

Legislative Council

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CHILD PROTECTION CASE

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:21): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities a question about a child protection issue.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Last Thursday I had an 11-year old boy arrive at my office after running away from his foster parents. This young person has been in care for seven months and has been removed from the care of his father, but not because of allegations of abuse and neglect. I notified the minister's office that the boy had come to my office, and she then asked his case workers and a trouble-shooter from the department to come and negotiate. This child was well aware of his rights and knew that he could not be removed from this place. He had come here for sanctuary and all he was asking for was the opportunity to spend some time with his family.

The family member is his aunt, with whom he has been involved since he was a small child, and there is no order against the aunt to not have contact with him, but for some reason contact has been completely cut off and the child has been isolated from his family. I have a six-page litany of the mishandling of this case since this child was five years old. The first incident that started to change his behaviour—

The PRESIDENT: The honourable member will refrain from opinion.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: There is no opinion. It's a six-page litany.

The PRESIDENT: I thought it was your opinion.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: No, it's not.

The PRESIDENT: Isn't it your opinion that that is wrong?

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: What's wrong?

The PRESIDENT: The stuff on the paper.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: This?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: No; this is right.

The PRESIDENT: So, it is your opinion that it is right?

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: No, this is a public interest disclosure statement.

The PRESIDENT: But is it your opinion that it is right?

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: No, I haven't made it—it has been handed to me and there are supporting documents for this.

The PRESIDENT: Carry on.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: This child's behaviour began to deteriorate when he was five years old and claimed to have been sexually abused by a 10 year old student at his school. Families SA did not pursue an investigation into this because the assault had apparently occurred by someone within the same age group as this child. This situation has escalated now to where last week the young boy ran away. All he wanted was contact with his family. I spent 6.5 hours negotiating with department workers and the boy to get him to go back into foster care. He agreed to go back into foster care on the undertaking that an assessment would be made of his aunt so that he could spend time with her. The department agreed to that and there was supposed to be a meeting on Wednesday morning. On Tuesday I was informed that those issues would not be discussed at the meeting on Wednesday. As a result, I heard this morning that this boy has again run away.

In the meeting this boy made very clear that if he ran away again he would not be found and that he would rather be unsafe in a place of his choosing than in the care of his foster parents. I am not saying that his foster parents are not doing a good job—they have a tough job—but my questions are:

1. Will the minister undertake to meet with the father and the young boy to discuss the serious matters included in the public interest disclosure and sight the supporting documents I mentioned?
2. Is the minister aware that family contact has been absolutely discontinued, despite the undertaking of case managers in my presence that they would complete an assessment of a family member so this boy could be placed in the care of the aunt, if she is seen to be fit?
3. Is the minister aware that the department made an undertaking to this young boy in order to get him back to foster care and that it broke its word and should now take responsibility for the fact that today he has run away again?

The Hon. CARMEL ZOLLO (Minister for Correctional Services, Minister for Road Safety, Minister for Gambling, Minister Assisting the Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (15:25): I thank the honourable member for her important questions, essentially in relation to a child protection issue. I undertake to refer the matter to the Minister for Families and Communities in the other place and bring back a response. I do note the honourable member's involvement in trying to assist this constituent, as well as the assistance provided by the minister's office in the other place to ensure that there is a good resolution.