



Speech by

CHRIS FOLEY

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Hansard 20 August 2003

CHILD ABUSE, ROYAL COMMISSION

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (6.27 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of a call for a royal commission into the situation of child abuse in Queensland. As a father of six kids, there is no other situation I can think of that is more distressing and depressing than the thought of children being robbed of their innocence by the predatory behaviour of people who are entrusted with their care. Whenever I pick up a newspaper or switch on the TV and hear about the latest case of child abuse by people who seem to lack the basic milk of human kindness, I feel a profound sense of anger for this deep injustice perpetrated against little ones who are powerless to defend themselves. At the same time I recognise that often these tragic people were themselves the victims of abuse in their early years. The abused often go on to become abusers themselves.

Children are the true innocents of our society and they have a right to expect nothing less than absolute vigilance in terms of their protection and support, especially when they find themselves facing the tragedy of the breakdown of the traditional family unit. I pay tribute to the many wonderful parents and foster-parents throughout Queensland who would lay their life on the line to protect their children. I am saddened that in some cases when people chose to use innocents to satisfy their sick and twisted desires the reputation of the role of foster-parenting is tarnished. Some mud sticks.

It is critical that good, honest foster-parents are available to nurture children who have endured the tragedy of being separated from their birth parents and who have often been abused themselves.

In rising to support this motion, I am sure that both sides of this House care deeply about getting it right when it comes to administering a regime of care for children in our state. I do not wish to call into question the motive of ministers from either sides of the House who have laboured hard to bring equity and justice to this very difficult portfolio. This is an issue that is far bigger than politics. If a royal commission can find failings in the system and recommendations for change that save one Queensland kid from the indignity and horror of child abuse, it will be money well spent. One only has to look at the outpouring of hostility that emanated from the bashing of a young father in Sydney this week which resulted in a skull fracture of his four-week-old daughter whom he was carrying to know that community support is squarely behind the absolute protection of children in our society.

We need to pull out all stops to speak up for the little ones who have no voice. A royal commission will provide an independent and fair assessment of the efficiency of the department. If there are things that need changing to enhance the safety of children in our state, this should take a greater priority than political point scoring from either side of the House. I call on members from both sides of the House to be open and honest about the efficiencies of the Families Department so that we can deliver the best possible outcome for the protection of Queensland kids. I noted that Minister Spence mentioned Hetty Johnston, and I also want to acknowledge Hetty Johnston from Bravehearts and her tireless care for the children of Queensland and her constant calls for a royal commission. To this end, I lend my support to the call for a royal commission by my parliamentary colleague the member for Gladstone.