

## Legislative Council

Tuesday, 26 October 2010, Page 1100

### ANTI-POVERTY SERVICES

**The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON** (14:59): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities questions about the future of the anti-poverty services provided by Families SA.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON:** The anti-poverty service is a division of Families SA, which provides financial services, including financial counselling, such as debt management and budgeting assistance, as well as short-term financial assistance to pay bills and buy groceries, to vulnerable families across the state. Housing SA and other government departments and agencies also refer their clientele to the anti-poverty team if they are experiencing financial stress. In addition to providing financial assistance, this team also develops and delivers a variety of anti-poverty strategies to work with Families SA social workers to identify and address poverty issues which impact on the ability of families to provide appropriate parenting to keep their children safe.

There is clear need for such a service, particularly in the current economic times, as families and individuals struggle to make ends meet, with the anti-poverty team having over 22,000 individual client contacts in the last financial year and 24,000 the year before. However, my office has been contacted by several non-government organisations which have been informed by Families SA of the intent to disband this team and transfer the responsibility of delivering the emergency financial assistance program to the non-government sector in line with Sustainable Budget's recommendations.

This comes on the back of information provided to me earlier this month in which the executive branch of Families SA apparently instructed managers of Families SA district offices to compile a list of non-government organisations in their catchment area that currently provide financial services and/or assistance or could provide financial services. This work clearly continues, as it was only late last week that one NGO was informed directly by Families SA that the anti-poverty team is to be disbanded and as such they would be expected to handle an increase in their clients. This NGO is already stretched beyond capacity. My questions are:

1. Will the minister guarantee that the current amount available to vulnerable South Australians under the emergency financial assistance program will not be decreased when non-government organisations assume responsibility for its delivery?
2. If the department is still compiling a list of non-government organisations that are able to provide financial services as is evidenced by the approach to non-government organisations only late last week, how can the minister say with any certainty that financial assistance services will be available in all areas of South Australia?
3. Will non-government organisations be provided additional funding to deliver the emergency financial assistance program or will they be expected to do so out of their existing budget?
4. Will Families SA retain the capacity to provide integrated financial counselling and social work with care and protection cases?

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO** (Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for the Status of Women, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Government Enterprises, Minister for the City of Adelaide) (15:02): I thank the honourable member for her most important questions and will refer those to the Minister for Families and Communities in another place and bring back a response.