



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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RESIDENTIAL SERVICES [ACCREDITATION] BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (11.29 a.m.): This bill will forge new standards in what has been a very neglected area of the accommodation sector. It seeks to protect the most vulnerable and sometimes most marginal members of our community. We owe our aged community members a great debt of gratitude for the freedom we enjoy in this country and the kind of society that Australia has become. Many have made remarkable contributions to our communities, raised their families and been hard working, and they thoroughly deserve to live out their years in a safe, caring environment in which all their basic needs are met and they are free from exploitation, fear or intimidation.

I must admit that there have been times when I have wished that my area was far older and had a number of old guesthouses. When the Logan City area, then part of Albert shire, began its rapid expansion, we had reached the era of the small three-bedroom house. Thus, single people looking for accommodation in my area can have difficulty finding it. Yes, there are many units, but they require a bond and may also not give people the level of security and support services they require.

Many of the people who seek to live in hostels and boarding houses or rental facilities for the aged may have a physical or mental disability, they may be aged without family support or they may simply be seeking the additional security offered. They may require meals and their rooms serviced as well as personal care services. I recall many years ago I assisted a friend in removing an elderly lady from a boarding house for the aged. The memory of that very sad experience lives with me very vividly. The elderly residents sat on a chair or lay on their beds in dark, dank rooms—no sunshine, few staff, inadequate meals. When we sought to rescue this lady, her belongings were thrown at us in a tirade of abuse. As a 22-year-old, that was a frightening experience for me.

Over the years I have witnessed people who may have been happily married, financially secure, enjoying an independent life, and then, through an accident or catastrophic event—sometimes through mental illness or drug or alcohol abuse—they have slipped away into a realm of existence which could almost be described as the twilight zone. Life can deal cruel blows to some individuals, and should they not have the love, tolerance and support of family members, they may end up in a very dreadful circumstance.

This legislation first of all deals with registration, where such important issues as fire safety and building compliance are addressed and then criminal history checks of operators carried out. Following registration, the accreditation process takes place. I appreciate the need for a time frame to be registered and granted accreditation, as many of these establishments may fall short in a number of areas. The three levels of accreditation cover the broad range of services from simple residential to residential with food services and, finally, the higher level, where personal care is required.

In recent years, a number of aged residential facilities have been built in or near my electorate. My predecessor, Mike Kaiser, was very active in responding to complaints to his office by aged residents. I know that he will welcome these initiatives. I note that the third level of accreditation seeks to meet individual needs, protect their interests and enhance their quality of life. I like the word 'enhance' for it encourages a positive effort to enrich and bring greater quality of life to the residents—a happy social life, perhaps visits for shopping, bus outings and the like. Why should our elderly citizens expect anything but respect and care in their sunset years? The same applies to people with disabilities and special needs. They too deserve our care.

I offer my support for this bill, which has been prepared with due attention to those in this sector who are well meaning but may need time to comply. For those who do not and will not comply, there may need to be some weeding out. For our society to claim to be civilised and caring, these residents must receive our protection. I thank the minister and her staff for this very worthy legislation and commend the bill to the House.
