



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Wednesday, 1 September 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.06 a.m.): I want to talk about the significant milestone in the reforms to the child protection system in Queensland that take place today. The first stage of legislative reforms set out in the blueprint is now complete. Under the new legislation that comes into effect on the first day of spring, children and young people in state protection will have their rights and interests safeguarded by an expanded community visitor program.

I am pleased to report that we have moved quickly to implement these changes so the rights of the most vulnerable in our society are protected. I would like to see the member for Toowoomba South support this as well. The changes are the second instalment in a series of legislative reforms which will bolster Queensland's child protection system by introducing greater accountability and monitoring measures.

In other initiatives being introduced, the Department of Child Safety will also have the ability to intervene where it is suspected that an unborn child may be at risk of abuse or neglect after its birth. The changes have bipartisan support and are major steps towards reforming the child safety system by ensuring that government departments are open, transparent and accountable.

Under the new reforms, the community visitor program, managed by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, will be expanded to include all children and young people in the alternative care system, including those in foster care. Community visitors will meet with every child and young person in alternative care and foster care on a monthly basis. They will provide an important additional layer of support and advice for these children and young people and will also advocate on their behalf to help resolve concerns.

Community visitors will also play an important role by providing children and young people with information about their rights, deal with concerns about their standard of care and make referrals to other agencies for assistance when needed. Community visitors will work in partnership with the Department of Child Safety's 46 child safety service centres across the state of Queensland, having regular contact with child safety officers in the management of a child's case plan and developmental needs. Child safety officers will work collaboratively with other agencies and community visitors to resolve issues or concerns at a local level, ensuring that the best interests of the child are always paramount.

From today, the Department of Child Safety will also be able to offer assistance, as I indicated, to pregnant women where it is suspected that an unborn child may be at risk of abuse or neglect after its birth. I emphasise that this is not to interfere with the rights of pregnant women but to offer supportive intervention that will reduce the likelihood of the child being placed in out-of-home care after birth. Also coming into effect is a requirement that all relevant state government departments detail their role in promoting child welfare and delivering child protection services in their annual reports. Starting in the 2004-05 annual reports, relevant government departments will showcase the initiatives and achievements in their promotion of child welfare and delivery of child protection services. This is a new era of child protection in Queensland, and these changes to legislation are absolutely vital for the reforms to continue.