



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Wednesday, 20 October 2004

CHILD SAFETY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (3.58 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2004. The bill represents the second stage of legislative reforms that were recommendations from the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*. The Beattie government committed to reforms leading into the 2004 state election—a decision that the community accepted as one of leadership capability and determination. The Beattie government committed to implementing all 110 CMC recommendations that were outlined for implementation in a blueprint developed by Peter Forster and handed to the government in 2004.

The recommendations are aimed at ensuring a more child focused approach to child protection and strengthening safeguards for children and young people in the child protection system. The bill seeks to strengthen the coordination of agency responses to the protection and care needs of children. To achieve this, the bill amends the Child Protection Act 1999 to remove any legal or legislative barriers to service providers that are referred to in this bill as prescribed entities such as Queensland Health, the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Communities, Housing, Corrective Services, et cetera—sharing information that is relevant to the protection and care of children. It is important that information is shared efficiently, as timing is often found to be critical in ensuring that the child is safe and that a coordinated and responsive service meets the needs of the child and the family.

To strengthen case planning processes for children subject to ongoing intervention under the Child Protection Act 1999, this bill establishes a legislative framework for case planning that includes a duty on the chief executive of the Department of Child Safety to ensure that case plans are developed and continually revised, and the establishment of family group meetings that involve the child, the child's extended family and other people and other related entities that form part of the support network of the child. The legislative framework for case planning also ensures that case plans are regularly reviewed at least once every six months.

I was pleased to read that, in order to develop this bill, the Create Foundation, an organisation that advocates for children and young people in care in Queensland, was provided with an opportunity to consult children and young people about how information regarding their lives should be shared. This bill incorporates a number of recommendations from this report which, if implemented, require further amendments to be made to the Child Protection Act 1999. The amendments ensure that information about a child and the carer can be shared so the carer is given information he or she would reasonably need to decide to accept a placement. As well, the child is given information about the carer to enable the child to participate in the decision process. These amendments ensure that the focus of any decision is about the child—by keeping the child informed, considering the child's views and giving the child an opportunity to participate in decisions being made about his or her life.

This bill will amend the Health Act 1937 to strengthen the reporting of suspected harm to children by mandating doctors and nurses to notify the Department of Child Safety. Amendments to the Health Act 1947 will also ensure that such health professionals are protected from liability if they have acted honestly

when giving information about a child who is at risk or who has been harmed. Some \$1.5 million has been allocated for the training of doctors and nurses about the mandatory training.

As part of the bill, amendments will be made to the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000 to strengthen the monitoring powers of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian by extending those powers to other agencies. I wish to take this opportunity to commend the Minister for Child Safety on the work that he has done to date. I know that all the provisions in this act have commenced and that department staff right around the state are preparing for the changes. I understand that an additional 318 professionals and paraprofessional positions within the department have been promised for 2004-05, that foster care allowances have increased and that the minister has announced funds of \$12.8 million to an allocated 134 new and enhanced alternative care places for children and young people with complex needs. This government, the minister and the staff of the departments involved in child safety are working hard to implement the change that is needed. I commend the bill to the House.