

WADE SCALE

485. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Premier:

Wade Scale's grandmother wrote to former Premier Geoff Gallop in 2002 outlining in detail the violent and drug-affected environment in which her grandchildren were living. The Premier directed the then Minister for Community Development, the member for Kenwick, to investigate the grave concerns raised. Despite the detailed information provided, the minister failed to identify the dangers these children faced and failed to intervene. In July 2003, Wade Scale died. Is this the sort of performance the Premier expects from a minister he describes as diligent, committed and outstanding?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, and for his interest in this issue. The minister who held the community development portfolio at the time of the events described by the Leader of the Opposition, and who is now the Minister for Tourism; Indigenous Affairs; and Culture and the Arts, was and remains an outstanding minister of the highest integrity. Nobody in this chamber, outside the ebb and flow of political debate, would question that minister's integrity. She is a diligent, hardworking minister.

Most members opposite know that this area of government activity - case managing children in dysfunctional families - is extremely difficult. All over Western Australia, there are cases that would make us weep. What happens inside some families is unbelievable. The caseworkers dealing with those families make extremely difficult judgments about what should or should not be done and what is in the best interests of the child; they consider whether to take the child away from parents and siblings, and so on. In this case, the minister, via the department, received advice that has subsequently, in hindsight, turned out to be regrettable. That is not to say that the minister was in any sense negligent. The advice came from Mofflyn, the Uniting Church non-government organisation that works with families in difficult circumstances. Mofflyn reported that the family members continued to relate well to each other, and that both parents were very appropriate with both children.

Ms S.E. Walker: What date was that?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: December 2002. Mofflyn had no concern, it says in the advice to the minister, about the level of care the children were receiving. The minister acted upon the concerns that were raised. The coroner acknowledged that the minister had been given unreliable advice.

I say this to everybody in this chamber: it is inappropriate to try to sheet home the blame for the tragic death of this little boy to the minister who was presiding over that department at the time, acting on the best available advice. Outside the value of political attack, nobody would be suggesting anything more than that. It is inappropriate to try to pin the blame on the minister for the tragic death of the small boy in those incredibly complicated and tragic family circumstances. The coroner had already found that the minister was given unreliable advice. Nobody has suggested that she did anything other than everything that she could.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the member for Nedlands and the member for Roe.