

**DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - REVIEW**

*Statement by Minister for Community Development*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for Community Development)** [2.02 pm]: In August this year I ordered a review of cases in which serious concerns have been raised by family -

*Point of Order*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I take this point of order under standing orders 149 and 150 which relate to ministerial and brief ministerial statements. Mr Speaker, as you are aware, brief ministerial statements were introduced for, simply, brief statements or announcements by ministers. The tradition of this Parliament, under standing order 150, is that major statements and announcements and the release of major reports will be done by ministerial statement, which allow the opposition of the day the opportunity to respond. I suggest that we are about to hear a major ministerial statement, and it should be treated accordingly under standing order 150.

**The SPEAKER:** The standing orders definitely allow for a ministerial statement of 20 minutes duration and, also, a short ministerial statement of three minutes duration. I cannot recall the last time there was a 20-minute ministerial statement either in this or the previous government.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** There were plenty of them in our government.

**The SPEAKER:** I have heard only a few words of the ministerial statement and I presume it will be a short ministerial statement of three minutes duration.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Further to my point of order, I seek clarification: Mr Speaker, if, in your judgment this is a significant ministerial statement, I would appreciate it if, not now but perhaps later, you will consider ruling on the distinction between brief ministerial and ministerial statements.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Mr Speaker, I am sure you will consider the matter raised by the member for Cottesloe, but I think he is trying to read into the standing orders something that is simply not there. The member alluded to standing order 150 which states -

By leave of the Assembly without a dissentient vote . . . a Minister may make a statement . . .

It is a matter of judgment for the minister making the statement to determine the seriousness of the statement; however, that is not something that is entered into under the standing orders.

**The SPEAKER:** I am happy to look at that and give a more detailed ruling at a later stage.

*Ministerial Statement Resumed*

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** In August this year I ordered a review of cases in which serious concerns have been raised by family members or their advocates - including members of Parliament - about the safety of children. The circumstances of 39 children have been examined by a team of experienced child protection practitioners, who have made a number of important recommendations about how the department can ensure the safety of children. The review process was overseen by an independent and external panel member. Fifteen recommendations were made by the review, which the government accepts and supports. The recommendations highlight the need to make sure the child's safety and wellbeing is at the heart of all decisions made by the department.

The report highlights the complexity of working with parents affected by combinations of alcohol, drug and substance abuse, family violence and mental health problems. We need more staff with knowledge in these areas. In future, no case will be closed until the department has strong evidence to prove parents can protect their children. Parents should not be given second chances if they revert to non-protective behaviours. In eight of the cases reviewed, serious risks were identified and these were referred to the director general for immediate action to protect the children involved.

I was not prepared to release this report until I was satisfied with the department's response to the review's findings. In four cases, the department has taken or is in the process of taking statutory protective action through the Children's Court. In one case, the child is now being cared for by another family member. In another case, the child's difficult behaviour has stabilised due to round-the-clock support, and in a further two cases, intensive family support or psychology services are being provided.

I thank the review team for listening to the voices of children and ensuring that they are heard and responded to. I have instructed the establishment of an ongoing and impartial review of cases in which concerns are raised to make certain that Western Australian children are safe. I am happy to report that the members of the review team are more than supportive of the government's response to their report. This ongoing review is part of the Carpenter government's plan to strengthen child protection in Western Australia. In this year's state budget, the

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr John Kobelke

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department received an extra \$140 million, the single biggest increase in its history; and in September, an additional \$50 million was provided to employ 133 extra workers, including 87 caseworkers, this financial year. A review of the department is under way to ensure that its primary function is the protection of children.

I also advise the house that the Director General of the Department for Community Development has advised the Premier that she will retire from the public service effective from the close of business, Friday, 3 November 2006.

I now table a copy of this report.

[See paper 2161.]

**The SPEAKER:** Members, I acknowledge the presence in my gallery of Hon Susan Nakawuki, MP, a member of the Ugandan Parliament.

[Applause.]