




Speech By  
**Joseph Kelly**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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**CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL; DIRECTOR OF CHILD PROTECTION LITIGATION BILL**

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (4.53 pm): I am speaking in support of the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2016 and the Director of Child Protection Litigation Bill 2016. These bills reflect the Palaszczuk government's commitment to implement the recommendations of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. These recommendations are aimed at providing the guidance to build a sustainable and effective child protection system over the next decade.

Before I get into the specifics of the bill, I would like to say that I am pleased that we have achieved bipartisan support on these bills and I am sure the bills will receive the support of all members of the House. In my professional career I have had limited interactions with children who have been abused and also some interactions with adults who have done the harm. This is extremely distressing for all involved, but my sympathy remains with the child. Like all members of this House, I remain determined to do all that I can to ensure that all Queensland children grow up in an environment that is safe and provides them with the opportunity to grow and to thrive.

The changes in the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill are extensive and cover many areas. They aim to make sure that the voices of children and their families are heard in decisions that impact on them, minimise delay, improve the quality of evidence presented to support applications for child protection orders and improve decision-making by ensuring that the court has access to relevant information.

During the hearings I was particularly interested in the provisions of the bill aimed at maintaining the family involvement in the decision-making processes affecting their child, if the child is in fact in long-term care. Quite frankly, I was initially quite perplexed by this. Surely these children come from a family situation which had potentially or actually done the child some harm. What could possibly be the benefit of involving the family? Mr Ward, the Children's Law Committee representative of the Queensland Law Society, pointed out that it gives the parents a reminder that things need to be organised for the child who is in the long-term care of the department of child safety. It gives them the opportunity to become involved again and encourage some sort of relationship, albeit in a very controlled environment.

Perhaps the most compelling reason he gave though was that it is in the interests of the child that they have some kind of understanding about where they have come from and who they really are. For me, that is the essence of these bills. They operate on the basis of what is in the best interests of the child. The involvement of the family not only is in the interests of the child but also provides an opportunity for the parents to move towards resolving their own issues. I think this is important. To really fix these problems we have to help not just the child—that should be our No. 1 priority—but also the families.

The provisions of this bill that allow the court to give people who are significant to the child the opportunity to participate in proceedings are incredibly important. This is an important recognition that the nature of families does not always fit the stereotypical nuclear family model. It also recognises that where a family is struggling and a child is being potentially or actually harmed, it is in the interests of the child to allow other significant people who have an interest in the safety of that child to be involved in the proceedings. Again, these provisions are focused on the best interests of the child.

The best interests of the child also drive the creation of the Director of Child Protection Litigation Bill. The bill is aimed at improving the efficiency of child protection litigation. Litigation processes that are delayed, complicated and ineffective ultimately are not in the interests of the child. We must keep the interests of these children at the forefront of our thinking and our actions. Again, there are many aspects of this legislation but all are aimed at promoting the interests of the child. This approach is new and the minister is to be commended for taking a brave new path. Our committee, while acknowledging that this novel approach is well thought out, has recommended that the act be reviewed after three years rather than five. I thank the minister for considering this recommendation.

I would like to thank the committee chair and the other committee members. I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that took the time to make submissions. In particular, I would like to thank those workers in the front line of child safety for their contribution to this process. They do a job that few of us could cope with and I thank them for their service to the children of Queensland.

I would also like to congratulate the ministers responsible for both of these bills. They have produced bills that focus in all respects on the best interests of the child. I trust that these bills, if passed, will help in achieving the ultimate objective of building a sustainable and effective child protection system, a system that is more capable of protecting children so they may grow and thrive safely in our state. I commend the bills to the House.