




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Child Protection

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (12.20 pm): I rise today to again share my concerns at reports of yet another alleged child murder coming to light where the child was known to Child Safety. As I speak, reports are emerging that police have arrested someone for the alleged murder of a child in 2015. This latest case follows the suspicious death of a two-year-old boy in April 2015. Our front-line police have been working tirelessly for the last two years to get justice.

Sunday marked one year after the death of Mason Jet Lee and, sadly, Labor's embattled Minister for Child Safety could not even acknowledge little Mason's death at her pre-budget press conference. It is clear though that nothing has changed in the troubled child safety system under the poor stewardship of the Labor Palaszczuk government. It is not just me saying it; head of the Together union, Alex Scott, was on ABC Radio this morning saying he thinks there are real problems in Child Safety. These are the sad facts. Child Safety staff are still struggling to deal with mounting case loads and no reprieve is in sight for at least two years. We have seen a culture of secrecy and cover-up descend over the department to shield this incompetent minister. Since Mason's death we have seen more shocking cases of systemic failure with at least two further child deaths, including a baby at Yeppoon and, more recently, Maddilyn-Rose Stokes, all purportedly known to the Department of Child Safety. At least one in five children known to Child Safety who died in the last 12 months committed suicide. Our child protection system is supposed to be protecting these kids.

As I have travelled around the state visiting child safety service centres, it has become clear that the backlogs that have plagued Caboolture are not confined to just that area. Labor might have forgotten little Mason and want everyone else to forget how the system they presided over failed him. What we saw from Labor over the weekend were measures too little too late from a do-nothing child safety minister who was warned in 2015 that her department was underresourced. Crisis after crisis we heard the minister promise more staff would fix the problems. First it was 160 extra staff, of which less than a third were said to be actual front-line child safety officers. Since then over the last 12 months we have seen the system lurch further into crisis. Labor had consistently promised the world on protecting children but delivered only disaster and dysfunction.

No amount of money will mend the broken hearts of those little kids who are still waiting for this do-nothing Labor government to fix the system that is designed to protect them. It is not about how much money you throw at the system; it is about having the right people with the right skills in the right place and that is what Child Safety staff across Queensland are telling me. We have seen Labor throwing good money after bad at the department and it does not fix the system which is in crisis. Child safety officers I talk to on the ground say Labor are struggling to fill existing child safety roles, let alone any new ones, given the toxic culture in the department.

We know last year nine children had died in suspicious circumstances under this Labor government, while about 50 child deaths were known to the department in this financial year alone. Under Labor in the last 12 months to December 2016, more than 400 kids were shoved out of the system as teenagers with no exit plan and no direction. It is startling to see in the latest December data that 62 per cent of all abuse investigations were still not being actioned within required time frames. Labor's embattled child safety minister can try to spin it whichever way she likes, but, on her own figures of the 24-hour cases not seen to in required time frames, 110 were subsequently confirmed cases of abuse, up from 98 in 2014. We know that investigations requiring a 10-day response are stuck at a record low action rate of 26 per cent. More than 10,000 investigations dragged on longer than the required 60 days, leaving children and families in limbo and putting greater strain on investigative teams. The number of abuse investigations has jumped to 22,976. These are some of the worst figures since before the commission of inquiry into child safety. Behind every one of these figures is a child in need of protection and assistance.

The LNP left Labor with a record \$406 million in extra funding until 2018 for Child Safety and an extra 77 front-line officers, as well as \$20 million in a contingency fund. How much more new money has there been? Only an LNP government can build stronger families by ensuring the child safety system is put back on track.