

YOUTH SUICIDE — UNIT 18, CASUARINA PRISON

848. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Just before I ask my question, I recognise that Saturday, 11 November was Armistice Day, recognising the end of World War II.

Government members: World War I.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It was World War I; I apologise. In particular, I want to recognise the service of officers and former members of this chamber.

The SPEAKER: Member, I am sorry; you have a very valid sentiment there, but it is not the appropriate time to do it. I would like to caution all members to not use the opportunity when asking a question to make a statement about something, however important. That is not your opportunity. There are other opportunities during the week to make those statements. I make some exception for the Leader of the Opposition and also the Premier if there is a tragic matter like the death of the ambulance officer, but that should not give other members the idea that they can make a small statement about something, however worthy.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I refer to the damning report released last week into unit 18, which highlighted the systemic failures that contributed to Cleveland Dodd's tragic and preventable death. When will the minister do the right thing and close this appalling facility?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I thank the member for his question. Just with respect to measures that have been taken, I will just afford a more complete answer to the Leader of the Opposition with respect to actions that have been taken since Cleveland's death. When we went out on Friday, the Commissioner of Corrective Services announced a range of measures that were being implemented to respond directly to the challenge associated with unit 18 and making it better and safer. Firstly, he has increased the seniority of staff involved in supervision of the unit and increased staffing numbers. He also announced on Friday that he will be moving to afford an opportunity for all youth custodial officers and other staff in unit 18 to be outfitted with the same body-worn cameras that the police have. These have a completely different capability from the ones in Corrective Services at the moment; they have longer endurance of battery life, have greater capacity for the storage of data, can be operated remotely and can connect to a remote location. His intention is to shift the control centre for Corrective Services to the State Operations Command Centre for police. As is currently the case with police across the metro area and is soon to be the case across the state via Starlink, the SOCC will be able to monitor what is being seen by those people who are wearing body-worn cameras inside juvenile detention. His priority is to start with unit 18 and Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Those things are immediate in terms of additional measures to ensure, as best we can, that we avoid a repeat of this tragedy.

Beyond that, the member's question related to shutting unit 18.

Dr D.J. Honey: Absolutely.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The reason we have unit 18 is that Banksia Hill suffered a series of really significant disturbances, culminating in May with a riot that burnt down 25 per cent of the buildings inside Banksia Hill. There is no capacity for suitable accommodation at Banksia Hill Detention Centre to house this very challenging and complex, and very often dangerous and violent, cohort of juveniles. If we put them back into Banksia Hill, we will compromise Banksia Hill. The detainees in Banksia Hill are currently experiencing, on average, eight to nine hours a day out of their cells, as they have done for all of the last month and the better part of a couple of months before that. Increasingly over time, they are receiving greater intervention and better rehabilitation. They are getting to school and they are exercising, and they are not in their cells. That is a significant improvement.

Unit 18 is not yet what we want it to be. Hours out of cell are improving there, but we are working on improving it further by the application of a new technique for separating the small number of detainees in unit 18 into different cohorts so they do not disrupt each other in the event of a significant incident in any one of the cohorts and by increasing the numbers of staff. It will have to stay until such time as there is an alternative that is secure for housing them—that is, secure housing for the cohort who are in unit 18 right now.