

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2006-07 budget estimates

Melbourne—8 June 2006

Members

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Witnesses

Ms M. Delahunty, Minister for Women's Affairs;

Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary, Department for Victorian Communities,

Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities; and

Ms F. Sharkie, director, Office of Women's Policy.

The CHAIR—I welcome Mr Yehudi Blacher, the Secretary for the Department for Victorian Communities, and we send a cheerio to Terry Healy, whom we were expecting; Ms Fiona Sharkie, Director, Office of Women's Policy; Mr Stephen Gregory, Chief Financial Officer, Department for Victorian Communities. Minister, we appreciate that we did keep to time last time with the overheads. If we could plea for a similar short presentation, that allows us then to ask questions and you can outline in detail specifics of your portfolio. Thank you.

Slides shown.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Thanks very much. Again it is a pleasure to present to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the Office of Women's Policy. As you know, the Office of Women's Policy is part of the Department for Victorian Communities. We have the priority areas listed there: (1) 'Representation and equity', (2) 'Education, work and economic independence', (3) 'Justice and safety', (4) 'Health, wellbeing and community safety'. The Office of Women's Policy provides leadership, advice, advocacy and expertise on women to government and the community. A big focus is on our evidence-based research, and I do want to stress that: we are not a service provider. We are basically a research and advocacy outfit, and a very effective one I might say. We build relationships, and influence and maintain partnerships with key stakeholders internal and external to government. Our value to women is that we act as a serious conduit to give women a voice in government. We recognise and promote the experiences and achievements of women, and we are lucky to have a cabinet which has so many women in it. I have listed the priority areas.

Some of the key achievements in the last year, 2005-06—this is a terrific achievement: we had a target of 40 per cent representation of women on government boards and committees. We have exceeded that at 41 per cent, and rising. We have expanded the Women's Register to include diverse groups—and I know this was of some interest to the committee last year—to include appropriately qualified women of CALD and Indigenous background, young women and those with disabilities. The Victorian Honour Roll is going gang busters. We have added an extra 24, which brings it to 356 outstanding women inducted since we began the honour roll in 2001. We have awarded Women's Community Leadership Grants, particularly in the last year with emphasis on disadvantage, LGAs, and that is a total of 87 grants since 2002. That is, of course, in 2005-06.

In the area of education, work and economic independence, we held the sixth Premier's Annual Women's Summit last year, focusing on ageing with financial security. Because there was nothing in the marketplace, we created a specific and practical guide, *Making superannuation work for you*; conducted 20 financial literacy workshops as a follow-up to that summit right across Victoria; and released the research *Paving the way*, which drove our policy work.

'Justice and safety': you would be well aware of the extra funds in the 2005-06 budget for the beginnings of an integrated family violence strategy. We have implemented Respectful Behaviours, working initially with the AFL which, of course, is a tremendous influencer in our society. In fact, 25 per cent of players and club officials have agreed to act as mentors. This will be a big change to the culture around respecting women.

Safe at Work?: again, groundbreaking research in that area. And we have continued our work with the three statewide steering committees which do such terrific work.

'Health, wellbeing and community strengthening': there is the Health and Wellbeing Forum which we host every year. We have held 10 roundtables throughout Victoria in the last year. I think I have conducted about 30 since I became minister. They are extremely successful and, I note, are being emulated by other governments and other departments, who are now doing business roundtables and youth roundtables and others. So that is very useful. And there is the Queen Vic Women's Centre, which I know has been of great interest to this committee, and I think we might some get some questions on it.

There are the New Strategic Directions, the new vision for women beyond 2007, the next tranche of the Women's Safety Strategy, the next Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and we are beginning to have discussions with the community about how we should reflect upon and celebrate the centenary of the women's vote here in Victoria in 2008.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Minister. We have 18 minutes for questions, so I am going to be succinct and hope that you can blind us with the facts and figures.

Ms DELAHUNTY—I will do my very best.

The CHAIR—You have referred in your overheads to the 41 per cent representation by women on government boards and committees as of June 2006. That is impressive. Can you give us a little more detail about the facts in that regard.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes, it is a good result, and I have to say, unless you can measure something, you often do not achieve it. There was a lot of goodwill around this, but we needed to drive it very hard, and I take a lot of personal satisfaction in the fact that my colleagues have accepted and implemented this with such alacrity. Some of the figures around this: in February this year I announced that women's representation on government boards and committees had risen from 29.7 per cent in 1999 to 41 per cent in June 2005. As I have said, that is rising.

The number of female chairs on government boards and committees has also increased and that is important; up to 26 per cent, further strengthening women's involvement in senior decision making. Of course, we know that this is on top of the number of women who are in cabinet, the number of heads of departments who are women, the first female chief police commissioner and the incredible numbers of women who have been appointed on merit in the judiciary. But we want to see this continue. Indeed, as I have mentioned, we have expanded the Women's Register, which has been one of the drivers of this, as has tremendous work within cabinet, I must say, from my colleagues and from departments; all leading to this outcome.

So for Victorian boards we are well ahead of the private sector, where only about eight per cent of the board seats in Australia's top 200 companies are filled by women. I think it is a lost opportunity and we are helping the private sector to increase that number.

Mr FORWOOD—Minister, on 14 June you are hosting the Women's Health Victoria 'Unfinished business' abortion law reform function. What policy advice have you so far received on abortion law reform? Is this on the agenda at the moment, and what steps are you taking to achieve it?

Ms DELAHUNTY—You are quite right about the event that I am hosting as both arts minister and women's affairs minister. It is actually at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image because there will be a film shown on that evening. It is certainly part history. It is examining the history of this debate and the changes that have been made. It is introducing women who are keen to know the details of that history, and it is appropriate that I welcome people to the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. Of course, as you know, the Labor Party has a policy on this matter and the government has no plans to introduce any changes in this parliament.

Mr FORWOOD—Is it true that Ms Hirsh has given an undertaking that it will be done next parliament?

Ms DELAHUNTY—I am not quite sure what that question has to do with the budget.

The CHAIR—The minister cannot answer hypotheticals. She can only talk about what is in the budget papers.

Mr FORWOOD—Let me rephrase the question. Of the \$3.1 million that has been allocated for women's policy, how much do you anticipate will be spent in the forthcoming year on matters to do with abortion?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Matters to do with abortion through the Office of Women's Policy?

Mr FORWOOD—'Provide strategic whole-of-government policy advice on key issues of concern to women'.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes.

Mr FORWOOD—Is abortion a key issue of concern to women? Yes.

The CHAIR—The minister can answer questions, not you.

Ms DELAHUNTY—If you go back to the focus of our work, Bill, it might help answer that question. We are certainly working on a new Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We are also, of course, focusing on the key areas on which we have to spend both our money and time: representation and equity; education, work and economic independence; justice and safety. It is the fourth area in which I think you are most interested with this question: health, wellbeing and community strengthening. We run the Health and Wellbeing Forum every year. That is for women and women's groups to raise any issue they like around women's health. I was not there for that entire forum that we have just completed, but I do not know that it was even raised during that Health and Wellbeing Forum.

Our job is to provide advocacy. It is to represent the views of women to government, particularly to government departments which are the service providers. When it comes to women's health, the service providers, of course, are the health department and Community Services.

Hearing suspended.

The CHAIR—Minister, have you finished your answer?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes.

The CHAIR—Mr Merlino?

Mr MERLINO—Minister, I refer you to page 267 of Budget Paper No. 3, where reference is made to the Office of Women's Policy consulting with Victorian women. Can you report to the committee on the women's financial literacy project, the new initiative of the 2005 Premier's Women's Summit, and the benefits to women that flow from that?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes. The financial literacy project was announced at the Premier's Women's Summit last year, which focused on ageing with financial security. A lot of the research that was done by the Office of Women's Policy and others showed very clearly that the financial planning industry is still very much determined by the model of male employment; that the female employment model is still different; and, fundamentally, that women move in and out of the paid workforce much more than men do, mostly due to family and other caring responsibilities. We also uncovered that women are retiring earlier than men, despite the fact that they have about a third, on average, of the superannuation savings that comparable males have.

We decided that we would produce a specific guide to provide practical self-help tips for women to start to take some control of their financial security. We also realised that what was lacking was practical information, yes, in a written form but also in discussion form, so we established the financial workshops for women around the state. They were targeting women aged 40-plus and 55-plus. There were a total of 20 workshops, which were held between October 2005 and April 2006 and just under 500 women attended. It was heartening that not only the women who attended found that it was very useful but they were helping their friends. This is the brochure that we produced. It is very worthwhile. We have sent them around to members, but there are more copies of those, if you would like to see them.

The CHAIR—Thanks, Minister. Mr Clark.

Mr CLARK—Thank you. Minister, I think in your presentation earlier you referred to your role as coordinating and liaising with service providers in relation to delivery of services to women.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes.

Mr CLARK—I want to refer you in particular to a service being delivered by the Department of

Human Services with sexual assault support services. At page 107 of Budget Paper No. 3, there is a timeliness measure for the provision of those services which indicates a target of expected outcome for the 2005-06 year and a target for the 2006-07 year of 80 per cent, an actual outcome in 2004-05 of 86 per cent. You may be aware, given your responsibilities, that the government has committed \$30.8 million over the next four years to improve the system of response to sexual assault, a sizeable part of that to be spent in 2006-07. Is this an issue to which you have turned your mind as minister and, if so, do you have any concerns that the timeliness performance measure is so low—at an 80 per cent level—particularly given the extra money that is being devoted to the service?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Of course, it is not my direct responsibility. That is the responsibility of another minister. But what you see in our government, particularly around women's safety and, indeed, the Women's Safety Strategy explicitly, is that you have an agreement from across government departments and leadership by a collective of government ministers to try and improve the safety of women in this state. That is the challenge for us in the women's policy area. We are not a service provider. We advocate for the funds with my colleagues, and then the funds are provided to the department, quite appropriately, to deliver.

Mr CLARK—Presumably you advocate for delivery as well as for funds. It is not much good having the money unless the service is delivered, so if your role is advocacy, presumably it is to advocate for the effective delivery of service and not just for the provision of funding.

Ms DELAHUNTY—That, as I said, is the responsibility of another minister, as is appropriate. You cannot have a women's affairs minister that is getting her hands dirty around the detail of funds to be spent by another minister. We do not do that. We do it cooperatively.

Mr CLARK—What is the point of advocating if you only advocate for the money and not for the result that the money is supposed to achieve?

Ms DELAHUNTY—I guess the big difference is that we do advocate for the money. That is the difference between us and the previous government. That is the difference between us and perhaps your own party.

Mr CLARK—Yes, we concentrate on results, instead of just spending money.

Ms DELAHUNTY—It has only just outlined a women's policy after all these years. Here it is in the middle of 2006. We have a women's policy from the Liberal Party—

Mr FORWOOD—Got the women's centre up yet?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes, ask me about it.

Mr FORWOOD—How many years has that taken?

Ms DELAHUNTY—I would like to answer the question when I can.

The CHAIR—Mr Clark, that is understood?

Mr CLARK—We have had the minister's answer, yes.

The CHAIR—Ms Romanes.

Ms ROMANES—I would like to ask about the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. Minister, you mentioned this in your presentation, and I note on page 267 in the performance indicators that you have already exceeded the targeted occupancy rate.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes.

Ms ROMANES—Can you tell us more about what the budget allocation is for that has been given to

the centre, and what these funds will do for women in Victoria?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes. I know that this has been of great interest to the community. I do not think that anyone underestimates the challenge that this building was, particularly when it was part of a building site with the Grollo development of the Queen Vic area. That is now completed, the building is fully tenanted, and that is a fantastic achievement. But the costs of this building, which is a heritage building, are substantial.

What we have done is something quite new and I think it will be of great benefit to the government and, indeed, to the women of Victoria and the trust itself. We have signed a service agreement with the trust and ourselves for the funds and the 2006-07 budget allocation of \$1.9 million includes \$300,000 per annum to implement the funding and service agreement with the Queen Vic Women's Centre. This allocation will be explicitly in acknowledgment of the heritage nature of the building, building repairs and maintenance, insurance and depreciation; and of course the management and security costs of the building are quite high.

There is an additional one-off allocation of \$700,000 that has been made for capital works to bring the building up to contemporary standards: such things as disability access ramps, which are expected now; repair to the verandah; upgrading the fire and safety equipment; and external improvements, including the women's rest garden. That will then allow the trust to manage the building with the income from the tenants and to provide programs for women and to continue the one-stop information hub which is specifically for women right across regional Victoria.

Mr FORWOOD—Which group does the money come from?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Office of Women's Policy; 267.

Mr FORWOOD—Of the \$3.1 million, those are the funds? I thought that was the advocacy funding. Are there any other funds that go to particular outside organisations, out of the \$3.1 million?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Which organisations?

Mr FORWOOD—There is one output group for women's affairs. It is the women's policy output group and it is an amount of \$3.1 million. You have just told us that some of that \$3.1 million is going to the women's centre.

Ms DELAHUNTY—No, it is not the Women's Trust. It is the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. We also have moneys for the Women's Information Referral Exchange, known as WIRE.

Mr FORWOOD—Of the \$3.1 million, could you tell us how much you keep in-house for doing policy work and how much you grant to external organisations?

Ms DELAHUNTY—We can. Not much.

The CHAIR—Minister, we have 100 per cent occupancy rate. Is the same rate projected for next year?

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes, I believe so. I believe that that is the case. It is a good result, a very good result with the numbers of tenants, particularly those who will be able to support the programs of the Women's Trust.

Mr CLARK—I refer to the performance measure in women's policy of the women attending consultation forums/summits on page 267 of Budget Paper No. 3, which is shown falling from 875 actual in 2004-05 to 500 target in 2006-07. Can you explain the reason for that change?

Ms DELAHUNTY—The number of women attending the consultations is expected to decline in year 2006-07 due to the fact that we are not conducting any women's roundtable events in the period July to December 2006. That would be for obvious reasons. The Girls to Government initiative also did not take place early this year as it has in previous years, due to the Commonwealth Games happening at exactly the same

time and government departments, particularly DVC, being so involved. A high number of staff were seconded to support the initiative, so we did not proceed with Girls to Government in March. But that probably does not worry you because we have had a bit of criticism from the Liberal opposition on the Girls to Government initiative, which is a bit disappointing because it is a great initiative.

Ms GREEN—I refer you to page 267 of Budget Paper No. 3, Minister, and I ask what progress has been made on the Women's Safety Strategy since you last presented to PAEC?

Ms DELAHUNTY—This has been a tremendous amount of work across government. I do not underestimate how much work and how much of a challenge the Women's Safety Strategy is. We were committed to reducing both the level and the fear of violence against women alleged in 2002, as you know. It outlines the directions and the around 60 separate initiatives right across government, whether it is in DHS or whether it is in justice or in fact in police as well. We released the mid-term progress report in December 2005 and one of those achievements has been the extra \$35.1 million which I mentioned in my presentation. I think the big change in the culture around domestic violence has really come out of the introduction of the Victoria Police code of conduct. That has made a huge impact on women and, indeed, perpetrators. We have seen the increasing number of intervention orders that have occurred because women actually trust the police to follow up. As a result of the code of conduct, there is now an offer of a safety plan, often, for women.

We have created a new offence in the *Crimes Act* 1958 to combat forced prostitution and sexual exploitation and we have allocated \$25.5 million to implement a range of initiatives to deal with women in prison. We have also set up two family violence courts to try and deal with those experiencing family violence. It is a very complex area of the law and what we wanted to do was bring together those magistrates and other support staff who have a specialist knowledge of family violence. The two courts, as you know, are in Heidelberg and Ballarat and they commenced in June last year. We have developed a partnership, which I referred to in my opening remarks, with the AFL, again trying to work on the culture—not just the crisis response, but work on the culture that says it is okay to abuse women. We say it is not okay and we want to see that culture change.

We are also doing work with men's behavioural change. If you are the subject of an intervention order, you can be directed by a magistrate to behavioural change programs, which, from the initial feedback, is starting to show some improvement. That is the report, *Women's Safety Strategy progress report*, which has all the details of what we are doing across government under the Women's Safety Strategy.

Mr FORWOOD—Minister, on page 267 in the women's policy output group where it says 'Client satisfaction with advice provided', are you the client or is there some other client?

Ms DELAHUNTY—It is both. It is certainly government, and the minister representing the government, but it is also the women that we deal with, particularly in what we call our continuing conversations with Victorian women; and that is through the forums that I have outlined, the Premier's Women's Summit and I think we could probably add, couldn't we, the roundtables as well. At each roundtable, for example, we do ask the women who have attended to evaluate the two-hour roundtable. It is certainly not a quickie. It takes two hours, often more. You would also consider government departments to be the clients of the advice, the research capacity and the policy development work of the Office of Women's Policy.

Mr FORWOOD—I am pleased you said that, because the participant satisfaction with forums is not 100 per cent. Minister, I wonder if you could provide the committee with a breakdown of spending for the \$3.1 million you anticipate spending in 2006-07 and how you spent the \$3.1 million in 2005-06 because, as you are not doing as many consultations and not doing other things, then you will be allocating those funds somewhere else. You can take that on notice.

Ms DELAHUNTY—Yes, we can. It is about \$200,000 that we are giving to WIRE, which is the information referral service that I spoke about before; but, yes, we are happy to do that.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Minister. That concludes consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Arts and Women's Affairs. Thank you to not only the minister but the departmental advisers, both those present and those who prepared your briefing notes. It has been extremely helpful to PAEC. We

will be forwarding those questions you have taken on notice. Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.