




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2022

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.51 pm): Our committee has statutory oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission, the QFCC. The QFCC has one of the most important roles. It is tasked with protecting and representing the rights, safety and wellbeing of children in Queensland. The QFCC has an obligation to build awareness of and accountability for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children in Queensland within the child and family support system across the Queensland community. My colleagues and I support transparency in all government actions, but this is even more important when it comes to our children's safety. However, it appears the state government is delaying releasing reports from the QFCC, and this just simply is not good enough to me.

As part of the annual reporting process, the QFCC provides an assessment of its performance in achieving state and national goals relating to the child protection system. The committee report notes that the measures on which Queensland received a 'needs improvement' assessment pertained to: finalised child protection investigations; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in a home based placement; and children in care who are the subject of a substantiation of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect. It also notes that Queensland only received a 'satisfactory' assessment for: children's early development across five domains; and the proportionate state government real recurrent expenditure on all child protection services. In fact, the only area Queensland received a 'strong' assessment for was children aged 0-17 years commencing with intensive family support services.

It is really not good enough that Queensland needs improvement in these areas and that Queensland only received a 'satisfactory' assessment for some. We cannot have our most precious and vulnerable children living away from home in potentially dangerous circumstances. We cannot have a situation where these children are dying. The continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system is very concerning and it is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed. It is this government's responsibility to ensure budget money is being spent in the best possible way. This is undoubtedly a big responsibility on both the minister and the government, but they must do it better.

Throughout the committee process we further delved into other areas that need improvement. Of specific discussion was the Child Death Review Board. The principal commissioner advised the committee that the QFCC has considered the deaths of 55 children and young people known by the child protection system: 10 by fatal assault and neglect; six by suicide; two by drowning; two by non-intentional injuries; 10 by natural causes; nine by transport accidents; seven which are currently unknown and pending further investigation; and nine sudden unexplained deaths. I was deeply saddened to hear of the number of children who have tragically died in the past year who were known to Child Safety, and I share the concerns of the QFCC regarding the nine sudden unexplained deaths.

Any death, especially that of a child, is one too many. The child protection system must be there to protect the children who need it. It is of the highest importance that any system failings or gaps be transparently addressed to ensure future tragedies are prevented.

During the committee hearing my colleague the member for Glass House asked the principal commissioner for an update on the 'red flag' project. This is a project referring to the idea of using red flags to help identify where children may be at risk. I note that this research was due to be completed in August last year, but we are yet to receive it. I look forward to receiving that research and that update. It remains clear, however, that the system needs urgent review. This is imperative to keeping kids safe and out of high-risk situations. The government and our community must never forget the interests, rights and voices of our children. Every child deserves to grow up happy and healthy. Every child deserves to feel safe and to have a home in which they feel safe. It is this government's responsibility—and it holds a very serious responsibility—to ensure that this occurs for our most vulnerable and precious children in our child protection system.