



Speech by

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Hansard 10 March 1999

CHILD PROTECTION BILL

Mr PAFF (Ipswich West—ONP) (3.45 p.m.): The Child Protection Bill is an emotive subject when one considers the protection of children, and that is of the utmost importance. We consider the family unit to be the best place for a child. Parental discipline is necessary to the wellbeing of children. People who abuse children are animals and deserve nothing less than the harshest of punishment, especially when that animal is the child's parent. Sadly, that is often the case. What we must be careful of is involuntarily protecting the abuser when the aim is the opposite. We must also be careful that we do not remove children from good family environments when the aim is to remove children from harmful environments.

The Bill before us certainly appears to allow the relevant authorities more than enough power to enter premises, remove children and other items and obtain orders for the assessment of children. But does it allow too much power? What if the alleged crime of the parents is that they have smacked their child for misbehaving? Is this action covered within the definitions of the Bill?

Under clause 9(1) the Bill defines "harm" as being any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. Who determines what is harm of a significant nature to the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing? I would suggest that such a definition is far too ambiguous. Does it include normal parental discipline?

There is much ambiguity in this Bill. In typical style, it is filled with some warm and fuzzy statements that are open to discretionary definition or are unquantifiable. The Bill embraces the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child—another document full of warm and fuzzy statements with little realistic substance. The convention was an agreement that is another example of the ridiculous issuing of rights without responsibilities. It was an agreement which was developed by some unelected delegate in some other country.

I have great concern also with the provisions for protecting the identity of the child under clause 183(2). This provision will also ensure the protection of the identity of the child's abuser or abusers. Yes, there are children who will be exposed to further harm should the case be spread across television screens and newspapers, but there are also situations where such publication can help the child and the community.

I use the example of Matthew Nemet, a three-year-old boy who was tortured by his mother and her de facto husband in 1997. This little boy was seen on television screens and on the front pages of newspapers for days after the events occurred. The boy's father was flooded with offers of community support. He received offers of toys and other aids to help Matthew get over the horrific abuse he suffered. This generosity helped the father as well. The community was obviously very touched by pictures of Matthew and knowledge of the abuse he suffered. It not only moved many people to act in a kind and generous way but I am sure it made them re-evaluate the importance of the children in their lives and appreciate them a little more.

The publicity allowed Matthew's mother and her de facto to be seen by all for the vile creatures they are for committing such acts. They were identified to the public, and I am sure the community will not forget their actions for some time to come. If this legislation had been in place at the time those positive effects upon the community and upon Matthew and his family would never have occurred. The public would not have seen examples of such abuse and hence would never have been moved to action by them.

I am not suggesting that all children should be identified, but should there be a blanket ban on the public knowing of any child abuse situation? Why not leave the situation up to the child or the child's remaining family or guardian? Sometimes good things can come out of tragedies, especially if tragedies can help others. Just as we do not have the right to reveal the identities of all child abuse victims, we do not have the right to stop them or their families from doing so should they so choose.

I reiterate that One Nation's absolute belief is in the protection of children. I also reiterate our concern for a balance to be found between protecting children and bureaucracy intruding into people's lives and reducing their rights. Our belief is that it is Australians who should be inputting into the laws of this country, not bureaucratic delegates who make agreements that most Australians do not even know about. The concerns that I have mentioned are small elements of the Bill, but have large ramifications and I am concerned that these issues remain unaddressed.
