




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (12.09 pm): I rise to speak on the Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. The bill was introduced to the parliament on 15 September 2021 and referred to the Community Support and Services Committee for examination. The Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 was examined previously by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee in the 56th Parliament, which tabled its report on 28 August 2020. Given the bill is the same as the one which was examined comprehensively by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, the Community Support and Services Committee agreed to include the former committee's report as part of its report. The committee recommends the Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 be passed.

The Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 seeks to amend the Child Protection Act 1999 in the three key reform areas: reinforcing children's rights in the legislative framework; strengthening children's voices in child protection decisions that affect them; and streamlining, clarifying and improving the regulation of care. It is encouraging to know that the bill will further enhance the rights of children by implementing the reforms proposed within the 2019 discussion paper titled *Rethinking rights and regulation: towards a stronger framework for protecting children and supporting families*, which outlined a number of options for legislative reform to the Child Protection Act to continue implementing the Supporting Families Changing Futures reform program.

All children deserve to be safe. However, for some children this is not always the case. We, therefore, rely on services to provide intensive support. This support helps vulnerable families to overcome personal challenges that would minimise future risk of harm to a child. I acknowledge the severity of cases ranges from low to high risk. Despite the level of risk, every child deserves the right to have a say in the decision-making process. That is, they should be able to freely express their feelings and thoughts. When we talk about working in the best interests of the child, it is our duty as policymakers to ensure we not only give these children a voice, but we support and we nurture their voice to feel empowered and gain control of their reality. As a mother, I will always want all children to have a voice, and this bill speaks directly to those who do not have a voice.

I am proud of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to legislate strong reforms to protect the rights of vulnerable children in this state and to ensure children and families are fully aware of their rights and how to exercise them. As someone who has spent some time working in child protection in both the government and the non-government sectors, I have worked with many children and their families who have travelled down the path of disempowerment by not having the right to have a say or contribute to any form of the decision-making process. I have seen how the inability to contribute to important life-changing decisions leads to feelings of disappointment, frustration, anger and extreme sadness which becomes quite stressful and traumatic for everyone. When considering the amendments in the bill it is important to note that many factors can often prevent children and families from actively participating in the decision-making process. I want to make specific mention of the cultural barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and the recognition of Aboriginal traditions and Torres Strait Islander customs that is deserved when dealing with those children.

The bill seeks to embed a human rights focus throughout the Child Protection Act so children and families become fully aware of their rights and are empowered to exercise their rights appropriately. This bill will broadly include amendments to support collaboration with, and involvement of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the child protection system; further protect and promote rights for children in care; encourage participation of, and communication with, children and young people in decisions that affect them; streamline the regulation of carers to ensure a robust, safe and transparent framework for children; and make minor and technical amendments to modernise provisions and support operational efficiencies.

This is a good, strong bill that speaks volumes for this government's commitment to child protection reform in this state. The Queensland government is committed to strengthening the child protection and family support system to support the wellbeing of children and families now and well into the future. This bill is about empowerment, it is about strengthening processes and how we can make the child protection system work for our most vulnerable. Most importantly, it is about protecting the rights and liberty of our children.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Hon. Leanne Linard, Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, for all her work in progressing this important legislative reform. I acknowledge and thank the Community Support and Services Committee; committee chair, Corrine McMillan; members of the committee, the members for Nicklin, Burnett, Scenic Rim and Maiwar; the committee secretariat; and Hansard for their work in the examination of the bill. I commend the bill to the House.