




Speech By
Tarnya Smith

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

Record of Proceedings, 19 April 2016

MOTION: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

 **Mrs SMITH** (Mount Ommaney—LNP) (6.11 pm): Without the state funded ECDP, kids with learning difficulties will not be equipped to face the challenges presented to them as they begin their early years at school. The parents and the people that I represent are not interested in theatrics or hysteria. We are not interested in the political one-upmanship and we are not interested in excuses or further buck-passing when the decision is wholly and solely the minister's. Let us be clear about that. The decision on whether the ECDP continues rests solely with the Minister for Education.

In the last parliament I shared with the House Bella's story. I got quite emotional in telling Bella's story because as a parent of three children they were challenges that I had never experienced. I was also uplifted because of how one program could have—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mount Ommaney, take your seat. I am going to be even-handed here.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Let us just have a bit of decorum and peace on the right-hand side of the House for the member for Mount Ommaney. The member for Mount Ommaney is not quite as loud as the previous speaker and I would like to hear her.

Mrs SMITH: I say again that the people and the parents that I represent are not interested in the theatrics or the hysteria that is coming from the government side.

Let me say how uplifting this program was to one individual. I will recap. Let us consider what Bella's transition to school would have been like without the foundation year at the ECDP, without all the support and knowledge that a teacher shared with her at school. It has not been an easy transition, but she has come a very long way from the little girl—hear this please—who could not talk, who would sit in the corner of the playground eating sand, who could not sit at the desk or hold a pen. We owe all of that to the time she spent at the ECDP. If they get closed down, the department of education is failing all of those children, like Bella, who deserve a fair start to their education.

A constituent of mine came to see me over a month ago with concerns that the Early Childhood Development Program was going to close down. So concerned was Karen that she created an online petition, which, as the member for Everton said, resulted in over 30,000 petitioners signing that, showing their concern.

Ms Fentiman interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, your interjections are not being taken. They are not helpful. Please desist.

Mrs SMITH: It is always interesting that when Labor are caught out they start on the personal attacks. I want to continue with this issue that means so much to so many people. Having had my own personal experiences, I think everybody should be grateful if they have children who do not face these challenges. The minister has sidestepped this issue. If you look at the minister's response to the 30,000 petitioners, she said, first, 'Go and see your federal members. It is all the federal department's fault.' Then we saw her sidestep and over the Easter holidays she said, 'No. We are going to extend it to 2020.' If that is the case, that still leaves a lot of questions unanswered. On that date, who decides who stays, who goes and what replaces the education component—and what about all the staff and the specialist teachers?

I ask the minister to do the decent thing. If the minister is not going to commit to keeping the ECDP open after 2020, then she needs to keep her promise and meet with the parents and explain her reasons why. This program is crucial not only for the children who are our future generation—at the very least they should be given the same opportunities to access the best possible start in life. This program is not only so important to the children but also so important to the parents. They are dealing with a lot of emotion when their children are diagnosed. When I had the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister out in my electorate to talk to many concerned parents, the one message that came across loud and clear was that most parents in early years, say, one to five, are in denial of their child's situation or they are grieving. The ECDP is an amazing program, with positive outcomes for everyone who accesses it. Minister, the ball is in your court. Do the right thing for our future Queenslanders.

(Time expired)