



Speech By  
**Ros Bates**


**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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## **MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

### **Child Protection**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (12.08 pm): Since the last sitting of this parliament just three weeks ago, Queenslanders have continued to be sickened by what they have seen in Child Safety. They have seen more helpless kids missed by a failing system, more secrecy by this Labor government and more of this incompetent minister ducking for cover. How many times will I need to stand up in this House and highlight the gross failings of a system supposed to protect our kids before something is done? How many times will I need to stand up in the media and demand answers from an out-of-touch minister before she comes clean, and how many more deaths of children known to Child Safety will we see before this minister is shown the door?

Two weeks ago we saw another tragedy occur under this minister's watch. We learned of yet another child dying whilst allegedly waiting in a Child Safety backlog that is only getting worse. Like all Queenslanders, I was shocked and angered to hear of yet another child death. That was a six-month-old baby from Yeppoon. Concerns were raised for his safety in January of this year but he was missed by child safety officers. This baby died waiting in an apparent investigation backlog at the Rockhampton Child Safety Service Centre. What we have seen in the weeks since is that in Rockhampton Child Safety is struggling. In fact, by all accounts, it is in a worse state than Caboolture, and staff are stretched to the limit.

Secret internal data from October reveals only 20 per cent of abuse reports requiring a 10-day response were actioned in time in Central Queensland. Worse still, 12 per cent of critical 24-hour cases were missed. As I have said before in this House, these are not just statistics; these are real kids in real danger right now, today, waiting for Child Safety to come knocking. The Premier and her minister are not only failing to protect Queensland children; they are putting child safety staff in the most stressful of situations. This is just another example of Labor's child safety department in complete disarray and imploding fast.

Meanwhile in Caboolture we heard of more child safety officers quitting this troubled child safety service centre in the wake of the death of Mason Jett Lee. In November 2016 we were promised the final report by the expert panel into how the system failed Mason Jett Lee and that it would be released in January. It is now March and the report is still nowhere to be seen. Queenslanders deserve to see the full release of every report into Child Safety's handling of Mason Jett Lee. The full implications of this report and its findings are too important to be kept secret by a minister more interested in clinging to her portfolio than in telling the truth.

This case has shocked Queenslanders to their core and they deserve answers. They deserve to know about the failures in their child safety system. That is why the LNP opposition submitted a right to information request which would shine a light on how each child safety service centre is performing against key performance measures. However, in a bizarre turn of events, this request came back with a \$4,320 price tag attached to it. It is clear this Labor government is running a protection racket for a

bumbling, fumbling minister and a child safety system in crisis. Queenslanders deserve to know if the almost 4,000 cases of suspected child abuse stuck in a secret backlog have become worse. Charging RTI costs of over \$4,000 is nothing short of scandalous. First, Labor was washing the data and now they are hiding it through a protection racket. The real question is: how much influence did the minister's office have in this decision-making process? Not since the dying days of the Bligh Labor government have we seen a department performing this badly and with this level of secrecy.

The crisis in Child Safety goes far beyond Rockhampton or Caboolture and we need answers. What is this minister doing as children die and the system fails? She is claiming it has turned a corner. She is burying her head in the sand. She is choosing to remain blissfully unaware or in firm denial about the issues plaguing her department under her stewardship.

What is the Premier doing about the gross incompetence of her child safety minister? Absolutely nothing! This Premier simply continues to support a bumbling minister who is putting kids' lives at risk by failing to fix this crisis. Our kids cannot afford to wait any longer as this Labor government refuses to act. They need action today. We need to overhaul the way child abuse investigations are carried out because we need to put an end to these terrible deaths.