



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Homelessness

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (9.58 a.m.), by leave: The problem of homelessness within our communities is a difficult and complex one. It is an issue that has been with us in one form or another for many years, but the faces of our homeless are changing. More young people are now sleeping in the parks and under bridges. Young women may, for a variety of reasons, find themselves without a place to sleep.

It is an issue confronting all levels of government, and those who are serious about trying to resolve this issue know that there are no instant solutions. We know that strategies are needed to tackle the multiple factors that contribute to homelessness. We know that to effectively deal with youth homelessness we also need to deal with domestic and family violence, a lack of affordable accommodation, unemployment, health issues and drug and alcohol abuse.

We are working closely with community organisations to try to identify the best solutions for local problems. We are doing so because this government believes that building the safety nets for our young people is a significant investment in our future. So I was a little surprised to hear the Federal Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Vanstone, accuse the Queensland government of abandoning the homeless. The reverse is true.

We have not abandoned the homeless. It is the federal government that for years has refused to address the issue of chronic underfunding of the supported accommodation sector. It is the federal government that refuses to acknowledge that Queensland is still receiving only 16.6 per cent of the national contribution to SAAP, even though we are 18.5 per cent of the population. This shortfall translates to \$2.9 million of underfunding to Queensland each year.

So Queensland has met its obligations. In fact, it allocated additional funding, yet to be matched by the federal government, to help services with penalty costs associated with the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Supported Housing Award. We are funding CASH, while the Commonwealth has a shortfall of \$900,000. Queensland did get a \$2.1789 million increase in Commonwealth funding, available from 1 July 2001, but this increase was not out of generosity; it was a one-off funding boost as part of the agreement for the introduction of the GST. Everything else we have matched in recent years.

The fact of the matter is that Australian Bureau of Statistics census data of 1996 gives Queensland 24 per cent, or 25,649, of the homeless people in Australia. That places us second only to the Northern Territory. It is something the federal government needs to clearly understand.

The House should also be aware that following the federal budget I wrote to Senator Vanstone seeking assurances from her that the federal government was not welshing on the agreed funding deal with the states for Australians with disabilities. It is an assurance that all state governments are keen to get, because otherwise the states and territories face a funding shortfall of \$248.9 million. That is money that the federal government promised but is not shown in the federal budget. For Queensland it would mean a shortfall of \$18.3 million.

I can assure the House that in this coming budget the Beattie government is meeting its commitments to Queenslanders with a disability. However, if the Commonwealth does not change its

decision to welsh on its agreement, then many of the states, Queensland included, will have to consider what services to reduce.

I urge Senator Vanstone to ensure that Queensland receives its proper share of funding so that we can put in place the best programs to help some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community.
