



Paul Miles MLA

Your State Member for Wanneroo



PUBLIC



10 May 2010

Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment & Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
18-32 Parliament Place
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Ellis

PETITION NO. 63 – Interim Care Centre for Abused Juveniles

Thank you for your letter of 15 April inviting me to make a submission regarding the issues raised in the petition pertaining to the above matter.

I am happy to provide the following information. Before commencing, let me state that I have not taken my complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

The first I knew of the issue was when I was contacted by a constituent in Mariginiup, asking for further information on the State Government's purchase of the million dollar-plus property at No. 52 Timely Hostess Mews to house "orphans".

My subsequent contacts with the Department for Child Protection then revealed their purchase of a second million dollar-plus property at **2 Kentia Loop, Wanneroo**, as an Interim Care Centre. As Petition No 63 relates to this particular property, I will confine my comments below to that particular facility only.

I recognise and support the Department's policy to rehouse juveniles in State care in more homely accommodation, as opposed to their former hostel-type accommodation which certainly presented major social problems.

However, I believe the purchase of the property at 2 Kentia Loop, Wanneroo has not been well thought out and is quite unsuitable for the Department's intended purpose, for the following reasons:

- The property purchased by the Department for Child Protection is located in the Timberlands Estate, about one kilometre south of the Wanneroo townsite between Wanneroo Road and Lake Joondalup. The estate is rural in character, with secluded houses on heavily wooded blocks of approximately one acre. Most housing in the area sells for \$1m or more.
- The Department plans to use this property as an Interim Care Centre for juveniles aged between 10-17 years. Residents are concerned, as am I, that as this facility will have a fairly regular turnover, juvenile clients will be less likely to regard the house as their "home", leading to an increased risk of thefts or other offences in the estate.
- The proximity of the Interim Care Centre to the Wanneroo townsite could also present problems. Juveniles escaping the supervision of their carers would have easy access to alcohol and drugs.
- Many residents in the area have expressed concern for the safety of their children or grandchildren, should juveniles manage to escape the supervision of their carers. I feel this is a very valid concern, given the very troubled backgrounds which some of the young people in the Department's care have come from.
- The risk of fire – whether from a surreptitious cigarette or from a deliberate arson attempt – is extremely high in this Estate. Large gum trees abound, along with native vegetation, so even a small fire could soon escalate to a major problem for residents of this area, with the loss of homes a quite likely scenario.
- The area is zoned "Special Residential" with appropriate planning restrictions in place to preserve a unique lifestyle. Any proposed change must not "alter the character and amenity of the location." Residents believe the proposed use of the property as an Interim Care Centre may contravene the City of Wanneroo's planning regulations, which permits only "dwellings" to be constructed. A dwelling is defined as a place for "permanent habitation", which clearly, this proposed facility is not. Neither the Department's carers nor the occupants could be deemed to live there permanently.
- Because of the Department's use of the facility, with attendant carers working shift hours, the facility will in fact be a place of employment, which contravenes the City of Wanneroo's planning laws. The City of Wanneroo have already signalled that action will be taken against the Department for Child Protection if they proceed with their plans to use this property as an Interim Care Centre, in contravention of local planning laws.

- On paper, the level of supervision applying to these juveniles seems very adequate –24 hour supervision by 2 carers per shift. But incidents at other DCP facilities show a different reality – when carers are distracted with another situation and a juvenile escapes supervision.
- Another scenario which could quite conceivably arise is that of staff shortages due to illness or for other reasons, leaving just one carer to supervise juveniles.

These are the issues which worry my constituents and so far, the Department's responses haven't eased their minds at all. Simply put, the Department cannot guarantee the safety and amenity of surrounding residents once 2 Kentia Loop is occupied.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Please don't hesitate to contact me for further information if required. I look forward to the outcome of your Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Paul', written in dark ink.

PAUL MILES MLA
MEMBER FOR WANNEROO