

~~Emergency Service Assistance, Delays~~

Mrs STUCKEY: ~~My question is to the Premier. My office has received a number of calls from residents about delayed emergency service assistance caused by 000 phone calls being diverted to the New South Wales Police Service. Can the Premier advise what she is doing to improve those services for the people of Currumbin and when they can expect this issue to be resolved?~~

Ms PALASZCZUK: ~~I thank the member for Currumbin for the question. It is a very important question. I will follow that up for her and I undertake to get back to her in relation to the matter.~~

Multiculturalism

Mrs GILBERT: ~~My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Will the minister update the House on what the Palaszczuk government is doing to support an inclusive multicultural Queensland and any alternative policies?~~

Mr SPEAKER: ~~Minister, you have one minute.~~

Ms GRACE: ~~I thank the member for Mackay for that great question. I know she is very supportive of the multicultural community in her area. Today is Harmony Day, a celebration of our cultural diversity and a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Queensland or Australia home. The message of Harmony Day is that everyone belongs, which is a fantastic message that we will be sending to each other and to every Australian. However, it was with dismay that I woke up to find that the Turnbull government has chosen today of all days to discuss watering down section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. What an insult to those from a multicultural background! Today is Harmony Day when we should all be celebrating diversity, but of all days what do they do? They want to advance the watering down of 18C! That is shameful. Those opposite should renounce them. They have no respect for our multicultural communities. I condemn them for their actions.~~

Mr SPEAKER: ~~The time for questions has expired.~~

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CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION LEGISLATION (REPORTING OF ABUSE) AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

Mr PYNE (Cairns—Ind) (11.34 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the Child Protection Act 1999 and the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 for particular purposes. I table the bill and explanatory notes. I nominate the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Child Protection and Education Legislation (Reporting of Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017.

Tabled paper: Child Protection and Education Legislation (Reporting of Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017, explanatory notes.

This bill is very simple: it amends the Child Protection Act 1999 and the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 to impose the obligation of mandatory reporting for sexual abuse, real or suspected, on ministers of religion. The bill follows the widespread and worldwide revelations of childhood sexual abuse by religious representatives over decades. The bill amends section 13E of the Child Protection Act 1999, mandatory reporting by persons engaged in particular work, to insert a new category of persons, namely, a minister of a religious denomination or society who performs work for or has an association with a school. Examples of 'religious representative' include priest, pastor, bishop, rabbi and imam.

Regarding the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, in this bill clause 5 amends section 384, definitions for part 10, to insert 'religious representative', which means a minister of a religious denomination or society. Clause 6 amends section 365, obligation to report sexual abuse of persons under 18 years at state schools, to impose a mandatory reporting requirement on a religious representative. Clause 7 amends section 365A, obligation to report likely sexual abuse of a person under 18 years at state schools, to impose a mandatory reporting requirement on a religious representative. Clause 8 amends section 366, the obligation to report sexual abuse of persons under 18 years at non-state schools, to include 'religious representative'. Clause 9 amends section 366A, obligation to report likely sexual abuse of a person under 18 years at non-state schools, to include 'religious representative'.

The bill is substantially uniform or complementary with legislation in other states. The bill is consistent with fundamental legal principles. The bill does not include the confessional as an exception

from mandatory reporting. The bill is not a direct response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse, after all, the issue of abuse by church-run institutions is a well-known worldwide fact. The tragic conveyor belt of witnesses before the royal commission only proved to confirm what we all know about institutional abuse: it ruined thousands of lives and hurt thousands of vulnerable children. I am sure we all felt shock and deep sorrow at the staggering statistics produced by the commission. One in 14 Catholic clergy were accused of abuse by 4,444 victims over six decades, which is a terrible abuse of power and a terrible failure of our society. In some individual orders, the rate increased to a staggering one in five. The report also stated that the church was unwilling to investigate the reported abuse and also assisted in covering up incidents after they were reported, with senior counsel Gail Furness noting to the commission that—

Children were ignored or worse, punished. Allegations were not investigated. Priests ... were moved. The parishes and communities to which they moved knew nothing of their past. Documents were not kept or they were destroyed.

The worst order, the Saint John of God Brothers, had 40 per cent of religious brothers accused of abuse. The consequences of failing to achieve fundamental structural and cultural change would be dire, not only for the protection of children but also for the fate of the Catholic Church itself. That is shown by the Christian Brothers through its slow dissent into irrelevance. Twenty-two per cent of its clergy were alleged perpetrators, which is the second highest rate of any religious order in the country. More than 1,000 survivors made a claim against the Christian Brothers. On average, victims were 11 years old when they were abused. I cannot imagine the horror of that experience for a child. Of any Catholic order, the Christian Brothers has paid out the most to survivors, making 763 payments worth \$38.5 million, which is an average payment of around \$64,000. Its brand is all but gone from Australia, replaced by Edmund Rice Education Australia, an organisation with the Christian Brothers' founder as its namesake. Christian Brothers Oceania leader, Peter Clinch, said there are only 280 brothers left Australia-wide, most of whom are aged 75 years or above. The youngest is 53. They no longer seek new candidates for the order. I, for one, say that that is an overwhelmingly good thing.

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Royal commission witness Christopher Geraghty wrote in 2013—

... the Church has for centuries presumed that it can police its own borders, that it is an independent empire, not answerable to any secular power. It has had its own language, its own administration and training programmes, its own schools and universities, its own system of laws and regulations, its police force and lawyers, a developed list of penalties and its own courts and processes. A law unto itself—an organisation founded by God and answerable only to God.

Such an attitude is no longer acceptable. In fact, a majority of Australians find such an attitude thoroughly objectionable. It falls horribly short in protecting our children.

It must be noted that Australia's first saint, Mary McKillop, took action against clergy abuse in 1871 and was excommunicated. One can only wonder how many children were abused by clergy in the 150 years that followed. Childhood is the one time in life that human beings are entitled to feel happy and carefree. It is vital we acknowledge the suffering of those who have had their lives ruined by childhood sexual assault and that encouraged them to seek justice.

This place has also had members guilty of childhood sexual abuse—prominent MPs at that. Those who are aware of the details of the Heiner affair know all too well that those in highest positions within government have not been above destroying evidence of childhood sexual abuse. In that case, as in many others, justice was never served.

We are dealing here with people who, in their customs, traditions and behaviour, proclaim a great knowledge of morality and what is right. I have never accepted that. My attitude in the past to many of these leaders, like George Pell and others, was simply one of a lack of respect. Now it is one of disgust. It is high time they had a higher burden placed on them regarding mandatory reporting and this bill does just that. It is time religious representatives are subjected to the same rule of law as many of the other groups that work with children in schools. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

~~Mr PYNE (Cairns—Ind) (11.42 am): I move~~

~~That the bill be now read a first time.~~

~~Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.~~

~~Motion agreed to.~~

~~Bill read a first time.~~

~~Referral to the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee~~