

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2008–09

Melbourne— 16 May 2008

Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Munt	Mr B. Stensholt
Mr W. Noonan	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Ms M. Morand, Minister for Women's Affairs,
Mr T. Healy, Deputy Secretary,
Ms R. Cumberland, Director, Office of Women's Policy, and
Ms K. Kelly, Manager, Policy Development, Office of Women's Policy, Department of Planning and Community Development.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee I welcome Terry Healy, deputy secretary; Rhonda Cumberland, director, Office of Women's Affairs; and Kath Kelly, manager, policy development, Office of Women's Affairs. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance implications of the budget estimates for the women's affairs portfolio.

Ms MORAND — Thank you for the opportunity of presenting on my women's affairs portfolio, particularly in this very significant year of the centenary of women's suffrage.

The CHAIR — Absolutely.

Overheads shown.

Ms MORAND — It is the 100th anniversary of women being able to be in this place and participate in democracy. In terms of our achievements in the portfolio over the last 12 months we have launched the celebrations and are undertaking celebrations of the centenary of suffrage. We have met the target that we set ourselves for getting 40 per cent of women on government-appointed boards. We have continued the honour roll. I think you, Janice, were there at this year's lunch where we inducted another 30 women onto the honour roll.

Ms MUNT — Absolutely.

Ms MORAND — And we have decided to continue that important program of recognising women's achievements, particularly the achievements of those women who do not seek that sort of recognition. We have also developed material for the Women's Financial Literacy workshops, which was a budget initiative from last year. We held the annual Premier's women's summit. It was the eighth summit held, and the theme was 'Women into work'. It was a very successful summit. We are evaluating the women's safety strategy, and we have completed the annual report on Leading with Victoria's Women.

I am putting up this slide because I wanted to remind members that I am the lead minister for family violence but it really is the other ministers who have the spending programs, and it is a whole-of-government approach to tackling this difficult problem. As you can see, we have the housing minister, the Attorney-General, the police minister, the Minister for Community Services and myself. Family violence is one of the key areas in terms of the Minister for Women's Affairs portfolio and one of the key areas of reform for the government. I wanted to remind members that we have had some significant success in terms of responding to family violence since the new code of conduct came in in 2004. We have seen intervention orders sought by police increase by 169 per cent, and police charges have increased by 183 per cent; they are very successful numbers. We have developed a very successful partnership with over 70 providers across Victoria supporting women and children in family violence. We have also improved access and responses in terms of the court system. We have established a Family Court division in Ballarat and Heidelberg, and 200 men were directed in 2006–07 to attend a mandated behavioural change program through the Family Court violence division in Ballarat or through Heidelberg. We have also assisted 1300 women every year with outreach and intensive case management, and approximately 1200 men are accessing men's behavioural change programs each year. Something I may be able to report on at the next hearing is the benchmarking data that we are doing. We are doing a benchmark process over the next two years in terms of looking at the number of police call-outs, court information and family violence service providers, so we will have more information on that in the future.

In this budget we have announced a \$24.7 million additional investment to address family violence, and this adds on to the spending that we have already committed to family violence over the last few years. This time we are really focusing on prevention. As I say, I think we have had a good response in terms of how we are responding to family violence, but this is a new way of looking at family violence in terms of prevention, and we have tried to look at the critical system gaps and provide more intensive case management for women and children. We have used \$4.3 million to provide extended crisis response, to expand the intensive case management for women and children and to target those at highest risk. We have also allocated \$4.2 million to help connect agencies, such as family violence service counselling and refuges, with police and with courts to better support victims of family violence. In addition we have allocated another \$6.1 million over four years to increase the accountability of the perpetrators of family violence and to increase access to men's behavioural change programs, to increase intensive case management and also to expand the existing phone line for men who use violence.

Also in the budget there are funds to support a communication strategy, and that is very much underpinning the introduction of the new family violence act which will be introduced later this year. That strategy will be developed

by the department over the next few months in terms of what will be specifically used; whether it be radio ads, print media or TV is still to be determined, but we have a budget of \$1.5 million which we will develop and spend in the best way possible to promote people's understanding of the new act when it comes into effect. Also, we are increasing our focus on indigenous family violence, with \$8 million focused on specific investment for indigenous family violence, which really supports our 10-year plan on indigenous family violence. So the priorities for this year are to continue supporting the celebrations of the centenary and making sure as many as possible know what we are celebrating and involve people in that celebration. We will be rolling out the financial literacy program. In fact one of the first ones has already been held, and there is the development of a new policy framework and a new safety strategy will be developed over this year. I will leave it at that.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. You mentioned Ms Munt in your presentation, so I will hand over to her.

Ms MUNT — I would like to say that I am very proud to be a woman MP asking the minister for women a question about the centenary of suffrage in the centenary year. I think they would have been very pleased to have been a fly on the wall in this room today. It is worthwhile reminding all young women how far we have come in the last 100 years.

The CHAIR — I think we need a photo of a woman in this room as well. It might be a good idea.

Ms MORAND — That is a very good point, Chair.

The CHAIR — Perhaps it should be recommended to the President and the Clerk of the upper house.

Ms MUNT — Absolutely! I have had a ride on the purple tram, which was very good. What else is happening to celebrate the centenary of suffrage so the whole community can be part of this very special year?

Ms MORAND — It is a special year, and I am very lucky to be the minister in this centenary year. I think you are right. There might be still a few ghosts around this place of people who did not support women being provided with the vote. There may even still be a few members in the current Parliament who are not completely supportive of women's rights in all aspects. It took 20 years and 17 bills for the Suffrage Bill to finally pass in November 1908. As I have been talking to a whole lot of different people across Victoria about celebrating the centenary, it is also worth considering how far we have come in that 100 years and then how far there still is to go. One statistic which always is of interest to members — I do not know if it will interest members here today; maybe they already know — is that Pauline Toner was made the first minister in 1982. When she was elected in 1979 there had only been five women in Parliament before Pauline Toner came into Parliament in 1979, so it is really only in the last 20 or 30 years that women have really had a critical mass in participation in Parliament.

Ms MUNT — Joan Kirner once told me a story that, when she was first elected, there was no women's toilet. They said, 'It is too hard to get a women's toilet', so she said, 'That is fine. I will just use the men's toilet until you find me one', and it took two weeks. So there was not even a women's toilet!

Ms MORAND — As you said, the launch happened in February, and I hope members have seen the colourful tram that is going around the city circle. We are very happy to get some support from Yarra Trams to support that. It has some of the original suffragists on the side of the tram, like Vida Goldstein. In addition we have launched a grants program. The grants program has been distributed. There are grants totalling \$354 000 to 51 community groups across metro Melbourne and also many groups in rural and regional Victoria as well. There is a range of different activities, a great diversity of activities and a great program, which I invite members to have a look at on the women's Victoria website.

We also want to encourage women to sign calico banners that are circulating Victoria in memory of the monster petition that was signed in 1891 by 30 000 people supporting women's right to gain the vote. That petition was tabled in Parliament in 1891, and it was 200 metres long — in fact I have seen the petition. This petition is not a replica, but it is in memory of the suffragists' petition, and we are circulating it as much as possible and hoping to get 30 000 signatures on it supporting ongoing support for women's equal rights.

As well, curriculum materials are going to be introduced for all upper primary and secondary students in Victorian schools, and we are going to schedule the launch in July to ensure that children at school know more about the history of the centennial of suffrage. Finally, the public sculpture will be unveiled in November. It depicts the

original monster petition, and that is going to be unveiled as part of the open day, which will coincide with the celebration of the centenary in November this year.

Ms MUNT — Thank you. Sounds good to me.

Mr WELLS — Minister, can I just clarify one point before I ask my question. Does the new family violence act include the interim intervention orders? Is that the main part behind it — the new interim intervention orders?

Ms MORAND — Yes. It reforms the system of family violence intervention orders.

Mr WELLS — Fine. Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 191, and the measures on ‘Women’s Safety Strategy delivered against performance target’. Last year in PAEC Minister Allan said that one of her priorities for 07–08 would be the evaluation of the Women’s Safety Strategy which ran from 2002 to 2007. I am wondering if that evaluation has been carried out. If so, what are the results and are they going to be made public?

The CHAIR — That is probably more an outcomes question.

Mr WELLS — I am happy to put in on notice.

The CHAIR — Maybe put that one on notice, if you like. It is more an outcomes question.

Ms MORAND — Yes. It has been evaluated, but did you want more information on the evaluation?

Mr WELLS — Yes. We wanted to know what the results were and when the results are going to be made public.

Ms MORAND — It was completed in December of last year, and it is going to be published on the website in the next few months.

Mr NOONAN — Minister, I am interested in the intervention programs for men and men’s behavioural change — an allocation of 6.1 million. It might be worth, if you can, talking about what those programs involve and whether there are any measurables in terms of the value of those programs minister speaking? They are provided by a range of different service providers, and I will ask the head of the department to assist me with this, but we know that there is a lot of repeat offending in terms of family violence, so it is about trying to target men who repeatedly use violence in the home, and assist them in changing their behaviour. But in terms of outcomes I might ask Rhonda if she can assist me with that.

Ms CUMBERLAND — It is probably important to realise that there are two kinds of intervention — some are mandated and some are voluntary — and essentially most of the new investment is going into voluntary programs. The emphasis on a voluntary program is important because someone who volunteers to participate is always thought to be someone who will be a more successful candidate. At this stage the way these programs are evaluated is by virtue of completion of the project; but essentially part of Victoria’s response in this area is to talk to the partner of the person involved and take into account the qualitative information that she will provide to see if there have been any changes in the behaviour at all. So it is a quantitative and a qualitative evaluation strategy. It is new science, if you like, not just in Victoria but around the world, and they are essentially the key indicators and measures.

Mr NOONAN — So the modelling comes from where, for this new measure?

Ms CUMBERLAND — Most of the work on men’s behaviour change comes from America and Canada.

Mr BARBER — Minister, I was just wondering when you and your group of ministers might eventually get around to doing a review of the Prostitution Control Act as was promised so many years ago?

Ms MORAND — I am not able to answer that because it is not in my portfolio.

The CHAIR — I am not sure you can ask — —

Mr BARBER — I am coming at it from the angle of family violence and the women’s safety strategy.

Ms MORAND — I am happy to take it on notice in terms of timing and whether that review is under way.

The CHAIR — Maybe you can ask the Attorney-General when he comes.

Ms MORAND — I think it is also under the Minister for Consumer Affairs as well.

The CHAIR — If you are talking about brothels it tends to fall into about three different areas. Prostitution control is more the Attorney General's area.

Mr BARBER — I am asking from the point of view of a women's safety strategy of course, which you are the leader on.

Ms MORAND — It is a fair question, and I am happy to give you some feedback on that.

Mr SCOTT — I would like to refer you to budget paper 3, page 279, and the line item 'Financial literacy'. Can you explain how the financial literacy program will roll out, and who will benefit from the program?

Ms MORAND — Thankyou for that question. We know it is a real problem in terms of women planning for their financial security in the future, and that their superannuation savings are generally much less than men's and the obvious reasons for that are lower participation rates in the workforce and the greater number of women who are in casual or part-time work, or who have lower wages generally. So generally they are poorly providing for their future.

In terms of the \$1 million from last year, we will have a Financial Literacy Month in September, and we will develop train the trainer programs through face-to-face workshops across the state, and the programs will be developed for specific target groups, understanding that different age demographic groups will have different needs and different ways of thinking about their economic futures. So they will be very much targeted to those age-specific groups and also indigenous groups and ethnic-specific training work shops.

We are really pleased with the progress we have been making in terms of the development of the material. The Women's Information Referral Exchange has a grant to train the facilitators across Victoria on the workshop materials, and the Queen Victoria Women's Centre is also to receive funding to assist the delivery of the workshop program, and that will include the Queen Victoria Women's Centre undertaking registration process, marketing and promoting the workshop program. It fulfils an election promise to deliver this over the next year.

The CHAIR — Are other organisations able to be involved? Is it basically just through the Queen Victoria centre?

Ms MORAND — Yes, other providers are involved too.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I want to bring you to the issue of the family violence bill 2008. I am wondering when that will be brought into Parliament. My understanding is that the law reform commission made recommendations to the Auditor-General in December 2005, which is two-and-a-half years ago; then on 13 August last year the Auditor-General promised the bill would be introduced in 2007. I am just wondering where we are up to with it.

Ms MORAND — The final draft of the bill was circulated last month. You have probably seen the draft of the family violence bill?

Mr HEALY — There has been a consultation draft which has been circulated widely to stakeholder groups. There has been a very extensive process of consultation for quite some time. It is not for me to say when the government will introduce it, but I would have thought later this year is a safe bet.

Ms MORAND — My best estimation would be later this year.

The CHAIR — It is included in the forward program for the beginning of the year. There is a page on it there.

Ms MORAND — Yes.

The CHAIR — Minister, how is the Queen Victoria Women's Centre going? We have talked here about the occupancy rate. Can you give us a progress report? It says 85 per cent occupancy rate, or greater than 85 per cent. Has it got some vacancies?

Ms MORAND — It is fully tenanted now, so we are really happy with it. I was there yesterday, launching the new Shilling Wall in commemoration of the shilling fund that established the hospital at the turn of the previous century, and there is a new program to establish a shilling wall for people who want to put women of significance in their lives — loved ones or other people who want a memory of specific women on the Shilling Wall. The first two panels were unveiled by myself and some other key women yesterday. So it is going very well.

The CHAIR — Having been born at the Queen Vic, I can relate to this. Who else has gone into the Queen Vic recently?

Ms MORAND — The most recent tenants?

The CHAIR — Do you have the tenants who fill it up?

Ms MORAND — I can tell you who they are: Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, BreaCan, Centre Against Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Victoria, Emily's List, Urcot, Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, Vita Natural Health, WIRE and the YWCA.

Mr WELLS — I remember last year we asked for the rental costs for Emily's List. For some reason we were not able to get that from the previous minister. Will that change under your guidance?

Ms MORAND — Obviously the rental is not something that is negotiated with my office. It is done by the Queen Victoria trust with the various tenants.

The CHAIR — The trust is independent; it is not a state body, is it? What is the arrangement?

Ms MORAND — There is a committee and a chair of the committee. They are responsible — —

The CHAIR — Do they do an annual report to Parliament? Is that part of the — —

Ms MORAND — Yes.

Mr HEALY — It was established by statute.

The CHAIR — Theoretically the request can be passed on to them through your portfolio.

Ms MORAND — I think there is probably financial information in the annual report.

The CHAIR — If there are no other questions, I thank you, Minister, and officers for your presentation today. I thank you for your earlier presentation and for the one on women's affairs. There are a number of issues to be followed up, and requests for information will be provided in writing at a later date. We would appreciate it if they could be provided within 30 days.

Committee adjourned.