



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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CARERS (RECOGNITION) BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (8.37 pm): In rising to participate in this debate on the Carers (Recognition) Bill 2008, I, too, as many other members in this House have done, want to pay tribute to all of those carers in the community. Obviously I am talking about the spouses, the mothers, the fathers, the grandparents, as referred to by the member for Noosa, relatives and often friends and cousins who devote a lot of their time, a lot of hard work and a lot of dedication to looking after their loved ones and friends, often at their own expense to their careers and their lifestyles. Therefore, it is really important that we unite in this House tonight to recognise the role that they play in the community and the role that they have—that much-needed support and care that they give to so many in the community, from children to the elderly.

Even in the short time that I have been the member for Brisbane Central—just over 12 months now—it is amazing the number of these people that I meet. I congratulate not only the member who brought this bill to the House but also the minister's office, which does a lot of work with carers in trying to assist them to carry out their duties.

Just the other day I held a health forum. At that forum I spoke to a man who had told me that he had given up full-time work. He is now working part-time and spending the rest of his time looking after his 86-year-old mother. That is just one of many cases I have come across in my electorate of people who have dedicated and devoted their lives to helping their loved ones. I think it is important that we recognise them.

Specifically, I would like to address the agency reporting and accountability requirements in the bill. The private member's bill requires public sector agencies to consider the carer's charter and to consult with carer representative bodies when making a decision regarding services affecting carers. It is also important that we make some amendments to tighten up the reporting requirements.

The government has already played a significant role in looking after carers. I was a bit dismayed that during this debate the member for Currumbin suggested that this bill would, unlike the government's Carer Recognition Policy, provide direction to government agencies in the formulation of policy relating to carers. I will read directly from page 2 of that Carer Recognition Policy. I think it is important to do so, because the government is doing something in this area and I think to say otherwise is quite misleading. The policy states—

The Carer Recognition Policy provides Queensland Government departments and agencies with a framework to identify and recognise the important role of carers. It provides a clear set of principles and guidelines for Queensland Government agencies to adopt in recognising the role of carers in the design and delivery of relevant policies, programs and services, now and in the future.

Once again, the member for Currumbin is incorrect in saying that these government agencies did not abide by those types of rulings and policies.

As I have said, the reporting requirements in the bill could be improved. Although the bill includes a requirement to record some decisions in writing, it does not include any public reporting requirements. I think it is important that we do that. Reporting is a way of ensuring continuous improvement in the way in which public authorities meet the objectives of the legislation. It is proposed that the bill be amended to

require a public authority to report on the ways in which it is meeting its obligations under the legislation and how it is taking action to reflect the principles of the carer's charter in the provision of services.

I commend the carer's charter. I think a charter that recognises carers' skills, their knowledge, the relationship they have built up and the important role they undertake gives carers the respect they deserve in our community. I believe that is very much a fundamental part of legislation that we should be reporting on. The report would also include information prescribed by regulation and it would be included in the annual report of the public authority. I think that is a very important part of this legislation.

The practical effect of the reporting requirements would be to require each public authority to implement a process to ensure that the carer's charter is considered when providing services for the authority which affects carers and the people who they care for. Additionally, the new Carers Advisory Council, to be established through this bill, will be able to make recommendations to the minister on ways to enhance compliance by public authorities with the carer's charter. Reporting in this way will help build a culture across the government of ensuring that the interests of carers are considered and cemented in the legislation.

There are many elements that government agencies can take and then apply. For example, in the area of industrial relations, which is my background, some of the most vulnerable workers in our workplace are carers. It was devastating for me when a lot of workplaces with fewer than 100 workers lost their rights to unfair dismissal under John Howard's laws, because let me tell members that the people who suffered were the carers—the ones who had to look after their families and who were not able to be at work. Some of the cases that came through the QCU and its unions were quite devastating. Workers were sacked because they were not able to turn up because they had to look after their grandchild, or their child, or a sick relative, or someone like that. They had no protection. Many of them were sacked on the spot and they had nowhere to go. It is fantastic to see that such laws are currently being removed from the Australian industrial relations landscape.

It is great that, when respite care services are being formulated, the young and the elderly are being taken into account and their carers are being heard and listened to about the best way to provide respite services. Those government departments are then enabled to report on what they have done and how they have listened to those people in formulating policy and the delivery of services. Home and Community Care services fit neatly into that category as well.

When I was involved with the Jupiters Casino Community Benefit Fund, all of us who were involved in that fund had a very soft heart when it came to giving funds to palliative care services. There are many in society who provide an incredible array of support and assistance for those who provide palliative care. It would be great, when government is formulating policies around palliative care, if the carer's views were taken into account and how those views that were formulated were reported. Of course, any financial assistance that we can offer carers is fundamental to ensuring that their lives are just that little bit easier. It is very pleasing to note that the peak body for carers strongly supports not only the recognition of carers but a charter and that legislation should be formulated around recognising their role.

I find this legislation to be most welcome. I congratulate the member who brought this legislation into the House and the minister. I commend the bill to the House.