




Speech By  
**Joseph Kelly**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2016

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

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (9.07 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason's Law) Amendment Bill 2016. I start by acknowledging the previous speaker and the passionate way he has pursued this issue over many years. I wish to pay tribute to Susan and John Sandeman. They have selflessly toiled over many years to try and salvage something positive and lasting out of a great personal tragedy. The death of a child under any circumstances is incredibly tragic, but to adults—particularly those who are entrusted with the care of a child, or who are related to a child, or who supposedly love a child—deliberately hurting a child in any way is incredibly appalling and disturbing. It disturbed me 25 years ago or more when I first cared for suspected child abuse victims and neglected children in the children's hospital, and it disturbs me today. Those images will long remain with me.

Our children constantly come into contact with institutions and organisations from the moment they are born. Like all parents, I have frequently entrusted the care of my children to midwives, nurses, doctors, early childhood educators, childcare workers, teachers, sporting coaches, music teachers and most recently Scout leaders. My personal experiences have been positive, and any concerns that I have raised have been dealt with professionally and quickly. The early childhood educators and childcare workers that I have dealt with have been professional and caring. They have done much to enrich the lives of my daughters and my entire family, but what this inquiry and this issue have shown is that there is more to be done. This bill is doing that. The majority of people who work in this sector provide the highest quality of care. We have made a range of changes over many years to ensure the safety of children in care, and this bill will continue this process.

As a nurse I worked for years in a profession that has mandatory reporting obligations. These reporting obligations mean that we have been trained in identifying child safety issues and we have robust systems in place to report concerns. Perhaps most importantly they have raised the general awareness across the profession of nursing about these issues and raised the awareness of how to respond to them in a way that has helped to keep children safe.

I fully support the establishment of mandatory reporting obligations in the early childhood education and care sector. We heard from many organisations in the sector about the positive benefits this change will bring for the sector. I am pleased to say that the organisations were supportive of the intent of this bill. The committee listened to the feedback about the bill from those who work in the sector. While acknowledging that mandatory reporting is important, they were keen to have a delayed commencement date to allow time to properly prepare for this change. That request was born out of their desire to get this process right.

In my time as a nurse I went through many process changes that had implications of life and death. People do need time and training to make these significant changes and get things right. I commend the organisations that came before the committee for taking this issue so seriously and for

being so willing to consider changes that will have impacts on them. I am pleased that the minister acted on the committee's recommendation regarding the start date. This recommendation was unanimous.

I acknowledge the members of the committee. This was not an easy inquiry to go through—few that we deal with seem to be easy—but the challenges we faced were microscopic compared to those of the families, particularly the Sandemans, who have to deal with the aftermath of the loss of a child in the manner in which Mason was lost. I commend the member for Aspley and acknowledge the positive contribution she has made on this issue.

Committee members could not reach agreement on who should be covered by the requirement for mandatory reporting. This industry is complex and evolving, as are the professions and the occupations in this industry. I am glad that the departments of child safety and education have undertaken consultation with the ECEC sector to navigate these complexities. I am pleased that the Minister for Child Safety is now in a position to move forward with these amendments with the ECEC sector's support. That will see a workable solution. I am sure that with these amendments this bill will achieve its objectives.

The entire community will welcome the bipartisan support for these changes. I certainly appreciated the spirit in the committee, which approached this issue in a very bipartisan manner. Improving safety for children in the early childhood education and care sector certainly deserves nothing less.

I finish by again acknowledging Susan and John Sandeman. I acknowledge their courage in pursuing this matter. Nothing will replace Mason, but I hope they will take some small solace from the fact that they have played a significant role in improving safety for all kids in the early childhood education and care sector. I as a parent am appreciative of the fact that they have pursued this matter. I am sure that all parents in Queensland will appreciate it also. I commend the bill to the House.