



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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POLICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (3.18 pm): I rise to speak to the Police and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. As members of this House have already heard from my colleague the shadow minister for police and corrective services, the member for Burnett, the coalition will be supporting this bill with the exception of clause 6 and the amendment to clause 10.

An opposition member interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: We will be supporting it. Can I confirm what I just said. The honourable member has informed me that we will be supporting it.

The principal objectives of this piece of legislation are to remove redundant provisions, correct deficiencies or omissions and implement agreed policy changes.

Unlike some members opposite, we can actually admit when we change our minds. They seem to find that very difficult to do. The Police and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 makes amendments to the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000, the Police Service Administration Act 1990, the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004 and the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995.

Today I will focus my response to two specific areas of this legislation: the first being the amendments to TORUM which facilitate the enforcement of the proposed peer passenger restriction reforms to improve young driver safety; the second being the changes to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004.

In respect of the new young driver licensing provisions due to commence on 1 July 2007, it is imperative that we in this House as responsible legislators effect changes which reflect methods enabling greater protection for the younger members of our society. Since being elected the member for Currumbin there have been a number of instances in my electorate where young people have been killed in motor vehicle accidents. The tragedy that spreads throughout the community has a very numbing and humbling effect, one that is especially felt on the anniversaries of some of these young people's deaths.

When I spoke on the Transport Legislation and Another Act Amendment Bill on 21 February this year I highlighted to the House the young driver survey which I undertook in 2005 after the death of two Palm Beach Currumbin High School students. As I stated then and I repeat now, their young, unfulfilled lives were tragically lost due to a combination of inexperience, speed and driver incompetence.

As the mother of two children who are now grown and both over the age of 25, I remember well feeling secure in the knowledge that during their late teens and early 20s when they went anywhere with their friends they took turns to share the responsibility of driving. I trusted them to be sensible and take every precaution to look after their mates so that they could all come home safely.

Many young people practise this arrangement as it avoids the need to wait at lengthy and sometimes dangerous taxi queues or bus stops. Making it illegal for young people to engage in this practice will certainly be seen by many of the young people who venture out together in groups to licensed

venues as overly restrictive. There are many areas on the Gold Coast, particularly west of the M1, where public transport is non-existent after 11 pm. In some areas it is non-existent full stop.

Coupled with a shortage of taxis at peak entertainment times on Friday and Saturday nights, which other members of the House have acknowledged, these new laws have the potential to create considerable difficulty for a number of our younger adult generation. However, the high number of avoidable and senseless young deaths due to vehicle accidents warrant this legislation.

Growing up is often a tumultuous time and can present many situations to young people where the difference in their decision making can result in life or death, especially where cars are involved. I do support the measures which are being introduced with the new young driver licensing laws, and I note that these new requirements impose not only the display of learner's, P1 and P2 plates but also the mandatory 100 hours of driving experience.

Like many members I have recently received the brochures published by Queensland Transport outlining the requirements. The department has done a pretty good job of spelling out to young drivers exactly what their rights and responsibilities are under this new system. As part of my community awareness program, I will be promoting this brochure in my electorate, particularly to the senior students of my local high schools.

Clause 9 of this bill sends a clear message to young people that if police are required to stop a vehicle and as passengers they are asked to provide proof of their age they must do so or they may face charges. The government must ensure that it continues to circulate the information about the new laws and to ensure that in its efforts to reduce road carnage it provides sufficient security and public transport to convey residents to their homes or chosen destinations safely and not place young people in potentially dangerous situations. As far as the police are concerned, it is a lot better for them to be pulling vehicles over and undertaking identity and age checks than having to attend a motor vehicle accident and the checks end up being done by the parents at the morgue.

We know that statistics show that young drivers, high performance cars and peer pressure can have significant impacts on young drivers. The passenger restriction provisions will hopefully go a long way to curtailing some or all of these factors. Tonight local police are holding a road safety forum at the Currumbin RSL. It will cover the causes of traffic accidents. I sincerely hope that this will be well supported by our community considering there are two very large high schools in the electorate. The forum is for parents with teenagers who are in the process of obtaining a driver's licence. One of the featured speakers tonight is Shem Aitken, who is now in a wheelchair as a result of a speeding traffic accident. It is to be hoped that those in attendance will listen and learn and not be statistics of the future.

The police in the Currumbin electorate do a remarkable job in engaging in community consultation, and I am very pleased to announce that Coolangatta has recently formed a community consultative committee following along the lines of the Palm Beach consultative committee, which started less than two years ago.

In relation to part 2 of this bill, which incorporates clauses 3 to 7, we have specific changes to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004. These clauses particularly clarify the requirement that a reportable offender must report their personal details to the Commissioner of Police within the later of either the period specified for the offender detailed in the table of the provision or 28 days after the commissioner gives the offender a notice under section 59.

As we have heard from the member for Burnett, there is contention in respect of clause 6, particularly in regard to the principles of maintaining secrecy of a reportable offender's location, over the community not knowing if there is a sex offender living there. The effective gagging of police from releasing this information goes against the coalition policy of a Megan's law type scenario.

Of concern to me are child sexual offenders, most predominantly those who fall within the Wortley and Smallbone stranger profile. This type of child sexual offender has multiple numbers of victims and will normally take the highest risk to ensure that they are able to offend. This type of offender uses opportunity and situations to sexually offend. With multiple victims, it is more often the thrill. This offender is most likely to reoffend and falls into the predator category. When examining the circumstances which lead to a person being designated as a dangerous prisoner and a child protection reportable offender, it is the antisocial predatory stranger child sexual offender behaviour which results in this identification for the register.

Research suggests that these offenders are the ones who will reoffend despite rehabilitation and hence place children in our community at greatest risk. There is the potential over the next three years that 100-plus prisoners will be released back into the community who the courts and forensic psychologists have deemed have a high risk of reoffending. I know within my small community, even within a couple of streets—I live on acreage—that there is great concern amongst people moving to my area that a paedophile lives amongst us. It is a very difficult task to continually reassure people with young children in particular that everything is being done to protect them without identifying the address or the name of the offender.

I ask the minister perhaps in her reply to tell the House what measures have been implemented by her government to give the community any knowledge that the reportable offenders will be living in their midst, understanding the sensitivity of this situation. We also need to know that Queenslanders can be guaranteed that departmental officers will be able to adequately monitor the reportable offenders and that resources will be provided to police to track them to ensure that they do not reoffend. Resources, as we all know, are stretched within the Department of Child Safety, as well as in both police, community corrections and health. We need to keep the pressure on everyone to continue to be diligent in this regard.

The final thought I leave members with as I commend this bill to the House is that once a child is abused it is a situation that can never be changed. It does become society's problem, a problem for the future, a problem that in one way or another deeply affects all of us.