



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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HEALTH LEGISLATION (RESTRICTION ON USE OF COSMETIC SURGERY FOR CHILDREN AND ANOTHER MEASURE) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (5.06 pm): I rise to support the Health Legislation (Restriction on Use of Cosmetic Surgery for Children and Another Measure) Amendment Bill 2008. This bill, as we all know, amends a number of acts aimed at improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of Queensland's children. The provisions of this bill are directly age related and relate to cosmetic procedures and the use of solariums. These provisions are about protecting young people in Queensland from potentially harmful health outcomes.

For those members who do not know, today is exactly 12 months since I was sworn in as a member of this House. It is amazing how quickly time flies. They say that time flies when you are having a good time, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as the member for Brisbane Central. I have been working hard with my constituents on many and varied issues that come through my office. If I am getting to know the constituents better—and I have lived in the electorate of Brisbane Central all of my life—I firmly believe that they, too, would support this bill and in general would support what this bill aims to achieve.

This bill will prevent children from undergoing unnecessary, risky and often invasive cosmetic procedures and solarium use and makes it an offence for anyone to perform or offer to perform certain cosmetic procedures on children other than where it is in the best interests of the children. We know that that is sometimes difficult to interpret, but I am sure that the legislation will give the teeth that will enable this to happen.

I believe that this bill strikes a good balance between, on the one hand, prohibiting high-risk invasive cosmetic procedures and, on the other hand, allowing procedures to take place where they are justified on medical grounds. In these cases the legislation will provide an exemption from an offence. I have a good example. I have a niece in Tasmania who was born with a number of moles on her face. They were very noticeable and they were actually very large moles. There were about three or four of them.

A government member interjected.

Ms GRACE: They were very dangerous. I take that interjection. On medical grounds, when she was about 11 or 12 it was agreed that the best course would be to remove them earlier rather than waiting until later in life. My niece understood exactly what was happening. I think she was also teased a bit at school. When we have something on our faces, young people tend to tease us at school over things like that. With her consent and the consent of her parents and obviously under medical supervision and under medical advice, it was agreed that the scarring would be minimal and that they would remove the moles. She was holidaying in Queensland in September just recently and you really could not tell that any surgery had actually taken place. Young skin has a fantastic ability to heal, and there is no evidence whatsoever of these moles having been removed. I believe that it is these types of situations that illustrate the good balance that this legislation is striking here in Queensland.

I was also amazed when I read the statistics and saw how many young people would consider getting cosmetic surgery—I note the figures given by the member for Bundamba—for purely cosmetic reasons. When this is coupled with peer pressure, concerns about body image and the desire to conform to stereotypes, I believe this bill is most timely. I commend the minister and the Bligh government for tackling this situation now, particularly after the Premier was informed by doctors last year that there was an increase in adolescent patients not only inquiring about cosmetic surgery but also, in some cases, demanding cosmetic surgery. Surely allowing the situation to continue unchecked would definitely not be in the best interests of children.

I was also amazed to read the statistics about the emergence of brokerage and advisory services as part of the cosmetic industry in Queensland and, indeed, Australia. I believe that this bill, which I support, will provide the teeth to make it an offence to procure or offer to procure for payment a cosmetic procedure for a child. This offence will be specific to these brokerage and advisory services. However, this offence does not apply where a registered health practitioner makes a clinical referral to another practitioner—for example, a GP referring a patient to a plastic surgeon such as in the case of my niece in Tasmania. In cases, however, where a petitioner is found to have acted in contravention of this bill, the legislation will have the teeth so that action can be taken against reported alleged contraventions. The chief executive of Health can report contraventions to the Health Quality and Complaints Commission and the practitioners registration board, and authorised persons under the act will also have entry and monitoring compliance powers. I support these measures that are encompassed in the bill.

We all know, and we have heard it many times today, that Queensland does have a higher incidence of skin cancer—in fact, the highest in the world. It is alarming that 80 per cent of any damage often occurs in the first 18 to 21 years of life. This is from the dangers of UV radiation. My husband, Michael, who is an ex-bricklayer, is suffering today, as is the member for Caloundra, for his exposure to the sun. He often—I think every six months—has either some radiation treatment or skin removed in order to control his now unfortunate skin cancer caused by those many days of exposure to the sun.

I think the solarium industry is an interesting industry. It is one which I understand is currently self-regulating. We all know what self-regulation does. We only have to look at the financial industry at the moment to know that self-regulation does not work in every instance. Operators at the moment voluntarily adhere to the Australian standard, and that includes a requirement to obtain consent from anyone who is under the age of 18. However, research has shown that just over 40 per cent set a minimum age of 18 which, on balance, is allowing 60 per cent of children to use solariums.

Like other members in this House who have spoken in this debate, I do not get the use of solariums. Maybe it is seeing those horror movies where people get trapped in the solarium and cannot get out or perhaps it is an aversion to just lying in a very confined space, but I do not see the benefit of going to a solarium. I have never used one and never will, although I have had a bad case of sunburn. I know what that is like, and I would dread to think of the damage these solariums cause to our skin and our young people, in particular.

I think it is great that we are taking a nationally consistent approach. I congratulate the minister. It is pleasing to see that 80 per cent of operators are backing moves to regulate the use of solariums by anyone under the age of 18. The Cancer Council Queensland and the Australasian Solarium Association are among a number of organisations supporting the Bligh government's stance and the benefits that this bill will deliver to young people in Queensland.

There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders regarding the bill. It is pleasing to see that this is a common-sense bill. It is a bill that makes you proud to be a member of this Labor government. It is great to see that the House is supporting it. I commend the bill to the House.