



Speech by


**Liz Cunningham**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

Hansard Thursday, 16 February 2012

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## **DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION BILL**

 **Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (4.18 pm): I rise to speak to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Bill 2011 and to support the legislation. It has to be said that the Minister for Community Services has been tireless in her support and in her defence of people caught up in domestic violence. It has to be acknowledged that those who are victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly women. The new definition of domestic violence in this bill includes behaviour that is physically or sexually abusive; emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or behaviour that in other way controls or dominates another person and causes fear, which is an incredibly broad definition, but I am sure it has been developed on the basis of experience.

I would like to put on the record my appreciation for the many groups in my electorate who assist, as I said, overwhelmingly women in these circumstance. The Women's Health Centre provides counselling and orchestrates the domestic violence remembrance day and each year does an amazing job to not only try to raise the profile of people who are subjected to domestic violence but also raise the very real fact that an active decision can be made by individuals who are at risk of committing domestic violence to get help and to get assistance because it is available.

I acknowledge the people who staff Louise Lodge, which is our women's shelter. Each and every one of them does an amazing job. There is a problem with the women's shelter where a family is broken up because of domestic violence and there are young teenage boys. They are not welcome at the women's shelter. That causes a problem in terms of the dislocation of that family at a time when mutual support and being together is so critically important. For some women who are vulnerable or who have been subjected to domestic violence, the fact that their young male children are not able to stay at the women's shelter means that they turn away from that assistance. That is a great problem. I am not saying that it is a problem with the women's shelter. I understand the logic behind it. But that service not being available and the inability to keep the family together is certainly a disincentive in some instances for women and their children looking for help.

I also commend the police. They are not in an enviable position. They do an amazing job supporting families affected by domestic violence. I think they get a bit jaded about some of the perpetrators—and I would in their position as well. I have observed police in my electorate who have been dealing with a woman who has been the victim of domestic violence and my observations at the time were that they dealt with her very sensitively, very kindly and very compassionately. I commend them. We have acknowledged in this place that when police are called out to domestic violence situations they themselves are at risk, simply because they never know not only how the perpetrator will act but sometimes the victim will defend the perpetrator because he is a meaningful person in their lives.

I would also commend the counsellors in the electorate who provide services to the victims and their children after the crisis has passed. The member for Gaven talked about education. It is important for all children to understand that domestically violent behaviour, whether it is physical or more psychological, is unacceptable. We need to get these little boys when they are small so they can learn about the need to respect particularly women and girls but also respect themselves and that behaviour that causes fear in someone they purport to love is not behaviour that is loving. There is a lot of help that is needed for these young children who are themselves the victims of domestic violence as they are observers and sometimes

victims. In circumstances where there is violence between the adults in a family situation and there are children, sometimes those children who are clearly victims are easily overlooked. The psychological damage to them over time is significant. They will carry that experience into adulthood. There need to be services that offer support and counselling to those little ones because they are collateral damage in many instances.

The bill also gives police more options in relation to dealing with domestic violence situations such as the ability to remove the perpetrator from the environment and the ability to hold the perpetrator for longer. Whilst some would argue that that is a deprivation of liberty issue, the fact is that many times the perpetrator is inebriated and once they have sobered up they are regretful. Sadly, they often reoffend, but the fact is they need to be able to be held for long enough so that they can confront their own behaviour and, if arrangements have to be made for that family to be removed, that there is time for that exercise to occur.

I think domestic violence in families is a hidden epidemic. Sadly, we see the tip of the iceberg because much of the violence is not physically evident; much of it is more emotional and psychological. As the other speakers have said, we have a responsibility to be conscious of people that we live near or that we work with, to be supportive and, where we know that there are problems, to as much as possible provide them with incentives and support to get help—not just the victim, although primarily the victim, but also the perpetrator where it is possible for that person to confront their behaviour and genuinely want to adjust it.

I commend the minister for the legislation. It is my hope that over time the incidence of domestic violence in all of its forms can diminish in our community, but when it does not diminish there have to be mechanisms to deal with the perpetrator and support the victims. I commend the minister and the bill.