



Speech by

Ronan Lee

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (6.10 pm): Today I genuinely welcome the opportunity to speak about why new legislation for community services has been developed. Currently the Department of Communities provides funding to community organisations under the Family Services Act 1987. Aspects of that act are jointly administered by our wonderful ministers Pitt and Boyle.

No significant changes have been made to the sections of the Family Services Act that relate to government funding since the act's introduction over 20 years ago. As a result, the Family Services Act is quite obviously dated in style and content. It does not provide a transparent guide to exercising powers and performing legislative functions. Also it does not provide adequate measures to ensure the safety of vulnerable service users and the appropriate use of public funds.

By contrast, the Community Services Bill being debated today provides greater transparency and certainty for the community services sector, ensures quality outcomes for service users, their families and communities, and ensures consistency with other contemporary human services legislation.

I would like to talk in more detail about some of the important improvements contained within the bill. In relation to funding, the Family Services Act does not specify the requirements that community organisations must meet to be eligible for funding assistance. Also, under the current arrangements, organisations need to submit similar information a number of times and in a number of ways.

A clear process for determining which organisations are eligible for assistance from the department is set out in the bill, and these are called approved service providers. Determining eligibility for assistance will provide greater transparency and certainty for the sector and provide a consistent benchmark. Processes for providing information to the department will also be streamlined.

The current statutory provision of monetary grants does not fully reflect how the department assists community organisations. By contrast, this bill clarifies the kind of assistance, including funding leases and other forms of assistance, the department can then provide. Clarifying the kind of assistance that can be provided reflects contemporary arrangements for assisting community organisations and will support future innovation. This will also provide a consistent benchmark and a transparent legal basis for service agreements.

The Family Services Act does not effectively support a proactive or flexible response to managing performance issues. Investigative and monitoring powers are limited and the only performance measure is the suspension of funding.

The bill provides flexible and responsive remedial and assistance measures. It equips the department with contemporary investigative monitoring powers to deal with serious concerns and provides greater transparency and effective safeguards to ensure the appropriate use of powers.

Contemporary expectations for the review of decisions are not currently met by the Family Services Act. For the first time, the bill sets out a fair process for reviews and appeals that will provide a transparent, accountable and fair right of review for important administrative decisions and facilitate improved decision making by the department.

The bill being debated today provides a contemporary legal basis for the Department of Communities to give assistance to community organisations. The legislation also intends to meet community expectations about the quality, safety and accountability of services provided to Queenslanders. The Department of Communities will obviously use this new legislation instead of the Family Services Act as the basis for giving assistance to community organisations.

I applaud Minister Pitt's commitment to ensuring new community services legislation that will provide a strong and clear guide for the community services sector, and help government and community organisations work together to provide high-quality, safe and accountable services. This genuinely contemporary approach is essential to achieving the government's vision of safe, valued and empowered communities.