

RETAIL WORKERS — ASSAULTS

**66. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Attorney General:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to keeping Western Australians safe, including in the workplace. Can the Attorney General advise the house what action this government is taking to deter acts of violence against retail workers?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY replied:**

Retail staff play a critical role in our economy and in our communities. This was highlighted for the community during the pandemic. Retail workers could not work from home; retail workers had to be on site, on station, supplying families with necessary supplies. During that period, tempers were becoming frayed—frustrations about the pandemic—and we saw increasing acts of violence against retail workers. There were threats, pushes—the whole lot. A survey of thousands of Western Australian retail workers was conducted by the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, which showed that 87 per cent of members had experienced abuse from customers in the last year. They are often teenagers in their first job who are working part-time while they study.

I will share a couple of examples. Last month, a young employee sustained cuts to his ear, a black eye and scrapes to his body after he was punched and kicked and had products thrown at him by a group of offenders after he asked the group to remove products from their bag. That is what he was obliged to do. Late last month, another retail worker was punched in the chest by an offender for intervening when witnessing another team member being harassed and inappropriately touched.

Under no circumstances should workers be exposed to threats of violence in the workplace. None of us would tolerate it. We have to protect the young and all retail workers. I was pleased to announce with the Premier last week that the Cook Labor government will not stand for cowardly acts of violence against retail workers. This week, as the Attorney General, I am introducing legislation to Parliament that will create tough new penalties in the Criminal Code for assaults committed against retail workers.

The definition of “assault” is broad and captures conduct such as spitting at a person, throwing an object, attempting to hit a person with an object or threatening violence. The reforms that I will introduce on behalf of the Cook Labor government are amongst the toughest in Australia. We made a most inhospitable jurisdiction for bikies with our bikie laws and we are going to bring in the toughest laws to protect retail workers. We will see the maximum penalty in the Criminal Code for assaulting a retail worker increase from 18 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$18 000 to seven years' imprisonment for an indictable offence or three years' imprisonment and \$36 000 if the offender and the court can be convinced that it can be dealt with summarily and not be sent to a District Court judge. However, if at the time of threatening a retail worker the offender had in their hand a dangerous weapon—for example, at a Bunnings counter, they were holding a hammer, a screwdriver or any other dangerous weapon that they might have gone to the counter to buy—the penalty will increase to a maximum of 10 years. We are not going to muck around in our efforts to protect the safety of retail workers. They perform a vital function in our economy and in our community.

These reforms will ensure that not only our justice system protects retail workers, but also community standards are met with appropriate penalties for these types of crimes.