

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all of the members for their contributions to this important debate.

I also thank the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for its careful consideration of the Bill. The committee heard from a range of stakeholders including the Auditor-General, the Office of the Coroner, the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Australian Medical Association Northern Territory.

After considering the evidence and the department's responses I am pleased that the committee recommended the Bill be passed with only a minor amendment proposed to clause 22. While the committee recommended requiring the Public Trustee to provide financial statements to the Auditor-General within four months of the end of the financial year, I do not consider this necessary. The existing requirement for the audit of the common funds to be completed within six months already ensures the timely provision of information and the proposed amendment is unlikely to improve audit or reporting time frames.

Throughout the inquiry, a common question was whether streamlining these boards and committees would reduce oversight or accountability. The answer is no. This Bill removes duplication and outdated processes but it does not remove important safeguards or oversight functions.

The proposal to abolish the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee received considerable attention. I acknowledge those views put forward. Our government carefully considered those views. It is also important to recognise the operational reality. The committee has not had a quorum since October 2024 and, as a result, has not been able to meet. This Bill brings the legislation into line with that reality while ensuring the important work continues in a practical and effective way.

The committee has not been operating, but the functions it performs continue through the agency and statutory officers best placed to undertake them. This Bill does not reduce the investigation of child deaths or the ability to identify systemic issues. Those important functions will continue.

The Office of the Coroner has already been providing the secretariat support for the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee. Additional resourcing has been provided to the office to undertake that work and that resourcing will continue.

This means the expertise and support that currently exists will remain in place. The Coroner will continue to investigate reportable deaths, the Children's Commissioner will continue to exercise its important independent oversight functions. Other agencies will continue to carry out their respective responsibilities to improve outcomes for children and to identify opportunities for systemic reform. Importantly, the Legislative Scrutiny Committee recognises this point in its report.

The committee concluded that it was clear the important functions currently undertaken by the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee would continue when allocated across development agencies and offices. Those agencies would continue to have the expertise and resources needed to perform those functions effectively.

What changes under this Bill is the administrative structure, not the government's commitment to learning from child deaths, improving systems and protecting vulnerable children.

Concerns were also raised about the abolishing of the Health and Community Services Complaints Review Committee. As I have outlined previously, this committee has a limited role. It reviews the processes of the commission rather than its decisions. Over many years, it has not identified significant concerns requiring intervention. Importantly, Territorians will continue to have access to the existing complaints processes under the Act, along with other independent review pathways where appropriate. This reform removes an unnecessary layer without reducing people's rights.

The committee also considered the amendments relating to the Public Trustee. The Auditor-General supported greater clarity on reporting timeframes and auditing requirements. These amendments provided

clear and more practical process while maintaining transparency and accountability. They also modernised the legislation and clarified the treatment of levies and fees.

The remaining reforms in the Bill are practical improvements that reflect the way government operates today. Combining the Electrical Safety Board and the Discipline Committee removes duplication while preserving the existing disciplinary functions. This allows the Chair of the Liquor Commission to attend meetings remotely, when temporarily outside the Territory, reflects modern practice and provides greater flexibility without changing the commission's independence or decision-making.

This is a sensible and practical Bill, it modernises legislation, removes unnecessary duplication and administrative burden and improves clarity. It allows government resources to be focused where they are most effective while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability. This Bill is not about reducing scrutiny, it is about ensuring that scrutiny is carried out in the most effective way by the agencies and the statutory officers best-placed to perform those functions.

I move the bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time

DRAFT