

WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS

Statement by Minister for Child Protection

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for Child Protection) [3.12 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house about progress with the implementation of the working with children checks. Until today, the Working with Children Screening Unit has received about 33 700 applications and issued more than 30 800 cards to permit people to work with children.

The SPEAKER: If members want to talk and have meetings, will they please go outside. I cannot hear what the minister is saying.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Twelve negative notices and five interim negative notices have been issued prohibiting people from working with children. This is a powerful system to prevent harm to children. Introducing these checks will prohibit people who pose a risk from working with many thousands of children. Prior to this act, some who are dangerous to children would not have been identified, especially self-employed people or those who do not have convictions but have faced charges. This is the widest protection through checks system of any jurisdiction in Australia as people in child-related work who are volunteers, self-employed or employed in public, commercial or non-profit sectors must all have checks.

The number of checks is increasing rapidly, and is now at about 400 applications per day. This is the second year of the five-year phasing-in process. Priorities for phasing-in are based on the relative risk of harm to children of different ages and for occupations with little or no screening in place. Last year those screened included volunteers working with children under eight years old, self-employed people, some new employees and ministers of religion. This year checks are required for all people providing placement services for children in the care of the Department for Community Development, including foster carers, as well as people entering new child-related positions such as those in schools, child care, hospital wards where children are patients, babysitting, counselling, coaching or private tuition. Volunteers working with children up to 12 years old now require checks. Recently staff from the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health have been co-located with and supervised by the screening unit to undertake working with children checks for their employees and others.

I am pleased to advise the house that today the government has advertised for applicants for the first Commissioner for Children and Young People in WA. Once established, that office, which will be a powerful and independent advocate for children, will have transferred to it the working with children screening unit.