




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Child Protection

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (11.55 am): Today in question time we saw an embattled minister once again refuse to accept any responsibility for the failings of her department and the failings of this government to protect a little boy. Not only that, but when asked the Premier refused to endorse the minister or say that the minister had her confidence. With no vote of confidence from the Premier, this Minister for Child Safety should finally accept the system failure that has occurred under her watch. This government should hang its head in shame over its handling of the child safety system failure to protect little Mason Lee. Today we have not seen the minister or anyone in this government apologise for this complete failure.

As each day passes we learn more and more of how this government failed this little boy. The questions over how the system failed grow. The facts now show that it took four months for Child Safety to visit the mother of Mason Lee. They never sighted Mason and no investigation was ever commenced. Four months is how long it took this minister to release the March Child Safety performance data, and we wait for the minister to release the June data in light of the ongoing blowout in investigation backlogs. I want to remind the House that during the 2015 estimates the director-general for Child Safety said—

One of my priorities is to ensure we actually have best quality data entered as quickly as possible so that we can be very clear that we are not missing any child at risk who requires investigation or assessment ...

He went on to say to say in that same response—

One of my priorities—and I have recently met with my senior staff—is to make sure that we continue to impress on our service delivery staff the importance of making sure that that data is contemporary and that we are checking that to ensure every single matter is followed up.

Why does the minister now hide behind secrecy and spin? I am not alone when it comes to a complete lack of confidence in this government's handling of child safety because 26,000 people have expressed their lack of confidence in the minister and this government, calling for more accountability in the wake of Mason Lee's death. That is 26,000 people who have no confidence in the system under this minister's watch. As I have said today already, 18 months is all it has taken for this Labor government to run the child safety system into the ground. When will the minister finally accept responsibility for the failures that have occurred under her watch to protect children like Mason Lee? Why does the Premier continue to protect this embattled minister despite the complete failure of the system to protect children like Mason Lee?

The reality is that it has taken the death of toddler Mason Jet Lee to shine a light on the rapid meltdown in Child Safety under Labor's watch. It is time for this Labor government to stop hiding behind reviews and come clean on how the system failed this little boy to ensure that it does not fail again.

It has now been six weeks since 30 June, the latest full quarter for Child Safety reporting and a close to the financial year. Today we heard excuses for not releasing the most up-to-date data. We can only surmise it is worse again than the March data. The minister needs to come clean and tell Queenslanders the true number of investigations not commenced in the last year. For a government that claims to be open and accountable, that clearly does not extend to Child Safety.

The minister needs to take responsibility for the system that failed little Mason and start acting on the growing crisis in investigation delays. Child abuse response times continue to blow out because Annastacia Palaszczuk and her minister refuse to act immediately to provide extra resources to front-line child safety officers to protect at-risk children. We know for a fact that back in October last year the minister was briefed about worrying response times, but she still has not deployed specialist investigation teams since being advised.

Too many Queensland children are being left in dangerous situations for too long. We need immediate action to ensure our kids are protected. Ten per cent of Queensland children deemed to be in the most danger are not being seen within the recommended 24-hour time period. What will the June data show? Seventy-one per cent of kids that are supposed to be checked on within five days are not being seen in that time frame. Again, Queenslanders need to know what the June data is going to show.

There can be no hiding from the fact that under this minister's watch almost half of all child abuse investigations are now taking longer than two months to finalise, since Labor came to office 18 months ago. This is a damning result, despite investigations being required to be finalised within 60 days. Not only are children at risk of abuse languishing in investigation backlogs waiting to commence; more and more children are waiting for action as investigation times blow out. The more we look at the performance of Child Safety under this minister, the more concerned we become.

(Time expired)