




Speech By
Tracy Davis

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

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

Second Reading

 **Ms DAVIS** (Aspley—LNP) (8.22 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am very pleased to be here tonight to speak to this very important bill. From the outset, I thank the Minister for Child Safety for her assistance in working with me in ensuring that this bill has a smooth passage through the House.

The protection of children is everyone's business. That is why this bill is so important. It speaks directly to the protection of Queensland's youngest and most vulnerable—our zero to five-year-old children. The Child Protection (Mandatory Reporting—Mason's Law) Amendment Bill 2016 will align Queensland's early childhood education and care sector, the ECEC sector, with the mandatory reporting obligations that other states and territories have had in place and successfully managed as they too recognised these provisions to be an important part of the broader child protection system. It will ensure an added layer of protection to the existing mandatory reporting regime in Queensland so that no child attending an approved ECEC service should fall through a gap.

I thank the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee for its examination of the bill and for the opportunity to brief the committee. I would also like to thank all stakeholders who took the time to provide their submissions to the committee and for their participation in the public briefings. It is the views and insights of those stakeholders, those who are invested in providing care to our youngest cohort of children, which should be considered in our endeavour to have a safe and protective Queensland for all of our children.

This bill is an important achievement for two very special people, two loving grandparents, John and Susan Sandeman, who have journeyed from Townsville to be with us here tonight to witness this debate. I first met John and Sue back in 2014 when I flew to Townsville for a personal meeting with them to discuss their call for Queensland's ECEC sector to have mandatory reporting obligations. They are remarkable people, salt of the earth people, people whose lives changed in the most cruel way when in April 2011 their beloved grandson Mason Parker was murdered by his mother's then boyfriend. In the few weeks prior to Mason's death, bruising had been observed on his little body by staff at the childcare centre he regularly attended. These concerns were reported up the line of management in accordance with the childcare centre's policies and procedures. However, the concerns were never reported through to the authorities. This bill will make it mandatory to report those concerns to the authorities.

There is no doubt that this is a significant day for John and Sue after many years of lobbying for these laws—five years of relentless campaigning. They have been referred to as 'walking billboards', pounding the streets of Townsville gaining the attention of prime ministers and state politicians, even

creating a television advertisement in their pursuit to ensure our state's youngest and most vulnerable children are better protected. I am so very pleased that they are here tonight to witness these proceedings of this important bill in the House. Once again, I thank the minister for her collaborative work with me in ensuring that this bill passes through the House tonight.

It is also a significant day for the member for Hinchinbrook, who advocated on behalf of the Sandemans to the LNP government to consider amendments to the legislation to capture the ECEC sector. I would also like to acknowledge the former attorney-general, the member for Kawana, for his genuine interest in the protection of children in this state and for his referral to the Queensland Law Reform Commission to undertake the review.

The bill delivers on the key recommendation of the QLRC's review of mandatory reporting obligations for the ECEC sector; namely, that the mandatory reporting provisions in chapter 2, part 1AA, division 2 of the Child Protection Act 1999 be expanded to apply to the ECEC sector. The QLRC made two key observations during the review of mandatory reporting for the ECEC sector. The first was that Queensland and Western Australia are the only two Australian jurisdictions that currently do not extend mandatory reporting to the ECEC sector. The second was that the overwhelming majority of submissions received by the commission supported extending mandatory reporting obligations under the act to apply to the ECEC sector.

One of those submitters was Early Childhood Australia, who identified that the ECEC sector 'is one of the largest universal service systems working with families with young children' and that 'young children are particularly vulnerable to child abuse and neglect as their capacity to communicate and understand their world is still developing'. The Benevolent Society considered that 'staff in the ECEC sector have an important role to play in the child protection framework, especially for infants'.

They noted that children aged zero to five years are particularly vulnerable to abuse and believe that mandatory reporting is therefore particularly important for the ECEC sector staff who, in many cases, may have the most ongoing contact with the infants. They also noted that, as infants, they are preverbal and are unable to communicate for themselves, they are highly vulnerable and those subject to harm are most in need of protection by responsible adults with whom they have contact.

The committee also heard from two of Queensland's most respected academics on mandatory reporting who said that the social science evidence shows that physical abuse and sexual abuse are widespread, harmful, costly and affect highly vulnerable children. They noted that acts of child sexual and physical abuse occur in private contexts and that child victims are extremely vulnerable members of society who cannot protect themselves and who require strong protective measures. They further noted the tendency for the most severe and dangerous physical abuse to be inflicted on children under three years of age. Most stakeholders considered that the ECEC sector is in a unique position to have exposure to these children in the first year of life and in the preschool years, and in those periods ECEC staff are in a superior position to all other professionals such as teachers, police and medical professionals to detect and report significant harm and enable early intervention.

Again, I would like to thank all stakeholders who took the time to provide their valuable information, experience and insights to the committee on this bill. The key outcomes of this consultation have helped shape a number of amendments to the bill that I will outline in a little more detail. On 8 June 2016 the committee tabled its report recommending that the bill be passed subject to a commencement date of 1 July 2017. The bill prescribed a commencement date of 1 January 2017, and we acknowledge that there was a preference by the sector to have more time for training in readiness for reporting obligations. In response to that, I foreshadow an amendment which will be made to clause 2 of the bill to commence operation on 1 July 2017. The QLRC found that the extension of mandatory reporting to the ECEC sector could be adequately addressed through appropriate training and education about the scope and content of the reporting obligation and the provision of adequate support and resourcing to the ECEC sector to fulfil the obligation. This is a similar process to that undertaken by the LNP when in government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am running out of time, but if you would indulge me: John and Sue, I know that the passing of this bill will not bring your beloved Mason back. On behalf of all children in Queensland, the 28,000 children who currently attend day care, thank you for your unrelenting determination to help make Queensland a safer place for them and for all children, because your dream and the work that you have done will finally be realised tonight.