

CORONAVIRUS — PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS

163. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Industrial Relations:

I refer to the state government's response to COVID-19. Can the minister outline to the house how this government is working to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring all public sector workers including casual workers are not financially disadvantaged in the event they become unwell or need to care for a loved one?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I am pleased with that question so that I can outline some of the work that the government is doing in response to COVID-19.

Over the three years of the Labor government, we have been reducing use of labour hire and reducing the casual workforce in the public service so that we have more permanent full-time and part-time public servants so that they can enjoy sick leave and other entitlements. Of course, there still remains a sizeable casual workforce. I want to say that the government in Western Australia is responding to the call from commonwealth government to ensure that casual workers are not unfairly treated in this difficult situation that the country finds itself in. The federal Minister for Industrial Relations, Christian Porter, told me on Friday that there are three and a half million casuals in our workforce across the country, and they are all potentially in great difficulty. If they are required to absent themselves from work, they may not be paid. That would be a burden on them as individuals and might lead them to make unwise decisions and unnecessarily expose the community. The government has responded to that challenge, and we are providing a special type of leave for COVID-19. It will be available for all employees of government, including casuals. It is paid leave with pay calculated in the same way as it would be for annual leave, excluding the leave loading. It does not affect existing annual leave or long service leave accruals. It will not accrue from year to year. It is available to all public sector employees, including casuals. Pay for casual employees is to be calculated according to the preceding four-week average of all the shifts that they would otherwise be rostered for. It is available for people who have contracted COVID-19, need to care for another person who has COVID-19 or is required to self-isolate, or cannot access school or other care arrangements because of COVID-19, or are otherwise prevented from working because of COVID-19. This is the government's response here in Western Australia to ensure that our casual employees are not disadvantaged. I want to join with Christian Porter, the federal Minister for Industrial Relations, in calling for action by other major employers. I call for other large businesses in Western Australia to extend this COVID-19 leave to their casual workforce to make sure that these casual employees are not unfairly disadvantaged. I also particularly want to call on local government to follow the lead of the state government in providing COVID-19 leave to their casual workforce. We all know that small businesses are going to have many challenges in dealing with this matter, but I am calling for those larger businesses that have more resources and for local governments to join the commonwealth government and the state government in extending this entitlement to their casual workforce so that we can continue to work together as a nation and as a state to fight this terrible situation.