



Speech by

JAN JARRATT

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 10 May 2002

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES [ACCREDITATION] BILL

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (10.36 a.m.): I am very pleased today to rise in support of the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill 2002. In my first speech in this House, in April of last year, I affirmed my deep and sincere conviction that the true measure of a society can be assessed through the way in which it embraces the least fortunate amongst its number. In my life I have been very fortunate in that I have had a loving family to steer me through the inevitable hard times and to support me financially and emotionally when the need arose. That support has enabled me to overcome the hurdles in my life and to be one of the privileged majority who experience good health and emotional and financial security.

This bill seeks to protect a group of our citizens who, for a variety of reasons, and not always as a matter of choice, are accommodated in private sector supported accommodation hostels, boarding houses or aged pensioner rental complexes. It is well recognised that many such residents, apart from being socially isolated, have limited incomes, which in reality restricts their choice when it comes to accommodation. In addition, many suffer the complication of physical or mental disability or are victims of drug or alcohol abuse.

These people have traditionally had little or no recourse to mechanisms which may improve the standard of their accommodation as, until now, residential services accommodation has not been covered by industry standards or legislation that applies in other residency situations. For the same reason, there has been no mechanism to assess the suitability of persons who might provide care services within such accommodation facilities. Other than the homeless, it is difficult to think of another group in our society that is more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

This bill seeks to not only ensure a minimum standard of accommodation and service; it will also establish security for residents who wish to lodge a formal complaint about the conduct of a residential service. As the minister pointed out in her second reading speech, the bill establishes minimum standards and living conditions in private sector supported accommodation hostels, boarding houses and aged pensioner rental complexes by providing for a mandatory accreditation scheme to be administered by the government.

The first step is for a residential service operator to seek registration. This involves a requirement to demonstrate compliance with a number of minimum standards that address issues relating to the immediate wellbeing and safety of residents. Following registration, residential service operators will be required to apply for accreditation, which aims to ensure that services meet agreed industry standards. This process involves components of self-assessment as well as external assessment by an audit team. The level of accreditation required will depend on the nature of the service provided. This can range from services providing accommodation only through to services that provide food to residents to those services providing additional personal care. It is important to note that the introduction of the registration and accreditation process will be carried out in an incremental fashion across different accommodation types to minimise the risk of closures, an event that would be contrary to the intent of the bill.

This bill represents the high-water mark in legislation that goes to the core of providing protection for those in our society who have been powerless to protect themselves. It reflects the very heart of what I had hoped to achieve as a member of this Labor government, because it is legislation that will bring about meaningful social reform and give protection to those who have had no voice. I commend the minister, her staff and all who have assisted in bringing this bill before the House today. I am proud to support this bill.