



Speech by

**CAROLYN MALE**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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Hansard 12 November 2003

**EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION [STUDENT PROTECTION] AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms MALE** (Glass House—ALP) (5.05 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise this afternoon to talk on the Education and Other Legislation (Student Protection) Amendment Bill 2003. As with a lot of the Beattie Labor government's legislation, the focus of this bill is on protecting the welfare of children and looking after their best interests.

I will deal firstly with the amendments to the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988. A new section in the act makes it quite clear that the Board of Teacher Registration has to ensure that the primary consideration in all of its dealings must be the welfare and best interests of children. The Board of Teacher Registration will have a greater ability to access a prospective teacher's full criminal history and a range of other information relevant to its screening protocols. The Queensland Police Service, teachers' current employers and prospective teachers will all be required to provide this information.

Ensuring the suitability of teachers in our schools has to be our highest priority. Teachers have an enormous influence on children, and an enormous amount of trust needs to be placed in them for this reason. As a lot of members have said, on the whole teachers across Queensland are very dedicated and professional and they do have the best interests of all students at heart. I find that that is so in my electorate. When I went to several of my schools on World Teachers Day we recognised and celebrated that. This bill seeks to deal with the element who are not professional and caring people and who are actually predatory in their behaviour. We need to make sure that they are picked up and dealt with in the best way possible.

The Board of Teacher Registration will be able to suspend the registration of a teacher whilst it conducts an inquiry into that teacher. This means that during an inquiry that person cannot be employed as a teacher. This is a sensible change which will ensure the protection of schoolchildren everywhere.

The amendments will also make it mandatory for the Board of Teacher Registration to cancel the registration of a person who has been convicted of serious offences. The bill enhances the board's ability to notify its registration decisions to other relevant bodies, such as the teacher's employer, interstate and overseas teacher registration authorities, the Minister for Education, the director-general and other relevant people who need to know these things. I believe that the sharing of information across all the different jurisdictions will enhance the quality and reputation of our teachers and help to weed out any who should not be there.

The amendment to the Education (General Provisions) Act provides for the compulsory reporting by school staff of suspected cases of child sex abuse by another staff member. The intent of the legislation is to balance this reporting requirement against the possibility of malicious reports against staff members. Any malicious complaints would then not be protected against the defamation laws or from disciplinary action. This balance will work well. It makes sure that teachers who do become aware of anything are not afraid to report it and are given that protection.

The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000 will also be amended to extend the screening process to cover persons providing alternative education programs or flexible arrangements for students outside mainstream learning. I understand that there was comprehensive consultation done throughout the wider education community including the board, the relevant unions, parents, the non-state school sector and the public.

I am very pleased to be able to stand here today and debate these important amendments. The protection, welfare and best interests of our children must be of paramount concern to this parliament. Our laws must always reflect this. I congratulate the minister and the department on their proactive work in this very vital area. I commend the bill to the House.