

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES — FUNDING

**197. Mr T.J. HEALY to the Minister for Community Services:**

I refer to financial counselling that supports those facing hardship, but a service that was heartlessly cut by the previous Liberal–National government. Will this government reverse those cuts and now support those in need?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

Thank you very much for that question.

I can confirm —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, we made a ruling on that before, and that stands. The person on their feet can use it, but other people cannot. That is a ruling made by the house.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** This is actually an important piece of information that I am holding up, because it is the way that —

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the second time.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** This is the result of the way the coalition government handled its budget, and it is why we are in the mess we are in. We were forced to give an election commitment that we would reinstate funding to financial —

**Mrs L.M. Harvey:** You're in government; you're not meant to pull stunts.

**The SPEAKER:** Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the first time.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** WA Labor gave a commitment that we would reinstate full funding to financial counselling, and that is exactly what we will do. We will reverse the cuts implemented by the Liberal–National government in 2015.

There was a huge public outcry after those cuts, and rightly so. It made no sense to cut financial counselling assistance for people who needed it the most. It made no sense. Although the Liberal–National government had no commonsense at all, the Western Australian public did. There was a public outcry, and people understood that if people are given assistance when they need it at beginning of experiencing hardship they could keep their car, they could keep —

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I have given you a fair bit of leeway, but you are just shouting across on every question. Let us see whether we can just go through one when you do not say anything. You might even get a lollipop at the end of the day!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. If people were given assistance when they needed it at the beginning of experiencing hardship, they could keep up the repayments on their car so they could get to work and keep their job, and they could keep up their house repayments. That was good for not only that person and their family but also the public purse, because it was going to be much more expensive for all layers of government if those people went under financially, rather than being given assistance. That made sense to most Western Australians, but sadly not to the Liberal–National government. There was a public outcry at the cuts to financial counselling and, as a result of that public outcry, the government did put some money back, but not all of the money. WA Labor committed to putting all the money back into financial counselling, and that is exactly what we will do. I went to see one of the financial counsellors who operates in my electorate. He is a man called Bal Beer, who works as a financial counsellor for UnitingCare West. He told me that for every person he sees and gives financial counselling to, there is one person whom he turns away—for every person he sees, there is one person he turns away. That means that someone has gone to the bother of understanding that they need help, of reaching out, of making some phone calls and of getting themselves in to seek assistance, but they have to be turned away. That is the result of the Liberal–National government's handling of our state's finances and the mess they left for people most in need.

Several members interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Just this morning the member for Mirrabooka was saying to me that there is no financial counselling available for people in Balga. There is a physical gap in the Perth metropolitan area. There is no financial counselling available in Forrestfield, as the member for Forrestfield has pointed out to me, or Balga. WA Labor will reinstate the money to financial counselling and we will give people assistance when they need it.

