



Speech by

JULIE ATTWOOD

Member for MOUNT OMMANEY

Hansard 14 October 2003

POLICE SERVICE ADMINISTRATION [ALCOHOL AND DRUG TESTING] AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (8.39 p.m.): I rise in support of the Police Service Administration (Alcohol and Drug Testing) Amendment Bill and the men and women of the Queensland police force. The minister, the Hon. Tony McGrady, and the Commissioner of Police, Bob Atkinson, have shown that they have the welfare of ordinary departmental officers at heart. Across many government departments there are rehabilitation programs and support mechanisms available to staff suffering from stress. It is about time that these programs were introduced into the police department. This bill is essentially about ensuring that we do all we can to help police officers who have a drug or alcohol problem and ensure the integrity of the service is preserved.

As a government we have improved the level of policing in the Mount Ommaney electorate. Indeed, right across the state police levels have increased by 300 officers per year over the past five years. A number of initiatives affecting residents in the Mount Ommaney electorate include the establishment of the Oxley Police Beat, extending opening hours at the Mount Ommaney Police Station, the stationing of the Dog Squad and the tactical crime squad at Oxley, re-defining the boundaries between the Sherwood and Mount Ommaney policing areas and the proposed upgrading of the Sherwood Police Station to a 24-hour station.

A few weeks ago the minister and the commissioner visited my electorate to talk to neighbourhood watch groups. The minister spoke about the decreasing level of crime in our community and praised the neighbourhood watch groups for their contribution to community safety. The Police Commissioner answered questions about local residents' concerns including hooning, graffiti, gatecrashing of teen parties, burglaries, citizen safety and the like. The minister and commissioner take their responsibilities seriously and are conscious of being available to address community groups. It is also our responsibility to our officers and to the wider community to ensure that we have appropriate detection and rehabilitation mechanisms in place to deal with substance abuse within the Police Service. The only way for the Police Commissioner to implement this is by providing a legislative basis for conducting the blood and alcohol testing.

The bill relates first and foremost to health and welfare issues but, where fitting, disciplinary measures under the Police Service Administration Act 1990 are included. This bill achieves and enhances the welfare of the officers by amending the PSA to allow for a scheme of drug and alcohol testing of police officers and staff members working in critical policing areas.

Police Service employees discharge a special role in our society and this is accompanied by special responsibilities. In reality, police officers and QPS employees must present an image of leadership to the community. Our police officers carry guns and are often required to engage in high-speed vehicle pursuits. They have to be alert at all times, never knowing when they will be faced with a life and death situation that may involve lethal force. There are many who believe that it is in our local community's interest to know that armed public servants are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The bill requires police, including cadets, to abide by a limit of 0.03 per cent blood alcohol concentration levels while at work. Those police involved in covert operations are not included in the testing regime.

I have the greatest respect for the Police Service staff that I regularly interact with, including Assistant Commissioner Kathy Rynders from the South Brisbane District, Senior Sergeant Ian Grace from the Mount Ommaney Station, Senior Constable Scott Utteridge from the Oxley Police Beat and Sergeant Ray Green from Sherwood. I believe that I have a good working relationship with the local

station staff at Mount Ommaney, Sherwood and the police beat at Oxley and the staff there do not appear unduly concerned about the testing. There are some issues as to how the system will be managed on the ground, but these operational issues will be sorted out during the first few months of implementation. I have not had one representation from anyone connected with the Police Service over this issue. However, I have had a number from ordinary electors who thought that such a testing and rehabilitation program was already in existence.

There has been widespread consultation with unions, officers, the Crime and Misconduct Commission and government departments during the lead-up to this bill and concerns have largely been addressed. It is pleasing to note that the amendments proposed by the Police Union regarding the inclusion of cadets has been incorporated into the bill. This bill will ensure appropriate steps are taken in the interests of the health and welfare of police officers and other staff members in critical areas while enhancing the public's confidence in the service and promoting the integrity of the service. I congratulate the Minister for Police, the Honourable Tony McGrady, and the Commissioner of Police, Bob Atkinson, on their stance on this issue and commend this bill to the House.