



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 9 March 2006

DISABILITY SERVICES BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (4.54 pm): The Disability Services Bill 2005 gives me an opportunity on behalf of my electorate to discuss the very important and serious matter of disabilities. I would like to congratulate the disability services minister, Warren Pitt, for the hardworking and courageous example that he has set for members on both sides of this House. Some members of the Labor Party would do well to model their behaviour on the minister, as they would on our shadow minister, Mr Kev Lingard, who is also a true gentleman.

This place is fortunate to have both a shadow minister and a minister who have reputations, amongst those on all sides of politics, as being men of intellect, having high morals and having a heart. These qualifications are essential when it comes to effectively managing and understanding the area of disability services. I do not know what it is like to live with a disability, but I am about to find out from the backbenchers that many of them probably jokingly suggest that I have a disability.

By God's grace I do not know firsthand what it is like to live with a mental or physical disability. By God's grace I do not know firsthand what it is like to have to care for a disabled family member—a wife, son, daughter, parent or friend. I pay tribute to the hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders who daily, quietly, unassumingly, willingly and with unconditional love accept what many people would think of as a burden. These very brave Queenslanders, these heroes in many ways, treat this as a gift. It is those very precious people, the disabled and their carers, whose care and protection we—the politicians, legislators and community leaders—are entrusted with. It is a duty and a privilege that I take very seriously. It is a duty and privilege which has challenged me many times to examine my beliefs and inner soul. It is a duty and privilege which has confronted me with many of my weaknesses and prejudices and left me counting my blessings.

I had a recent experience where I spent some time with a constituent, a young lady. She is a very brave, courageous single mum who is caring for her baby son who is disabled. The young lady is struggling to cope. Her baby is living with multiple disabilities. Her two-year-old son Daniel is suffering from a number of illnesses such as spasticia, quadriplegia, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and vision impairment. He is fed through a peg in the stomach. Sadly she told me that her son Daniel is not expected to survive much past the age of six and she wants to spend as much quality time with him as possible.

When Daniel was born, unfortunately his dad left, all the friends disappeared and this lady's mum does not really want to get close because she cannot cope with the fact that Daniel will soon die. Like many other parents of children with severe disabilities, she believes that there are not enough services and funding available to provide assistance and she is desperately attempting to seek respite care and a number of items that will make living easier, such as a shower chair with wheels, an electrical bed to fully support her child and a specialised car seat. Her independence is very important to her. Travelling around in a car is quite dangerous for Daniel because of his disabilities; the slightest big bump could cause his neck to snap and break the spinal cord. I have made representations to the minister regarding this matter, who I hope will consider her plight and assist her. I look forward to the minister's favourable response in this matter.

During our discussion recently the mother handed me a letter, which I believe is a standard letter many parents send to the minister and their local members, which highlights the significant problem of underfunding of disability services for children in Queensland. As a result, a significant number of children are not receiving the services and support they need. The letter reads—

As a Queensland parent of a child with a disability, I struggle daily to access services for my child who is unable to access the full range of services that they require.

I am advised that many providers of service to children with disability are struggling with increasing demand for services, and increased costs of service provision and historic underfunding.

There are many vital programs for children with disabilities that do not operate in Queensland due to this lack of funding.

The letter states further—

The Australian Bureau of Statistics conservatively indicates that there are 64,000 Queensland children aged 0-14 years with disabilities who require specialist services.

52% of these children have a severe or profound activity restriction.

In 2003-04, only 3,978 ALD children aged 0-14 with a disability received services funded by Disability Services QLD. This represented only 6.2% of QLD children with disabilities.

However, the letter points out that the ABS data does not include children with mild disabilities in the zero to five and the 15 to 18 years categories, meaning that the percentage of Queensland children receiving services is much lower.

Debate, on motion of Mr Messenger, adjourned.