



Speech By
Hon. Charis Mullen

MEMBER FOR JORDAN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Hon. C MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (3.40 pm): I would like to thank the chair and committee for its examination of the appropriations of the child safety, seniors and disability services, and multicultural affairs portfolios. As minister, I was pleased to highlight the significant work and achievements of our government and department, and I acknowledge the incredible dedication of our public servants, many working in complex and challenging settings. During the hearing I received questions about our child safety system and reforms. The child safety system is certainly stronger and more robust than the system we inherited in 2015. It is galling at times to hear the opposition talking about a broken child safety system, the very system that they ripped \$200 million from when they were in government, the very system they were willing to cut by an additional \$500 million had they stayed in power, and the very system from which they sacked 402 permanent and temporary child safety workers.

In this year's budget, we are investing \$2.3 billion in child and family services. We have increased Child Safety staff by more than 58 per cent since coming to power, but I acknowledge we are seeing increased demand in the child safety system, demand which mirrors the complexities we are seeing more broadly in all of our communities. This includes growing domestic and family violence, mental ill health, drug and alcohol issues and vulnerable families struggling with cost-of-living pressures.

Since January, I have visited 28 child safety service centres and will be visiting more next week. Whilst I have visited residential care homes, my intention will never be to intrude and poke around into what are essentially children's homes. They deserve their privacy and our respect. However, the visits to our service centres and homes have been valuable, enabling opportunities for continued improvements and practices. In that vein, our road map for residential care in Queensland released in February aims to halve the number of children and young people in residential care in the next five years. It is an ambitious plan, but we have a laser-like commitment to achieving this, with all first-year actions now underway. We will do this by keeping children and young people in family or family-based care where possible. The number of children and young people in kinship care is rising, and foster caring numbers remain steady. We have established a youth advisory network called Shift. Young people who have all lived in residential care will get to share with me directly the ways we can make things better and more responsive for children in care.

We are investing \$1.4 million in Queensland foster and kinship care to focus on recruitment and retention of foster and kinship carers. We are supporting PeakCare with \$3.3 million to lead a residential workforce strategy and developing quality staff. We have reviewed every First Nations child and young person in residential care and are already seeing positive results with more children now placed with kin. As I have said many times, residential care must be seen as a pathway back to family rather than a placement.

As minister for disability services, I can say that we are in a period of significant reform. We have now released the Queensland Disability Reform Framework to ensure we continue to honour and action the disability community's mantra of 'nothing about us without us'. We have backed this framework with an initial commitment of \$160 million in funding. We have released Queensland's response to recommendations from the disability royal commission and will provide a response to the NDIS review which is due at the end of this year. We continue to work with the federal government on the NDIS legislation and are actively engaged on what will be fundamental and important changes to our disability ecosystem through foundational supports. I can assure the House that the Premier and I will continue to fight for a fair deal for Queenslanders with disability under any proposed federal changes.

Funding for our multicultural events and projects has been increased to \$3 million. These grants are incredibly important in celebrating and strengthening our diverse communities. I was also pleased to advise that, based on feedback from our multicultural communities, we will also now accept our grant submissions in different languages to ensure everyone has equal opportunity to apply. We are providing an extra \$4.8 million over two years for the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance Program on top of the over \$2 million we provide annually. This is not just a nice thing to do; it sends a clear message that Queensland is and will always be a welcome haven to all, not just for those whom Peter Dutton likes. As I said at the very start of my estimates hearing, how we look after the most vulnerable in our community speaks to the Queensland we want to be. I commend the report to the House.