

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE — PEEL REGION

Grievance

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [9.34 am]: My grievance about the statistics of family and domestic violence within the Peel region is to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. It is an unfortunate reality that family and domestic violence is a major issue within the region, with high rates within both the Shire of Murray and the City of Mandurah. Although the population centres of Pinjarra and Mandurah have been shown to be hotspots for family and domestic violence, smaller areas within my electorate of Murray–Wellington are also not immune. Family and domestic violence is also seen in the outer rural and urban areas in the Shire of Murray and within the Shire of Waroona, although fortunately at lower levels than in the major town centres. I hope the minister is able to provide further information on the recent crime statistics in the family and domestic violence areas, particularly for Pinjarra and Mandurah.

I regularly speak with constituents and service providers who are concerned about the high statistics for family and domestic violence in the region, as well as access to support for those affected. I know the minister is well aware of the issues faced by victims in the Peel region and that there is a plan in place to help support those who need it most. Local service provider Allambee Counselling has received over \$1 million to support its work in the community and, importantly, a second domestic violence refuge will open in the Peel region by 2021. In a state first, the therapeutic refuge will provide tailored services to survivors with complex mental health, trauma and substance use issues. The service will also have flexibility in responding to clients' needs, taking into account the individual needs and client mix at any one time. The importance of this to the region cannot be overstated as it will reduce the immense pressure on existing providers and ensure that women and children from right across the region have access to the support they need. With the reinstatement of the Mandurah policing district, there are now also more police in the local police stations to deal with issues when they arise. This is in stark contrast to previous years, when the resources in the region to manage the demand simply did not exist.

This is an issue that I am passionate about. As I believe that survivors should not be disadvantaged due to the location they live in, I am an alliance member of Peel Says No to Violence, a community project set up to help raise awareness and understanding of family and domestic violence within the region and to take action to help prevent it and support survivors.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Member for Vasse, can I ask you to take that conversation outside.

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: By increasing community awareness of both the issue itself and the support services available, the project aims to eliminate family and domestic violence from the region.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Murray–Wellington, can you sit down for a second? Member for Vasse, I asked you to take that conversation outside. Thank you, member for Murray–Wellington.

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Community-based projects such as Peel Says No to Violence provide hope that attitudes are changing and the wider public is becoming aware of the seriousness of the issue. In an ideal world these changing attitudes would mean that one day those services would not be needed, but in the meantime it is important that the community is kept educated of the significance of family and domestic violence in our area, that support is readily available to victims when they need it and that perpetrators are kept accountable. Having a ministerial portfolio committed to the prevention of family and domestic violence has ensured that those concerns are taken seriously. I ask the minister to provide an insight into the recent crime statistics for family and domestic violence in Pinjarra and Mandurah and to provide an overview of the government's commitment to tackling family and domestic violence in the Peel region.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence) [9.39 am]: I thank the member for raising this important issue in the house, and particularly for her focus on working with her community to understand the problem of domestic violence and her response to this issue through her involvement with the Peel Says No to Violence coalition. The member was present at a meeting in late February in the Peel region with the community services sector hosted by the member for Mandurah, which was a great coming together of a range of different service providers who were interested in talking about, not only domestic violence, but also other social issues facing the local area. Certainly, domestic violence was an important issue that was discussed. It was good to be able to give some assurance to the community sector about the McGowan government's proactive approach to community services, including domestic violence.

I can talk about a lot of things in terms of our work in the community, particularly relating to community safety. At the core of what we are trying to do with domestic violence is to make sure that we place vulnerable people at the heart of decision-making, and not expect that those vulnerable people traverse their way through different services; that we work from a firm evidence base when looking at our response; and that we track outcomes for families and their communities, so that we have a firm line of sight on how we are going in terms of outcomes and

the effectiveness of our interventions and supports. That is a framework that is informing all our work in relation to supporting communities.

As the member said, we now have me as a dedicated minister on the issue of domestic violence, and we have prioritised implementing a series of election commitments that we took to the 2017 state election. That includes over \$20 million of new funding into programs and supports, strengthening legislation to protect victims, and mapping a strategic path forward over the next 10 years so that we can start to make inroads, not only to a better response, but also doing important work to prevent domestic violence from occurring in the first place. Not a day goes past that the issue of preventing violence from occurring in the first place is not raised with me.

Of course, the member knows that the Attorney General, in his responsibilities as Minister for Commerce, shepherded important changes to the Residential Tenancies Act to protect victims of domestic violence. Those amendments become law next week. They are important protections, and in fact will mean that Western Australia has among some of the strongest protections in the country for victims of domestic violence who are residential tenants. Therefore, they will be able to make changes to their property without asking permission; stay in the home if they choose and be able to apply to the court to have the perpetrator's name removed from a tenancy agreement; install CCTV security in their rental home; and not be liable for property damage, unpaid rent and disbursement of the bond if any of those damages were not their fault but resulted from domestic violence.

The member asked specifically about the Peel region and the statistics relating to domestic violence. Firstly, one of the difficult issues in tracking the amount of domestic violence in our community is that we know it is under-reported. While we want to see the incidence of domestic violence go down, we also want to see reporting go up. The more we talk about domestic violence, the more we might see the number of reports go up. I will give a few examples specifically from your electorate, member, in the City of Mandurah and the Shire of Murray, including the Town of Pinjarra. According to the statistics for 2017–18, in the categories of threatening behaviour (family) and assault (family), police recorded 774 incidents in Mandurah and 117 incidents in the Shire of Murray. Again, I hasten to say that we think these reports understate the extent of the problem. Members of the member's community sector who met with us in late February indicated that they certainly believed that that was the case, as they see not only a number of incidents of domestic violence, but also the knock-on effects of domestic violence. It is expected that domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness amongst women, but we also see the trauma that occurs over generations when children witness and experience domestic violence themselves. There are wideranging implications of high levels of domestic violence in our community.

I spoke earlier about the need in our community services response to make sure that victims are at the heart of any services and assistance we give people, and that will inform the model for the new refuge that we have committed to put in place in Peel; that is, we will have a therapeutic model in that refuge. A number of refuges around the state link victims of domestic violence to other services, and they do fantastic work doing that, but in this new refuge we will have services either co-located or at the heart of the response there, including mental health services, drug and alcohol services, and financial counselling. We are trying to make sure that we can get women and their children back on track so that they can lead safe, happy and secure lives into the future.