

CORRECTIVE SERVICES — CARE OF YOUNG OFFENDERS — REFORM

702. Mr I.C. BLAYNEY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Can the minister please advise the house about the care of young offenders —

The SPEAKER: Just sit down a minute.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Can the minister please advise the house about the care of young offenders in Western Australia and the reform that has been undertaken in the sector by the Liberal–National government?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Geraldton for his interest in this very important matter. I say at the outset that the first priority I outlined when I became Minister for Corrective Services was to do something to reduce the travesty of the number of young, particularly Aboriginal, boys in detention, both sentenced and on remand, in Western Australia. To put it in some kind of context, in 2008 when the government changed, there were just over 170 juveniles in detention—predominantly Aboriginal kids and predominantly male. At the time of the riot, just before I took over, there were about 220 juveniles in detention, both sentenced and on remand. Today as I speak, the number is 116. We have seen through our reform process in juvenile justice a 50 per cent reduction in the number of young Aboriginal kids in detention in Western Australia. It is something I am exceptionally proud of. Everyone in the Department of Corrective Services also should be very proud of the way they have attacked and gone through the reform process, in particular through juvenile detention.

The key performance indicators are not just on the number of juveniles who are either on remand or sentenced; it is on the recidivism rate more than anything else. In 2013, the recidivism rate for all juveniles in detention was 75 per cent; upon their release from Banksia Hill Detention Centre, 75 per cent of them recommitted a crime. Today that has gone down by 20 per cent. Although we still have some way to go to get the recidivism rate down, it is down to 55 per cent. That is a significant reduction. It is a significant achievement in trying to do the right thing and reform the lives of some of the most troubled kids in Western Australia, despite the opposition from the union that represents what we now call youth justice workers—the former youth custodial officers—despite the fact that they wanted to use pepper spray and batons at Banksia Hill and despite the fact that they still do not like the idea that we are withdrawing spit hoods and replacing them with personal protective equipment masks and goggles for the workers to deal with kids obviously in very excited circumstances.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: With all of this in mind, this is an important issue. Despite the fact that we do not use restraint chairs and beds, we can now guarantee that what happened in the Northern Territory does not happen in Western Australia. We have a very, very different focus—predominantly on the reform of the young offender and making sure that we correct their behaviour so that when they are released, they do not reoffend. It means less cost to re-incarcerate them and it means that they can go on and become a meaningful member of society, make a contribution and have a real life.

Mr M. McGowan: You look a little bit guilty.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, please.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This is a really important issue! The Leader of the Opposition does not care about Aboriginal kids in custody. He wants to make stupid interjections. It is typical of the Labor Party. Stupid interjections!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This is a very important issue, Leader of the Opposition! We are very proud of our achievements in reducing the number of kids in detention in Western Australia. Grow up!