



Speech by

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EVIDENCE [PROTECTION OF CHILDREN] AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.49 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Evidence (Protection of Children) Amendment Bill 2003, which will change the way applications are made for restraining orders without notice. It will also change the definition of 'disqualifying term of imprisonment'. It has been suggested that this will be achieved in a number of ways, but it is the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act and the amendments in committee to which I now turn.

Townsville is one of the fortunate places to have a drug court pilot program at the Magistrate's Court. The eligibility of participants under the amendment will be widened by defining a 'disqualifying term of imprisonment' as a single term of imprisonment of more than one year. The court diversion program is a responsible social strategy that is used to keep people with a drug dependency out of prison. As a former teacher and counsellor, I saw first-hand how easy it can be for those caught up in drug addiction to gradually fall into a life of crime to feed their dependency.

This diversion program is interventionist and targeted to those caught early in their spiral. The programs have the potential to improve the overall social and emotional wellbeing of participants, dramatically reducing recidivist criminal behaviour. I am a great believer in prevention and early intervention. Measures to reduce criminal activity directly related to drug dependency must be applauded.

There are many reasons people fall into habitforming behaviours like drug taking, but no-one taking part in these risktaking activities can ever imagine the horrors associated with it when it is too late. I have seen lives shattered and families trying to grapple with a loved one caught in the grip of drug addiction. The tension, disappointment and fear is only one part of this horrifying experience. To watch one's child sink to levels of degradation, ill health and psychotic behaviour, coupled with lying and theft from family, is something no parent ever wants to experience. Practising tough love is not always as easy as it sounds. There is always the fear that applying logical consequences to certain behaviours could result in death and most parents would rather not face that.

The drug court diversion program saved my friend's daughter from a life of crime and certain death. This girl did not come from a dysfunctional family and had not been sexually or physically abused. In fact, she had very supportive parents and had not been exposed to lies, deceit, theft, prostitution, et cetera. On top of that she was beautiful. But drug addiction does not single out just the most vulnerable. This young woman fell to the depths of depravity and was inches away from prostitution. Her short crime spree to feed her heroin habit put both herself and her family in a constant state of despair.

She is one of the lucky ones who did not go to prison. Her life was turned around by the drug court diversion program. To say that she was lucky is an understatement, but because of this government's social policies it is programs like these that not only prevent further crime but also save lives. I commend the bill to the House.