

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS — SUPPORT DOG CONTRACT

35. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General:

I refer to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' contract for the provision of a support dog at the cost of \$162 000.

- (1) When was the Attorney General first made aware of this decision?
- (2) What expert advice did the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions receive to validate that a support dog is the best way of dealing with staff stress?
- (3) Will the Attorney General table this advice?
- (4) How many other support dog contracts exist within the departments and agencies for which the Attorney General is responsible?

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The Attorney General first became aware of the decision on 21 April 2021 when WAtoday contacted his office to ask for a comment on a tender for the provision of support dog services, published on the Tenders WA website.
- (2)–(3) The Director of Public Prosecutions has advised that her office has done significant research into the various methods of dealing with workplace stress and vicarious trauma suffered by its staff. One study the ODPP considered is detailed in “Dogs in the Workplace: A Review of the Benefits and Potential Challenges” published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. I table that study.

Section 3.1 of the study considered social support and stress reduction provided by dogs in the workplace, while section 4.4 considers the potential for dog bites in the workplace. This and other considerations contributed to the ODPP trialling the use of a specially trained support dog rather than permitting employees to bring their own dogs to work. In addition, a number of ODPPs across Australia have used assistance dogs in courts and to support victims and witnesses for some years. They include the New South Wales government's canine court companion program operating at 10 courts, the Victorian government's court dog program utilising two full-time dogs, and the South Australian government's legislative amendments last year to permit a support dog that had been offering support to witnesses during meetings with its ODPP to be permitted to support people giving evidence in court. Further, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was satisfied of the potential for support animals to reduce trauma associated with child sexual abuse prosecutions, with recommendation 61(b) of the *Criminal justice report* providing that complainants, vulnerable witnesses and other prosecution witnesses should be allowed to be supported when giving evidence through the presence of a support animal should the prosecution consider it necessary.

[See paper [158](#).]

- (4) There are no other contracts. For clarity, the ODPP support dog program is a three-month trial at this stage, with a total estimated cost of \$13 500 for the three months across the ODPP's 300-plus staff.