



Speech by

**DIANNE REILLY**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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Hansard 3 September 2002

**DRUG REHABILITATION [NORTH QUEENSLAND COURT DIVERSION INITIATIVE]  
AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs REILLY** (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (4.05 p.m.): I am pleased to rise today to support the Drug Rehabilitation (North Queensland Court Diversion Initiative) Amendment Bill 2002. As we have already heard this afternoon, this bill will effectively allow the extension of the existing trial of drug courts currently operating in Southport, Beenleigh and Ipswich to Cairns and Townsville. The trials are currently being reviewed to determine whether they should become a permanent part of Queensland's judicial system. I fully believe that they should. I have long been an advocate of diversionary programs and am looking into a number of other types of diversionary programs that may work within our criminal justice system. I will be considering and researching those programs over coming months.

I believe that criminal justice is at its most sophisticated, its most humane and its most successful when it aims to keep people out of jail. This is the principle that applies to no person more, I believe, than the non-violent property offender who is driven, usually completely out of character, to commit a crime for no other reason than to maintain a habit over which they have little or no control.

Addiction is an illness. It makes people sick physically and mentally and it rips them from their family, tears them from their friends and destroys not only their own life but also the lives of those around them. Drug addicts need hospital beds and medical treatment. They need community support and they need friends in the community. Most of them do not need jail.

I am very pleased to hear that the National Party opposition will support this legislation. It is so obviously something that should be supported. However, I take exception to some of the comments made by earlier speakers, particularly the member for Callide. He spoke about some aspects of drug addiction, the criminal justice system and police response to drug addiction. The member for Callide seems to claim a monopoly over community consultation, friendships with police or discussions with anyone who has any first-hand knowledge. He suggested that members on the government side get out and talk to police or—

**Mr Seeney:** Don't just believe the statistics.

**Mrs REILLY:** That is right. The member for Southern Downs earlier mentioned a whole range of statistics that he has obviously well researched and looked into. While the member for Callide does not think statistics are worthy of any note, I note that the member for Southern Downs does. I remind the member for Callide that he is not the only person who has ever spoken to a police officer about what police do and he is not the only person who has had an opportunity to consult with the community. I do not think he has a friend he has known for 15 years whose son is a drug addict. If he does, I would like to hear his personal experience.

In less than two short years of operation the drug court pilot program has commenced in Beenleigh, Southport and Ipswich. Drug courts have been widely accepted as successful in their goal to divert drug offenders away from detention and into rehabilitation. That is not something I have made up. Those are the sentiments of the non-government organisation Mirikai, which provides rehabilitation to drug court clients on the Gold Coast. In fact, Mary Alcorn from Mirikai has said—

We think the Drug Court Trial has been an extremely worthwhile initiative, that is cost-effective, and has been well accepted by the community—we have received lots of positive feedback. We genuinely believe that the community supports diversion into treatment. We have seen some amazing results and success stories of motivated clients ...

Those are the words of the operators of the treatment service on the Gold Coast.

Because of the very insidious nature of addiction, it is very difficult to measure success in traditional terms. Obviously, the intensive drug rehabilitation programs are not for everybody, but for many who do get the opportunity to be referred to the program, the very real spectre of a jail term is hanging over their heads and so there is all the more incentive to make a genuine attempt to succeed. Having said that, we are going to see up to 50 graduates of the program very shortly. Eighty-three people are still participating in rehabilitation programs, and in coming months we will see 50 who have come through the program, are now clean and are out. They are out of jail and they have beaten their addiction. In my view, that is 50 lives that we have saved.

The drug courts are special courts which help drug-dependent offenders to deal with drug dependency. They combine treatment services, correction programs, frequent drug testing and court supervision in an intensive rehabilitation program. The expansion of the drug court trials to regional Queensland was an election commitment, and establishing new drug courts in Cairns and Townsville will fulfil this commitment. Funding for 40 intensive drug rehabilitation orders has been provided to participating agencies, with a total allocation to the north Queensland trials of \$14.3 million through to 2005. Additional drug rehabilitation treatment beds have also been provided.

However, north Queensland's drug courts will be different from those in the south-east corner. This is in response to the different communities and profiles of drug use, the greater indigenous population, the greater distances involved and other unique factors. These are pilot programs, and so it is important to run them differently to be able to provide comparisons for evaluation down the track.

Australian drug courts have tended to focus on the hard end of offenders—those with a long history of property offending. But it could be argued that these are the people who need this special hand the most. They are also the ones who are most involved in the cycle of crime and drug dependency, and therefore the hardest to retain in treatment and, ultimately, to rehabilitate. It is for this reason that the bill will exclude offenders who have served more than six months imprisonment.

The north Queensland trials will focus more on those offenders who are just beginning their involvement in crime, who are facing their first possible term of imprisonment. That is something for which operators of organisations like Mirikai have been asking, because they believe that these offenders will be more motivated to succeed.

I have watched closely the progress of the drug court trial in Southport. I have come to know well the work of organisations like Goldbridge and Mirikai. I have come to admire the dedication, commitment and genuine caring professionalism of these daily miracle workers—and make no mistake about it; they work miracles every day. Nothing grips one's heart more than hearing first-hand from a former addict the story of their struggle and their return from the precipice of destruction. If the drug courts can do that for the people of north Queensland, if they can save the lives of our precious young people, of our husbands, of our wives, then they will have taken a very important step in stamping out the scourge of drug addiction. For that reason, I commend the bill to the House.

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