



Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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### **CHILD PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (4.13 pm): I rise to contribute to the Child Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. From the outset we must acknowledge that we have failed too many children in our community. While the impetus for this bill was the all-too-short life and horrific death of Mason Jett Lee, we must acknowledge that, sadly, Mason is not the only child who the current system has failed. To me, this issue is above politics. Yes, as the coroner's report showed, many people failed to keep Mason safe and failed to keep at least another 15 children safe in this state. Quite simply, that record is not good enough.

It is not good enough that we are seeing continual failings. It is not good enough that the recommendations of the Carmody commission of inquiry were largely ignored. It is not good enough that Queensland children—some of whom are the most in need of support—are not sure where they will be living tomorrow, next week or next year. Most of all, it is not good enough for Queensland and it is definitely not good enough for our children.

I will not be opposing this bill and I hope that this bill is a symbol of hope for those children who most desperately need it. I hope this bill shows that this government, and this parliament, now see the importance of providing stability and, most of all, safety for our children. Regardless of where they live, their cultural background or their circumstances, Queensland's children must not only be safe but feel safe if they are to achieve their full potential. Children in the care of the state deserve to be and feel safe. Children need to feel safe instead of fearing someone will break into their home or that they will be harmed. Children need to feel safe on their way to and from school, and all children need to know that as legislators we will do whatever is needed to keep them safe. That starts here today in this chamber.

Mason Jett Lee's story is a horrific one. It is one that we cannot forget and one that we definitely cannot ignore. I note that the Child Protection Act 1999 was reviewed from 2015 to 2017 and that reforms included inter alia: new permanency principles; case planning requirements, including early planning for permanency; a limit on the making of successive short-term child protection orders that extend beyond two years unless it is in the child's best interests; and the introduction of a new child protection order—a permanent care order.

We are talking about the rights of children here and it should always be about what is in their best interests. That includes considering whether adoption is an option for achieving permanency for children in care. Of course we would all like to think that the first preference when considering permanency is for the child to be cared for by the child's family. However, experience shows that sometimes that is clearly not in the best interests of the child. For that reason, we need procedures, processes and legislation in place to act quickly and decisively.

I am concerned that the number and proportion of children in the child protection system subject to long-term child protection orders has increased substantially in recent years, with significant numbers of child protection orders granting long-term guardianship of a child to the chief executive. It is worth noting that this is the last priority for achieving permanency for a child in Queensland's existing permanency hierarchy.

I note that section 51VAA requires the chief executive to review the case plan for a child two years after the long-term order was made. Once again, I certainly hope that the best interests of the child are first and foremost when conducting these reviews.

On too many occasions, I attended incidents where children lost their lives, and I can tell the House that it is the most horrific incident an emergency service responder can ever attend. It is absolutely earth shattering for the responders; it is earth shattering for the families and the members involved. We need to make sure here today that we start this step towards protecting our most vulnerable in our community. I implore all members of this House to do their utmost for Queensland's children. Across the chamber, we may disagree on issues and we may disagree on the best way to address them, but every single one of us must make a stand for our children, not just today but every single day.

We have lost too many children. Their potential will remain untapped. But today we can all commit to protecting and ensuring the safety of our children not only through this bill but in so many other ways. Madam Deputy Speaker, your children, my future, the future of children like Mason Jett Lee and the future of all Queensland children depend on it. I am pleased to support the bill before the House.