




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (4.11 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Appropriation Bill 2017. This budget is a typical Labor budget. It is a con job for Queenslanders and a shameless abandonment of my electorate of Mudgeeraba. It is a desperate attempt to shore up Labor seats before the next election while the rest of the state is blatantly ignored. Worst of all, it is a budget which is too little, too late for Queensland's most vulnerable children and families. With a rail fail, email scandal, child safety and domestic violence crisis, Adani indecision, infrastructure cuts, economic mismanagement and price hikes, locals know this is a do-nothing Labor government. With this budget, over the next four years the cost of living will go up and debt will increase, jobs will be lost and the economy will stall. This is a budget that does nothing for Queensland except bring more debt and more uncertainty.

Nowhere is there more evidence of Labor's incompetence than in the budget for the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. We can clearly see that in the past 12 months Labor has massively underspent on capital works across the portfolio by almost \$18 million. What is worse is that a \$6.8 million deficit is predicted for 2017-18. Meanwhile, Child Safety budgets are shrouded in secrecy. Just over three pages have been provided to explain how the department is spending \$1.1 billion of taxpayers' money. What are this Labor government and this Labor minister trying to hide? This year's budget is too little, too late to fix the crisis in Child Safety. In this budget we see a six per cent cost blowout in out-of-home care; the rate of Indigenous children in care is five times higher than for any other children; 62 per cent of kids exiting care had more than two placements; and there are only six performance measures and three pages of analysis for a \$1.1 billion Child Safety budget. This is too little, too late for the thousands of kids with broken hearts who have been waiting for Child Safety to come knocking. It is too little, too late for the child safety officers who walked away from the department and it is too little, too late for the 10 young people known to Child Safety who took their own lives in the last 12 months.

For 16 of the last 19 years Labor has been in charge of protecting our most vulnerable children. In that 16 years we have seen a crisis in care leading to the Forde inquiry and a crisis in foster care that led to not one, not two, but three inquiries, culminating in the CMC inquiry of 2004. Since then we saw the department change its name, but the system continued to lurch from crisis to crisis. In 2012 when the LNP came into office we inherited a system where only 34 per cent of investigations of abuse were actioned on time, including 17 per cent of 10-day cases. There was an explosion of kids in foster care, and we inherited a residential care program that had a \$50 million black hole in funding. When we left office in 2015, we had finalised the Carmody inquiry and accepted the recommendations in December 2013. We had committed \$406 million towards early intervention and family intervention services, and we boosted front-line child safety officers by 77 in 2014. Most importantly, we left Labor with a system that was achieving its best results ever.

In May 2014 the LNP introduced and passed the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill. As at 30 June 2014, 40 per cent of all cases started on time, 91 per cent of 10-day cases started on time and five-day responses cracked 30 per cent for the first time ever, hitting 33 per cent. We also lifted 10-day responses to more than a quarter. Sadly, after 2½ years of Labor all of that positive momentum and reform has been squandered. Response times to 24 hours, five days and 10 days have all slipped. We have heard over and over again about the tragic loss of children known to the department who slipped through the cracks. For three budgets now we have heard from the minister that the Child Safety budget is a record investment.

The results show that money is not the issue. It is the minister and Labor. There is no leadership, no direction and no idea. We heard the minister announce some 292 new positions, many of which do not come online until 2018-19. Only one in five of those will be new front-line child safety officers. Despite being warned of the pending child safety crisis back in October 2015, the minister only budgeted for 21 new CSOs in the 2015-16 budget and then cut that to 17 in 2016-17. Since then she has been scrambling to paper over the crisis. This crisis happened under her watch and was of her own making. This minister ignored the warnings and failed to act in the best interests of children. Under this embattled minister we have seen a veil of secrecy descend over the department in a bid to shield her own incompetence. When we talk about Labor and child safety, it does not matter how much money they throw on the crisis fire; the department's performance and the interests of kids go up in smoke.

How many more children are we going to lose in Queensland under this dysfunctional child safety system presided over by an incompetent minister? Time and time again we see children being returned to dangerous and dysfunctional homes. The system's insistence on reunifying children with parents who should never be given another opportunity to re-harm their children is killing kids in Queensland. Parenting is a privilege, not a right. How can you return a child to a parent who deliberately and maliciously decided to burn that child with a cigarette? Abused children have experienced burns from cigarettes, rope burns from being tied up or burns from being immersed in hot water, with catastrophic results.

Ms Jones interjected.

Ms BATES: I would imagine that, as a mother, the member for Ashgrove might stop for a minute—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Crawford): Order! Minister for Education, you are pushing close to a warning.

Ms BATES: The member for Ashgrove, who is a parent, might sit here and listen to some of these stories. As I said, parenting is a privilege; it is not a right. Abused children have experienced burns from cigarettes, rope burns from being tied up and burns from being immersed in hot water, with catastrophic results. How can any adult make a conscious decision to bite a child so hard that deep teeth marks are left on an infant? How can a parent beat their child to death with a vacuum cleaner pole whilst they sobbed and asked the parent to pray for them? How can you return a child to a parent who has harmed multiple siblings even before the birth of another child?

If you have starved, beaten, burned and neglected your child because you are too busy getting your next hit or getting a refill because the bottle is empty, you do not get another go at being a parent. So many children have had horrendous injuries inflicted on them by those who are meant to protect and love them. If you sell your child for drugs knowing that they are being sexually abused, you do not get another chance. If you as a mother bring a man into your home to be 'daddy' and then let that man hurt your child, you do not deserve to have those children with you. As a nurse, it makes me sick to the stomach when court reports and media reports outline the horrendous injuries inflicted on those who have died or been hurt. I can see the X-rays of what those old spiral fractures look like. I can imagine the horror of the doctors and nurses when their suspicions are confirmed on a scan or an X-ray.

How many children have had multiple old fractures that were never treated or that left them unable to walk properly because the injury was never treated? As a nurse, I know the agony a child with a perforated bowel would feel—the vomiting of bile, excruciating abdominal pain, the anguish of not being able to voice what you were feeling because you were too young to say the words or, worse still, of knowing that no-one cared about you enough to help you, to be crying pitifully until your little body, racked with pain and shock, eventually succumbed. I know what burns look like—how the skin would be blackened and peeling off your little body with huge blisters filled with pus and the indescribable pain you would have felt.

Mr Whiting interjected.

Ms BATES: I know how the ambulance and police officers would have felt when they sat in the gutter and sobbed at some of these callouts. The member for Murrumba might contemplate that.

How can anyone make a professional decision to leave a child in a home like this or, worse still, send a child back to the abusers so they can abuse them all over again? Would you do that to your child, your niece or your nephew? We know that there is a massive problem with our foster care system. We know that 76 per cent of foster carers left the system because they were treated so badly. We also know that the process of ensuring the right foster carers are screened into the system has often failed, with catastrophic consequences.

Even a cursory look into the history of many of these families clearly shows a pattern of abuse, not only of the victim but also of those who have been abused either before or after them. We have heard of little children with multiple bruises or fractures in various stages of healing which were never treated and, even worse, bruising on a little baby, who cannot even crawl or walk yet, inflicted by those meant to care for them—or worse, hand prints or belt marks on the body of a beautiful, chubby little baby. We have names for some of these broken-hearted little mites who will never see adulthood. Worse still, there are others we cannot even honour with a name. We have many more complaints of children left in dangerous situations, but, under the so-called privacy provisions of the Child Protection Act, this minister and her senior executives hide and lie about what is really happening. The public, quite rightly, are horrified.

Why are we sending defenceless kids back to bad parents? Blaming ice is a cop-out. Alcohol is still far and away the biggest issue in domestic violence and child abuse. Stop sending kids back to dangerous parents and dangerous homes. What is the solution? Firstly, make sure they are not missed in the first place. Make sure we have people at the intake services who know what they are looking for, who can spot the most risky cases and get them seen urgently. Stop reunifying deadbeat parents and put permanency provisions in place for parents who want to love a child and not hurt them. Open up adoption for parents who want to love a child and stop giving second, third and fourth chances to people who are repeat offenders. Change the culture and start thinking of what is in the best interests of the child, not in the best interests of the abusive parent. Stop allowing deadbeat parents a say in what happens to the children they have hurt and punish those who have committed the most heinous crime there is in our society: deliberately hurting a defenceless child. Stop lying about the backlogs and stop putting kids back into families when you know that you are only crossing your fingers and toes when you return them and you hope to hell nothing else will go wrong. The system needs to change, and it will not change under Labor because the history of Child Safety is fail after fail when it comes to those on the other side of this House.

This budget does nothing to assist victims of domestic violence at the pointy end, on the front line. Domestic violence victims will continue to have nowhere to turn under this Labor budget. They will continue to be forced into motels, with little investment in crisis shelters. As a survivor of domestic and family violence I am absolutely appalled by Labor's reckless abandonment of domestic violence victims who need somewhere to go when they have made the courageous decision to leave. We know that leaving is not an easy decision to make, but it is made harder when Labor refuses to make real investments in crisis accommodation and instead decides to continue to put victims up in an unsafe motel, often with their children in tow, miles away from their home or their school. This is distressing for both the victim and their children as they have nowhere to go and often have little support provided to them. Too often they find that it is too difficult, and they may even decide to return to the abusive situation because no crisis shelter or accommodation support was available.

Labor's record is appalling and it needs to change. We saw a hollow promise of two shelters for all of South-East Queensland, with no detail of where or when they will be delivered. It will not change until we have a government in Queensland that understands victims need services wrapped around them when they leave. Sadly, in this budget we see Labor confirm once again that it has no interest in delivering the services we need to keep victims safe. Those opposite should hang their heads in shame for their appalling record on the prevention of domestic and family violence. It takes more than a selfie.

We know that just months ago it was the LNP that introduced tough new domestic violence laws into this parliament and passed them through the House from opposition. This is almost unprecedented. Our laws will give extra protections to victims and their families. In contrast, Labor's response is abysmal. Labor tried to rally against our bill in front of those brave mothers of victims who had lost their lives to domestic homicide. Those mothers were there in the gallery that night watching the debate in disbelief as Labor tried to cobble together a reason not to support our reforms.

Dale Shales was there. She is the mother of Teresa Bradford, who was brutally stabbed to death by her husband out on bail. Her body was discovered two months after her estranged husband and killer was reportedly locked up for bashing her, taping her mouth shut, dragging her across a room by her hair and attempting to tie her up with rope in an attack in her own home. Bonnie Mobbs was there, too. She is the mother of Shelsea Schilling, who lived in fear and was stalked relentlessly by her former partner and eventual killer. While out on bail, Shelsea's killer reportedly bashed her head against the tiles, left her unconscious with a broken nose and then pushed her head into a pillow, suffocating her.

Natalie Hinton could not be there as we debated our bill because she was looking after her grand-daughter. That grand-daughter, as I said that night, will grow up without her mother, Tara Brown, who was let down by the system and murdered by her bikie former boyfriend. She was known to domestic violence services on the Gold Coast for 12 months and she was sent to numerous shelters and motels, but less than two years ago triple 0 operators took a call from a terrified Tara Brown as she screamed for help and was chased and rammed off the road after dropping her daughter off at a childcare centre. She was then beaten to death with a metal plate as witnesses watched helplessly and tried unsuccessfully to stop her murderer.

Sonia Anderson was there with us that night as we passed our legislation. Sonia is a rock of support for her family after her beloved daughter, Bianca Faith Girven, was strangled to death by her partner at a Brisbane lookout. She still lives with the outcome of this day after day.

These victims and many others like them were let down by Labor when they tried to oppose our legislation. Labor's appalling lack of support for our laws did not stop the embattled minister from shamefully trying to claim credit for our reforms in the *Townsville Bulletin*. She can try to rewrite history all she wants, but Queenslanders know that those opposite have failed to deliver for the victims of domestic violence time and time again. Those opposite have been in government for 2½ years with a clear road map laid out for them in the LNP's *Not now, not ever* report. Of the report's 140 recommendations, only 55 have been completed by this government. That is less than 40 per cent. Meanwhile we see reports of a 7½-month wait to get a hearing at the Southport domestic violence court. Labor is neglecting to meet a \$300,000-a-year funding shortfall for the Women's Legal Service Queensland, meaning victims fleeing domestic violence may have nowhere to turn for legal advice. Police locally, especially on the Gold Coast, are telling our members and anyone who will listen that domestic violence is the single biggest issue for them. Sadly, Labor continues to drag its feet. In contrast, the LNP stands shoulder to shoulder with victims of domestic and family violence.

When it comes to disability services, we see a worrying 10 per cent cut to state revenue. This should concern every man, woman and child with a disability in Queensland because as the NDIS rolls out we do not know how Labor will ensure those with a disability are supported. I know from travelling throughout this state just how inspiring Queenslanders with a disability are. They are wonderful people who just want to be able to live their lives with dignity and with certainty. Sadly, that certainty has been taken away from them by a Labor government that has given no assurance of support in the future. We know that the NDIS will not be fully rolled out for another two years, but Labor has refused to commit to providing vital support services for those languishing on the register of need in the meantime. We have seen a funding shortfall in disability services over the next three years. It is Queenslanders with a disability who will suffer as a result. We have a minister sitting on her hands waiting for the federal government to roll out the NDIS for her. It is clear to Queenslanders that this do-nothing minister has simply given up on trying to secure tangible outcomes for Queenslanders on the register of need.

We know that our seniors will miss out under this budget, with nothing being done to stop the scourge of elder abuse. The minister has sat on her hands whilst the number of seniors reporting abuse has continued to rise under her watch. There were 1,550 reported cases of elder abuse in Queensland in the last 12 months, a jump of 21 per cent. Elder abuse is a serious crime and as a community we must take a zero tolerance approach to stamp it out. Instead of doing something about it, the minister has her head in the sand. We need more than a few throwaway lines from the minister, and that is why in the 2013-14 budget handed down by the LNP in government we allocated \$7.2 million to seniors' participation and support programs.

Labor's budget once again shows it is completely out of touch with the needs of the Mudgeeraba electorate. We have been blatantly disregarded and it is our local area that will miss out again as a result. Labor can spin the facts any way it likes, but residents know that Labor is nowhere to be seen on local issues. All Labor has been able to muster up in almost three years is \$179,000 to seal a walking track in Springbrook National Park at Natural Bridge. In contrast, the LNP invested more than \$1 million for a new suspension bridge and walking track upgrades at Purlingbrook Falls in 2014. It was Labor that gave us the Reedy Creek quarry and it was the people power that stopped it. It was the LNP that shamed Labor into funding the next M1 upgrade from Robina to Reedy Creek after 2½ years of delay, but no funding had been set aside until after 2018 for the upgrade itself. It was the LNP that funded the \$8 million Carrara roundabout upgrade, but that did not stop Labor from desperately rehashing and reannouncing it yet again in this budget. Locals in my electorate and Queenslanders throughout the state know that this is a do-nothing Labor government and only the LNP will build a better Mudgeeraba and a better Queensland.