



Legislative Assembly

Community Services Legislation

Amendment Bill Hansard

Extract

27/06/2002

Second Reading

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.38 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

New South Wales has the most complex oversight arrangements of community service providers of any jurisdiction in Australia. The Community Services Legislation Amendment Bill represents a significant reform to these arrangements, whilst retaining and enhancing the protections for vulnerable people in our society. The bill provides for important changes to the roles of the Ombudsman, the Community Services Commissioner and the Coroner. The bill simplifies, clarifies and strengthens the roles of the Coroner and the Ombudsman in the review and monitoring system. By amalgamating the Ombudsman and the Community Services Commission, it adopts the best and most effective powers currently available to those organisations. The bill has been described by the Community Services Commissioner, Mr Robert Fitzgerald, as the most advanced scheme of its kind in Australia. I am heartened by the Opposition's support for this bill. It shows that sensible reform can be above politics. We appreciate the useful discussions held with the Opposition on the bill over the past few days.

Those discussions resulted in a series of amendments being moved in another place that the Government agreed to support. They will help to improve the oversight of those providing services to some of the most vulnerable members of society. I will leave talking to the substance of each amendment to the Opposition. However, we accept that the word "disability" should be added to the title of the commissioner, and to the new community services division within the Ombudsman's office. We also accept that reviews of the deaths of children in care be extended from two to three years immediately preceding the child's death.

We do not believe that the Opposition's amendments will detract from the overall intention of the bill. The legislation will deliver clarity and a certainty for the staff of the Community Services Commission and the Ombudsman's office. I realise that consultation on the bill has led to a fair amount of stress and uncertainty for people working in both organisations. The bill is strongly supported by the Ombudsman, the Community Services Commissioner and the Coroner. We believe it will create the best, most comprehensive system of consumer protection for vulnerable people in Australia. It represents a significant and sensible reform. I commend the bill to the House.