




Speech By
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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL; DIRECTOR OF CHILD PROTECTION LITIGATION BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (5.15 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2016 and the Director of Child Protection Litigation Bill 2016. Unfortunately, it seems that legislators are having to do more and more with respect to dealing with the abuse and neglect of children not only in Queensland but across Australia and throughout the world.

I often ask myself: what is happening when children, some of our most vulnerable community members, have become the victims of abuse, neglect or dysfunctional, social and/or family circumstances? Whilst the definition of child neglect can be very broad, in general child neglect is considered as the failure of parents or caregivers to meet the needs that are necessary for the mental, physical and emotional development of a child. Child neglect is one of the most common forms of child maltreatment and, unfortunately, it continues to be a serious problem for many children right across Queensland. Child neglect can substantially impact upon the physical development, the mental development and the emotional development of a child causing long-term consequences such as poor academic achievement and the development of psychiatric disorders and personality dysfunction. Unfortunately, as a doctor, I have seen these outcomes and consequences firsthand.

Such consequences can also impact on our broader society since it is more likely that children who have suffered from childhood neglect will have an increased propensity to developing drug and alcohol disorders, have poor educational outcomes and potentially have an impaired capacity to maintain stable employment and generate individual wealth when they reach adulthood.

Clearly, certain forms of child abuse can also occur as a consequence of neglect. Revelations in recent times about the extent of physical, sexual and emotional abuse in some of our key institutions, within certain families and by supposed trusted individuals leaves me at times confused and angry but also determined to address this as one of the many elected representatives to this Queensland parliament. The saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' is still as true today as it was when it was first enunciated. Parents, family relatives, friends, neighbours, social groups, and political and community leaders all play a vital role in preventing child abuse and neglect.

Under the former LNP government, the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, otherwise known as the Carmody review, released its report *Taking responsibility: a roadmap for Queensland child protection*. This commission of inquiry found that our child protection system was in need of major reform due to the significant stress it had been under. A total of 121 recommendations were made in order for the Queensland government to enhance and deliver a sustainable child protection system for many years to come. The Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2016 implements a number of recommendations related to the functioning of our Childrens Court proceedings involving children and specifically addresses a number of issues with respect to child protection orders. Ensuring all relevant information is available in legal proceedings, minimising delays and enhancing the

quality of material that is available to ensure robust, transparent and fair outcomes is a must for all concerned. From our committee hearings, it must be noted that ensuring that there is absolute clarity in relation to the terminology, language and/or nomenclature used in the legislation is extremely important. This is critical to ensuring and achieving absolute legislative intent at the operational level.

I am also of the view that the creation of a new independent statutory officer—the Director of Child Protection Litigation—in the child protection litigation bill 2016 has the capacity to increase accountability and appropriately oversight child protection order processes. There certainly needs to be further consideration of performance criteria and professional experience in the role of Director of Child Protection Litigation to ensure the best possible outcomes for children within the child protection system. Appropriate oversight of this role is also paramount.

In evaluating these pieces of legislation it was also clear to me that the interests of any child must be above and beyond all other interests, even if that means family unification is unable to be maintained, and adoption or other permanent placement alternatives need to be expedited as long-term solutions. Whilst concerns have been raised during the committee hearings on this legislation about the impacts on front-line staff with respect to some of these changes, I believe that adequate resourcing will be allocated by this government given the seriousness of the issues we are discussing within these dual pieces of legislation. In my opinion, confidentiality provisions and protections with regard to the rights and liberties of individuals have been well considered.

I conclude by acknowledging and thanking my fellow committee members, our secretariat and technical scrutiny staff, and those individuals and organisations that provided submissions and attended the relevant hearings. I would also like to specifically acknowledge the chair of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee, Leanne Linard MP, the member for Nudgee. It was certainly a pleasure to work with her and her colleagues on the committee, and I commend the legislation to the House.