




Speech By
Barry O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2024

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) (HELPING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL COSTS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (6.10 pm): I refer to the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023, introduced by the member for South Brisbane. The private member's bill was referred to the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee for examination and the committee recommended that the bill not be passed. To assess the private member's bill the committee called for written submissions, resulting in 64 responses from various stakeholders. In addition to the submissions, the committee organised two public briefings. During these briefings we heard from the member for South Brisbane and representatives from the Department of Education. The purpose of these briefings was to gain insights into the bill's intended outcomes and the implications for the education sector.

Further to the public briefings, the committee sought direct evidence from five key stakeholders during the hearing held on 18 March 2024. These stakeholders provided statements based on their expertise and experience within the education sector, offering diverse perspectives on the potential impact of the bill. However, after carefully considering all of the evidence and the statements provided, the committee expressed concerns about the bill's ability to achieve its stated policy objectives. Consequently, the committee recommended that the bill should not be passed.

It is important to note that current school costs covered by the state under the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 include instruction, facilities and administration. I believe that every member in the House would agree that these are appropriate costs to be covered by the state government in our schools. The recent budget showed that we are investing a record \$20.9 billion to ensure that our schools have the right staff, supports and environments to make all kids succeed. This bill seeks to have other costs be covered by the state as well. Some of the examples given were textbooks, stationery, computers, school uniforms, extracurricular activities, excursions and camps.

I am aware of the cost-of-living challenges that my constituents are facing. That is why I am so pleased that our government is providing support for families with regard to free laptops, free kindy, the Textbook and Resource Allowance, school transport assistance programs, free period products in schools, free breakfast and lunch programs, FairPlay vouchers and health supports in our schools. These are real programs providing real support to Queensland families. These have been outlined, costed and funded. This bill, on the other hand, was not able to outline or clarify how much additional funding would be required to fulfil its objectives. The lack of clarity raised concerns among the committee as it made it challenging to determine the feasibility and financial implications of the proposed measures.

The committee also highlighted an important consideration regarding the Department of Education's role in managing the costs associated with academic and extracurricular activities. The department has limited control over the expenses incurred by non-state schools for similar activities. As

a result, the cost for the department in providing equivalent opportunities for students in state schools could be highly variable and potentially limitless. The lack of this control further complicates the implementation of the bill and raises questions about its long-term sustainability.

The absence of clear funding details and the challenges associated with cost controls in the education sector were significant factors in the committee's recommendation to not pass the bill. While the bill's objectives of providing quality education and reducing financial barriers for families are commendable, the committee expressed concerns about the feasibility and the financial implication of the proposed measures. Given the concerns raised during the inquiry, the committee could not recommend the bill be passed in its current form. It is crucial that any legislation aimed at improving education outcomes is carefully considered.