




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

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ADOPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (9.59 pm): People are often genuinely surprised when I tell them that same-sex foster carers cannot adopt the children they care for. We all know that foster carers do an incredible job. Some of them happen to be in same-sex relationships, but that is no barrier to them being able to foster a child. It is no barrier to them being able to care for them, feed them, clothe them or help them with their homework. It is, however, a barrier to eventually adopting them and formalising the families they have created.

It is no wonder that foster carers with children in their care for a long time, often from birth, frequently express a desire to adopt these children. For the children in this situation, it makes sense that they would feel a true part of the family they have lived with for a long time, but same-sex foster-parents are explicitly excluded from adopting their foster-children. I know one of these couples. Out of respect for them, I will change their names so as not to identify their son. James and Adam had been together almost 10 years when they started talking about children. After being engaged for a year, they became the first male couple to get a civil union in Queensland. They turned up at the registry at dawn hoping to be the first, but they were beaten by a lesbian couple who had camped out overnight.

When they decided to expand their family, they discussed altruistic surrogacy and all the wonderful friends who had offered to help them over the years, but ultimately they decided they were in a good place to help a child who really needed it. They decided to become foster carers and open their home to a young boy with a sad history. I will call him Lewis. Being a foster carer can be very rewarding, but of course we know it can be challenging, not least of all because almost all of the children will eventually return home if they can re-establish positive relationships with their biological family.

They understood that Lewis was not their child, but they were there to love him and care for him anyway, and soon he started to call them dad and daddy. He would correct them sharply if they mixed up those monikers. Lewis went to school as normal but struggled with his work. James spent most afternoons working with him on his handwriting, his spelling and his maths. After a life of inconsistent care, he had fallen behind and they had to work hard to help him catch up.

He was no angel and, like all children, he got into his fair share of trouble. It started with running away, not because he did not like his new home but simple tasks like brushing his teeth, having a shower or eating his breakfast seemed so overwhelming to him. Introducing new routines and expectations brought out so much anxiety, fear and trepidation in him that quite often his natural instinct was to run. Off he would go down the stairs, on his bike or on foot, trotting out of the house as fast as his little legs would take him. James and Adam always ran after him and after a while he stopped running.

They loved him in spite of some of his worst behaviours and after a short time you could see him really begin to feel and understand that. He became their son, and now they live together as a family. For children, that is so important. They do not care if their parents are gay; they care whether their parents love them. In fact, the Australian Institute of Family Studies' key research into this topic found that children in same-sex-couple families progress emotionally, socially and educationally at the same rate as their peers from heterosexual families.

In James' and Adam's case, however, they discovered this on Lewis's first day of school. A few days before his first day they were making dinner in the kitchen as he asked a million questions about what to expect on his first day. They assured him that they would be there to support him, and his face fell and they knew why. They knew at some point there would come a day where he might be embarrassed by them. They just did not think it would come so soon. They had watched him meet new kids before and do the explanation, 'That's my dad and that's my other dad'—never with any shame, always with pride or just nonchalance. So they asked him, 'Why are you worried about us both being at school tomorrow?', and he replied, 'If I turn up to school and everyone sees me with two dads, they are going to know I am a foster-kid and they will think I'm weird.'

To this day, Lewis is proud of his two dads and they have spent the last five years caring for him and working with him to overcome his sad past. As it turns out, he is in the percentage of foster-kids who will not be going back to their biological family, and his biological family is very supportive of him being adopted by James and Adam. Most importantly, though, Lewis wants to be adopted by them, and why shouldn't he be allowed to when they have built this beautiful, caring family?

This bill will give that possibility to so many same-sex families and possibly encourage more of them to be foster carers, which is a wonderful thing too. This bill will also bring Queensland into line with the rest of the country. In fact, the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction without either legislation in place or a bill before the parliament. We will join 25 countries around the world which already understand that loving families come in many shapes and sizes and that we should support those families. I congratulate the minister for bringing this important bill to the House. It is yet another reform she can rightly be very proud of. I commend the bill to the House.