



- 6 NOV 2018

Gregory Soar
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Tēnā koe Mr Soar

Thank you for your email dated 11 October 2018 addressed to Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development, regarding the use of pseudonyms by Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) staff. Your email has been referred to the Ministry for response. I am responding on behalf of the Chief Executive.

You have asked what legal authority is used by the Ministry to permit the continued use of false names whilst appealing to a higher court.

You may have seen reporting in the media about the recent High Court decision that the Ministry can no longer use pseudonyms. The Ministry has decided not to appeal the decision on the use of pseudonyms by Benefits Review Committees in the small percentage of cases (between 50 to 80 instances in any given year) where clients are considered a safety risk. We accept the Court decision and we will stop using pseudonyms in Benefit Review Committee cases.

Since 2004, we have used pseudonyms as one way to protect our staff from threatening or abusive clients in Benefits Review Committee cases. The vast majority of our clients communicate with us safely, but a small minority regularly make threatening and abusive comments and act threateningly to our staff. We have strong safety procedures in place to continue to protect our staff including locking down our offices and involving Police, where this is necessary.

The Ministry has also stepped up measures to ensure staff are safe from potentially dangerous clients through a range of measures including:

- making some changes to our service to clients who are threatening or abusive
- site security assessments
- threat/risk assessments on clients who say threatening or abusive things or act threateningly
- personal security assessments on the safety of former and new staff
- site security assessments on home addresses of former and new staff
- group and individual staff counselling sessions, available if needed.

We are absolutely committed to the safety and security of our staff.

Thank you again for writing. I hope this information clarifies matters for you.

Nāku iti noa, nā

Elisabeth Brunt
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services