



Speech by

Kate Jones

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard Thursday, 23 August 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Ms JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (3.15 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Community Services Bill 2007. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the minister on this bill which has been the product of several years of hard work and reform. This bill is reflective of the minister's commitment to the community sector and, in particular, the dedicated organisations that provide services to some of the most vulnerable citizens in our community.

It is also about ensuring that the state government can be confident that the services and programs supported with taxpayers' funds are effective and complement the government's priorities. For a large human services agency that is responsible for developing policy on volunteering, crime prevention, family and domestic violence prevention, family support, homelessness and even disaster recovery this bill delivers significant changes.

Since we are celebrating Seniors Week it is appropriate to draw to the attention of members that the department also promotes the interests of seniors. The minister recently joined me at the Regis Nursing Home at The Gap. The minister provided the residents with information regarding services provided by the department, such as the seniors line, and other state government agencies. We had a lovely time.

Mr Bombolas interjected.

Ms JONES: I will take that interjection. You are on the other side of town. There are no southsiders on my side, mate. I commend the department for its excellent work in supporting and promoting the many activities and events that are being held throughout the state this week in celebrating Queensland seniors.

The bill before the House is the result of a long-term reform process aimed at making community organisations more viable and effective in the future. I clarify for the House that the member for Chatsworth is welcome in my electorate any time he likes.

Mr Weightman interjected.

Ms JONES: And baysiders as well. In 2005 the minister launched the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations Strategy. The strategy focused on building the capacity of funded non-government organisations to ensure they provide quality services to the community and to their clients with the taxpayers' dollars that they receive.

There are nine key initiatives contained within the strategy being undertaken collaboratively between the department and the community and disability sectors. This bill is an integral part of this package. It provides a contemporary framework to support the work of community organisations to ensure that Queenslanders have access to high-quality, accountable community services. The reforms also clarify and provide greater transparency in the processes for application and allocation of Department of Communities' funding for organisations.

New regulations will set out requirements and standards approved service providers are expected to meet. To strengthen these requirements the bill provides for the department to issue compliance notices and show cause notices should standards not be met. Further measures include suspending or stopping assistance, recovering unspent or misused funds and also the ability to appoint an interim manager.

This bill also provides for the department to be able to investigate serious concerns about funding use and service provision. Departmental officers will be able to request that documents be produced and that they enter and search premises with consent or with a warrant. This bill is about ensuring that we have security for the future. These main features of the Community Services Bill are necessary and will give government the mechanisms to ensure that non-government organisations provide vital services in our communities and that taxpayers' dollars are not misused. I commend the bill to the House.