

COMMONWEALTH STATE/TERRITORY DISABILITY AGREEMENT

645. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Disability Services:

Can the minister inform the house of any recent developments in negotiations over the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

I thank the member for his question and his advocacy for families in his electorate. Members will recall that in June and July I responded on behalf of the government to an offer from the commonwealth to provide matched funds to address unmet needs in accommodation support and respite for people with disabilities. On behalf of the government my department responded positively and offered to inject an additional \$156 million cumulative funding, or \$55 million recurrent funding at the end of five years, into the disability services budget to address the escalating incidence of unmet need. That \$156 million was to be matched by the federal government in line with Minister Brough's very bold offer and would have enabled us to support just over 3 000 families in need in Western Australia.

Months passed and I reported back to Parliament that we had heard nothing from the commonwealth government. Concerns emerged that if the money that the commonwealth had promised had been forthcoming it would be drawn down from the \$1.8 billion disability assistance package that the Prime Minister announced a couple of months ago. When that proposal was put to the commonwealth it said that the money was in addition to the \$1.8 billion and that we had it wrong. Senator Scullion said in federal Parliament that the \$1.8 billion would not go directly to the states. Despite the minister bleating loudly to families that have members with disabilities, I report to the house that the commonwealth has failed the Australian disability community badly.

I finally heard on Tuesday night from Minister Brough that he and the Prime Minister have offered to match just one-third of our offer. We put on the table that we needed \$156 million cumulatively from the commonwealth and it came back with an offer of \$55 million over five years, which basically comes to about \$3 million.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

The SPEAKER: Surely the Leader of the Opposition knows that I have called him to order three times and I am sure he does not want to be called to order for the fourth time.

Ms S.M. McHALE: We made it clear to Minister Brough that the offer was \$156 million cumulatively. If he is unable to understand the nature of funding people with disabilities, it is not for me to give him a lesson; it is for his advisers to inform him that \$55 million recurrently at the end of five years is built on \$156 million cumulative funding.

I am very disappointed to report to the house that the federal government has made a number of costly promises to people with disabilities that it cannot keep. I believe it was shocked at the size of the effort that Western Australia was putting into families with members with disabilities and it will not match that. To paint the complete picture, notwithstanding the fact that Minister Brough has deceived, duped and let down families with members with disabilities, he said the state government could go back and negotiate the difference but it would come out of the \$1.8 billion. After professing that it was not coming out of that \$1.8 billion, he has now admitted that any additional money will have to come out of that amount.

An enormous effort has been made by the Western Australian government that demonstrates that it was prepared to work with 3 000 families with members with disabilities. Now the offer from the commonwealth will barely go to supporting 350 disabled people. We had the opportunity of supporting 1 500 families and the commonwealth government has let them down.

I have had to break that news to the disability sector and members can imagine how disappointed they are. We will continue to work hard in this area and look forward, hopefully, to working with a Rudd federal government to improve the multilateral agreement. However, thousands of Western Australians whom we are endeavouring to assist will see through this, the act of a desperate federal government that has let down thousands of Western Australian families.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the member for Roe and the member for Bunbury.