

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

476. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the 409 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The state government has accepted 93 per cent of the applicable recommendations and rejected none.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house what this means in practical terms?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on the implementation of these recommendations for those who are concerned about child protection?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for this question. Again, can I acknowledge the work of the royal commission, particularly those people who appeared before the royal commission over the five years of its work.

- (1)–(2) Our response to this issue has been threefold. One is to recognise the abuse that has occurred in the past, and that is why our decision to sign on to Redress WA is an appropriate response. I acknowledge the Attorney General's work on that. My responsibility as Minister for Child Protection is to coordinate work in government and with the rest of the community to do all we can to ensure that the abuse does not happen again in the future and, if it does occur, that we respond in an immediate and effective manner. That is what the public expects of us and many of the recommendations that the member for Bicton referred to go to that point. I could talk about a number of issues; for instance, how we best respond to harmful sexual behaviour amongst children, or how we implement independent oversight mechanisms, particularly in our child protection system. That is something I have given some thought to. Of course, there is also the role of religious institutions and their response to the royal commission. I think it is also worth mentioning the comments made by the royal commission regarding child-safe standards. A lot of the community is interested to know how we can implement and better understand how we can ensure that there is child safety in the community, particularly amongst organisations and institutions that we entrust with our children. As part of our response to the royal commission, Western Australia has agreed to the development of a national statement of child-safe principles and we will be working with other jurisdictions on a national approach to implementation.

We call on all institutions—both government and particularly non-government—that are engaged in child-related work to work under those child-safe principles, because we all have a duty to keep children safe. As I said, I think people who see the myriad institutions and organisations that exist in our community wonder how they can have confidence that children in their care are safe—they might be normal sporting organisations, local arts organisations, local church groups and, obviously, large organisations such as schools, hospitals and the like. There are so many organisations that impact on children and the public wants to have confidence that child-safe standards apply and some rigour exists in relation to those standards. I think, too, there is generally a role for government to be promoting awareness about child safety and not just thinking that it is the role of someone else, whether it implements working with children checks or child-safe standards in institutions, and for all of us to have an understanding of what child safety means in our day-to-day lives. If a person with children sends them to their friend's place for a sleepover, what is the empowerment those children can have themselves to maximise their safety? We will continue to work to implement the recommendations. We will report again at the end of this year and then annually thereafter to be transparent in the implementation of the recommendations of the royal commission and, as I said in my statement to the Parliament, to honour the work of the royal commission and all those who appeared before it.