

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 23 November 2012

Members

Mrs A. Coote
Ms G. Crozier
Mr D. O'Brien

Ms B. Halfpenny
Mr F. McGuire
Mr N. Wakeling

Chair: Ms G. Crozier
Deputy Chair: Mr F. McGuire

Staff

Executive Officer: Dr J. Bush
Research Officer: Ms V. Finn

Opening statement by Chair

The CHAIR — Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's hearing of the inquiry into child abuse. Since we were last here in this room, as I am sure you are all aware, the federal government has announced a national royal commission into child abuse. There has been much media coverage at a national level and questions about how this will impact on our work here in Victoria.

I have said that our committee will continue with our work, because at this stage there are many things we do not yet know about the royal commission — in particular its scope, how and where it will operate, the likely time frame to establish the commission and how long it will take. In Victoria we have already undertaken a significant amount of work through this inquiry, and this has brought to light important revelations that have influenced the decision to call a royal commission.

At the last hearing I said that people have the right to expect that there will be full accountability for past wrongdoing and failures and that we can develop mechanisms to ensure that those systemic failures will not continue. We have also said that anyone who wants to appear before this committee will have the opportunity to do so, as we believe this is an important part of our process.

We sincerely thank those victims who have been willing to come before us and share their experiences. Listening to victims tell their stories allows us to hear firsthand the impact that child abuse has had, not just on the actual victims themselves but on their families and those around them whose lives have been ruined by the actions of some and the inaction of others.

Our terms of reference for this inquiry specifically focus on Victoria and on the handling of child abuse by religious and other non-government organisations. We are considering how practices and processes within organisations may have discouraged reporting to state authorities and possibly contributed to both the incidence of offending and the effective denial of justice to victims. Part of our job is to identify systemic and legal solutions to improve responses to this very important issue.

We believe that within a relatively short time frame — not years — we will be in a position to make findings and recommendations, and in the absence of any details as to how the national royal commission will operate this committee has agreed to continue this inquiry in accordance with the plans previously determined.