

# SA's Child Protection Minister defends only recently finding out about paedophile's abuse of girl, 13, in state care

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Minister for Child Protection Rachel Sanderson says processes have changed to ensure ministers are informed about serious cases of abuse. (ABC News: Ben Pettitt)

A 13-year-old girl under the legal guardianship of South Australia's Child Protection Minister was abused and impregnated by a paedophile in January — but the Minister only found out about the case this week.

On Monday, Matthew James McIntyre was imprisoned after pleading guilty to grooming the girl using the teenage dating app MyLOL and having unlawful sexual intercourse with her in January.

A worker at the house had discovered disturbing message exchanges with McIntyre on the girl's phone and called the police.

It later became apparent the girl was pregnant and a DNA test confirmed McIntyre was the father. The pregnancy was terminated.

McIntyre, 35, was sentenced on Monday to three years and nine months in jail, with a non-parole period of just under two years.

SA Child Protection Minister Rachel Sanderson, the legal guardian of children in state care, said she was "very angry" she was only informed of the case on Tuesday.

## Key points:

- The girl became pregnant to a paedophile while in state care in January
- The Minister, Rachel Sanderson, said she was informed on Tuesday
- The Opposition has called for an independent inquiry

The Opposition has called for an independent inquiry into how the abuse occurred.

## Paedophile told girl he wanted to get her pregnant

In sentencing remarks, Judge Julie McIntyre (no relation) said McIntyre's behaviour was "disgraceful, persistent and predatory".

She said he continued to communicate with the girl up until the messages were discovered, including telling her he wanted to get her pregnant.

The girl had tried to end the messaging after the sexual intercourse because she feared she might be pregnant.

"It would not be an exaggeration to say that you bombarded your victim with messages even when she told you that she did not want to continue messaging," the judge said.

"Even when your victim told you she feared she was pregnant and would have to have an abortion because she was unable to cope with a baby, you suggested that she ought to keep the child and continue to have unprotected sex with you."



The District Court judge said the consequences of the girl's abuse were likely to be "significant and enduring". (ABC News: Eugene Boisvert)

The man has a substantial number of prior convictions and a young daughter from a previous relationship, whom he had not seen in years.

The judge noted that he had shown remorse for his actions and pleaded guilty at the earliest possible time.

However, she said, it could be argued he only pleaded guilty because he knew it was inevitable he would be convicted.

"It is the experience of the courts that victims of such offences suffer long-term adverse effects," Judge McIntyre said.

In particular, the psychological and physical consequences of becoming pregnant in these circumstances and having a termination of that pregnancy at only 13 years of age are likely to be significant and enduring."

## **Minister had directed department to keep her informed**

Ms Sanderson said she was not informed of the case until this week despite policy changes she instituted earlier this year, intended to ensure her department kept her informed.

She said she had asked for the policy change after the offences occurred but before the judgment was handed down.

"Unfortunately, I was not made aware of this incident," she told reporters on Thursday.

"It should not happen again and I am very unhappy that it did happen at all."

Despite this, she insisted the policy change had worked and that she would be told of such serious incidents in future.

She said she had full confidence in Department of Child Protection chief executive Cathy Taylor.

"I have every confidence with Cathy Taylor ... she's doing a fantastic job taking the chaos out of the Child Protection Department and running a smooth ship," she said.

"She's aware I was very unhappy I was not notified."

## **'A human tragedy'**

Opposition Leader Peter Malinauskas on Wednesday called for an inquiry into how the crimes were allowed, saying Ms Sanderson was responsible for the welfare of children in care.

"Tragically, a situation has been allowed to unfold where a 13-year-old girl has fallen victim to a ... paedophile and subsequently fallen pregnant," he said.

"This is truly a human tragedy.

"That is an appalling situation that must be accounted for."