




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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FORENSIC SCIENCE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (11.15 am): ‘Playing pure politics’: these are the words of the former failed health minister, the words she gave to Queenslanders when we called on this government to widen the commission of inquiry to include the forensic services lab. She said—

I have no idea why the opposition would be calling for this other than playing pure politics. It is a duplication, it is completely unnecessary.

Tell that to the at least 37,000 victims. Rapists and murderers could be walking free as a result of the DNA lab failures under this state Labor government’s watch. We know that two years ago the Labor government was responsible for the most abhorrent case of maladministration in living memory. As a result of the systemic failures at the DNA lab, rapists and murderers could be walking free for their heinous crimes. Even today we do not know how many victims of this government’s monumental stuff-up there are. The latest update was that there are 103,000 samples and 37,000 cases up for retesting. That is 37,000 victims of crime who may not have seen justice done.

The Forensic Science Queensland Bill is designed to cover up this government’s failures in the DNA lab—failures which have rendered an unknown tally of victims of crime, failures which have rendered them and their families without justice and treated them as collateral damage. These are people’s lives that have been irrevocably damaged and unforgivably up-ended because the government took its eye off the ball. To the 37,000 victims—37,000 people who we already know have been affected by this monumental government stuff-up—and the countless more that we do not yet know about, I say: my colleagues and I hear your pain. We hear your anguish and we will not stop fighting until you get the justice you deserve.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that if it were not for the family of one of those victims we may never have had the two commissions of inquiry into the DNA lab and this bill would not be before us today. Over a decade ago, Shandee Blackburn was the victim of a truly horrific crime and her young life was senselessly and violently stolen, yet today no-one has been convicted of her murder. Shandee’s mother, Vicki Blackburn, has been absolutely awe-inspiring. She has worked tirelessly to bring Shandee’s murderer to justice. I say a massive thank you to Vicki for her committed advocacy, which has shone a light on the systemic failures of the DNA lab and brought lasting change to the entire system—lasting change that would never have happened without her courage, without her strength and without her advocacy. This advocacy was not only for her daughter Shandee but also for other victims and families who will benefit from her legacy. Vicki, the decision you made to put the public interest first, even when this meant constantly reliving the tragic horrors your family experienced, all in the interests of safety and justice, will never be forgotten. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Dr Kirsty Wright, the scientist who put it all on the line and bravely took a public position on a devastating issue even in the face of this government not believing and even in the face of this government saying that we were playing pure politics. Her commitment to transparency, accountability and truth, as other members in this chamber have said, risking her own career, is truly admirable. To all the brave scientists from the forensic lab who, at great personal risk, came forward to share their experiences with the commissioner—to Kylie, Emma, Dr Ingrid, Angelina, Alicia, Rhys, Amanda and everyone else who has had to remain anonymous—we thank you.

This bill is long overdue and the government was dragged kicking and screaming to bring it before the House. The LNP first raised concerns about this in 2021. At the same time, the *Shandee's Story* podcast went live, highlighting the issues with the DNA lab. Despite the government's denial and the then failed health minister, Yvette D'Ath, claiming that there had been no evidence of systemic failures in the forensic pathology unit, Shandee's family and the opposition kept fighting. By May 2022, we were calling on the government to launch a commission of inquiry. Again, the health minister and the then health minister vehemently rejected our concerns saying that we were playing pure politics. Now here we are, implementing recommendation 121 of a commission of inquiry that those opposite never wanted, a commission of inquiry the recommendations of which are not being implemented fully—

Mr Krause interjected.

Mrs GERBER: I take the interjection from the member for Scenic Rim—and a commission of inquiry that uncovered the truth that the DNA lab was failing in its most fundamental task—that is, to actually find DNA.

Finally, we have this bill before us. I have to highlight that this bill will in fact take responsibility from Queensland Health and give it to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, which is headed by the very same minister who oversaw the failed DNA lab and the very same minister who oversaw this monumental stuff-up by the state Labor government. The current health minister does not want any association with the chaos and crisis under the Attorney-General and former health minister, saying, 'Not my circus, not my monkeys', except that it is. While the health minister may have passed the buck, she is still ultimately responsible for implementing the findings of the commission of inquiry, which are not being implemented fully.

The failures of the DNA lab have been the greatest case of government maladministration in living memory. I am going to repeat this because it is so important: at the last count there were 103,000 samples to be retested and potentially 37,000 victims who did not see justice—victims of rape, victims of murder and victims whose perpetrators may be walking the streets as a result of this government's failure.

Mrs Frecklington: Who was scaremongering?

Mrs GERBER: I take the interjection from the member for Nanango.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): That is unfortunate because the member for Nanango is on a warning. Please pause the clock. Member for Nanango, you can leave the chamber for one hour. I was trying to get your attention to remind you that you are on a warning, but that has happened.

Whereupon the honourable member for Nanango withdrew from the chamber at 11.23 am.

Mrs GERBER: My apologies to the member for Nanango.

An opposition member: It was a good interjection, though.

Mrs GERBER: It was a good interjection. We were accused of scaremongering and yet here we are debating this bill and attempting to seek justice. Let us hope that the victims and their families get justice because, right now, those victims and their families are going to have to relive the harrowing memories and experiences that they went through as victims of crime in order for the system to retest—that is, in order for the system to do what it should have done in the first place. Victims of crime and their families from right across Queensland deserve transparency from this government.

The minister must answer these questions. Does the government know the total number of cases that will need to be reviewed? How many cases has the legal-led review assessed to date? Of those cases, how many have been found to have probative DNA samples in need of retesting? How many have been retested and, of those, how many have had profiles found that were not previously found? How many victims have been contacted regarding the retesting of their samples, whether that their samples will be retested or have been retested?

The member for Scenic Rim makes a very valid point: in his address on the bill, the member for Toohey tried to say that none of this is relevant, that victims of crime are not relevant and that none of these questions that victims deserve answers to and that their families deserve answers to are relevant. Have they learned nothing? Even now they cannot admit their faults. The member for Caloundra said that this is political leverage. We are talking about the biggest maladministration in the history of a government and it lies at the feet of this state Labor government.

(Time expired)