



Speech by

**BONNY BARRY**

**MEMBER FOR ASPLEY**

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### **CHILD CARE BILL**

**Ms BARRY** (Aspley—ALP) (12.51 p.m.): I rise to support the Child Care Bill 2002. The choice a parent or guardian makes in relation to who will look after their children when they go to either work, study or participate in other community or training opportunities is, quite frankly, one of the most important choices that they will ever make. Being able to feel confident that your child is in a safe, emotionally secure environment, and an environment that is conducive to a mix of both learning and play, is paramount.

The range of child care services that a parent can access during a child's life changes over time. My own experience as a parent was to access a whole range of child care services: family day care when the children were babies and toddlers, kindergarten, preschool and long-term day centres when they were preschoolers, and before and after school care when school started. May I say that some of mine are still in after school care.

The experience that I have had as a parent—and I know other members would have this experience—is echoed by many members of our community. There is a great desire for flexibility of the service to meet the needs of working parents, and in particular parents who may be shiftworkers. But there is also a need for rules and laws which give confidence about the quality of care. These are the major objectives, I believe, in any parent's mind.

The Child Care Bill 2002 aims to regulate the provision of child care services in Queensland to give confidence to parents and guardians. It does so by the use of a regulatory tiered approach in relation to appropriate standards for various child care sectors. The bill defines what is a child-care centre. It sets out requirements for staffing numbers in relation to the number of children being cared for, the hours of care and the age of the children in care, as well as the setting of the service. A key feature of the bill is to include the regulation of school-age care programs. In the electorate of Aspley we have very large school programs. Up to 70 children can be accommodated in schools after hours. They do lots of activities in very busy environments in the city. The bill also introduces minimum qualifications for staff, and I would like to talk about that in a little more detail later.

The objects of the bill are to protect and promote the best interests of children receiving care, and it does so in a threefold way, namely by licensing systems, by establishing regulation for the conduct of a service and by setting standards for service provision. The bill is underpinned by principles that care should be conducted in a manner where the child's care is paramount, where parents are supported in the development and care of their children and where child care occurs in an environment that involves both parents and the community.

Licensing occurs for both centre based services and home based services. May I say that the licensing for centre based care is for one centre only. That ensures that individual centres are able to be better scrutinised rather than having a whole series of centres. Home based services are licensed for one or more homes. That is a practical approach, particularly in relation to family day care programs.

Licences have effect for no longer than three years. Part of the licensing program requires the CEO to be satisfied that the service complies with the Commission for Children and Young People's Act 2000 in relation to the employment of staff. It also ensures the suitability of premises for child care. The culturally specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are considered in the bill.

The bill confers powers to suspend or revoke a licence, with urgent suspension of a licence if it is indicated. This provides for action to be taken to protect children and also to protect the reputation of quality child care services from rogue operators remaining in the industry. The bill moves to ensure minimum standards for carers and is specific in relation to the numbers and definition of the carers engaged. The move towards ensuring that carers have suitable training is one that is consistent with many childcare workers in Aspley's own professional education trends. Many workers in child care services in my electorate have, over the years, embraced the need to seek further qualifications and training—training that improves the outcomes for child care and enhances the professional images and outcomes of childcare workers. This is an indication of the commitment of quality childcare workers, and I congratulate them on their endeavours.

The bill also includes responsibility for a quality assurance process to be developed by a service. It does so through the requirement for services to have up-to-date written policies that are available to parents and guardians. It is a responsible way to achieve consistent quality care across the child care sector.

The Child Care Bill 2002 is very significant legislation. The Child Care Act 1991 was, at the time, benchmark legislation, and the review and introduction of this bill has come about because the Beattie government is committed to ever improving child care services. This bill is a result of a comprehensive review of the current regulatory framework and standards in child care. It is debated here today after extensive consultation. I know that it was wide-ranging consultation which required much input from many groups with information about many aspects of child care service providers.

May I say that in my previous life—which I can hardly remember now—I was a professional officer in aged care for the Nurses Union. That particular job gave me great insight into the responsibility that government has to ensure quality care for vulnerable members of our society. I commend the minister for her commitment to children in care. I know that not all the interests and desires of service providers are agreed to in this bill, and indeed that not all Labor desires and interests are agreed to. However, the outcome is balanced. It is a balance that ensures that the best interests of children are provided for in terms of quality, safety and efficiency. The bill achieves that balance and I congratulate the minister on that.

Over 6,000 children live in the electorate of Aspley. There are excellent after school services, long day care services and home based services looking after them. I thank the Aspley service providers, childcare workers, parents and community groups who have contributed to the consultations connected with the review of the legislation and the subsequent bill before the House.

I would like to thank the minister, her hardworking committee and her staff for their efforts in relation to this bill. At the end of the day, I cast my parent eye over this bill as well as my legislator analysis, and the parent in me said, 'Well done and congratulations.' I know that the outcome for children will be welcomed by my fellow parents. I commend the bill to the House.