

PREVENTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAM, JOONDALUP

Grievance

MR O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [9.50 am]: My grievance is directed to the Attorney General and concerns the report in *The West Australian* of Wednesday, 22 August about funding being cut to the Joondalup prevention of family violence program. My understanding is that it was funded as a pilot program for two years from December 1999, and that the program finally commenced in December 2000. Therefore, the funding should not run out until December 2002. An independent evaluation will be carried out before the pilot program ends. The reports in last Wednesday's *The West Australian* and last Thursday's Joondalup edition of the *Wanneroo Times* clearly gave the impression that funding for the program would be pulled from December this year.

The pilot program was established to provide victims of family violence with an avenue for protection from perpetrators of violence. Previous acts of violence against other victims may be taken into account when risk assessments are performed. These occur when a victim makes a complaint. The risk assessment is carried out with the domestic violence support worker, the police domestic violence unit and the victim.

This pilot program is the first of its kind in Western Australia and, to date, anecdotal evidence indicates that it has far surpassed any expectations about its ability to reduce family violence. The original evaluation was to be undertaken by an independent source and was to compare statistics in the Joondalup district with those in the Midland district, which is a similar size and socioeconomic demographic to the Joondalup district. The review would also collect qualitative evidence from users of the program - both victims and perpetrators - to assess its effectiveness in reducing the incidence of family violence. The current proposal is to conduct an internal review of the operation of the program, and to conduct postal surveys to assess its benefits or otherwise.

Up until February this year, the Joondalup family violence court dealt with 565 restraining orders and more than 150 criminal matters. The review must consider the continued savings to the community when acts of family violence are prevented. Family violence is a heinous crime. The victims are usually well known to the perpetrator, and the offence usually occurs over a prolonged period and involves both mental and physical abuse. Savings to the community come in many forms, such as the reduced need for psychological counselling for victims, perpetrators, and the children who are sometimes the hidden victims of family violence. Monetary savings can also be made when an act of family violence is prevented. These come in the form of savings on court and legal costs, and on the cost of incarcerating perpetrators, with its associated cost of reintegrating those perpetrators in society.

Reports indicate that up to six women have been murdered in the past 12 months in Western Australia as a result of family violence. Police figures from the past three years put the number of deaths at as many as 25. This trend is clearly unacceptable. Violence is increasingly becoming a part of Western Australian life. Family violence should not, and cannot, be tolerated in this State; it must be prevented.

This program should be evaluated appropriately. If the anecdotal evidence is supported by the review, funding of the program should be continued. I support this program. It has been running since December 2000 in Joondalup. I have spoken with the coordinator of the family violence refuge centre in Joondalup, and she has assured me that this program has prevented many cases of violence against spouses and children. I hope this program can continue well into the future.

MR MCGINTY (Fremantle - Attorney General) [9.55 am]: I thank the member for Joondalup for his grievance. I will draw attention to a number of important matters concerning the Joondalup family violence court. The court opened in December 1999 following recommendations in the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce action plan. The pilot was launched for a period of two years to December 2001.

A full evaluation will commence in October to measure the outcomes of the program and to determine the nature of future operation of the court. I will receive that report by 31 December. The intention was always that the court and the Joondalup family violence program would run for a period before being evaluated, and that any decision about its future would depend upon that evaluation.

The Joondalup family violence court deals with violence and misconduct restraining orders and all criminal matters relating to family violence. In just over a year - between 1 February 2000 and 28 February 2001 - the court dealt with 565 restraining order matters and more than 150 criminal matters. I received an update of those figures this morning. In the 14 months to 30 March 2001, the court dealt with 589 restraining order and 184 criminal matters. About 90 per cent of the people who applied for restraining orders were women, and 86 per cent of criminal matters involved male defendants. The figures I have been given are that eight deaths have occurred as a result of domestic violence in 2000 in Western Australia and, so far, nine have occurred in 2001.

The aims of the Joondalup family violence court are to improve the criminal justice response to family violence, make perpetrators accountable for their behaviour, support and ensure the safety of victims in the criminal justice system, and reduce the incidence of family violence in the Joondalup district.

Domestic violence is the biggest cause of injury to women in Australia. I assure the member for Joondalup that there is no preconceived outcome to the evaluation process. The matter has been brought in-house because it is my belief, and that of the Government, that the use of external consultants should be minimised. It does not, in any way, prejudice the likely outcome; it simply means that the evaluation will now occur differently from perhaps that which was discussed when the program was originally set up. When we have problems, we should look at dedicating the courts to particular outcomes. The Children's Court deals with child offenders, and that is a most appropriate approach. The Drug Court deals with drug-related offences. I wholeheartedly endorse that coalition Government initiative, particularly the appointment of the magistrate to that court.

Our community must also deal with family violence. Leading up to the last election, the Labor Party committed its full support to the Joondalup family violence pilot project and to providing an appropriate level of funding. Members on this side agree that it is an excellent idea, and nothing that has happened so far suggests that that view is in any sense misconceived. It will take a lot of persuasion to convince me that this court has not been a success. However, I do not want to pre-empt the evaluation. It should take place as originally planned to assess properly the work done and outcomes in the family violence area. As I said, it will take a lot to convince me that this is not a good idea. I will leave any response to it until the evaluation has been completed. However, I assure those who are anxious about the future that they have no reason to be concerned.

It must be kept in mind that this is a pilot program; that is, it was set up to be evaluated. The evaluation will take place and the Government will not form a view or make an announcement one way or another until it is completed. Once it is, and based on its results and recommendations, decisions will be made about the future of the court and how it can be best structured to achieve optimal outcomes for the community. Any suggestion that the matter has been prejudged or that the Government has a predisposition against this project are completely unfounded. I assure the member for Joondalup that I believe this is a worthwhile project. I await the evaluation for future directions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Grievances noted.