

PRISON OFFICERS — DRUG AND ALCOHOL TESTING

144. Mr C.D. HATTON to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Can the minister update the house on the status of drug and alcohol testing for prison officers?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Balcatta for his question.

Mr P. Papalia: How about testing the crims?

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, you can ask a question on testing the crims. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I have not even started yet, but, member for Warnbro, we do that also; we test criminals in prisons. If the member had been watching much in the media lately, he would have seen the significant trial of a new program on restrictions of privileges that we have introduced in Bunbury Regional Prison in order to try a new way of ensuring that we can stop prisoners from taking drugs, other than just the obvious way of stopping them from being smuggled in. That brings me to the question. Last Friday, 18 March, the Department of Corrective Services was authorised to begin testing those who work in the custodial environment for both drugs and alcohol. That includes not just prison officers and youth custodial officers, but also superintendents—in fact, assistant commissioners and the commissioner himself can and will be subjected to random alcohol and drug testing, because what is good for prison officers is good for everyone in the custodial environment. We acknowledge that prisons are full of dangerous people and prisons are dangerous places to work, so we are driven and motivated by two reasons, the first of which is occupational workplace safety. It is essential that any prison officer who walks into a prison knows that the person by his side has his back and is free from the influence of drugs and alcohol. Secondly, it is a matter of integrity. It is only right, and it is the community's expectation, that we do what we can to ensure that those who look after drug dealers and drug users are free from the influence of drugs themselves. Firstly, workplace safety is the key one and, secondly, it is about integrity. Also, if there is any suspicion and credible evidence that staff members are using drugs, they can be recalled to undertake drug testing. There will be a number of different avenues and consequences to deal with those who test positive, starting with counselling depending on whether it is a low level of alcohol, through to dismissal if it is a significant drug offence and detection. We will do whatever it takes to ensure that the very small number of prison officers who let the overwhelming majority of the team down are dealt with. We are committed to cleaning up the Department of Corrective Services, as members have seen in the past three years. We are absolutely committed to trying to get drugs out of prisons, which is a very difficult job.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We are absolutely committed to it, so I do not really care what the Labor Party thinks about it. I do not really care what the WA Prison Officers' Union thinks about it. They can harp on as much as they like. We are very proud that, for the first time in many, many years, something is happening to try to clean up the issue of drugs in prisons.