




Speech By
Amanda Camm

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2022

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Foster Carers

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (2.36 pm): I would like to bring to the House's attention the definition of a 'troublemaker': a person who habitually causes difficulty or problems, especially by inciting others to defy those in authority.

Mr Harper: Talking about the opposition leader.

Ms CAMM: I take that interjection from the member for Thuringowa. When I was in his electorate last week, it was quite interesting to hear his own constituents being referred to as troublemakers. I was in the electorate of Mundingburra last week. His constituents reported to me that he will not even return emails. The troublemakers I am referring to are foster carers across our state who are giving their love, their support and their attention to the most vulnerable children in our state. I note from the minister a statement released on Friday, after my visit to North Queensland. It reads—

I want parents and carers to know that support is always available to keep their children safe and their families healthy and thriving.

My message to the minister is: that is not the way foster carers and families across North Queensland are feeling. In fact, I heard from them that they think the minister's words are superficial at best. When the minister and her director-general travel to North Queensland to meet with foster carers, it is not seen as genuine engagement.

Mr Harper: You are a disgrace!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Order! Member for Thuringowa, you are warned.

Ms CAMM: I take that interjection. What is a disgrace is the lip-service paid by this government to First Nations children. What is a disgrace against this government is when children are sent back to community—

Ms Enoch interjected.

Ms CAMM: I am. I am referring to every minister—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member, you will put your comments through the chair. Member for Algester, you will do the same with your interjections, but I ask you to cease interjecting.

Ms CAMM: Foster carers feel they need to meet with me in secret to share their concerns about young Indigenous children being sent back to community. In not one and not two cases but in three cases I have heard of children under the age of five being sexually assaulted. I hear words like 'manager's discretion' being used in relation to Child Safety senior management in North Queensland. Thresholds that would not be acceptable in metropolitan areas such as Brisbane somehow seem to be acceptable in Far North Queensland—thresholds that move based upon the colour of a child's skin and based upon the community from which they come.

The standards of care are not consistent between Brisbane, Central Queensland and certainly Far North Queensland. We hear that the responses to sexual assault claims that have been raised by foster carers and referred to child safety have been, 'It has been alleged but not substantiated.' We hear about toddlers who are being returned to situations where they have no voice—children who have no voice to speak about their own fear or their own safety.

This is a government that is tasked, resourced and budgeted to support and protect our most vulnerable children. I do refer to section 187 of the Child Protection Act, which is solely in place to protect children. That very act is used to threaten foster carers, carers and GPs across North Queensland. New disclaimers regarding that act have now been added to emails only in Far North Queensland. I do not see that addition to emails coming out of the department in South-East Queensland.

I know there are many hardworking child safety officers across this state, but I implore the minister—and I have said it before in this House: there is an issue in Far North Queensland. Whether it is an unofficial policy of this government or not, it is upon everybody who sits opposite. I will continue to meet with foster carers. I will continue to answer the calls from those children who cannot speak for themselves. It is upon everyone in this House—most importantly those opposite—to ensure they get to the bottom of it.