




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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**CHILD DEATH REVIEW LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.33 pm): As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for communities and shadow minister for disability services and seniors and shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Child Death Review Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. From the outset, I wish to note that the Liberal National Party opposition will not be opposing this legislation.

It is a tragic reality that there are children in Queensland who are seriously injured or indeed killed by people who ultimately should have had the best interests and safe care of those children at heart. One child who is seriously injured or killed is simply one too many, yet in Queensland it is occurring far too often and, sadly, it is happening to children who are known to various Queensland government departments and agencies. It is fundamentally critical that Queensland's agencies are well reviewed and oversighted, well equipped and provided with the information and tools necessary in order to ensure that to the best extent possible children who are known to Queensland's agencies do not come to harm. Under this Labor government, such fundamental principles and the independent external framework to enable such reviews and information sharing has been lacking. In fact, it is very unfortunate that it has taken so long to get to this point today. However, I will expand upon this point further shortly.

In relation to the objectives of this bill, this legislation seeks to implement the recommendations of the Queensland Family and Child Commission report and give effect to the development of a new independent model for reviewing child death cases. To achieve this, a new independent Child Death Review Board will be established and located within the Queensland Family and Child Commission which will be responsible for carrying out the systems reviews following the death of a child connected to and/or under the child protection system. This legislation will also expand the requirement to conduct an internal systems review following the death or serious physical injury of a child known to child safety and/or to other relevant government agencies that are involved in the provision of services to that child.

Specifically looking at the Child Death Review Board, I note that the board will be responsible for identifying opportunities for continuous improvement in systems, legislation, policies and practices to identify preventative mechanisms to help protect children and prevent deaths that may be avoidable. I also note that the minister will have the ability in exceptional circumstances to ask the board to carry out a review in circumstances where a child is not connected to the child protection system but where the death or injury is relevant to the child protection system.

I believe it is worth stating again—and it was articulated by my colleague, the shadow Attorney-General and shadow minister for justice, the member for Toowoomba South—that this legislation is not aimed at investigating any one specific child case or one specific incident or death. Rather, it is aimed at identifying and addressing areas of any systemic state government and/or departmental or statutory agency failure.

The objectives of the bill and the systems that it will put in place are all reasonable and can arguably lead one to ask why it has taken so long for it to be enacted. That really is the question. How could this Labor government let such fundamental and critical child safety reforms drag on for so long?

Queenslanders know all too well that the Palaszczuk Labor government has had extreme difficulty managing the child safety and the child protection system under its term in government. It is not just this Labor government. We have seen it under successive Labor governments that have failed this fundamental function of government. Who can forget former Labor premier Peter Beattie's plea to the Queensland people that he was 'sickened and ashamed' at reports of child abuse among state wards and foster children and his promise at that time that 'We'll fix it'? That was back in 2003 leading into the 2004 state election.

Turning to more recent times, and with specific reference to this bill before the House today, Queenslanders deserve to understand the sheer lack of will this government has had to date to enact such vital reforms. It truly defies belief, particularly when Queensland has experienced an unprecedented period of crisis within the child safety department under the Palaszczuk Labor government. The aforementioned Queensland Family and Child Commission report, which is the genesis for this legislation, was tabled on 30 March 2017. That was back in the 55th Parliament. Incredibly, it has taken this Labor government a full 902 days—just shy of two years and six months—before it has finally introduced this bill into the Queensland parliament. It has taken a further 139 days from the bill's introduction before the House was finally able to begin its debate.

Let there be no doubt that, when those opposite claim the mantle of working in the best interests of the welfare and safety of Queensland's most vulnerable children, such words ring hollow in this chamber. There is simply no excuse for this Labor government to take 902 days to introduce legislation implementing the recommendation of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. This Labor government has its priorities all wrong. It is more focused on changing the names of hospitals, moving dubious motions in this place and reckless spending on outsourcing core functions of ministerial responsibility and accountability, rather than focusing on this important core aspect of government.

The latest statistics available paint a harrowing picture of Child Safety in Queensland. We know that the number of children living away from home rose by 742 in the 12 months to September 2019 to 10,535 children. Concerningly, in one year alone under the Palaszczuk Labor government, there was an increase of more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living away from home, a rise of 10 per cent. By contrast, the increase in non-ATSI children living away from home was six per cent. Indeed, almost every indicator and statistic—children subject to protective orders, number of notifications received, number of child protection orders—has risen under this Palaszczuk Labor government. However, there has been a decrease. Sadly, it is in the number of investigations that were completed in the 60-day period, which is now down to 39 per cent from 47.5 per cent a year earlier.

We are truly facing a child safety system that is in crisis. If there is one clear message from the process that has led to today's bill, it is that time is of the essence. For the sake and safety of Queensland children, any reform that can bring about positive change to the child safety and child protection system and other related government agencies must be pursued with absolute care, urgency and vigour.

Before I conclude I wish to thank all members of the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee, in particular, the member for Pumicestone and the former member for Currumbin for their consideration and examination of the bill that is before the House. I also thank all of those important stakeholders who made submissions to the committee. The Liberal National Party will always stand for safe communities and the safety of all children. That is why we support the proposals and measures that are contained within this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.