

Division 2: Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations, \$10 502 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mrs M.H. Roberts, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr C. Field, Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

Mrs M. White, Deputy Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

Ms R. Poole, Senior Assistant Ombudsman, Strategic Planning, Projects and International Relations.

Mr K. Heritage, Principal Project Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[9.50 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just in the short time that we have, I refer to page 101 of budget paper No 3. There is a statement on the expenditure of \$1.6 million, which has been approved over 2021–22 through to 2025–26 to undertake the legislative monitoring functions under the criminal law act. Will that \$1.6 million be enough to undertake those functions under the unlawful consorting and identified organisation insignia legislation?

The SPEAKER: Whilst this is not directly a question about division 2, I understand that the member is referring to an item in budget paper No 3. I will ask Mr Field whether he would like to respond to the member's question.

Mr C. Field: I am indebted to you, Madam Speaker, to the chair and to the member for that excellent question. Can I say that the amount that has been apportioned to my office in relation to the cost of monitoring the particular functions to which the member refers is, in our view, absolutely adequate to undertake that function. It has been based on our previous experience in monitoring these sorts of functions undertaken by, in this case, the police, and in other cases other organisations in which we have a monitoring and inspecting function, and a reporting function as well, including a reporting function that can be reasonably wide, not just on matters that have been undertaken, but also on their impact upon certain groups in the community. We spent considerable time internally discussing those matters. We certainly received unambiguous support for the amount that we put forward, and I believe the amount that we put forward will be adequate and appropriate to undertake that function.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is reference in the table at the top of page 53 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, to the FTE increase from 70 to 82 in 2022–23. Is that the necessary increase to handle the reportable conduct scheme; and, if so, is that enough to provide the necessary staff to undertake the obligations under that program?

The SPEAKER: I will ask Mr Field to respond, please.

Mr C. Field: I thank the shadow minister so much for that question; I think it is an excellent question always to ascertain whether we have adequate and appropriate funding for the functions we undertake. I can assure the member that we are absolutely confident that both the number of FTEs for reportable conduct, which is the bulk of the FTE allocation there, and the number of FTEs for consorting, which was part of my previous answer to the previous honourable member's question, are the right numbers to be able to execute those functions to the satisfaction of the Parliament. Of course, reportable conduct has to pass the Parliament, but I can say that in relation to those functions, I am absolutely confident that that is the right number of FTEs.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer now to the paragraphs on page 51 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". In the first paragraph there is mention of the commissioner's role in reviewing the deaths of children in circumstances of family and domestic violence. Do the child deaths that are reviewed relate only to family violence or are they deaths of any nature? What does the commissioner's office review when it undertakes such inquiries, and how many circumstances would be reviewed in a year, usually?

Mr C. Field: That is a very good question. We have a legislative function to review all child deaths that occur in this state. When we talk about numbers, of course, I do not want to make a trite reference to a number; these are the tragic deaths of children. The number of tragic deaths will vary from year to year. In relation to child deaths, that is a separate function. There is an additional function, which is a function to review all deaths that occur from family and domestic violence. That is predominantly women, as the honourable member would expect, but it is also in relation to children. We will be reviewing both when it comes to child deaths—one in relation to the child death function itself, and the second in relation to family and domestic violence reviews. Children might die in either of those circumstances. For example, a child might die in the early infant years, a sudden infant death syndrome death, but at the same time there might be a child who very tragically dies—all deaths are tragic—in the context of violence in the home. They are all studied by my office in relation to that review function. Secondly, we undertake major own-motion investigations in relation to those matters and we table those in Parliament. A number of members will be aware of those. We have done a number of investigations about ways to reduce child deaths. For example, youth suicide has been a major focus of my office, and doing major investigations in that area about recommendations to reduce deaths.

The SPEAKER: Just for further clarity, the commissioner is reviewing all reviews of child deaths, as opposed to all child deaths. There would be children who perhaps have passed away from an illness in a hospital or the like that the commissioner would not be doing a review of.

Mr C. Field: That is an excellent point. When we first commenced this jurisdiction, it was in relation to all child deaths that otherwise met the criteria for legislation in relation to reviewable functions, and the Speaker, as the then minister, would have understood those matters very well; I would have briefed her on our investigations. We have had some additional functions requested by the government in relation to reviewing deaths in any circumstances. That was asked of us because there were concerns about a cohort of deaths that were effectively slipping through the cracks in terms of their analysis. We are now able to investigate and review all deaths of children that occur in this state, including in medical misadventure matters. But I still say that the principal focus could not be more right: the principal focus of the child death review function is those children who were, for example, known to the Department of Communities in the two years before their death. They are the reviewable deaths that we normally would be talking about.

The appropriation was recommended.

[10.00 am]