

Speech By

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Record of Proceedings, 20 November 2025

JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE; REPORT

Motion to Take Note; Report No. 16

Ms BOURNE (Ipswich West—ALP) (3.11 pm): I rise today to speak on the committee's report reviewing the Queensland Family and Child Commission's annual report for 2023-24 and the Child Death Review Board's annual report for 2023-24, and I thank them sincerely for their role in providing this report. The QFCC plays a critical role in ensuring Queensland's children are safe, protected and given every opportunity to thrive. Their work ensures that the systems we put in place to care for and support our children—especially those involved in the child protection and youth justice systems—are held to account. It is with that purpose in mind that I address the House today.

The annual report makes reference to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, a bill introduced to this parliament last year. It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to thank the then attorney-general, the Hon. Yvette D'Ath, for her dedicated work on this important legislation. The report clearly articulates the rationale behind this reform, stating—

Every Queensland child has the right to be raised safely in their culture, connected to kin and Country.

One of the most sobering parts of the annual report is the work of the Child Death Review Board, which is hosted by the QFCC and is responsible for maintaining Queensland's Child Death Register. In 2023-24 the register recorded 422 child deaths. That number should give all of us pause, but it is not a statistic to be quietly filed away. The data in the register informs prevention work across agencies, whether that is improving risk indicators for drowning, addressing co-sleeping dangers or developing better suicide prevention measures. It is also shared with the Coroners Court and research bodies, because transparency and learning are essential if we are to do better.

Over the past year the QFCC has conducted major system reviews and studies into areas where our systems are most fragile, particularly around children absent from care and what the commission calls 'crossover kids'—that is, children involved in both the child protection and the youth justice systems. These are some of our most vulnerable young people, and the commission's findings should be a wake-up call to every one of us in this House.

One key issue raised repeatedly throughout the report is the persistent barriers to information sharing. These barriers are real obstacles to delivering coordinated, effective services for children and families. If agencies cannot talk to each other, if they cannot share the right information at the right time, then children fall through the cracks and some never make it back.

In 2024 the QFCC launched the Principle Focus dashboard, an important digital tool to monitor and better understand the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our child protection system. This is a significant contribution to transparency and policy reform. Also in 2024, following the release of their *Growing up in Queensland* report, the commission launched the Data Explorer, a tool that aggregates wellbeing data from over 8,200 young Queenslanders aged eight to 18.

This tool represents a breakthrough. For too long, system design has occurred without hearing from the very people affected by it. Through the Data Explorer, young people now have a direct voice in shaping the services that are supposed to serve them. This data is available at both regional and state level, drawing on information from NGOs, researchers and government departments.

However, the commission has also issued a strong warning: poor quality data erodes accountability. In their risk management framework, the QFCC identified difficulty accessing high-quality data as a strategic risk to the system. Unfortunately, that risk is no longer theoretical. It is very real and it is being realised before our eyes with the Unify system rollout under the watch of this government. When child safety workers do not have access to case histories, when agencies cannot access timely and accurate information, when frontline decisions are made in the dark, it is not only a risk to vulnerable children; it is a risk to public confidence in our child protection system. Queenslanders should be able to expect more than vague reassurances from a minister.