




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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**CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.44 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017. At the outset can I say that child safety is a priority for our government in this state. I thank the minister for her work in terms of employing more child safety officers in Queensland. Our state has some 9,000 children in care. Of these, almost 4,000 are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. As a regional member, I am very happy to see that the priority amendments include the safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their family, community and culture. This is something that the committee certainly heard in our public briefings in Mount Isa, Townsville and Palm Island in particular. I will talk about some of the feedback we received from those communities and community members. Needless to say, their comments were invaluable with regard to permanency of care and self-determination. I know that all members of our committee gained significant insight into those communities. We know the importance of ensuring that we get it right with our work in child safety with good, effective policies that will make tangible changes in those communities.

Other amendments to the bill are with regard to permanency and stability for children in out-of-home care now and throughout their lives, including after-care support. This means that care does not end at 18 years of age, with policies now in place to ensure that we provide young people with support through to 25 years of age. I have met some of these young people who have turned 18 and are about to start the next phase of their lives. They shared stories about their upbringing. One young lady in particular at Riverway spoke of the dozen homes she had been in until finding the perfect family some seven years ago, and they were there supporting her. That young lady's very personal story reinforced and highlighted the need for children themselves to also have a say in care arrangements. That certainly is an important aspect of this bill before us today.

I have said on a few occasions during our public hearings that we must acknowledge and thank those families who take in children with a range of backgrounds for the love and support they show in raising children into their adult lives. As a relative of family members who are involved in child safety—albeit in another state—who have five children from a range of backgrounds I personally know about their experience with permanency of care, which has been adopted in other states like New South Wales. It has provided that family with certainty to provide a loving and supportive environment for some pretty vulnerable children who entirely deserve a better start to their lives. To all Queensland foster carers—and we heard from Foster Care Queensland in our briefings—I say thank you. In my book, you are each quite amazing.

With regard to permanent care orders, this bill introduces a new permanency framework which includes introducing and defining the concept of permanency as the experience of having stable relationships, including living and legal arrangements, and amending the act's paramount principle to provide for the safety, wellbeing and best interests of the child, both during childhood and throughout his or her life.

In relation to the safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to their families, communities and culture, I want to particularly mention Palm Island and thank Mayor Alf Lacey and the elders very much for their contributions. They were indeed insightful. They want to have self-determination in their community. I support them. I support the bill before the House, and I commend the minister for getting on with this particular bill.