

NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME — BRONTE GLASS

Statement by Parliamentary Secretary

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.03 am]: On 11 August 2021, Hon Colin de Grussa brought to Parliament's attention Ms Bronte Glass's experience in applying for redress as part of the National Redress Scheme. Her application related to historical abuse she suffered when she was a ward of the state. I note that Ms Glass is in the President's gallery today.

The two state government departments involved in Ms Glass's Redress process were the Department of Justice and the Department of Communities. The Department of Justice was involved because it has responsibility for the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime and the Redress coordination unit, which play a key role in administering Redress applications. The Department of Communities was involved because Ms Glass was a ward of the state when the abuse occurred, and therefore the department was responsible for providing the verbal and written apology that Ms Glass had requested as part of her Redress application.

I note that at the conclusion of Hon Colin de Grussa's statement, he called for the relevant ministers—Hon John Quigley, MLA, Attorney General, and Hon Simone McGurk, MLA, Minister for Child Protection—to meet with Ms Glass to discuss her experience. Following Mr de Grussa's statement to Parliament, a meeting was convened so government representatives could hear directly from Ms Glass. I understand that attendees included a number of people, including the Attorney General, the Minister for Child Protection, the director general of the Department of Justice, the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, and a senior officer from the Department of Communities. I also understand Hon Colin de Grussa was present at the meeting, and that Ms Glass is very grateful for his ongoing assistance and support. Following that meeting, and with Ms Glass's permission, the Attorney General asked me to provide a statement updating the Parliament and the public on the status of this matter.

Regrettably, there were various failures by the Department of Justice in administering Ms Glass's Redress application. Certain staff members involved were not adequately trained prior to speaking to Ms Glass. There was also significant misinformation given to Ms Glass by the Department of Justice. For example, it was suggested to her that apology letters were simply template letters "rubberstamped" by the Department of Justice, rather than individualised responses provided by the responsible department. This is not the case and has never been the case. However, I cannot imagine how utterly demoralising it would be for a survivor of abuse to hear that from a departmental officer. I can confirm that the director general of the Department of Communities has provided Ms Glass a written apology for the abuse she suffered. This was not a template letter and it certainly was not rubberstamped by the Department of Justice. I can also confirm that the Commissioner for Victims of Crime has personally written to Ms Glass to apologise for the way in which her direct personal response was conducted.

Since Ms Glass first raised her concerns, various measures have been taken to avoid her experience being repeated. Her concerns were taken seriously by the Department of Justice and a full investigation of the matter was undertaken, including a referral to the Department of Justice's professional standards division. In addition to the independent review of the concerns, a full review of the direct personal response process was undertaken to ensure that the Department of Justice is meeting the objectives of the scheme. This review found several areas for improvement and since then the following improvements have been implemented: a training package has been developed in partnership with an external expert; all Justice staff involved in the National Redress Scheme are required to complete the training; and all executives who participate in a direct personal response are required to complete the training. In addition, a new national Redress coordinator has been engaged. This coordinator is highly experienced in trauma-informed practice and is leading the direct personal response process in WA. A panel of outside facilitators is also available for complex cases.

The recent Kruk independent review into the National Redress Scheme found that there are significant issues in the delivery of direct personal responses across the national scheme. Ms Kruk recommended the development of an action plan focused on improving communication about the process, better provision of support to survivors, improved training provided to executives and creating an oversight process. The Department of Justice is working closely with the commonwealth government and all states and territories to develop an action plan to address these recommendations.

The National Redress Scheme was intended to assist survivors in obtaining accountability and acknowledgement from those institutions and government departments that were responsible for historical abuse. However, in this case, Ms Glass's experience fell well short of expectations.

Again, Ms Glass, on behalf of the Attorney General and the state government, I apologise for your experience and I hope that the improvements made will avoid this happening to any other survivor of abuse.