



Speech by

Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Tuesday, 19 May 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget, Disability Services

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (10.24 am): I welcome the Rudd government's continued recognition of the importance of Queensland's disability sector in the federal budget announced last week. The Bligh government is committed to working with the Rudd government to shape reforms within this area. The budget highlights the need to ensure ongoing support for vulnerable members of the community, particularly during these tough economic times.

Single disability pensions for recipients who receive the full rate will increase by an extra \$32.50 a week. The introduction of the carer supplement of \$600 a year to all 450,000 carers receiving a benefit also recognises the immense contributions carers make in caring for people with a disability. Some \$9.3 million over four years has been provided for an extra 250 places for outside school hours and vacation care for teenagers with a disability or severe medical condition.

It has also established a \$1.8 million national companion card scheme, which has been successfully running in Queensland. This will mean up to 200,000 people with a disability and their carers can attend sporting and entertainment events and venues without incurring the cost of an extra ticket. These national initiatives, to name a few, provide the Bligh government an opportunity to work in partnership with the federal government to deliver significant reforms across the country to promote social inclusion and to combat discrimination.

I am aware of recent reports in the *Courier-Mail* in relation to vision-impaired people being discriminated against because they have a guide-dog. This is simply unacceptable. This morning I spoke to the transport minister about this issue. Under section 2 of the existing Guide Dogs Act 1972, people accompanied by a guide-dog in public places cannot be discriminated against because of their guide-dog. Under the new Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009, all guide-dogs plus assistance dogs will have access to public places and all public passenger vehicles.

The aim of this new act, due to take effect on 1 July, is to ensure blind and vision-impaired people are able to have access to public places with their assistance dogs, including taxis, buses, shopping centres and restaurants. To enforce this, penalties for discriminating against a person accompanied by a guide-dog or assistance dog will significantly increase from \$100 for an individual up to \$10,000. The Bligh government is committed to improving the lives of blind and vision-impaired people and increasing their participation in all aspects of community life.