




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 16 July 2020

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

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.02 pm): I rise to speak to report No. 30, titled *Investigation of the closure of the Earle Haven residential aged care facility at Nerang (Inquiry into aged care, end-of-life and palliative care and voluntary assisted dying)*, tabled by the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee in November last year. What happened at Earle Haven was an absolute disgrace and should never happen again. No-one denies that. My heart goes out to the residents of that aged-care facility for what they had to go through.

On 11 November last year, former ACT chief minister Kate Carnell AO released a report following her inquiry into the events at Earle Haven. All 23 recommendations from that inquiry were accepted. The report went deep into shining a light on the system issues that led to the Earle Haven debacle last year. It reported that on 11 July 2019, contrary to media reports that staff had walked out, the care staff of Hibiscus House and Orchid House continued to work despite being told they would not be paid. They placed the needs of residents before themselves. Many morning staff stayed beyond their shift. Staff arriving for their afternoon shift stayed on after being told they would not be paid as they arrived for work. People who were not rostered on that day or who no longer worked at the site received phone calls from their colleagues and came in to lend a hand. Some staff remained until around midnight.

My great concern is how the Palaszczuk Labor government sought to play politics with the issue and that the focus of the issue seemed to be more about maximising political opportunism. That is a disgrace. The member for Gaven seemed to be a regular visitor to Earle Haven after the incident happened but not beforehand. When I asked her at the public hearing on the Gold Coast how many times she had visited the high-care facility in the past 18 months, the member for Gaven said—

I had not visited the high-care section of the facility prior to this event. I had tried numerous times to get on site, asking the management to meet with the independent residents.

When I asked for the documentation to prove that, the member responded—

I do not know if they expressly refused or did not get back to us, but I know there were several conversations whereby we had requested and that did not eventuate.

At the same public hearing I also asked, since Earle Haven had occurred, how many times the member had visited the Nerang Nursing Centre, where 50 of those patients were evacuated to, and the answer was—

I have not been to the Nerang Nursing Centre as yet. I had every intention of visiting that facility on the Thank You For Working in Aged Care Day, but I was not able to, but I have a hamper in the back of my car for them so I will be visiting there soon. But I have received information back from some of the family members who have been to that facility.

The public hearing was on 12 September. The events at Earle Haven happened on 11 July, over two months earlier. That should say it all.

Queenslanders want to see world-class aged-care facilities that look after our most senior residents. These are Queenslanders who have worked hard all their lives and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. There has been a disturbing trend of failures in the system and we need to ensure that standards of care are improved, with greater transparency. We need to take the politics out of this issue and focus on better care and improving the system. I would hope that all levels of government can work together in the interests of elderly Queenslanders without the political grandstanding and blame game that we have seen from the Palaszczuk Labor government. Blaming the member for Moncrieff, who had been the federal member for a minute, was disgraceful, disingenuous and downright dishonest.

It was very disappointing that health minister Steven Miles was quick to jump on the Earle Haven disaster to try and score cheap political points while complaints about abuse and neglect have been happening at state-run facilities right under his nose. Only last year, the ABC reported that an elderly resident with a cognitive impairment in a Queensland state-run aged-care facility was treated so poorly that police had to be called to investigate complaints about the use of excessive force. Another resident made a complaint about allegations of sexual assault. The details of these issues were obtained by the media under RTI, showing 16 serious complaints raised with Queensland Health in 2018. No-one knows whether it was one complaint at 16 state-run aged-care homes or 16 complaints at one home.

I wrote to the health committee last year asking that state-run aged-care facilities be included in the Earle Haven inquiry, and the silence in response has been deafening. We agree with the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union that there needs to be greater transparency, but that should also include state-run aged-care facilities, otherwise it is just another Labor cover-up. I have also written to health minister Steven Miles asking to visit 14 of the 16 state-run aged-care facilities that I have not managed to visit yet and there has been no response to that either. They want a world-class aged-care system, but my concern, as it always has been—

(Time expired)