



Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.07 pm): I rise to address report No. 42 of the 56th Parliament titled *Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission*, as tabled by the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee on 4 July 2019. The Queensland Family and Child Commission performs a fundamentally important role in our state and has done so since first established in 2014 under the former Newman Liberal National Party government following the Carmody inquiry and report. The purpose of the Queensland Family and Child Commission is to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people and to improve the functioning of Queensland's child protection system.

As a humane society, the protection of our youngest and our most vulnerable is a responsibility that falls upon us all. Unfortunately, the Palaszczuk Labor government has continuously failed in regard to fulfilling its responsibilities on child safety. Indeed, Queensland Labor has failed time and again to protect children and our most vulnerable, stretching across the terms of multiple Labor governments and Labor premiers, including the infamous 2004 election called by then premier Peter Beattie in response to the damning review of his Labor government's failure to protect children from abuse.

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee is charged with overseeing the Queensland Family and Child Commission. As a part of this duty, the committee also reviews and considers the Queensland Family and Child Commission's annual report, in this instance the annual report for 2017-18. Having analysed the annual report, there are many concerning and in some cases disturbing findings. In 2016-17, 428 Queensland child deaths were recorded, marking an almost eight per cent increase from the prior reporting year. This report highlights some very serious issues, in particular regarding youth suicide. As the annual report outlines, 70 per cent of those deaths were due to external, non-natural causes including suicide. With respect to youth suicide, of the 21 deaths nine of these young people—almost half—were known to the child protection system 12 months prior to their death. The death of any child is simply heartbreaking, but to learn that such deaths have come as a result of suicide and that almost half are known to our child protection system only worsens that heartbreak.

As the Liberal National Party shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, I am particularly concerned by the report's revelation that in 2016-17 some 57 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had died, an increase from 52 in the year before. Whilst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate continues to be almost twice the rate for non-Indigenous children, most concerning is the fact that the suicide rate amongst Indigenous young persons is a staggering three times the rate for non-Indigenous young people. Much more needs to be done by the state Labor government.

Having previously served on the Queensland Mental Health Commission's advisory council, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Commissioner Ivan Frkovic and the great work of the Queensland Mental Health Commission to advance improvements in youth mental health and strategies to address

youth suicide. I have seen firsthand how young people's suffering from educational, social, economic and health disadvantage can lead to the development of mental health conditions, alcohol or drug dependency disorders, self-harm and even suicide.

What this report identifies is that much more needs to be done to create resilient communities and that the Palaszczuk Labor government is failing by not investing enough in education or in our hospital and health system. As we have seen in the recent ABS figures, there are also significant issues with respect to unemployment here in Queensland. It is only through sound economic management that any government can invest in community wellbeing and families and, ultimately, in the future of our young people.

I wish to finish my contribution by acknowledging the staff of the Queensland Family and Child Commission for their ongoing important work across the board to progress and protect the best interests of Queensland's children and young people. I also acknowledge all of the work that has been undertaken by committee members on both sides of the chamber in preparing this report and the relevant parliamentary secretariat staff. I commend the report to the House.