

PRISON NURSES, INDUSTRIAL ACTION

429. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the minister representing the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs:

I refer the minister to industrial action taken by prison nurses around the State on Monday, 25 November 2002 and ask -

- (1) Does the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs concede that prison nurses undertake particularly challenging roles that are generally very difficult to fill?
- (2) Given that the Government has now agreed to grant prison nurses similar employment conditions to those enjoyed by mainstream nurses, as set down in their June 2001 enterprise bargaining agreement, why is the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs refusing to back pay prison nurses to this date?
- (3) What actions will the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs immediately take to end the prison nurses' industrial action?
- (4) What has been the total cost to government of the recent prison nurses' industrial action?

Hon NICK GRIFFITHS replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. The Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs has provided the following response -

- (1) Nursing positions in prisons, like nursing positions in other government agencies, are generally difficult to fill.
- (2) The Department of Justice nurses' enterprise agreement nominally expired on 31 May 2002. Department nurses have been offered back pay to 1 June 2002, consistent with government policy.
- (3) No action will be taken at this stage. The department has contingencies in place to manage the delivery of service to prisoners.
- (4) At this stage it is estimated that the additional cost incurred as a result of the industrial action by nurses will be offset by salaries forgone as a result of their strike action.