

Legislative Council

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MATERNAL ALIENATION PROJECT

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:06): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for the Status of Women a question about the maternal alienation project.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: On 20 September 2002, a public meeting launched the maternal alienation project, a project which most likely slipped under the community watch radar, but one which has and will continue to have a long-term damaging impact on the status of fatherhood in South Australia. In essence, the project was based on the anonymous anecdotal case studies and findings contained in the thesis by a Ms Anne Morris, a student of gender studies at the University of Adelaide. This thesis was then used as the basis upon which the Salvation Army central violence intervention program coordinated its service and intervention approach and, as recently as a few weeks ago, we have been led to believe that even the court officers, police and social workers at Elizabeth at least have been trained in this theory, which has been labelled an academic hoax on South Australian families.

On a more serious level, several constituents also discovered the real identity of the author, Ms Anne Morris, and a question was asked in this chamber by the Hon. Andrew Evans on 16 July 2003. This particular maternal alienation syndrome purports to assert that all men have the potential to be wife bashers and child abusers, and notably the project aims to name the phenomenon of mother alienation as a world first. However, the concept of parental alienation has existed and been accepted by our legal system since the mid-1980s. It is a concept that is entirely without gender bias and open to be applied by either gender in any given situation. By genderising the notion of parental alienation, the project claimed that the notion of maternal forms of alienation are more serious, damaging and prolific than actually occurs to men, whose wife may speak ill of them to their children and change the perception of their father.

In 2003 the project had received some \$44,000 in funding at the time, and Ms Morris has been appointed its senior project officer, but assurances were later given by the Hons Terry Roberts and Steph Key that the project would no longer receive any funding. My questions to the minister are:

1. Is she aware of any training in DV units or other support networks that support and fund parental alienation syndrome, and is it funded by the state government?
2. If she is aware, what steps will she take to stop the training and any application of this disproven theory of maternal alienation?

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) (15:09): I thank the honourable member for her questions. I am not aware of this particular project or syndrome. I am not aware of any training or

components of this philosophy or theory that are part of any of the domestic violence training programs, interventions or support programs.

I am not aware that there is any association whatsoever, but I am more than happy, obviously, to look into the matter and bring back a response if I find that there is some association.