



Speech by

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms PHILLIPS (Thuringowa—ALP) (11.39 a.m.): I rise to applaud the Minister for Families, Judy Spence, and her department on the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill, which expands the existing legislation to cover abuse between family members, abuse of older people and people with disabilities by their informal carers, and abuse in dating relationships.

During the consultation period on this bill I spoke to many women. Some of these women, who represent women's shelters, legal services and women's health organisations, told me that they believed the gendered nature of violence could be obscured by changing the act to include violence in all relationships. They believed that spousal violence should stand out clearly. They considered that changes could in fact undermine the hard-won gains for women and even weaken women's safety. They did not wish to deny the very real problem of other violence occurring in relationships—be it elder abuse, child-parent violence, or violence in same sex relationships—but they were very keen to ensure that spousal violence, usually perpetrated by a man on a woman, is not hidden after years of action and to bring it to the forefront of community awareness.

I referred these concerns to the minister and am happy to report that I was more than satisfied with her response. The minister pointed out that the bill does not dilute the core provisions of the act to provide a civil legislative protection against violence between one or more persons. Rather, it expands on and develops those provisions. The minister said that during the consultation period it became clear that many of the provisions for responding to spousal and non-spousal domestic violence were the same. So the development of two separate pieces of legislation or two parts within one act would have involved unnecessary duplication.

The most substantial consideration for not drafting a separate act to cover non-spousal relationships was that the legislation had to be workable for both government and community services. It is critical to this bill and to this government's policy that the most vulnerable people actually receive the services they require. The amendment also sends an important policy message that everyone should be safe in their homes and that violence in domestic relationships, be they spousal or non-spousal, is unacceptable.

As a social worker for many years before entering parliament, I worked with many people who were abused in family, care or personal relationships. Then, as I do now, I spoke out deploring violence in any form perpetrated against anyone in the community. This bill very much reinforces my own professional practice and philosophy. Perhaps once the group of victims of domestic violence is extended beyond defenceless women the community at large will cease to express the attitude that these violent attacks that occur in the home are 'just another domestic'.

Today is International Women's Day. Unfortunately I am here in the parliament and unable to be in my electorate, celebrating with other women there. I was honoured to be asked to attend one of my local high schools during the week, Northern Beaches High, to speak at their International Women's Day breakfast for women staff and senior students, which they held on Tuesday so I could attend. I thank the principal, Gayle Pritchard, for inviting me to be at that occasion.

International Women's Day is a United Nations commemorative day that is a designated national holiday in many countries around the world. We all know what it is, but why do we celebrate it? It is a day when women on all continents come together to remember their struggle for equality, justice,

peace and development, and to remember the work that has been done by women to achieve the lifestyle we now enjoy.

International Women's Day began in 1910, and the first Australian rally took place on 25 March 1928 in Sydney. The question is: why have women all over the world continued to celebrate once a year for so long? The answer is that celebrating helps us remember three important things: firstly, that the world has not always been fair to women; secondly, that some parts of it still are not; and, finally, that the only way to make it better is to keep fighting for what is right.

It has been a long hard road, even here in Australia, but by remembering and honouring the women who have gone before us we can ensure that we never have to go back to the bad times. Although the first Queensland parliament sat in May 1860, women were not able to vote until 1905, and it was not until May 1929 that a woman was first elected as a member of this parliament. That woman was Irene Longman, an activist in a number of women's organisations. She stood against the sitting member, A. W. Wright, who, when asked how his campaign was going, replied, 'Well, you know, I am only being opposed by a woman.' Famous last words! Irene served only one term in parliament and, sadly enough, it was another 30 years before another woman was elected as a member of this parliament. In 1966, Ellen Violet Jordan of the Labor Party became the second woman elected to state parliament and the first female MP to serve for more than one term. Like her predecessor, Vi spoke out strongly about rights for women and children, and held her head high despite much criticism against her sex.

So what changed it all? How did it happen that 37 per cent of the Legislative Assembly are female members and all women in Australia are able to enjoy today's freedoms and reforms? The answer begins in part with some very dissatisfied women in the late 19th century. The suffragettes started a campaign to acquire the right to vote, and, therefore, the right to change laws that tied women to a few life choices. In Queensland, one of the founders of the suffragette movement was a woman called Emma Miller, who was involved in the Queensland union movement. She campaigned tirelessly for equal pay and opportunity for women. She was one of the reasons that Australian women became the first in the world to vote in a national election in 1902.

The determination of Queensland women helped pass the laws that allow women today the freedom to decide their own futures, including equal pay and equality at law. As legislative changes were made, society's attitudes began to change, too, and more women became involved in the running of their states and country. Because of these women we are able to decide for ourselves how we want to live our lives. Women have the right to go to school, which they did not have 150 years ago. We have the right to gather together in groups to discuss and make changes to the world. We have the right to speak for ourselves and the right to share in the resources. That is why we celebrate International Women's Day—to remind us of just that and to celebrate women who are still meeting this challenge even today.

I take this opportunity on International Women's Day to applaud the work being done by some wonderful women in the Townsville-Thuringowa area who are providing outstanding women's services. I cannot mention them all in the time allotted to me today. In selecting a few, I do not wish to imply any less praise of and support for the ones not included.

The North Queensland Combined Women's Services brings together three programs within the one service, with a service and combined roles unique in Queensland and probably Australia. They operate from two adjacent properties, with one house acting as the client contact centre and the other filling their counselling and group requirements. Across the three programs they run a number of groups, including those specifically for older women, for intellectually disabled women and for young lesbians. As well as their services with a focus on violence intervention they also provide counselling and groups with a focus on violence prevention, such as self-esteem, communication skills and relaxation.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program provides counselling for women escaping domestic violence and generalist counselling and also provides a referral to Sera's Women's Shelter, which responds to sexual assault crisis calls and provides emergency support. The Sexual Assault Service, funded by Queensland Health, provides counselling for women who are survivors of sexual abuse, regardless of when that abuse was experienced. Thus their counsellors will be dealing with issues from incest to violent rape.

The Women's Community Health Program, also funded by Queensland Health, provides counselling and health promotion for women on issues such as healthy ageing, pregnancy, pregnancy termination, sexuality and depression. Their workers are confronted daily by distressed women with multiple and complex issues, including drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, mental illnesses, suicide, unwanted pregnancies, domestic and sexual violence, and insufficient basic means to support their families. The staff at that service are ably led by Morgan King and include Ann Surtees, Penny Jansen, Janet King, Carol Olsen Bull, Claire Carey, Belinda McIlroy, Thao Dang, Ruth Oldfield, Bernadette McKenna, Rose Morton and Karen Cameron.

The North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service provides direct services, counselling and support to people who are victims of domestic violence. It also provides assistance to victims with taking out protection orders and helps these people through the court process. Its programs also include services for perpetrators through its Stopping Violence group program. One of the most important roles it plays is raising awareness of the issue of domestic violence in the community and assisting the system to respond quickly. It networks closely with the courts, police and other service providers and provides specialist domestic violence training to professional staff and members of the community. Staff members include Pauline Woodbridge, who is the manager, together with John, Jo, Ines, Catherine and Shirley, who is an indigenous worker for rural and remote areas outside the Townsville region.

The North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service also runs a part-time program now known as AARDVARC—Acknowledgment and Recognition of Domestic Violence and Real Change. It is a program for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence. It reflects not so much therapy but a journey of redeveloping trust in a safe and creative environment. It allows the child or young person to set their own pace throughout their healing process. It is a gentle program and often provides the first chance for a child to talk and express their feelings and experience of violence. The counsellors do this through creative play and activities that encourage expression of feelings. AARDVARC also involves the parent or carer and is a chance for them, too, to talk about issues of concern for them and their children. A parent's experience and insight is vital to AARDVARC. The committed workers of this program are Jennynne Dillan and Joanne Baker. Other services with equally wonderful staff include the Maria House shelter, Iona, which is a refuge for young women, and Sera, the shelter I referred to earlier.

On this International Women's Day, I wish that I could be in north Queensland to personally tell all of these women that I respect and applaud their dedication and commitment. Finally, I congratulate Dr Betty McLellan and her team of very hardworking volunteers who are preparing the Townsville International Women's Conference. This conference has the motto of Poverty, Violence and Women's Rights—Setting a Global Agenda and will be held in Townsville from 3 to 7 July this year. This international conference is for all who care passionately about improving women's positions in the world, who demand justice and full human rights for women everywhere and who believe that a feminist analysis is essential to defining a fairer globalised world. Speakers are already confirmed from almost a dozen countries and nominations have come from over 100 countries. In recognising the work all of these groups and individual women are doing to address the issues of violence in domestic settings, I commend the bill to the House.