

**Division 53: Commissioner for Children and Young People, \$2 809 000 —**

Mr J.M. Francis, Chairman.

Mr C.C. Porter, Attorney General.

Ms M. Scott, Commissioner for Children and Young People.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I would like to preface my comments by saying that the opposition intends asking only a very few questions on this division. That is not a reflection on either the Commissioner for Children and Young People or the interest that we have for her particular responsibilities, but we want to get to the Department of Corrective Services, which is a very large department, and a couple of other departments. Sadly, we have to move on. I refer to the significant issues impacting the agency, and the second dot point on page 668 of the *Budget Statements*. The government has identified the need for more effective collaboration and coordination in the delivery of services and programs. Having identified that requirement, what action is being taken? Is there a cross-departmental focus on trying to coordinate the provision of services? Is the government looking also at the potential impact of some of the other things that we discussed earlier, specifically young people, and how we might identify that in advance of changes to practices or legislation and be more effective in dealing with it?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will let the commissioner give a more expansive answer.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am talking about the disproportionate representation of Indigenous people, obviously.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** It is a perennial difficulty for government. I will give the member an example of supervised bail. Supervised bail will involve the Department of Corrective Services, the court, the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Department for Communities. All four agencies will play a critical role in ensuring that someone who is arrested, charged and granted bail but who does not need to be remanded in custody will not be remanded in custody and that a responsible adult will be either found or provided. There has been a certain amount of correspondence recently between me and the president of the Children's Court, Peter Collins from the ALS and others about how to achieve that. We have achieved very good things in that area, yet we must do more in terms of coordination. My view is that we need to attack these things on a case-by-case basis. As an example in that area, co-location is a very important feature. If in our new regional youth justice facilities we are able to co-locate child protection workers alongside the Department of Corrective Services, youth workers and bail supervisors, that will be a huge step forward. We cannot merge the entire departments, but if we can have co-location around central points of service provision, that appears to me to be an important way forward. The member asked a question about how to achieve that more broadly. That certainly is within the commissioner's overarching ambit, and I will let her answer that.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Pre-empting the response, has the Attorney General considered widening it beyond the four departments to link the Department of Education and the Department of Health, and looking at a holistic as possible approach to deal with the issue in a whole-of-government response, particularly for disadvantaged and disproportionately represented Indigenous people within the justice system and, more widely, elsewhere?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** As matter of practice over the past two years, I have found that co-location is a simple way to achieve really substantive results. When I say "simple" that does not mean that it happens by just having a polite word with my ministerial colleagues; there is often a lot of debate about how it might work. That is one practical way. How it might be done on a greater basis has lot to do with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs' portfolio and his committee. Another example that was raised recently is employment. We will provide employment programs and placements inside prisons and we will run training and skills programs. The Department of Environment and Conservation also runs Indigenous training programs, obviously outside prison. Four or five different employment and training programs for Indigenous people might be run. Throughout his adult life, an Indigenous person might meet five or six different agencies. Communicating to Indigenous people the availability of the programs and how to access them is about coordination. In my experience, we will only achieve meaningful steps forward by doing it one area at a time. It is such a big problem that trying to do it across the board, even in a portfolio area, is difficult. I have been tackling it on a piecemeal basis. It may be that the commissioner has a better answer to that question than I do because she has a wider ambit.

**Ms M. Scott:** I will reinforce what the Attorney General said in relation to juveniles in detention. Members are aware of the Auditor General's report that was tabled in Parliament in June 2008. As a result of that report, I wrote to the Director General of the Department of the Attorney General and the Commissioner for Corrective Services. We have had a very positive response to bringing together a wide range of government agencies to tackle the Auditor General's recommendations. That has been a very positive, concrete example. Some of the initiatives that the Attorney General has referred to, including the youth justice services, have come about as a result of that good collaboration. That is an area in which there has been a positive and practical impact and that

has made a big difference. Western Australia is lagging behind the other states in the early years—from zero to eight years—of a child's life. I have referred to that in both my annual reports to Parliament.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** As I said, I am not trying to be rude or anything, but we would like to move on if we can.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am aware of that. The member for Southern River has a question.

**Mr P. ABETZ:** The final dot point on page 668 of the *Budget Statements* mentions significant resourcing issues that impact on the ongoing capacity of the commissioner to fulfil her statutory responsibilities, including extensive regional travel and so on. Could the Attorney General elaborate on that?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will let the commissioner do that. There is never a head of a department who says that more funding is not needed. With respect to these pressures, the commissioner is right insofar as an enormous amount of travel is involved. When people often make comparisons with other jurisdictions, they forget that Western Australia is twice the size of western Europe, which causes difficulties for the prison and court systems and also for the commissioner. I will let the commissioner speak about those cost pressures.

[12.20 pm]

**Mr P. ABETZ:** I think it is 17 or 18 full-time equivalents. That seems to be quite a sizeable group of people to be working on this. I am wondering what the pressures actually are.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will let the commissioner answer that.

**Ms M. Scott:** When I took up my position in December 2007, I was the first Commissioner for Children and Young People for Western Australia. I think that at that stage, looking broadly as what my functions and responsibilities were, \$2.7 million was a reasonable budget. Having been in this office for over two and a half years now, I can greatly appreciate some of the challenges that relate to the geography, and also some of the specific functions that I have—if we look at section 19 of the act, they are very broad. Travelling extensively, and giving priority particularly to Aboriginal children and young people throughout the state, is a challenge. At the moment, the budget is sufficient. I have had some preliminary discussions with the Attorney General about a review of that.

**The appropriation was recommended.**