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Media Release: 120 submissions rejected, experts ignored, Territory children left behind

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Yesterday was a tragic missed opportunity. We all agree that keeping children safe must be our highest priority, and the evidence showed us how to do that.

The CLP Government chose to ignore the overwhelming evidence presented to Parliament, passing a harmful law that nearly the entire child protection system has warned them will put children at risk.

The Government's decision to pass the Care and Protection of Children (Every Child Matters) Bill without amendments is failure of leadership, and Territory children will bear the consequences for decades to come.

To debate a child protection Bill on the very day a Government-commissioned review into the child protection system handed down its findings is a blatant undermining of the scrutiny process. It's clear that this Bill has been an established part of the CLP's agenda – waiting in the wings, regardless of the evidence.

It comes as no surprise that the Webb-Shanahan review made exactly the same recommendations as the 120 opponents to this Bill, who provided submissions to the Scrutiny Committee.

These organisations – made up of Aboriginal organisations, frontline practitioners, legal services, community representatives, and people with lived experience, put forward practical recommendations to address the urgent need for reform of the child protection system.

Their evidence made clear that what is putting children at risk are delayed responses, overwhelming workloads, workforce shortages, weak governance and a system that is already stretched beyond capacity.

The CLP never intended to listen to this advice, and their Bill addresses none of it.

Page 1 of 2



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I wrote a dissenting report during the scrutiny process, and during debate of the Bill moved several amendments that reflected the overwhelming evidence put forward by experts, Aboriginal organisations, frontline practitioners, community representatives, and legal services and people with lived experience.

Each of my amendments would have made children safer, but not a single one was supported by the Government.

When a government systematically ignores and silences evidence simply because it does not fit their political agenda, that is weak leadership, and Territory children and their families deserve better.

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