




Speech By  
**Corrine McMillan**

**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2021

**CHILD PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (12.17 pm): I rise to support and urge support for the Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. The previous speaker suggests that the system is broken. Some 3,000 workers employed by the child safety system work very hard each and every day to ensure the safety of every Queensland child who comes into the system. To suggest that the system is broken really is quite defeating to those 3,000 workers and to our significant Public Service who give their life, their career and their daily commitment to the children of our great state.

We know that those children who come into the care of Child Safety are from some of the most complex environments. It was not until I started as principal at Glenala State High School in Inala that, for the first time in my life, I began to truly understand poverty. Poverty is multilayered. Poverty affects children in more than one way. It is very concerning and derogatory to the 3,000 workers who make up our system and who contribute tirelessly in relation to the 10,000 children in our care to suggest that the system is broken.

Like every other Queenslanders, I was appalled at the death of Mason Jett Lee but encouraged by the commitment of the Palaszczuk government to take up every recommendation made in all of the reports coming out of Mason's death. There is always more to do to make Queensland's children safer, and this bill is one more of the many changes made to build a stronger system. I am sure that other speakers will talk about the implementation of the rest of the recommendations in the Deputy State Coroner's findings of the inquest and the government's commitment to making the change in this bill. This bill is advanced without in any way undercutting, winding back or reducing in force the child placement principles set out in schedule 7 of the Adoption Act and schedule 5C of the Child Protection Act, both of which relate to the placement of our First Nations children.

Bringing this bill to the parliament matches the approach of this government since it was first elected. The Palaszczuk government has made an unprecedented investment in child safety since 2015. Prior to that the LNP had cut jobs in Child Safety, so to suggest that it is committed to the safety of our children is appalling. In both funding and additional staff, the Palaszczuk government has made significant reforms to Queensland's child protection system and our family support system over the past five years.

The Palaszczuk government has allocated over \$728 million since 2015 and funded more than 550 new staff to the end of this financial year, along with recent announcements regarding an additional 154 child safety staff. Despite this investment and reforms, our system faces increasing pressure but child safety staff do an extraordinary job, as I mentioned, and continue to deliver positive outcomes each and every day in the face of significant demand in the extremely complex needs of children and their families.

Let me talk about that demand. Some 129,113 concerns or intakes were reported to Child Safety over the past 12 months, which is one every four minutes. Investigations commenced in the last year are up 11 per cent. Some 10,527 children are in out-of-home care, foster care, kinship care or residential care. This is up by 9.1 per cent since last year. Let me be clear: the Palaszczuk government

will not turn away any child if we believe they need to come into care, and we can be proud of that principle. When we talk about complexity, the sort of thing we mean is this: 39 per cent of children who came into the care of the department during the 12 months to 30 June 2020 had a parent with current or previous methamphetamine use recorded, up from 38 per cent a year ago, and in 78 per cent of cases the type of methamphetamine was ice.

There is a huge prevalence of risk factors within households where a child experienced or was at risk of significant harm: 67 per cent of parents had a current or past drug or alcohol problem; 56 per cent had a current or previously diagnosed mental illness; 54 per cent had a criminal history; 51 per cent experienced domestic and family violence within the last year; and 43 per cent had been abused as a child. Some 75 per cent had more than one of these risk factors, and I spoke earlier about the complexity of poverty. Every single one of those risk factors is significantly worse than five or 10 years ago. The world we live in is significantly different than five or 10 years ago. For example, when the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, the Carmody report, reported to the Queensland government in 2013, ice was barely on the radar. It now has an enormous impact on the safety of Queensland children.

With regard to the results in spite of that demand and complexity, cases of substantiated harm are down from over 8,000 in 2012-13 to fewer than 6,500 for the year ending 31 March 2020. For investigations with a 24-hour priority, 94 per cent had an investigation commenced within that time frame. This is the best result since recording this data commenced in 2008-09. Case loads for CSOs continued to be around or below 18 for the 11th quarter in a row, down from 21 under the LNP. Queenslanders are continuing to step up to become foster and kinship carers. Over the last year 1,645 families stepped up to become carers for the first time, an almost 20 per cent increase compared to last year. We have increased the number of carer families to more than 5,600, 880 more than in 2013.

One of our proudest achievements in child protection is the deployment of large-scale early intervention programs and services. We know that these programs and services work. As a result of our investment in early intervention, from January 2015 to May 2020 there have been over 156,000 Family and Child Connect inquiries and intensive family support referrals for information and advice and to connect families to support services. From April 2017 to May 2020 there have been more than 11,500 referrals for family support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family wellbeing services.

The early intervention family support system is working. Some 11 per cent of families who completed the family support services programs were investigated by Child Safety within six months. Some 26 per cent of families who did not receive a family support service were investigated within six months. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families referred to Child Safety, six per cent of families who completed family support services programs through a community controlled family wellbeing service were referred to Child Safety for investigation and assessment within six months.

These results do not just happen; they are driven by the investments the Palaszczuk government has made in restoring frontline services and investing in programs which work. They are also a reflection of the tremendous efforts of our staff and the work that they do with our families and carers. *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019-2023* is the Queensland government's strategy for delivering the right services at the right time to the right families to keep children safely at home. It is a whole-of-government plan, setting out a five-year strategy for the final years of the 10-year child and family reform program initiated by the Carmody report.

It is the Palaszczuk government that has delivered the vast majority of recommendations in the Carmody report and the Queensland Family and Child Commission recommendations, and we are committed to implementing these recommendations as well as those of other independent bodies such as the Deputy State Coroner and the Queensland Audit Office. There is more to be done to make sure our child protection system is the best it can be in the face of that demand and complexity, and the Palaszczuk government will be looking at what is needed next. We have implemented multiple rounds of legislative reform and a further tranche is required of Minister Linard in her charter letter. I congratulate our minister. I congratulate the great work that we have enacted within the child safety environment, and I know that our children are safer today than they were under an LNP government. I commend the bill to the House.