

FOSTER CARERS — WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS —
MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION'S INTERVIEW

361. Dr A.D. BUTI to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to yesterday's media interview in which the minister asked the television news crew to turn off their camera while they were asking her legitimate questions about her portfolio.

- (1) Why is the government putting vulnerable children at risk by not ensuring that all foster carers have valid working with children checks?
- (2) As the minister responsible for the protection of children in this state, does she not think she has an obligation to respond to questions about child protection?

Ms A.R. MITCHELL replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member so much for asking this question. He does not know how much I really want to answer this question. I am delighted that I get the chance to put this on the public record.

Several members interjected.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I will speak through you, Mr Speaker, because this is very important.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Unfortunately, the Foster Care Association of Western Australia has been tarnished, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support's staff have been tarnished and the working with children check unit has been tarnished by allegations that work has not been done and it has not been done properly. I want to put on the record here and now that those people do an amazing job. They do the job far better than anyone anywhere else in Australia. In fact, the other jurisdictions say that we have the best. The Auditor General looked at this in 2014. He went through the whole process and was satisfied with how it is done. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse made recommendations about working with children checks. It said that we are the best. We will continue to improve our standards. We will continue to make sure that we have the best.

I go back to the foster carers. I say again: they are an amazing resource.

Mr M. McGowan: Now answer the question.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Stop trying to intimidate. This is about the safety of little children.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you! Through the Chair.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I am very happy to keep talking about foster carers. The other reason I find it absolutely frustrating that they have been run down as not capable of being able to help out in certain situations because they did —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Give it a go: answer the question.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Why didn't you want to answer the questions to the media?

The SPEAKER: Sit down, please. Member for Mandurah and member for Midland. Right, you have had a good lead-in now, minister; just answer the question.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I am not sure whether any members opposite have gone through foster care assessment and training. It is absolutely thorough. It is more than just a working with children check. They are given training and an assessment, because we have to make sure that we get people who are able and capable of doing the job. They go through an amazing training program and an amazing assessment program. Quite often people who apply do not actually get through. Yes, they do have a working with children check. Yes, if they do not have it straightaway, they are to get it. Relative carers often come in when there are crisis situations. They may not have had a working with children check done when there is a crisis. When there is a crisis, we need to get that child out of that crisis situation and put them into a safe situation. We will do that. We will keep close to that family. We do not leave them out there without watching them. When we have a crisis we need to take those children out of that crisis situation and put them into a safe environment that is secure and monitored.

Mr P.T. Miles: They don't care.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Of course they do not care. Does the Treasurer know what members opposite want? They want more resources. They want more public servants. They want to bill the government up again; that is what they want.

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: I raise this as a point of relevance. I think I have been rather patient today on this question. I asked two specific questions. As you said, Mr Speaker, the minister has had a very detailed lead-in time. Could she please answer the two questions that I asked. Firstly, why is the government putting vulnerable children at risk by not ensuring that all foster carers have valid working with children checks? Secondly, as the minister responsible for the protection of children in this state, does she not think that she has an obligation to respond to questions about child protection?

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. Member for Wanneroo, I call you to order for the first time. Minister, I think you have covered the first section of the question and I want you to cover the second section very succinctly.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I spent three quarters of an hour with Channel Nine's broadcast team yesterday. They did not like the answer I gave them so they did not put it on the tape.