



Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 1 September 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, Report

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (11.54 am): I rise in the House to support the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2021, for the following areas of the committee's responsibility: justice and Attorney-General, women and the prevention of domestic and family violence, police, corrective services, and fire and emergency services.

Consideration of the budget during estimates allows for public examination of the responsible ministers and the chief executive officers of agencies within the areas of responsibility as outlined above. The committee's recommendation is that the proposed expenditure for the committee's areas of responsibility, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2021, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the ministers and their staff, and the officials from the relevant departments for their attendance and for providing detailed answers to questions from the committee during the estimates hearings. I also thank the secretariat staff, the Hansard staff, the parliamentary broadcasting staff and all of the other parliamentary staff for their assistance.

I will now speak about some of the important aspects of the estimates hearing as highlighted by the ministers. The Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence informed the committee of the government's significant and broad reform program being delivered to keep Queenslanders safe and foster a fairer and more inclusive society.

The heads of jurisdiction, led by the Chief Justice, responded rapidly during the COVID lockdowns to ensure Queenslanders continued to have access to justice. Audio and video links in courts and allowing various documents to be signed and witnessed electronically by video link are just two of the temporary measures used during both COVID lockdown waves. Online technology solutions were developed and implemented, with work underway to make some of these measures more permanent.

We know it is the border closures that have kept Queenslanders safe, but this has resulted in an unprecedented demand for assistance from government by Queensland consumers. The Office of Fair Trading received a 21 per cent increase in demand for their service, compared to the previous financial year, and they processed a record 17,482 complaints, 1,400 of which related to COVID-19.

The investment in justice includes an additional \$7 million for QCAT, which is one of Queensland's busiest jurisdictions. Almost \$5 million has been invested in coronial services and the implementation of reforms in response to the 2018 Queensland Audit Office report. The minister advised the committee that the government will establish a second coronial registry within the Coroners Court of Queensland, and that the Sentencing Advisory Council has been asked to review the sentencing of offenders convicted of serious violent offences.

The government's commitment to advancing gender equality and respect for women and girls across the state is as strong as ever. The current Queensland Women's Strategy has helped us make significant progress towards gender equality, and work has begun on the new strategy to find solutions to the ongoing impacts created by this pandemic as well as continue to look at ways to eliminate the harassment of women in the workplace and in broader society and to address the gender pay gap.

The committee welcomed the Minister for Police, who informed the committee of the government's investment in policing. First the minister informed the committee of the tragic death of Senior Constable Dave Masters, who was killed while doing his job keeping Queenslanders safe. I offer my condolences to his family.

These are historic times for the Queensland Police Service. The Queensland Police Service is going through an unprecedented period of reform, underpinned by yet another record budget, a massive infrastructure program and the biggest investment in police personnel in three decades. Queensland will have a police service that is bigger, more efficient, better resourced and more agile than ever before.

The pandemic has demonstrated, like never before, the key role the Queensland Police Service plays in maintaining public safety and supporting government administration. Police officers are on the borders, in our airports and in our quarantine hotels keeping the community safe. The Queensland Police Service is world class, and that is without dispute.