

**CHILD WELFARE AMENDMENT BILL 2001**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 6 November 2001.

**HON DERRICK TOMLINSON** (East Metropolitan) [4.50 pm]: The Opposition supports this Bill, which had its beginnings in a meeting of commonwealth and state ministers. Drafting of the uniform legislation was signed off by the then Minister for Family and Children's Services, Hon Rhonda Parker, in 1997. The Victorian Government was the first to enact the legislation, and Western Australia is the last.

The Minister for Community Development took the opportunity to include two clauses in this Bill, both of which are desirable. The first is nothing more than a statement of principle to be included as a prelude to the legislation. It is a principle that has for some time guided the activities of what was once the Department of Family and Children's Services and is now the Department for Community Development; that is, that the interests of the child are paramount. As a statement of principle, that is uncontestable.

The other matter deals with the definition of parent. Until now, a parent has been defined as the mother of the child. The father has had no standing under this provision of the Child Welfare Act. This has meant, for example, that if the foster carers of a child who had been in care for some time chose to move outside the State, the natural parents of the fostered child had to be advised. Even now, it is only the mother who must be advised, because the Act is silent on the father. This is a form of gender discrimination that should not have been allowed to continue to this stage. It is a desirable amendment and one that the Opposition supports. Therefore, the Opposition commends the Bill. We regret that it has taken so long to get to this stage and sincerely hope that the legislation can now proceed as quickly as possible.

These are interim measures that will be used until such time as a new Bill is brought to the Parliament. I sincerely hope that the parliamentary secretary can indicate that the new Bill is imminent. I commend this Bill to the House.

**HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH** (East Metropolitan - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.53 pm]: I thank the member for his contribution. The Government proposes to introduce the rewritten legislation during the spring session. Quite clearly, it has taken some time to deal with this legislation. I understand that there is no problem with this Bill, but I believe Hon Giz Watson would like to make some comments. Is there any possibility of extending the sitting beyond five o'clock? This is important legislation in terms of the operation of child protection orders. It is fairly important that we wind up this legislation this evening. Hon Giz Watson has indicated that she needs more than five minutes in which to speak.

This is not a contentious piece of legislation. There has been unanimity on it. I will not hold up the debate. There is support for this legislation. The committee has done a good job. I thank all members for their contributions.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.