




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (3.41 pm): I also stand to make a contribution to the debate of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's report No. 31, titled *Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission*. I will start by joining my colleagues in acknowledging the hard work of the secretariat, who do such a fantastic job of making us all look very good. I would like to thank my colleagues, in particular the chair, the member for Toohey, and the deputy chair, the member for Currumbin.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions and the work of the Principal Commissioner, Luke Twyford. Luke, as we have heard, replaced former principal commissioner Cheryl Vardon in January. I think it is important to acknowledge the work of Cheryl Vardon. She has been a stalwart of the QFCC and has done a lot of fantastic work in her time and provided some wonderful systemic oversight. I know they will feel her loss, but I also know that Luke comes from a fantastic background in the NT. He has done a lot of work in the juvenile justice system there, so he will make a fantastic contribution to the commission.

I would also like to acknowledge Commissioner Natalie Lewis, who is phenomenal. Anybody who sees Natalie perform and advocate would acknowledge that she is such a warrior of a woman. Notwithstanding all of the hardworking people in the QFCC, she has absolutely advocated for a human rights lens to be applied to that organisation. I really want to congratulate them both on their work.

As we have heard here today and as we have heard a lot and I am sure we all recognise, the department of child safety operates in a really difficult and complex service delivery environment. It does have multiple oversighting measures including independent bodies, and I think we would all understand the reasons why that needs to happen. Any agency that has the functions and powers to remove a child from their family because a family cannot or will not protect them needs to have appropriate oversighting measures in place. The QFCC is one of those oversighting bodies. There are a few others, but I will stick with the QFCC because that is what the report is on.

The QFCC's work looks at the systemic advocacy for children and young people. Some of their statutory functions include: oversight of the child protection system; promotion and advocacy regarding the responsibilities of families to protect and care for their children; reviewing, analysing and evaluating systemic policies and practices relevant to child protection; and reporting that to the minister. Under the act they do need to give a disproportionate focus to the voices of young people, which is so important, and a focus on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, which they do. During the reporting period we heard they did this in a number of ways. I will talk to only a couple of those.

The first is its report *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms*. In the period this report was prepared there were three tragic and fatal vehicular incidents involving young people. That obviously significantly changed the public discussion on the topics within the report. Those deaths were sudden and shocking and rightly led to community demands for changes that would prevent recurrences. As the QFCC report states, in order for these changes to be lasting, as a

community we have to actively engage with the sometimes confronting concept that preventing crime means looking at the causes of crime. As we know, youth justice is much more than court, bail diversion and detention. We are looking at health, education, keeping them safe in culture and safe in family and how we respond to victims of crime.

The other report I want to mention is Rights, Voices, Stories. This was a project that focused on the experiences and perspectives of young people in the child protection system. Importantly, it looked at the outcomes they thought should be measured. We often talk about child protection measures in terms of outputs and inputs, but it is important to look at the outcomes. They identified five things they wanted to focus on which were: identity, stability, health and wellbeing, feeling safe and loved, and equity and fairness. This is something the QFCC will continue to work on in the following years, working with the agencies responsible for our children in the child protection system, making sure that they are implementing recommendations and looking at those wellbeing indicators, and performing that oversighting and monitoring role themselves. That is something that the QFCC is going to be reporting on annually. They are going to start collecting the data. I look forward to our next hearing with them so we can understand that a little bit further. I commend the report to the House.