




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.43 pm): To protect the rights of our youngest is to invest in our future. This includes dignity and health, identity, equality and non-discrimination. They have a right to a safe place to live, to be protected from harm, to participate and to be heard in the decisions that affect them. They have the right to privacy, education, play and freedom of thought. These rights are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, additionally, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; however, sadly, as we are seeing in some statistics, these rights are not ensured by some of those whom they depend on for their care.

The Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 proposes to amend the Child Protection Act to more deeply embed children's rights and voices in both the legislative framework and their lived experience of care. Why is this so important? In Australia in 2019-20, over 174,000 children aged up to 17 received child protection services. More than half of these children were the subject of an investigation only and were not subsequently placed on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care.

Some groups of children are consistently over-represented. In 2019-20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost eight times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Infants aged under one were also more likely to have received these services than those aged between 15 and 17 years. Children from geographically remote areas had the highest rates of substantiations, more than three times those from major cities, and were more likely to be from lower socio-economic areas—35 per cent, compared to 5.9 per cent from the highest. Tragically, the number of children receiving these services continues to rise. I find all of this deeply confronting. These are our children, our grandchildren and our future.

Even though the rights of children would be expanded by this bill to include culture, religion and language, amongst others, what does this really mean and how does it translate to reduce these horrendous statistics? I note that the committee is encouraging the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs to establish a process that ensures there is customary and age-appropriate participation of children in care in decision-making processes that affect them. Children and young people are a natural inclusion in the design processes and decision-making, given their role as experts in their own lives; however, diverse cultural backgrounds mean that one shoe does not fit all, which is something we need to be cognisant of. This view was consistent across many submitters.

The bill also proposes a number of other amendments including to the Working with Children Act 2000 to enable the chief executive to have regard to adverse decisions in other jurisdictions as part of a blue card assessment. As well, Queensland will participate in the Working with Children Check National Reference System to identify persons who have been deemed ineligible to work with children in another state or territory. This simplifies and streamlines the categories of regulated employment and regulated business to better reflect the contemporary service delivery model used by licensees in discharging their functions.

Many submitters, including the Women's Legal Service Queensland, support these amendments. However, while submitters support information about the existence of domestic violence orders being considered as relevant and concerning for continuing to hold or obtaining a blue card, they highlighted the potential inadvertent consequences on women and their capacity to obtain a blue card in relation to the care of children and work that they are able to apply for. Into the future, we must ensure that the amendments outlined in this bill flow through the system via policy, procedure and practice to impact day-to-day engagement with and for improved outcomes for children and young people. This must include safe housing and practical, ongoing support.

I thank the minister and departments for their hard work in this confronting arena; the committee and secretariat; submitters; and attendees to hearings. I extend our gratitude to all who work in bettering the lives of our children, with a special call-out to our foster carers and organisations dedicated to this. It takes a village to raise a child and we must ask ourselves: what will each of us do to assist them in their endeavours?