



Treasurer; Attorney General

Our Ref: 35-17795

The Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment & Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis *Brian*

Petition 134 – Violence in the Community of Geraldton and the Midwest Region

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on *Petition 134 – Violence in the Community of Geraldton and the Midwest Region* which was tabled in the Legislative Council on 22 September 2011 by the Hon Matt Benson MLC.

A range of issues have been raised in the petition and associated submissions by the principal petitioner, Ms Jennifer Clayton, and the tabling member. I note that matters such as the investigation of violence and removal of perpetrators fall within the portfolio of the Minister for Police. I understand that the Standing Committee has written to Minister Johnson to seek his views on the matter.

I am keenly aware of the community's concern about family and domestic violence, not just in the Midwest region but the State as a whole. To address this issue, the Department of the Attorney General (DotAG) operates six specialist Family Violence Courts in Joondalup, Rockingham, Fremantle, Perth, Midland and Armadale. These specialist courts are currently being evaluated as part of DotAG's commitment to continual improvement.

In recognition of the particular issues faced by Aboriginal communities, DotAG also manages an Aboriginal-specific Family Violence Court, known as the Barndimalgu Court, in Geraldton. The Barndimalgu Court is specifically tailored to the needs of the Geraldton and the Midwest region. It is designed to be more culturally inclusive and relevant to Aboriginal people by involving local Aboriginal Elders and respected community persons in providing advice to the magistrate on cultural issues. The Barndimalgu Court is supported by a dedicated 20-week program provided by the Department for Corrective Services, aimed at helping offenders address their violent behaviour. An outcome evaluation of the Barndimalgu Court has been scheduled in 2012.

As I am sure you are aware, the issue of Aboriginal family and domestic violence is also highly relevant to the portfolio of the Minister for Child Protection. Accordingly I have forwarded your correspondence to the Office of Minister McSweeney for her consideration.

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To assist in addressing the issue of community violence as well as inter and intra-family feuding, DotAG provides a free culturally appropriate dispute resolution service, known as the Aboriginal Mediation Service (AMS). The AMS aims to resolve conflicts before they escalate into violence. While the AMS is not a crisis intervention service, it can be successful in resolving conflict where parties voluntarily agree to participate in the mediation process. Where the AMS cannot assist in resolving a dispute (for instance, because one party is unwilling to participate in the mediation process), the service will make every attempt to provide appropriate referrals to the most relevant agency or support group that may be able to assist.

The initiatives outlined above are important steps in reducing the incidence of violence in Geraldton and the wider Midwest region. However, it should be noted that the underlying causes of violence in Aboriginal communities are multifaceted and deep-seated. There are a range of socio-economic factors that contribute to the high incidence of violence referred to in the petition and the associated submissions, and this complex situation is being addressed by State Government policies across a range of portfolios, including those of the Ministers for Police, Indigenous Affairs, Child Protection, Community Services, and Corrective Services.

I thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment on the issues raised in the petition, and trust this information will be of use to you.

Yours sincerely



Hon C. Christian Porter MLA
TREASURER; ATTORNEY GENERAL

25 NOV 2011

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