



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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DISABILITY SERVICES BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (4.44 pm): It gives me pleasure to talk to this Disability Services Bill this afternoon, if only for a brief time. Firstly, I acknowledge and thank all of the parents and carers in Caloundra who provide wonderful homes, love, care and affection for disabled children of all ages. There are many of them within my electorate. However, I would like to single out one—Mrs Bernie Mole. For years, she has cared for and provided ongoing love and assistance to children who are disabled. Bernie does this without any thought for herself. She does not seek media attention or praise for her efforts. She is simply guided by love for the children she takes into her heart and home and provides with a wonderful, loving environment. In fact, it is impossible to be in her presence and not sense her serenity.

She is a woman who has devoted many years of her life to a wonderful cause and she does so without any thought of recognition. People such as Mrs Mole are the real heroes in our community—men and women who devote themselves to the unselfish work of providing for those who are unable to provide for themselves for various reasons.

I wish to acknowledge a disability group on the coast which has formed a social club and which, on a regular basis, holds functions or barbecues around various spots on the coast. They organise these events themselves. They have a wonderful spirit of togetherness and clearly enjoy the time that they spend together.

I praise the minister for his work in this area and I congratulate him and his team on this wonderful bill. This is a very difficult area indeed for any minister to take hold of and make a fist of. The minister has done an exceptional job. I echo the many comments made around the chamber today that he is, in fact, a man of high regard across all political circles and divides. Congratulations to him on the work that he has done.

I turn briefly to the bill in some detail. Some issues raise concerns for the opposition, as stated by the shadow minister. Clause 61 does away with the protection provided by the Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1986. That was passed, as the shadow minister stated, to give young people the chance to rejoin and become a member of the community by removing the stigma of a criminal conviction after a period of 10 years on the proviso that the offences were of a minor nature. The bill removes that right and overturns the act to the extent that it requires all convictions to be placed before the chief executive. However, the bill goes further, in that clause 65 requires disclosure not only of any conviction but also of any charge, together with full details relating to the charge. Therefore, it is not just a criminal history of convictions that is required but of offences as well.

There must always be concern when an act that was put in place to assist young people is overturned or at least circumvented. Extensive reasons need to be given for this approach. Clause 65 contains a requirement to provide details of offences or charges, which may well be very scant, given the time that could have expired between the charge being laid and the date the application is lodged to join the department. This could well cause problems, particularly as many years have passed and memory is poor due to the passage of time.

I ask the minister to address these concerns as they are important matters; young people do commit silly offences but then never repeat them. This bill means that they can be taken into account when assessing an application to join the department many years after the event. I note also the same requirements exist for those people who are to be engaged by funded non-government service providers and the same act is excluded under clause 74. I ask the minister to comment upon the rationale behind these provisions.

Finally, the bill has very similar provisions in regard to another bill currently before this House dealing with monitoring and enforcement, as contained in part 10 of the bill. Clearly, there are issues associated with authorised officers being given extensive powers but not having the background training or a control over their activities being put in place. If we are to give wide-ranging power to authorised officers, then such officers need to be trained and the public needs to have redress against them in the event that they are involved in some form of misconduct.

I congratulate the minister on what he has achieved not only in this bill but also in his portfolio. I also sincerely wish him all the best on a personal basis for the future. I commend the bill to the House.