

Legislative Council

Thursday, 23 June 2011, Page 3271

FAMILIES SA

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (14:52): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities questions about the accountability of Families SA.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: On 6 May 2010, I detailed concerns brought to me by several constituents about the witnessed abuse and neglect of three children who were living in conditions so squalid that the family dog had been removed some weeks before by the RSPCA. I also informed the council that I had been provided with a safety plan prepared by Families SA that warned that the children were living with a man who had 'previously sexually abused a child'.

Despite hundreds of reports to the child abuse report line of the abuse these children were receiving at the hands of their parents and Families SA knowing that they were living with a paedophile, our child protection agency had failed to intervene in a meaningful way. On the day I rose, the children had not been removed from their parents nor from the sex offender's home.

Appropriately, I sought to question the minister about her department's involvement in this case and why it failed to protect these children when they were so clearly at imminent risk of abuse and neglect. On 7 June 2011, exactly one year, one month and one day later, I received the following answer:

Under section 58(1) of the Children's Protection Act 1993, a person engaged in the administration of this act has a duty to maintain confidentiality and must not divulge information relating to personal information relating to a child, a child's guardian or other family members or any person alleged to have abused, neglected or threatened a child. Accordingly, on public interest grounds, I consider it inappropriate to provide the information sought by the honourable member and respectfully decline to answer the question.

It took one year, one month and one day to decide that they could not answer the question.

The member for Bragg in the other place encountered similar evasion of scrutiny by the Minister for Families and Communities when she attempted to ascertain the department's involvement in the tragic case of the five-year-old boy who died following his mother putting methadone in his cordial bottle. My questions to the minister are:

1. What accountability does Families SA face when it fails so miserably that children are left in the home of a known paedophile or die prior to their intervention or from no intervention?
2. If this parliament is unable to scrutinise Families SA, then who does, apart from the HSCC, which has proven to be woefully hopeless?
3. What legal ramifications does the minister believe would be appropriate for child protection workers when children are left in a home after numerous notifications are made and when children remain in that abusive home for prolonged periods of time?

4. What measures will the minister put in place, apart from making funding announcements, to ensure that this agency fulfils its obligation to the children of this state and, if she is unable to present a cohesive plan that is outcome-based, then will she please resign?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Public Sector Management, Minister for the Status of Women, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Government Enterprises, Minister for Gambling) (14:56): I thank the honourable member for the questions. I am sure that she is not suggesting that she would want the Minister for Families and Communities to withdraw her funding announcements. I am sure that she does not want the minister to withdraw the new money that she has made available. I am sure that that is not what she intended to say, but anyway I just thought I would clarify that. In terms of the details of the particular case that the honourable member has raised, I will refer those to the Minister for Families and Communities in another place and bring back a response.