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Inquiry into young children accompanying members into the House

Thank you for undertaking this inquiry.

It is more than just symbolic for the Parliament to be taking steps to allow carers to bring young children into the chamber.

It is a pretty tough ask at the best of times to combine caring for children and a political career. In my experience it takes a combination of a supremely generous partner, broader family support and 26 hour days to be a parent and a polliie.

Sometimes, even the best laid child care plans can go wrong. It happens. The person you had lined up to care for your child can't make it, nor can the other three emergency carers you have previously turned to. Then it is the ultimate responsibility of a parent to make sure their child is looked after and safe.

If this run of events happens on a sitting day, and it will happen to every parent at some time, then under the current rules a member has a choice of either being a parent or being an elected representative. This should never be the case. This rule change would help make the choice less stark.

Bringing a young child into the chamber is unlikely to be a regular thing. It's hard to deliver a speech or enter into the debate with a two year old at your side. But the flexibility to be there for a vote or to make a (almost certainly) brief contribution, with your child at your side if needed, would be a welcome step forward.

Of course the case is even clearer when a mother is breastfeeding. For many mothers breastfeeding is a healthy, natural and loving part of raising their child. This is no less so if the child's mum is elected to the NSW Parliament and our rules should reflect this.

My only suggestion for a possible improvement in the wording would be to broaden the language from "member with a child" to "member with the care of a child". This would ensure we are not limiting this to just natural parents, but also to foster parents and those with shared care arrangements (as sometimes happens when grandparents have to step in and take over the care of their grandchildren).

Again thank you for undertaking this inquiry,

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Shoebridge'.

David Shoebridge