




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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**CHILD PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (3.39 pm): I too rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I was a member of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee in the last parliament. It was a very interesting experience to be involved in the process of considering this bill. I acknowledge the work of my colleagues on that committee—the members for Toohey, Macalister, Mansfield, Mirani, Lockyer and, at one stage, the member for Currumbin.

I start by making some observations about some of the things other members have said in the chamber today. The first thing I will address are some of the words of the member for Mansfield. I like the member for Mansfield and I value my friendship with her, so what I am about to say is not a personal attack on her. It is a rebuttal of some assumptions I hear from those on the opposite side of the House about the LNP's relationship and credentials when it comes to the child protection system.

I was watching in my office when the member said that our perception that the child protection system is broken indicates an affront to the 3,000 workers in Queensland who undertake child protection duties. That is not so. The government is responsible. I cannot see a single minister on the other side of the House who would look me in the eye and say, 'The buck does not stop with me.' Of course, the buck stops with the minister. Failings in child protection are a matter that the government has to accept responsibility for.

The member for Bancroft spoke as though the LNP rides in like a census taker to impoverished areas and then departs with its statistics in hand to brandish here in the House. That is also not true.

**Mrs Frecklington:** I have one of the lowest socio-economic electorates in this House.

**Mr LISTER:** I take that interjection from the member for Nanango. That is an excellent point. There is nothing about the election of members like the member for Nanango or myself as the member for Southern Downs—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** Could I ask for some protection, Madam Deputy Speaker, because this is a serious matter?

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mrs Gerber): Order! Pause the clock. Members, please cease your interjections.

**Mr LISTER:** I see nothing in my election or the election of members like the member for Nanango which disqualifies us from having a valid view on child protection. I too have communities which have low incomes. In fact, it is the Greens and the Labor Party in this state that represent the most affluent communities. I can see members around the chamber who represent electorates which have wealthy communities and affluent suburbs where everybody drives four-wheel drives and their children go to private schools. I represent people whose opinions are valid. To haughtily chastise the LNP as being out of touch with the causes of poverty does this state a disservice and it ought to be called out.

I am glad to see in this bill that the adoption of children has been given an increased priority. We all understand that children who are in the care of the state, are cared for by foster carers and have a variety of foster carers do not have the stability they need to do all the things we talk about—that is, thrive and become the good citizens of tomorrow and have the opportunities they want. Kids need stability. It follows quite obviously therefore that adoption is something that should be available to them. Where the line is drawn as to how easily adoption should be able to occur will always be a matter for debate in this House. I do not think it can be said that there is not enough caution in deciding when to take children from an abusive environment and permanently give them to a loving family that will cherish them and give them the very best opportunities in life.

I wonder how much of what I hear from constituents about adoption and the extraordinarily difficult process that that is stems from hand-wringing on the part of the government when it comes to the issue of taking children away from their natural parents. I think more emphasis needs to be placed on the good of the child because if they are in a druggie's house, if they are being abused, if they are not being given the love, attention and opportunities they deserve then they are primary victims. I think the rights of the child to have those opportunities and to be taken out of an environment where they are imperilled should always be seen as the most important consideration.

The LNP has a very proud history of performance in the child safety field. It is no small thing that it was a government from this side of the House that instituted the Carmody commission of inquiry. That is why we are here right now—eight years down the track from the final report of Mr Carmody QC. It has taken too long for us to reach the point of legislative reform. I do not say that the Labor Party has sat on its hands deliberately because out of hard heartedness it does not want to do the reforms that are necessary. I just think it wrings its hands too much. In the process, while worrying about the things it does, children are suffering. I think we need more action and to show a bit of leadership. I think that that has not been happening. That is probably why, in my opinion, we have seen terrible failures in the child protection system in this state.

Obviously we grieve for Mason Jett Lee and children like him. I listened to the shadow minister, my honourable friend the member for Whitsunday, when she said earlier that 53 children known to child protection in Queensland died in 2019-20. I am not an expert in this field, but that sounds like a pretty high number. Any more than zero is something we have to do something about. We need to take a good hard look at how we run child protection to make sure that we are not absorbed in the symbolism and disinclination to disoblige birth parents who do not look after their kids. We need to put the kids first and make sure our attentions are devoted to making sure they have the opportunities and the life they deserve.

In my electorate, I am fortunate to have excellent staff who have been able to help me with child protection matters that have come in my direction. As members of this House, we all know that this is a very difficult matter and often not a matter which is appropriate for members of parliament to deal with. I acknowledge my staff: Ian Jackson, Virginia Marsden and Ryan Burton-Ree. Ian and Virginia, in particular, have given me some stories about the things they have had to deal with over the many years they have worked in that office.

It is a corrosive thing for our society that children are left to grow up in fraught circumstances. We owe it to them to do everything we possibly can. I support the bill. I ask the government to please take on board the messages I have put forward.