

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE — OUR WATCH PROGRAM

54. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:

I refer to the national Our Watch program, which was established in 2013. Will the minister explain the program, why it is necessary and why has it taken WA so long to sign up?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I am very pleased to address this issue.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, this is a very serious issue. I call you to order for the first time.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am actually very proud and take the responsibility of being the state's first Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence very seriously. It is a heavy responsibility because these issues are very widespread; they are complicated problems that require a sophisticated answer and response. I was heartened by the quality of the inaugural speeches that we have heard in this chamber, particularly the number of inaugural speeches that addressed the issue of family and domestic violence. The members in here who are connected to their communities understand that this is a widespread issue that is deeply troubling and hurting families. As I said, it requires a concerted response by government.

The number of family and domestic violence incidents in this state is absolutely shocking. Western Australia has the second highest rate of domestic violence in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. In 2015, over 53 000 cases were reported to the police, with children involved or present in 65 per cent of those cases. We absolutely must do more. Labor took a comprehensive policy to the election that addressed a number of issues. We said that we would keep victims—women and children—safe in the case of family and domestic violence, and we will do that. We will put more measures in place to protect those victims. We said that we would hold perpetrators to account, and we will do that. The Attorney General has a range of initiatives in train that will improve our criminal justice system to hold perpetrators to account.

When I am out there talking to the community, people say to me that it is one thing to respond to violence after it has occurred, and we must do that, but we also need to change the conversation when there is such a prevalence of violence against women and children—family and domestic violence in particular. That is where Our Watch comes in. Before the McGowan Labor government was elected, WA was one of only two states that had not joined the national effort to change the conversation. This is a national problem and it requires a national response. Our Watch is a bipartisan, not-for-profit organisation initially set up by the commonwealth government and the Victorian government. As I said, all jurisdictions are involved, apart from New South Wales and, until recently, WA. It aims to look at a range of initiatives that will increase gender equality and prevent violence against women in all aspects of everyday life, whether we are talking about community organisations, sporting organisations, schools or social media—all through our community. We want to influence policy and, as I said, change the conversation.

In eight and a half years members of the Liberal–National government now sitting across the chamber did nothing. When it announced its own strategy for preventing family violence, I asked a question of the then police minister and minister responsible for women's interests. She said that family and domestic violence services were not her responsibility. They were not something that she understood anything about. That is what she said when I asked a question in this chamber about her own 20-point plan, such that it was, called Freedom from Fear. The member for Scarborough said that those services did not fall within her portfolio responsibility.

We have to do more about family and domestic violence. The McGowan Labor government will do exactly that.