




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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PUBLIC GUARDIAN BILL; FAMILY AND CHILD COMMISSION BILL; CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.46 pm): I rise to speak to the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2014, the Family and Child Commission Bill 2014 and the Public Guardian Bill 2014. In particular, I rise to speak to the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill and the Health and Community Services Committee's report on this bill from earlier this month. I thank my hardworking fellow members of the committee and those who took part in the committee process as we compiled our reports on the merits of this bill over the past two months. The duty to protect those who are most vulnerable is one of the fundamental responsibilities of any society, and this bill delivers on a commitment by this government to continue to make Queensland the safest place to live and to raise a family.

In 2012, as members are aware, the government established the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry led by the Hon. Tim Carmody QC. The commission, having been tasked with charting a new course for child protection for the coming decade, found that the current child protection system was under immense stress and that the government must undertake to reform this system for the benefit of future generations. It was with this in mind that the Attorney-General introduced the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill into the House. The Health and Community Services Committee recommends, first and foremost, that this bill be passed.

In compiling its report, the committee was fortunate to have officers from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services who were willing to brief committee members on this bill. In addition, the committee held a public hearing to examine the bill on 29 April at Parliament House during which witnesses from six organisations commented on the bill, while 19 written submissions were also submitted to the committee for consideration.

At its core, this bill seeks to implement the recommendations of the commission of inquiry and establish important legislative frameworks to better facilitate child protection in the years ahead. This bill will streamline child death case reviews and refocus them on learning. Reviews will be required in all cases where a child dies or is seriously injured and they were known to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services within 12 months of their death or injury. It provides measures to address the level of unsustainable demand on the child protection system. It reforms when reports about a child must be made to the department. It vests the complaint and oversight functions currently performed by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian in the Ombudsman in order to improve the complaints processing system and avoid duplication.

It improves the blue card system with the transfer of responsibility for blue cards to the Public Safety Business Agency in a new stand-alone piece of legislation. It reduces the burden on the department by omitting a requirement for annual reporting by departments with responsibilities for child protection. These reforms are absolutely critical in implementing the recommendations of the

commission of inquiry, a process which the committee recognises will take some time. In addition to recommending that this bill be passed, the committee outlined a number of other key recommendations. The committee recommended that the Attorney-General or the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services inform the House of the expected timing for the main components of the reforms to be implemented and that they provide detailed information about the expected sequence and timing of child protection reforms to stakeholders.

It was also recommended that the Attorney-General, the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and the Minister for Education, Training and Employment work with stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to certain new requirements. This bill is an important piece of legislation which will implement some of the most significant reforms to child protection in recent memory. It will reform child protection to ensure that we are able to better protect children and their families from harm into the future. The level of strain on the state's child protection system is unsustainable, and the government is absolutely committed to reforming the child protection system to improve its efficiencies, end duplication, remove unnecessary legislative requirements, and secure the safety and wellbeing of children and their families throughout Queensland.

I again thank my fellow committee members for their hard work and the Attorney-General for introducing this important bill. I commend the bill to the House.