



Speech by

Hon. Kevin Lingard

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G (REPORT NO. 2)

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (9.09 pm): I thank the committee and the ministers of this estimates committee. The opposition always has a concern when only one hour is given for a particular section. The government takes half of it, and if there are one or two other non-government members on that committee there are probably only three or four questions in which one can investigate all of the sections which are questioned under the Department of Communities. Three or four questions is obviously ridiculous.

The primary reason for my dissent is the lack of practical support for vulnerable families at risk of entering the child protection system. These deficiencies include delays in the development of the early service centres which were promised last financial year and the shift in emphasis from providing them to high-need areas in 2006-07 to high-growth areas in 2007-08; inadequate early intervention programs and crisis accommodation for vulnerable families; and the \$10 million underspend during 2006-07 which had been allocated to provide desperately needed programs for vulnerable families such as safe havens, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-care infrastructure upgrades, family support, community support, domestic violence prevention, and assistance for the homeless across the state.

Peak representative bodies and academics believe that the huge increase in the number of children in out-of-home care is an unintended consequence of separating the Department of Child Safety from the Department of Communities and that since more children now enter the child protection system for neglect than abuse the Department of Communities needs to provide more family support and wellbeing measures. Clearly, this budget does not provide the level of support necessary to significantly impact outcomes for these vulnerable children and families. I note that the number of notifications is up and the number of kids in care amounts to a crisis. There has been a 150 per cent increase in five years. Currently, there are 6,500 kids in care in Queensland. The fact is that children in care have abysmal adult outcomes. The big question is: why take kids into care if we are not going to give them better quality of life outcomes?

I would have liked to have had enough time to question the minister about staffing. My understanding is that permanent staff represents only about 10 per cent of the department. In terms of the ICMS system, whilst the minister said that it is operational I understand that it is not working and the department is paying tens of millions of dollars to Microsoft to fix this problem. I would have liked to have questioned him about that.

The other concern that the opposition has mentioned relates to the reports of the Auditor-General, and once again I refer to Auditor-General's report No. 2. I have spoken about this in debate on the Community Services Bill, but we have to realise that the Auditor-General has recommended that the department develop an information management system—that is, a grants management system—which enables the effective and timely collection and analysis of financial and performance data to inform policy and program development and service interventions. The Auditor-General also says that this department should investigate the scope for a broader development and application of the department's proposed grants management system for use across human service agencies and develop an integrated financial

and performance management framework which includes policy and operational procedures, tools and resources, training and guidance for departmental staff and communication to NGOs on reporting requirements and support available. This could be in the form of a consolidated resource manual or electronic guidance.

I note the reply by the department in which the director-general says that the department has already commenced work on a whole-of-government policy to determine the most appropriate mode of delivery of government funded human services. Quite obviously we will inquire as to whether this department has done that, but I note that in report No. 4 the Auditor-General says that a whole-of-government approach is impossible with the lack of computer equipment that the government has. Even when this department gets itself online, it is questionable whether this government has enough computer ability to monitor these grants systems, especially to NGOs, across the state.