



Speech by

RACHEL NOLAN

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.01 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Domestic Violence Legislation Amendment Bill. This is positive modernising legislation that recognises that people form many different kinds of relationships in their lives and, sadly, that violence can occur in any of them.

The existing domestic violence act provides legal protection from domestic violence for people in spousal or spouse-like relationships. Protection in the form of a domestic violence order can be granted by a magistrate following a complaint from someone who is suffering from, or genuinely fears, domestic violence. Usually these orders prevent the aggressor from coming into contact with the person who fears them. This bill will extend these protections to people in other kinds of relationships, including carer relationships and dating relationships. It will, for the first time, address elder abuse, creating protection for the many older people who fear abuse from their children, their carers or others.

The bill recognises that all kinds of relationships exist and that everyone, not just those in conventional relationships, requires protection. Such legislation would in this day and age seem obvious but, sadly, as the member for Clayfield pointed out the day before yesterday, we still live in a world in which many people continue to insist that only relationships between married men and women are legitimate and worthy of acknowledgment. Having heard many stories of people who, in quite conventional relationships, have suffered abuse and terrible sadness, I always find this moralising notion a bit hard to take and I am appalled to note that the opposition has effectively followed it in its failure to support this legislation. I am very glad that the Queensland government has taken a slightly more inclusive and progressive approach than that, recognising that relationships come in many forms and protecting people in a broad range of them. I am sure that this legislation will be welcomed both by those people who have experienced domestic violence and by the many workers in the community who devote themselves to preventing it and assisting the victims.

In Ipswich, police are generally the first port of call in dealing with domestic violence, and I commend the police on the big steps forward they have taken and continue to take in their approach to domestic violence. I want to acknowledge the work of Inspector Tonya Carew and Sergeant Toni Crowther of the Ipswich police in this area. They have certainly led local police. Police responses begin either when someone turns up at the police station seeking a DVO or when police are called out to a violent incident. When called out, the role of police is to establish that it is, in fact, domestic violence and, if necessary, arrest the perpetrator. In a situation in which charges are laid, both parties involved have to attend court.

For many victims of domestic violence making a complaint and giving evidence, often against a partner or someone they love, are very difficult things to do it. It is a great shame and irony that sometimes in life it is when difficult circumstances which are not our fault are visited upon us that we have to be at our strongest. It is difficult for a rape victim, a domestic violence victim or, even in a different situation, someone who has been unfairly sacked to stand up and face the person who has hurt them at the time when they are feeling their worst, but that is the nature of an evidence based system. People who have been victims of violence are expected to stand up for themselves and they should be given all the support possible to allow them to do so.

In Ipswich the arresting officers usually give the domestic violence victims details of local support services such as the excellent Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence and the Ipswich Women's Health Centre. However, it is of great concern that some victims, usually women, still fall

through the cracks and fail to receive the support they need to make informed and independent choices about how to get on with their lives.

Recently a tremendous group called the Ipswich Domestic Violence Strategies Group came together to better coordinate domestic violence responses and to develop better responses among all those who deal with domestic violence in Ipswich. I would like to commend all those involved for their commitment, which is above the call of their day-to-day work. The people involved in the Ipswich Domestic Violence Strategies Group include Tania Shepherd from the Ipswich Tenancy Advocacy Services; Ruth Bails from ATODS; Kym Purcell from the Leichhardt Community Centre; Peter Riley from Yamanto police; Jan Snewin from the Booval Community Service; Pat King from the council; Iain Forrest from the Housing Department; Robyn Hargreaves from council; Lyn Kindt from the Ipswich Hospital; Sonia Lonne from Relationships Australia, which runs an excellent 15-week program called Alternatives to Aggression; Jenny Gilmore and Vanessa Coady from the Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence; Cathy North, who has done many years of excellent work for women in Ipswich through the Women's Health Centre and is now at Child Health; Catherine Brewster from ATODS; and Sandra Harvey from SWICH. The Domestic Violence Strategies Group is considering many strategies, including a fax-back response whereby police attending domestic violence incidents obtain written permission from the aggrieved to send his or her details to a local centre against domestic violence so that that centre then contacts the person to arrange an appointment for counselling and follow up. The fax-back strategy has greatly improved the number of domestic violence victims receiving genuine support in the Logan area, where it is extremely well run by police in conjunction with Iona Cominos and the other staff of WAVSS. I am very supportive of such a strategy being adopted in Ipswich.

In recent years the rate of domestic violence in Ipswich has remained fairly steady, though it would be wonderful to think that as our society becomes more liberated it would decline. On a positive note, the services provided are improving all the time. I would very sincerely like to commend the committed workers in Ipswich who provide excellent support to people who experience domestic violence. This legislation furthers the campaign against domestic violence. It does so by reigniting the debate and expanding our understanding of what domestic violence is. Reducing domestic violence relies on individuals to take responsibility for our own actions and it relies on the whole community, both men and women, to acknowledge the problem. Domestic violence is not a women's issue. After all, it is usually perpetrated by men. I am disappointed that in this House where women are in the minority we have made up by far the great majority of people speaking in this debate. We must all be aware of domestic violence. We must all be vigilant.

Ms Keech: It is everybody's responsibility.

Ms NOLAN: Domestic violence is the whole community's responsibility. This bill takes a great step towards improving our understanding of and our vigilance to help prevent domestic violence and I commend it to the House.