



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 1 August 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

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: Tomorrow and Friday I will be attending a meeting of state, territory and federal Community Services Ministers, including ministers responsible for disability services, in Adelaide. My aim over the two days will be to fight for a fairer share of funding for Queenslanders. This is funding that helps hold families and communities together and responds to the demands of a caring and humane society. This is funding that supports the homeless, helps protect women and children fleeing domestic violence, and gives greater dignity and independence to people with disabilities.

One of my top priorities will be arguing for a more equitable slice of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. This program—or SAAP as it is known—is a joint Commonwealth-state funded program assisting people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help disadvantaged people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance.

SAAP is underpinned by the SAAP Act 1994, a multilateral memorandum of understanding between the Commonwealth, the states and the territories, and a bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and each state and territory. For the record there are 190 SAAP funded services in Queensland.

The bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Queensland was signed in October 2000 and that agreement will determine ongoing Commonwealth/state funding of SAAP IV until 2005. We direct the funds to where they are most needed. For instance, \$1.29 million went to address viability issues in the existing SAAP service system in January 2001, and a further \$880,000 of the growth funds was allocated to new and enhanced services in Brisbane, Caboolture, Sunshine Coast, Hervey Bay and Townsville.

In spite of these positive achievements, Commonwealth SAAP funding for Queensland lags behind our population growth. As it stands, Queensland receives 16.6 per cent of Commonwealth funding, yet we are home to 18.5 per cent of the nation's population. This equates to a shortfall of \$2.916 million in Commonwealth funding. This shortfall in Commonwealth funding is severely restricting Queensland's capacity to address the issue of homelessness, which, in relation to other states, is high in Queensland. In fact, according to an ABS report published in 1999, Queensland has 24 per cent of the nation's homelessness. Clearly this is a very important issue for some of our state's most vulnerable people.

Another concern is the federal government's arrogant refusal to answer a simple question about whether or not it will turn its back on people with a disability. More than two months ago I wrote to the federal Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Amanda Vanstone, requesting an assurance that she would honour a deal that her government made last year. This deal would ensure that people with a disability receive ongoing funding under the Commonwealth/state disability agreement after the existing agreement expires on 30 June next year. I have said in this place before that either the federal coalition is looking at a budget blow-out of almost a quarter of a billion dollars over three years, or it plans to betray Australians with disabilities and their families. I will again be asking Senator Vanstone for an answer. Her silence for the past two months makes me fear that betrayal is on

the cards and that the Commonwealth plans to deprive Queenslanders of \$54.9 million over three years.

The disability services sector is also worried. Yesterday I received a letter from the Unmet Needs Campaign encouraging me to seek a reaffirmation of the funding commitment from the federal government. The Australian Cerebral Palsy Association has issued a press release warning that the shortfall in the coalition's forward estimates—

... is equivalent to 1800 people with severe and profound disabilities being deprived of the accommodation support they currently receive and depend on.

If realised, they and their families would be plunged into crisis.

These are the sentiments of a sector that will not tolerate broken promises from a mean and tricky coalition government. They echo the message that I will be sending Senator Vanstone in Adelaide this week. Queensland expects its fair share of Commonwealth government funding. We will not allow John Howard and Amanda Vanstone to turn their backs on Queenslanders who are most in need.
