



Speech by

Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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CARERS (RECOGNITION) AMENDMENT BILL AND SENIORS RECOGNITION (GRANDPARENTS PROVIDING CARE) BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (4.13 pm): This afternoon I rise to contribute to the cognate debate of the government's amendment bill, the Carers (Recognition) Amendment Bill, and the opposition's legislative amendment, the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill. For the record, I want to commend the outstanding work done in this place and across Queensland by the shadow minister for community services. The member for Burdekin is certainly a leading advocate for carers recognition in this state, and that is evidenced by the Carers (Recognition) Act that she introduced in 2008, which was passed with a government amendment, and the introduction of this private member's bill some three months before the introduction of the government's own bill. It is clear through our shadow minister that the LNP is leading the advocacy for carers and support of carers in this state, and the leadership of the member for Burdekin in this area should not be understated.

For ease of reference and for the benefit of my colleagues opposite, I will speak on each bill separately, commencing with the opposition's legislative amendment. The Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill deals with the issue of recognising grandparents who care for their grandchildren in the absence of the parent as the primary carer. This bill provides a legislative framework for the recognition of this care, something that I am certainly happy to support. The bill will institute a charter giving grandparents who provide primary care to their grandchildren official status as immediate family members and the rightful recognition of their efforts.

Legislation always needs to be reviewed to maintain currency with societal standards and expectations. For some families, grandparents are playing a more pivotal role in the upbringing of their grandchildren and the opposition's bill recognises their status. Since I was elected to represent the people of the Kawana electorate in this place I have been contacted by several constituents with respect to the issues of recognising grandparent care in legislation. As the shadow minister would know, I have liaised with her on a number of occasions in relation to her private member's bill and consultation for key advocates in my local community. I want to thank the member for Burdekin, the shadow minister, for her assistance and communications on this matter and I know that my constituents certainly appreciate the opportunity for dialogue on such a key policy matter for them.

I also want to pay tribute today to Mr Greg Pullin, national president of the Grandparents and Grandchildren Society, who lives in my electorate; Ms Lynda Dickson from the Grandparents as Parents Program, also in my electorate; and Mrs Margaret Appleton, the managing director of Shine Community Care located at Birtinya in the Kawana electorate. These three people from three separate organisations are leading advocates for carers' rights and have been tremendously supportive of the LNP's stance on this issue. For the benefit of the House, I table correspondence from Shine Community Care to me on 9 June this year with respect to its support for the opposition private member's bill.

Tabled paper: Letter, marked received 9 June 2010, from Margaret Appleton, Managing Director, Shine Community Care Ltd, to Jarrod Bleijie MP in relation to the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill [\[3343\]](#).

I also table a copy of correspondence that was sent from the same organisation to the Premier and the Minister for Community Services and carbon-copied to me, also on 9 June this year.

Tabled paper: Letter, marked received 9 June 2010, from Margaret Appleton, Managing Director, Shine Community Care Ltd, to Hon. Anna Bligh MP and Hon. Karen Struthers MP in relation to the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill [3344].

In tabling this correspondence I point out that the first letter from Mrs Margaret Appleton states—

Dear Jarrod,

I attach a paper supporting the Seniors Recognition (Grandparents Providing Care) Bill. I have also written to the Premier and Minister for Community Services and Housing, supporting the bill you—

the LNP—

have proposed. I congratulate you and your party for proposing this legislation and I know you would have the support of many Queenslanders also.

That is from one of the leading advocate groups in the Kawana electorate congratulating an opposition for finally recognising this issue in Queensland, congratulating an opposition for having the foresight to get ahead of the government and do this. Again on behalf of those three community organisations to the member for Burdekin, the shadow minister, thank you. Unfortunately we will not have the opportunity to vote on that particular bill, but I thank the member for Burdekin for her initiative and for listening to the people of Queensland, particularly those in relationships as grandparent carers.

I also thank the Parliamentary Library for its comprehensive research brief on the opposition's bill. As indicated on page 3 of that brief and in the member for Burdekin's second reading speech, according to Mission Australia the occurrence of grandparents as primary carers is estimated at one per cent of families nationally and affecting approximately 30,000 children. Furthermore, the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded that in 2006-07 there were 14,000 grandparent families in Australia in which grandparents were the guardians or main carers of co-resident children aged zero to 17. In 2003, 89 per cent of grandparent families had one or two children in their care, with 11 per cent having three or more children. Clearly this is an underlying social and economic issue that is at play here, and as legislators it is paramount that we have the necessary recognition in place.

As marriages split, children are born to parents who are not prepared for the responsibility and cost-of-living expenses spiral out of control, the burden is more and more on young families, particularly given the current economic climate. There are more and more families who have moved in with grandparents or circumstances where parents have to work away and grandparents are always handy as carers. As indicated on page 6 of the brief prepared by the Parliamentary Library on this issue, some of the commonly reported reasons for grandparents having primary care of their grandchildren is the death of a parent, particularly the mother, or the death of both parents; health problems of one or both parents, including physical disability, intellectual disability or mental illness; substance abuse by one or both parents—generally reported as one of the main and increasingly common reasons; incarceration of one or both parents; poverty; relationship problems such as family breakdown or domestic violence; or an inability or an unwillingness of parents to adequately care for their children—for example, where children are being sadly neglected.

There needs to be more recognition of the role that grandparents provide in the extended family unit, and the opposition's bill certainly recognises that fact. It also recognises the fact, having it as the primary responsibility in the opposition's bill introduced by the member for Burdekin, that not all children who are being cared for by grandparents have a disability. The opposition's bill sat comfortably and quite rightly in one area, but the government's bill comes under a different ministerial responsibility. I guess the government could use the excuse of 'two different ministers, two separate facts' and it may think that Queenslanders will get over it. But the point is that the opposition initiated this response and, at the end of the day, if we get some recognition—anything better for grandparents—it is going to be better than nothing.

But let Queenslanders not forget that it was the opposition—the member for Burdekin, the shadow minister—who had the courage and the conviction and listened to the community to actually get this legislation in place. Then some three months later the government introduces a bill, some of which is very similar to the opposition's bill, but it comes under the disability portfolio. I say to the minister that not all grandparents are caring for children with disabilities. They are simply caring for them after the mother or the father might have been tragically killed in an accident. The Shine Community Care team, which I tabled the letter from for the minister's attention, handed out community spirit awards to grandparents for children—

Mr Hoolihan: Hope you never practise law in that area.

Mr BLEIJIE: This is a serious matter, member for Keppel, and to make light of it is shameful, in fact.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments by the member offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Kawana, the member for Keppel has asked for a withdrawal.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw. As I was saying, in contrast, the Bligh Labor government has been very slow to respond to the increasing number of changing family arrangements or circumstances that exist in society. The government's bill adds grandparents to the category in the Carers (Recognition) Act, grouping

them with different groups of carers who provide care for people with disabilities or who are infirm, aged or incapacitated. There is no specific, separate distinction for the role that grandparents play in many families. To just throw all your eggs in one basket is a failure on the government's part to understand the complexities and disparities that exist between the different groups of people who require care in Queensland.

This legislation is a poor attempt to copy the leadership of the LNP on this issue. When I say 'a poor attempt', I mean a very, very poorly conceived, poorly consulted, rushed job. As the shadow minister said in her second reading speech, seniors in Queensland make up 40 per cent of the total constituency base but, despite that fact, they continue to struggle for political recognition. Maybe that lack of recognition follows along a similar line to revelations made during the federal election campaign that Labor does not support seniors because Labor believes that the majority of seniors do not vote for them. I am not sure if that is the case, but, with that attitude, I would hardly think that it would endear the Labor Party to seniors. If members opposite question that remark, I believe that in the leaked cabinet documentation the honourable the Prime Minister did not support the pension rise at the time.

I would urge the government to either adopt the opposition's bill or amend its own bill to provide for separate recognition of that special role that many grandparents are playing in society. I know from my constituents and in the circumstances of friends and family that the role that grandparents are playing in supporting their grandchildren is increasing continually. As a parliament we need to do what we can to recognise that fact and provide the support that we can. For that reason, I commend the opposition's bill to the House.