



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Thursday, 23 August 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (3.44 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Community Services Bill 2007. The Department of Communities is a human services agency that is responsible for developing policy on volunteering, crime prevention, family and domestic violence prevention, family support, homelessness and disaster recovery. The department also promotes the interests of seniors so that they are valued and active members of Queensland communities.

This week is Seniors Week. There are quite a number of activities taking place on the Gold Coast throughout this week. In particular, I look forward to visiting Moncrieff U3A tomorrow where I will present some awards at an art exhibition being held there. I take this opportunity to 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. They really do a fantastic job. I am sure many of our communities really enjoy all those activities.

In addition to these responsibilities of the department, the Department of Community Services provides financial support to a range of non-government organisations that work closely with communities to identify local needs and opportunities. Some of these organisations on the Gold Coast include the Nerang Neighbourhood Centre and the Gold Coast Family Support Group. I know that many of the Gold Coast members have had a lot of dealings with and have worked closely with those groups. They do a fantastic job of supporting people with disabilities and their families.

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 that they continue to provide a high-quality service to their clients and also the community. Within the strategy there are nine key initiatives that are being undertaken collaboratively by the department and the community and disability sectors. This bill being discussed today is one of those initiatives.

The bill is an up-to-date legal foundation for supporting the work of community organisations and ensuring that Queenslanders have access to high-quality, safe and accountable community services. It aims to provide a greater transparency with regard to how the Department of Communities provides funding to community organisations, ensuring that there is a clear understanding by those organisations about the process and for the department in determining what groups are eligible for funding. The bill also enables a regulation to be made which sets out requirements and standards that approved service providers are expected to meet in order to ensure that funding is provided and continues. It is, of course, public funding. This bill ensures a greater amount of accountability.

To strengthen these requirements the bill provides for the department to issue compliance notices or show-cause notices to approved service providers should the standards not be met. Further measures of accountability include suspending or stopping assistance, recovering unspent or misused funds, and the opportunity for the department to appoint an interim manager. The bill also provides for the department to be able to investigate very serious concerns about funding use and service provision by an approved

service provider. This bill provides that officers will be able to request documents to be produced, and enter and search premises with consent or with a warrant.

These main features of the Community Services Bill will be welcomed by the many thousands of Queenslanders who access vital services through non-government organisations as the requirements and checking processes will go a long way to eliminating any opportunity for funds to be misused. This bill provides greater checks and balances, which the community expect to be in place, and the minister and his department should be congratulated on the extensive consultation undertaken in the development of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.