



Speech by

Michael Choi

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

Hansard Wednesday, 24 November 2004

CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING) BILL

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (12.36 p.m.): A lot of honourable members realise that my electorate office is actually in a shopping centre. Part of the benefit of having my office in a shopping centre is that I get to go into the shopping centre and meet a lot of my constituency. Sometimes, however, a five-minute journey becomes a one-and-a-half-hour talkfest.

I was in the shopping centre not too long ago and I noticed that a young mother was doing some window shopping with her daughter. Obviously whatever was being displayed in the shop captured this young mother's 100 per cent attention. This little child wandered off to probably 20 or 30 metres away from her mother. I have three daughters and I love children, so I took the opportunity to have a chat with this girl. Before long the mother realised that the young girl was missing, found that she was talking to a strange man, grabbed her away from me and gave me a very, very dirty look which said, 'If you touch her, I will kill you.' I was not offended by that. I actually think it is a very sad indictment on our society that we have to be very protective of our children these days.

When I was growing up my parents always taught me, 'Be kind to strangers. Talk to strangers and if they need any help give it to them.' I taught my daughters, 'Don't talk to strangers. If they ask for anything, run away.' As I said before, it is really a very sad indictment on our society. It horrifies me that there are people in our society who prey upon our children. As a society and as a government, we must face the fact that there are dangerous sexual offenders who prey on our children and who derive pleasure from taking a child's innocence. Our government can never eliminate the risk posed by these sexual offenders, but as a government we can work to minimise risk and protect our community.

This government is responsible for some very outstanding legislation in protecting the children of our society. I sincerely congratulate the minister and her team for their hard work on this legislation. The Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Bill 2004 requires that child sex offenders keep police informed of certain personal details for a period of time after they have been released into the community.

As a father of three beautiful young girls—almost ladies now—I would like to think that I have some control over the environments to which my children are exposed. I would also like to think that my children are kept safe and that everything within my power is done to protect them. Unfortunately, in the world we live in, hoping that I have done everything to protect them may not be sufficient. Child sexual offenders are the scum of our society. I can continue to hope that my daughters' school crossing attendant is a trustworthy person. I can hope that their music teachers or supervisors in their recreational activities are genuinely interested in their wellbeing. But, again, as I said, hoping is not sufficient. That is why this government has to legislate, as it did yesterday and is doing today, to protect the children of our society.

The changes to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Bill and the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Amendment Bill, which I spoke about yesterday, mean that I can have some degree of trust in those people around my children. These pieces of legislation cannot be considered a foolproof standard. However, with community vigilance and observation, they can provide us with some reassurance that our children are safe.

Having said that, I did some research on the Internet and noticed that in America legislation known as 'Megan's law' was introduced in response to the murder of a seven-year-old girl called Megan Kanka by a convicted sexual offender living in her neighbourhood. The legislation introduced in America not only requires the sexual offenders to notify the police of their current residency but also empowers the police to notify the community. I read with interest, and perhaps a degree of horror, that the police have a web site identifying every single sexual offender in the neighbourhood. In fact, they have pin maps to identify where they live and what they look like.

If I were asked for my opinion as a father on how we should deal with sexual offenders, I would say, 'Give me a knife, lock them up and throw away the key.' As a citizen, I like to think that I have the right to know where they live. However, as a person who supports individuals' rights, I believe that when a person who has committed an offence has served their sentence, they have an entitlement to live freely as part of our community. Honestly, at the moment I do not know where the fine balance should lie. We should look at this legislation again in 12 months time to see if there is anything we can do to tighten it, to ensure that the intention of this legislation is fulfilled.

As a parent, I am also doing my best to raise awareness among parents in my electorate of the dangers facing our children. While speaking on this bill, I would like to draw the attention of members of this House to a publication by the Queensland Police Service called *Who's chatting to your kids?* I am distributing this publication to all primary schools in my electorate with their final newsletter of this year. This is a great way to help parents become more aware of what they can do to protect their children, particularly with cyber sexual offenders.

This bill clearly demonstrates the government's commitment to protect our children—the most vulnerable members of our society. The information on child sexual offenders will be kept on the register which is maintained by the police. I must also take this opportunity to congratulate the Queensland Police Service on their work in the initial apprehension of those dangerous offenders. As a member of the PCMC, I have to confess that I do not like going to PCMC meetings—not because I do not like working with my colleagues. I go there because I know how important the work is that is being undertaken by the PCMC, but reading through reports about sexual offenders, about adults in our society preying upon innocent young children in our communities, really stresses me out.

Having said that, the Queensland government has done a wonderful thing in this regard. I think we would be hard pressed to find an issue that is more emotive and as difficult to face as that of a child sexual offence. Governance is not an easy job. Finding the right balance between protecting the community as a whole, protecting victims and ensuring fairness to individuals is a difficult and sensitive process, but this bill is another example of this government's willingness to tackle the tough issues. I commend this bill to the House.