

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, CHARGES FOR ADMISSION TICKETS AND COMPANION CARD

296. Dr J.M. WOOLLARD to the Minister for Disability Services:

- (1) Is it correct that on Liam Bartlett's ABC radio talkback show yesterday, the minister stated that he had taken advice that it is not in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act for a disabled person and his or her companion or carer to be charged for two admission tickets instead of just one to enter a venue?
- (2) Who gave the minister that advice, and could the minister please table that advice?
- (3) Given community opposition to a charge for the companion card, will the minister reconsider his decision to allow a charge for this card?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) Yes; it is not discriminatory to charge for two admission tickets. It has been discussed that, in some instances, not charging people could be a cross-discrimination. That would come under the federal legislation. Whether that is discriminatory or not, the card is about making sure that people with disabilities are properly dealt with. I am somewhat disappointed with the attitude that the member for Alfred Cove has adopted on this issue, given the fact that she was given confidential briefings and that this question was very clearly answered in the estimates committee. I want to make three points. The companion card was a Gallop government election commitment to offer a two-for-one-price service to the carers of people with disabilities. A group of people require a carer or companion if they wish to attend a sporting event or access some service in the community. That is a very different situation from that of a person with a disability who can gain entry into a sporting venue or other facility without a companion. The companion card was designed to provide the two-for-one-price service for carers of people with disabilities. The eligibility criteria would ensure that only people with a disability who required a carer or companion to accompany them in order to participate fully in an activity or service would receive the card. Despite the speculation and rumour-mongering over the past few days, the details are still being worked out. The member for Alfred Cove was present during the estimates committee hearing. If she reads what I said then, she will see that the success of this card is dependent on the amount of private sector and local government support for the scheme. People with disabilities and their companions deserve this kind of recognition, but without those organisations that currently charge people with disabilities to enter sporting venues and cinemas etc being willing to come on board and support this program, it cannot work. The government's aim in introducing the card lies in lifting the embarrassment and the onus on the carer or person with disabilities to check with service providers to see whether a discount is available or if people with disabilities must have a companion with them. We plan for this card to further our initiatives to break down the very real barriers in the community. It is very premature to start criticising a program when we do not know whether it will gain support in the community. One of the things that has happened is that we have put money into the process to allow ACROD to support this process. From day one it was always decided that there would be some small charge for the administration fees. As I clearly stated in the estimates committee hearing, which the member for Alfred Cove chooses to ignore, in addition to ignoring the confidential briefings that she was given, if this scheme does not receive the support we want it to receive, obviously, as a minister, I must go back and re-examine this proposal. It is as simple as that.

Ms S.E. Walker: What are you talking about - confidentiality?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: However, to start to jump in with both feet as the member for Alfred Cove has done, when there is a real concern here that should this kind of publicity start to affect -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Nedlands.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: There is a real concern that the kind of negative publicity that people are trying to generate, for quite frankly base political reasons, may affect the development of this card. Give it time to be developed. Let us look at the process and let us see what needs to be done.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Nedlands and the member for Dawesville to order.