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CHILD PROTECTION RESTRAINING ORDERS

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (14:32): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Police questions about child protection restraining orders.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: On 28 September last year, I asked a series of questions about the implementation of child protection restraining orders. Those questions concerned the case of a father whose 13-year-old girl had run away to live with her 18-year-old boyfriend and who was told by police that both he and they were powerless to intervene. This is despite child protection restraining orders having come into operation several months earlier. It was not until this father contacted the Leon Byner show on FIVEaa that he was informed of his right to apply for such an order, and he subsequently did so with some success. At the time I attributed the failure of the police to inform the father of these rights to the Attorney-General's Department's failure to fully brief stakeholders prior to the commencement of the act.

Now we have another case. A 15-year-old girl has run away from her mother's home to live with a 29-year-old drug addict. We know from the daughter that he has provided her with drugs and that they are sexually active. I repeat that he is 29, making this a criminal offence under section 29(3) of the Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935. The desperate mother went to her local police at Golden Grove, where she was told by officers that there was nothing that the mother or the police could do.

It is alleged that the police informed the daughter that she was free to leave home and that her mother could not stop her. The police then drove this young girl to a phone box outside a supermarket, in the middle of the night, where she called the 29-year-old to collect her. Again, this mother was only informed of child protection restraining orders after calling radio station FIVEaa. My questions to the minister are:

1. Does the minister consider the actions of the police officers in telling the daughter that her mother was powerless to prevent her from running away and then taking the girl from the mother's home to a phone box to call this man (who they were told was providing her with illicit drugs and sleeping with her) appropriate?
2. Does the minister concede that this parliament's intent of empowering parents to protect teenage runaways is being undermined by what is clearly police reluctance to acknowledge the existence of parental rights?
3. Has a general order been issued informing front-line officers of their powers to initiate a child protection restraining order and of their responsibilities to inform parents with runaway teens of their right to do so?
4. Given that parents are able to initiate a child protection restraining order without police cooperation, will the government please do a public education campaign to inform parents of their rights?

The Hon. B.V. FINNIGAN (Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for Gambling) (14:35): In relation to those specific cases, I

will refer that matter to my colleague in the other place, the Minister for Police, and bring back a response. What I will say is that this government certainly does support our police. We have invested record funding in providing them with the resources to do their job, and we have record numbers of sworn police officers in the state, and more to come, unlike some of the honourable members of the opposition, who seem to be running a bit of a campaign against police, calling into question their integrity and refusing to take their advice in relation to matters pertaining to their work.

The government is very committed to ensuring that children are able to live in a safe environment, and there are a number of legislative tools in that regard, as well as the work that our police and others do, such as the Department for Families and Communities. That is highlighted by further changes to domestic violence legislation, for example, which this government has made in recent times. Certainly, I believe the government is committed to ensuring that children are safe and that, wherever it is necessary, the tools are in place to ensure that children are kept in a safe environment.

I know the police take seriously any new responsibility or change in responsibility as a result of legislative changes and undergo a thorough training program in relation to them. However, in relation to the specific details, I will obtain further information.

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The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (14:37): I have a supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT: The Hon. Ms Bressington has a supplementary question.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Can the leader of the government confirm whether or not a training program actually did happen about this particular piece of legislation, as was promised by the Attorney-General's office nine months ago? Has that actually happened yet, or a briefing at least?

The Hon. B.V. FINNIGAN (Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for Gambling) (14:37): As I said, in relation to the specifics of that matter, I will seek further advice.