

NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION WEEK

Statement by Member for Mirrabooka

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [12.58 pm]: This week is National Child Protection Week, which emphasises that all children in our community have a right to feel safe and protected. The many events held in communities, such as one being held in Mirrabooka this afternoon, recognise the hard work of child protection staff who are devoted to children's wellbeing. It is therefore disturbing that we heard today from concerned workers who came to Parliament House to present a petition to the Legislative Council. Holding red hearts on the steps of Parliament House, members of the Community & Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association stood together to highlight the needs of children waiting for the government to care for them, as some 667 children sit on the waitlist for a Department for Child Protection and Family Support caseworker.

The petition presented to Parliament signed by almost 1 000 people opposed the \$40 million cut in funding to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. The workers alerted the Parliament to the increasing number of children requiring assistance over the last five years, at a time of reduction in funding, which escalates the risk for the most vulnerable children in this state. The workers at Parliament today spoke of workers becoming distressed, to the point of tears, worrying about the children they have not been able to assess because of the excessive workload placed upon child protection caseworkers.

The petitioners called on the government and Parliament to honour their commitment to the most vulnerable Western Australian children by providing enough resources to ensure that every Western Australian child at risk has a direct caseworker; committing to the ongoing funding of preventive programs to reduce the number of children being taken into care; ensuring that all Department for Child Protection and Family Support employees have a safe, fair and reasonable workload; exempting the DCPFS from budget cuts; and not privatising services delivered by the department.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm