Child Protection System

Mr MILLS to CHIEF MINISTER

Yesterday, the latest in a long line of Labor Child Protection ministers tabled yet another report into the Territory’s broken child protection system. The report provides a glimpse into a chaotic, dysfunctional system, a system that has seen vulnerable children pay the ultimate price because of profound political failure. Each successive Child Protection minister has assured Territorians that the system is improving when, in fact, it has been descending into chaos. Why is it that children in protection have lost their lives, but no Child Protection minister has lost their job?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the question from the Leader of the Opposition, because protecting children is the responsibility of everyone. First and foremost it is the responsibility of families, having strong, functional families caring for children is the first responsibility of any adult who has children. It is the responsibility of society to identify when children are at risk or being abused and reporting them to the authorities, and it is then the responsibility of the authorities to pick up the pieces as they fall through the cracks.

Now, what we have seen in a succession of reports is, yes, we do need to significantly improve our child protection system, but since we have been in government we have invested over $80m a year into child protection services. When we came to government the child protection budget was a pittance $7m a year. When we came to government there was no dedicated after hours service to respond to reports of child abuse in the Northern Territory – no dedicated after hours service at all. So, we have been building this system from the ground up.

Mr Mills interjecting.

Mr HENDERSON: We have also introduced legislation to make it mandatory and compulsory for people to report children at risk and, tragically, we have seen a 69% increase which has come about because of the requirements to mandatory report, the promotion of that by this government, and I do accept that, in those reports which were tabled yesterday and tabled previously, the capacity within the department to respond to each and every case has not been there. That is why I initiated the most broad ranging inquiry the Territory has ever seen; that is why this government is committed up-front to implementing the recommendations that come out of this inquiry, and anyone who reads any of those cases which have been reported, an absolute tragedy, not only for the kids, but for families and the whole community.

So we are certainly committed, we have been building this system from the ground up. It barely existed when we came to government. Now, over $90m a year into this system, hundreds of extra workers and the community is now reporting - which is a good thing - but we need to do much better. We have initiated the inquiry; the reports handed down by the minister yesterday, I spoke to the minister this morning, have been immediately actioned and we will implement the recommendations that come out of the report.

Youth Antisocial Behaviour in Palmerston

Mr GUNNER to CHIEF MINISTER

Chief Minister, can you please update the House on the government’s initiatives to address youth antisocial behaviour in Palmerston?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Fannie Bay for his question. Last June I attended a public meeting in Palmerston with the Lord Mayor, the Leader of the Opposition and over 300 Palmerston residents to discuss the issue and, as always, there are a small proportion of young people that disproportionately cause a large number of problems in our community, and I made a commitment at that forum that we would take action, we would reduce the problem, and this government has.

What we have done since that meeting last June is provide additional funding for Mission Australia to now operate six days a week, a proactive outreach service by Mission Australia to engage with juveniles on the street and actually engage with them in a positive way and point them to assistance where they need assistance. We have installed CCTV cameras in the Palmerston CBD and established a mobile police beat - very well received by everyone in Palmerston.

Most importantly, through the police and a tasking and response group in Palmerston, 18 families have been focused on. From these 18 families the core of disengaged youth who were causing problems have been engaged through family responsibility agreements, other interventions and the core number of families within this cohort have seen a 60% reduction in police contact. So proactive, positive, multi-faceted intervention into families that are struggling and are dysfunctional has seen a 60% reduction of contact of police with these families.