




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.06 pm): As we know, the purpose and function of the Queensland Family and Child Commission, which was established in July 2014, is to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people and improve child protection services. In reviewing the annual report of 2016-2017 the Principal Commissioner noted the commission had increased its focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The commissioner stated they had done a great amount of work in breaking down barriers to employment, the development of community based approaches and working with partners on initiatives aimed at helping and making changes for vulnerable children and families. The commission's annual report also provided details of delays in implementation of 2013 reforms and referred to 10 recommendations from the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry that still are not delivered.

The committee reports that system reviews highlight disturbing facts around delays in implementation of actions to protect those who are most vulnerable. A report released in July 2016 following the death of Tiahleigh Palmer identified a number of inadequacies and made 29 recommendations. We all wait for the findings of the review now due. We do know, however, that in a supplementary review tabled 18 months ago containing 17 recommendations only two have been completed with the remainder yet to be finalised. There is more bad news in that a prepared report requested by the Premier following the death of Mason Jet Lee 19 months ago made only one recommendation which is still being considered.

The commission was asked over two years ago to lead an examination of the blue card and foster care systems in Queensland to identify any gaps. Of the 42 recommendations, half have finally resulted in legislation being introduced into this place. It was disturbing to read in the annual report that the rate of substantiated child protection cases involving Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has been declining. However, there is conflicting evidence from the Smallbone and the Jones reports that would paint a very different picture in Queensland. New figures show Queensland's child safety system is continuing to go backwards under this government. They do not have a road map. Child safety notifications have now reached their highest level in five years, some 24,000, with response times in almost half of all cases, nearly 12,000, taking five to 10 days. We all agree that is not good enough.

Department of child safety statistics also showed that intakes have hit their highest level at nearly 120,000 since the Carmody reforms were introduced almost five years ago. There are now 9,600 children living away from home, which is almost 1,000 more than in 2013-14. The data also shows that in 2017-18 the number of children subjected to substantiated sexual harm was up by nearly 400, which was a jump of 70 from 2016-17 alone and the highest level in three years.

The Palaszczuk government is failing the most vulnerable children in our society. This committee report should sound alarms bells across our state. It is clear that our kids need help. It is absolutely disgraceful that the Palaszczuk government has claimed that its child safety system has shown improvements when the data says exactly the opposite. We are seeing more children subjected to harm or risk of harm, more children living away from home and more children subjected to sexual harm.

Last month was Sexual Violence Awareness Month and we are still to see a single dollar of the supposed \$12 million promised by the Palaszczuk government to combat youth sexual violence. No matter how the minister may cherry-pick data to sell her story, the fact remains that, instead of the system improving, unfortunately more kids are being put at risk under Labor. Tomorrow, 25 child safety work sites will go on strike, throwing the child protection system into chaos. The Palaszczuk Labor government has failed to complete negotiations with the Together union on child safety worker wages and children will be put at risk as a result.

As the shadow minister, I continue to raise these issues in this place. The committee report tabled today gives us more damning insights into the problems for children at risk. Child Safety and Youth Justice workers have put up with this crisis. The two departments are trying to work hard, but it is hard under Labor. We always talk about bipartisanship. I pray and hope that the Palaszczuk Labor government can give the early LNP reforms a real go. The Carmody inquiry produced a good report that was all about vulnerable kids.

Our youth justice system is in crisis again. Why do we continue to play political games around what is happening in youth detention? With ongoing riots, assaults on staff, a failed bail house experiment and youth detention centres where kids are packed in like sardines, we can only guess what the results will be. This is just the latest example of the Palaszczuk Labor government putting Queensland children in harm's way.