

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Fifth Report — Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the
Commissioner for Children and Young People — Tabling*

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [10.30 am]: I present for tabling the fifth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People entitled *Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*.

[See paper [1897](#).]

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: The committee reviewed the Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Annual report 2021–22* and considered several other reports published by her office in the past year. Most were published in the period since January 2022, when Jacqueline McGowan-Jones took over the commissioner role from Colin Pettit.

Some of the work referenced in the report had its origins in work begun by Mr Pettit. For example, the second Speaking Out Survey, which collected the views of around 16 500 students in years 4 to 12, was conducted in early 2021. A summary of the results was published at the end of 2021. In 2022, the commissioner's office continued to explore the data, revealing some startling findings around kids' views of their own safety. Further exploration of the data related to mental health revealed findings that mirrored the first survey in 2019, showing teenage girls were more likely than teenage boys to feel depressed and unhappy with themselves. The commissioner has tackled this worrying trend by establishing a girls' wellbeing project to explore the reasons for the gap and gather views on how to improve girls' experiences.

The commissioner also received Lotterywest funding to extend the Speaking Out Survey to several groups that the mainstream survey could not cater for. These include students who are homeschooled, students with special educational needs and students in remote communities. It is important to capture the views of these minority populations to provide the best possible understanding of what children and young people in this state are experiencing. Hopefully, funding will be available to do this in future years.

The commissioner told the committee that she has enjoyed her first months in what is her dream job. We have every confidence she will continue to perform the role as well as she has in her first year.

MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany) [10.31 am]: I rise as a committee member to speak in support of the tabling of fifth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People entitled *Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*. As noted by the chair, I would like to highlight the important work that the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the passionate Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, has achieved since starting in the role.

I would like to focus on the Speaking Out Survey and the girls' wellbeing project. As the mother of a 10-year-old girl, the key findings in the report are concerning. In 2021, the commissioner undertook the second Speaking Out Survey, collecting the views of 16 532 children and young people from across Western Australia. One of the key findings of this survey was that female young people consistently rated their wellbeing below that of their male peers, with higher rates of stress and lower life satisfaction. According to the survey, female young people are twice as likely as their male peers to report not feeling happy with themselves, feeling unable to achieve their goals or to deal with things in their lives. The transition from primary school to high school is more difficult for female students, with many reporting negative mental health experiences and low self-esteem. As they get older, they also begin to feel disconnected from their parents and that no-one is listening to them or providing them with the support they need. Female young people are also more likely to feel unsafe, which is another contributing factor to poor mental health. Our female young people are being left behind and we need to address this.

The committee takes this opportunity to further draw attention to this important research by echoing the statement by the commissioner —

Both government and non-government sectors have a responsibility to work together to ensure policies, programs and services are focused on improving wellbeing outcomes for girls. Every young person must be given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their gender.

I conclude by drawing attention to the commissioner's latest work, *Here I am: Stories from young and everyday leaders in Western Australia*. It showcases the incredible stories of children and young people who are making a difference in their communities. As the member for Albany, I proudly read about Ajia, a young leader from Albany who is planning to publish a book in 2023 to promote body diversity and positivity, with hopes to study psychology when they finish school.

I would like to thank the commissioner and her team for their ongoing advocacy for all children and young people in Western Australia. I commend the report to the house.

