




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL
Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.25 pm): As the chair of the Community Support and Services Committee already noted, my statement of reservation this year is remarkably similar to what it was last year, the year before that, the year before that and the year before that because the system is still just as busted as it has been previously. It is still not serving the purpose it is supposed to and that Queenslanders presume is how the key opportunity for transparency and accountability might work in this state. I do want to note there were some improvements made to the process this year that, from a crossbench perspective at the very least, have been valuable. I want to give credit where it is due. As crossbench members, having questions on notice across the full range of portfolios and having the opportunity to put at least one question to each minister was a huge step in the right direction from my perspective, and I am sure the rest of the crossbench would agree.

We could take it further. If we are genuinely interested in scrutiny and accountability we would not have these kinds of limits on questions on notice that could be asked: we would be entitled to ask multiple questions to each minister or, at the very least, be entitled to ask one question on notice in respect of each portfolio area. As we see in these hearings, having questions on notice that overlap multiple portfolios within a single hearing means that, first of all, we do not get to ask that question on notice in respect of each portfolio area but also we are squeezed into having very short timeframes for specific portfolios rather than the whole of the minister's portfolio responsibilities.

I also appreciate the intent of providing a mandated minimum proportion of questioning time for non-government members and specifically for crossbench members. It is well intended. I recall when the House was looking at the motion for estimates this year the member for Stafford—I hope his health is improving—was agog at the idea that the crossbench would not jump at the fact we were being guaranteed a proportion of time. In practice, the truth is that at best as an entire crossbench we still get seven minutes out of every hour. If you consider that in circumstances where there is a full-time member from the crossbench on a committee—and this year's experience was no different to others, where there were up to three visiting members—it is a vanishingly small amount of time.

This brings me to the observation of some committee chairs, the chair of the Community Support and Services Committee included. The 72 per cent of time for non-government questions is fine. The member for Thuringowa can claim his crown of more than 80 per cent for non-government members for the Health and Environment Committee, but that does not matter when we are still talking about tiny little windows of time. The proportions mean nothing; it is the total time we have for questions. How the government can pretend we are able to adequately scrutinise a portfolio like youth justice in an hour and a half is beyond me. How we are supposed to scrutinise the extraordinary amount of spending and

all of the operational work of the Queensland Police Service in an hour and a half is beyond me. This government is spending money hand over fist on new prisons in this state and we are given one hour to ask questions about Corrective Services. Child safety was similar with an hour and a quarter.

If this were a government that genuinely prioritised transparency and accountability, we would be given more time. If this were a government that genuinely cared about public confidence in the operations of the executive and the parliament for that matter, they would give us more time. Instead, time and time again—year in, year out—we see the prioritisation of their own interests. We see them ducking and weaving, avoiding difficult questions by just not giving us enough time.

The solutions are not complicated: expand the timeframes for these hearings and show your priorities through that, similar to what we are seeing in the House this week. We have these three cognate bills that have been introduced and will be debated in one sitting week. Meanwhile, important bills such as the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will go lagging. Children are being taken out of kinship care arrangements because the government cannot get its act together and pass this legislation, just like the Child Safe Organisations Bill. Prioritise this work.