



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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RESIDENTIAL SERVICES [ACCOMMODATION] BILL

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.55 p.m.): It is a great pleasure to speak in support of the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill 2002, which provides definitions for residential services covered by this and the previously considered bill and which establishes a mandatory standards and accreditation system. In doing so, I must point out a great deficiency in this bill, that is, the fact that there appears to be one house towards the Gold Coast that does not seem to be covered by this. Of course, that is the *Big Brother* house! I can picture *Big Brother's* ratings going up with the minister at the controls of that house and directing its operations! I can just see the minister tasking the residents on day release to slip out and put a coat of paint on some Queensland housing stock to keep them active! I am sure this would improve the show.

More seriously, I know that the minister's great empathy for the people affected by this bill would have been shaped by his and my early experiences of a boarding house behind the town hall in Rockhampton near the Gresham Hotel when its residents sat on alderman Pilbeam's purple Fairlane. The less than empathetic and warm approach that Councillor Pilbeam showed to those people was certainly indicative of the attitude conveyed to the people in those days and indeed since. I raise that point very seriously, because these people have suffered a great stigma in the past and have been at the so-called lower end of our society. I wish to make it very clear whom we are talking about. These are people often only one degree away from being on the streets and sleeping rough. They are often people only one degree away from some form of nursing home accommodation. As such, they really do need particular care. I urge the minister and the Residential Tenancies Authority involved in administering this bill to use great caution, because I know a lot of the people in my electorate who live in this form of accommodation and that they are aware of this legislation.

There is some nervousness out there about the prospect of shaking up the system and making it harder for these places to operate. I know the minister would agree with me and everybody else in this place that the last thing we want is one person who is in that accommodation at the moment to be back out on the street. That would be a disaster for us all. We want to make sure that this legislation, along with the package of other legislation that is now in place, is implemented cautiously and in such a way that everybody is given a fair amount of time to make appropriate changes. We need to ensure that we do not overregulate, especially in relation to those people going into and out of this accommodation on a very ad hoc basis. Often, these are people who have just been released from prison or psychiatric institutions. They need the utmost care and understanding in terms of the difficult situations in which they have found themselves.

It is pleasing indeed to see the two-year review period in this respect and that this legislation will be examined very carefully after that two-year implementation period. There are a number of other measures to ensure that there is a smooth transition, including the availability of loans to providers to help them with any particular renovations and changes to the accommodation that may need to be implemented.

The other very significant issue that stands out in this bill is the regulation relating to possible forced eviction. This might seem draconian in some circumstances, but if members know of some of the arrangements in this form of accommodation, in my experience some people who live in those places are very scary and may indeed need a very firm hand in terms of being required to leave. The people who work as supervisors in these boarding house arrangements are often faced with a very difficult task in arbitrating disputes between residents and in dealing with very difficult and sometimes

dangerous people who may be asked to leave in circumstances where their conduct is unwarranted or in other circumstances.

In conclusion, the health and wellbeing of people in this form of accommodation is also of extreme importance. As I said, a lot of these people are close to requiring nursing home accommodation, and often they are on a range of medical support and medical drug support. We need to ensure that there is great empathy in the future for these people and that there is adequate support and capacity within these regulations so that people with these illnesses are looked after well and so that when they overstep the mark they are treated empathetically. I commend the minister for bringing this bill to the House and I wish well those overseeing its implementation.
