

BANKSIA HILL DETENTION CENTRE — DETAINEE MANAGEMENT

573. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I note the minister's statement to the house yesterday on the management of detainees at Banksia Hill Detention Centre in my electorate and the comments made by the Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA about 18-year-old detainees. Can the minister please provide to the house further details on how older juveniles are being managed at this centre?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Southern River. I know that Banksia Hill is in his electorate and that he has a keen interest in that facility.

It is no surprise that members on this side of the house normally have a bit of argy-bargy with some of the union movement. Obviously, the key reason for that is that they do not control our preselections, but that aside, I have to say that I nearly choked on my banana last night —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This is an important issue; it is about what happens to children who turn 18-years-old when they are in detention. I have to say, I was absolutely appalled at the comments made last night by the secretary of the CPSU–CSA about why some juveniles, once they turn 18 years old, stay in Banksia Hill Detention Centre. I think it is worth putting this into context and explaining why she was absolutely wrong. I think to have an intelligent debate about juvenile detention in this state people have to be honest.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: To suggest that there is an increase in the number of over-18-year-olds at Banksia Hill because of staffing or funding cuts is absolutely wrong and disingenuous. Firstly, the number of staff at Banksia Hill has increased by over 25 per cent in the past 12 months. We now have one of the highest ratios of staff to detainees we have ever had. We have about 1.25 staff for every detainee. There have been no funding cuts out at Banksia Hill. We have spent significant amounts of money out there. This week, I announced two separate amounts of funding to help attract people who will be able to make a meaningful difference in the lives of some very troubled people. Not only do we have the highest ratio of staff to detainees at the moment, but also we are increasing that even further with a massive recruitment drive underway for more youth custodial officers. If it costs half the amount to keep an adult in an adult prison than it does to keep people in Banksia Hill at double the cost, how can funding be the reason for keeping people in Banksia Hill beyond their eighteenth birthday? That is the most ridiculous proposition ever. The issue about the number of 18-year-olds at Banksia Hill was totally misrepresented by both the ABC and the union yesterday. Forty-three of the 46 17-year-olds who will turn 18 years old by the end of this year will be eligible for release before 31 December. We are talking about a very, very small cohort of people. Putting all of that aside, the decision about when a juvenile—be they 18 or 19 years old—is transferred to an adult prison, if at all, is not made with any of these factors in mind. That decision is made personally by Judge Reynolds, the president of the Children's Court, who takes into account all of these considerations: the nature of the offending, the time left to go before release and whether anything is to be gained by putting an 18-year-old who has six months left to run into the adult prison system. The best person to make that decision is, of course, His Honour Judge Denis Reynolds, who has all that information in front of him. What we saw last night was an absolutely lazy comment from a lazy union. I do not know which person is more lazy—the spokesperson for the union or the member for Girrawheen. It was absolutely appalling commentary by the Public Sector Union.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I call you to order for the first time. You are complaining about noisy people.