

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 8 September 2009, Page 3038

FAMILIES SA

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:09): I seek leave to make an explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Families and Communities questions about the conduct of her department, Families SA.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Last week, I was approached by a foster parent from Port Pirie and her advocate about the removal of a child from her care. This foster mother had, over a 13 year period, been a highly successful and effective foster parent for some 24 children, three being long term and several children had a disability.

I was told that she had become aware on 30 January 2009 that there were some unspecified care concerns, delivered to her verbally, concerning one such child who had been in her care for over five years.

In February, after complaining to the department that the child's need for more resources was being ignored, the foster mother was required to attend a psychological assessment; she was told that it was a condition of the child receiving any further support or services. Instead of offering additional support, the department then put in place moves to remove the child from the care of this foster parent.

The foster parent wrote to the minister, with no reply. A meeting was scheduled for 21 July 2009, which I believe was the country cabinet meeting period. The minister did not attend. By August 2009, the foster family was given the first sign of the department's intent to remove the child from the family's care. With no case conference, and based solely on one psychological assessment, a decision was made to remove the child from the foster family.

On 3 September, this young girl (now aged 9) was removed and taken to a location 300 kilometres away, to unfamiliar surrounds, with no family, friends or support networks in place. No opportunity was given to say goodbye to school friends or family or to attend a family birthday that had been organised for that weekend.

My office was made aware that the minister's office was attempting to set up a meeting appointment time, but after much confusion between the constituents, their advocate and the minister's representative, Mr Matt Clemow advised that he would meet with the constituents for half an hour to make up for the time that the minister did not give the constituent in July. He made it clear that, in fact, this meeting was not to review the case or to consider any of the issues that the foster family wanted to raise about the poor conduct of the department, but rather just to appease.

When my office and the advocate requested that the purpose of such a meeting be clearly put into an email to ensure clarity for the benefit of all parties, Mr Clemow, in a rude and abrasive way, expressed to my office and the advocate, in separate calls, that he had no intention of clarifying the purpose and nature of the meeting to be held,

whilst berating all parties concerned for the last minute cancellation and apparent lack of appreciation of his efforts to arrange the meeting. My questions to the minister are:

1. How many foster carers remain registered with the department who do not have placements with them at this point in time, and what is the main reason for those foster parents not having a placement?
2. What steps did the minister take to seek advice on the adverse effects this swift removal would have on a child who was placed in foster care because of ongoing abuse and neglect issues of her birth family?
3. What obligation does the department have to alert foster parents of a lack of skills to provide care to foster children?
4. Why cannot foster parents be provided with a clear and detailed report of why their long-term foster placements are removed, and why does not the department take steps to upgrade the training of these foster parents and stop this pain being caused?

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) (15:12): I thank the honourable member for her questions and will refer them to the Minister for Families and Communities in another place and bring back a response.