

Legislative Council

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DISABILITY SA

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:08): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities questions about disability funding.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: I have been contacted by a constituent with a seven year old son, Matthew, who is severely disabled and is totally dependent for all functions of daily living and has chronic and complex health needs. For three years, this family was fortunate enough to have 26 nights respite a year provided by a wonderful volunteer group. When that came to an end at the beginning of last year, Matthew was placed on a waiting list for another 'saint' family, but saints are in short supply and the family is still waiting. Meanwhile, the family was advised that they must exhaust all community options before being considered for respite funding.

The level of phone calls and emails was ramped up, whilst the exercise became an all consuming task of nothing but dead ends and rejections. Six months later, at breaking point, the family requested funding from Disability SA. Their request for five hours respite care per week was initially denied and, only after extensive debate, were they eventually given five hours per fortnight. However, the carer provided could not bathe Matthew due to the need to lift him in and out of the bath. Matthew was also on the equipment waiting list for a lifter.

After dozens of phone calls, forms, emails and meetings with two bureaucrats, the mother was informed that to access respite through Disability SA she would have to relinquish the miniscule respite she has already had, as well as the occasional out-of-home respite they had through carer respite and support care and CARA Respite House. She was told that she would have to do this to be considered for an individual funding package in the future, but with no guarantee of funding being made available through their agency for individualised funding, anyway. My questions to the minister are:

1. What possible logic or rationale would lead Disability SA to require any family pleading for additional services to relinquish the meagre services they have already without any promise of a comparable service to replace those being forfeited?
2. When did the minister become aware that such a policy was being applied to desperate families?
3. When was this policy implemented within Disability SA?
4. Will people with disabilities, their families and carers see a prompt transition to individualised funding within the lifetime of this current government's term in office?

5. Will the minister investigate this matter as soon as possible and advise this chamber of the outcome of that investigation and what action can be taken to assist this family?

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 Assisting the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Energy) (15:11): I will refer the honourable member's important questions to the Minister for Families and Communities in another place and bring back a response.