

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2010–11

Melbourne — 20 May 2010

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Witnesses

Ms M. Morand, Minister for Women's Affairs,

Mr J. McIsaac, Acting Deputy Secretary, People and Community Advocacy,

Ms J. McCabe, Director, Office of Women's Policy, and

Ms R. Green, Manager, Family Violence, Department of Planning and Community Development.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2010–10 budget estimates for the portfolio of women’s affairs. On behalf of the committee I welcome Ms Maxine Morand, MP, Minister for Women’s Affairs; Mr James McIsaac, acting deputy secretary, people and community advocacy; Ms Jill McCabe, director, office of women’s policy; and Ms Rachael Green, manager, family violence, Department of Planning and Community Development. I will call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the women’s affairs portfolio.

Ms MORAND — Thank you very much for the opportunity to present on my portfolio of women’s affairs. It has been a very busy 12 months in that portfolio, and some of the priorities have been focused on women’s safety, women’s leadership and women’s economic independence.

Overheads shown.

Ms MORAND — In terms of women’s leadership we held a very successful Premier’s Women’s Summit in September last year which was attended by over 200 people. We heard from some fantastic speakers including Dr Anne Summers, Helen Szoke from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, and private sector organisations such as Deloitte and also Geoff Allen, the chair of the Committee for Economic Development of Australia.

The highlight in the last 12 months has been the release of *A Right to Respect — Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women*, a 10-year plan which I released with the Premier and the Attorney-General on White Ribbon Day in November last year. We have also continued the successful rollout of the financial literacy seminars. We held 31 sessions last year, attended by nearly 940 women.

As to women’s safety there has been a lot of work done. We have continued to deliver the family violence risk assessment and risk management framework, and that has been nationally recognised in its aims to better identify and respond to victims of family violence. It provides for a consistent evidence-based response for victims of family violence.

We have also continued the rollout of our communications campaign that Victorian has had enough — the Enough campaign. It has now been extended into 2010 through a partnership with Netball Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League, and as I mentioned a Right to Respect was launched last year.

Specifically the total funding in the budget for preventing violence against women was \$16.8 million; \$14.1 million of that is to implement the first phase of a Right to Respect, which is our 10-year plan to prevent violence against women. Also \$2.7 million over three years has been allocated to rolling out more family violence risk assessment training, \$180 000 to improve women’s participation on boards and committees, which is a high priority for me personally, and \$100 000 to continue the successful financial literacy programs. In particular we are going to focus on indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Specifically there is a range of different examples of how we are going to extend current projects that are already under way with the \$14 million — for example, supporting local agencies to coordinate and drive whole-of-community projects and building on work undertaken by councils such as Maribyrnong and Darebin; an extension of the Respectful Relationships in schools demonstration project, which is currently being trialled by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in partnership with CASA House; working with sporting codes to develop and implement programs to build environments that are safe and inclusive of women; supporting workplaces and developing environments that are safe and inclusive of women as well; and encouraging women’s participation and leadership. An example is supporting the development of positive workplace strategies through human resources and industrial relations policies that are gender equitable and recognise women’s equal participation, development, progression and leadership in workplaces.

Of course the media is a very important part of the strategy. An example is supporting media awards for reporting on violence against women and recognising the important role that media plays in shaping community attitudes.

A common risk-assessment framework is \$2.7 million over three years. It builds on our successful training that we have already done with specialist family violence workers. The additional funding will provide for a range

of training with specialist family violence services, magistrates courts, housing and homelessness services, counselling, sexual assault and child protection.

Finally, \$100 000 for the financial literacy seminars to target specifically the groups that I have mentioned. The \$180 000 in this year's budget will seek to increase the pool of women available for participation in private sector boards. We will be providing training to help women become board ready. We will work in partnership with key organisations such as AICD and women's participation in local government to deliver information programs and to promote and encourage more women to participate in leadership opportunities. I can leave it there.

The CHAIR — Can you briefly tell us what plans and strategies you have to underpin your budget and any changes to last year?

Ms MORAND — Our family violence reforms are very much building on the extensive work that was commissioned by government. We commissioned VicHealth to do some research for us. Really they have done a fantastic job in providing the research that backs up the plan. What that research found is that the family violence continues to be a significant problem in our community with intimate partner violence being the leading contributor to ill health, disability and death for Victorian women aged between 15 and 44, and it found that 77 per cent of family violence victims are women and girls.

In responding to family violence, VicHealth has done work in helping us develop the family violence A Right to Respect. We have also had very significant and important input from Domestic Violence Victoria, Victoria Police, CASA, child protection and the Federation of Community Legal Services.

The participation of women in leadership positions is very much responding to the fact that women continue to be underrepresented in positions of leadership in our community, particularly underrepresented in private sector boards. The government has been successful in improving the number of women who are appointed to our boards and statutory authorities. We have moved from 31 per cent to 41 per cent and have last year set a new target of 50 per cent of new appointments to government boards and authorities must be women.

Finally, financial literacy: the additional funding was sought because the evaluation of the program that has been under way has been very successful.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 165, the total output costs for the women's policy unit. The website for the Office of Women's Policy listed earlier this year a calendar of community events. As part of the 2010 International Women's Day, two of these events were actually for Emily's List, on 8 and 17 March. Why was the Labor Party fundraising arm listed as a community event on a government website and will the minister allow the listing of National or Green party or Liberal Party women's sections in the events in 2010–11, and how much funding does your department give Emily's List in grants?

The CHAIR — Minister, as it relates to the budget.

Ms MORAND — I think this question is based on a bit of envy from the Liberal Party, considering the poor number of women that you have recruited into the parliamentary party.

Mr WELLS — That is a disgraceful thing to say. This is a legitimate question. What is your problem with answering this question?

Ms MORAND — What is your problem about Emily's List?

The CHAIR — Without assistance, Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS — I am asking you a legitimate question.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, through the Chair, please. The minister, to answer the question as it is presented, without provoking members of the committee. Of course, that should be mutually done, in terms of showing respect for each other.

Ms MORAND — There is a range of organisations that are funded through the grants program, Emily's List not being one of them. Emily's List is also a tenant in the Queen Victoria centre. I would expect a question on that shortly from you.

The CHAIR — In terms of the question asked, have you got anything else to add?

Ms MORAND — No.

Mr WELLS — Hang on, you have not answered any part of it.

Ms MORAND — The question was: why give Emily's List money as another community organisation?

Mr WELLS — No. I asked two parts of the question.

The CHAIR — I know what you asked them. Let me deal with it.

Mr WELLS — You will deal with it, because this is embarrassing.

The CHAIR — Let me deal with it, without the commentary, thank you very much. The question was asked in regard to the material going up on the website in the budget estimates period from a range of community groups, including Emily's List. That was one part.

Ms MORAND — I have just been informed that that website listed events that were being undertaken as part of International Women's Day, but it was not funded by the government. I can look into it and see if there is any further information I can provide, but Emily's List is not funded by the Victorian government. As I have been informed, it was on the website to notify people of events that were taking place, that being one of them, an event that Emily's List was conducting, but it was not funded by the government.

The CHAIR — The ability to provide information in regard to other women's organisations is a matter of them approaching the office, is it, or what? That was the purport of the question.

Ms MORAND — We do not fund women's organisations directly. We funded leadership grants recently, which were 20 grants totalling \$250 000. That was based on a competitive grant application process. It was \$500 000 over two years — \$250 000 in this current financial year.

Ms GRALEY — Minister, I would like to talk about 'A Right to Respect — Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women', which is in the budget papers and which you spoke a little about in your presentation. I would like you to outline to the committee how the government will be working with local government in the forward estimates period to prevent violence against women through the right to respect plan.

Ms MORAND — Local government is a really key partner in our broad agenda in preventing violence against women, and there have been some great successes that we would like to build on. There are a couple of great examples that I can provide you with, one being the Maribyrnong City Council, which has developed a Respect and Equity project, and that was done with VicHealth funding. It sounds like you are familiar with it. It has just been fantastic. The first stage has been to integrate prevention of violence against women into the core business of council and getting prevention into council action plans. They have also built a team of male ambassadors as white ribbon ambassadors and they have held lots of different forums and events. The second stage is about capacity building of community groups and organisations for them to be able to undertake prevention activities.

They partnered with Women's Health West and they have developed a training program for local workplaces and also for community organisations. Both organisations and primary-care partnerships are now developing a Western metro subregion strategy for the prevention of violence against women, and that includes initiatives such as training professionals in associated agencies.

Also I would like to mention Darebin council because they have also been a lead council in the work they have done in violence against women as well. One of the projects is the northern interfaith project, which is another project that was funded by VicHealth, and in fact I launched that last year. It really builds on the collaboration of faith leaders in the community and it involves training and organisation activities with the faith leaders and

communities to challenge attitudes and develop policies and programs that foster respectful relationships and violence-free relationships, and resources have been produced as part of that program.

Darebin also funded a dedicated prevention of violence against women officer to try and mainstream prevention activities right across all the council's programs. A new 12-month local government networking and capacity-building project is also being funded by VicHealth with Darebin. On 26 August this year I will be convening, with the Minister for Local Government, the inaugural local government preventing violence against women conference. This we hope will showcase the great work that is already being undertaken by councils like Maribyrnong and Darebin and encourage other councils to adopt the sort of violence-prevention activities that these councils have really championed. I invite you to participate on 26 August.

Dr SYKES — Minister, my question relates to improving female representation on boards, and I refer you to budget paper 3, pages 329 and 333. Just while you are finding that, I will indicate that I have got some form on this matter. Back in 1981, when I was appointed coach of the Benalla Football Club, my first job was to recruit members to the Benalla Football Club board and I recruited two ladies, one who was an artist and ballet teacher, Annette Collaretti, and another lady called Vi Caddy, who was a successful local businesswoman. My question, Minister, is: we know that the Victorian Women's Register has 2000 women registered, but does the minister have any figures on the number of women from this register actually obtaining board positions, and which boards? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

The CHAIR — Maybe you can give us a general reply and the details on notice.

Ms MORAND — First of all, thank you for the question and congratulations on your form in supporting women into leadership positions. The women's register, as you rightly point out, has 2000 women on it. We have just completed an upgrade of the register where we have asked all existing women on the register to refresh all the information that is provided, because some of them have been on the register for quite a long time. In doing that, we are then going to allow that register to be accessible to the private sector, because at the moment the Diversity Register is always being used just for government departments, to find women to serve on our own boards and statutory authorities. The upgrade that we have just finished — and it has gone live just a week or so ago — means that it is another avenue that we hope will be accessed by the private sector. Sometimes the private sector will say, 'We haven't been able to find suitable women', but we have a significant range of women with skills and relevant background to serve on boards.

In specific answer to your question, we are doing that work because we have not to date had a good enough sense. We do know, obviously, of individual women who have been found through the register and who are now serving on government boards, but in terms of really accurate empirical information on the number that have been recruited as a result of the Diversity Register, we will certainly be doing that prospectively, but we have not got very detailed information on how many women from the register, which has been going I think 15 years, have actually been recruited from being on the register.

The CHAIR — Thank you. If you have any further information, if you could provide that to the committee.

Mr SCOTT — Could you please explain to me how the \$14.1 million in the budget for A Right to Respect — Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women will be applied in schools through the respectful relationships program?

Ms MORAND — What we are doing with the right to respect relationships in schools is we are currently undertaking some demonstration projects and they are working with CASA House and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The schools included are two in the southern and two in the metro regions. Stage 1 of the demonstration project is being completed this month. It will involve consultation with relevant agencies, obviously the schools and education staff, and it will result in the development of prevention of gender-based violence models for schools, including a whole-of-school approach and leadership commitment, school reference groups, professional learning for teachers and support staff, classroom materials and support, feedback, debriefing and, most importantly, evaluation.

In speaking to CASA House recently, what they stressed was that the models that will be developed will be quite unique to the individual school communities. They are keen to have a very thorough evaluation of the demonstration project. It might be that a preferred model is developed, but it also might be that a range of different models are developed that could be adopted by different schools for different community backgrounds.

It is also important that the work in the school is complemented by community-based prevention activities, which is why the approach that we are taking is in schools. Obviously students go to sporting clubs, so the sporting clubs are also adopting the Right to Respect agenda and workplaces, through local government and community health services and also in the media. You have to have a consistent message so that, whatever the location, the message is to reject disrespectful and aggressive attitudes towards women. We hope that by having it in all those different settings it will have a significant outcome.

Ms PENNICUIK — Minister, I refer to your goal of 50 per cent of women on boards and the \$180 000 that you have put towards that. You mentioned that representation of women on boards and in government departments and statutory authorities has gone from 31 to 41 per cent. Another area that I think is important — and I am not sure whether you pay attention to it or how much attention you are paying to it — is in terms of companies that work with government on government tenders or government projects. Does the department or do you use that criteria as to whether they have women in leadership roles?

The other issue that I think is really important is, if you look at pages 369 and 370 of the budget papers, which is ‘Average nominal weekly earnings of Victorians’ and ‘Average real weekly earnings of Victorians’, you can still see that women are tracking about 20 per cent below men. In fact in the last year it seems that men have kicked up a bit and women have kicked down a bit. Given your goal is to close that gap, is it a requirement that companies that tender for government services have a pay equity audit? Does the government take that into account in its tendering process? It seems to me that would be a way to increase those two goals that you have in your portfolio.

Ms MORAND — The simple answer to the question is no, there is not a requirement for procurement or assessment in giving contracts.

Ms PENNICUIK — I thought that might be it. If no, why not?

Ms MORAND — But there is a lot of work going on through the Australian Stock Exchange and through the Australian Institute of Company Directors in promoting women into leadership roles and also a recommendation to report in annual reports a diversity report. I think that is definitely a move in the right direction, but we do not require that specifically, no.

Ms PENNICUIK — If not, why not, though, Minister?

The CHAIR — We may have time for two more quick questions.

Mr NOONAN — I think in your overheads you referenced the women’s leadership program. I might be wrong there. Was there a slide on the women’s leadership program? There was. I wonder whether you can advise the committee what the government is doing over the forward estimates to promote more women in leadership positions through the leadership program?

Ms MORAND — There are two facets to women in leadership. Clearly the one that I have already outlined is through appointing more women to government boards and statutory authorities to give women the opportunity to have board experience. In that way we hope that more women, from having board experience on government boards, will have the opportunity to serve on a range of other boards, including in the private sector and the ASX top 200 boards.

Leadership also starts at the community level, and it is a complex issue in terms of the barriers that women confront in their opportunities for leadership in their community. What we would like to do is support more women in leadership opportunities actually in their community and via that leading to greater opportunities in larger organisations.

A total of \$500 000 in leadership grants has been announced, \$250 000 in this current year and another \$250 000 in the next budget year. The grants program is designed around increasing women’s capacity to participate in decision making, increasing women’s opportunity for leadership, trying to increase the diversity of women in our community who are able to participate in leadership opportunities, and promoting the achievements of women in leadership opportunities, whether it is in their local communities, local government or in more senior positions, in that way encouraging other women to put themselves forward for leadership opportunities.

Some of the examples are through local government. I will give the example of the City of Casey. It is called Casey's Women's Cultural Link-Up. It will place women from established and emerging communities into mentoring relationships and enable women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to build better leadership capacity, and that will in turn benefit their communities and the broader community. It is in partnership with the City of Casey, the south-east migrant resource centre and the local chapter of the Soroptimists, which many people will be familiar with. I think it is a great example of a partnership between a range of communities that have as their important goal improving the opportunity and encouraging women to participate in leadership opportunities that exist in their community.

The CHAIR — We will have a final question from Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I refer you to of budget paper 3, pages 329 and 333. You have mentioned on a number of occasions A Right to Respect — Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010–2020. There has been an enormous amount of publicity around this program and I note that it was first announced in November 2009 and was based on a VicHealth report of 2007. Why is the bulk of the \$14.1 million being spent in the later years, particularly in 2012–13, and not in 2010–11?

Ms MORAND — I have had that discussion with the head of Women's Health Victoria, talking about why you would scale it up. The simple answer is that you really need to establish and evaluate what works. The programs that we will run out in the first year or so will establish the sort of programs that we think we can build on. It was very much supported by the women's health agencies. They recognise that they want to see the program rolled out over time because in that way you make sure that the money you are investing in this important program is the best possible way you can spend that money. That means doing a proper evaluation of the programs that are currently running and the ones that we will fund further in the first one to two financial years.

The CHAIR — That concludes consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolios of children and early childhood development and women's affairs. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. Where questions were taking on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to those matters be provided within 30 days. Thank you, Minister.

Witnesses withdrew.