



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 8 March 2002

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.15 a.m.): On International Women's Day, this parliament is asking us to pass legislation which could severely undermine the domestic violence services sector. That is not just my opinion, it is the opinion of many women's groups who have worked hard to provide a network of care to women and children in their most vulnerable moments.

Ms Struthers: Who are you speaking to? Who has told you that?

Miss SIMPSON: As legislators, we should not blindly support legislation and pay no attention to the implementation and administration of those laws.

Ms Struthers interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: My concern is that this law sounds nice in principle—it widens access to domestic violence laws—but resources have not been put in place to administer it. Thus, it hurts the women and children who are supposed to be the current focus of care. Where are the extra shelters? Where are the extra funds to provide emergency care? Where are the guarantees for a smooth transition for all the extra people brought under the domestic violence laws?

The flaw in this law and its implementation is it expects the same life rafts—equipped only to take women and children, and already riding low in the water—to now support a far wider section of the community. They will quite simply be swamped. People do need protection from abuse but, for goodness sake, this is not the way to achieve it. Given the Beattie government's recent track record of dismantling services and throwing this sector into turmoil, I have no confidence that suddenly domestic violence services will have an amazingly enhanced capacity and that organisation will come out of the government-induced chaos. This model runs the risk of overloading an already inadequate system and demands a far better solution than has been presented to this parliament. I talk to women who are working to provide the crisis services to try and help the sufferers of domestic violence, and they are struggling now to obtain access for these people to shelters and emergency care. Labor governments arrogantly think they are the only ones who have a mandate to talk about domestic violence laws and that no-one else should question their performance or ask for accountability. Well, I demand accountability and I question their ability to administer the laws, because I have been talking to the people who are trying to do that now and they say they simply do not have the resources.

Given that implementation and resourcing is the crux of this legislation, let us look at what is happening with the Beattie government's current mishandling of domestic violence services, with the upheaval over funding of the state-wide Domestic Violence Telephone Service. It ceased to operate on 19 February and the new tenderer will not be put in place until June. In the meantime, over 5,000 calls a week are going to the Department of Families' Crisis Care section. Also, there is the Domestic Violence Resource Centre which has been defunded and the process of changing its services is also of great concern and is subject to widespread criticism. We have called for the Premier to get involved in fixing this mess and we are hoping that he will listen to the concerns. The Queensland Domestic Violence Telephone Service has specifically asked to meet with the Premier and to date, I understand, it has not met with a favourable response in that regard. We do believe that the Minister for Families, Judy Spence, has been badly advised by her senior advisers.

Now, I have listened to some of the interjections from the other side asking who are these people who are criticising what has occurred. Well, let me read from some of their letters, some of their pleas for assistance. A letter from the Women's Legal Service to the Premier stated—

For our experience in this area, we have serious concerns for the safety of women and children because of this decision making. We urge you to reconsider the continuation of funding to the existing domestic violence telephone service until the new service is funded.

I wish also to read from a letter from Jennie Harvie, the chairperson of the Sunshine Coast Community Services Council Inc. In her letter she outlines that they have been trying to get an appointment with the Premier and, unfortunately, at the time of writing this letter they had still not been able to secure one. In her letter of 4 March she states that unfortunately the families department has—

... chosen to misrepresent the positions of both myself, as Chairperson of the Sunshine Coast Community Services Council Inc, and the chairperson of the QDVTS Inc.

...

We are both firmly of the view that the Minister's decision must be reversed for the sake and safety of women in Queensland, in particular indigenous women; that Crisis Care should not be providing the service and that it should be returned to QDVTS Inc.

...

The Sunshine Coast Community Services Council Inc is firmly of the view that this decision has impinged upon the human rights of indigenous women in Queensland in particular. We take this matter extremely seriously and to that end have sought advice and assistance from the UNHCR in Geneva.

A letter to the Premier from Mrs Shay Zulpo, the president of the Queensland Domestic Violence Telephone Service, which was until recently providing the state-wide service, states—

Over the last week several issues have come to light. Contrary to what I was led to believe by people within the Department of Families and media statements made on behalf of the Minister I understand that there are significant problems with the service being delivered to women and children in domestic violence situations who have called the 1800 number—

the interim service where all of the calls have been dumped in the meantime before the full-time tender is put in place—

My understanding is that this is not necessarily a lack of will on behalf of Crisis Care workers but a lack of resourcing and a totally inadequate transition process from the experienced and competent workers previously delivering the service through Queensland Domestic Violence Telephone Service Inc. and Crisis Care. QDVTS Inc. expressed our concern about this on several occasions prior to the relinquishment of the 1800 number to Crisis Care. But we were always assured that Crisis Care staff were experienced and trained and would have adequate resources to cope. The fact that we are continually being contacted by organisations and individuals in the Domestic Violence sector informing us of problems connected with the service provided through the 1800 number and that the Department are now requesting our assistance indicates to me that this is (and never was) the case.

This responds to members opposite who tried arrogantly to say that those expressing concerns do not have a right to that view. These are the people who have been trying to help women in desperate need of access to competent emergency care.

We have seen a total dropping of the ball in terms of an appropriate response for those who need access to domestic violence support services. This service has been defunded. In the meantime, the services have been thrown onto an interim care provider from the Department of Families—up to 5,000 calls per week—and the new tender will not be in place until June. That is placing at risk the women and children who need access to services.

When members opposite state that their new legislation will meet the needs of everyone suffering abuse in the community, I do not have confidence in what they are saying. We need to see how the existing laws are being administered. The ball has been dropped. People who care about women and children and who are speaking from experience in this area have had the guts to say that the process is wrong. They are disappointed that the Premier has not intervened and fixed this problem. We will see more of the same given that the department seems hell-bent on breaking up some of the services and placing a greater load on existing ones with the introduction of this legislation.

Let this government be judged not by its flowery words and the hearts and flowers of its legislation but on the way it implements its legislation. It must already be judged for its dropping of the ball in relation to domestic violence support services in this state. I call on the Premier to meet with these people delivering the services and to meet with the domestic violence telephone service people. To date they have found, sadly, that their concerns have not been addressed by the Department of Families. Providers throughout Queensland have expressed their concern to the department that people are falling through the cracks. I urge the Premier to meet with these people to address their concerns. Unfortunately, the government's handling of this issue has thrown the domestic violence services sector into turmoil and women's and children's lives are being put at risk as a result.