

20 December 2014

Hon. Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman, Select Committee on Environment & Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Sir,

Petition No. 72 – Domestic Violence Funding

In response to your letter dated 3 December 2014 I submit the following in support of the matters raised in my petition in support of the need for further investigation into the funding for a further refuge in Perth. Please note that I have not taken this matter to the Ombudsman.

Recent Australian surveys suggest that as many as one in three women experience family and domestic violence (FDV) in their adult life (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). One in four children grow up witnessing family and domestic violence (Indermaur, 2001). These numbers are even higher for Aboriginal women. It is estimated that 50 per cent of Aboriginal women experience family and domestic violence, and more than 40 per cent of Aboriginal children witness this abuse (Department of Child Protection, 2013).

The rates of reported FDV are on the increase in Western Australia. According to the DCP Family and Domestic Violence Operating Procedures (2013) WA Police recorded a 30% increase in reporting of FDV over the period from 2011 to 2013.

The Government responded with the following:

- Troy Buswell (August 2013) promised two new shelters in the Perth Metropolitan area. He went on to state, "the Department for Child Protection and Family Support will also spend an additional \$3.5 million over the forward estimates period on increased support and outreach services for victims of domestic violence accessing the new shelter".
- He also stated (8 August 2013) "this will deliver \$2million to build an additional refuge shelter in 2013/14 to protect women and children who flee from domestic violence".
- Robyn McSweeney (Banks 2012) announced "The Department has provided funding of nearly \$6.9 million over four years to implement the Safe at Home and Domestic Violence Services".

Regrettably, early in 2014 a decision was made by Government not to proceed with a planned FDV refuge in Perth's South Eastern suburbs.

In November 2014 a petition was brought to the Legislative Council requesting the Government reconsiders the decision not to go ahead with the construction of a new refuge in the South Eastern Region of the Perth Metropolitan area.

The increasing statistics on the reporting of FDV and the pressure on current programs has not dissipated. We are calling for a more detailed investigation into the need for this refuge to go ahead. Women's refuges in Perth are full every night. Families are being turned away.

The Safe at Home Program has been very successful and is a cost effective means of bringing services to a wide range of FDV victims. This program is under pressure with the increase of referrals.

The safety and wellbeing and at times the life of any victim of FDV rely on a timely and accessible service response. In Western Australia deaths from FDV doubled in 2012 (Banks 2012). There were 28 domestic homicides in WA during 2012/13, where the victim and offender had a family or domestic relationship (Morton, 2014). The increase in funding for WA services falls short of the growing need of families who experience FDV in the community.

There are only 37 locations of FDV Services across this State. In 2013/14 the State Government provided \$20.2 million and in 2014/15 approximately \$21 million.

Over recent years, I have been on the board of domestic violence services. My experience has seen Women's FDV Services working well above capacity. Adding to this the clients are more complex. There has been a rise in referrals from women and children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Many speak little English and have specific needs. There has also been families on 457 Visas who cannot seek employment for various reasons or leave the country. This has added to the dilemmas faced by refuges trying to ensure the safety and ongoing wellbeing of families needing assistance.

Prior to the announcement in 2013 of the construction of new refuges, there had not been a new refuge in Perth for some 16 years. Services have not kept up with community need.

In summary, ask the Committee to further investigate the need for another refuge in the South Eastern Metropolitan region of Perth. Funding for this refuge was allocated, then withdrawn. The need for this refuge has been backed up by the signatures on the petition submitted to the Legislative Council in November 2014, and to the Legislative Assembly on 19 March 2014, and by the fact that refuges in Perth are running to capacity and have to turn families away. Death by FDV in this state doubled in 2012 (Banks 2012) and there has been a 30% rise in the reporting of FDV in WA and this is not matched by adequate funding.

Yours sincerely

Helen Tuck

Sources:

Mouzos, J. & Makkai, T. (2004). *Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings of the Australian Component of the International Violence against Women Survey*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. Indermaur, 2001; NATSISS, 2008).
Indermaur, D. (2001). *Young Australians and Domestic Violence*. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
Department of Child Protection and Family Support (2012). *Family and Domestic Violence Background Paper*. Sourced at: <https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Policies%20and%20Frameworks/FDVBbackgroundPaper.pdf>
Department of Child Protection and Family Support (2012). *Family and Domestic Violence Operating Procedures*. Sourced at: <http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/FDVRT%20Operating%20Procedures.pdf>
Buswell T (2013). *State Budget - Building Stronger Communities*. Sourced at: <http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Default.aspx>

McSweeney R (November 20, 2012) 'Domestic Violence Deaths Double in a Year'. The West Australian
McSweeney R (2013) Media release
Morton (2014) Media release