

Legislative Council
Thursday, 6 May 2010
FAMILIES SA

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (16:11): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities a question about child protection.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Prior to the election, numerous people came to me with concerns about three children being emotionally, physically, verbally and possibly sexually abused. Most were neighbours of the children, and they told of the filthy conditions in which the children were living—so bad, in fact, that the family dogs had been removed some weeks before by the RSPCA. They reported an attempted suicide by the nine year old boy, with this child of the family requiring CPR from one of the neighbours and ambulance attendance, and high rates of school absenteeism by children.

They also cited the seven year old girl being kicked in the stomach so hard that she was launched across the front yard and rendered unconscious and having seen this little girl being repeatedly dragged by the hair up the street because she was not walking fast enough. They reported domestic violence and drug use by the parents in the home, as well as frequent visits by suspected drug dealers and, on one occasion, a man entering the house with a gun, threatening the father in front of the children and those children then seeking refuge in one of the neighbour's home.

Despite hundreds of notifications to the Child Abuse Report Line over a period of three years, letters to premier Mike Rann and minister Rankine, and reports continuing as recently as this week, Families SA has only superficially intervened since September last year, even though the notifications continue and the children remain in the home with the parents. Neighbours are now complaining that they are being threatened with having their houses burnt down, and another neighbour's daughter and grandchild have now had their safety threatened as well.

Further to the reports of abuse by the parents last week, I was provided with a safety plan that Families SA required the parents of these children to sign. The safety plan demanded that the parents cease allowing access to the children by the owner and part-time resident of the premises in which they live because the owner ' has previously sexually abused a child ' and this has been confirmed by Families SA. The safety plan goes on to state, 'We, the parents, acknowledge that it is not possible for us to provide adequate supervision if this person is in our home.'

I also note that the safety plan makes no reference to the parents' drug use, violence and other anti-social behaviours that have been repeatedly reported. My questions to the minister are:

- 1.How long has Families SA known or suspected that the owner-occupier of these premises had sexually abused a child?
- 2.If I am correct in believing that the owner had offended against a previous family's child in that home, why did Families SA, knowing that this offence had occurred

more than three years ago, not act sooner on the reports to the Child Abuse Report Line?

3. Given that the parents are not tenants but living at the property free of charge at the owner-occupier's offer (which in itself should have raised alarm bells), how is it possible for the parents to execute the demand that the owner-occupier does not attend his own home?

4. Given these difficulties, and the seriousness of Families SA concerns, why has emergency housing not been found for this family before now to remove them from this home?

5. Given the serious abuse reported by neighbours, why have these children remained in the care of their parents, considering the numerous cases of parents having their children removed for far less serious matters?

6. How does the Safe Baby Strong Families Program fit with this particular case, given the ages of the children, as well as the numerous notifications made over three years, and now knowing that the children were living in the home of a known paedophile?

7. Finally, knowing that Families SA did not act to protect the children from the parents, despite numerous serious allegations of abuse against these children, and their having also left the children in the home of a suspected paedophile, why should the people of South Australia have any confidence in this government's ability to act in the best interests of our children or to protect children at imminent risk?

The PRESIDENT: The honourable member was requesting from the minister a number of opinions, so they should be disregarded.

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) (16:16): I thank the honourable member for her most important questions and will refer them to the Minister for Families and Communities in another place and bring back a response.