



Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2022

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (3.06 pm): I too rise as a former member of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee to address our report into the oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. I think I have previously shared with the House the two reasons why I primarily decided to join a political party—the LNP. The first was that the community I lived in was then in the electorate of Nicklin. I think it was in the condolence motion of the former member Mr Gordon Simpson that I mentioned that it was to get rid of the then Speaker Mr Wellington.

The second was that I was actually an employee of the Department of Child Safety at the time. One of my biggest frustrations was watching the Labor government, the Beattie government of the day, try to implement the Forde inquiry and make all of those platitudes to the broader public that they knew there was a problem and they wanted to fix it. I was watching their so-called fix and it was actually making the lives of children in our care far worse. It was destroying families and children. I wanted to join a party and help write policies that would make a difference.

One of the biggest joys I had during our term of the LNP government between 2012 and 2015 was the focus we took not only on domestic violence but also child protection. We instituted the Carmody review. That was such a comprehensive document and it really picked up on many of the key themes that I had hoped we as a party and as a government could implement. We were well on track to doing that. We needed clearly one more term because the subsequent government, this government, even over seven years has dropped the ball. I will come back to that in a moment.

One of the things we were able to achieve was the passing of the Family and Child Commission Act 2014, which established the Queensland Family and Child Commission. As mentioned in the report, that commission has a number of functions: the oversight of the child protection system; the promotion and advocacy regarding the responsibilities of families to protect and care for, and the safety and wellbeing of, children and young people, particularly those in the child protection or youth justice system; to provide research, assistance, capacity building and leadership for agencies involved in the child protection system; to review, analyse and evaluate systemic policies and practices relevant to the child protection system; to inform and educate the community; and to report to the minister about matters relating to its functions.

It was good for us to again meet with Cheryl Vardon, former principal commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission, and Natalie Lewis, the commissioner, on 14 June last year and hear how they are going. I commend both of those ladies and their teams for the work they are doing. Keeping an eye on how government is implementing our child protection system and how we are working with families to keep our children and young people safe is vital work, so full credit to the commissioners and staff for what they are doing.

I do not want to address a number of concerns that we in the LNP continue to have. We were, and we always are, saddened to hear that a number of children pass away each year and that those children are known by Child Safety. As mentioned in our statement of reservation, the death of any child is one too many. We believe that there continue to be a number of systemic failings and gaps that need to be addressed. As I said, if we had been implementing the Carmody inquiry as per what we had intended, I believe those gaps would have been addressed.

What we are concerned about—and they are the concerns of the QFCC as well—is that there were nine deaths reported as sudden unexplained deaths. This is different from SIDS. It is a significant number. It does lead us to think that further investigation is warranted, and the commission agreed with that position. We would like to see the results of the research into the use of the red flag system, particularly where this could make up for gaps in the system and in understanding how relevant officers get children who are in immediate danger out of the situation urgently. Representing the parts of the community that I do, I know that Child Safety staff do a fantastic job, but have they got the resources? Have they got the training? Do they have the ability to get to those kids, particularly when an urgent matter needs to be addressed straightaway?

The other matter we continue to be concerned about is the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system, again something that was a significant focus of the Carmody review. We had a range of activities that we, as a government, were looking to implement. Had they been implemented, had they been followed up with the rigour they deserved, I believe we would be in a far different place for kids in care, and I encourage the government to take up that baton.