

**Hon. Simone McGurk MLA
MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION**



**EVENT:
ROYAL COMMISSION RESPONSE**

**VENUE:
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**DATE:
27 JUNE 2018**

**TIME:
NOON**

**** 15 MINUTE SPEECH ****

- The community has a right to expect that our children are safe, especially within the institutions entrusted to protect, educate, care for and nurture them.
- For five years, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse uncovered where institutions – Government and non-government – have **failed** to meet this expectation. It uncovered trauma inflicted upon childhood after childhood.
- The experiences that emerged have been alarming. They have shone truth on what has been hidden for a long time – historic and contemporary cases of child sexual abuse within institutions, and a concealment of evidence that has provided a refuge and protection for offenders.
- These experiences, and the courage shown by those who have come forward to create change, **cannot** and **will not** be ignored by the McGowan Government.
- In speaking to the McGowan Government's response today, I must begin by acknowledging the survivors of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, some of whom join us today in the gallery.
- I recognise that sometimes in sharing their experiences, they have not been believed. I recognise that sometimes they have been alienated further, and sometimes it has been too much.

- I want to further acknowledge in this place, those who are no longer with us today to see these events unfold. To their families and loved ones, to those who they live on through, I also acknowledge and pay my sincere respects.
- As Minister for Child Protection, I know that the majority of carers have been, and still are, decent honourable people who continue to open their hearts to care for vulnerable children.
- However, I also acknowledge that some carers have abused the trust placed in them. They have preyed upon our children.
- As the Minister for Child Protection at the conclusion of this Royal Commission, I feel personally compelled to acknowledge on behalf of the State Government that:
 - some children who were placed in the care of the state were abused.
 - that these children were hurt through no fault of their own.
 - that their cries for help fell on deaf ears, and were dismissed as untruths.
 - that the state failed to protect its most vulnerable citizens when they needed us most.
- In 2007, the then Labor State Government announced a redress scheme, called Redress WA, to recognise the sexual, physical and

emotional harm inflicted upon children who were placed in the care of the State.

- Today, I acknowledge that many people were hurt further by Redress WA following a change in Government and the previous Government's decision to reduce payments.
- This was never the original intention of Redress WA.
- As the State Minister for Child Protection, I apologise for the further hurt and pain this has caused.
- But, most importantly, as the Minister for Child Protection at the conclusion of this Royal Commission, I am committed to ensuring that the widespread scale of abuse that has occurred does not happen again.
- I will ensure that the recommendations do not sit in a report on a shelf.
- I will ensure that this Government implements the recommendations to the best of our ability.
- The Royal Commission has presented us with a unique opportunity – it has brought all these issues to the surface, and laid them on the table for all to see.

- There is no hiding from what has happened in the past. Whilst these conversations have been hard, and confronting, we are determined to see them create significant change.
- Today I stand before the house to speak to the Government's response to each of the 409 recommendations made by the Royal Commission.
- And it is important for all of us in this place to remember, that these recommendations have been formed from the:
 - 42,041 Calls handled by the Royal Commission
 - The 25,964 Letters & emails received
 - The 8,013 Private sessions held
 - The 59 research reports, and;
 - The 57 public hearings and case studies developed
- This task has not been easy, and I thank the Commissioners for their role in developing it.
- I am proud to state to the House, that in response to the evidence and subsequent recommendations the McGowan Government has accepted or accepted-in-principle 93 per cent – or 289 of 310 – of the applicable recommendations.
- We have not rejected one recommendation.

- And, in the interests of being transparent, twenty-one of the recommendations require further consideration due to a range of reasons including:
 - the complexity of the issue;
 - the legislative framework underpinning them; and
 - the way in which they relate with national initiatives.
- We will continue working on those recommendations that require further consideration, and will now work towards the delivery of a staged implementation plan of the recommendations. The plan will outline reform priorities, timeframes and resourcing options.
- We will ensure that this work is collaborative, methodical and rigorous because the McGowan Government is committed to building a community where children are safe.
- The Government will publish a progress report on the recommendations which will be tabled in Parliament at the end of this year and annually thereafter.
- I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks and appreciation to my cabinet colleagues, the staff in their offices, and the many public servants across Departments who have all contributed to this whole of Government response.

- However, I am acutely aware that the McGowan Government's response to the Royal Commission does not change what happened to those who have endured, it does not right the wrongs of the past, and, unfortunately – it will not result in the complete protection of children overnight.
- Whilst that work has begun within Government, there is still a lot of work in front of us, and the whole community.
- Change will not be instant, but we are committed because the importance of this work is clear: keeping children safe is the highest priority.
- I hope that our response today, and our intentions laid out in this area sends a very strong message to those who have a connection to the issue of child sexual abuse: This Government has heard your experiences, we recognise your pain, and we are going to act to make sure that your experiences are not repeated.
- In closing my remarks now, Mr Speaker, I want to share with the house an anecdote from the Message to Australia book on the Royal Commission website, which includes over a thousand personal messages from survivors who provided evidence to the Royal Commission.

- Message 146 starts with a poem, called Who will cry for the little boy? by Antwone (Ant-one) Fischer.

- The poem reads:
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - Lost and all alone.
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - Abandoned without his own?
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - He cried himself to sleep.
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - He never had for keeps.
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - He walked the burning sand
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - The boy inside the man.
 - Who will cry for the little boy?
 - Who knows well hurt and pain
 - Who will cry for the little boy?

- He died again and again.
- Who will cry for the little boy?
- A good boy he tried to be
- Who will cry for the little boy?
- Who cries inside of me.
- Following the poem are the hand written words of a survivor, who says: “I’m standing up for the little boy who at the time had no-one to stand up for him. I only wish we could hold the people who harmed me accountable.”
- Mr Speaker, I believe that today, the McGowan Government is standing up for survivors of child sexual abuse. And I encourage everybody, to join us in this important work.
- I thank the house.