




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

National Child Protection Week

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.25 pm): This week is National Child Protection Week. It is a week where all Queenslanders and all Australians are given a chance to come together for the safety of our children. National Child Protection Week is also an opportunity for government, business and communities to come together to promote the safety and wellbeing of children. Friday this week is also White Balloon Day—a day to unite communities in making a commitment to protect our children from sexual assault. With these hugely important occasions approaching, I encourage all Queenslanders to do their part by promoting child safety in Queensland and Australia.

Sadly, substantiated cases of children being harmed or at risk of harm are once again on the rise in Queensland. According to the latest statistics on child safety, 5,799 children were subjected to substantiation over the last year, which is an increase of 148 children on the year before. In regional terms this has meant an increase of 5.4 per cent in Far North Queensland; an increase of eight per cent in Central Queensland; an increase of eight per cent in South-West Queensland; and an increase of 13.5 per cent in South-East Queensland. In the same period there were 318 substantiated cases of children subject to sexual harm, which is an increase of 12 cases from the same time the year before. Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up less than five per cent of Queensland's population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently make up around 37 per cent of children subject to substantiated cases of harm and unacceptable risk of harm.

Much more needs to be done to keep Queensland kids safe. Unfortunately, Queensland's most vulnerable are being let down. National Child Protection Week is a chance to address things that are too often hidden away, such as the impacts of domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence is an issue that not only impacts partners and spouses but it can also directly and indirectly impact Queensland's children. It is therefore disturbing to hear that perpetrators of domestic violence who work in the Queensland Public Service are able to gain access to taxpayer funded domestic and family violence leave. Worse still, these perpetrators do not even have to prove they have received counselling to stop them from committing future violence. Granting paid leave without any accountability to perpetrators of domestic and family violence not only sends the wrong message to others who might commit violence but it also continues to put Queensland children at risk.

More needs to be done to address child safety in Queensland, and it can start right now if this government is willing to act. During budget estimates the minister did two notable things: firstly, the minister released a 16-month-old report by the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee. We all remember that was at West Cairns and Aurukun, the Smallbone report. Secondly, the minister announced \$12 million to combat sexual violence in a manner that objectively lacked any detail of where the money would be spent. I could go on for some time about both of these being shameful tactics and convenient political timing, but this week is about government's inactions and failings. National Child Protection Week should be a call to action, and I am adding my voice to this call.

This week I call on the Palaszczuk Labor government to stop delaying and finally take action on fixing the child safety crisis. I am calling on the Palaszczuk Labor government to take action on a report that is now 17 months old. I am calling on the Palaszczuk Labor government to take action on the 40 different reports that have been tabled over the last decade. I am calling on the Palaszczuk Labor government to take action by allocating the \$12 million it announced to combat sexual violence. I am calling on the Palaszczuk Labor government to review how and why domestic violence leave is granted to those Queensland public servants who are perpetrators of domestic violence. It is National Child Protection Week, and a lot more needs to be done to keep our children safe. The call from this side of the House to the Palaszczuk Labor government is to get on the job.