




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2022

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.01 pm): The Queensland Family and Child Commission, or QFCC, as a statutory body has a vital role to play in family and child related matters throughout our communities relating to safety and security in the home and in other forms of care. As well, it is charged with improving the child protection system. This work is difficult and challenging, however; it is integral in working to keeping our youngest safe. The process leading to report No. 19 on the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's oversight of the QFCC has afforded the committee the opportunity to review the annual report 2020-21 and to directly question the principal commissioner and departmental representatives in relation to their activities.

In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the commission also believes that children and young people's views about their lives and issues that affect them need to be taken into account. This is reflected in a more participatory model of practice and service delivery. The commission has reached out to young people through a variety of mechanisms and to date has engaged directly with over 8,000 young Queenslanders who have been forthcoming with their views about their lives, the impacts of COVID and the other issues they deal with daily.

Highlighted as their top three concerns were mental health, education and the environment. We must all strive harder to work across our electorates to ensure that the services they rely on are available to them as needed. Within the Noosa electorate alone the waitlists for psychologists and psychiatrists are unacceptable, yet we have counsellors available who could assist. The current system of referrals does not facilitate access to this resource, with ongoing advocacy to the federal government for multiple sources so far unsuccessful.

The Child Death Review Board informs the work being done to improve the child protection system and youth justice systems reforms. In reviewing the protection of children with mental health issues, I encourage the continued push for services that connect young people with services to help them deal with complex health challenges, including targeted suicide prevention, and to continue the cross-departmental referencing and collaboration to prevent loss of life in our vulnerable young Queenslanders.

The commission is also committed to working closely with Police, Education, Health and, importantly, Housing. Housing continues to be a key stressor. With the commission becoming more involved with the Women's Justice and Safety Taskforce, it was important to use this opportunity to further analyse issues that impact women and children in domestic violence households and the obstacles they are confronted with. Again, within my own community local housing and emergency accommodation continues to be an issue and is one that could immediately be alleviated if the department of housing was able to review its assets. In Noosa shire alone we have 73 properties listed as underoccupied with at least two spare bedrooms in each.

Of note, the commission reiterated that children are often not seen or treated as primary victims of domestic violence and are therefore not necessarily included in calculations, supply of services and funding to best cater for their complex needs. I urge the continued push for reforms in this area so that their trauma is exposed, recognised and responded to in a timely and appropriate manner with the necessary resources. This includes funding models for refuges, about which I have spoken previously and is still not resolved.

Examining the role of First Nations elders and communities in providing a supportive framework and involving them in the process of setting accountability measures around services is ongoing, and I look forward to hearing about progress. It is understood that COVID has delayed the statutory review of the commission, recommendations from which will further inform the work of the commission with young people and families going forward. We look forward to seeing its outcome midyear.

Thank you to the representatives of the Queensland Family and Child Commission and the department for their ongoing work in one of the most difficult and at times heartbreaking realms. Thank you, as well, to our Legal Affairs and Safety Committee chair, my fellow committee members and our secretariat for the work they have undertaken during this review.