



Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2022


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

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Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, Report

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (2.05 pm): Firstly, welcome to the Woolloowin State School students who are here in the gallery.

Estimates of the Attorney-General and justice portfolio and the women and prevention of domestic and family violence portfolios lasted just short of two hours. The opposition and non-government members shared three question blocks of 20 minutes, for a total of one hour to examine some \$623.5 million of departmental outlays. This included time to allow an examination of statutory bodies such as: the CCC, the Human Rights Commission, Legal Aid, Office of the Information Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission, Prostitution Licensing Authority, Electoral Commission of Queensland, the Ombudsman, the Public Trustee and bodies such as the Legal Services Commission—in one hour. The time blocks were also the only times available to scrutinise the operations of divisions of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General such as the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation and the Office of Fair Trading as well as the operations of all of the courts including, critically, the Coroner's Court. Importantly, the operations of the service area of women and violence prevention were also included in this one-hour block of time. While the member for Toohey was fair in his allocation of time, the reality is that an hour is far from ideal for a complete and thorough examination of departmental expenditure of over \$620 million.

I acknowledge the increase in departmental expenditure, particularly in the area of women's justice in response to the *Hear her voice* report of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. As this involves the first allocation of funding for their response, it will be vital that future estimates have time to adequately examine this expenditure to ensure it does in fact deliver better experiences and more appropriate outcomes for women who come into contact with the justice system in Queensland.

Obviously the \$363 million is not all in the Attorney's portfolio and covers many departments. Keeping track of its myriad expenses will be vitally important. Equally, I want to acknowledge the long-awaited increase in funding for Legal Aid service providers. This was a matter I raised in last year's estimates committee. The reality is that fees for the provision of these reports have been woefully low for too long, and this funding increase will no doubt be welcomed.

I raised the issue of the lack of funding for the Court Network service. Staffed by up to 200 volunteers and organised by a small number of employees for less than \$600,000, this is an extremely valuable low-cost service that helps those attending courts, especially the Magistrates Court,

as well as the courts themselves. To be told that the Court Network missed out on a tender and so the service was cut was a real slap in the face to the hundreds of volunteers who do this work. It is also clear that the organisation that did receive funding is not in fact offering the same or all of the services that Court Network did. We were told by the director-general that the new organisation, PACT, is taking up some of that space. It is clear that services are being cut.

Concerningly, estimates revealed that the government is completely obsessed with hiding the cost of the indemnities and legal assistance granted to former deputy premier Jackie Trad. Embarrassingly, the Attorney was completely confused about who granted the indemnities to former deputy premier Jackie Trad. Two days after her evidence to the committee that she and the Premier granted the indemnity the Attorney had to correct the record. The Attorney's letter revealed that she had got it completely wrong on two counts: she confused herself with the former attorney-general and the Premier with the Deputy Premier. Perhaps there was some wishful factional thinking going on.

That is despite an almost 20-minute period for the Attorney or her staff, the battery of public servants and the Crown Solicitor, who were all sitting in estimates, to check and ensure the correct answers could be given. The Attorney repeatedly refused to tell Queenslanders how much has been spent on, firstly, the CCC inquiry itself and then Ms Trad's separate legal action to prevent the CCC report being made public. During almost 20 minutes of questioning, the Attorney continued to dodge and obfuscate on the entire question of granting legal assistance to former deputy premier Jackie Trad. In fact, what we did learn through relentless and continued questioning was that this is the first time that the existence of the second grant of legal assistance had been made public. It had never been mentioned before.

Critically, the Attorney did not answer two simple questions: firstly, the reasons she gave special approval for legal assistance to stop the release of a CCC report into the appointment of senior public servants by this government; and, secondly, the cost to Queensland taxpayers of the indemnities to date and the amount of legal assistance to date. In both instances, the Attorney gave no adequate explanation. We also heard about the \$500,000 report into the fees and charges of the Public Trustee—a report the government has had for over six weeks and has still refused to make public. Many other matters were canvassed. Transparency and openness were not a hallmark of these estimates.

(Time expired)