



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (12.38 pm): I am pleased to provide an overview of the budget for the Department of Child Safety and the programs that are ahead of us over this next year. In fact, I quote two honourable members from the recently released Reforming Child Protection in Queensland report by the Crime and Misconduct Commission who state—

Expenditure on protecting children from harm and providing adoption services has increased steadily from \$296 million in 2004-05 to approximately \$500 million in 2006-07.

In the estimates debate we were able to see the further boost to the child protection budget of nearly \$50 million in the 2007-08 year making it a budget of \$551.3 million. I am pleased indeed that the opposition spokesperson mentioned the One Chance at Childhood initiative. It is a new initiative which has received funding in this budget of \$12 million. It is a beginning budget to do what has not been done by any government before and that is to focus on very young children, babies and toddlers, who come to the attention of the child protection system to ensure there is a rapid and intensive response towards either reunification with their families or finding an alternative permanent placement.

It is a very important policy shift for this government to take. It is a policy shift that has not been taken by any previous government, including the National Party governments of the past. It was important that we made a commitment to the policy shift and that we attested to that commitment as a government by putting our money on the table as it were. Only then is the department in a position to work out exactly how that administration will occur. It is a very serious message to give parents, 'Shape up or we will take your kids and we will give them to other parents instead.' It is right and proper therefore that we take the time to make sure we are coordinating all the kinds of support that those families may need in order to have their chance to pull their household together to provide a safe and loving home before we remove their children permanently. Of course that takes some time to manage in terms of the kinds of expertise that the department needs and has not presently got and how it can be best distributed around the state. There is also the work that must occur in coordinating with other departments.

So often in Child Safety we are picking up the pieces of a litany of long-term problems in a family that go way beyond the portfolio of Child Safety. I talk of housing problems, poverty problems, education and training problems, employment problems, health problems and alcohol and drug problems. So our coordination of this program with other departments also must be well worked out before we are able to launch it. The good news I have for those concerned is that we will have it up and running in the last quarter of this year. I look forward to the opportunity to inform the House in more detail about how the program will work.

The other major initiative funded in this budget is a new model of service delivery to Indigenous communities and with that a huge capital works program to rollout much better facilities for our staff to work from so that they can work much closer to these remote Indigenous communities. As well it includes places where our staff can live in these communities. Most importantly probably are the safe houses that we will establish in these communities so that children who are in need of protection can come out of their own

homes but stay within the community in a safe home run, hopefully, by leaders in their communities. Some \$19.1 million operating and \$15.5 million capital funding are included in this budget and will be spent over four years on these Indigenous initiatives.

May I take a moment to thank the committee but beyond the committee put the thanks where they are due and that is with all the staff of the Department of Child Safety who have worked so hard to get us a child protection system that is world class.