



Speech by

Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Thursday, 20 May 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Assistance Dogs

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (10.02 am): The Bligh government is committed to improving the lives of young Queenslanders living with a disability. Under the new Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009, all guide-dogs and assistance dogs will have access to public places and all public passenger vehicles. The aim of this new act is to ensure blind and vision impaired people and those with intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities are able to access public places with their assistance dogs. This includes accessing taxis, buses, shopping centres and restaurants. To enforce this, penalties for discriminating against a person accompanied by a guide-dog or assistance dog have increased from \$100 up to \$10,000 for individuals, and up to \$50,000 for businesses.

Today I can announce the first two assistance dog owners have gained Handler Identity Cards and now have the same rights as owners of guide and hearing dogs. At 1.15 pm today, I will welcome into Parliament House Reilly Paterson and his assistance dog, Harry, and Luke Sharpe and his assistance dog, Jerry. I will present their handler cards to them. Reilly Paterson is an active five-year-old who was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. Before Reilly met his assistance dog, Harry, he found it difficult to be in a shopping centre as it would cause sensory overload, he had trouble communicating and low muscle tone. Reilly simply did not like walking. Now that he has Harry, Reilly's world is changing. He is walking from one end of the shopping centre to the other and talking with strangers about his dog. There is no doubt that this new legislation is helping to make a huge difference to the daily lives of Reilly and many others dependent on an assistance dog. Assistance dogs will be identifiable by a badge on their coat or harness, just like guide or hearing dogs. The dogs visiting Parliament House today are the first assistance dogs certified through a public access test that has been approved by a certified trainer.

Queensland is leading the way. This law is an Australian first and it is changing people's lives. We are the first state to introduce these laws and we obviously need to make sure that people such as taxidriviers, restaurant owners and others are informed about them. We are committed to fighting discrimination and ensuring all Queenslanders with a disability play an active role in the community and can access public places, just like everyone else. I encourage members to welcome Reilly and Harry and Luke and Jerry to Parliament House by coming along at 1.15 this afternoon.