




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (9.50 am): I rise today to speak on the vital reforms that are making Queensland the safest state in Australia for children. At the outset I place on record my thanks to all of the expert panel members led by Queensland's Family and Child Commission. The report tabled this morning on the capacity of the child safety system confirms the devastating impact the LNP's cuts had on areas already under pressure. Some 225 permanent Child Safety staff were cut and 177 temporary positions were also lost under the LNP, and 130 of those who lost their jobs were Child Safety officers and regional support officers on the front line. It is no surprise that these reports also identified that ice corridors in our state in the south-west, south-east and north coast regions are particular pressure points for the system. Increased awareness and reporting about domestic and family violence and the rise of ice use amongst families have created the perfect storm, magnifying the pressure already created by the LNP's job cuts.

The report's findings have underpinned our massive commitment in this year's budget of \$200 million to employ almost 300 new Child Safety staff in the right locations to ease that pressure—pressure that was already being relieved by 129 new staff in the previous budget and of course new policies like our mandatory drug testing for parents where drug use is suspected. Consistent with the report's recommendations, we have already acted by making sure new staff go where they are needed, creating better training and career pathways for staff and introducing a relief pool to cover staff whilst on leave. The government has accepted this report's recommendations and action plan in full and is getting on with the job of restoring life-saving front-line services.

Our valued partners at the front line of course are Queensland's more than 5,000 carer families. The review of the foster care system has also been tabled by the Premier this morning, and that review confirms our system is working as intended but important improvements can be made. Again, we are accepting and implementing all of these recommendations. We will toughen background checks on prospective foster carers so that domestic violence history, traffic history, referee checks and a medical clearance are mandatory right across the state. We will improve training for foster and kinship carers and strengthen our Community Visitor Program to ensure our system is even more accountable. We will also double our efforts to listen to and include the views of children and young people and better match the needs of children with our carers.

We are already well on our way to improving the system, having already introduced legislative changes for new permanent care orders, professional foster care and boosting childcare subsidies for our carers. There is more work to do, and these reports provide us with the blueprint needed to build a stronger system. These reforms, along with the recommended improvements to the blue card system, will provide the safest out-of-home care system in the nation because Queensland's most vulnerable children deserve no less.