



Anthony Marx, The Courier-Mail

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QUEENSLAND'S shadow attorney-general has been "inundated" with complaints about the Public Trustee, and yesterday asked the state's Ombudsman to investigate the troubled agency.

David Janetzki has also vowed to launch a more in-depth review if the LNP wins the next election.

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Mr Janetzki said he had heard a litany of horror stories from Public Trustee clients and their families over the past year, with the most common issues involving mismanagement of cases, the loss of control over financial affairs and unreasonable administration costs that have depleted estates.

In one case, he said two siblings walked away with only about \$2000 each after the Public



Man in custody after siege near school



welfare of vulnerable Queenslanders is protected,” Mr Janetzki wrote in his letter to Ombudsman Phil Clarke.

His call for action follows the shock suspension of Public Trustee boss Peter Carne in June over undisclosed allegations of wrongdoing, the subsequent exodus of some of his top lieutenants and whistleblower claims of a toxic and dysfunctional work environment.

It also comes after the Victorian Ombudsman’s office released a scathing report also in June, about “systemic” problems in that state’s trustee operation, underscoring the fact that this is a national problem demanding reform.

The report found “poor financial management” in 23 of the 30 cases examined in-depth, including insurance paid on a car sent to the wreckers three years earlier, and recommended a raft of changes.

With \$2.7 billion in assets under management, the Public Trustee in Queensland has oversight of nearly 10,000 cases.

Many involve people with impaired decision-making abilities, as well as deceased estates, trusts and some of society’s least affluent individuals.

The organisation, founded in 1916, has grown to employ more than 600 workers across the state and claims it is now the largest maker of wills in the southern hemisphere.





 Ombudsman Phil Clarke

But there have long been complaints about the way it operates, including alleged conflicts of interest and a “self-funding” model that some say encourages overcharging.

The critics say the agency lacks accountability and transparency, with some even accusing case officers of tampering with documents and other fraudulent activity, allegations that have been strenuously rejected.

Mr Janetzki sought to raise some of the issues during an Estimates hearing last week (July 26) but he later claimed that he was “stonewalled” by Attorney-General Yvette D’Ath.

“It’s clear from the Estimates that she has no interest in reviewing the operations of how the Public Trustee operates,” he said.





“There will always be, from time to time, aggrieved clients or, can I say, also aggrieved family members who are not clients,” Ms D’Ath said.

“Sometimes those family members do not like the fact that they are not managing their loved one’s money...

“There will always be people aggrieved because they personally do not believe that someone else should be managing their money or their loved one’s money.”

One aggrieved party is Doug Young, a consumer activist and officeholder in the Committee to Expose the Public Trustee as well as the Australian Association to Stop Guardianship and Administration Abuse.

The groups are pushing for a commission of inquiry in Queensland and amendments to state legislation, including the Guardianship and Administration Act.

They also seek continued oversight of the Public Trustee by an independent authority.

“The common denominator amongst us all is the Public Trustee has taken homes, money and assets from our loved ones and spent it on their own fees and bad investments against the will of their clients, who have had their lives severely restricted as a result,” he said.

