




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (10.03 pm): I rise to speak in support of this bill. As earlier speakers have alluded to, this bill has become known as Mason's Law because it represents the five-year battle of the Sandemans, the loving grandparents of 16-month-old Mason Parker, who was murdered in 2011. As a father of three—and I think it would be the case for all members of this House—I can think of no worse blow than the loss of a child or grandchild.

For the Sandemans the pain has been made worse by the discovery that Mason's injuries had been noticed by staff at his childcare centre. In fact, they had been photographed. They had not been reported and there was no legal requirement that they should have been reported. This amendment grows out of that peculiar fact which cost baby Mason his life. It has been dearly paid for.

Western Australia and Queensland are the only two jurisdictions which do not have mandatory reporting for the early childhood education and care sector. Under Queensland law, schoolteachers have mandatory obligations but early childcare and education workers do not. These children, ranging from birth to five years of age, are totally dependent on the care of adults around them and do not have the protection.

Mason's Law will amend the Child Protection Act 1999. Perhaps this flaw in the legislation is partly the result of the massive growth in the early childhood education and care sector since 1999. This growth is a reflection of the increased need for both parents to be in the workforce or studying. It is also partly a reflection of the mobility of our workforce today. One or more parents may be a fly-in fly-out worker or a shiftworker. The whole young family may have to move to follow work and find themselves living away from their family support network of loving grandparents, aunts and uncles. I know that is true for many young families in my electorate of Gregory.

We have seen a relatively rapid expansion of the early childhood education and care sector. Having to spend some time in day care and kindy is probably the norm for most children today. For most parents there is a daily heart tug when they leave their little one behind. There is a little tug of worry and a little pang of separation.

Parents have demanded to know that childcare centres and early childhood education campuses are safe and politicians have responded to what is fundamentally needed. As a result, whether it be family day care or commercial childcare centres or kindergartens, the sector is heavily regulated. In recent years there have been increasing expectations of the qualifications to be held by staff providing these services.

To my mind, staff at these services, like schoolteachers, have had the opportunity to develop unique insights into the children they are caring for and the families who bring them. They can be the first to see when things go wrong. The staff are trained and the staff have concentrated exposure to the children for whom they care. I also believe that to be working in that sector the vast majority of staff absolutely have the best interests of the children at the forefront of their minds.

All this means that they are very well placed to pick up on the clues of abuse. They are not only well placed but invaluable if we, as a society which values and loves our children, are going to provide every child with the protection which is their human right.

Many childcare centres have already self-regulated in this regard. They have their own internal policies on the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse. They do this as a best practice method of ensuring maximum protection for the child and for their staff who might otherwise face false accusations themselves.

All this is real world evidence of the need for this amendment. This is real world evidence that staff are capable of the task. This is real world evidence that this amendment will make a huge difference. If placing mandatory reporting requirements on the early childhood education and care sector saves the life of one child or indeed saves one child from abuse, then that alone is enough that every member of this House should support the bill.

As a father, it breaks my heart that this has come too late to save Mason Parker. My heart breaks for Mason. I hope the legacy of the protection created by Mason's Law will provide some consolation. I hope that you will be able to think about those other boys and girls who may be rescued and saved by Mason's Law. I hope you can hold tight to that thought when you think of Mason every day.

In this House as members we sometimes wonder whether we make a difference. I can say that the member for Aspley and the member for Hinchinbrook have made a huge difference. The determination and grit of the member for Aspley and the member for Hinchinbrook to get this amendment through should be applauded. The member for Aspley and the member for Hinchinbrook can walk away from this House when they retire or leave this House knowing that they made a significant impact in this place. I applaud you and your inspiration to us new members. It reminds us that determination and persistence will always make an impact to make Queensland better.