

CHILD PROTECTION — CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

1819. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt to the parliamentary secretary to the Attorney General:

I refer to the shocking statistic that on average one child per fortnight is killed by a parent or step-parent and the research that some of these children's lives may have been saved if corporal punishment was prohibited, and I ask:

- (a) has the government considered the prohibition of corporal punishment;
- (b) if yes, please provide an update on what is being done by this government to prohibit corporal punishment; and
- (c) if no to (a), why not?

Hon Matthew Swinbourn replied:

Violence against children will not be tolerated. The Cook Government is committed to protecting children in WA from all forms of abuse.

Since coming into government, the WA Labor Government has:

Invested more than ever in child protection in WA, including in early intervention.

Funded more child protection workers on the frontline.

Enacted stronger and more effective laws to keep West Australian children safer.

Section 257 of the Criminal Code (WA) provides that “It is lawful for a parent or a person in the place of a parent, or for a schoolmaster, to use, by way of correction, towards a child or pupil under his care, such force as is reasonable under the circumstances”. This defence applies only in limited circumstances and does not authorise the use of force unless it is for the purpose of correction and is reasonable by contemporary community standards. It does not permit the physical abuse of children. Further, corporal punishment is prohibited or banned by law or policy or both in WA schools, early childhood settings, juvenile justice and alternative residential care/foster care.

While the Government has no plans to amend section 257 at this time, it will continue to monitor the use and regulation of corporal punishment in Australia and abroad.