

POLICE — OFFENDER BLOOD TESTING

602. Mrs M.H. ROBERTS to the Minister for Police:

- (1) Has the minister had any discussions with stakeholders about mandatory blood tests for offenders who assault police or other emergency workers?
- (2) If so, which stakeholders has the minister discussed the issue with?
- (3) In particular, has the minister discussed this issue with the Minister for Health?
- (4) Does the minister understand the importance of this issue?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

- (1)–(4) I thank the member for this question. I have discussed the issue of mandatory blood testing for police officers where the potential —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It is for offenders, not the police officers.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I beg the member's pardon.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You blood test the offenders, the people who assault the police officers.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am just trying to be clear on the question that has been asked. My conversations around mandatory blood testing have been twofold. There is an issue around police officers and other potential emergency service workers who have been bitten by an offender. We are certainly having some discussions around the possibility of compelling blood testing of an offender who has bitten a police officer or emergency service worker.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Do you have any legislation or not?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: We are in the very early stages of discussions. I am yet to have further discussions with the Minister for Health on this issue, but I would like to put on the record that I think it is a very good idea. There is not enough time in this session of Parliament to deal with it or introduce legislation, but at this stage my discussions with the police executive and the Western Australian Police Union have been very positive. I am certainly interested in progressing that.

To give members a bit of background on this, presently if police officers are bitten or spat on by an offender, we cannot compel the offenders to be blood tested for serious diseases such as HIV–AIDS or hepatitis. I think there is some merit in being able to compel those offenders to provide a sample of their blood so they can be tested for diseases. At present, officers and emergency workers who have been bitten undergo a series of tests and it may take many, many months before the officers can get the results. During that period of waiting, they and their families are on tenterhooks as whether they may have contracted a serious illness as a result of the offender biting them or spitting on them is determined. It is certainly something that has been raised with me. It is an area that I am interested in progressing.

Members will appreciate that with the short time left in the spring session of Parliament, it is highly unlikely that we will be able to have legislation ready before Parliament rises. However, it is something that is high on my list of priorities to bring forward next year. Certainly, any government next year should have it high on its list of priorities to bring it forward to protect our emergency workers.