




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Bailey**

**MEMBER FOR MILLER**

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Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2022

## **CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (4.06 pm): I rise to support the Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. I stand before the House to make a contribution to the bill and support the meaningful reform and protections this bill holds for our children, for young people and for families right across Queensland. The Palaszczuk Labor government is committed to making the child protection and family support system as strong as it can possibly be. It is an essential part of effective government and an essential part of who we are as a society that that should be the case. That should be an ongoing priority for us and for any government that is connected to the values of a decent society.

Our government has already delivered significant and meaningful changes through the 10-year Supporting Family Changing Futures program. This bill continues that reform by improving our child safety system. Our key and primary objective is to keep our children safe. That is a basic right that every child in this state deserves. Another important aspect is providing children with a stronger voice in the decisions that impact them. In this day and age of the internet, social media and all sorts of ways of communicating, that is a very important thing to consider. The ability for people to engage is greater than it has ever been, but sometimes there are greater risks with that. That means we need to work to ensure that we keep up with that and that the forces of good, the forces of respect, are ahead of those people who are on the other side of that equation, particularly in terms of children. That is something that we are very aware of and that we have very much encapsulated in some of these reforms.

We know how formative and fundamental the early years are for children. The vast bulk of learning and cognitive development happens before the age of five. That has ramifications in terms of how we help vulnerable children in particular. This bill will help to protect the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children. Not only that, we are also actively implementing the recommendations of recent reviews. I thank all of our officers, all of our MPs, who have been part of those reviews. They have done a lot of very important work in terms of identifying the issues that need to be considered that are part of reform and have been encapsulated in this bill, so I thank them for their very profoundly important work.

That is an important part in making sure these key amendments hit the mark and deliver the changes that are needed across our state. Making sure that the rights of children are entrenched in legislation is an important step forward to protecting and supporting children and their families. That is why I endorse this bill and the changes it contains.

As a member of parliament representing the electorate of Miller, I spend a lot of time talking to local families, parents, children and young people, like all members of parliament do. The engagement about the future has probably never been stronger, and where young people and children are in that future is a very dynamic thing. It is my responsibility as their local representative and as a member of the Palaszczuk state Labor government to advocate for legislation that delivers the best outcomes for their future and keeps track with the times.

One thing that has stood out for me is just how vocal—and rightly so—young people and children are in terms of the importance of knowing their rights, of having their voices heard and of being listened to and respected in the decision-making process. I am glad to say that the contents of the bill certainly do just that. We are providing dignity and autonomy to the children and the youth of our state, allowing them to advocate for their best interests. Young people deserve that right. They also deserve the right to be treated fairly—and this bill certainly has that as a core value—and the right to be treated with respect.

They deserve the right to maintain a connection with their culture. In this state, we have cultures from 200 different nations across the world and many First Nations cultures, including Torres Strait Islander culture, and it is very important that children have the right to have that connection, particularly where that connection might be broken or deferred or may have had interruption. They have a fundamental right to have that connection if that is their origin. They have the right to religion and also the right to language. I acknowledge that there are many languages that are spoken as a first language in many places of the state, particularly our First Nations languages.

They have the right to develop, maintain and enjoy an identity, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This is one of the great changes in our society in the recent decade or so, with discussions, a greater acknowledgement and a greater understanding of some of those aspects. We are only just beginning to be a truly inclusive community. We had the marriage equality referendum only four or five years ago, and that is a right people should have had a long time before that. People deserve those equal rights and equal respect. We will not stand in the way of the rights of children. We will strengthen their rights with this bill.

The Palaszczuk Labor government is also committed to partnering with First Nations people across Queensland, their community representatives and their organisations which hold so much collective wisdom, law and culture going back in some cases 3,000 generations. Through this bill, we will also continue to deepen and strengthen our partnership with them. There are five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle that were recommended, and we are the first state to legislate all five. As a member of this government, I am proud of that achievement, as are all of those who are voting for this bill, because I think that is a very important aspect of it.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this state have an innate right to develop and maintain a connection with their country, their family, their community, their culture, their traditions and their language. They also have the right to participate in decision-making and advocate in the best interests of First Nations children. It will only be through genuine and collaborative partnerships with First Nations people that we will deliver the best outcomes for children on a physical and emotional level. I pay tribute to our three First Nations MPs here—the members for Algeester, Bundamba and Cook. They are very important people and real trailblazers not just within this government but within this parliament.

This is something I feel very strongly about. It is a privilege to be able to speak to this bill. I thank all of those who have been associated with it and who have driven it, including the minister. I commend the bill to the House.