



Speech By
Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGEES

Record of Proceedings, 1 September 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (2.50 pm): I would like to start by equally thanking the members of the Community Support and Services Committee for their report and for their work on the day to support the estimates process. I would like to acknowledge the parliamentary staff for the vital work they do each year and acknowledge the committee chair, the member for Mansfield, for her professionalism. She always does an extraordinary job.

Estimates is only as constructive as the members who participate in it. I would equally like to acknowledge the member for Whitsunday, who was respectful to all of the departmental representatives who were there at the hearings. I know that this is not the tone that everyone experiences at estimates, but I am very appreciative that that is the tone taken in regard to my departmental leaders, and they are equally appreciative.

Estimates provides an important platform of transparency, but it also provides a platform to speak about the vital work carried out by my department in often—and we could safely say always—challenging circumstances. In the past nine months since being appointed the minister, I have travelled extensively across the state to meet with our department's dedicated staff, carers, young people and service providers. Again, I would like to take this opportunity, as I do every opportunity, to thank them for their tireless work and to place my sincere appreciation on the record.

My department's budget for this financial year is \$1.86 billion, continuing our government's record investment in child and family services, youth justice and multicultural affairs. I would like to reiterate my commitment, and my department's commitment, to keeping vulnerable children safe, to investing in programs and infrastructure to prevent and reduce youth crime, and to ensuring the cultural diversity of our state is supported through policies and investment.

We continue our ongoing reform in child protection as we enter the eighth year of our 10-year reform program, Supporting Families Changing Futures. The Queensland Family and Child Commission and our contracted partners are evaluating these reforms and will use their findings to inform future strategy and investment.

We recognise the over-representation of First Nations people in the child protection and youth justice systems and acknowledge that, while much has been done, there is still much to do to address it. Through the delivery of the Our Way strategy and action plan, we are working hard to eliminate the

disproportionate representation in the system within a generation. We know that initiatives under this strategy—such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and the delegated authority trial for Indigenous community controlled organisations—are making a real difference in Queensland communities. We know it will take courage to continue on that path. We faithfully walk with our colleagues our First Nations leaders in that work.

We also continue to make significant investment in change and reform in youth justice to curb offending and reoffending to give our young people positive choices for education, training and jobs and to keep the community safe. The Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy, our five-point plan, and the targeting of serious recidivist offender work is reducing youth offending and is focused on keeping Queenslanders safe.

Coupled with today's announcement about the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group, our government is resolutely focused on public safety and community confidence. Since coming to government, we have invested more than half a billion dollars in new youth detention centre beds, staffing and early intervention programs to reduce reoffending. We have invested another \$98 million to target serious repeat offenders—the 10 per cent who commit almost 50 per cent of offences. We have legislated changes to strengthen the youth justice bail laws and improve information sharing.

Our amendments to the Youth Justice Act make it clear to the courts that we must keep our communities safe. We have established a youth crime task force, which the department and QPS are co-leading under Assistant Commissioner Cheryl Scanlon and the department's Senior Executive Director, Michael Drane. Results are encouraging, with a reduction in the number of offenders and offences committed by 10- to 17-year-olds.

With respect to multicultural affairs, August was our dedicated multicultural month. This year's theme was 'Inclusion in action'. COVID disruptions notwithstanding, there have been some wonderful and vibrant celebrations across the state from Mareeba to Mount Isa and across the south-east, and I look forward to the return of many more next year.

This year we are also vitally increasing our support for the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance Program, which will be even more important in the times ahead as we see traumatised individuals coming from Afghanistan.

In the time I have left, I acknowledge all of the senior executives across my department who continue to work to support Queensland's most vulnerable children, young people and families.