




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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FORENSIC SCIENCE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.21 pm): I rise to address the debate on the Forensic Science Queensland Bill 2023. On 29 November 2023, the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women introduced this legislation into the Queensland parliament where it was then referred to the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee for further examination. As outlined, this legislation will establish a statutory framework for forensic services to support the administration of criminal justice in Queensland. Accordingly, this framework will see the establishment of a statutory position of the Director of Forensic Science Queensland, a supporting Office of the Director of Forensic Science Queensland and the creation of the Forensic Science Queensland Advisory Council.

Whilst the creation of a legislated framework for the provision of forensic services in Queensland has been portrayed as a standard, reasonable—if not overdue—step forward for Queensland's criminal justice system, the hard truth for this state Labor government is that it has taken unimaginable pain and systemic mismanagement to expose the many failings within Queensland's forensic services system under this state Labor government. So catastrophic have these failings been that it has required this legislated intervention in order to fix the failure that has been the provision of forensic services in Queensland.

The genesis of this legislation is really the story of the tragic murder of Shandee Blackburn and the subsequent and unwavering pursuit of truth and justice by her family, scientists and experts, led by Dr Kirsty Wright, and, of course, journalist Hedley Thomas of the *Australian* newspaper. I acknowledge not only Shandee's family but also the leadership and diligence that was shown by both Dr Kirsty Wright and Hedley Thomas—without them, many of these circumstances would not have been brought to the fore.

It must never be forgotten that when legitimate concerns were first raised about the failings within Queensland's forensic sciences and DNA laboratory, the Palaszczuk-Miles state Labor government brushed these concerns aside, virtually denying that such systemic issues even existed. Indeed, as articulated by the Liberal National Party's member for Theodore and member for Scenic Rim in the statement of reservation accompanying the committee's report on this legislation—

It must be noted that repeated and increasingly desperate calls for a Commission of Inquiry into the DNA Laboratory by the sections of the media, experts, victims of crime and the Opposition were repeatedly ignored, and at times even mocked, by the Government. The failings of the Forensic Services Laboratory marked one of the most significant cases of government maladministration in living memory. It has fundamentally shaken the foundations of the criminal justice system in Queensland, with the long-term ramifications still largely unknown. From the moment concerns about failing forensic services were raised, the State Government has been at best slow to act, and at worst dismissive. It is deeply regrettable that it took so long for the issue to be properly acknowledged by the State Government, and for changes to be made.

I want to briefly reflect on the examination of this legislation via the former Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, now the Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee. I wish to acknowledge how this committee heard directly about the deficiencies within Queensland's forensic services system and the devastating impact this has had on families and communities right across Queensland. These

deficiencies have resulted in perpetrators of violent crimes, including rape and sexual assault, escaping justice. What is more, these deficiencies and the long process to ensure the restoration of justice have had an incredible impact on victim-survivors and the unimaginable trauma they have continued to endure.

In the chair's foreword to the committee report it was rightly stated—

Victim-survivors should not be confronted with the trauma of seeing their rapist or attacker walk free due to bureaucratic mismanagement and technical incompetence.

However, in addition to bureaucratic mismanagement and technical incompetence, it should also be stated that victim-survivors should not be confronted with further trauma due to ministerial incompetence and failures of government oversight. In having to rectify the mess that has been forensic sciences in Queensland and the administration of the DNA forensic laboratory, Queenslanders deserve nothing less than full transparency and accountability from the Palaszczuk-Miles state Labor government. Not surprisingly, such transparency and accountability has not been forthcoming from the Labor government. Liberal National Party members of the committee sought important answers on matters including the number of cases which would require forensic retesting, as well as how many cases had, or are likely to be, re-litigated or reopened as a result of previous substandard forensic testing.

In a further blow to transparency and accountability, I note that such questions were repeatedly dismissed and shut down by state Labor government members of the committee. Throughout this devastating saga, the state Labor government has been a hindrance on ensuring Queenslanders can see justice being served. With the passage of this legislation, as well as previous legislation and other additional measures, hopefully the serious matters of gross maladministration will be finalised once and for all. Victims in Queensland deserve nothing less and Queenslanders, one and all, deserve to have a forensic services system that works in their interests.