Speech By

Amy MacMahon

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Record of Proceedings, 21 April 2021

MOTION

Schools, Free Meals

Dr MacMAHON (South Brisbane—Grn) (5.00 pm): I move—

That this House:

1. acknowledges:

    (a) Foodbank's 2018 *Rumbling tummies* report shows that 20 per cent of children start the school day without eating breakfast, and 15 per cent of kids arrive at school without lunch, while Bankwest's Curtin Economic Centre's 2020 *The early years: investing in our future* report shows that in 2020, 18.5 per cent of Queensland children were living in poverty—the highest rate in the country, an increase from 15.2 per cent in 2009-10, making it the only state where child poverty has increased over the last 10 years;

    (b) at under $5.35 per meal per student (based on the cost of school lunch in Finland including staff salaries, foodstuffs, equipment and fittings, transportation and food bought externally, plus 10 per cent to account for more expensive average grocery prices), with a 30 per cent uptake rate (based on the 21 per cent rate at a Victorian free school breakfasts program at 500 schools, adjusted to account for higher rates of child poverty), a universal free school breakfast and lunch program in every Queensland state school would cost approximately $374 million per year; and

2. calls on the government to:

    (a) deliver a free healthy breakfast and lunch program to run at every state school in Queensland, available to every state school student; and

    (b) work with Foodbank Australia to expand and better resource the charity's existing free breakfast program in Queensland state schools where it is already operating.

I move this motion today because the provision of free school breakfasts and lunches would be transformative for thousands of families and schoolkids across our state. Not only could we ensure that thousands of Queensland state school children start their school day with a nutritious meal; we could alleviate financial pressure on Queensland families. In 2020, 18.5 per cent of Queensland children were experiencing poverty and that has increased by over three per cent in the past decade. We have 16,000 children waiting for social housing.

As we are likely facing a once-in-a-generation recession, we still have high rates of unemployment, families are struggling and with the shocking cuts to JobKeeper by the federal government, we should expect rates of food insecurity to only get worse over the coming months. Foodbank has reported that one in five children across the country goes to school hungry. Food insecurity can have lifelong impacts on children, including outcomes at school and health outcomes throughout their lives. Parents have also reported avoiding social events for their kids or keeping their kids home from school to avoid embarrassment or shame.

I imagine that the minister might respond to this motion by watering it down so much just to highlight the inadequate programs that we currently have in Queensland. Foodbank are doing an absolutely incredible job with the funding they have but right now they have only enough funding to provide 1,000 breakfasts per week, with other incredible organisations pitching in where they can. The

minister would know that there are around 500,000 kids in Queensland state schools and that around one in five of those kids currently goes to school hungry. Amending this motion to nothing more than the status quo could mean that an estimated 90,000 Queensland kids will continue to go without breakfast every day.

A universal program in every state school would cost just $374 million, which is a small investment to ensure that every Queensland kid gets the best start in life. For comparison, yesterday the Queensland government announced that they will be investing $1 billion to upgrade the Gabba and we are spending $150 million to build a 32-bed youth detention centre at Wacol. In a wealthy state such as Queensland we can afford to ensure that every child at a state school has a nutritious breakfast and lunch. We would make a huge saving over a child's life with better outcomes at school, better health outcomes and a lower likelihood of crime.

The failure to offer free school meals sits alongside the government's failure to fully fund our state schools. The Queensland government is providing just 69.26 per cent of the schooling resources standard—the figures speak for themselves—with no plan to properly and fully fund state schools in Queensland.

From the bilateral agreement, the Queensland government have said that Queensland has limited revenue-raising capacity when it comes to school funding yet they will freeze royalties for mining companies, they will subsidise gas companies and they will keep capping the charges on developers at woefully inadequate rates. The government's unwillingness to take on their big corporate backers means that Queensland kids miss out. In a wealthy state such as Queensland that should not be the case. If the Queensland government made property developers, big banks and mining billionaires pay just a little bit more they could easily afford to fully fund our schools and give every state school kid a healthy breakfast and lunch. The government has a choice: to commit to delivering a program that will ensure every Queensland kid gets the best start in life or to continue to let their mining billionaire mates get off scot-free and further punish kids who are already struggling.

According to Queensland Labor's own policy platform, Labor believes that children who have access to appropriate nutritious food are more likely to achieve better educational outcomes than those who do not. Labor has been in government for about 27 of the past 32 years here in Queensland. That is 27 budgets in which they could have introduced free school meals for Queensland kids. That is nearly 27 budgets in which they could have meaningfully addressed child poverty in this state. I urge the government to act now. I urge them not to water down this motion so that when the government hands down their 28th budget they do not let down Queensland schoolkids yet again.

(Time expired)