




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

**Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence
Prevention Committee, Report**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.47 pm): What a disappointing example of irrelevance from the Labor backbench chairs and an absolute disgraceful arrogance and attitude during estimates. Everyone who has risen to speak today from the other side has tried to defend their actions with regard to the questions that we asked. I will give the House an example. During the estimates process the minister tabled a report in her opening remarks. My first question about that report was interjected on by the chair of the committee who asked about relevance, and that went on and on during this hearing. Those chairs took on a protection role for ministers who should have been capable of answering those questions, and this shows just how out of touch and divided the Labor Party is.

When we consider that Labor has had 40-odd reports tabled over the last 10 years into child safety that they have not actioned, it was a disappointing process. The estimates process for the portfolio of Child Safety, Youth and Women and Prevention of Domestic and Family violence highlighted significant ongoing failures by this government. Members could appreciate the opposition members' disappointment that the minister used estimates to release the report I mentioned earlier of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee. Not only had nothing been done with this important report for 16 months; the timing of its release prevented any reasonable analysis or questioning of the report's validity and contents.

This report, which sat in the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships before the buck was passed, was there for 16 months and with the current minister for eight months and yet no action was taken on the report's recommendations. Given that some of the report's recommendations would have had an immediate impact on child safety, the delay in releasing this report was questionable at best—and when you asked questions in estimates you got shut down anyway.

Knowing that some of this report's recommendations would have an immediate impact on child safety, the delay in releasing this report, the continued delay in taking action and the chair's response during estimates were deeply shameful. Further, it was shown that, under Minister Di Farmer, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women is a department in crisis. We had a Labor committee chair trying to disrupt questioning. This is insulting to the children who are calling out for action from this government. The government continues to delay real action on the reforms that were established years ago. The Carmody reforms set a clear pathway for better outcomes. Let us hope this political posturing stops and the children in need receive the support they need.

It was also confirmed during opposition questioning that the government's commitment to establishing a youth reference group has been completely abandoned without any notice or announcement of this occurring. This was confirmed to have consequential impacts on the government's promised Youth Charter, which has had little progress made on it despite having been scheduled for completion in December 2017.

Practices within the child safety system were shown to be in need of further improvement, with opposition questioning highlighting notable cases of children being returned to parents despite concerns being raised by the department. It was unfortunate to hear that, in the year leading up to 31 March 2018, there had been nine cases of child sexual abuse in foster care. Further reform and oversight is clearly needed to ensure that the safety of Queensland's children is put first.

With child safety statistics getting worse under this government, it is clear that the upcoming report into the progress of the Carmody inquiry's recommendations will highlight significant failures from this government. Sadly, this means that more children are suffering as a result. Further reforms and oversight are clearly needed to ensure that the safety of Queensland's most vulnerable is fast-tracked. This is a department that is overloaded with work due to a government that ignores expert reports and advice. This is clearly a department in crisis.

As the Carmody review approaches October 2018, we need to make sure that we put Queensland's children first. Those reports that we anticipate will be made available during the Carmody report will paint what has happened over the last four years under the Queensland Labor government. Those opposite have rambled on about sacked staff. In 2015 when the department was returned to Labor, there were more staff employed in Queensland child safety than when we took government in 2012.

In conclusion, I want to say that those who stood up here trying to defend their actions during estimates need to hang their heads in shame. They tried to deflect and say that it was all the LNP's questioning and posturing, but this is clearly a reflection on how poorly and arrogantly they took the estimates process. I saw plenty of examples of this in the short time I had in front of the committee. There were irrelevant chairs from the backbench trying to make themselves relevant, and it made the estimates process very disappointing.