

Family Allowances Act, 1973

● (1200)

If one were to look at the committee report one would find that an official from the Department of National Health and Welfare made a statement which suggests that the unamended Act allows the Government to remit the overpayment. If that is the case, then why does this clause give the Minister the power to issue a death certificate? Why does he need the power to issue such a certificate when he already has the power of compassion which exists in the present legislation?

It just does not make too much sense to suggest that the reason for having this provision is to help missing children. The reason is that it is obviously a bookkeeping measure which ignores the feelings and the hurt of the parents of missing children. It does not recognize the fact that they are spending a great deal of money to try to find their children. Until the child has been actually found they will continue their search.

As the President of the Child Find organization expressed to the committee, parents never stop looking for their missing children. Even in hopeless cases they never stop looking. They never stop spending money in their search. I refer to long distance telephone calls, advertisements, and so on. As the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) suggests, the removal of the sum of approximately \$31 from the parents of missing children means that they do not have that little extra amount to spend which would make them feel as if they were actually doing all they could in order to find their missing child. The Government is saying that we cannot afford that little bit extra which helps parents to search for their missing children. The claim that the Government is doing this for compassion's sake does not make sense. It is withdrawing \$31 from parents, thus reducing their ability to go out and search for a child who has disappeared. The type of expenses which parents expend in search of missing children, such as expenses for printing thousands of copies of pictures, expenses for long distance telephone calls, legal advice and private investigators, are all expenses which parents must face if they are to continue their search for their missing child. Apart from that, imagine the impact upon yourself, Mr. Speaker, if your child were missing and the Minister suddenly issued a death certificate.

The family allowance was originally created in recognition of the parenting role. The money was paid out to families to allow parents to do the best job possible in raising their children. However, if the payment is stopped when a child has gone missing for some reason, then the help which is part of parenting is withdrawn. If a child walks down the street and disappears for a couple of hours, the parents of that child are worried. They go out and use their best resources to find their child. If their child disappears for a couple of years, they continue to use their resources to find the missing child. Consequently, the family allowance pays for the continued responsibility of parenting which these people with missing children have.

Our suggestion is that we look at the whole clause and bring in something which recognizes either the present legal death requirement, which is seven years, or the fact that death should not be assumed until the missing child reaches the age

of majority. Let us not suddenly withdraw from parents the type of support which they need and then say that what we are doing is approaching compassionately the whole area of concern. We suggest putting this clause in place so that parents do not have to repay the money which they have received during the period in which their child has been missing in the event the child is eventually found dead.

I believe that every Member of the House has been approached by parents not only with respect to this particular clause but with respect to the entire Act. If the Government truly feels compassion for children, then it should recognize that there is a large group of parents in the country who need this \$30 and the increase each year. I refer to the increase attributable to inflation. The Government should recognize that these funds should not be cut off, or the real dollar value reduced each year, until somewhere down the road, perhaps in ten years' time, the value of the family allowance will be so small that it will not have any real affect upon the assistance given to a parent who is attempting to take good care of his or her children.

Before me I have a number of telegrams which deal with this very point. They are critical not only of the clause to which I refer but of many clauses. In fact, they are critical with respect to the whole approach taken by the Government in terms of the family allowance. I wish to refer in particular to one of the telegrams which was received. The original of the telegram was sent to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). It is from members of a home and school association. It states that the individual family unit does not have a special type of organized lobby group and, thus, they feel concern with respect to many family issues. As members of a home and school group they feel the responsibility to take issue with these proposed changes, since parents groups are not organized in the same way in which senior citizens groups are organized. I have a series of telegrams from home and school associations from across the country who feel that not only is this clause incorrect but that the Government should withdraw the whole Bill.

● (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Tardif (Richmond-Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased and proud to take part in the debate on Bill C-70.

Earlier today a Government Member said that no one has exclusive jurisdiction over compassion, that he and his colleagues feel the same kind of compassion and sympathy as Opposition Members do with respect to families and parents that have lost a child. In my judgment one only needs to read the clause to realize that compassion does not even come into play. The clause itself proves beyond any doubt that the people who drafted it do not even know the meaning of the word compassion. I know that a lot of viewers who follow House debates on television may have some difficulty understanding the purpose of this amendment.