




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 12 September 2023

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Disability Royal Commission, Recommendations

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (2.51 pm): On 27 May 2020, at around 7.20 am, the Queensland Ambulance Service attended a home where they found a man in cardiac arrest and two young men who were locked in a room, naked and with no bedroom furnishings. Police also attended the home that day and they observed faeces on the floor of the spare bedroom and the main bedroom. The two young boys' bedroom was completely bare, with door handles removed, and the two boys were unclothed. These two boys we now know as Kaleb and Jonathon. They were admitted to hospital on that day—27 May—and were discharged more than 10 days later, on 10 June. They were diagnosed with severe malnutrition.

Through the Disability Royal Commission, we now know the real story of more than two decades in the lives of these young men. The findings state that the state of Queensland, through the departments and agencies that engaged with Kaleb, Jonathon and Paul Barrett, could have—and should have—done more to prevent Kaleb and Jonathon from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and the deprivation of their human rights having regard to the particular department or agency's powers and responsibilities. Those departments and the ministers responsible over those two decades include Education, Housing, Queensland Police, Health and Child Safety.

The LNP acknowledges that it held power in this state for almost five of the 20 years and the Leader of the Opposition has made an apology to Kaleb and Jonathon. That does not take away, though, this government's effort to prevent a proper investigation into the system and departmental failings—as evidenced by the Disability Royal Commission. What we have come to learn through the findings of the royal commission was that back in 2020, on 20 August, the then attorney-general, Shannon Fentiman, withheld full details within a QFCC report that was provided to the royal commission. We then discovered that on 2 October, the then attorney-general, Yvette D'Ath, to avoid scrutiny—there was an upcoming election some several days later—decided and informed the principal commissioner that she would not refer certain matters outlined in the QFCC terms of reference to undertake a full review. This was almost three years ago. It speaks to the government's protection of its own reputation, not the protection of children.

According to the latest figures, released in March, there are 1,700 children in residential care. We do not know how many children are in residential care today. Fifty per cent of those children have a disability. I have zero confidence in any minister who has overseen the failings of the system that was set up to protect Jonathon, Kaleb and the many thousands of children who are in our child safety system. The government's announcement today is a little too late. It took a royal commission, the opposition calling for over a week, community outcry and disability advocates reaching out to the LNP to support our call for an independent review.

The Ombudsman's findings from the review that will be undertaken need to be publicly released. There needs to be accountability. Over the course of this royal commission and for the past three years there has been silence from multiple ministers of this government and the Premier. It is not just chaos and crisis—that does not even sum it up. Those words do not even come close to what those two young boys endured for two decades of their life. This is a cover-up. This is about a government that is more interested in protecting its own image and brand than it is in protecting vulnerable children and children with disabilities in this state.