



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

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CHILD CARE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (3.02 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Child Care Amendment Bill, which amends the Child Care Act of 1991. It takes into its area of responsibility the licensing of care facilities and day-care facilities for children. The number of children being cared for in child care or early education programs has certainly soared over the past few decades primarily driven by an increase in the number of women who have gone back to the work force and changes that have developed within the family structure. Child care is no longer an experience for just a few children. In this present day and age it certainly has become the norm.

Gone are the days when the average Australian family had a mum at home looking after the kids while dad was at work. More and more mothers are being forced to return to work in order to meet financial commitments and to make ends meet. We certainly have an accelerating society and we are seeing more and more that children are being raised outside the family home—quite often more than they are being raised inside the home. Another phenomenon that is raising its head is the DINKS—double income, no kids—which is a phenomenon that is probably going to increase more and more as time goes on. That should be a warning for all Governments about where our policies are tending to push families.

Consequently, most parents rely on child care as part of their daily lives. It plays a significant role in supporting parents who participate in the work force and also who partake in other activities such as further education and training. Some parents also call on child-care services so they can attend to appointments, go shopping or for other personal reasons. In a majority of circumstances, the extended family of the couple, such as parents and grandparents, who used to provide child care so the couple could take care of some of those things is affected by the same problems that we face as parents ourselves.

Just as child care is becoming the norm for children, struggling to secure a child-care arrangement is becoming the norm for parents. Parents face an array of choices: friends, as I said, relatives and child-care programs operated either privately or publicly and staffed by individuals with varying degrees of training and experience. Parents must weigh the considerations of quality, convenience, availability and affordability while worrying about whether they have made the right decision. Reliability and having reliable and quality care is exceptionally important because young children are dependent on care givers to fulfil the basic need to keep them from harm.

Preschoolers are also in the midst of forming personalities, developing cognitively and learning social skills. Child-care providers can and do have a major impact on these processes and certainly on their outcomes. The care and the education children receive regularly from individuals other than their parents have attracted the attention of policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the past few years. The percentage of children receiving such care and education has grown to the point at which most children now receive some type of non-parental care and education prior to starting the first grade.

The Bill before the House seeks to address home-based care, or backyard care, and establishes minimum safeguards and guidelines for persons engaging in home-based care. The Bill has been introduced to ensure that children participating in home-based care are both protected and in a safe environment. This is achieved by setting minimum standards that independent home-based carers must meet which are comparable with the standards across all child-care facilities. I certainly take

on board what the member for Indooroopilly said about the affordability aspects of what parents have to do to try to meet that criteria and how a lot of those backyard operators, so to speak, who provide this care provide it so that there is affordable care available to those parents who are having trouble meeting that need and yet who are both forced to be out there in the workplace.

Under this amendment Bill carers can care for only six children under the age of 12, and out of the six only four children may be under the age of six years. If the carer has children, they are included in the number permitted and that, therefore, provides an appropriate number of children to be cared for in home-based care. Secondly, carers and any family members residing at the carer's premises must not have a criminal history. As the department is authorised to obtain criminal history information about convictions and charges of all applicants, this will ensure the suitability of independent home-based carers. In addition, applicants must be at least 18 years of age. Finally, carers must take out and maintain public liability insurance of \$5m. I think this aspect will certainly prohibit a lot of people who are intending to go in there and try to make a quick buck out of something that should be made safe.

We will certainly be looking over the amendments that were foreshadowed by the member for Indooroopilly, the shadow Minister for Families, as to what we intend to do with those later in the Committee stage of this Bill. But at this point, the City Country Alliance is satisfied with the standards proposed by this amendment Bill and accordingly support the amendments to the Child Care Act of 1991 that were introduced by the Minister.
