



22 May 2017

Our reference: LEX 29261

Mr Keith Owen

By email: foi+request-3436-3b0dd8c2@righttoknow.org.au

Dear Mr Owen

Decision on your Freedom of Information request

I refer to your request, dated 22 April 2017 and received by the Department of Human Services (the **department**) on the same day for access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the **FOI Act**) to the following documents:

'I respectfully request data on the number of suicides and homicides recorded by the Child Support arm of the Department of Human Services for the preceding 12 months.

I respectfully request data on the number of "Termination Events" involving the death of either a payee or a payer recorded by the Child Support arm of the Department of Human Services.

We are aware these statistics are recorded, with particular reference to Suicides and Homicides because the Child Support Arm of the Department of Human Services makes reference to this data being recorded as a result of a "Critical Incident" and treated as separate cases to generally recording the deaths of clients as "Termination Events".'

My decision

I have decided to refuse your request for access under section 24A of the FOI Act on the basis that all reasonable steps have been taken to locate the documents you have requested and I am satisfied that they do not exist. Please see **Attachment A** for the reasons behind my decision.

You can ask for a review of our decision

If you disagree with any part of the decision you can ask for a review. There are two ways you can do this. You can ask for an internal review from within the department, or an external review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. You do not have to pay for reviews of decisions. See **Attachment B** for more information about how arrange a review.

Further assistance

If you have any questions please email FOI.LEGAL.TEAM@humanservices.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Charlotte
Authorised FOI Decision Maker
Freedom of Information Team
FOI and Litigation Branch | Legal Services Division
Department of Human Services

REASONS FOR DECISION

What you requested

I respectfully request data on the number of suicides and homicides recorded by the Child Support arm of the Department of Human Services for the preceding 12 months.

I respectfully request data on the number of "Termination Events" involving the death of either a payee or a payer recorded by the Child Support arm of the Department of Human Services.

We are aware these statistics are recorded, with particular reference to Suicides and Homicides because the Child Support Arm of the Department of Human Services makes reference to this data being recorded as a result of a "Critical Incident" and treated as separate cases to generally recording the deaths of clients as "Termination Events".

What I took into account

In reaching my decision I took into account:

- your original request dated 22 April 2017;
- consultations with departmental officers about the department's operating environment and functions;
- guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (the **Guidelines**); and
- the FOI Act.

Reasons for my decisions

I am authorised to make decisions under section 23(1) of the FOI Act.

Section 24A of the FOI Act

Section 24A of the FOI Act provides that:

- (1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
 - (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
 - (b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
 - (i) is in the agency's or Minister's possession but cannot be found; or
 - (ii) does not exist.

The Child Support Smart Centres Division conducted searches of the department's electronic records. The Division did not identify any documents matching the description in your request.

I undertook further consultations with this Division and was informed that the department has no data on the number of suicides and homicides of child support parents. The

department does not request information about the circumstances of the death of child support parents.

I was advised further that the department does not refer to the deaths of child support parents as 'termination events'. While the phrase 'terminating events' is commonly used by the department, this phrase refers to a broad range of events, which result in a child support case ending. Section 12 of the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989* (the **CSA Act**) defines a 'child support terminating event'. The CSA Act is available for you to view at www.legislation.gov.au.

On the basis of the information I have been provided by the Child Support Smart Centres Division, I am satisfied that in accordance with section 24A of the FOI Act:

1. all reasonable steps have been taken to find the documents; and
2. the documents do not exist.



Attachment B

INFORMATION ON RIGHTS OF REVIEW

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982

Asking for a full explanation of a Freedom of Information decision

Before you ask for a formal review of a FOI decision, you can contact us to discuss your request. We will explain the decision to you. This gives you a chance to correct misunderstandings.

Asking for a formal review of a Freedom of Information decision

If you still believe a decision is incorrect, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) gives you the right to apply for a review of the decision. Under sections 54 and 54L of the FOI Act, you can apply for a review of a FOI decision by:

1. an Internal Review Officer in the Department of Human Services (the department); and/or
2. the Australian Information Commissioner.

Note 1: There are no fees for these reviews.

Applying for an internal review by an Internal Review Officer

If you apply for internal review, a different decision maker to the departmental delegate who made the original decision will carry out the review. The Internal Review Officer will consider all aspects of the original decision and decide whether it should change. An application for internal review must be:

- made in writing
- made within 30 days of receiving this letter
- sent to the address at the top of the first page of this letter.

Note 2: You do not need to fill in a form. However, it is a good idea to set out any relevant submissions you would like the Internal Review Officer to further consider, and your reasons for disagreeing with the decision.

Applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner

If you do not agree with the original decision or the internal review decision, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner to review the decision.

If you do not receive a decision from an Internal Review Officer in the department within 30 days of applying, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner for a review of the original FOI decision.

You will have 60 days to apply in writing for a review by the Australian Information Commissioner.

You can **lodge your application**:

Online: www.oaic.gov.au

Post: Australian Information Commissioner
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au

Note 3: The Australian Information Commissioner generally prefers FOI applicants to seek internal review before applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner.

Important:

- If you are applying online, the 'Merits Review Form' is available at **www.oaic.gov.au**.
- You should include with your application a copy of the Department of Human Services' decision on your FOI request
- Include your contact details
- Set out your reasons for objecting to the department's decision.

Complaints to the Australian Information Commissioner and Commonwealth Ombudsman

Australian Information Commissioner

You may complain to the Australian Information Commissioner concerning action taken by an agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Australian Information Commissioner must be made in writing. The Australian Information Commissioner's contact details are:

Telephone: 1300 363 992
Website: www.oaic.gov.au

Commonwealth Ombudsman

You may also complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman concerning action taken by an agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. The Commonwealth Ombudsman's contact details are:

Phone: 1300 362 072
Website: www.ombudsman.gov.au

The Commonwealth Ombudsman generally prefers applicants to seek review before complaining about a decision.