

PROTECTIVE SECURITY BILL

Tuesday, 5 June 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I rise to support the second reading of the bill and, like the Hon. Ann Bressington, I acknowledge the government's work in introducing it. Family First certainly supports the thrust of the bill. It seeks to restructure the existing Protective Security Services Branch (PSSB) as part of the police force under the supervision of the Commissioner of Police. I will not repeat how the bill came about, as other honourable members have outlined the review process that brought this bill before us. We have also received a briefing about the matter.

It surprised me to discover that the protective security officers we see at the entrance to Parliament House, who look and act like police officers, in fact have no greater power to arrest someone who is committing a crime than you or I—that is, to make a citizen's arrest.

I suppose it is one of the best kept secrets in this building—and perhaps in the Police Force—because I am sure that every visitor who comes to the building assumes that these men and women are police officers, armed with a weapon and handcuffs and ready to deal with any crisis appropriately.

This bill gives us an upgraded protective security force in that some officers who are identified by a training and selection process will be allowed to bear arms. However, a number of them—and many of the existing officers—do not have the training at this stage to bear arms and act like normal police officers. They will continue doing as they have been doing. Further, the standard protective security officer will have only the power to stop and physically restrain a suspect; they must then deliver those suspects to the South Australia Police. By and large, they will not have any cells to hold prisoners, although I am advised that on some government sites there may be a designated room for the holding of suspects for no longer than 30 minutes. I would be grateful if in his summing up the minister would explain some of the scenarios where this sort of detention might be warranted.

The protective security officer's rights to arrest, etc. under this bill will be invoked only in the precincts of the asset they are protecting. I think this demonstrates how different they are from police officers. They cannot go about finding evidence, they cannot question suspects and they cannot commandeer vehicles, for example. I think members will have to put out of their mind anything they may have read in crime novels and the like. Indeed, the protective security officer is a person empowered only by their proximity to the place they are tasked to protect.

I note that the minister can declare an area worthy of protection. By way of illustration, it was explained to me that a vehicle occupied by a visiting dignitary, for example, might be such a place to which protective security officers are tasked. When you consider their expertise in securing a building or asset, this makes sense, rather than sending police officers without that particular training to guard that asset. It is also useful to note that protective security officers will be under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority, although they will have their own disciplinary tribunal separate from the SA Police Disciplinary Tribunal.

Family First can see merit in the reform of this branch of the state's protective security services, because surely there is a deficiency in the powers they currently have. We would be grateful if the minister advised the number of officers to be deployed in this manner—it may be that this is explained in the forthcoming budget—because we in Family First are always concerned that the laws we make in this place have a law enforcement element that will actually be enforced. In other words, we hope that with this reform we will in fact see protection of our public assets, and we hope we will never again see an event like the murder of Margaret Tobin.

You can never prevent every evil thing, but for the sake of the families and the people who work in public buildings and the like—and, indeed, in this institution—I do hope that the reformed protective security force can represent the government's utmost attempts to protect employees, visitors and their families. In summary, Family First wholeheartedly supports this bill and commends the government for its introduction.