



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 19 April 2006

CHILD SAFETY (CARERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (9.43 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Child Safety (Carers) Amendment Bill 2006. As a broad general principle, the legislation errs on the side of caution and comes down in favour of the child so that the child's safety comes first, and that is why I am supporting this legislation. I have previously spoken on the current situation of child carers in the Bundaberg-Burnett area, making this House aware of comments made to me by private psychologists. I feel it is necessary to reiterate what these professionals have told me in relation to background checks of carers looking after children. I think the minister has paid attention to those comments made to me by psychologists that I have spoken about previously in this chamber. This bill streamlines the process of attaining blue cards for carers.

The psychologists I have previously spoken to are concerned by the department's inaction saying that in past months and years it did not always follow through properly and was cutting corners in the process. In the past, instead of carrying out thorough background checks before a child is placed in a home, there were a lot of cases where children were being put in homes with carers who had not had full background checks completed. I compliment the minister because this legislation, we hope, will streamline that process and stop that happening.

Psychologists believe that this was happening quite frequently, especially in an area like Bundaberg-Burnett where there is a shortage of carers available. The system is under pressure to find carers for these children. The department was tempted to take the risk and place those children who have nowhere to go with a carer prior to their background checks being completed. The department apparently labelled this as risk management. You can call it whatever you like but it is still cutting corners, which has the potential to be very dangerous for the children. As I have said before, it all comes back to the fact that we do not have enough adequately trained and approved carers. That is a major problem in regional Queensland—in particular, in the Bundaberg-Burnett region—and that needs to be addressed.

The government, as the shadow minister has pointed out, has admitted that there are delays in processing background checks for blue cards, and creating an additional provision in the legislation that enables an extension of the period allowed to approve a carer or licensed care service will ensure applications are not refused due to the length of time it takes to approve these applications. I would hope that these background checks are taking a fairly lengthy time to approve because those checks need to be thorough. With those few words, I support the legislation.