

HOMELESSNESS — PREGNANT WOMEN

374. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to local support service providers in the south west reporting that there are approximately 100 pregnant women without a fixed address and a recent significant spike in demand for newborn packs for homeless mothers.

- (1) Can the minister guarantee that women giving birth at local hospitals and their newborns will be supported and provided with suitable and stable accommodation?
- (2) Is there any risk that mothers who do not have a fixed address at discharge would be separated from their children?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I actually have not heard the information that the member is referring to, and I would have appreciated her bringing that to the attention of my office before raising it in this place. It is not my understanding that children are ever taken into the care of child protection simply because there is no accommodation available for the mother. In fact, everything is done to make sure that people who need emergency accommodation are given emergency accommodation, and if there are any concerns about what would happen to someone who is facing a range of difficulties, whether they be domestic violence, mental health, drug and alcohol or housing insecurity issues—whatever they are—those issues are dealt with before the baby is born and supports are given to that family. In fact, we have put a record amount of investment into early intervention assistance for families to ensure that children do not come into the child protection system.

To answer the member's question, I am not aware of the circumstances that she is talking about. We are well aware that there are housing pressures throughout the state with the demands on private rentals as well as in the public system. However, I do also note that there has been a record number of building approvals. The Premier talked about this in question time last week. I think over the last year there has been an increase in building approvals of over 80 per cent. There have been a significant number of building approvals, and there has been quite a bit of commentary that once those buildings are built and people are able to move into them, that will in turn take the pressure off private rentals and get them into the public system. Of course, there has been significant investment by this government into public and social housing as well.

I would urge any individuals, families, community members or their representatives, if they know of people living in that sort of hardship, to get involved with services or the Department of Communities, because it certainly should not be the case that there are risks to families being kept together because of homelessness or the threat of homelessness.