



Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 11 September 2024

CHILD SAFE ORGANISATIONS BILL; WORKING WITH CHILDREN (RISK MANAGEMENT AND SCREENING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LISTER (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution on this cognate debate. I will focus on the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I have the pleasure of being on the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee and this was one of the bills which came before us. As is always the case on committee work, I find I learn something new and I am exposed to new organisations, new lobby groups and new identities.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Member for Southern Downs, could you pull your microphone closer? We have been having some trouble with the microphones. I am finding the sound a little faint from back there, which is unusual I know.

Mr LISTER: I do not really need a microphone, but I will use one to keep up with the practice in this place!

Mr Power interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take the interjection from my honourable friend the member for Logan. Yes, Emu Swamp Dam is a matter that is of great importance to me. I will speak about that more at an appropriate moment. This particular bill introduces the great work that was done by the Queensland Family and Child Commission. I echo the comments which were made earlier by my learned friend, the member for Clayfield, the shadow Attorney-General and shadow minister for justice, when he defended the Liberal National Party's record in this space. He pointed out that the Queensland Family and Child Commission, who were responsible for these reports—*Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: review of the blue card system*, which was the blue card review report, and *A thematic analysis of provisionally applied kinship carers who receive a subsequent blue card negative notice*.

We are very proud of the establishment of that organisation. As the member for Clayfield said, it was opposed by the Labor opposition at the time. We are great supporters of the work of the QFCC; we always have been. We believe that their work should be given a high priority. It is a shame that the Labor government has talked a lot in this space—the amount of time it has taken for the bill to get to this stage at five minutes to midnight in their third term shines a light on their priorities. It seems to me it is more about making the right noises, rather than getting down to the necessary legislative change to implement the reforms.

Progress has been woefully slow. This review was conducted following the death of a child in foster care. I am quite certain that most members in this House know the case I am referring to. That death was at the hands of one of the child's foster carers. The review was published in September 2017 with 81 recommendations. The premier at the time, Anastacia Palaszczuk, said—

My government has had the courage to take a detailed look at how we can keep children safer and the fortitude to follow through on the recommendations in these reports.

That was a very long time ago, and we are only seeing this action now. The report stated that the nation was shocked when this particular child's foster carers were arrested after their tragic death, and that—

It was important to make sure the blue card and foster care systems were the best they could be. It was time to check whether they had kept pace with changes in service environments, technology and community expectations.

The QFCC was labouring under the understandable, but subsequently shown to be misplaced, view that the government would take this seriously and would work quickly. That has not occurred. I heard some outrageous and brazen political provocations from the government side and from the minister today concerning children in care. I entirely disagree with those remarks. Apart from the fact that they contained some language which I felt was unbecoming for a statement in this House, it also made suggestions that the Liberal National Party opposition is in the pockets of the providers of residential care. That is false.

The state may not have to rely so much on residential care if there could be more foster carers. The concern that foster carers express when they speak to me is they feel they are not properly supported. They may bring a child into a loving and supportive environment and see that child flourish and reach their potential, only to have the child whisked away because it has been decided that mum or dad is now fit to look after that child—they are much better now; they have given up the drugs, or whatever their moral turpitudes were. They see that child taken away, and then regress. I say that as a counterpoint to the observations stated by the minister earlier today.

It is understandable that these changes are necessary in terms of allowing more kinship carers to undertake that important role, particularly in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. I associate myself with the remainder of the remarks made by the shadow minister earlier in this second reading debate.