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**Navigating the crisis:  
Excessively busy  
period as COVID-19  
dominates discourse  
inside and outside of  
Parliament**

Members' Statements

## Welcome.

Firstly, I hope that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy, and that you are receiving the support that you need to navigate through these difficult times. It is more important than ever that we treat one another with kindness.

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted and will continue to impact every aspect of our lives. This has very much been reflected in my work both in and out of Parliament these past weeks and months. There has been much to say, question, respond to and do in almost all of my portfolio areas.

My team and I have been working at full capacity while adjusting to working remotely. We have been keeping up regular contact with

stakeholders; responding quickly to the roll-out of Government measures; preparing for and debating emergency legislation; and ensuring everyone who contacts my office receives a timely response, on COVID-19 and other matters.

Parliament was called to return multiple times during the parliamentary recess to debate a suite of bills designed to enable the Government and its agencies to respond to the crisis. We debated five COVID-19 related bills in the first session and three COVID-19 related bills in the second session.

I acknowledge the urgency with which the Parliament needed to address the issues brought before it, but debating bills with sometimes just hours' notice was at odds with my usual practice of consulting widely and considering bills' implications in great detail.

I made sure to make mention during each of my contributions that our abilities as Parliamentarians to scrutinise legislation had been severely truncated. Again, while I supported the bills in principle, I was concerned by some of the new mechanisms put in place, particularly around transparency and accountability.

Aside from my work relating to COVID-19, all of the things I was doing before the crisis started have also continued. It has been an excessively busy period.

On a separate note, pre-selection fell during this tumultuous time. And I am very happy that I was selected to run for election again in 2021. I very much hope to continue to represent the Greens for North Metro in the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament.

# COVID-19 responses

## Community Sector funding

As the crisis deepened in mid-March, I called on the Government to ensure it provided adequate financial support for the community sector. It is more important than ever that the sector continue to provide support for people who are vulnerable. I reminded the Government that the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis was just one aspect which needed to be considered as part of its response to the pandemic, because mental health and crisis-support need is likely to grow, as people lose jobs and self-isolate.

## Frontline workers must have PPE

Within the first month I was very concerned to hear reports that employees providing essential personal care to seniors and people with disability were not being provided with face masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE). Without this equipment, these workers risk infection for themselves and for the people they are caring for. I called on the Government to ensure PPE was available to people working in care homes and other residential facilities.

## Concerns for schools

As the COVID-19 crisis worsened in late March, I backed the SSTUWA in their call for the Government to immediately close schools to the majority of students. At the time, testing regimes only included people who had returned from overseas and were showing symptoms. International data was showing school closures were necessary to protect the whole community with social distancing very difficult for students and staff in crowded classrooms – and impossible for

those working in education support. At the very least, I told the Government, vulnerable staff must be able to take immediate leave. As our schools slowly reopen I will continue to monitor the situation closely.

## TAFE must go online

Following the announcement on 26 March that the Government would close schools to most students ahead of the Easter holidays, I received much concern from TAFE lecturers and students as to whether they would also be able to move TAFE learning online.

I told the Government of these concerns and that same day a case of suspected coronavirus was detected at Armadale TAFE. The calls came loud and fast for TAFES to temporarily close to allow lecturers to prepare online resources for use in Term 2.

I reminded the Government of the need to ensure TAFE students were not disadvantaged in their studies, particularly as placement opportunities quickly became non-existent. After the pandemic, it will be more important than ever that we have a well-functioning TAFE system, which is producing properly trained people.

## Mental Health services

I have called on the Government to ensure community-managed mental health services are adequately resourced to meet the expected increase in need during the COVID-19 crisis. This is of course a worrying time for everyone, but particularly for those with acute and ongoing mental health conditions. Self-isolation is an added risk factor for many vulnerable Western Australians. They must be able to access support if and when they need it.

Despite the 10-Year WA Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services Plan setting out the need to realign our mental health services towards better

community care, these services remain underfunded. I urge the Government to view its response to the current crisis as an opportunity to transform our mental health service. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we keep people out of hospitals by providing better community support.

## Homelessness need grows

Following reports that homelessness services were being affected by the pandemic, I questioned the Government about its intentions for supporting frontline service delivery and ensuring that this continued throughout the crisis. I was dismayed to learn that at least one youth accommodation service had reduced its service due to staff shortages as staff members self-isolated.

I quizzed the Government about whether appropriate hygiene products would be made available to services working with people who are homeless. I was also dismayed to hear reports of rough sleepers being issued move-on notices during the crisis. I am continuing to advocate around the issue of homelessness as a priority amid reports that numbers of rough sleepers are actually on the increase.

## Justice must be provided

By 25 March, WA was lagging worryingly behind other Australian jurisdictions in its measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the justice system. Before Parliament resumed in early April, I was calling on the Government to ensure provisions were made in its upcoming COVID-19 emergency legislation to increase capacity for judge-alone trials, which are not generally commonplace in WA.

I was also concerned when I learned that people on remand appearing by video-link were not always receiving the support that they needed. I reminded the Government to ensure checks and balances were still in place and justice was still provided, despite the quickly changing situation.

## Self-isolation adds to burden for people experiencing FDV

I emphasised in late March that it was crucial the Government ensure family and domestic violence (FDV) services were adequately funded to provide support to survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the crisis, I had already been hearing reports of increased need, as self-isolation and job losses began to impact families. Evidence from China showed that instances of FDV increased during lockdown.

Worryingly, isolation means fewer opportunities for survivors to seek help. I urged the Government to ensure funding was provided to allow people to stay safe in their homes; for more crisis accommodation, and to enhance service providers' ability to provide counselling and other services remotely.

In April, I supported the Government's Family Violence Legislation Reform (COVID-19 response) Bill 2020, which covers a number of reforms to the Restraining Orders Act, Sentencing Act, and Bail Act. Significant reforms include the doubling of the limitation period for court proceedings for breaches of family violence restraining orders, restraining orders and police orders, and the ability for courts to make interim orders *ex-parte*.

Also during this period, in the lead-up to the start of the coronavirus pandemic, I spoke on a motion recognising the continued toll of family and domestic violence on women, men and children across the state. This came just days after the devastating murder of Hannah Clarke and her three children in Queensland. I reiterated my concerns about the inadequate justice response to family and domestic violence incidents.



At the launch of the WAM Fair Play report with Audience Development Officer Em Burrows\*



At the IWD hosted by WACOSS, with UnitingCare West CEO Amanda Hunt\*



I joined Greens members at the Unions WA IWD rally, where I sang a rendition of 'I am Woman' with the wonderful Android Sisters\*

\*Events attended just before the introduction of social distancing measures

## Release refugees and asylum seekers now

I called on the Federal Government on 30 March to immediately release refugees and asylum seekers from Manus and PNG, as well as from overcrowded WA detention centres, to protect them against coronavirus. I backed calls from the Refugee Council of Australia for the Federal Government to ensure all refugees and asylum seekers have access to the same financial and other supports as the wider Australian community. I urged the Federal Government to ensure this group has access to Medicare, and reminded the McGowan Government of its responsibility to provide access to education, family and domestic violence support and other services. Many refugees and asylum seekers come from backgrounds of trauma, and they are already living with uncertainty. We must ensure that we are upholding our legal and moral responsibility to protect them as best we can from the virus' health and economic consequences.

## Keep fine-defaulters out of prison

At the beginning of April, I called on the Government to stop issuing Warrants of Commitment (WOCs) and suspend Work and Development Order (WDO) requirements to ensure no Western Australians are sent to prison for fine default during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A fines enforcement reform bill has passed the Legislative Assembly but not yet been debated in the Legislative Council. The Government clearly intends to stop this appalling practice and right now WA should be following the lead of other states and getting low-risk prisoners out of prisons, not sending more people in.

The Government must stop issuing WOCs for fine default, to ensure that we are not adding to the burden for people who are already vulnerable, particularly as they deal with the coronavirus pandemic. I am particularly concerned for women during this crisis, who may not reach out for help in family and domestic violence situations for fear of being arrested and sent to prison themselves for fine default.

**NO ONE SHOULD  
GO TO PRISON  
FOR BEING UNABLE  
TO PAY A FINE.**

*ESPECIALLY NOT DURING A HEALTH CRISIS!*

## Mixed messages for public sector

On 6 April, I called on the Government to provide clear direction to the public sector on how workers should perform their roles during the pandemic. I was concerned to learn workers were still being told to attend work, despite there being options to work from home. While I recognise that working from home is not always possible, I have heard many workers have been obliged to come into work unnecessarily. I told the Government I shared the concerns of the CPSU/CSA that the public sector had not received clear direction.

## Solutions needed to contain spread of COVID-19 among WA prison populations

I asked the Government in mid-March to consider releasing low-risk prisoners from WA prisons, to reduce the risk of any outbreaks of coronavirus. In other states and countries, the authorities took note of the World Health Organisation's research findings that infectious diseases are likely to spread among prisoners at 100 times the rate of the general population. Prisoner

health outcomes are already worse than in the community on the whole and I was particularly concerned about the health of prisoners at Hakea after I revealed through questions in Parliament that several health-related roles were vacant.

I have also been contacted by a number of community members who have concerns about a lack of necessary equipment in prisons like hand sanitiser, and about their

access to virtual visits and phone calls. Inmates' families have told me about rumours of illness within prisons, and their distrust of prison management. I have questioned the Government about a number of issues since the crisis hit – and also written to the Inspector for Custodial Services asking him to investigate. The Government must urgently implement solutions for prisons.

## Progress slow after birth at Bandyup

Before the COVID-19 crisis started, I had been asking questions of the Government about its progress in implementing recommendations made in the Inspector of Custodial Services' (OICS) December 2018 report, The Birth at Bandyup Women's Prison in March 2018. That a vulnerable woman gave birth alone in a cell rightly shocked the community. Both mother and baby were placed at unnecessary risk - and OICS made some damning findings, including that staff were slow to act, and that record keeping was poor and flawed. My questions on notice have revealed that, more than two years on, almost a quarter (22.7%) of staff members have still not received trauma-informed training. The Government committed to this training in response to the OICS recommendation that a culture change was needed among staff, to better respond to distress. The Government would not provide a direct answer to my question about how many audits of cell-call logs had been carried out.

## Corrective Services complaints reflect wider issues in prisons

My questions on notice revealed that the Department of Corrective Services' complaints management system does not record whether complainants were satisfied with the outcomes of their complaints nor record the number of complaints which were closed and then re-opened. The Department received 4,344 complaints in 2018-19, with the majority (16.3%) relating to sentence management. People also complained about communication; gratuities and private cash; visits; constructive activity; property; offender incidents and charges; and facilities. This shows that there are many areas for improvement within the Corrective Services system.

# Transparency and accountability crucial now and after COVID-19 pandemic

Members of Parliament were called to return from mid-term recess multiple times to debate the Government's suite of COVID-19 emergency response bills. Understandably, debates were fast-tracked to ensure a speedy response to the crisis, however this meant that debate regarding the transparency and accountability issues these Bills was severely truncated.

The Government's Emergency Management Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020, which compels members of the community to comply with directions and, as a result, provides enormous discretionary powers to police was one of my concerns. This is not the sort of bill the Greens would support under normal circumstances. The Greens

have a long history of advocating for our civil liberties. In this unprecedented situation, the ultimate liberty is the liberty to remain alive and I recognise that this bill, which punishes those disobeying quarantine directions, is needed ultimately to ensure the health and survival of people who are vulnerable. This is the dilemma we are all facing.

I raised concerns about members of the community unintentionally breaching directions, in cases where they may not be up to date with ever-changing rules. I was also very concerned about the Government's push to make the new laws retrospective. Worryingly, a sunset clause of 12 months existed on only one section of this bill. While most police officers are doing the right thing, I am alarmed about the potential for the over-step of powers, as we have seen in NSW, and about its potential impact on people who are vulnerable.

Changes to the Local Government Act (COVID-19 Response) Amendment Bill

2020 are intended to enable the Minister to suspend elements of the Local Government Act that require certain actions (such as elections) to be done in specified ways and specified timeframes.

Again, while I recognise the need for greater flexibility regarding statutory deadlines and such matters, the Bill provided a great deal of discretionary power to the Minister and to individual



Raising my concerns during debate

councils, including the ability of the council to suspend any of their local laws.

I raised a number of concerns during debate on the bill, including the recent raft of changes to Local Government Regulations and to the Planning and Development (Local Planning Scheme) Regulations designed to assist in the local economy surviving and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.

The Minister for Planning now has the power to grant exemptions to planning requirements, including the requirement for approval; conditions on existing approvals; permissibility of land use; and requirements around consultation, advertising, applications and time limits. Members of the community were already concerned about a letter the Minister for Planning had sent to Local Governments, asking them to fast-track 'non-controversial' development proposals. These powers to potentially support developments that do not comply with Local Planning Schemes

has many community groups deeply concerned.

These extraordinary powers are at odds with the processes of good planning and I sincerely hope the Minister does not push through projects that do not align with community expectations.

Changes to a number of Local Government regulations also raise questions about accountability and transparency, particularly around spending. This is worrying, particularly for those communities where there is a history of distrust in Local Government decision making processes. It is absolutely crucial that if we are going to remove elements of participation, accountability and transparency, that a solid plan exists to put these back into place, once the crisis subsides.

Furthermore, I supported in principle the Lotteries Commission Amendment (COVID-19 response) Bill 2020, though I was compelled to put forward amendments to ensure improved transparency with activities relating to the Government's \$159 million COVID-19 Relief Fund. The bill widens the criteria for organisations eligible for Lotterywest grants, to include public authorities such as Ministers, public sector agencies, Local Governments and statutory bodies. The Act intends to provide hardship relief to not-for-profit groups across the sport, arts and community sectors. While Lotterywest has an excellent reputation for its work, and is a trusted agency, I held concerns about the bill's reporting requirements in its unamended form. I put forward an amendment, which was supported by the House, requiring eligible organisations AND public authorities to disclose exactly where relief fund money is going, and for what purpose.

# Animal Welfare update

WA animal shelters that care for, foster and rehome companion animals are facing anxious times ahead. Fundraising activities, an essential part of all shelters' core business, have been smashed by the necessary cancellation of many



Pebbles happy as I work from home

fundraising opportunities and events. To compound this issue, many of the volunteers who care for animals have had to self-isolate and step back from volunteering due to age and health concerns. In the meantime a number

of organisations have raised concerns that the Government has not yet confirmed they are even providing an essential service.

In March I questioned the Government over their **response to the shocking animal abuse** recently revealed on WA cattle stations. Despite the cruelty and appalling animal husbandry practices shown, the Government was unable to prosecute anyone, as a two year statute of limitations had passed.

I will continue to push the Government to **regulate the Animal Welfare Standards** and Guidelines for Cattle that were agreed nationally in 2016 as quickly as possible. While the Minister promised to "act immediately" to **enforce the use of pain relief** for procedures such as castration and dehorning on all animals over six months of age, I question why this doesn't apply to younger animals. Clearly our animal cruelty laws need updating. The need to maintain **community confidence in the animal welfare practices** of WA's primary producers emerged as a key theme in my submission to the **Animal Welfare and Trespass Legislation Amendment Bill 2020**. I strongly support an improved regulatory regime that will permit proactive inspections of abattoirs, knackereries and other defined



Lulu wonders why I've suddenly invaded her house

places. These proposed powers are appropriate, proportionate and overdue, but to be a real deterrent, they must include all places where animals are born and raised, especially pastoral leases. The RSPCA have identified **other shortcomings with the bill**, such as "designated inspectors" only able to be drawn from DPIRD ranks. This clearly needs to be changed to permit the Society, whose job it is to investigate animal cruelty, to do their job. I will be pushing to ensure that the legislation reflects these vital concerns. The Government **must guarantee support** for these organisations at the frontline running the rescues, adoption facilities and shelters to ensure they can keep their doors open and their programs running.

## Public Housing evictions must cease during crisis

As it became clear in mid-March that the coronavirus pandemic was going to affect every aspect of our lives, I called on the Government to immediately halt public housing evictions, to match the provisions being made for private renters during the pandemic I continue to be contacted regularly by tenants facing imminent eviction. I have spoken in Parliament on a number of occasions and regularly question the Government about the policy of evicting people with mental health issues, often because of breaches related to property standards and inspection issues.

This is a particular issue for tenants who have hoarding disorder. It also coincides with the continued decline in overall funding for community legal centres, who are crucial in advocating for tenants with mental health issues. I have also been asking questions about the Government's disruptive behaviour management plan and the Thrive program which does not appear to be effective for all vulnerable tenants needing assistance. The Minister was not able to answer my questions about how many people had successfully completed the program and the program is not due for evaluation until 2022.

## Redress still important during COVID-19 crisis

Towards the end of March, I called on the Government to ensure survivors of institutional child sexual abuse were not re-traumatised by long delays with their redress applications. While the whole country is grappling with the pandemic crisis, many survivors are ageing and unwell, and can't afford to wait much longer with many cases already delayed. I asked questions in Parliament about what the Government was doing in this space, and urged the Attorney General to act urgently.

## Disability employment rate too low

I have been questioning the Government about continued funding for services during the NDIS transition, and the unacceptably high rate of unemployment among people with disability.

18% of Australia's population have a disability. Within that group, the employment rate is 53%, compared with 83% of people without disability. Discrimination and efforts to avoid discrimination, physical accessibility, mobility and communication difficulties contribute to the high level of unemployment.

The Government has set out a 5% target to employ people with disability in the public sector by 2025, but I am concerned that some agencies are not prioritising this work. In 2018-19 the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment found 88% of agencies' workforce and diversity plans were overdue.

Since the COVID-19 crisis hit, I have been in regular contact with stakeholders within the sector, and working closely with Senator Jordon Steele-John to ensure that we continue to raise issues for people with disability navigating the crisis, at both the state and federal level.



## Block funding needed for Kites Therapy

Early in March I spoke with the revitalised Kites Children's Therapy which includes the Kites Therapy toy library service (formerly the Noah's Ark Toy Library). Kites provides a range of therapies, including therapy dogs, for children with disability or developmental challenges such as autism, global developmental delay, intellectual or learning disability, sensory impairment or physical disabilities. Kites will deliver services in conjunction with Curtin University's School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology, and university students will lead playgroups. VisAbility is currently funding Kites – and it really requires block funding from Government.



## SECCA at risk of losing funding

In February I met with Suzanne Paust and Sue Crock from SECCA. SECCA is the only service for people with a disability who need support for sexual and relationship matters in WA, and provides critical support services to people with disability presenting with suspected sexual assault, as well as those accused of committing sexual assault.

Their services have significant waiting lists. SECCA is also, distressingly, one of a number of disability support organisations who are facing losing their block funding as a result of the introduction of the NDIS. SECCA have been providing their services for more than 27 years, and I hope they are able to continue to do so for a long time to come.

I will continue to urge the Minister for Disability Services to ensure the future of vital niche community organisations like SECCA by providing them with a sustainable block funding stream – these are services we simply can't afford to lose.

## Long-awaited CNS fails to meet need

My questions in mid-March revealed that the long-awaited Custody Notification Service (CNS) only made contact with 57% of Aboriginal people in custody, since it began operating in WA in October 2019. Data released by the Government at my request showed there were 7961 calls to the service between 2 October and 31 December 2019. More than a quarter of calls from police to the service were missed. This dismal rate shows that the CNS was not initially funded adequately, despite knowing that it will save lives. While I acknowledge the service has now received funding top-ups, I will be monitoring the situation closely. The CNS provides a range of important functions including carrying out health and welfare checks, and providing basic legal advice on issues which disproportionately affect Aboriginal people, like fine default.

## Opposition voiced in fracking debate

Western Australia's moratorium on fracking was lifted across the state late last year. While fracking remains banned in Perth, Peel, and Southwest Regions, part of the Dampier Peninsula and in National Parks, the rest of the existing petroleum exploration licence areas can once more be fracked.

I took the opportunity of a disallowance motion moved by my colleague the Hon Robin Chapple to once again debate the lack of merit in fracking for unconventional gas. My position about the future for the fossil-fuel industry remains unchanged. We are diverting resources and time into propping up an industry that we know cannot be allowed to continue into the future. I once again raised the concerns about the fierce competition for water in areas like the mid-West, where we have farmers, miners, townships and once again frackers all competing for water supplies in a drying climate – a warming and drying climate caused by our reliance on fossil fuels. I continue to encourage people to join with us to act against the approvals and extensions to operations of these climate vandals.



# Get in touch.

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## PORTFOLIOS

- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Animal Welfare
- Child Protection
- Community Services
- Consumer Protection
- Corrective Services
- Disability
- Education
- Electoral Affairs
- Gambling
- Family and Domestic Violence
- Health
- Industrial Relations and Worker Safety
- Integrity of Government
- Law and Order
- Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
- Multicultural Affairs
- Public Sector
- Seniors and Ageing
- Sexuality and Gender Diversity
- Training and Workforce Development
- Veterans Affairs
- Volunteering
- Women
- Youth

Before social-distancing measures were introduced, I attended the Pride WA 2020 Culture Counts Impact Statement event

## Bills debated

Criminal Code Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Emergency Management Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Family Court Amendment Bill 2019

Guardianship and Administration Amendment (Medical Research) Bill 2020

High Risk Offenders Bill 2019

Local Government Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Lotteries Commission Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Western Australian Future Fund Amendment (Future Health Research and Innovation Fund) Bill 2019

## Alison's committees

Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission

The Inquiry into Corruption risks around public sector procurement is due to be tabled soon. The Inquiry into the CCC's handling of complaints of excessive use of force by police continues.