




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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GUIDE, HEARING AND ASSISTANCE DOGS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (9.58 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Amendment Bill 2015. I thank the committee for their work on this bill and thank all the stakeholders who took the time to make a submission.

At the heart of this bill is the objective of enhancing independence for people who rely upon a specially trained dog for support. People with a disability have a desire and a right to live their life in a manner that they determine. At times a person with a disability will need assistance from other people, perhaps an animal or sometimes a technology to achieve this. In fact, this is actually no different to people without a disability. I like to drive a car but I definitely need the assistance of a mechanic to keep my car functioning safely.

I have two fantastic organisations in my electorate, Vision Australia and the Queensland Narrating Service, which do a great job supporting people with visual impairment. They have a range of staff there, but I particularly want to note this week the occupational therapists, because it is Occupational Therapy Week. I note the great work that they do supporting people with visual impairment, particularly those who have recently acquired one to adjust to life with a visual impairment.

To see what can be achieved by people with a disability who need assistance, I think members could find no better example than Mr Gerrard Gosens. Currently, Gerrard is the manager for special projects at the Queensland Eye Institute. Gerrard has had an outstanding career as a sportsperson, a sports administrator and leader and manager of non-profit organisations. Gerrard has climbed Mount Everest and made it to the semifinals of *Dancing With the Stars*. At one point Gerrard was the youngest Australian to receive a guide dog. I encourage all members to take the time to make the short trip across the river to the Queensland Eye Institute, and Gerrard will take the time to show them the groundbreaking working that the institute is doing on macular degeneration and other conditions that lead to premature blindness.

An honourable member: A pretty amazing place.

Mr KELLY: Certainly. I take that interjection. It is a very amazing place. At the Eye Institute, members will quickly realise that providing a person with a disability with assistance is about so much more than just enhancing their independence; it is really about empowering them to achieve great things for themselves and their communities.

Although there has been accreditation and access rights of guide and hearing dogs in Queensland since 1972, it is now recognised that we need to amend and improve these rights. This bill recognises that at times there will be situations where there needs to be more than one handler for a dog to be able to effectively provide assistance to a person with a disability. I once nursed a patient in a rehabilitation setting whose dog was brought in each day to allow that patient to complete their rehabilitation sessions. Under these amendments, alternative handlers will have full access rights to bring the dog in on public transport and into the hospital setting.

The bill also does a number of things to streamline administrative processes related to the guide, hearing and assistance dog. It allows authorised trainers and training institutes to issue handler identity cards. This will create a one-stop shop for dog users, which is something that the stakeholders have indicated that they want. But the government will maintain a regulatory role to prevent fraud. The bill also allows the chief executive to consult more widely, which will allow for greater flexibility and more involvement of a wider group of experts in the approval and standard-setting process.

In the interests of the welfare of both the users and the assistance dog, I am pleased that this bill improves monitoring, investigative and enforcement provisions. Although it is good to create a one-stop shop and reduce red tape, we must ensure that government agencies have the power to act to enforce legislation. The new general power to request information and allowing powers of entry to premises by way of a warrant achieve this objective and I fully support them.

Apparently, Mr Gosens is working on a book called *My Eyes Have a Wet Nose*. I look forward to reading this book as, no doubt, it will give personal insights into how a person with a disability can be empowered through the use of a guide, hearing or assistance dog.

My own nanna was completely blind and I wonder how different her life might have been had she had access to a guide dog. This bill at its heart is about empowering people with a disability. I fully support it. I commend this bill to the House.