



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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JUSTICES OF THE PEACE TRAINING COURSES

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (11.09 p.m.): Funding for justices of the peace training courses at TAFE colleges is normally allocated after negotiations between the Departments of Training and Industrial Relations and Justice and Attorney-General. It is extremely disappointing and indeed of grave concern that the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE has now totally shut down justices of the peace training programs due to unavailability of funding in 1999. This has recently been brought to my attention by Dr Keith Tronc, who is not only a highly respected lecturer at various institutes of TAFE which have offered training courses for justices of the peace but also the original architect of the JP reform process and the author of all the official training manuals.

I should not have to stress to Government the importance of justices of the peace to community structures in this State. Legal requirements are such that all Government departments, especially the Queensland Police Service, as well as almost every citizen will at some time or another require the services of properly qualified justices of the peace.

Although there are several other justices of the peace in the Burleigh Heads CBD, my electorate office alone handles up to 10 or more requests for JP services almost every day of the week. Reforms to the justices of the peace system have been welcome and the extension of the moratorium training period to June 2000 was set in place to ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity of upgrading to Justice of the Peace (Qualified), of qualifying as a new Justice of the Peace (Qualified) or of becoming a Justice of the Peace (Magistrates Court).

Although Justice of the Peace (Qualified) can be achieved by studying the manual and sitting the examination, I strongly urge all such candidates who come before me to undertake the TAFE training course, and most of them do so. They are uniformly high in their praise of these courses and find them extremely beneficial. There can be no doubt that the training courses play an important and integral part in improving the quality of justices of the peace, which was the reason that the reforms to which I have referred were initially put in place.

As a member who has nominated many constituents for appointment as justices of the peace and who communicates regularly with all justices and commissioners for declarations in my electorate, I am very sensitive to the importance of this vast body of community-minded citizens who offer their services in a voluntary capacity.

I am aware that the Queensland Law Reform Commission has made certain comments on the future role of justices of the peace and has raised certain questions about the powers of that office, but what would replace the system of justices of the peace? As far as I know, there are no plans to establish some other system and no plans to replace the role played by justices of the peace in the justice system of this State. Until some other methods are devised, justices of the peace will continue to be a necessary part of the justice system in this State, and training courses for existing and intending justices will continue to be a necessary part of the justice system in this State.

I deplore funding cutbacks which will preclude existing and future justices from acquiring the necessary training if the training courses are abandoned. Two years ago Dr Keith Tronc warned that south-east Queensland would be greatly affected by funding cutbacks—including the Gold Coast, South Bank and Brisbane Institutes of TAFE. The shutdown is now happening on the Gold Coast, with no courses being offered at the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE in 1999 because no funding is available.

I understand that in 1995 some 5,875 places were made available in TAFE colleges as part of the State training profile allocation, and 3,202 places were taken up by people seeking JP training. Similar figures were seen in 1996. In the following year, 2,908 places were offered in 11 TAFE colleges.

I have made the strongest possible representations to the Minister for Training and Industrial Relations and to the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General that funding immediately be restored to enable justices of the peace training courses to continue at those institutes of TAFE, particularly the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE, where they have been offered in the past. Justices of the peace play such an important and voluntary role in our justice system that they deserve all the support, assistance and training back-up Government can provide.
