

**FAMILIES SA**

Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 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 regarding the investigative procedures of Families SA.

From what I have been told by a number of constituents, it is evident that there are often discrepancies in the recollection of events that take place in interviews and meetings conducted by Families SA. South Australia Police and Transport SA interviews are recorded electronically. While they are recorded in this manner for the purpose of prosecution, Families SA interviews often occur in the context of deciding whether a child should remain in their parent's care. The impact of the removal of a child is arguably equal to, if not worse than, the consequences of a prosecution. However, I understand that Families SA has not adopted this practice. My questions are:

1. What procedures are currently in place to ensure that what is stated by all parties in investigations conducted by Families SA is accurately recorded?
2. Will the minister introduce mandatory electronic recording of all investigations conducted by Families SA, with copies provided to all parties involved; and, if not, why not?

**FAMILIES SA INVESTIGATIONS**Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007

In reply to **Hon A.L. EVANS** (6 December 2006).

**The Hon. CARMEL ZOLLO:** The Minister for Families and Communities has provided the following information:

*Families SA Case Recording Principles and Guidelines* were developed in 2001. They are available to all Families SA staff via the intranet. These guidelines clearly stipulate that accurate case recording is a legal requirement in all investigations. They provide guidelines regarding quality, purpose, accuracy and type of case recording for particular circumstances. They also place an emphasis upon the importance of case recording and the requirement to distinguish between fact, opinion and assessment.

Families SA staff receive training in case recording via various accredited training courses provided by the Families SA Faculty in the College for Learning and Development, the Registered Training Organisation of the Department for Families and Communities. These courses include the Diploma in Statutory Child Protection and the Certificate IV in Protective Care. Case recording principles and requirements are covered via various training methods which include role plays, case examples, screen summaries, write-ups and practice in report writing and case recording.

All staff are required to sign and date case notes. Significant case decisions, case-plans and case-reviews are counter-signed by social work supervisors.

The introduction of a requirement to electronically record interviews during child protection investigations would place a heavy emphasis upon forensics and evidence collection. Families SA workers are not conducting criminal investigations. Statutory child protection requires a delicate balance between the assessment of risk to children and the importance of engaging with parents and caregivers to help them to be better and safer parents. This balance is a

complex one, which requires skilled practitioners who are able to collect evidence and protect children whilst also providing supportive services to keep children safe and families together.

It is not the current practice of Families SA to electronically record investigative interviews and there are no immediate plans to introduce this into Families SA policies.