



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Wednesday, 19 April 2006

CHILD SAFETY (CARERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (9.17 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Child Safety (Carers) Amendment Bill 2006. There is no doubt that this is an attempt to improve the greater protection and safety of children under the care of the state government. I note that in the minister's second reading speech the minister said—

The commission's blue card screening process has established a high level of community acceptance and confidence as a prerequisite for working with, or providing services to, children.

He then goes on to talk about how it is, accordingly, appropriate that the blue card be extended to children in care under the Child Protection Act 1999. He further says in his second reading speech—

In the short term, Queensland and interstate criminal, domestic violence and traffic history checks of the proposed carer and their adult household members and an assessment of the person's suitability will be considered by the chief executive when approving provisionally approved carers. In the longer term, those carers and adult members of their household will need to apply for blue cards as part of the substantive application to be a foster or kinship carer.

I have read the bill and I have listened to other speakers, in particular the contributions of the member for Beaudesert and the member for Gregory. The member for Gregory made the great comment that there really should be a photo to go with the blue cards. What we see in the legislation is an attempt to put in place more checks and balances in relation to people who are going to be the primary carers of children under the responsibility of the state government. I ask the question, as a number of grandparents have raised with me when they have come to see me during the short time I have been a member of parliament, about the natural parents' ability and capacity to be the ongoing parent of their grandchild when the mother of the child is a heroin addict and the baby is born with an addiction to heroin. We talk about the fitness of parents to be parents. This legislation is setting out a whole range of new steps where people have to demonstrate their capacity and fitness to be a carer of a child.

I question the consistency of not just the state government but also the federal government when it comes to the issue of responsible parenting in Australia and Queensland. I will be very interested to hear the minister's response to my comments in his reply. There are rights and responsibilities associated with being a parent. To think that mothers are bringing into this world babies who have addictions to drugs such as heroin and other addictions simply because they were not prepared to be a responsible mother or parent really raises the question about how fair dinkum this state government is in making sure we are consistent and send a very strong and clear message to all parents in Queensland that it is not simply one's right to bring a child into this world but also a very serious responsibility. That requires mothers not taking drugs or smoking during the crucial months of pregnancy, as I understand it.

I would be very interested to hear the minister's comments about what he has been doing about this issue at the ministerial forums—that is, when he meets with his fellow ministers and the federal minister. He is looking at extending the responsibilities in this bill. He is endeavouring to extend this responsibility to parents to ensure that they are fit and proper to be the full-time guardians and carers of children. I really look at all the checks and balances that we are requiring of foster-parents and wonder what would happen if we tried to apply some of these same checks and balances to people in the community who are raising their own children. I will be interested to hear the minister's response to that. I will be interested to listen to the contribution of other members during the debate and also in the consideration in detail stage.