




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2022

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Public Trustee

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (10.02 am): The personal experiences described by the people featured in the *Four Corners* report last night were difficult for all of us to watch. All clients of the guardianship and administration system deserve the highest quality service and experience. The guardianship system is an important part of our community, intended to provide safeguards for our vulnerable members against abuse.

As part of Queensland's guardianship and administration system, the Public Trustee has, under new leadership, been on a significant reform journey—in fact, the most significant reforms in decades if not its history. It is working hard to transform into a more modern, customer-centric organisation. While much positive change has already been occurring, there is still work to be done.

I take the stories of Mr Pearson, Mr Vandenberg and Mr Ristic featured in last night's *Four Corners* story very seriously. All three of these clients' matters have now been referred by the Public Trustee for an extensive independent review. In an Australian first among state trustees, the Queensland Public Trustee established the Office of the Customer Advocate in 2021 to consider complaints and appoint independent external reviewers where appropriate. I can advise the House that the two independent external reviewers for these matters are Mr Forbes Smith, the former energy and water ombudsman and former CCC chief executive, and Mr Andrew Brown, the former health ombudsman. As a result of the stories last night, the Public Trustee has also directed the Customer Advocate to commence an internal investigation into the Public Trustee's systems and practices. I have spoken to the Public Trustee this morning and I can advise the House that I will table the findings of that internal review once finalised.

The allegations featured on *Four Corners* highlighted a number of damaging past practices by the Public Trustee stretching back decades. I can assure Queenslanders that under the leadership of our new Public Trustee, Samay Zhouand, practices such as charging customers for legal fees when complaints are made have ended and, as a matter of practice, the Public Trustee no longer opposes any client wanting financial independence. In addition, the biggest review in the history of the Public Trustee of fees and charges is underway and is due to be completed by June.

The current Public Trustee also introduced a structured decision-making framework, designed to ensure the Public Trustee considered its customers' human rights in decision-making. I am pleased to table a report by the La Trobe University's Living with Disability Research Centre dated November 2021 which evaluated the adoption of the structured decision-making framework in the everyday work of the Public Trustee with its customers and whether its practices had changed.

Tabled paper: Document, dated November 2021, titled 'Considering Human Rights in Decision Making: Evaluation of the Introduction of Structured-Decision Making Framework in the Public Trustee Queensland' by Professor Christine Bigby, Professor Jacinta Douglas and Dr Elizabeth Smith, La Trobe University, Living with Disability Research Centre [272](#).

The review found that the Public Trustee has already successfully implemented a new, more rights based and customer-centric way of working. Following the Public Advocate report last year, the Public Trustee and government have already actioned a number of recommendations from the report and we are continuing to respond to the report. As part of this work, legislation was introduced to establish an advisory and monitoring board which will increase transparency and public accountability. I was pleased to table a progress update from the Public Trustee last sitting week. I thank the Public Advocate for shining a light on these important issues and for their ongoing work to help protect vulnerable Queenslanders. The government is absolutely committed to ensuring vulnerable Queenslanders are supported and protected when they need it most.