

CHILD PROTECTION**Thursday, 21st September 2006**

The Hon. A.L. EVANS: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Emergency Services, representing the Minister for Families and Communities, a question about the investigation of child abuse and neglect notifications.

According to the Child Protection Review by Robyn Layton, the percentage of child abuse and neglect notifications investigated by Families SA fell from 78 per cent in the financial year 1992-93 to 30 per cent in 2001-02. Data recently received by my office from the Department for Families and Communities for the financial year 2005-06 indicate that, out of 25 198 notifications of child abuse and neglect, only 4 779 investigations were finalised. This equates to just 19 per cent of all allegations having been investigated. Astonishingly, 2 777 of the 15 069 complaints that met the criteria for a reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect were 'closed with no further action due to higher priority work taking precedence'.

The Layton report also criticised the manner in which Families SA dealt with less urgent tier 3 cases, stating:

The current minimal response (to tier 3 cases), that of a letter requesting the family to attend a meeting and stating that the allegations will not be investigated has serious implications for the agency.

According to the department's own statistics, confirmations of abuse and neglect occurred in approximately 30 to 40 per cent of all cases investigated. As a result, the department is potentially failing to address real instances of concern. My questions to the minister are:

1. Despite the government's having increased funding for child protection in response to the Layton report, will the minister explain why the number of investigations into child abuse and neglect is diminishing?
2. Will the minister advise the council what higher priority work took precedence over the investigation of allegations that met the criteria for a reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect?
3. Will the minister advise the council whether Family SA's procedures for dealing with tier 3 child abuse and neglect cases have been modified?