




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

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

 **Ms BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (9.56 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason's Law) Amendment Bill 2016 and the bipartisan amendments to the bill. I start by paying tribute to John and Sue Sandeman, who are with us in the gallery tonight. Thank you for your dedication, perseverance and commitment as agents of change to ensure that there are more protections in place for some of the most vulnerable in our community.

I am an educator from the early childhood education and care sector. I worked in the sector for many years. I am a passionate advocate for the industry and the dedicated and under-recognised educators who put their experience and energies into shaping the hearts and minds of our community's most precious resource: the children who light up the centres, kindergartens and OSHCs every day.

Mason John Parker was one of those bright lights. He attended two day care centres in North Queensland. In April 2011, tragically Mason passed from serious internal injuries. Mason's educators had observed something out of the ordinary and they had documented those injuries. Tragically, those observations and concerns were not reported to the department by Mason's educators or the directors of the centres. This bill intends to right that wrong. This bill widens the scope of mandatory reporters in the ECEC sector. It fulfils the campaign of John and Sue Sandeman, Mason's grandparents; a campaign that will go a long way to preventing the pain and anguish that they have experienced and the potential trauma to children across the state.

In Queensland, working as an educator is very different from working as a teacher or a police officer. Both of those professions are currently mandatory reporters. An educator is in very close contact with all of the children in their care, from toileting to frequent clothes changes through wet and messy play, accidents or change of weather, just to name a few. That direct and frequent contact with children, which is demanded by the job, in and of itself provides an ideal front-line opportunity to look at general health, be it rashes; hand, foot and mouth disease; head lice; or, of course, bruising, lacerations or marks that are out of the ordinary. I have very distinct memories of finding those things and identifying alarming patterns or trends in all aspects of overall care. Those are some of the few very unhappy memories that I have had in the profession. They are memories that are hard to shake.

I recall these memories with an overwhelming emotion of hopelessness inasmuch as your observations and reports were left with others to action. While we would like to hope that everyone is operating with good intentions and from an informed position, this is not always the case. In the case of little Mason I would argue that this is the perfect example of how the system can fail the most vulnerable. No child should be in this position and no educator should be either.

That is why the Palaszczuk government is expanding mandatory reporting to all educators—not only educators with specific qualifications, roles or titles. Standing up for children is everyone's responsibility. This takes away the experience of hopelessness that I and, I am sure, other educators have felt over the years.

In 2014 Queensland had over 28,000 children in over 2,800 centres and services. It has surely increased since that time. We know the people who deal directly with children are best placed to deal with direct abuse or neglect. That said, we need to ensure that we educate and train the sector so they are able to fulfil the responsibility of mandatory reporting. That is why the implementation date for mandatory reporting has been pushed back to allow for the appropriate training and support for the workforce to be mandatory reporters commencing 1 January 2017.

Children who cannot protect themselves need others to protect them, and this measure will ensure protections where they do not currently exist. During the early years children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and need stronger protections than children who are at a stage of development where they can seek help for themselves.

The Queensland Law Reform Commission raised the point in the pro arguments for mandatory reporting for educators that it will increase the professionalism of ECEC staff. Picking up on this point, I would like to highlight my view and the view of the vast majority of the sector that this is already a sector this is terribly under-recognised. Roles, duties and responsibilities are not commensurate with the remuneration in the sector. I have spoken, through my first speech in this place, about having to leave the work that I love due to this fact.

Currently the workforce turnover in the sector is not acceptable, with approximately 180 educators leaving the sector each week. Being an educator is not babysitting. An educators' community campaign has, through their union and my union, United Voice, come a long way to establishing a community understanding of the role; however, the entrenched inequity in ECEC has been there for many decades. Parents cannot be called on to pay more for the service. The federal government needs to do more to intervene and ensure that the sector is equipped to provide professional wages and the best start in life for our kids.

We know that abusive parents will not usually ask for help; that is why the Family and Child Connect Services are so important. It is a community based intake and referral system that acts as a preventative service. It is a non-government referral service responding to the needs of vulnerable families at an early stage in an effort to prevent the need for tertiary services in the long-term.

In the 2015-16 period over 1,200 referrals came from the Moreton Bay catchment. Pine Rivers is an electorate within that catchment. There were over 400 referrals from Child Safety, almost 200 referrals from Education, over 100 referrals from health services and almost 100 self-referrals from parents and caregivers. Educators establish relationships with parents and caregivers. That is why they are best placed to provide Family and Child Connect referrals to provide early intervention. It is also why they are best placed to be mandatory reporters. These are, after all, measures that are in the best interests of the child.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the member for Aspley and the member for Hinchinbrook for the early work they have done. I acknowledge the bipartisan approach that has been taken with this bill. I would particularly like to pay tribute to the committee and parliamentary staff who, no doubt, had a very harrowing time going through the evidence before them in reporting on this bill. I commend the bill to the House.