

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE — FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

800. Ms S.F. McGURK to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to research showing that 50 per cent of domestic violence victims are also suffering from financial abuse, and that women who leave an abusive relationship are often left bankrupt and homeless.

- (1) Considering that this government has halved the money allocated to financial counsellors, how does the minister expect women leaving abusive relationships to access free financial advice?
- (2) Given that women and children in violent relationships will be worse off because of the minister's cuts to financial counselling, when will he reverse his cuts in this crucial area?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON replied:

I thank the member for Fremantle for her question.

- (1)–(2) This matter was raised last Thursday morning with the member for Forrestfield in his grievance and I referred to what we have done in this area. Financial counsellors were funded through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. We have recently done some work to make sure that the financial counselling comes over to my Department of Local Government and Communities. One of the things is that we have identified a need for face-to-face financial counsellors. My department and I have held two meetings with the sector and worked with the sector to work out how we can put that back into the system. We have allocated \$2 million back into this process —

Ms S.F. McGurk: Out of \$4 million that you cut.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: No. Mr Speaker, there is an allocation of \$5.8 million in the budget for financial counselling services in Western Australia. We put back into the system \$2 million for face-to-face financial counselling services. We acknowledge the sector and we work with the sector. Right now the services are out for tender, which will close off in early October, and the sector can apply for that tender. We have listened to the sector and have worked with the sector to make sure we put this back in.

I make the point that as a government we have worked with the sector, but members must bear in mind that prior to the changes in this year's budget, people had to deal with a financial counsellor to access money through the hardship utility grant scheme. We have changed those rules so that people can go to the utility and put in an application to access that HUGS money without first having to go to a financial counsellor to pay their utility bills. That is a very good change and less work in terms of the burden for financial counsellors.

Again, members should bear in mind that we have reallocated money for face-to-face counselling services. I am confident that we have the system right. We are going through the process of putting the services out to tender and will have them in place by early November. We are happy to work with the sector to make sure we can deliver financial counselling services back to those people.