




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2022

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (8.24 pm): Above all else, the role of any government should be to ensure the safety of its citizens. That safety must be upheld for our society to function properly. It is those who cannot keep themselves safe that we must always have at the front of our minds. It is the government's job to protect them, to keep them away from harm and to ensure their safety. There are many in our society who fit that category, but those I am speaking about here and now are our children—the children of Queensland who cannot fend for themselves. It is those children who grow up in homes where they are not loved and not cared for that the government needs to protect the most. They are born innocent but they are born into a life which can be neglectful, harmful and damaging.

I have said many times in this place that parenting is a privilege and not a right, and I stand by that. I believe it to be true beyond all doubt. Every child is precious. They deserve love and they deserve to be cared for, yet sometimes they are not. It is a sad and truly disturbing reality of life, but it does happen. It is reality and we cannot walk away from it. So it is that government must ensure the safety of these little ones who are born into homes and into lives that you would not wish on your worst enemy. Just as the role of government is to ensure the safety of these children, it is the role of the opposition to hold the government to account on how it is doing that job. Over nearly eight years, to my great dismay and the dismay of many of my colleagues on this side of the chamber we have watched on as this government has failed in its duty to these children.

Let me be clear: nobody wins when our child protection system fails—nobody. I wish I did not have to come in here and talk about these issues, but where there are failures they must be identified. We have to call it out, we do call it out and we should call it out. We saw the issue rear its ugly head again in today's newspaper. The article in the *Courier-Mail* began by saying—

A bright and funny teenager who took his own life at just 14 years old might still be alive today if the department of child safety had not failed him, a coroner has ruled.

Does that not say it all? Just think about that. A boy, a mere 14-year-old, was so horribly let down by the child safety department that he felt the only way out of his situation was to take his own life. That is what the coroner said. I ask members to think about whom they might know at that age or to think of themselves at that age. They should be great days, yet that child was robbed of them.

Since 2015 somewhere in the order of 28 children known to the child safety department have died under suspicious circumstances under this government. One is too many, but nearly 30 in eight years is a disaster. It is a disaster in every sense of the word. They are just the ones that we know about. Why and how does this keep happening? In my view, it is because child safety keeps sending abused children back to those homes where the abuse happens. Reunification is the policy—reunification at all costs, no matter what the cost. That is a failed notion. It has failed too many children,

and that failure has cost them their life. It is shameful. My fear is that others will suffer the same fate if something is not changed. They will wind up in the same homes with the same people who perpetrate that abuse. It needs to stop.

That takes leadership. It takes accountability, yet not one of the three ministers responsible for child safety since the election of the Palaszczuk government has shown that leadership or that accountability. It started with the member for Waterford. Sadly, she set the tone for the member for Bulimba and the current minister, the member for Nudgee, both of whom were sent to the witness protection program for failed child safety ministers. The member for Waterford is far and away Queensland's worst child safety minister. It is not good enough and it is a blight on this government. Under the Labor government you are more likely to die as a child in Queensland if you are known to the department of child safety. The member for Waterford is the worst child safety minister in the history of Queensland's parliament. It is a travesty. It is this Labor government that—

(Time expired)