



Speech By
Amanda Camm

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (3.44 pm): I am pleased to stand and contribute to the estimates report of the Community Support and Services Committee. I thank the members of the committee from both sides of the House as well as the secretariat. I am also pleased to be speaking after the minister today in the House. In my four years in this parliament and having sat through estimates four times now as well, I have to say of the three ministers I have faced off against, this minister was the least across the brief of child safety that I have experienced. When the minister was asked of her experience in engaging with the residential care system, a system that is under enormous stress in this state and a system that is actually in crisis, it was uncovered that the minister had only visited a residential care facility in the past month since being appointed minister earlier this year and in fact had signed off on and released a residential review into resi-care and a road map that outlines this government's plans to aim for a 50 per cent reduction in residential care attendance over the course of the next five years. What we have seen over the previous five years is an increase in numbers into residential care by 85 per cent. I do not know how this government think they are going to tackle that challenge when a review is released that does not even address children under 12. As outlined by former minister, Crawford, the commitment was to reduce the number of children under 12 in residential care.

We have babies and children aged five and six in residential care facilities being put to bed at night by one carer and being woken up the next morning by another carer. The minister and the Labor government need to understand what the role of a 'parent' is. What is the role and obligation of the minister when it comes to our most vulnerable children in this state? I think it is to speak to children, to hear their views, to engage and visit residential care facilities like I have and engage with the sector, with those young people, to understand what 36 placements does to the mental health and wellbeing of a child—our most vulnerable children. I point to Dylan, who has been in residential care in Cairns since the age of two and is now 17. He has had over 36 placements.

When I am out and about, I am approached by young people over their lived experience who have been failed under this current Labor government. Ministers should be ashamed that they have abdicated their responsibilities to these children.

The number of children in residential care is growing. There has been a 105 per cent increase since 2019—1,955 children as of March this year. It is disgraceful. These figures are the highest of any state jurisdiction. It is a demonstration that this Labor government has failed both in child safety and in the way it has administered the residential care system. It was never designed to be how it operates under this government.

The minister also outlined that the department confirmed that about 25 per cent of the whole cohort of children in out-of-home care are experiencing disruptions to schooling through suspensions or being expelled. That is unacceptable.

In reviewing the case loads of our frontline workers, particularly the case loads of those in my community of Mackay and the Whitsundays where vacancies are significantly high, it is unacceptable that child safety officers are dealing with up to 60 cases. That is not a government that is putting their frontline workforce first. That is not a government that is respecting the services that are needed. When we see once again that case loads are being averaged out over funded positions—similar to what they do with the police numbers—it does not represent the true extent of the workload pressures experienced by those frontline workers in these services. This was the third Labor child safety minister to face estimates in the term, and the lack of priority demonstrated by this government to our most vulnerable children will continue to generate poor outcomes. The fact is we now have a crisis in child safety, a crisis which has been linked to the youth justice crisis in this state.