



Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle

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DON'T LET MIGRANT SERVICES GET LOST IN THE RESHUFFLE

Member for Newcastle Sharon Grierson today called on the Howard Government to commit to fixing migrant services in the Hunter, following the shifting of the responsible minister out of the portfolio in yesterday's reshuffle.

The former Minister for Citizenship & Multicultural Affairs with responsibility for the troubled Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), John Cobb, has been shifted sideways and replaced by a junior Parliamentary Secretary.

"We now have Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone with direct responsibility for the administration of the IHSS at a time when her department is already facing major cultural and administrative refocussing," Ms Grierson said.

"I have today written to the Minister urging her to reconsider the decision of her predecessor not to hold an inquiry into the death of Richard Niyonsaba, a two year old Burundian refugee who tragically died shortly after arriving in Australia in November last year under the IHSS."

"I have also invited the Minister to visit Newcastle to investigate the broader operation of the IHSS under the ACL group."

"Some of the stories of inadequate services provided to migrants under the IHSS - many of whom have already faced great trauma before coming to our country - are extremely disturbing, particularly for those of us who are proud of Newcastle's strong tradition of welcoming and accepting new settlers."

Ms Grierson wrote to the previous Minister in August 2005 and raised the issue in Parliament in September and November, warning of potential problems and seeking guarantees that former service levels would be maintained.

"Unfortunately, this has not been the case."

"Minister Vanstone now has the opportunity to admit there have been problems, to see them first hand, and to commit to doing something about them."

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