




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.15 pm): I rise to address the Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. As I have said before in the Queensland parliament, an important measure of any modern society is how it treats and takes care of its most vulnerable. It is an unfortunate reality that in Queensland there have been too many tragic incidents and revelations of significant failures and shortcomings with respect to the protection of children and young people, particularly in the care of the Queensland government.

When it comes to Queensland's child protection system, both the voice and the safety of a child must take priority. Unfortunately, we have heard and seen too many examples where this has not been the case. That is why this legislation before the Queensland parliament is an encouraging step forward. However, as the Queensland Minister for Children and Youth Justice articulated in her first reading speech, the journey to improve the child protection system must continue.

The Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 was introduced into the Queensland parliament on 15 September 2021 and it was subsequently referred to the Community Support and Services Committee for consideration. As outlined in the bill's explanatory notes, the objectives of this legislation are to amend the Child Protection Act to better support children and young people in care; and streamline, clarify or improve processes including by, firstly, reinforcing children's rights in the legislative framework, secondly, strengthening children's voices and decisions that affect them and, thirdly, streamlining, clarifying and improving the regulation of care.

There are also amendments to the Adoption Act 2009 as well as the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000, the latter of which will support the sharing of domestic violence information as well as facilitate Queensland's participation in the working with children checks national reference system, which is in line with the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

On 12 November 2021 the Queensland parliament's Community Support and Services Committee tabled its report making three recommendations, including that the legislation be passed. I note via the committee's report that stakeholders and submitters were generally supportive of the proposed amendments to the principles of the Child Protection Act which will enable children in care to have a greater say in the decisions that affect them so that their care can better be tailored to suit their individual needs. I also note that stakeholders were similarly supportive of the expansion of children's rights and also improving children's knowledge of their rights within the child protection system. It is hoped that such a move to ensure children have a greater awareness of their rights will have a resultant impact on encouraging children to identify and also speak up when they may be in harmful environments. All children in Queensland deserve every opportunity to thrive, especially those who come into contact with Queensland's child protection system.

Children in child protection deserve a greater voice and, importantly, the Queensland government must ensure that an enhanced voice is equally matched by enhanced support, particularly through what can be difficult and traumatic processes relating to their care. Whilst these specific changes are

welcomed, it is incumbent on the Queensland state Labor government to take immediate steps to clarify and improve the administration of the Child Protection Act 1999 and other related and relevant acts. In addressing this legislation, I would like to raise a specific matter as it pertains to relevant legislation.

In my electorate of Moggill, over many months local residents have told me of their incredibly difficult experiences in seeking to work with the Queensland government with respect to local premises that are seemingly being utilised under the auspices of the Child Protection Act 1999 and the Youth Justice Act 1992. In fact, along with local community safety concerns following multiple police incidents, a significant concern of local residents has been a seeming lack of openness, transparency and accountability by the Queensland government and the continued level of 'secrecy', as local residents term it, around the utilisation and occupancy of such premises as well as suitable supervision. Local residents understand and appreciate the importance of privacy provisions contained within legislation; however, in raising a number of concerns and conflicting legalities of the operation of such a premises, the veil of privacy is being used to effectively override the concerns of some residents and not answer legitimate questions. In fact, local Queensland Police Service officers are being hindered in keeping our community safe due to such provisions. That is certainly information that they continue to provide to me.

There are also issues pertaining to the legal use of the premises, given concerns that have been raised with respect to the application and jurisdiction of Brisbane City Council's Brisbane City Plan 2014 and the requirement for an impact assessable development application in the relevant rural residential zone. Responses that local residents have received to date from the Queensland state government show that there is a significant blurring of the jurisdictional and regulatory lines between the Child Protection Act and the Youth Justice Act and how it intersects with the Queensland Planning Act and Brisbane City Council's Brisbane City Plan 2014.

The Queensland state government is failing local residents, and Queenslanders more broadly, by enabling such premises to be utilised for specific purposes with no community input, engagement or consultation. The Queensland state government seems to be exempting itself from the application of Queensland's planning laws.

I raise these issues specifically in the parliament in addressing this legislation because I understand that they are important for the minister. I have formally written to the minister about those issues as well, but it certainly needs a suitable solution for all involved. I ask the minister and the Queensland state Labor government to continue to engage comprehensively with local residents and the local community and provide them support in relation to the answers they seek whilst also looking after vulnerable Queenslanders. That would be greatly appreciated.

This legislation is enhancing efforts by the government to fix child protection and the youth justice system, but it certainly cannot come at the expense of community safety and transparency. As outlined earlier, the measures that are contained within this legislation are a positive step forward, but it is clear that more needs to be done not only for Queensland children but also for families and the communities they live in.

Finally, I take the opportunity to thank all members of the Queensland parliament's Community Support and Services Committee. I know that the Liberal National Party members, the Labor members and other members on that committee do some very important work, particularly in scrutinising this legislation. After looking at their comprehensive report, I would like to give acknowledgement to all of them but particularly from this side the deputy chair, the member for Burnett, and the member for Scenic Rim; the committee secretariat for its support; and the stakeholders who contributed to the committee's consideration of this legislation. Again, without the contributions made by various submitters to the committee, it would be extremely difficult to get improvements and enhancements to legislation which are in the best interests of all, in this case particularly vulnerable Queenslanders. I acknowledge the contributions the submitters have made to the committee oversight process. It has been vital work. We would all hope that the passage of this legislation will strengthen and enhance the protection of vulnerable Queenslanders, particularly children who are in the child protection system.