

## CHILDREN IN STATE CARE

12 November 2008

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD:** I also indicate Family First and my personal support for this motion. I congratulate the Hon. Ann Bressington on bringing this motion forth: it is timely and appropriate. I am also very heartened by the contribution of the Hon. Mr Hunter a moment ago signalling the government's response to the questions that have been put to them. I am encouraged by that. It certainly seems that their endeavour is genuine in order to meet the very real needs of the people who were the subject of this inquiry. In supporting the motion tonight, I am acknowledging the formal apology put by the Premier and leaders of church groups to these unfortunate victims.

My next point is that we await concrete promises of action in response to the recommendations of the Mullighan report from the government, but, as I said, I am quite heartened by the comments of the Hon. Mr Hunter a few moments ago, which go a long way to addressing any concerns that members in the chamber have. Much is still to be done, but certainly the indication given to us by the Hon. Mr Hunter tonight is very reassuring indeed.

It is well-known that the Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry took evidence from some 792 people and detailed some 826 allegations involving 922 perpetrators, which are staggering numbers. It is truly a sad state and a terrible reflection on possibly the time and also the circumstances and, indeed, this state (although I am sure we are not alone) that those numbers are so high. When you consider that some 922 perpetrators have been investigated by this inquiry, it really is staggering. The mover of the motion (Hon. Ann Bressington) has quite rightly called it a mountain of human heartache, and I think that only probably begins to describe the situation.

It would be remiss of me in my brief contribution not to mention the contribution of the Hon. Andrew Evans (as he then was) in this whole situation. The Hon. Ann Bressington was kind enough to pay due credit to him

in her contribution. Of course, it was the Hon. Andrew Evans—that is, when he was the then honourable, if you like, when he still had that title—

**The Hon. R.L. Brokenshire:** He will always be honourable.

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD:** That is right; indeed, he will. Of course, it was he who moved the amendment to remove the statute of limitations so that sex offenders who had committed their crimes prior to 1982 could be prosecuted. Without that, it is highly unlikely we would have had a Mullighan inquiry at all. I think he will be remembered fondly for that action. It has, indeed, opened the floodgates of a great deal of pain, but I think that, if we do not go through that pain, there is never true and genuine healing. He deserves to be commended for those actions. Indeed, along those lines, since 2003 and up until 31 December last year, there were some 69 finalised historical sexual offences as a result of the bill that Andrew Evans introduced removing the statute of limitations. Of those, 29 were found guilty and 23 were actually sentenced to a period of immediate imprisonment. So change is under way, and I am happy to support this motion wholeheartedly.

**The Hon. R.L. BROKENSHIRE:** I will also be brief, although this is an important motion. It is also the first time since I have been in this council that I have been able to speak on the public record about the Mullighan inquiry and the importance of looking after the victims of these horrendous crimes.

I want to join with my Family First colleague the Hon. Dennis Hood to say, as I have said before in this place, that I am proud and privileged to have replaced the Hon. Andrew Evans in this council, and I owe him a great deal for that. Part of what I owe him is the responsibility to ensure that there is an ongoing opportunity to support the victims of these horrendous crimes. As my colleague the Hon. Dennis Hood said, if it had not been for the Hon. Andrew Evans the Mullighan inquiry probably would not have got up. I also know for a fact that those perpetrators who are behind bars (with many more, I hope, to be behind bars sooner rather than later) are there only as a result of the Hon. Andrew Evans' efforts.

At that time I was in the other place, and it was not—as the media and the government sometimes project—a matter of the government coming forward with the initiatives to address, first, the legislation and, secondly, the Mullighan inquiry. There was actually more than a year of intense questioning in the other house before that inquiry came about. As an Anglican I was pretty concerned when the government was happy to table a report on untoward things done by the Anglicans at the time, but it was not happy to acknowledge what the state did; that took quite a lot of debate and effort. On this occasion I need to note that the Leader of the Opposition in the other place at that time also worked hard.

I put that on the public record because I strongly support the motion of the Hon. Ann Bressington with respect to ensuring that we are kept informed—and not only on this occasion. I am heartened by the remarks of the Hon. Ian Hunter on behalf of the government but, having said that, I know how government works, and when the media get onto another issue and other things are happening it is easy for the government to back away. It does not have to do the spin any more, and it is the hard yards and the hard grind that then have to take place.

I think I know the importance of this council probably more than anyone—apart from the leader of government business in this place who, I see, has a different opinion on this. We do need to keep a watchful eye, and I would like to see ongoing reports regarding what happens with the Mullighan inquiry, not just in this instance. I would like to see absolute transparency on this so that the least we can do is put in a proper effort. We will never entirely heal the pain and suffering of those people; that is impossible.

As a former police minister I saw some of the terrible crimes that came across my desk documented in various files, and I have to say that what happened to these victims involved some of the most horrendous types of crime that anyone could endure. We should not forget that, and we should not take it lightly at all. I believe this council has a place in continuing to demand transparency and action. Therefore, I feel a great sense of relief that the Hon.

Ann Bressington has brought this motion before the council, and I want to see regular transparency.

I would like to finish by commenting particularly on the last clause of the honourable member's motion regarding what steps the government has undertaken to give those victims of abuse justice, redress and closure. I have some personal interest in that one in particular, and I have to say that it must be carried forward. Just the same as I support the gold card and ongoing support for veterans, I equally support ongoing support for these victims throughout their entire life. I encourage the parliament to keep a very close watch on the circumstances of delivery, as this government and successive governments should continue to do on behalf of these people. I am very proud to support the motion.