



Speech by  
**Hon. BRIAN  
LITTLEPROUD**

**MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS**

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Hansard 10 November 1999

**FAMILY SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD** (Western Downs—NPA) (4.51 p.m.): In rising to speak to this Bill, it is not surprising to note that both sides of the House support what is being addressed by the legislation. I note from the Minister's second-reading speech and the comments of the Opposition spokesman, the member for Indooroopilly, that the Bill pertains to people within the Minister's department. Regrettably, this sort of legislation is necessary to further enhance these criminal history checks because of some revelations of recent times.

I notice in an article in the Courier-Mail of Monday, 25 October, that Mr Terry O'Gorman of the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties had a bit to say about the legislation. He queried whether or not this piece of legislation went too far. However, I make the comment that, because we have to give a higher priority to children than to other members of the public, there is a good excuse for the Minister and the department going down this track. I can see that a lot of thought has gone into the sorts of procedures that have to be put place to be as fair as possible to those people who are checked.

However, I have taken note of some of the comments and issues raised by the member for Indooroopilly. I look forward to the Minister's comments clarifying how the various Acts will relate to each other. In that regard, I want to speak about paedophilia and child molestation across the whole community, because part and parcel of the responsibilities of the Department of Families is to reach out to community groups.

One of the things that is having an effect on many good people who have worked in a voluntary capacity in their community for many, many years is the threat of being accused of paedophilia, even though it is committed by very few people. I pay tribute to those people who work with children in the institutions within the department and, secondly, to the people in the wider community—the teachers, the sporting coaches, the Cub leaders and the people involved in youth groups—because there is a real feeling that, as a result of adverse publicity, people are now not as willing to make themselves available for that type of youth work as they once were.

First of all, it is the right thing to do to clean up the Act as it relates to the department. I also note the Minister's intention to act in relation to community groups. It is only then that confidence will be restored to those people who in years gone by have put in an enormous amount of time outside their own vocational pursuits to try to help their community. The more that we can do for them, the better.

I recall that, prior to the 1995 election, the member for Indooroopilly, the member for Crows Nest and I toured the State to attend law and order seminars. Of course, part and parcel of the problem of crime is the break-up of the family. I remember attending a meeting at Strathpine at which one gentleman talked about the role of the community supporting the family. He made the comment that the trouble was that we had lost the real feeling of the tribal group. He went on to explain that, although the family unit is the basis of society, the family itself needs to belong to a small tribal group—be that a small church group, some sort of organisation, or even a small town or suburb—because the family needs the support of such a group. I have always remembered those comments.

At the time I was the shadow Minister for Family Services, and I was very supportive of the idea of the department encouraging community groups to look after the local people. In fact, I was pleased to see the efforts of my colleague the member for Beaudesert and Allan Male, who was at that time the director-general, strengthen the use of community groups by giving them more funding and

implementing programs. The department could then assess the success or failure of those programs and ensure the accountability of the funds being made available. I thought that, with the community helping itself, the department was getting better value for its money and it was also strengthening the moral fabric of that tribal group. I think it was probably also helping to overcome a shortage of funds within the department. I am very much aware of just how great the need is and how scarce the funds are. We are never going to have the perfect solution for all the ills of society. However, I was pleased to see more and more money going towards community groups. It will now be necessary for the Minister to follow up with criminal history checks within community groups.

I also draw the attention of the House to an article in the Sunday Mail of 24 October titled "Running wild". In that article, the Juvenile Aid Bureau was critical of the Department of Families, which has to look after children in care. The article stated that, although the courts have the right to put children in care, it is beyond the capacity of the Department of Families to give those children 24-hour a day care. In that article the Juvenile Aid Bureau points out that very often it is after hours, when the departmental officers have quite legitimately finished their day's work, that these children are running loose and getting themselves into more trouble. That adds to my argument that the more we can use community groups and people within their own family groups to help these children who are at risk, the better it will be. It also backs up my argument that we have to do more to make sure that these checks on the history of the people who work with children are much more watertight.

With that small contribution, I once again pay tribute to all of those people, be they departmental officers or people working in community groups, who are prepared to work with the young people of Queensland. They deserve a lot of credit. It behoves us to make sure that we can get rid of those people who abuse the privileges given to them or the positions that they hold. I support the Minister's legislation. However, I commend the member for Indooroopilly for raising issues that I believe are quite complex, especially as the Minister has indicated that she intends to go further by having these checks extended to community groups. I wish the passage of the Bill well and hope that the points that the Opposition has raised can be clarified.

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