



Speech By  
**Meaghan Scanlon**


**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 July 2020

**HEALTH COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY  
VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Ms SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (3.27 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the investigation of the closure of the Earle Haven residential aged-care facility at Nerang and report. In so doing I would like to thank the chair and committee for scrutinising the litany of failures that led to 69 frail, elderly residents in my community being grossly let down by the system that was supposed to care for them. The aged care sector has become a national disgrace, and unfortunately my community has been at the centre of that failure. This is an issue I have been speaking about for some time now.

On 21 September 2018 the *Gold Coast Bulletin* published an article titled 'Staffing shortage unsafe' wherein I commented on a statewide audit that showed the electorate of Moncrieff had the worst hours of care provided to residents in the state. On 16 November 2018 again the *Gold Coast Bulletin* published an article titled 'Elderly deserve a better level of care' which outlines the issues I was hearing from aged-care staff on the ground at the time. On 30 October 2018 I stood in this chamber and articulated my concerns as a matter of public interest in relation to insufficient staffing levels and associated elder neglect. On 9 May 2019 I spoke in this parliament about the impact the privatisation of the aged-care sector is having on our public hospitals.

I started a petition almost a year before the closure of this facility, calling on the federal government to ensure that the aged-care sector had a safe level of staffing. I articulated my concern about the privatisation of this sector meaning that operators are propping up their profits by cutting corners and shifting their costs onto the public healthcare system. I knew the system was bad: I did not think it was so bad we would reach the point we did on 11 July 2019, when I received a phone call stating that triple 0 had been called to relocate 69 elderly residents from Orchid House and Hibiscus House at Earle Haven over what, as we now understand, appears to have been a contract dispute over money.

I drove to the facility that evening where I remained with the health minister until the late hours of the evening. What I witnessed was akin to what we would see during a disaster. I want to thank all of the emergency services, health staff and aged-care staff who stayed behind until the very early hours the next day to ensure that everyone had a safe place to stay. I also want to thank the families who have shared their experiences through this investigation to ensure that this never happens again. As the report said, 'Put bluntly, the events at Earle Haven should never have happened.'

What has come to light since this incident is that there were a number of red flags that raised some very serious questions of the federal government, which was responsible for the regulation of this sector. On 30 April 2007 People Care, the approved provider, were sanctioned. They were again sanctioned on 3 June 2016 with a report identifying an immediate and severe risk to care recipients' safety and health and wellbeing. This detailed a failure to ensure appropriate clinical care that is consistent with general health, adequate nutrition and hydration, and a failure to provide care recipients with a safe and comfortable environment.

On 11 May 2017, People Care Pty Ltd were again sanctioned, and on 22 January 2019 they were issued with a noncompliance notice. We have also learnt that 22 complaints were made against the nursing home to the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner leading up to the incident since January 2019. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the committee has called on the federal government to take action because they are primarily responsible and accountable for deciding aged-care funding arrangements, the standards of care for clients, how complaints are dealt with and which providers are permitted to operate.

There are many recommendations in this report which would go a long way in protecting elderly residents in our community and I acknowledge the important work staff do every day caring for our loved ones. In particular, I would like to see the federal government improve transparency by implementing improvements in aged-care sector reporting and putting in place minimum staffing levels in private facilities, like we have legislated for in our publicly owned facilities. I also support an increase in wages for aged-care employees, with the long-term goal to achieve wage parity with other health sectors. I have shared the story in this parliament before of Allison, an aged-care worker who has been in the industry for 10 years and is paid \$24 an hour.

This report will not fix everything, but it goes a long way in addressing problems that have been ignored for too long. It is easy for us all to forget sometimes the impact that these reports have on people's lives. I recently called Lorraine Cook, a woman in my electorate whose husband was moved from that facility that evening. He went to another facility that she was not comfortable with and has since gone to another facility and is now at the end stages of his life. She wants to see systemic change in this sector, as do I, and that is what this report aims to do. Private providers need to be held accountable, as do governments.