

RANGEVIEW REMAND CENTRE — TRANSITION TO YOUNG ADULTS PRISON

Grievance

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [9.22 am]: My grievance is to the Attorney General and Minister for Corrective Services and regards the proposed young adults prison to be located on the site of the current Rangeview Remand Centre in my electorate of Jandakot. I believe that before the last election the remand centre was in the minister's electorate, so obviously he is familiar with it. My grievance relates to concerns over risks that this facility may pose to the community's safety that rightly or wrongly are being perceived by some of the surrounding residents, stemming from a recent break-out from Banksia Hill Detention Centre.

On 29 August a young man escaped from Banksia. I understand that he was 17 years old. He and three other inmates gained access to a restricted area where construction was underway and they managed to scale some scaffolding. Three of the teenagers were captured in the restricted area but one managed to jump a boundary fence and flee into nearby bushland. The escapee was caught by police in Kelmscott just a day later. However, the break-out from the Banksia centre has understandably provoked concern among some constituents in my electorate. Those constituents have approached me expressing concern over the potential consequences to the community if a similar breach of security was to occur at the proposed young adults prison. The Rangeview Remand Centre site is located in a major education and health precinct in the Murdoch area and it is surrounded by residential areas. If it helps members to understand, the remand centre is within a few hundred metres of the site for the new Fiona Stanley Hospital. Basically, concerns have been raised about the appropriateness of the area hosting the proposed young adults prison due to the risks it may pose to nearby residents. I understand that the young adults prison is part of the state government's plan to break the cycle of reoffending amongst 18 to 22-year-old males and I can honestly commend the minister's efforts in this area.

I seek comment from the minister on the security of the prison system in Western Australia and on the break-out from Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Can the minister reassure my constituents who live near the centre and who are concerned about the increased risk to themselves and other constituents in my electorate from locating such a facility near residential areas that the risk is minimal? Can the minister comment on how the large health and education precinct that surrounds this particular facility will be impacted and the benefits from changing this juvenile detention centre into a young adult remand centre?

MR C.C. PORTER (Bateman — Minister for Corrective Services) [9.25 am]: I thank the member for his grievance. It is obviously something that I have been involved in quite closely, because not only am I the Minister for Corrective Services but also, as the member points out, Rangeview Remand Centre used to be in my electorate. Indeed, the remand centre is now right next door, as the member for Jandakot's electorate neighbours mine. I have spoken to a range of individuals and representatives from the communities who have come into my electorate office at various times since this announcement was made. It seems to me there are three basic concerns, which the member touched on. The first concern that was put to me is that it is possible that more serious offenders will be housed at Rangeview. The second view that was put to me is that of greater disruption to surrounding suburbs and residents because of a greater number of visitors to the centre. The third concern is of the nature that the member raised, which is the security issue and the potential for escapes. I will address each of those concerns in the time that I have.

I will not go into great detail here about the merits of the proposal. Everyone I have spoken to recognises those merits. It is the backyard issue that raises its head here. I think the merits of this proposal should not be understated. This young adults prison is a very new thing for Australia and is based on a United Kingdom model. Indeed, it was the idea of the Minister for Police when he was the shadow Minister for Corrective Services. In effect, the department will handpick 80 young male offenders who are existent in the prison system and whom we think have the best chance of breaking the cycle of offending. Rangeview is being retrofitted so that it is able to provide all the education and training services that it can possibly give to these individuals, who, as I said, will be handpicked. I think everyone accepts the merits of a young adults prison. When I have presented with members of the community on this issue, the first thing I point out is that Rangeview already exists. I guess to an extent the remand centre is somewhat unusually located in that it is a corrective services facility very close to residential areas. However, many corrective service facilities are located close to residential areas, including Hakea Prison and Banksia Hill Detention Centre, which the member already mentioned.

The point here is that this facility has been operating as a corrective services facility since 1994, and it has done so rather seamlessly. When we were considering whether to use this facility and retrofit it for the young adults prison, I asked the Department of Corrective Services to look at ways in which Rangeview Remand Centre has affected the community to date. The department has kept electronic records of complaints since about 2007 and no complaints have been made about Rangeview since that time. We spoke with long-serving members of the juvenile and youth custodial divisions in Corrective Services and asked if they could ever remember a complaint

being made about Rangeview. As best as our corporate history tells us, there has never been a complaint. That is not to say that people are not fair-minded when they raise concerns about the transition from a remand centre to a young adults prison, but what I have said to those people about their three concerns is that so far the remand centre has operated seamlessly and without complaint. There has been one escape from Rangeview since the facility opened. I understand that was in the first week, when someone hid in the back of a vehicle. With protocols amended to take into account that situation, there has not been a security problem at Rangeview since. I have said to members of the community that the centre has been operating, in effect, seamlessly and without complaint since 1994. I will show members some of the data why I think this is the case, but in my view turning the centre into a young adults facility will mean that the centre will be less problematic for local residents than it is presently. There are a couple of reasons for that.

The first reason is that at the moment Rangeview is a centre for remand. That means it is for young people who have not yet been sentenced and that the average stay of someone in the centre on remand is very short—in the vicinity of six to 10 days. Therefore, the turnover of young people coming in and out of Rangeview is very high. The figures that are available to me are that there have been a total of 25 489 admissions to the centre since 1 July 1995, when electronic records were first kept. That number will decrease substantially because when the young adult males who will be serving their sentence, not their remand, there are handpicked, we will find that the average term they will spend there is between, I think, four and 10 months. That will mean that there will be fewer incomings and fewer outgoings and that decreases the risk to the community. The second thing is that the number of visitors to remand centres and visiting times are far less regulated than prisons where people serve their finite terms of imprisonment. We have said to the community that, whereas previously those 24 000 or so admissions have visitors for more generous amounts of time than they would have in a prison, we think it is likely that both the rate of visitors and time periods for which they visit will be lower than they are presently. We should keep in mind though, that with the huge number of admissions and exits from the system since 2005—all those people are using private and public transport—there has never been a complaint about existing visitation conditions at Rangeview Remand Centre. We do not think that there will be a problem there; there has not been in the past and in all likelihood there will be less reason for problems in the future.

The third thing is that with regard to security and escapes, and I have touched on this, Rangeview is a very secure facility. It is maximum security. Everyone who goes in there, because they are on remand, is automatically assessed as maximum security. The point is that when someone goes in on remand, it could be someone accused and awaiting sentence for as serious a crime as murder or in the past, wilful murder. Those sorts of persons are not there now. The trade-off for the local community will be that people will be slightly older, but their mix of offending will be significantly less serious; that is another point I have made to the local community. There has been a great deal of consultation, and in fact we have started up—I will not go through that here because time does not allow—a community reference group. I have met with it, I have met with the council, the community reference group has met with the council and the memorandum of understanding that touches on visiting hours, the expected number of visitors, transport, security and other facilities, will be signed shortly. I thank the member for his grievance.