




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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FORENSIC SCIENCE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (12.26 pm): I also rise to contribute to the Forensic Science Queensland Bill 2023. I do so with a really heavy heart. We know the language that has been shouted back at us and those who stand for the problems in Queensland's forensic science lab. It is dumbfounding to think that it was said that we were 'political scaremongering'—that was one of the worst. We are talking about people who have lost their lives, who have been raped and who have been abused. We are standing for the victims and yet it is said that we are 'political scaremongering'. Throughout this process our committee members had their questions ruled out of order because they were standing up on behalf of victims. As many members in this House have mentioned, whilst this is largely an administrative bill, it is what lies underneath that is so important. We are only here debating this bill today because this Labor government—both the Palaszczuk government and now the Miles government—completely and utterly failed to manage forensic services in Queensland.

The failure marks one of the most significant cases of government maladministration in living memory. It has fundamentally shaken the foundations of the criminal justice system, with the long-term ramifications still largely unknown. I have spoken in this House before on this issue, but I want to reiterate this important issue and again highlight the work of Hedley Thomas, Dr Kirsty Wright and, of course, Shandee's mum, Vicki Blackburn, in uncovering this diabolical piece of maladministration.

They exposed the information and the LNP started asking questions about the problems. We made speeches. We asked more questions. We went to the media and the government continued to deny and continued to talk down the issues. In February, the then health minister said, 'There has been no evidence of systemic failings in our forensic pathology unit.' How wrong could that minister have been? In March 2022 I asked a question in this House of the then minister for health and ambulance services. My question was—

Experienced forensic biologist Dr Kirsty Wright has found that in over half of all cases the government forensic lab has failed to get complete DNA profiles, even when swabs are directly taken from the male sexual offender or murderer. Will the minister intervene to ensure that offenders are held to account and that victims get the justice they deserve?

The answer by the then minister was quite telling. She said—

There certainly has been a lot of interest in the matters that have been the subject of the Shandee Blackburn matter. As members should be aware, I wrote to the Attorney-General asking the Coroner to reopen that investigation ...

The minister completely missed the point about the major failing that was happening within the lab under her nose. By late March 2022, finally the Palaszczuk government were dragged kicking and screaming to agree to the review. However, it was not until May that the terms of reference were released and it became abundantly clear that it was merely going to be a review for show. Zero consideration was given to a truly independent review and, as I have said, it was only after those continuing calls that a commission of inquiry was eventually announced in June. I should note that in all that time all we heard from the then attorney-general and minister for justice, minister for women and minister for the prevention of domestic and family violence was complete silence. We had silence on

an issue that will be the focus of our justice system for years to come. We had silence on issues that impact rape victims. We had silence on an issue that has left the Blackburn family completely broken because of the lack of justice following their daughter's murder.

By September an interim report was released, and finally the government realised they actually had a serious issue on their hands. The interim report issued the first of many recommendations to come, which was that more than 1,000 court statements must be changed to say that they are not true. The gravity of this cannot be overstated. What we have witnessed, like so many members in this House have stated, is one of the greatest failures, if not the greatest failure, in the justice system ever seen not only in Australia but in the world, and this was a government that said we were scaremongering. This is a government whose speakers we have heard say in the House today that we were just trying to make political points in our speeches.

I put to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this is one of the greatest failings in the criminal justice system that the world has ever seen. We have people waiting to bury their loved ones because of the backlog in the forensic science lab, because of the failings of this government, and they say we are politically scaremongering? No, this is a very big issue. This is an issue that will define our criminal justice system for decades to come. Why? Because that government, the Palaszczuk government, refused to listen and the Miles government still has its head in the sand.

Today we have heard the speeches that we are politically scaremongering. No, we are not. We are standing up for victims. We are standing up for the victims who are now out in public wondering whether, because of this maladministration, their accused is going to be roaming free to repeat heinous offences. We are talking about murder. We are talking about child abuse. We are talking about rape. This is a serious issue.

I know that the Palaszczuk government have spent their entire time—and now the Miles government is continuing this—dismissing the opposition. Those on that side of the House do not understand that democracy takes two sides and we as an opposition have a right to hold the government to account. That is exactly what we will continue to do as an opposition: we will hold the government to account for the failings and the maladministration that have happened under their watch. I say particularly to the members of the backbench that we are not scaremongering; we are not playing political games with this. We are actually standing up for the victims of these heinous crimes because of a maladministration that we tried for months to get this government to understand. Instead, because we said it, they said, 'No, there's nothing to see here. We don't believe in an opposition. We're just going to ride roughshod over the opposition.' The Palaszczuk government and now the Miles government do not understand that democracy takes two sides and it takes an opposition to hold a government to account.

Yes, we on this side are proud to have the bill before us, but do honourable members know what we are not proud of? We are not proud of the fact that we have to stand here and acknowledge all those heinous crimes that have gone unsolved because a government refused to listen to victims of crime. Like I said last sitting week in this parliament, the opposition will continue to stand up for victims of crime. We will listen to experts like Dr Kirsty Wright. What has happened to that incredible forensic doctor is a blight and a shame on all of those sitting opposite. The ministers should hang their heads in shame for what they put that amazing woman through. This is someone who is recognised worldwide for her research and who was thrust into the forensic lab debacle. She put her head up when they wanted to take it off.

Mr Powell: Pursue justice.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: She did that to pursue justice and I say: good on you, Dr Kirsty Wright, and good on you, Vicki Blackburn, for standing up for other victims. Vicki, I am so sorry that what happened to your daughter Shandee has been left because a government refused to listen to the fact that there was a problem. Those opposite continued to say that we were scaremongering. They forgot about the victims and they only thought about themselves. To that I say: shame.