

PASSENGER TRANSPORT (DISCIPLINARY POWERS)

AMENDMENT BILL

24 October 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: Obviously, the government has chosen not to support the bill so I will not waste too much of members' time, but I want to make a few comments. This bill is a little personal for me because my mother is blind—and some members in the chamber are probably aware of that. Through various stages in her life she has used canes and dogs. It is very tough for people who are vision impaired to operate in our society. They rely on taxis. They cannot drive, which is something sighted people take for granted. I cannot imagine what it would be like not to have a car yet my mother has never driven a car in her entire life; and anyone who is blind would be in the same situation.

This bill was a genuine attempt to right a significant wrong that occurs fairly frequently. My mother is blind, and works at the Royal Society for the Blind at Gilles Plains in a sheltered workshop environment. I have met many of her friends, who are vision impaired to varying degrees, many of them quite severely and many of them absolutely blind. They rely on taxis almost every single day of their life. Every single one to whom I spoke—and there would be dozens of them—had a story of being refused access to a taxi on several occasions. It is a genuine problem that exists.

Clearly, from that sample we are talking about perhaps over 100 instances of blind people being refused access to taxis in the past couple of years, so it is a significant problem. I have a letter from a taxi company in response to a complaint that was made. I will not name the company; it is probably not fair. The letter is in response to a complaint that was made, although the bill, if passed, would solve the problem. The letter states:

Unfortunately, we instruct our drivers as said (that is, pick up people with guide dogs) but, ultimately, the drivers themselves are responsible for their actions whilst on the road alone. All drivers are in fact self-employed

subcontracted individuals and, as such, are not supervised while they perform their daily duties.

That is exactly what this bill would have fixed. This bill would have put the onus squarely at the feet of the taxi companies so that those companies would be responsible for a driver refusing to pick up someone with a guide dog. Therefore, the taxi companies would cop the fine—and that was the intention of the bill. It would certainly make them more vigilant to ensure that their drivers did not refuse access to taxis for people with a guide dog. That being the case, it was a genuine attempt to right that situation.

I have received a number of letters detailing similar situations. I met with the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, Linda Matthews, who expressed strong support for the bill. In fact, the bill was drafted with the assistance of the Royal Society for the Blind. There has been significant consultation with the sectors that would be affected by this bill, including the taxi companies themselves. It is with some disappointment that I note it will not be supported by the government through this council. I look forward to the committee stage of the bill.

Bill read a second time and taken through its remaining stages.