

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEAVE — PUBLIC SECTOR

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

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's decision to provide paid family and domestic violence leave across the public sector—a move that is now being followed by many companies across Australia. Can the minister update the house on how this policy is supporting those who are experiencing domestic violence and how this has helped shine a light on this important issue?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for that question. It has been alarming but heartening to see the extent to which there has been a take-up of the paid leave for people who need support if they are experiencing domestic violence. Members may have seen the media reports, but in the last six months we have had the equivalent of 150 days' leave being accessed by public sector workers for support because they are experiencing domestic violence. As I said, it is concerning but perhaps not surprising because we know that we have a significant issue in our community. Why should the WA public sector be any exception to that? In fact, we want people to come forward and seek support. We want to make sure that they feel comfortable to talk about the fact they are experiencing domestic violence. It is through no fault of their own. We want them to seek support and we want to make sure support is there for them.

It is important that as the state's biggest employer, we are a model employer and that is what we have sought to do in providing this 10 days' leave. Early in my period as minister, it was heartening when a number of employers came to see me, including Rio Tinto, asking what they could do to better support their employees in terms of family and domestic violence. We discussed paid leave. Rio Tinto has now implemented that across its workforce nationally. It has 19 000 employees nationally. It is now actually white ribbon-accredited, taking a leadership position amongst its mainly male-dominated workforce to say that domestic violence is not acceptable.

As part of this paid leave, we have also made sure that managers in the public sector are aware of what sort of support they need to provide to employees, but that there are also contact people who are trained on this issue. Their response needs to be to recognise the different forms of domestic violence to respond to those employees appropriately—not to try to fix their problems but to refer them to specialist services. Of course, we want victims of domestic violence to stay at work if they are working. We know that about one in five victims of domestic violence are in paid employment. We want them to stay connected to their workplace. We need them to be economically independent. They are experiencing domestic violence in all its forms. It is not their fault; they are victims in this process. We need to make sure that people come forward and seek support. I am very proud of this initiative from the McGowan Labor government.