



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

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DRUG DIVERSION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (4.00 p.m.): I am pleased to speak on the Drug Diversion Amendment Bill 2002. A couple of years ago I received a visit from the mother of a young man who was in jail because he started on amphetamines. His mother came to see me because in the process of being in jail he ended up being a very bad heroin addict. It was quite a disaster for his mother. I remember the trauma she suffered.

As a result of that, and having seen reports on the benefits of drug courts in the United States, I am pleased to support this legislation. I believe I was the first member to speak on drug courts in this House, although I note that the member for Southern Downs raised the matter in the media prior to that. It is not a matter of being competitive, but I decided at that time that diverting young people from the criminal justice system and putting them in rehabilitation was the way to go.

I am delighted that this government and this Attorney-General have two drug courts operating in Brisbane at this time. In my electorate I have noticed the concern of parents. A program has been run by the community in The Gap area about how to drug-proof our kids. Parents are being shown the signs of drug taking. They are told what to look for and where to turn if they think their children are taking drugs. They are encouraged to intervene at a very early stage.

I have always taken a great interest in the provision of family services. Ever since I have been in this parliament I have talked about the need for early intervention and prevention, particularly in areas such as child protection and the like. Such an approach is inherent in the bill before the House today. This legislation will facilitate the trialing of an illicit drug diversion program in certain Magistrates Courts in Brisbane. I think we should impress on the sceptics out there that we are talking about a diversion and not the legalisation of drugs.

I remember becoming upset when I was first in this House about the case of a young person who was working in the Railway Department. This occurred at the time when Joh Bjelke-Petersen was Premier. This young person was found with two joints of cannabis in his possession. He lost his job and it was said that he would never work in the Public Service again. That is absolutely not the sort of approach that we should be adopting in such circumstances. Diversion is aimed at stopping a new generation of drug users from committing drug related crimes. We need to get the young people in the early stages of their contact with drugs and take them out of the criminal justice system. We need to highlight the fact that there is no future in using drugs and that it is a short walk to full-blown drug addiction.

This legislation is all about the need to intervene at the earliest possible stage in order to make a real impact on the drug problem. I would like to think that we could provide a lot more resources in the areas of school drug education, drug prevention and anti-drug promotion, rehabilitation services and support for the families of people with drug problems. It is fine to say that that is the way to go, but we ought to be resourcing those programs in a much greater way.

I know that the member for Tablelands said that this was a federal government initiative. I believe that the federal government has made a worthwhile effort but all the state government is receiving from the federal government for this pilot program is \$735,000, and that is not a substantial sum of money. If we are going to be fair dinkum about school drug education, prevention and the provision of rehabilitation services we need to do a lot more.

In his second reading speech the Attorney-General referred to the police diversion compliance program which concerns people found with less than 50 grams of cannabis on them. This program has resulted in 81 per cent compliance. That is a promising outcome. People have to admit their guilt before they are sent to drug assessment and education centres. I think that is very important.

I want to stress that this is a pilot program. The program will be evaluated in 12 months time. At that time a decision will be taken as to whether the program should be extended. That decision will be based on the evidence because that is what pilot programs are all about.

The Attorney-General concluded his second reading speech by saying—

This legislation means that the criminal justice system will not be the end of the line. The legislation may give a young person a way out.

That is what we are talking about. We are talking about a breathing space and a chance to escape the vicious cycle of drugs and crime. I think diversion might have saved the amphetamine user who became a heroin addict while in jail. That would have saved the unbelievable trauma that his mum and dad suffered. I commend the bill to the House.