




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Residential Care Sector

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (2.46 pm): I take a moment to welcome Lucas from St Catherine's in Proserpine who spent this morning with me and is in the chamber today. It is fabulous to see our young people from regional and North Queensland come down and see our democracy in action.

Over the past fortnight I have had the privilege, along with the Leader of the Opposition, David Crisafulli, to host up to 60 care providers in the residential care sector, both here at the parliament and in Cairns. I acknowledge the work they are doing each day with young people dealing with incredible trauma and complex backgrounds, but what they have to put up with under this current Labor government is frightening. I want to share some of their major contributions that were so concerning.

The first issue is funding for family and community contact. It seems that we have a policy in this state that is not facilitating family visits in a safe and affordable way and is putting young people at risk when they have to travel by plane on their own in remote areas of Far North Queensland. It is not helping with their transition or reunification.

Placements were another major issue. I note that the minister is undertaking an internal review, but I can save him the next six months and a lot of time. Children are being placed well outside of their communities, meaning that not only are they being moved again but also they are forced to change schools and be separated from extended family. There are also inappropriate placements such as a male teenager with a history of sexually violent behaviour being placed with young girls in a residential care house. Then there is placement removal, where a child and a care worker are not even given 24 hours notice of the removal of that placement. Then there are the 17 calls on a Friday afternoon to a provider from the department, begging them to take a placement. These issues are only escalating.

I refer to staff safety. When in estimates the minister cannot say how many staff have been assaulted, it seems to third parties that it does not matter. Staff have been threatened. Staff have had their hair set alight. Staff have been hit over the head with various weapons. Staff have been punched. Staff have been kicked. Staff have been spat on. Shockingly, debate ensues with departmental staff about whether these acts have actually occurred.

One of the most horrific incidents was when a staff member had petrol thrown outside their door and it was lit and the staff member had to escape through the window. There is a lack of empowerment to discipline these young children. Many of us are parents. Many of us know and understand that children need boundaries and discipline yet a child in residential care will not get that unless their provider or their support worker breaks the rules. We heard of a youth worker getting a breach for breaking up a fight—for physically restraining a child who is trying to hurt another child. We heard of others getting breached for not replacing a TV overnight when it was smashed to pieces by a child.

There are reports that illicit drug use is being condoned by the department and residential care providers are being instructed by the department to return vapes to 12-year-old children and return a bong to a teenager. These are things that would never occur in a family home in this state, but under this state government's watch it is happening. Under four failed ministers for child safety we ask: why do we now have a record number of children in residential care? There are over 1,100. The minister could not provide the latest detail. The figures we have date back to the end of March. We have over 500 children under the age of 12 in residential care. We have the care worker putting a three-year-old to bed not being the same care worker waking them up. I ask the minister: is this acceptable?

The minister has undertaken an internal review of a department that is already under enormous stress. In Far North Queensland we have 30 per cent vacancy rates for child safety officers, placements that are not being managed, children falling through the cracks and residential care workers who feel that they are operating under a master-slave culture of this government and fear for the safety of children in a child safety system in crisis. Minister, hear their pleas. If they continue to walk away children's lives are in danger.