

**CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AMENDMENT (BODY PIERCING) BILL 2007**

*Second Reading*

**DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove)** [4.05 pm]: I move -

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill is required to give children under the age of 18 years the same protection against body piercing as they currently have against branding and tattooing. The bill amends the Children and Community Services Act 2004 to make it an offence for a person to pierce any part of the body of a child, defined in the act as a person under the age of 18, without obtaining written consent of the child's parent. The bill will provide the same penalty for body piercing a child under the age of 18 as already exists for tattooing or branding a child.

In 2004 I proposed a similar amendment to the children and community services legislation when it was being debated in Parliament. Although the Liberals in this house supported the amendment, the government refused at that time to support the amendment, which would have protected young children, often only 13 or 14 years of age, from having their bodies pierced and leaving them open to acute and chronic health problems. I proposed that amendment because of concerns raised with me by constituents, particularly distressed mothers who found out that their children had body piercings only when there were serious medical complications. Distressed parents have called the police, the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection and Legal Aid WA when they have discovered that their children have had mutilating or disfiguring body piercings, and have been told that there is no legislation relating to body piercing in Western Australia and that current legislation covers only branding and tattooing. At the moment in Western Australia, children can come home mutilated and disfigured with pins, rings and studs embedded in all parts of their bodies, and there is nothing that parents can do to prevent it.

Queensland already has legislation in place, and recently South Australia and Victoria have moved to introduce similar legislation. I believe that we should be legislating to protect our children. I was extremely pleased when the current Minister for Child Protection, Sue Ellery, stated publicly that she would personally support protection for children from body piercings. I hope that she is able to persuade members of her party to support this legislation so that it has bipartisan support.

Under current legislation, the fine for branding or tattooing a child under the age of 18 is \$12 000 and imprisonment for one year. This bill will see the same penalty applied for body piercing. The bill does not affect piercing for medical or therapeutic purposes, such as acupuncture.

Medical problems arising from body piercing are well documented. It can cause mutilation and disfigurement, permanent body scarring, blood poisoning, toxic shock, hepatitis, AIDS and cartilage damage. Although body piercings may seem fashionable and trendy to young children, we should be legislating to protect them against potential serious health consequences. Serious infections and problems breastfeeding later in life can result from nipple piercings. Male and female genital piercings and scrotal skin piercings carry the highest risk because they involve deep tissue. That is why the bill does not allow these types of piercings for a child under the age of 18 even with parental consent. Many piercings can take a long time to heal. Lip piercings take up to six months and nose or navel piercings can take up to a year to heal. People who have their tongues pierced may suffer complications such as infection or blood poisoning. Other problems include tongue swelling, bleeding and nerve damage, as well as chipped teeth and speech impediments.

I urge everyone, as responsible members of Parliament, to support this legislation to ensure that young people in the community are protected from making a trendy lifestyle choice that could have dire consequences for them in the future.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Minister for the Environment)**.