

16 DAYS IN WA CAMPAIGN

Statement

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [6.40 pm]: I rise to note that we are a few days into the 16 Days in WA campaign. It started on the weekend. This year's theme for 16 Days in WA is "Stopping family and domestic violence: Play your part". A number of times when I have spoken about family and domestic violence and sexual violence, I have said that addressing what I would call a social epidemic is a whole community responsibility. I think that "Play your part" is a nice way to indicate to people that we all have a role to play. Most of us would prefer not to hear about it, see it, have to speak to someone about their experience of domestic violence or ask someone if they suspect they might be in some form of unsafe or abusive relationship, but those are some of the most important conversations that we can have.

The purpose of 16 Days in WA is really about drawing this social epidemic out of the shadows and unhelpful silence to help people understand how they can call out disrespectful and abusive behaviour, better understand the many forms of family and domestic violence and how to have supportive, empathetic and perhaps even helpful conversations with people.

At the commencement of 16 Days in WA, the Cook government announced a \$72.6 million investment to fund new crisis beds and primary intervention, education and recovery initiatives. These are all informed by the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce and appropriately targeted to areas of need. It is about supporting victim-survivors, intervening with perpetrators and working towards stopping violence before it happens. A really pleasing aspect of that targeted spending is stopping violence before it starts. It is a bit like health care—a lot of effort goes into addressing the problem after it has occurred and very little goes into unpacking and changing culture to address behaviours so that they do not happen in the first place.

In terms of aspects like sexual violence, I have a deep-seated fear that our young men are going to find themselves in significant trouble in the future because young women are becoming increasingly informed about their rights. I think about the work of a young woman like Chanel Contos, who talks about consent and that sort of thing. Young women are becoming increasingly aware of what violates their rights and of their capacity to say no. However, I do not think we are directing or hitting the target for our young men in the same way. Young women will take action on those things. Young men will find themselves in trouble and accountable for their actions if we do not teach them to change their behaviours, know about consent and know how to speak to a potential partner if they are thinking of engaging in intimacy.

I will now return to some of the money that has been put forward by the government. There was \$22.6 million assigned to the Stirling Women's Refuge crisis accommodation for those escaping violence at home, and \$6 million for a two-year public education campaign. I think that is a fantastic spend. I do not think we could ever spend enough on public education. That harks back to what I was just talking about: making people understand their rights and what constitutes respectful behaviour. On that note, \$1.5 million has been invested in the expansion and further enhancement of the Respectful Relationships teaching program through the Department of Education. There will also be some online content and culturally targeted content for young Aboriginal people that I think will be particularly helpful.

There is a range of other spending, but I would now like to turn to a couple of events that I had the privilege of attending at the start of 16 Days in WA. I represented our Minister for Women's Interests, Minister Sue Ellery, at the official launch of the Economic Abuse Reference Group WA, or EARGWA, as it is going to call itself. This body was established to specifically look at economic abuse and its impacts, particularly the long-term cumulative impacts it can have on people's lives. The Economic Abuse Reference Group is part of a national collaboration that aims to advocate for and support people experiencing economic abuse, particularly in the context of family and domestic violence. Economic abuse is a particularly insidious form of abuse because it is largely invisible and perpetrators often go unchecked. It is often the victim who is victimised by many of the systems that unintentionally collaborate with the perpetrator, who is using finances to abuse their partner. Many forms of economic abuse are actually legally sanctioned. Perpetrators often use government and industry systems and mechanisms to perpetrate economic abuse. It has very pervasive and enduring impacts for the victims of abuse. I would like to congratulate the collaborating groups—the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA) Inc, Women's Legal Service WA and Financial Counsellors' Association of WA—which have all come together to form EARGWA to advocate for systemic reforms to better prevent and respond to abuse and to minimise its long-term impact on women and children. It is fantastic work and I really look forward to them reaching out to all of us to see how we can assist with key policy and legislative changes.

I also attended the annual Walk Against Violence event in Geraldton. It happens each year and is organised by Desert Blue Connect. People meet and there are some speeches from people from various groups, such as the Western Australia Police Force and counsellors. This year, two women survivors of family and domestic violence spoke. I do not know that I have ever heard such challenging content at an event like that. It was incredibly moving

and was a significant reality check for many people who were not quite aware of the depth and awful nature of what women and children experience every day of their lives. These stories were quite horrifying and they continue to haunt me in my quiet moments. I think that is important. We have to play our part and be aware. We cannot pretend that these things do not happen. I commend Desert Blue Connect, as I often do. It has an amazing team and does amazing work. It really is playing its part.

Sometimes we do not want to play our part and do not want that in our yard. At the moment, that makes me think about the closure of the Safe Night Space in East Perth by the City of Perth. Please, for the love of God, play a part. I know it is uncomfortable. I know that it is difficult to encounter some of those things. I am really appalled at the defence of that by Lord Mayor Basil Zempilas. I think it is appalling leadership—I do not know if “leadership” is the right word—to justify behaviour like that, to not maintain a service for these people and to not stop to listen and hear the stories to understand how these people find themselves in these situations. The cynic in me says that this is politicising it and that this is not the group of people whom we should be politicising. We should all come together and support this group no matter what, because we all need to play a part. It is a whole community responsibility to look after our most vulnerable people.

Systems are operating, some of which we are a part of. Some long-admired predecessors were involved in forming legislation and rules that actively disadvantaged people who experience some of the most awful behaviour in their everyday lives. It is almost unimaginable that that is their everyday experience and that they live through those things. I commend the 20 000 people who signed the online petition to encourage people to keep the Safe Night Space alive and well. To anyone who finds those services around them, some of the behaviours can be really confronting and challenging, but they really have to be approached with significant empathy and compassion. We really do all have to play our part. It is a whole community responsibility.