

“STATUTORY REVIEW OF THE CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES ACT 2004”

Statement by Minister for Child Protection

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [2.06 pm]: I rise to table the “Statutory review of the Children and Community Services Act 2004”. Reviews of this legislation are required every five years. This review was conducted on my behalf by the Child Protection and Family Support Division of the Department of Communities with the assistance of two committees with senior departmental and external membership. The terms of reference of the review were to examine the operation and effectiveness of the act, including changes to support consistent high-quality foster care standards, the principles relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the safety and wellbeing of children and adults who are victims of family and domestic violence, the provisions relating to secure care arrangements for children at high risk, and the intersection between child protection and family law proceedings. There are 70 recommendations, 53 of which involve amendments to strengthen the act or improve its operation.

Aboriginal children represent 54 per cent of all children in care. I am particularly supportive of the review’s focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal children in care by establishing avenues for increasing the participation and involvement of Aboriginal people in decision-making processes. Promoting and maintaining Aboriginal children’s connections to family, culture and country is key to improving outcomes. Other significant recommendations relate to the court in which child protection proceedings are heard; independent oversight of out-of-home care; and the timely delivery of government services to children who are, or have been, in state care.

I would like to thank members of the committees for their time and their contributions, along with Rosemary Williamson and Emily Ohayon, the departmental officers who wrote the review.

The McGowan government’s priority is to keep children safe. The department will, of course, continue to focus on earlier intervention and family support so that wherever possible children can be kept at home with their families. Government will carefully consider the review’s recommendations. I look forward to working with the department, stakeholders, foster carers, and Aboriginal communities to discuss the next steps in improving the lives of Western Australia’s most vulnerable children and their families.

[See paper 991.]