



Speech by

**Hon. JUDY SPENCE**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT**

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Hansard 28 October 2003

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Department of Families; Child Abuse**

**Hon. J. C. SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.11 a.m.): I want to place on record my appreciation to the Chairman of the Crime and Misconduct Commission, Mr Brendan Butler, and counsel assisting, Trevor Morgan, for their role in the inquiry into aspects of how the foster care system deals with child abuse.

The Premier and I have made it plain that this government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to deal with any recommendations that flow from this inquiry. That is the fundamental difference between this government and those previously. We are prepared to act. I am prepared to fix the problems in a system that has suffered from underfunding, lack of direction and lack of political will, but implementing a reform agenda in an area that has been overlooked for decades is difficult. It requires strength of political will and courage of your convictions to face your critics and openly and publicly examine a system's shortcomings. In fact, for two and a half years I have spoken publicly about the systemic issues and challenges facing our child protection system. That is why I built an aggressive and long-term reform agenda.

It is my belief that the public examination of a wide range of issues at this inquiry and the dialogue that it has generated within the community is healthy, valuable and positive. It should have occurred decades earlier, but it took our government to face up to it. It took this government to lift funding to record levels, to double what we were spending on child protection; to increase staffing to record levels; to implement review and audit teams; to deliver new training; and to strengthen SCAN teams and dramatically increase the level of investment in prevention and early intervention. We have introduced new training and staff development, and we have planned the introduction of the best information system that money can buy. Many times I have acknowledged the problems of the past, but I also think that we need to move beyond that and focus on the future.

We are committed to reviewing the recruitment strategies, payment and support structures offered to foster-carers. We will investigate alternative placement models of care for children whose needs cannot be met in foster care. We will review the implementation and impact of the Child Protection Act. We will monitor the impact of additional funding for staff training and development and we will review the career structure, training, development and support needs of staff working in child protection.

I have always understood that overhauling the system would take an enormous amount of work and I am determined to see that through. These are not the actions of a government that will not face up to the failings of the past or is merely reactive. These are the actions of a government determined to bring about change, determined to fix the problems and determined not to be diverted. That is our challenge. The challenge for those opposite is to come up with a policy, or even a strategy, to improve the lives of Queensland children.