




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (8.41 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason's Law) Amendment Bill as the shadow minister for child safety. This bill will bring about important reforms which have come out of a terrible tragedy in the death of Mason Parker, a 16-month-old toddler from Townsville who was murdered by his mother's then boyfriend in 2011. These reforms aim to ensure that another tragic death like that of Mason Parker never happens again. Just days prior to his death, bruising was noticed on young Mason's body by staff at his childcare centre. We now know that, while staff members at the centre followed their internal procedures and reported their concerns for Mason to the centre director, they were never reported on to the relevant authorities because the mandatory reporting requirements were simply not there.

From the outset, I would like to congratulate my friend and colleague the member for Aspley for all of her work in bringing this bill before the House today because it was the member for Aspley who brought this bill to the House. She looked at this bill in government and has not stopped while we have been in opposition. She has made sure that this government is now supporting the bill.

The bill we are debating today is the result of a significant amount of lobbying and consultation which began under the former LNP government during the tenure of the member for Aspley as minister and, as I said, continued into opposition. I would also like to mention the member for Hinchinbrook, who as the hardworking local member played the most important role in driving this reform and who listened and fought alongside his local constituents, the Sandemans. Finally, can I commend the driving forces behind this bill, John and Sue Sandeman, Mason Parker's maternal grandparents. They have lobbied far and wide over the past five years for these reforms to be introduced into this House.

When I first met John and Sue Sandeman in Townsville in April of this year, it was five years to the date that Mason lost his life. I was struck by their courage and their determination. Through their hard work, they have motivated others to campaign for justice in child safety, including the petition that was tabled in the last sitting week for another 'Mason'. John and Sue Sandeman are truly an inspiration to many, and it was a privilege to once again catch up with them today in parliament. The day is finally here that they have worked so hard and waited so long for, and these reforms are at last being debated in this House.

As members will be aware, mandatory reporting laws are in place in every jurisdiction in Australia. It is accepted throughout this country that laws requiring mandatory reporting from relevant bodies and authorities are a fundamental part of the broader child protection system. They are a crucial way that we as a society keep our children safe from harm. In Queensland there are already a range of professionals who are required by law to report any child safety concerns to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services so that they can be acted upon. This requirement aims to ensure that we do not have kids falling through the cracks. Whether doctors, registered nurses,

teachers, police officers involved in child protection or a person engaged to perform a child advocate function under the Public Guardian Act 2014, legislation already exists to ensure that those who work with children, those who are best placed to know when something may be wrong, alert the appropriate authorities when they have legitimate concerns.

Today, through the significant concerns which have been introduced by the opposition, we will see these mandatory reporting requirements expanded to include the early childhood education and care sector, where professionals are not mandatory reporters under the current legislation. This legislation recognises that we all have a role to play in protecting children from harm and raising any concerns when we fear they may be at risk of harm. This bill recognises the critical protective role the early childhood sector has in relation to children aged between zero and five years, when they are particularly vulnerable to harm. Our legislation understands that staff employed in early childhood services are in regular and direct contact with children and their families and are in a position to observe and raise concerns that the children may be at risk of significant harm, enabling a timely intervention to protect the children from harm.

I am proud to have been part of a government and part of an opposition which fought to introduce these important reforms which will keep our kids safe. Through this expansion of reporting requirements to the early childhood sector, we can rest assured that no concerns will slip through the cracks when risk of harm is identified by early childhood education and care workers. I again wholeheartedly congratulate the members for Aspley and Hinchinbrook on their hard work and I commend John and Sue Sandeman on everything they have done to see these reforms come to fruition.