



Speech By  
**Laura Gerber**


**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2022

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.28 pm): Firstly, I would like to thank and acknowledge my fellow committee members, the committee chair, the committee secretariat and all of those involved in the reporting process, including the Queensland Family and Child Commission's Principal Commissioner, Luke Twyford, and Commissioner Natalie Lewis. The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee has statutory oversight over the Queensland Family and Child Commission, and the committee also reviewed the QFCC's annual report of 2020-21. The QFCC has one of the most important roles in our state. 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 safety and wellbeing of all children in Queensland within the child and family support system. In this regard, the QFCC has oversight of the child protection system. Throughout the 2020 and 2021 reporting period, the commission participated in several oversight initiatives, including systems oversight and performance oversight.

In relation to systems oversight, the committee heard that the review into the responsiveness to the five-day and 10-day notifications of child harm in Queensland found that there is an unacceptable delay between when an investigation and assessment process is commenced and when a safety officer physically sights the child who has been reported. While there was variation across Queensland regions, on average it is taking between two and nine weeks to sight a child when the notification was commenced by information. The QFCC has identified that this is an area that needs improvement, and when you combine this with the fact that the child protection and family support workforce feels strained, I ask the minister for child safety: what is she doing to address this very serious and potentially life-threatening concern? The minister cannot—she must not—wait until it is too late, until the notification of child harm turns into a tragedy. We cannot have our most precious and vulnerable children living away from home in potentially dangerous circumstances and an unacceptable delay in physically seeing and ensuring that a child is okay. We cannot have a situation where our vulnerable and precious children are dying, but tragically that is what we are seeing, both in relation to children known to the child protection system and child mortality statistics for suicide and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

During the 2020-21 year, the QFCC conducted its 16-year review of child death data. The review identified that the rate of youth suicide has increased by an average of 2.6 per cent each year. Based on this increase, that is nine more children committing suicide year on year. For context, during the 2020-21 year, there were 30 confirmed or probable suicide deaths of young people in Queensland, nine more than last year. Over the five-year period, suicide was the leading external cause of death for 10 to 14-year-olds and the leading cause overall for 15- to 17-year-olds.

It seems this horrific trend is reaching children under the protection of the state. During a different public hearing conducted by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, on 22 September we heard evidence from the chief executive officer of the Aboriginal Law Justice and Governance Association on Mornington Island. During that evidence Ms Sellin told us—

Unfortunately we have just had some sad news this morning that a 15-year-old girl who was removed off the island because families could not care for her due to the blue card situation—they moved her to Mount Isa and unfortunately she committed suicide last night.

I have asked our committee secretariat to write to the child safety minister and the Attorney-General regarding this evidence. Not only does this evidence on its face reveal yet another death of a child known to the child protection system but also it adds to the unacceptable trend that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in child mortality statistics, dying at around twice the rate of non-Indigenous children. It is not good enough that children are committing suicide, but it is a damning indictment on this government if children in the child protection system are committing suicide. What the review of the child death data shows is that children known to the child protection system are over-represented in child death statistics. They are dying at a higher rate than children in the general Queensland population. It is completely unacceptable that this is happening. This child safety minister needs to take some action in this space and she needs to do better because these are our most vulnerable children.