

## GUIDE DOGS

29 July 2008

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD:** I was privileged to be present last week at the Equal Opportunities Commission to hear the decision of Peter Ellson's landmark discrimination case being handed down. The vision impaired advocate achieved a legal first in successfully bringing an action against a taxi company after one of its drivers refused to carry his guide dog. The previous law specifically allowed legal actions to be brought only against an individual driver. We all know that the vast majority of taxi drivers do the right thing and that it is only a small minority of drivers who wrongly give the others a bad name.

A Family First bill drafted in consultation with the Royal Society for the Blind calls for that same outcome and remains on the House of Assembly *Notice Paper*. The bill imposes fines and disciplinary action for both taxi drivers and taxi companies who refuse to carry a guide dog. Possible disciplinary action under the bill would range from a reprimand up to and including a \$5,000 fine, including a total revocation of the licence. Labor members voted against the bill in October last year. The bill passed the upper house with Liberal and minor party support, for which I thank them. The bill is now stranded in the House of Assembly, unable to pass without government support.

Since that decision, Peter Ellson has again been refused a taxi, just a few days after the ruling, and I also received a complaint just this morning from another vision impaired constituent, saying that they had also been refused a taxi on the weekend just gone, again after the tribunal's decision. My questions are:

1. Does the minister agree that, despite the recent tribunal ruling, the problem is ongoing?
2. Does the minister agree that we will start to see this problem resolved only when taxi companies are forced to take responsibility for the actions of a small minority of their drivers?

3.If so, why will not the government support the Family First bill that languishes on the *Notice Paper* in the lower house at present?

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for the Status of Women, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Government Enterprises, Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Energy):** The situation recently brought to our attention in the media is shocking and completely unacceptable. I know the Premier also personally feels horrified about this. I understand he has issued a media release demanding that this situation be fixed immediately. I am happy to refer the question to the appropriate minister in another place and bring back a response.