to misbehaviour”.

The state’s corruption watchdog subsequently revealed that it was “investigating allegations of corrupt conduct relating to the Public Trustee”.



Peter Carne was suspended as chief of the Public Trustee last month.

A PT spin doctor said yesterday the agency “provides a broad range of services to diverse client groups” and acknowledged that “some of the people we serve may be dissatisfied with our decision or actions”.