



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 26 November 2003

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES

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) (6.16 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

That all words after 'House' are omitted and the following words inserted:

Recognises that the Beattie government has doubled the funding for the Department of Families; almost doubled the number of front-line child protection workers; added an additional \$1 million for training; established audit and review teams and appointed senior practitioners and extra SCAN coordinators to improve the response and monitoring of families with reported problems.

I think anyone who considers the amendment I have moved today—any independent, fair-minded person—would have to see that that amendment is about fact and they would have to vote for it. I have great time and respect for both the member for Gladstone and the member for Nanango. I know they are not moving this motion tonight because of any political games but because they are genuinely interested in this area and in child protection. My only problem with their addresses tonight is that they rely for all their information on the *Courier-Mail*, and I think that is a real problem. They need to read the CMC's web site where a lot of good people present a lot of good information and get a better understanding of the whole child protection system rather than rely on the *Courier-Mail* for their information.

The reality is that the Beattie government has provided unparalleled increases in funding to the Department of Families. In fact, we have increased this department's budget by 103 per cent, which represents a \$208 million increase in total. In last year's budget we added another \$188 million over four years—unprecedented increases to this department's budget. More recently, I have announced more funding for this department and more initiatives. They include an additional nine senior practitioners. That means that for the first time in this state every region will have a senior practitioner to supervise and support our child protection workers. That will be a first.

This year I introduced a quality assurance unit which for the first time will go around and monitor and examine departmental decision making area office by area office. More recently I announced a doubling of that unit to 10 people so that we can make sure that that is an area of priority for this government. In the last few months I have announced that another 40 permanent child protection positions will be created. I have announced another 25 SCAN team coordinators. For the first time in this state every SCAN team will have a coordinator.

I have announced an additional \$1 million for staff training. It is true that our staff are young and inexperienced. We make no secret of that. We talked about it at the CMC inquiry. In fact, 60 per cent of the child protection workers are in their first three years out of university. No other bureaucracy would have those kinds of figures. We know that we have to put more money into training. We know that we have to develop a better career structure to keep those workers, and we are committed to doing that.

The other thing I have talked about a lot in this House and at the CMC is our poor information management system. We have put money into that, but it will take some time to develop that new system. In the meantime, though, we will have a review of the record keeping. We will be training our staff in the new year in better record-keeping procedures. We have done a lot, but we know that there is more to be done to improve our child protection system and we are committed to doing that.

Finally, in the short time that I am allotted I want to make a couple of points about the motion moved by the member for Gladstone. She is down on the fact that we spend money on printed

promotional material and the member for Nanango talked about that material being frivolous extravagance. This is a small example of the printed promotional material that we put out in the Department of Families. Five hundred and fifty thousand copies of the latest edition of the Families magazine will be going out throughout Queensland. I can tell the House that schools, doctors and child-care centres love it.

Some of the other information that we give out is about education. We have to educate people about these matters. It is about prevention. The only way that we are going to improve the system is to have an educated population. That is what this printed promotional material is about. I challenge the members opposite to examine any of our publications and tell me which ones are frivolous and which ones are extravagant, because we are committed to prevention and early intervention.