

**INQUIRY INTO UNSOLVED MURDERS AND LONG-TERM
MISSING PERSONS CASES IN NEW SOUTH WALES
BETWEEN 1965 AND 2010**

Organisation: Centre for Missing Persons (Aust) Inc
Date Received: 17 March 2026

Stephenie Fielding

Centre for Missing Persons (Aust) Inc

17/3/2026

Committee: Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance

Re: Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Unsolved Murders and Long-Term Missing Persons Cases in New South Wales between 1965 and 2010

My name is Stephenie Fielding and I am making this submission as both a family member of a long-term missing person and as a community advocate working to support other families navigating the missing persons system.

My brother, Rigby Fielding, is a long-term missing person. The experience of living with the uncertainty of a missing loved one has profoundly shaped my life and has led me to advocate for systemic reform and support the officers who work in the missing persons units.

I am currently the President of the Centre for Missing Persons, an organisation dedicated to supporting families of missing persons. Through this role I assist families across Australia to navigate complex systems including police investigations, media engagement, government agencies, and support services.

Over the years I have spoken with many families affected by unresolved missing persons cases. A consistent theme emerges, in which families feel lost within a system that often lacks adequate resources, coordination, communication, and long-term support.

While this inquiry focuses on New South Wales cases between 1965 and 2010, the systemic issues experienced by families are consistent across Australia. I hope this submission contributes insights that will improve investigative practices and the support provided to families living with the lifelong trauma of unresolved cases.

These are some of the key points families struggle with on an ongoing basis when a loved one goes missing:

- Families of missing persons experience long-term trauma compounded by uncertainty and lack of information.
- Police units responsible for missing persons cases are often under-resourced, particularly when cases become long-term or “cold cases.”
- Families frequently struggle to access clear information, consistent communication, and advocacy within investigative processes.
- There is a need for specialised long-term case review teams and better resourcing of cold case investigations.
- Families require structured support services, including trauma-informed liaison officers and access to legal and administrative guidance.
- Families need greater national coordination to ensure long-term missing persons cases remain active and visible.

One of the most significant challenges families encounter is the decline in investigative momentum once a case becomes classified as “long-term.” This has a profound effect on the families who are left to carry on their own investigations to find their loved ones.

Families often report that:

- Active investigation decreases over time
- Case updates become less frequent
- Officers assigned to cases change regularly
- Families struggle to identify who is responsible for their case

While I recognise the significant pressures on police resources, unresolved missing persons cases require specialised attention. Families often feel that unless new evidence emerges, cases can effectively stall.

Dedicated cold case units and specialist investigators are essential to ensure that historic cases continue to receive attention and that new investigative techniques, including advances in forensic science and digital data analysis, are applied where possible. Families frequently describe communication with authorities as inconsistent or unclear.

In my experience working with families through the Centre 4 Missing Persons, common concerns include:

- Lack of regular case updates
- Uncertainty about investigative progress
- Difficulty accessing information
- Feeling excluded from decisions relating to the case

Many families also report that they must repeatedly re-explain their circumstances to new investigators when cases are reassigned. A dedicated family liaison system would significantly improve trust and reduce the emotional burden placed on families who already face profound trauma. Families of missing persons often live in a state of “ambiguous loss,” where grief cannot fully resolve due to the absence of answers.

The impacts include:

- Long-term psychological trauma
- Financial stress
- Difficulties accessing legal and administrative processes
- Social isolation

Unlike families of homicide victims, families of missing persons often fall into gaps between support services because the circumstances surrounding the disappearance remain unresolved.

Through my advocacy work, I have seen families struggle to access counselling, legal advice, or assistance navigating government processes. More comprehensive and long-term support frameworks are urgently needed.

When my brother, Rigby Fielding, went missing, our family entered a world of uncertainty that no family is prepared for. The experience of searching for a missing loved one is not only emotional but also administrative and investigative. Families are often required to coordinate media appeals, communicate with police, gather information, and maintain public awareness, all while dealing with immense grief and uncertainty.

This personal experience motivated me to volunteer and lead the Centre for Missing Persons, where I now assist other families facing similar circumstances. Through this work, I have witnessed firsthand the resilience of families but also the systemic challenges they encounter,

including navigating complex investigative processes with limited support. Many families feel they must become investigators and advocates themselves simply to keep their loved one's case visible.

Based on both lived experience and my advocacy work, the following systemic issues frequently arise:

Limited resources for long-term investigations - Cases that become long-term often receive fewer investigative resources despite the need for ongoing review.

Lack of specialised family liaison support - Families need consistent points of contact who understand the complexities of missing persons investigations and the emotional toll involved.

Insufficient national coordination - Missing persons cases often cross jurisdictional boundaries. Better information sharing between states is essential.

Lack of structured long-term support for families - Families may require support for decades, yet most services are designed for short-term crisis intervention.

Barriers to accessing information and legal processes - Issues such as presumption of death, accessing financial accounts, and legal documentation can create additional stress for families.

I respectfully recommend the Committee consider the following reforms:

- Increase funding and resources for specialist long-term missing persons and cold case investigation units.
- Establish dedicated family liaison officers trained in trauma-informed communication for missing persons cases.
- Implement regular scheduled case reviews for long-term missing persons investigations.
- Improve national coordination and information sharing between police jurisdictions.
- Provide government-funded support services specifically designed for families of missing persons, including counselling and legal guidance.
- Develop clearer protocols to ensure families receive consistent updates regarding their loved one's case.

Families of missing persons live with uncertainty that can last decades. The absence of answers affects every aspect of their lives. Through both my personal experience and my work supporting other families, I have seen how vital it is that missing persons cases remain a priority within investigative systems.

I thank the Committee for examining this important issue and for recognising the voices of families who continue to search for answers.

It is my hope that this inquiry will lead to meaningful reforms that improve investigative outcomes and provide stronger support for families living with the devastating reality of unresolved missing persons cases.

Sincerley,

Stephenie Fielding

President

Centre for Missing Persons