



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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CARERS (RECOGNITION) BILL

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (7.44 pm): I rise in the House to speak to the Carers (Recognition) Bill 2008. This bill was introduced into this place on 4 June by the honourable member for Burdekin, the shadow minister for social inclusion including communities, disability services, seniors, multicultural affairs and youth. I commend her for bringing this private member's bill to the attention of the parliament. In a noble sentiment this bill aims to ensure that carers, who really are the unsung champions of Queensland, are recognised for the invaluable contributions that they make to our community. This bill will be of great advantage to all carers throughout Queensland as it considers their rights and needs alongside legislative structure. The existing Queensland Carer Recognition Policy, which was updated in 2007, does not allow for this level of input on key decisions and policy making from the very people it affects most. People involved in part-time or full-time caring roles should not be made to feel as though they are second-class citizens whose opinions are not taken seriously.

The LNP believes it is morally wrong for carers to be disadvantaged physically, emotionally or economically due to the important and often unrelenting role they play as the hidden face of care for others. Clause 3 of the bill states—

A **carer** is a person who voluntarily provides ongoing care or assistance to another person who, because of age, disability, frailty, chronic illness or pain, requires assistance with everyday tasks.

Carers can be parents, grandparents, children or friends. In my electorate of Currumbin there are countless individuals and families who take on the enormous responsibility of providing care for loved ones affected by illness, disability or frailty. Tonight I wish to acknowledge each and every one of them.

On its web site Carers Queensland reports that there are 535,500 carers in Queensland, which equates to one in eight people. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in Queensland an estimated 1,068,300 or 47.1 per cent of persons aged 18 years and over provide unpaid care for another adult or child. These are astronomical figures. Carers Queensland further submits that the care provided by carers is estimated to be worth over \$6.1 billion per year. These extraordinary people who take on the challenge of often being the sole providers of support need support from the community as a whole. It is crucial that carers are appropriately recognised for the special contribution that they make to Queensland.

The introduction of this bill, which establishes a carer's charter containing 11 guidelines, is a pivotal step in guaranteeing that carers are not taken for granted and are included in decision making by public authorities. The guidelines create a framework that recognises and considers the important role of carers and the potential impacts government decisions may have on the livelihoods and wellbeing of those in a carer relationship. The charter contains specific considerations for people who find themselves in a caring situation at a young age. In instances where a young adult is required to look after an ailing parent, special consideration is essential. In those circumstances the Queensland community must lend a hand to lighten the heavy burden placed on those young shoulders. It is often said that people find superhuman powers and strength when faced with a crisis and only moments to react. I know some carers who find that

superhuman energy every single day as they lovingly and diligently perform tasks that keep their loved ones and those in their care fed, bathed and comfortable.

Clause 5 of the bill proposes to protect fundamental rights of carers against decisions made by public authorities. Under this clause public authorities that seek to make decisions relating to assessment, planning, delivery or review of carer services are obliged to take into consideration the 11 principles outlined in the carer's charter. All public sector units will need to consider the same charter, allowing for greater consistency between public authorities and carers. By obliging all public authorities to consider the charter, the rights of persons providing care are further protected with carers and their representative bodies finally being able to compete on a level playing field with government departments.

Clause 6 of the bill outlines further reporting obligations on public authorities. Where a decision is made relating to the assessment, planning, delivery and review of carer services, the authority making the decision must first consult with relevant representative bodies. Once this consultation has occurred, the subsequent decision must be given in writing to the carer outlining all appropriate considerations, including details of the consultation process with the carer representative bodies. This process will ensure the adequate protection of carers by allowing the full disclosure of decisions made by public authorities. The obligation of consultation with carer representative bodies, such as Carers Queensland, ensures that the interests of carers are sheltered from the potential overreaching of government authorities.

Carers throughout Queensland are vulnerable without legislation such as this. The Labor government has had 10 years to acknowledge the importance of carers in Queensland but has failed to implement adequate frameworks to ensure public agencies understand the importance of carers when making decisions affecting them.

We on this side of the House appreciate the importance of carers and recognise the massive savings to government their innumerable hours of caring generate. I am able to fully comprehend the direct consequences caring for others can have on people. Caring full-time for another in many cases creates severe hardships on many people, not to mention the loss of social life and freedom to come and go as one pleases. Statistics would highlight the fact that carers make enormous personal and financial sacrifices in order to keep their loved ones at home.

I listened to the honourable member for Ipswich tonight say that people should care for their own. Yes, I agree to a degree. However, government does have responsibility to care for people with medical problems and medical issues. The many dollars saved by not placing them into government care must certainly be considered apart from the compassion one needs to consider as well. I know from experience that many families despair at the thought of having to relinquish a loved one into government care. They would much rather keep them at home.

It should be noted that carers and those who require carer assistance have higher costs of living due to the need for specialised equipment and of course higher healthcare costs. With nearly half the number of primary carers in Queensland providing over 40 hours of care, there is not much time for these people to gain high-income or full-time levels of employment. In 62 per cent of cases involving primary caregivers, paid work is not usually a viable option, according to Carers Queensland.

Hardships associated with caring can also affect the relationship between the carer and the person receiving the care. Parents with disabled children often find it hard to cope not only financially but also emotionally. Graham Readfearn reported in the *Sunday Mail* on 21 June of a mother from Camira near Ipswich who, after caring for her daughter who suffers from intellectual impairment, autism and epilepsy for 20 years, could no longer undertake the day-to-day responsibility of caring for her daughter. With no extended family in the region and a husband working full-time, the situation became too much for the mother, who reluctantly placed her daughter into the care of a disability home. Relinquishment seems to be a growing matter, and this further emphasises the absolute necessity of providing carers with recognition and support for the contributions they make to the community.

The Carers (Recognition) Bill will improve the morale and the wellbeing of carers throughout this state by providing them with a level playing field where public authorities seek to make fundamentally important decisions with regard to the day-to-day services and activities available to those who need care. By obliging these authorities to take into consideration the 11 principles contained in the carer's charter, the parliament of Queensland will finally acknowledge the important contribution carers make to the community.

I was very pleased to hear from the minister a few minutes ago that her government will be supporting this bill. It is welcome news for carers. Further, I note the minister's amendments that were tabled only this evening and the fact that there has been little time to digest their content. However, I gleaned a bit more from the minister's speech a few minutes ago and I look forward to hearing more. I commend the bill to the House.