

~~Our community, made up of people from many cultures, has surrounded them with love and support. They are very grateful for the quick response from our state and federal governments, along with the government of New Zealand, and grateful to the Premier for the time she spent with community members here at Parliament House last Thursday. Their radio broadcast held over the weekend was well supported, and on Monday evening many from the community came together at the invitation of the Deputy Mayor of Logan, Russell Lutton, to plan for a Logan tribute and fundraising concert on 18 October.~~

~~In our schools, teachers, counsellors and chaplains are there supporting our large number of students, many of whom will have lost extended family members. I understand that Woodridge State High School is mobilising our schools to come together for a concert this weekend.~~

~~When I speak to elders of the community such as John Pale and Vaa Alifipo and High Chief Lemalu Felise, I realise that they are overwhelmed by the kindness and care their community is receiving from all quarters. The families in their homeland whom they represent may take a long time to rebuild their lives. So many have lost little children. Six whole villages have been swept away. At the moment they are afraid. The sea which once was a source of food and a thing of beauty is now like a sleeping monster. They are afraid to return and will rebuild on higher ground. However, they are resilient people. With so much practical, moral and spiritual support they will once again learn to live in peace. We hope never again to face such trauma.~~

DISABILITY SERVICES (CRIMINAL HISTORY) AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.36 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the Disability Services Act 2006 to prohibit people with violent criminal histories being engaged as carers of people with a disability. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Tabled paper: Disability Services (Criminal History) Amendment Bill.

Tabled paper: Disability Services (Criminal History) Amendment Bill, explanatory notes.

Second Reading

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.36 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in our community. With some disabilities requiring people to have intensive, around-the-clock and in-home care, the position of a carer is one that should embody implicit trust. There should be no question marks over the safety of the relationship between a carer and a person receiving that care. When a person with a disability uses services, be they provided by the government or by a community based organisation, they are entering into more than a business transaction.

It is not a simple matter of purchasing a service. The provision of services—on the part of both the carer and the person with a disability—transcends a business relationship and becomes about enabling a greater quality of life. A carer who enters a person's house is stepping over a threshold of trust, and a carer who works at a facility is equally in the home of a person with a disability. When this relationship is abused through violence, it is not only physical harm which results. The social abilities of some people with disabilities, the trust levels and their interaction with other people can all be damaged severely by an act of violence perpetrated against them by a carer. Unfortunately, these incidents have happened and do happen. In view of the time constraints involved, I seek leave for the remainder of my second reading speech to be incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

As such, the LNP feels there needs to be a legislative effort to try and enhance the confidence, not only that people with disabilities can have, but that families and the wider community can have in the integrity of that important relationship between a carer and the people they care for. To ignore the problem is not an option for the LNP. The Bill I am introducing today is designed to help protect people with a disability from being put in the care of someone who has a history of violence or abuse. The Bill will allow people with disabilities to have the confidence in their carer that they need, and it will also allow our service providers to employ carers with confidence.

Carers are exemplary people who give so much of themselves to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Their contribution is very often of a value well in excess of the remuneration they receive. They are essential service providers. They do their work with sincerity and, unfortunately, sometimes they provide the only genuine connection between their clients and the outside world. Indeed, in many cases carers enhance the quality of life of their clients.

Like anything though, there are exceptions. And caring for a person with a disability is such an important role, because they are often very vulnerable, that there should be no exceptions. This Bill introduces a standard—a person with a violent criminal history is not a person we should be entrusting with the care of another person.

The current legislation does not prevent someone with a violent criminal history from being a carer and as a result people with a disability are at risk of relying on someone who has a history of becoming abusive or violent. This bill would change that and prohibit someone who has been convicted of a violent offence from occupying the paid position of a carer to a person with a disability.

This amendment bill also proposes to allow the Chief Executive of the Department of Communities to decide if a person who has a history of violent charges, but who has not been convicted, should be allowed to take a job as a carer. While a prohibition notice will not be issued automatically, as will occur with those with convictions, those with charges relating to violence will be automatically referred to the Chief Executive for their consideration.

Considering that it's relatively common for domestic violence charges to be dropped, it is imperative that a potential carer's history is properly reviewed and that a violent history is not discounted when a person's wellbeing is at stake, especially when that person is as vulnerable as a person with a disability. This Bill will introduce a new level of protection that will ensure carers who are doing a good job can continue their work, service providers can continue to make a difference in people's lives, and all people with a disability can have confidence in the their paid carer.

The bill will affect people currently employed in a paid position, as a carer for a person with a disability, with a history of violent or abusive behaviour. The LNP understands that sometimes it can be difficult to secure the services of a person with relevant qualifications and experience to be carers. There may be a perception that this bill may make it even harder to find people willing to do the job, but the LNP argues that a history of violence and abusive behaviour should disqualify someone from providing care to a vulnerable person, such as a person with a disability.

The Queensland community has accepted the need to put in place a system to protect another group of vulnerable people in our society, namely children, with the development and implementation of the Blue Card system. This initiative implemented a screening requirement for those wishing to work with children to ensure they did not have any criminal histories relating to children—in other words, they were appropriate people to be working with children. The LNP considers that the same consideration should be given to people with disabilities, who can be just as vulnerable in care as children.

While the bill proposes to prevent people with violent or abusive histories from working in a paid position as a carer for a person with a disability, it does not prevent from working in other areas of the disability support sector, such as an administrative position. I commend the bill to the House.

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Debate, on motion of Mr Wallace, adjourned.

~~PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS~~

~~'Dave' The Elasmosaur~~

~~Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (11.38 am): 2009 is a year when all Queenslanders in all corners of the state have an opportunity to celebrate the achievements, take stock of challenges and shape the Queensland we want for future generations. In this year our 150th year, that celebration is taken to all parts of Queensland. That is why it was a great pleasure to travel to Chillagoe on Saturday to assist with the unveiling of 'Dave' the Elasmosaur.~~

~~Mr Wallace: Fine town!~~

~~Mr O'BRIEN: It is a fine town; thank you, Minister. I know you visited there recently to discuss its roads. Dave the Elasmosaur has put Chillagoe at the pinnacle of Queensland's dinosaur triangle. Queensland has a rich treasure chest of dinosaur bones and fossils stretching back millions of years. Chillagoe is the home of giant 1.2 diameter nautilus shell fossils as well as giant wombats and giant crocodiles with hooves. Dave the Dinosaur was found a few years ago, but he was unfortunately found without his head. He lost his head! However, the model that was unveiled on Saturday by local magistrate Tom Braes is complete with head and it is a fantastic addition and entry statement to the town of Chillagoe.~~

~~Chillagoe is more normally known for the excellent caving that is available in that region, but Dave has brought a new facet to the growing tourism numbers that are visiting Dave and it will be a must stop for people who are visiting the area. The reproduction is five metres long and sits just at the entry to Chillagoe on the Burke Development Road. Dave's original fossil is on display at the Queensland Museum in Brisbane. While a great attempt is being made by the locals to find his head, unfortunately that has not been successful. I urge people to come to Chillagoe to look at the caves and to look at Dave the Elasmosaur.~~

~~Public Hospitals; Waiting Lists~~

~~Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—LNP) (11.41 am): Kroy Day got it very right when he made the comment that ramping is endemic across the state. In fact, ambulance stretchers are now part of the emergency department bed numbers because these stretchers are there for so many hours on so many days of the week, and I can guarantee that it will not be long before we see these stretcher numbers appear in the official Queensland Health bed count along with trolleys, chairs, virtual beds and sofas. The real risk is this, however: every minute a paramedic is kept waiting at a hospital because Queensland Health cannot get its act together, people in the community are placed at greater risk. It means that you or I or our family members are waiting longer for an ambulance and in particular~~