

Oral Health

Mrs OSTAPOVITCH (Stretton—LNP) (12.00 pm): I am blessed to have always had healthy teeth, but for hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders this is not the case. Our waiting list for dental care had 112,204 people on it, and I can only imagine that their dental problem got worse with time. After many years of inaction by the previous Labor government, Minister Springborg approved a dental scheme to give those on the waiting list a \$750 voucher for, or towards, dental care for qualifying patients. The scheme has helped 50,000 people to address dental problems. The result is that the total number of long wait dental patients, those waiting two years or more, fell from 62,513 in February to the current figure of just 13,722. As at 30 September, 60,000 vouchers had been issued.

Mr Mulherin interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Stretton has the call.

Mrs OSTAPOVITCH: May I continue without interruption?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has the call.

Mrs OSTAPOVITCH: As at 30 September, 60,000 vouchers had been issued. The overall waiting list has fallen from 112,204 to 59,612. Many have topped up the voucher with their own money and if a voucher was more than the cost of the treatment, the remainder has been cycled back into the scheme for others. The scheme cost \$186 million with \$8 million from the federal government.

I have had many letters thanking us for what those who were suffering on waiting lists consider great compassion and kindness. I will quote from one of those letters. It states—

Good afternoon to my favourite representative! Words are a poor representation of my extreme gratitude for your efforts on my behalf. My dental problem has been expertly solved due to your response to a request for assistance. I humbly beseech you to accept praise for your help. This is as good as life can get. My best wishes for a continued Parliamentary career rewarded with increased successes.

While it is indeed wonderful to receive an email that confirms that, as members of parliament, we are making a difference in people's lives, I must forward this praise to Minister Springborg.

I would also like to praise the Tzu Chi Association for their own actions to address dental health. Twice a year for the last 10 years they have helped hundreds of people all over the state to address dental health. A couple of months ago I had the privilege to accompany Patrick Lieu and his team of volunteer dentists at the QEII Hospital where they provided over 100 new immigrants with dental care. Meanwhile, back at their meeting hall, they had set up approximately another 10 professional dental stations where they administered dentistry to disadvantaged people in the community.

While this is all wonderful news for those with dental problems, I would like to point out that prevention is better than cure. I urge Queenslanders to take better care of their teeth and especially appeal to parents to care more about their kids and what they feed them. Without any doubt, sugary foods and especially soft drink and juices are a major contributing factor to tooth decay. Awareness needs to increase that what we choose to eat or feed our kids makes a difference with regard to healthy teeth and bodies and even behaviour, as mentioned by the member for Nudgee. This was brought to my attention when I was told that when Africans come to this country they generally have amazing, white, healthy teeth. It astounded me that after just a few years of eating an Australian diet their teeth deteriorated at an alarming rate. So please think about what you put into your mouth. If nothing else, just rinse your mouth after eating and drinking. Hopefully that will help keep Queenslanders smiling.

(Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for matters of public interest has expired.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (CIVIL LIABILITY) AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction



Hon. CKT NEWMAN (Ashgrove—LNP) (Premier) (12.04 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Public Service Act 2008 and the Police Service Administration Act 1990 to provide for protection of Public Service employees, police officers and other persons in particular circumstances relating to

engaging in conduct in an official capacity. I table the bill and the explanatory notes. I nominate the Finance and Administration Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Public Service and Other Legislation (Civil Liability) Amendment Bill 2013.

Tabled paper: Public Service and Other Legislation (Civil Liability) Amendment Bill 2013, explanatory notes.

I am pleased to introduce the Public Service and Other Legislation (Civil Liability) Amendment Bill 2013. The bill amends one act within my portfolio, the Public Service Act 2008. It also amends the Police Service Administration Act 1990, which sits within the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Community Safety. This bill reflects our focus on supporting our hardworking public servants to do their jobs.

Prior to last year's election I gave a commitment to our dedicated police officers that I would initiate a review of the civil protection laws to ensure they can get on with the job of protecting our community. At present, there is a limited scheme of protection for police officers. For example, they are currently indemnified if they act in good faith and without gross negligence in circumstances that involve assisting people with illness or injury in emergency situations.

Police perform a critical role in ensuring safe communities across Queensland. In the often highly complex situations they respond to, and despite performing their roles professionally and in good faith, the nature of their business means there are occasional incidents that cause injury to people or damage to property. The potential consequences that flow to the individual officer as a result of these unfortunate occurrences—the threat of civil liability—place unnecessary pressure on officers and has the potential to impact decision making, especially in high-pressure, operational situations. This can ultimately reduce the level of service that police are willing and able to provide to our community. This risk of reduced service because of concerns of liability is not limited to police officers. It is also an issue for public servants performing a range of roles, including ambulance and fire service officers, teachers, doctors and nurses.

The amendments to the Police Service Administration Act 1990 and the Public Service Act 2008 will address this situation by providing our hardworking public servants with legislative immunity against civil liability. Liability will instead lie with the state. By transferring liability to the state, it ensures that anyone who suffers an injury or loss as a result of action by a state or Queensland Police Service employee still has the opportunity to seek recompense appropriate to the circumstances.

Our public servants and police officers should know the government and the community values their service, and this is reflected through this bill by providing an appropriate level of protection from civil liability. But let me be clear: this is not about reducing responsibility and accountability of public servants; it is about ensuring that we have a framework in place that supports our people when they do the jobs we ask of them and do them to an appropriate standard. For this reason, the bill proposes that the state has a right to recover contributions from employees who are subsequently found to have engaged in conduct other than in good faith and where it amounts to gross negligence.

The amendments proposed in this bill provide a level of certainty that does not currently exist. At present there are a range of policies and procedures that offer forms of indemnity—assistance with legal costs and penalties—that employees have to apply for after civil proceedings have been brought against them. What we are putting forward gives public servants and police officers certainty that we are going to support them from the outset for the ultimate benefit of the people and communities of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. CKT NEWMAN (Ashgrove—LNP) (Premier) (12.08 pm): 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.

Referral to the Finance and Administration Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Finance and Administration Committee.