

RADIO NEWS & TALKBACK PRECIS

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Morning / Lunch Period (9am–1pm)

(Plus talkback items scanned from last night 6pm–6am)

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

RADIO NEWS BROADCASTS

Ann Bressington, Independent MLC (891ABC 16.08-16.21) Baby safe havens

(Feldhoff: first to an issue that I think might be fairly confronting for a lot of people and this is a bill that is planned to be introduced into State Parliament next year by Independent MLC, Ann Bressington. Now, this is a bill that would make it possible in South Australia to offer baby chutes or baby safe havens. They have many names but these are basically the chutes by which we see in Europe and Japan that desperate mums who don't feel they can look after their baby and don't know how to go about passing that onto authorities can do so safely for the child and anonymously for them ... so that they face no legal ramifications. Now, it hasn't happened in Australia at this stage ... but it is something that Ann Bressington feels that we should be considering here in South Australia and she intends to introduce a bill early next year ... Ann Bressington ... is it true that the only current examples of this are in Europe and Japan? ...) Yes ...

(Feldhoff: ... would you bill then follow the same sort of concept? ...) Well, it would be very similar ... we would have these baby chutes or safe havens installed at hospitals in the maternity wards and also at some medical practices ... that would allow then the babies to be handed over to trained professionals to look after that baby ... I think the one difference with my bill to overseas is that the mother either during labour or after labour would be able to call an ambulance and get assistance and then they would take the baby and place it in a safe haven for her if she wanted. *(Feldhoff: ... this would be involving other people but who would do so anonymously with no requirement to pass on that information?)* Yes that's right and the mother could even, if she takes the baby to the hospital, the mother could even stay back and get checked out medically herself and would not be required to give any identification or ... anything that would identify her at all but would be able to also receive medical attention if need be. *(Feldhoff: Ann, if there is that face to face contact with a mother who is desperate and wants to offload her child in that manner, why then wouldn't it be appropriate to go through official channels? ... why would we have this baby chute option if they're prepared to deal with people face to face anyway?)* Well they may not be prepared to deal with people face to face. History says they aren't ... they go into public toilets and have their babies and stuff them in a bin or whatever they do with them. so history says that ... they aren't in contact with people and they aren't communicating with people and they aren't reaching out. I'm just hoping that if this is part of the bill and we send that message and the Government designs an education campaign around that, that these girls maybe won't feel so isolated ... if just one comes forward and reaches out then the objective of the bill has been achieved in my view. *(Feldhoff: What was it that prompted your interest? You mentioned the baby in the bin, I'm assuming that's referring to the issue in the university here in Adelaide a few years back?)* Yeah, we've had a couple over the years that ... when I've heard about it I've thought ... gee, how could somebody? But I've been contacted by people from

community groups that have said that there is a need for this ... my big thing since I've been in politics really has been child protection and I've seen some of the horrors that go on with some people and this is just basically trying to get it at the very beginning and trying to prevent a tragedy from occurring. So I think it's part of a prevention initiative that I've been banging on about now for about four and a half years ... I've been working on this bill for about six to eight months so it's not been something that I've just thrown together, it's had a lot of thought go behind it and a lot of research. *(Feldhoff: ... now significant do you think is the problem? We do hear examples ... in the media of babies being left in perhaps in cold and unsafe situations, but how significant do you think that problem is?)* Well, I don't think that this is happening every day, thank goodness ... our information ... through freedom of information that there's been about 12 around the country that we know about. my information from community groups here and interstate is that there are probably a significant number more than that 12 but these are actually the babies that are found ... nobody really knows, which is a very sad situation as well. But ... just because it doesn't happen every day doesn't mean that we shouldn't be taking these precautions and if one baby's lost through being abandoned inappropriately then in my view it's one too many. *(Feldhoff: From the examples in Europe and Japan have the baby chutes there been successful in restricting the number of babies left in other unsafe areas?)* Oh absolutely and especially in Japan ... they have these baby chutes not only in hospitals and at medical centres but also at our equivalent of non-government organisations and churches as well. So they're saying that this has significantly reduced the number of babies that have been just ... inappropriately abandoned and in most cases have died from exposure ... that's basically why I thought that this was such a good idea because they have achieved very good outcomes overseas. *(Feldhoff: ... I'm sure there are many people who are listening who think either this is a great idea or that this may be ... the last step in the process. Why ... did you choose to focus on that end of the problem ... rather than perhaps in putting more money or more efforts into the stages where you perhaps talk to pregnant women who are in those desperate situations?)* I've introduced a number of bills over the last four and a half years to deal with young girls being ... lured into risky situations. Last year a harbouring bill that actually got through, that was an amendment to the Child Protection Act. I've been working on ... these sorts of issues for about four and a half years. It's very difficult to get a government to amend our Child Protection Act which would start at the other end of this and I by no means say that this is a solution to a very complex problem but it's a stepping stone. And I note that around the State, New South Wales, Tasmania have also called for baby safe havens and that the AMA, the President of the AMA has come out in support of such measures as well. So ... it's not about focusing on this end of it, it's about this has just been a natural progression of what I've been doing for four and a half years as far as these issues go. *(Feldhoff: In a moment we'll speak with Pauline Connelly ... let's got to ... Nick ...)* **(Caller Nick: ... just with the research that you said that you've done ... how many just of say the 12 cases that you said that you knew about last year were the mothers involved with drugs?)** *(Feldhoff: Ann, do we know the answer to that question?)* No we don't ... when we get FOI information it's flimsy enough without going into the details. *(Feldhoff: I guess this is an area that perhaps Ann Bressington we don't have a lot of statistics on because by its very nature it's ... covert and hidden.)* Well that's exactly right ... perhaps with these baby havens as well it might give us an opportunity to be able to collect that data and refine the problem down even further. But ... we're not great stat collectors in South Australia as it is in these kinds of issues ... *(Feldhoff: ... a couple of texts ... 'Better than having the baby dying in the driveway as I think happened here' and another one asks 'Will fathers be informed and/or consulted?')*

Pauline Connelly, Assistant Director, Centacare (891ABC 16.17-16.20) Baby safe havens

(Feldhoff: Pauline Connelly ... the issue of baby chutes, do you see it having any merit?) Well you mentioned earlier ... that it's a very confronting one and it is very confronting I think. The concept of baby chutes initially one would think what is happening that we need to do this? And as Ann has indicated ... there is a lot of sadness and a lot of trauma there that it would cause a young person to have to put her baby in a chute ... my concern would be about how well our message is getting through, how well our services are known, how effective is everything that's happening today to support young pregnant women that we need to actually ... bring in a bill such as this? I ... suppose my primary care is that of the mother; when the mother has put the baby in the chute what happens to the mother then ... emotionally, psychologically, physically? ... what is the care for that mother? I think ... it's confronting because we need to have a step back and look at what is happening now, how effective are the services and what can we do about that?

(Feldhoff: Having baby chutes in existence should this bill come to pass ... do you think that it might encourage people who are perhaps on the edge and might look for other solutions to use that instead? I guess my question is do you think this might increase the risk of abandoned children by having that option open?) I'm not sure whether it would increase it but my concern would be that it would definitely be seen as an option that wasn't once there and where sometimes a woman might seek the help of another person, of another professional, they may choose this option instead ... therefore my concern would be where would that ... mother end up? *(Feldhoff: And for the babies ... do you think this is a safer option that might see babies surviving rather than dying in cold environments?)* It's definitely a safer option than being left in a shoebox or left in a bin, 100% safer. But my concern is that the numbers are low in babies being left in this way; I would not like that then to be seen as an option that increases, I would rather as a community and the government look at how can we resource ... early intervention, how can we resource caring for mothers? We have services where young pregnant women can go to be educated, to live in safe environments here in Adelaide, to deliver their babies and make a choice about whether they want to keep their babies or have them adopted. If we could look at how services such as that could be increased I think we may be down a better track. *(Feldhoff: Increased and perhaps made more aware of because I'd suggest there'd be a lot of people in that circumstance, probably a lot of young mums that wouldn't even know those services exist.)* Yeah, Centacare runs a service called Louise Place and young women can go there in safe accommodation or in supported housing, they can attend school and be supported by social workers who educate them and support them psychosocially up to the time they deliver and then afterwards. *(Feldhoff: Thank you for your time.)*

Back to Ann Bressington

(Feldhoff: Anything you'd like to add to the discussion Ann? ...) Just to pick up on a point that Pauline made ... when she said ... the trauma of putting a baby in a chute, these are humidicribs and through a glass window. So the mother knows that she's actually putting the baby in a safe place. Far less trauma I would believe than ... dumping the baby in a bin and then trying to keep that secret and live with it. *(Feldhoff: ... thank you for your time ... just a couple of comments from callers ... 'How do you know that mothers in that situation would have the capacity to get the baby to the safe place even if one existed? They might be mentally impaired or in a fragile state.' And another caller says he thinks this is a horrible suggestion: 'Our Government should never make it easier for a struggling parent to give up their children.' One of our texters says 'Bring back adoption. There are plenty of couples who can't have children who would make great parents for those who don't want their children.'*)