

Senior Citizens

order catheters for immobile patients. There are also unsanitary conditions. Some homes were reportedly infested with cockroaches.

Critical questions confront lawmakers who seek to make a legal response to such problems as these. Although there is a growing body of evidence of outright violence against the elderly, the problems seems more often to be one of neglect and deprivation and of emotional and social maltreatment, rather than physical abuse as such.

Apart from the obvious fact that such situations are often hidden and it is as difficult to remedy as to detect, they also pose a quandary: can we legislate care and concern for our senior citizens? Could we realistically expect that any such laws would be enforceable? Genuine solutions will require a much deeper understanding of the problem than we have now. We must inquire whether our knowledge of the etiology of abuse of the elderly is sufficient to enable us to legislate wisely. Our investigations must inevitably take us to a further consideration of abuse of the elderly in non-institutional settings, even within the family itself.

If mistreatment of the elderly is shown to be largely a function of stress due to the difficulties of living with the elderly, voluntary programs which provide services to help the elderly maintain independence or resources to lessen the burden on the nursing home staff or on families can be implemented. An interim measure could consist of drafting an elder abuse prevention and treatment act, which would make it mandatory for nursing home personnel to report cases of elder abuse and neglect and would make renewal of a nursing home licence subject to a clean record with respect to elder abuse.

Whatever measures we might take, we must ensure that laws designed to protect the elderly are sufficiently enlightened that they do not inadvertently contribute to stereotyping of the aged by treating them as incompetents who cannot make decisions with regard to their own welfare.

As Your Honour can see, I have not come with many answers today, but, rather, with a deep sense of concern and responsibility and a desire that we at least begin to ask the right questions concerning this significant social problem. I think it is time to invite the elderly themselves into the conversation. Many of them have been subjected to or have witnessed the kinds of abuse to which I have referred today. We need to hear from them if we are to be able to take measures which will speak to their real needs.

Abuse of the aged is, in the words found in one article on this subject, "everybody's nightmare". I think it should be a matter of urgent priority for this Parliament.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Weatherhead (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill C-521, introduced by the Hon. Member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie). Like him, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) has great concern and respect for the needs of senior citizens. I also have those same concerns,

coming from the older suburbs of the eastern part of Metropolitan Toronto. We have the largest number of seniors in Scarborough in our particular riding.

In recent weeks, I have had the honour of being elected Chairman of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. I have also had the privilege of being appointed, in recent days, to the new pension task force on pension reform. I am looking forward to taking a very active part on both the Committee and the task force in the months ahead.

However, in reading Bill C-521, and in listening to the comments of the Hon. Member this afternoon, one wonders what the proposed Senior Citizens' Commission could be expected to accomplish. The Bill states that the Commission is to study and identify the needs of senior citizens and make recommendations concerning these needs to the Governor in Council. A Commission such as that proposed would more appropriately be a matter involving action by the Provinces. I may say in passing that I think the Hon. Member confirmed this in devoting many of his comments today to the real problems in nursing homes. However, to my recollection, nursing home jurisdiction is almost completely in the hands of the Provinces. Although I am not downgrading his comments in that respect, as this should be of real concern to all of us, I think we should be speaking in terms of the provincial legislatures and not Parliament, or not to the same extent anyway.

Indeed, a number of provincial Governments have already made appointments and others are considering the appointment of bodies to identify the needs of older persons, to make recommendations as to how these needs can be met, and to serve in an advisory capacity in the establishment of programs and services to meet needs, identify gaps in information and services, promote research and, in some cases, carry out research. Called by any one of several names—senior citizens' commissions, provincial advisory councils or provincial senior citizens' councils—they are appointed by Government and responsible to a provincial Minister of the Crown.

Several Provinces have bodies operating under voluntary auspices, either as independent councils on aging or as components of provincial social planning councils. In some urban centres, similar structures have been organized locally. In addition, some Provinces have an office, bureau or division on aging, usually located in the Department of Social Services. Two Provinces have secretariats which serve to co-ordinate the programs and services related to aging and the aged being developed by several Departments. Finally, the appointment by Governments of provincial gerontologists to provide advice and consultation to the provincial Governments, academic institutions, service agencies, research projects and other endeavours, has augmented the work of the aforementioned bodies in identifying the needs of older people and in establishing or co-operating in establishing services for them.

At the federal level, the National Advisory Council on Aging was established by our Government in May of 1980. Perhaps the Hon. Member's Bill was filed before we went back in April of 1980. A number of things have occurred here since