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Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 21 August 2003, regarding the petition submitted to the House by members of the Townsville and Thuringowa region concerning hearing screening services to newborn babies.

Queensland Health would like to acknowledge the importance of hearing screening for newborn babies. The detection of hearing loss in the first 12 months of life can be difficult and is often missed by both the infant's parents and/or the physician. It is recognised that babies with hearing loss who receive intervention before six months of age experience far less psychological and sociological disadvantage and have essentially normal speech and language development by age three years.

In line with these findings, the Queensland Government recently announced a \$22 million Statewide neonatal hearing screening program entitled "Healthy Hearing". The program aims to detect permanent childhood hearing impairment in all babies by screening before three months of age. The program also incorporates a diagnostic and treatment service.

Townsville Health Service District, along with the Royal Women's Hospital and the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, will take a lead role in the implementation of the program. These facilities will be responsible for providing clinical support, professional development and training to staff in the regional and rural hospitals.

The "Healthy Hearing" program will contribute to Queensland Health's mission of "Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Queenslanders" by providing early intervention and improved opportunities to those children with hearing impairment.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

SIGNED

Wendy Edmond MP
**Minister for Health and
Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy**