

CHILD CARE SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [2.50 pm]: I was at the end of my very quick five-minute —

The SPEAKER: Members! Some of you may still want to ask questions of each other—ask them outside. We have moved on in the business of this house and I have given the call to the member for Nollamara. I do not want to hear from anybody else. If members need to have other conversations, please take them outside.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In ending my very brief contribution to the debate on the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011, I want to remind people in this place of the history of this issue. We quite seriously deregulated some of the regulations back in the early 1990s, which led to —

The SPEAKER: Members, you are still having conversations in here. I am struggling to hear the member for Nollamara. Please take them outside. I want to be able to hear the member for Nollamara, and I know that other members in here do also.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: We have a proud history of childcare services in Western Australia, and we have a very efficient child-to-worker ratio. I noticed on the website of the regulation agency that monitors child care that the largest issue is the supervision of children in terms of the breach of childcare licences. I remind people of the time in the 1990s when the regulations were changed on a state basis, and on a federal basis there were changes to community-based child care. This led to a proliferation of childcare centres quite close to each other. We had a situation in which there was suddenly competition for childcare services, which meant that those services offering really good quality, community-based child care lost out to many of the profit-based childcare centres. Then we went through the ABC period, when a large organisation came into the industry and sought to make a profit out of child care. I think that that history should show us that this is a very important area. Like our education system, this industry delivers early childhood education and it needs regulations to ensure that it provides effective and quality education at the zero-to-four level.

In finalising my remarks, I look forward to seeing what comes forward in the national childcare regulations reforms. I congratulate the government for bringing these amendments before us. However, I think there are some salutary lessons to be learned from our past and that we need to take these into account to ensure that we deliver those quality services on the ground. Part of that also involves recognising the professional quality of the workers in this area, not just with words, but with actions in terms of wages and conditions.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [2.54 pm]: I am very pleased to speak on the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011. The amendments that come before the chamber now relate to an inquiry that was chaired by Hon Kate Doust, who of course is my wife. I lived with the review of the childcare regulations for several years, and I was pleased the other day when I went along to the briefing by the departmental officers to see and read the report that was produced by that committee. It was a very broad committee that brought together all participants in the industry, including investors and the unions involved in the industry. It went through a very detailed process. Although it was not done in a bipartisan way, there was a clear and generous commitment to a proper examination of the regulation of child care. The Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011 largely flows from the report done by that intensive group. I make the point that although Hon Kate Doust was the chair of that committee, it was obviously driven by the secretariat provided by the public service, which ensured that a proper voice was given to all the participants. Hon Sue Ellery was the minister at the time, and with her very strong background in the area of child care from her professional experience at what was then called the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, and now called United Voice, the issues of the industry were clearly and carefully considered.

One of the things that I want to raise in this respect is the pressures that parents are under with child care. Often people do not realise the incredible expense that many parents have to go to in order to provide child care. My wife and I were both professional people, even before any involvement in politics. We were both union officials. Later, when my wife was elected to Parliament and when I became secretary of the union, the pressures on child care were enormous. There are often very great difficulties finding quality child care close to people's homes and at an affordable price. One of the problems that I saw as a parent was that when the federal government changed, it changed the funding arrangements for not-for-profit childcare organisations, and it stopped capital grants to not-for-profit childcare organisations. That had a major and negative impact on the industry. Not-for-profit child care is an important contributor to childcare arrangements. As not-for-profit childcare organisations cannot get capital because they do not have investors, the former federal Labor government of the 1990s arranged a system of allowing grants to not-for-profit childcare organisations, and that was removed. That was tragic, because what happened was that the for-profit sector moved in to fill the increasing demand in the area.

For-profit child care is not automatically bad, but a proper balance is needed. The removal of that capital grant arrangement meant that the for-profit sector became inordinately large for the proper balance in that childcare area. We all saw the problems that then resulted when ABC, which was the number one private sector childcare provider in the world, in fact, fell over. In the time that I had been a member, parents in my electorate came to see me at the time of the ABC collapse with serious problems with childcare arrangements. On a number of occasions I talked to the Department for Communities about the assistance it was providing to parents, and all the parents with whom I had contact at that time were able to find alternative arrangements. Of course, many of the ABC sites, such as the Mulberry Tree centre on Albany Highway, Cannington, were taken over by other organisations, but it was a major disruption. The not-for-profit sector does not have that same level of disruption because it is not based on the profit motive; it is based on the quality of care. Personally, when I was a parent with young children who had not started school, I found the use of the not-for-profit sector to be particularly important, and it was particularly good for me and my wife. It is just as expensive to put a child in long-day care as it is to send them to a grammar school. Let us understand that if parents are not in the income bracket that makes them eligible to receive a government rebate, it is a very expensive business. My wife and I both had very busy jobs and had to work until six at night. However, we needed childcare arrangements from the end of school to the time we finished work. I am sure that is the same sort of experience that every busy couple has today. When the parents finally finish work and are the last to pick up their kids from day care—members know how bad that feels when it happens—and they take their kids home, they cannot spend time with the children because they have to cook dinner and do the housework. This is a real major stress in modern society. I do not know whether some people properly understand the enormous pressures placed on working parents. Let us face it, most people need two breadwinners to meet the standard of living expected in modern society. Once upon a time there were not the same pressures. I will give members an example to illustrate the point I am getting to about child care. When I was a child 40 years ago, people would buy a block of land and live in a caravan or a jerry-rigged building on the site while the house was being built. Back then, a family would occupy a house that was only partly built and had just two bedrooms, but it is illegal to do that today. Council approval will not be given to build just part of a house. There are good reasons for having those planning arrangements in place, but let us understand the consequences of that. Young couples today must borrow 100 per cent of the value of the house in which they want to live in 10 years' time—not just today—so they buy a four-bedroom, two-bathroom house with a family room and a games room on a block for which they must pay all the servicing. Forty years ago many of the service costs were borne by the state governments. I will not go into why it was a good idea to not continue to do that. Nevertheless, it has significantly increased the cost of living for young families. Today, both parents work and people do not have the same opportunity that I had when I was a child and my mother was with me until I started school. I am sure the same was true for almost everyone of my age. The mothers tended to stay at home until we started school. People do not have that opportunity today because of the cost pressures, which is why quality child care is so important.

I experienced having to balance the childcare needs and the needs of my occupation and my career when I brought up my three children, particularly my son. I was very pleased that I was always able to keep my two girls in family day care until they started primary school. I believed that family day care suited me and my family, but I understand that it is not suitable for everyone. Every family must make that decision. It is very important to keep the regulatory framework so that all forms of child care can be made available to people at a standard that we all demand. My son was the last of our kids and was at preschool when my wife was elected to Parliament. We put him into a commercial long-day care program. Although it was a very good provider, some things that happened were not right. My son has always been a huge kid. As a three-year-old he was bigger than most of the four-year-olds and so the day care centre placed him with the four-year-olds. The problem with that was his language skills were not at the same standard as the four-year-olds, which resulted in him becoming aggressive and violent. That was a real problem for my family and it took us years to resolve that issue. They are the sorts of pressures that not only me, but also many other families are faced with today. Child care is a critical issue.

When I was in preschool some 45 years ago, my mum took in kids for what I suppose was family day care. I was too young to know what the particular arrangements were but I did know that it did not work out for our family. Now the problem we have is that everyone is using day care. Every time we read anything about workforce participation, the number one issue for increasing the availability of labour in Australia is about ensuring that quality child care is available so that women can re-enter the workforce. Look at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's website, any federal government website and the state government's Department of Training and Workforce Development programs and members will see that increasing Australia's participation rate of women in the workforce is one of the major strategies that underpin workforce development. When we talk about the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011, we are talking about not only the quality of the service, although that is absolutely essential, but also the economic future of the country. That is what society now needs. This is about the change in the demographics of our community. I am 49 years old and am the

youngest of eight children. I do not meet families of eight anymore. Families of three and four are considered large today, so the demographic profile has changed massively. Australia would have negative population growth if it were not for immigration.

Ms R. Saffioti: Or for the member for Mandurah!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Or for the member for Mandurah! Immigration is one of the major underpinnings of Australia's continuing demographic success. Child care is a necessary component of not only our social fabric, but also our economic future. It is important to make sure that we have proper childcare services so that parents can be confident that they can leave their three or four-month-old child—like we had to do—or their four-year-old child in preschool in the morning or, particularly in the case of primary school kids, in after-school care in the afternoon. These are the sorts of incredible worries that are shared by every parent that I have met. These are not trivial matters; they are essential and critical issues.

I want to pay tribute to Hon Sue Ellery for the fabulous work she did as minister that has led to the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011. She showed great leadership of the childcare system in this state. I would like also to pay tribute to the public servants involved in this area, including Helen Creed, who has provided leadership in this area for sometime. I am pleased that she is in the chamber today and I look forward to her providing advice to the Minister for Community Services. The appointment of Helen Creed to the public service was criticised by the Liberal Party at the time. The attack the Liberal Party made against that qualified person who received the job through a competitive selection procedure was outrageous. It was not a political appointment; it was a competitive selection procedure, yet the Liberal Party had the audacity to criticise that appointment. I am pleased to see the minister now get advice from Helen Creed, whose appointment the Liberal Party criticised. That is ironic. I do not know whether that is her view, but that is my view, and I think it is quite amusing when I see that happen. Helen Creed's extensive experience as the leader of the then Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union gives her an incredibly strong background to provide that advice to government.

I speak on behalf of myself and my own family about the childcare services issues that we have had to deal with. I believe I also speak on behalf of most couples in the modern community, many of whom are struggling. I happen to be a member of Parliament but there are probably 500 000 couples who both work two jobs just to get by in this modern age. Their problems are just the same as the problems I had as a working parent.

I will finish with one more point. I will not take that much longer. But I want to make the point that, once upon a time, childcare services was considered to be a women's matter. That is no longer the case. I am as proud to be a father as my wife is to be a mother. And I am just as proud to be involved in the raising of my children as I am to have had success in my career. The success of my children is something that I feel very personally motivated to assist with. Childcare services are the basis of that.

Hon Linda Savage has published a very good discussion paper on the need to improve the key services in the zero-to-five age range. I am very proud to be the patron of the Canning Early Years Group that has operated in the City of Canning. A lot of research has been done by committees of this chamber, and elsewhere, that outlines the critical need to get it right in the zero-to-five, zero-to-eight age range. If children arrive at school with difficulties—as I have indicated my son did—it may take years to sort out those difficulties. Therefore, the more we pay attention to childcare services, the better off the community will be, because children will be able to arrive at school adequately prepared for their future education.

I commend the government for bringing in this Child Care Services Amendment Bill, which is based on the childcare review that was led by Hon Kate Doust and implemented by Hon Sue Ellery.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [3.11 pm]: I rise to make some brief comments on the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Isn't that a conflict of interest?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: A conflict of interest, yes!

As indicated by my colleagues, we support this bill. One of the key issues raised by the member for Cannington just now is the role that child care plays in today's society. I think, as has been described, 50 years ago child care was used by a far smaller percentage of people—I do not know the exact statistics—than is the case today. That is because in many families today, both parents are working, maybe not for the first six months of the child's life, but certainly by the time the child reaches one or two years of age, both parents are back at work. Therefore, the issue of childcare regulation and the professionalism of the industry is very, very important. I think we can see that from the massive impact that the collapse of ABC child care had on communities around the suburbs.

Although I support this childcare bill, I also want to talk about the importance of early learning and child care. I believe we still have a long way to go on the broader policy of child care in Western Australia. I know that this

bill talks primarily about the regulation of child care. It is very important that we improve the accountability and professionalism of the childcare industry, and that is what this bill is about. But, as I see it, there should be no difference between child care and early learning. They should be one and the same thing. Many childcare centres now offer a three-year-old program, a four-year-old kindy program, and preprimary. I see the many struggles that families have to go through when they have to pick up their children from three-year-old kindy or four-year-old kindy and drop them off at child care. To me, in a perfect world, child care and early learning would be offered at one and the same place. As I have said, many centres in the metropolitan area are moving towards doing that. I believe that is where all centres should be heading. That would need to be a federal government policy, I suppose. But the idea of keeping child care separate from early learning is an outdated, antiquated idea. We need to make sure that our childcare services provide a learning experience that will enable all children to get the best possible start in life. That should be a key policy.

Some members have outlined their personal experiences. Of course I have my own experiences with my daughter, who is aged 20 months. She has not really reached that next stage, although she is always learning, of course. But it is important that we can have confidence that wherever our children may be during the day, they are gaining some real skills that will enable them to start primary school in the best possible way.

I want to talk also about the role that child health nurses play in the issue of early learning. One of the real issues that this state is facing is the lack of child health nurses. The Auditor General's report that was released late last year—I cannot remember exactly when—on universal child health checks outlined the percentage of children who are accessing child health nurses. It should be the case that within 10 days of a child's birth the parents are visited by a child health nurse. As I recall—this is just off the top of my head—only about 40 or 50 percent of newborns are seen by a child health nurse. I had a child health nurse visit me when I got back from hospital after the birth of my child, I think on day 11 or day 12, and I can tell members that that was an essential visit. She picked up a number of things that no-one else had picked up, and we were able to address those so that my child could then go on and sleep a bit more and eat a bit more. So those visits are essential.

I also want to talk about the visits by a child health nurse at 18 months of age and three years of age. Those visits are also very important. The fact is that only 30 per cent of children have their 18-month check. I have read some comments from the department explaining why that is the case. Two of the reasons put forward are that parents are confident and they do not believe their children need to be checked; or they think there are no visible problems, so everything is okay. I think one of the reasons is also that there is a lack of access to child health nurses. The fact is that sometimes it is very difficult for parents to get an appointment for the 18-month and the three-year checks because the child health nurses are under so much pressure from having to see the newborns and young babies. This is a key, key problem, because it is not about health; it is also about developmental issues. Again, we always hear about the problem of children rocking up to school and not having the skills and the development that they need to undertake their schooling in those early years. We also hear about the problem that if children start school two or three years behind the eight ball, it takes them years and years to catch up. The key is to try to identify and address the developmental issues early on. We need to have the resources to enable us to do that. As I have said, I believe that a lot of parents do not see the child health nurse for the 18-month and three-year check because of lack of access. I really do believe that is the case. I have some experience of that. They really do not have the access.

This is a very important issue. I am a bit disappointed that the member for Alfred Cove is not here for this debate, because she has raised this issue many times in this Parliament, and she has congratulated the government for its performance in this area. I believe there has been a lack of performance by the government in this area, and that needs to be addressed immediately.

I understand also that some new federal government rules and regulations are being brought in that will require that children be given some health checks before their parents can access family assistance part A payments. That is a positive step. But we need to make sure that we have a sufficient number of child health nurses to undertake those checks, otherwise parents will possibly miss out on their family allowances because they cannot access those checks.

This is an issue of critical need and one that needs to be addressed, because whether we are talking about kids getting behind at school, or whether we are talking about children being out on the streets at the age of nine or 10, a lot of it goes back to the issue of giving all children the basic tools that will enable them to learn in the school system, and to then contribute and actively participate in our society.

I started my comments by talking about child health nurses. In relation to child care, we support this legislation.

I believe that eventually we will see in the not-too-distant future the education and childcare systems as one system. However, whether the childcare centres are located on school grounds is a debate for another time; there should be one entire system with no difference between early learning and child care.

Watching my child develop over the past few months, I have seen that the amount of learning in the early years is incredible. The mimicking of what they see is incredible. Whatever we do as a parent, the child immediately absorbs and mimics. It is incredible how much information the child absorbs during this time. It is said that children absorb the most information between zero and three years of age.

I would like to see one system—one system in which education and child care are the same. Most parents struggle to hold down two jobs. One partner might be working part time, but the balancing of part-time and full-time work with picking up children from the three-year-old program to take them to child care is difficult. Picking up children here and taking them there—it should all be one system in one place. Frankly, I think we would see improved results if it were. The world has moved.

Mr P.T. Miles: Member, do you think all early childhood care activities should be in the school or community centre?

Ms J.M. Freeman: I think we should have that debate.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Of course. The ideal scenario in my world—in Rita’s world!—would be the baby room next to the two-year-old room next to the three-year-old room with the one-day-a-week three-year-old program. That is how to do it—and then with the four and five-year-old programs, we have the continuum. How much more confidence and security of wellbeing will the entire family feel when parents can drop their two-year-old and their six-year-old at the same place and pick them up from the same place in the evening.

Mr P.T. Miles: I totally agree.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. I think that is where we should be going. Some centres provide early learning opportunities. They normally cost a bit more—I have checked out a few things! Indeed, some of them in Perth have great reputations. However, the people who will normally access those centres are often those without the greatest need. I know this will sound very interventionist and very socialist, but it would be good to have a one-stop system that caters for zero to the end of years 6 or 7—whatever the final decision is. That is one system in the one location that will give parents a sense of security, satisfaction and confidence. The less the stress on parents picking up and dropping off kids—often they deal with three or four centres, be they schools or childcare centres—the better it is for the family. That is the where I would like the whole system to move. Some centres are offering such services, but they are high cost and many families are priced out of them. They are often not located in outer suburban areas. However, this is where the system should be going, whether controlled or not controlled by the Department of Education. I think such a system would give families the most satisfaction and provide better outcomes for our children.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [3.24 pm]: I will say a few words about the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011, which I fully support. I am a grandparent whose grandchild goes to day care. I know how much pressure day care takes off a single parent, especially when she has to work long hours. My daughter can very confidently take her child to a day care facility at which she hopes and knows her daughter will be looked after.

To pick up on something the member for West Swan said about having support services at one place: in Mount Barker the primary school and the high school are located on the one site—something I must thank former Premier, Hon Alan Carpenter, for because he organised that. Although not in my electorate, I know the people of Mount Barker think that is a tremendous facility because they drop off their primary and secondary age children at the same time. It will be great if we can get the early childhood, kindergarten and preschool programs together as a one-stop shop, especially in regional areas where people have to travel some distance from farms.

The lack of childcare nurses is a concern of mine. The nurses play a very important part in early childhood years. I am a member of the Education and Health Standing Committee, which has looked at this matter before. I am a little disappointed in the government at the lack of childcare nurses. We lose a great opportunity if we do not pick up difficulties at a young age and get children into a proper facility or learning area, which are great for that. One of my daughters wanted to get her child’s 18-month check, and there was a four or six-month wait. That meant those things that should have been picked up at 18 months and dealt with were not done for four or six months.

It is great that the State Administrative Tribunal will look at the provision of child care in regional areas to ensure that small rural services have equity with corporate metropolitan services when issues are brought before SAT rather than a Magistrates Court. The Magistrates Court can be held at any time with people waiting months and months; whereas SAT sits on a more regular basis.

It is important to tighten childcare centre regulations. I remember reports of young people jumping the fence and going walkabout on busy roads and young people being tied up in childcare centres. When people take their child to a day care or childcare centre, they want to feel that their children are in a safe environment.

I applaud the minister for bringing the bill forward. I believe young children are our future and that it is necessary to ensure that those businesses that care for them are the best. We all heard about the issue of the ABC learning centres. We had two in Albany and one had to close down—effectively because of lack of scrutiny and lack of regulations. I fully support the bill. Our children must be safe in these environments. With many families on twin incomes and many single-parent families, more people use these services and I think we need to make sure these centres are very secure and operate in a stable environment with a very good business model that will allow them to continue to operate in a profitable manner.

MR P.T. MILES (Wanneroo) [3.28 pm]: I want to say a few words on the Child Care Services Amendment Bill 2011 and commend the minister for these proposed amendments to the Child Care Services Act. From a two-income family with a child of eight, I acknowledge and totally concur with the member for Cannington's remarks, and with some of the member for West Swan's sentiments.

In my electorate of Wanneroo, we put in place a trial, which I understand is still running, at Spring Hill Primary School in Tapping. Members of this house have often heard me speak about this site because there have been some issues with it along the way and the Minister for Education has had to intervene from time to time. One service that was provided to the school was the 12 demountable buildings that were left over from the former kindergarten and preprimary school on the site. Another service that we have been able to put in there, through the Minister for Health and other agencies, is a childcare nurse. The demountable buildings have a toilet and a small administration area that lend themselves to that style of centre and service.

Ms J.M. Freeman: A child health nurse, not a childcare nurse.

Mr P.T. MILES: Yes, that is right, from the Department of Health. Unfortunately, we do not have the child health nurse for as many hours as we would like; they are a very limited resource in the health department. I do like the fact that those resources come out of Health and go into Education. I therefore support what is being done there. I have not spoken to the Minister for Health or the Minister for Education about this bill, but I know that the Minister for Education is very interested in and appreciates the importance of early childhood learning for zero to three-year-olds. However, this particular school has a child health nurse and also some preschool and after-school care facilities. Those facilities are vital for today's double-income families. Mums, and dads to a lesser degree, have a lot more guilt put on them because they go to work. My wife often finds it a pain when she cannot pick up Jacob in time or when some matter comes up at work for which she has to stay back an extra half hour. Obviously, as members of Parliament, our hours are often 24/7; we get phone calls at the drop of a hat. People get lost, therefore, without decent and proper child care and it is often difficult to find babysitters. I never went down the path of using friends and family for child care, as I knew the commitment would be too much. We therefore sought and found some people we could trust and pay for child care; after all, our children are the most valuable thing that we have in the world.

The early learning stuff that is happening at Spring Hill Primary School is bringing in all sorts of community events. What I like about basing everything in a school site is that the school becomes a really great part of the community, instead of a building that opens at 8.30 in the morning, closes at four o'clock in the afternoon and is isolated for the rest of the time. State governments all over the country pay a lot of taxpayers' money for these facilities that are very underutilised. The government pays \$14 million for a primary school, and I believe schools should be utilised a lot more than they are. I know that some principals allow new-style churches to use parts of their schools on the weekends and so on, which also adds to the passive security of these facilities. However, at the time the Spring Hill site was originally set up with the regional director, we said that one service that must be provided was after-school care. We are now able to utilise part of the building as an after-school area, which is usually the undercover area, and children are walked across from their classrooms to that area. Because the after-school care service in this case is run by a private company, it actually pays a notional rent for that facility. The school therefore gets some valuable support to purchase other items for its curriculum needs.

As I said before, I commend the Child Care Services Amendment Bill. When I read these styles of amendments to acts, whether it be to the Child Care Services Act or to other acts, the first thing that alarms me is putting more red tape in the way of and interfering with such services. As I said before, our children are the most valuable part of us as a nation, as a state and as a family, and we must always remind ourselves of that. Also at the school there were some incidents in the past that we had to take care of. I do not believe that we can prevent all accidents happening, but I do believe that the childcare services that are provided in my electorate are first rate. My son went to an ABC Learning Centre. The reason my wife chose the ABC centre was for the same reason the member for Cannington talked about; it had a very small, basic curriculum. My son knew his colours and his numbers well before he went to the school he attends now. That is a huge advantage for him and his future. He was lucky that we were able to get him into the centre that we did. Some parents, as the member for West Swan said, are not as lucky; they do not have appropriate facilities around them or some mums cannot get to them. I would always recommend that children, wherever possible, go into some form of early learning, as I believe it is very vital, even if it is just to learn social skills and be sociable with other children, and not to be too clingy. I

Ms Janine Freeman; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Paul Miles; Mr John Day

must admit, though, that some mums should stop being helicopter mums hovering around their children. Children do need to eat a bit of sand and —

Ms J.M. Freeman: There are no helicopter dads, are there?

Mr P.T. MILES: Definitely not; I can tell the member!

Ms J.M. Freeman: Let's talk about parents in general, instead of attributing it to mums.

Mr P.T. MILES: The member for Nollamara is probably right there, because we had to ask one of the dads at swimming lessons to get out of the pool. A teacher was in the pool teaching the kids how to swim and the dad was hovering around in there. The member for Nollamara is right.

Ms J.M. Freeman: I'm often right!

Mr P.T. MILES: No, she is not often right, I must say!

I do congratulate every person concerned who has put forward these amendments to the act, from this minister—I do not know who the minister is.

Mr J.H.D. Day: It is Hon Robyn McSweeney.

Mr P.T. MILES: Yes, of course. One of my favourite departments is the child protection area of the government. Thank you to Hon John Day for allowing us time to speak in the house on this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning) [3.37 pm] — in reply: I thank members, including you, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker), for their contributions to the debate on this bill. As the member for Wanneroo has observed, I am representing the Minister for Community Services; Child Protection in the carriage of this bill in this house. All members who spoke in one form or another made reference to the importance of high-quality childcare services, and in some cases to the importance of early learning services, which I believe are being increasingly recognised in the community. I would certainly agree with all the sentiments that have been expressed about the need for childcare services to be well founded and to be of a high quality. Some specific issues were raised, including by you, Madam Acting Speaker, about the affordability of child care in Western Australia. This is an ongoing issue and I am advised that the issue has been raised with the commonwealth government by ministers from this state over quite a period. I suspect that issue has been raised with both the current commonwealth government and the previous one prior to the change of government in 2007. Issues of a workforce shortage have also been raised by both ministers and officers from this state in various national forums. It is obviously, therefore, an ongoing issue and one that we hope the commonwealth will take on board to address more effectively than appears to be the case at the moment. It seems to be one of those issues on which there are plenty of views about what should be done. However, the funding needs to be provided, and that primarily is the commonwealth's responsibility.

Ms J.M. Freeman: There are things we could do as well.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes. The amendments to the legislation in this bill will go some way to achieving quality child care and protection for children. All members would understand that it is important to note that the amendments in the bill are to the Western Australian Child Care Services Act and do not refer to the proposed national regulatory scheme, which I understand is being developed and will come into this Parliament on a national basis before too long. It is the case that as a state, we do not directly fund any childcare services in Western Australia except for 21 occasional care services that were previously funded jointly by the commonwealth and the state. The commonwealth made a unilateral decision, without any advice to the state, to cease its contribution to the funding of those services from 1 July 2010. The state government therefore has had to pick up all the funding for those occasional childcare services, and this funding comes partly from the Department for Communities and partly from the royalties for regions program.

Ms J.M. Freeman: If the funding comes from royalties for regions, are those occasional childcare places in the regions? Because child care used to be provided in some mental health services and occasional child care was provided in some Department for Child Protection agencies at one stage.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am not sure about the location specifically, except that obviously some other places would be in regional areas, but some of the funding is coming from the Department for Communities, so that would allow services in the metropolitan area to be funded as well, I would expect.

The member for Nollamara made a couple of specific points. Firstly, she inquired whether there would be portability for the supervising officers referred to in section 5A. I am advised clearly that is one of the significant aspects of the amendments and is consistent with the proposed national changes. The amendment provides for portability for the supervising officers, rather than for the arrangements to be linked to just one particular service location, as is the case at the moment. There will be portability, presumably across the state. The member also

Ms Janine Freeman; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Paul Miles; Mr John Day

inquired about proposed section 29(4)(b)(ii) and the possibility of a refund being ordered to be provided to parents as a result of a State Administrative Tribunal decision. I can confirm that it is possible for a refund to be made available to, or to be provided to, parents if that is what the SAT decides is appropriate. Presumably, it would be a fairly unusual situation for things to get that far, but the provision is there to enable that to occur should it be appropriate.

The other comments made in the debate were fairly general and about either individual experiences with child care, the importance of child care in the modern society that we have or the importance of providing quality childcare services. As has been pointed out, this bill comes about as a result of the review that was commenced in the time of the previous government. I am not sure whether it was fully completed in the time of the previous government, but it certainly commenced then and the recommendations are now being put into effect through this amendment bill.

Once again, I thank members for their contribution and I commend the bill to the house.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Leave granted to proceed forthwith to third reading.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time, on motion by **Mr J.H.D. Day (Minister for Planning)**, and passed.