



Speech by

**Liz Cunningham**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

Hansard Tuesday, 4 September 2007

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## **COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILD GUARDIAN AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (2.45 pm): I rise to speak to the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Amendment Bill 2007. I do not think there is a person in this chamber who does not support the protection of children—that is, the intrinsic value of children. Their importance and their dependence on adults for physical safety, emotional safety and sexual safety is unarguable. Most people in the community find it very difficult to understand how another adult can injure a child in such a way. However, it happens and there are records of heinous crimes being done against children. One of the previous speakers in this debate was saying that a blue card is not an all-encompassing guarantee that children are safe, and that is true. Somebody who is determined to harm a child and who does not have a police record will be able to get a blue card, and the existence of a blue card does not remove the responsibility and obligation on people around children to be diligent and to pick up behaviours by an adult that are suspect or reactions by children that are of concern. We need to be careful that we do not see a blue card as a panacea for those potential problems.

I do not think there are many people in my community who oppose the blue card process. The only complaints that I get are complaints about the amount of time that it takes for the blue card process to occur and that if there is a backlog there is the potential risk—and it is a reality in my electorate—that those cards may expire. There have been situations where cards were up for renewal and the renewal had not been processed through the department, and one was a foster-carer and another one was an in-home child carer. They were at risk of losing their occupation until the card came through. Thankfully, we contacted the department and the department was able to check on the progress of those applications and we were able to avoid unnecessary complications. But that is the complaint that I get—that is, the time that it takes to process the blue card and sometimes the inadvertent complications that occur. For example, if someone has a common name and they are doing an interstate check, there can be lengthy delays in that process. As I said, people support wholeheartedly any initiative that will protect children, but certainly they want the process to be reasonably streamlined.

The member for Currumbin referred to Bravehearts Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure. Bravehearts is rolling out quite a significant program and I know that it is interested in commencing an outreach program in Gladstone, because I was talking with Hetty Johnston yesterday about it. Some time ago—I think it was about 2004—there was a pilot program for a specialist child counsellor in Gladstone. The program was closed down about four years ago and that counsellor had 20 parents on the book with children who had been sexually assaulted. When this program was closed down, those people were cut lose. The counsellors that are private—there are two I believe in Gladstone—have closed their books because they have too many people and we desperately need a specialist child counsellor to be able to service the community.

In the discussions that I have had with people, one of their concerns is not that children are not disclosing or when they disclose; their concern is that after the child has disclosed there are no services or inadequate services available to be able to provide support and counselling to the child. Having

established sufficient courage to be able to talk about something that is particularly debilitating, they then need to be able to get follow-up support services. I call on the minister again to reconsider a funding program for a specialist child counsellor for the electorate of Gladstone. I have received a letter back from the minister, Warren Pitt, which says that they do not have resources available. The letter refers to Roseberry Community Services and Gladstone Neighbourhood Centre. I know that one of the counsellors, Veronica Laverty, who does a wonderful job, has been moved to a management role for a time. So at least half the services that the minister may think are available in Gladstone will not be because of that secondment.

We will all stand here and say how important our children are. Anyone who does not value children needs to have some concerns about their values. They are so dependent. They are so trusting of adults until that trust is betrayed. I would again ask the minister to think about providing funding for a specialist child counsellor for the Gladstone area. I commend Bravehearts for their interest in establishing an outreach service there. It would certainly be appreciated and valued. I certainly support the legislation with the concerns about the time the applications take to process—both new applications and renewals—in mind. I support the legislation.