

SAFE AT HOME PROGRAM

672. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:

I refer to the Safe at Home program that does great work in preventing homelessness for women and children affected by family and domestic violence. Can the minister outline to the house why this program is so valuable; and, can the minister advise the house on whether the federal government has provided funding certainty for this program?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for her question, and also her passionate advocacy on behalf of this important policy area. Sadly, not a week goes by that we are not reminded why we need to pay attention to this important issue throughout this state.

There is a distinction between two programs. One, Safe at Home that the member asked about, is a program funded by the state government; another program with a similar name, called Keeping Women Safe in Their Home, is funded by the federal government, but they do a similar thing. When victims of domestic violence—usually women with children; sometimes they have children—need some advice about how to deal with the dangers they are confronted with, they might come into a women’s refuge, for instance, and get advice from one of those services. Keeping Women Safe in Their Home or Safe at Home—either of those programs—does a risk assessment of the circumstances for those women and sometimes children, and might advise that in fact it is useful for those women and children to stay in their house. So it might, for instance, be ensured that there are active restraining orders in place and a safety plan, and there might be added security—CCTV and the like—and ongoing monitoring, depending on the result of the risk assessment undertaken. The state government puts about \$1.8 million a year into that program, and from the state government point of view in 2018–19 we assisted 842 people through it. In fact, it is really heartening to see how many people have been able to stay in their home, particularly for children being able to stay at their local school and people being able to keep up their work commitments, and keep in touch with families and colleagues and the like and their support networks.

However, funding for the federal government Keeping Women Safe in Their Home program will come to an end on 31 October. Despite me writing to both the Minister for Women and the Minister for Families and Social Services about this issue, we have had no assurance that money will be provided in the future. I think that is an absolute shame. In fact, the Western Australian Council of Social Service and the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services are also concerned, and have written to both of those ministers and members throughout the federal Parliament advocating for the continuation of that funding.

Services that have received federal funding through that program include Pat Thomas House in Peel; the Patricia Giles Centre, which covers the Joondalup, Mirrabooka and Midland areas; the Pilbara Community Legal Service; Starick, which covers the south-east metropolitan corridor including Midland and Perth; the Lucy Saw Centre; and, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, which is doing a pilot for Aboriginal women and their children. That is all important work, member, as I hope most members in this chamber would agree. It was heartening, after the spate of very tragic homicides that this state has endured, that the Premier received correspondence from the current Prime Minister offering assistance. We hope he is true to his word on that offer, and we might be able to get some assurances about this program. I really hope that we can continue to advocate for not only an extension and a better understanding of the multitude of services that we need to provide for victims of domestic violence—often women, sometimes with children—but also that we can provide safe havens in refuges, and, when we can, keep women and children safe in their homes through proper risk assessment. I really hope we can continue to do that work.