




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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**CHILD PROTECTION (MANDATORY REPORTING—MASON'S LAW)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.17 pm): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason's Law) Amendment Bill 2016. At the very heart of this bill is the legacy of young Mason John Parker, a 16-month-old beautiful little boy tragically murdered in 2011—a toddler at the very beginning of what should have been a life filled with happiness and creating memories. That little boy, sadly—tragically—never got the chance to have that life. As we know, he suffered terribly at the hands of a person—I struggle to say his name—Troy William Reed, the de facto partner of Mason's mother, who was entrusted to care for him. As we heard from the member for Hinchinbrook, this beautiful boy suffered a fractured skull, bruises, internal injuries and a ruptured bowel. That monster I speak of is now serving 15 years in prison for his horrible crimes.

Let us all remember why we are here. We stand here today to finally deliver this vital and important piece of legislation—a piece of legislation that will protect young lives and, I believe, in fact save the lives of innocent children to whom some in our society do terrible things, resulting in injury and, in Mason's case, death as a result of those injuries.

This mandatory reporting will change the way our early childhood educators report on suspicious injuries identified on a child. I believe that we should do everything in our power as a government in a bipartisan manner, and at this point I commend Minister Shannon Fentiman, the dedicated staff of the department of communities and child safety, the secretariat and fellow committee members for the considerable body of work done in the background to effectively land this bill in the parliamentary chamber tonight. I also acknowledge the member for Aspley for her role in her private member's bill and the bipartisan nature of working through the amendments to see the bill pass.

I do have a matter of concern that I will address later, but all in this place have a role to play in protecting the innocent lives of all children and we all should as legislators do our measured best to deliver on bills such as this to ensure these terrible and tragic events do not happen in our society. Unfortunately, we cannot control those who seek to do harm. However, I firmly believe that this bill—Mason's law—will help identify those who deliberately harm children and that those people are dealt with by the courts and found guilty of such terrible behaviour.

I have spoken in this House before of my experience in having to respond to children in my 25 years as a paramedic, and I struggle to remove some of those shocking and tragic images from my mind. Those experiences, and, in fact, my own life experiences growing up as a child and having been subjected to violent episodes from those who are meant to love and care for a child, have changed me as a person today. I now observe and judge those in our community who are entrusted to love and care to raise children with a degree of uncertainty, just hoping they all do the right thing by their children. What a tragedy that as a society we have to create such legislation as Mason's law to ensure our children are protected from the monsters out there—and that is how I describe them—seeking to harm their own or other's children.

Before I go on, I want to acknowledge Mr John and Mrs Sue Sandeman in the public gallery observing history in our Queensland parliament—so often called the people’s house, and that term could not be more accurate tonight. John and Sue have been unwavering in their desire to see this through from the beginning. I commend their dedication and their commitment to see this legislation finally passed. I applaud you both for your love of Mason and your desire to see all children in early childcare centres protected through the passing of this vital but sadly needed piece of legislation aptly named Mason’s law. From your work the end of this long journey is near. You can now rest assured his legacy—Mason Parker’s legacy—lives on forever. Our congratulations. I have said before that in my short time here I have learnt that there is a time to be a parliamentarian and a time to be a politician. I believe this occasion calls for the former as we strive to deliver this in a bipartisan manner. We are here talking about Mason’s legacy after all. However, I am disappointed about an article in Saturday’s paper. I say to the member for Aspley that it did not need to happen. The article states—

No one, from local members right through to senior ministers, has bothered to keep in regular contact with the family ...

I know that I have only been a member for 18 months and I really do genuinely see the intent of what the member for Aspley and the member for Hinchinbrook have tried to achieve here, but for the record I think I have had a very good conversation and interactions—all positive—with John and Sue, including a very private meeting in my electorate office just a couple of months ago. Again, I only spoke with them last Friday before that article was printed and I just do not think it was needed. It takes the shine off what we are trying to do. Let us all rise above and remember why we are here. I do believe that we all have a really valid intent in what we are trying to achieve here. It is an important piece of legislation and let us keep that bipartisan manner as the bill is all deserving—all entirely deserving—of our very best performance as legislators and members of our parliament, so let us get on with it.

It is important to look at the journey so far. A public campaign led by John and Sue commenced not long after the sentencing of Reed, the person responsible for Mason’s death. On 11 February 2014, as the member for Hinchinbrook stated—and I commend him for his work—he tabled the Sandemans’ petition in parliament. It went through a number of procedures of the parliament at that time, the 54th Parliament. I still struggle to understand why when the then attorney-general introduced the child protection amendment bill 2014 it did not include the early childhood education sector. I still struggle as to why that did not happen then, but we are here now and that is a good thing. I commend those opposite for changing their views of what was in the 54th Parliament and getting it to the 55th Parliament and finally landing here tonight. As the committee said, we received numerous submissions with concerns by the definition used by the—

Mr Crandon: You can’t help yourself, can you? No, you can’t.

Mr HARPER: No. This is important. We are all here together and it does not need an interjection. We are all here together to deliver a very important piece of legislation. We know that appropriate training will be provided to educate people in the ECEC sector, but that is going to take some time. The Palaszczuk government is committed to the findings of the Queensland Law Reform Commission. Our government response to the commission’s report clearly supports the recommendation to expand child protection mandatory reporting provisions to the early childhood education and care sector as well as the approved services within which the obligations should operate. I know our government will deliver this. The Palaszczuk government is proud to provide bipartisan support. Child safety reforms deserve bipartisan support in this place. I again acknowledge Minister Fentiman and the member for Aspley for working together on these amendments to see them introduced tonight to make this bill workable. I commend the bill to the House to be forever known as Mason’s law. Again, I give my congratulations to John and Sue Sandeman.