



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

Hansard 9 March 1999

HOME ASSIST/SECURE PROGRAM

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (7.05 p.m.): I rise to speak on the issue of security in the home for Queensland's seniors. Honourable members will recall a series of disgusting attacks on elderly women late last year and earlier this year. There are very few incidents that could equal the depravity of cowardly attacks on the elderly. Housing Department units seemed to be the main, if not only, target in this particular instance and it is to be hoped that the good work of Housing Department personnel and police will result in a conviction and safer streets for all residents, but particularly our elderly.

The Minister for Public Works and Housing responded to the situation in January by initiating an audit of security at public housing seniors units in the Brisbane metropolitan area. I understand that a problem was identified that in some cases security locks or doors that had been fitted were not always used or keys were sometimes left in locks. I believe the initial audit also identified other initiatives which could enhance existing security, including such things as the installation of security plates adjacent to security screen door locks which would make it difficult for people to unlock the door from the outside and the provision of hooks on the wall near security doors to encourage tenants not to leave keys in locks but have them ready in case of evacuation. I add that such hooks would perhaps be better placed behind the solid door so as not to be visible to potential intruders.

I understand that the audit also identified a need to reduce the amount of thick shrubs around units where intruders might hide from view. Several other security issues were also identified during the audit. I support all of those initiatives and commend them to all householders as sensible initiatives.

I am sure that all honourable members would agree on the importance of security measures, not just in seniors accommodation but in all homes. But it is the senior citizens in our community who feel the most threatened, which is understandable due to their inability in many cases to defend themselves.

Last year a survey called the Conference for Older Australians was conducted by the Federal Government right throughout Australia. Many Queensland centres were visited, including Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Caloundra and other regions, as well as Brisbane. Although the report covered a number of issues such as health, education, transport, communications and carers, isolation, security and safety came through as very important issues. I quote a section of the report—

"Maintaining strong links with family or friends in their community can help prevent older people from becoming isolated. However it was strongly emphasised in the consultations that a number of factors can contribute to the feelings of isolation (including physical, geographical, social and emotional). It was also recognised that isolation means different things to different people and can be quite different from someone who 'wants to be alone'.

Even though the statistics reveal that older people are less likely to be victims of crime or personal violence than those of any other age group, there is a very real perception among older people that they are at risk. Not surprisingly, there was a considerable discussion at the consultations about how to improve safety and security for older people, and a number of practical suggestions were made. Overall, participants at the consultations recognised that the level of crime for older people was comparatively low, however they strongly believed that the worry about safety was something which could very much inhibit the lifestyle of older people and prevent them from undertaking activities that they enjoy."

The Minister's initiatives, although commendable, should be extended by increasing funding to the HOME Assist/Secure scheme to ensure that all qualifying senior citizens are provided with increased security. The elderly living in private homes should be afforded the same degree of protection.

Although any increase in funding for the security of public housing, such as security screens being fitted to windows and doors accessible from walkways, trees or meter boxes, is commendable, the Government should also extend such security provision to those in private homes who qualify under the HOME Assist/Secure program. People living in private residences should be afforded the same degree of protection and should not be disadvantaged. I call on the Minister to extend the HOME Assist/Secure program to achieve just that.
