



Speech by

**Hon. JUDY SPENCE**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT**

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Hansard 11 September 2001

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Forde Implementation Monitoring Committee**

**Hon. J. C. SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.06 a.m.), by leave: In 1999 Leneen Forde and her fellow commissioners delivered the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland report—the Forde report. It was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 8 June 1999. The report outlined 42 recommendations concerning contemporary child protection, youth justice, including youth detention, the Commission for Children and Young People, formerly known as the Children's Commission, and issues relating to former residents of institutions. The government committed itself to responding to the report's 42 recommendations. There were no illusions about the significance of the task ahead. There were no illusions that it would require a significant investment of time and financial resources to address the decades of neglect by successive governments. But the report highlighted a shameful legacy that we were determined to remedy.

The government appointed the independent Forde Implementation Monitoring Committee, chaired by Professor Ian O'Connor, to review the government's progress. The monitoring committee's terms of reference were, for a period of two years, to:

collect, monitor and analyse information from government and relevant stakeholders concerning progress in the implementation of the Forde inquiry recommendations; and

report annually to parliament, through the Minister for Families, concerning progress in the implementation of the Forde inquiry recommendations.

The monitoring committee's first report was tabled in parliament in September 2000 and provided an interim assessment of the implementation of the Forde inquiry recommendations. Today I am pleased to table the committee's final report together with the government's progress report.

The committee's report is a combination of a detailed review of the progress made and suggestions where the government's response could be enhanced. We are grateful to the committee for its valuable work. In that time significant progress has been made and more is required to be done. I have also tabled the government's progress report. The report also takes into account the comments of the monitoring committee and provides the government's response to issues of significance raised by the committee.

The government has invested \$78.2 million in the past three budgets to implement the recommendations of the inquiry. There remains considerably more work to do in the area of child protection and issues relating to former residents. The government reaffirms its commitment to continued improvement in all these areas. The progress is outlined in detail in this report.

The monitoring committee has commented extensively on the government's progress. It has noted that progress has been made in many areas, including youth justice and the Commission for Children and Young People, and has raised issues where continued work will be required. The committee's views and advice is an invaluable resource that will be an important reference to assist in future planning and review.

With the benefit of experience and new information, the monitoring committee also made suggestions for enhancements to the government's response. Given that these are proposed extensions to the original response, they are dealt with separately. The monitoring committee has suggested that the government consider amendments to the Freedom of Information Act 1992 to allow

access by former residents of institutions to information relating to deceased relatives. The matter is being referred to the Legal and Administrative Law Review Committee for inclusion in its current review of the Freedom of Information Act. The committee is due to report to the government at the end of this year.

The monitoring committee has expressed the opinion that the complaint power of the commission should be broadened to include services delivered to and in relation to children across other government departments. In its last report, the committee recommended that the commission be required by law to produce an annual report on the circumstances of children in Queensland—'The state of our children report'. Although the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000 does not obligate the commission to produce a 'State of our children report', the commission is empowered to do so under its broad functions.

In addition, the committee has suggested that the Community Visitors Scheme is extended to ensure the protection of the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people accommodated in:

- foster care, boarding houses, including student hostels for children from remote communities;
- certain subsidised unsupported accommodation for young people under funding provided by the Department of Housing; and
- domestic violence shelters.

The government believes that there is merit in these suggestions. The Department of Families and the commission, in consultation with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, will jointly examine these issues and develop options for consideration by cabinet.

The monitoring committee has suggested that a range of activities currently carried out by the Department of Families in relation to the victims of historical abuse be transferred to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet under a new body referred to as the council for restoration and healing. The government is of the view that such an arrangement would have only symbolic value at best. Line agencies that have experience with the relevant issues and the operational supports to implement policy will produce better outcomes. The Department of Families will retain responsibility for the above activities. The department will, however, consider the concerns raised by the committee and identify options for improvement.

In relation to improved access to personal information, the department will undertake discussions with other government agencies, such as State Archives, to assume responsibility as a central repository for personal histories. The idea of priority access to state government services for former residents will also be considered in consultation with other government agencies and former residents.

The monitoring committee recommended that the government undertake an investigation into the issue of compensation to victims of institutional abuse. It particularly referred to the compensation processes adopted in Canada. The government considered the issue of compensation in depth when first recommended by the Forde inquiry in 1999. That position remains unchanged.

A fundamental principle then, as now, was the need to strike a balance between repairing the past and securing the future. The government established the Forde Foundation. This was modelled on the British Child Migrant Trust, established by the UK Blair government. The government established the foundation with an initial allocation of \$1 million and enhanced it in this year's budget by an additional \$1 million. The government will continue to support the foundation's efforts to raise donations from the churches and the business sector.

In addition to supporting former residents in the healing process, the government will continue to develop community-based counselling, support and advocacy services. A recent initiative is the establishment of a peer-based support service that will build upon the informal supports developed by former residents. Applications for grants have been invited from community agencies interested in providing this service and it is anticipated that the service will commence later this year.

The committee has proposed that, with its task over, ongoing responsibility for monitoring the government's implementation of the Forde inquiry's recommendations be assumed by the Commission for Children and Young People. The government agrees that government should be kept informed about progress and any relevant issues. As a number of recommendations relate to the commission as well as the Department of Families, it is considered appropriate that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet develop a process for reporting and coordinate an annual report to cabinet.

A number of ex-residents of Queensland institutions are in the gallery today. They have followed our progress of the Forde inquiry recommendations over the past two years and, undoubtedly, will continue to do so in the future. I extend my thanks to them for their commitment in ensuring that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in this state. Again, I thank the monitoring committee for their conscientious attention to this task over the past two years.