



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Safety Officers

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women) (10.23 am): During my short time as Minister for Child Safety, I have had the pleasure of meeting some of Queensland's most dedicated and passionate workers. I believe child safety officers have one of the most difficult jobs in government. Their job requires them to make decisions that can have incredible effects on people's lives. It is often a thankless job. Unlike police officers, ambos and firies, child safety officers rarely receive a hero's welcome when they knock on the front door of a family's home. More often they are threatened with violence, verbally abused or even physically assaulted.

I am advised that only yesterday at a Brisbane child safety service centre during an interview with child safety officers a father produced a gun wrapped in a towel. The officers calmly continued the interview, then left the room—again very calmly—taking the gun with them and calling the police, who arrived immediately to give assistance to the officers and promptly arrested the man. Another child safety officer was almost run off the road when an angry family member chased after her in a car. Another was stabbed during a visit last year. When I recently visited a child safety service centre, a machete-wielding mother was stalking the front door. Even though I was a little bit concerned for the safety of the officers inside, they were calmly going about their business. These are just some of the horrors officers face every single day. And yet, day after day, they return to face them all over again.

They do it for one reason, and that is that these workers have an absolute passion for protecting children, children who do not have loving, capable parents to protect them. That is what it is all about for these compassionate men and women—the reward of seeing once frightened, neglected or abused children being given a safe, loving and nurturing environment. It is about watching those same children grow and mature, with the love and support of caring foster-parents, into young people with enormous potential. It is about watching them reach that potential and move into rewarding careers or have families of their own, knowing that their children will have a safe and happy home because they have learnt the skills their own parents lacked.

Child safety staff, together with 3,000 carer families, do an amazing job. Recent figures from the office of the child guardian show that 98 per cent of kids in care say they feel safe in care and 90 per cent said they were better off since coming into care. Being a child safety officer is not work everyone can do. It is very, very tough work, but it is some of the most important and rewarding work undertaken in this state. These officers deserve our support, and I urge all members to visit their local centre before Christmas and recognise and thank these officers for the absolutely brilliant work that they are doing in protecting our children.