



Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2023


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Seniors and Disability Services) (3.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the estimates debate, and I do so with a deep sense of disappointment in ongoing commentary from some of those opposite. The question must be asked: why do elected parliamentarians in this place insist on weaponising the lives of children and young people in the child protection system for political gain? This must stop.

Many children in state care are victims of harm, abuse and neglect. This is the brutal truth. Every four minutes Child Safety receives a report of concern for a child. In Queensland, nearly 15,000 children are subject to ongoing intervention and over 11,000 of them are in out-of-home care. I have met with our young people in foster care and residential care. They share the same hopes and dreams of youth. They hanker for love and care of a more ordinary life. Overwhelmingly, they are grateful for the support of our state-run system. Yet, if you listen to the unsubstantiated narrative of some of those opposite, our children are demonised as willing participants in crime. In the words of the Leader of the Opposition, residential care is 'a state sanctioned criminal pipeline'. Their tragic circumstances are weaponised for cheap political shots, and this must stop.

We readily accept that the system is not perfect. That is why I called for a top level review of residential care. We need to air grievances with the system. We need to be bold and brave. We want the child safety system to be the best that it can be. Yet at estimates the shadow spokesperson made serious allegations regarding residential care. She alleged, without providing any evidence, that children had been harmed. She claimed residential care workers had acted inappropriately, or even illegally, in caring for young people. My immediate response was to ask the member to provide the details of those allegations. Over the last two weeks the opposition leader and the member have continued to repeat these allegations including yesterday in this House. It is with deep disappointment that I am advised that, other than some media sound bites, no further evidence of these allegations has been provided by the opposition to the department or to my office.

I would suggest that it is the obligation of every member of this House to furnish for investigation any matter that may be criminal. Details of any situation where a child or a carer is at risk of harm should be—must be—referred. Not to do so is an abrogation of their moral and civic duty as an elected member of this House. The only conclusion I can reasonably draw is that those members prefer to sow the seeds of fear and uncertainty. They spread discord rather than seeking solutions.

Yesterday the member for Whitsunday criticised our approach to releasing child protection data. As the shadow spokesperson, the member knows that the department releases data quarterly. Queensland has the most transparent child protection agency data in Australia and publishes more data on more measures more frequently than any other state or territory.

The member for Whitsunday made reference to the rapid growth in the number of young people in out-of-home care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the serious social disruption saw a surge in the number of families under pressure and children who needed to be supported in the child protection system. Children in out-of-home care have complex needs. More than one-third of them are living with disability. We also recognise that for some children a residential care home can be the best placement option to support their significant needs. Some young people I have met personally have pressed this point with me. They said they preferred resi care over foster care. We must listen to them.

Our hardworking frontline officers work tirelessly to find the best placement options for children who need protection. We must listen to our front line. The issues in the child safety system are complex and challenging, and the solutions lie across many parts of government and in the community. It is up to all of us to do our duty. Let's see if we can rise above the politics and do this in a bipartisan way, because our children deserve nothing less.