




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (5.35 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate of the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2016. Sadly, not all children in our communities are living in safe homes and environments. As a community, we must all take responsibility to ensure no child is exposed to unsafe living conditions and environments.

This bill recognises the findings from the 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry report *Taking responsibility: a roadmap for Queensland child protection*. This report found that the child protection system was under immense stress and made 121 recommendations aimed at addressing the risk of systemic failure and building a sustainable and effective child protection system.

While working as a teacher I sadly came across children who needed support and protection. For one reason or another, the adults in their lives were unable to stand up for them, protect them or make the best decisions for them. Some children's lives are very complicated and very sad. This bill will give children a voice by reforming the court process for child protection proceedings. It also gives families an opportunity to be heard.

The bill implements 10 specific court related recommendations of the commission of inquiry. The bill aims to achieve better outcomes for families and children involved in child protection court proceedings and generally improve the function of the Childrens Court and the quality of applications. Children and families will be provided with greater support during child protection court hearings, improving the functioning of the Childrens Court.

I recently met with Jean. Sadly, Jean's daughter passed away earlier this year. As a grandmother she is too ill to care for her granddaughter. Unfortunately, Jean's family is affected by a lot of mental illness. Jean's granddaughter is already in foster care. She truly loves her granddaughter and is desperate that the decisions made for her future are the best ones for her. These changes to court procedures are good for Jean and her granddaughter. All Jean wants is to ensure her granddaughter has a happy and stable life and to be able to stay in touch with her, to make sure she gets the best possible care.

Where there is more than one child involved in a family requiring a child protection order, this bill allows, in section 115, for two or more applications to be heard together without the need to rely on an application by a party. This change allows children to be treated as individuals when they have different care needs and different orders need to be made. The amendments in this section also recognise that family structures can be complicated, with blended families. Children do not need to be related as siblings to be considered at the same time. This provision also allows a court to not hear cases together where bringing together different family members with a history of violence would be dangerous. Their cases can be heard separately. The decision to hear cases jointly will be made in the best interests of the children. This bill supports the needs of children.

Children need stability. For some children, stability is achieved through long-term guardianship orders with case plans. Amendments address the situation where parents are able to request a review of the case plan where their child is under a long-term guardianship order. Previously, parents were unable to request this review. Parents can only request a review if there has not been a review in the previous 12 months. This provision recognises that a child needs stability and prevents disruption to a child's life. Children need to be able to build relationships. Even in the education system we campaign and say to parents, 'One school, one year,' so that children do have a chance to learn, so this only makes sense in that children will be able to form those relationships. This bill is good for children and it is good for families. I commend the bill to the House.