

CORRECTED COPY  
**GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2**

**Wednesday 16 September 2009**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

**WOMEN**

**The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.**

**MEMBERS**

The Hon. R. M. Parker (Chair)

The Hon. C. E. Cusack  
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly  
Dr J. Kaye

Reverend the Hon. G. K. M. Moyes  
The Hon. C. M. Robertson  
The Hon. H. M. Westwood

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**PRESENT**

**The Hon. L. J. Burney**, *Minister for Women*

**Department of Premier and Cabinet**

**Ms V. D'Adam**, *Assistant Director General*

**Ms G. Ferguson**, *Executive Director, Office for Women's Policy*

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## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

**CHAIR:** I declare the hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2009-2010 for the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 inquiry into the portfolio of Women open to the public. I welcome Minister Burney and accompanying officials to the hearing. The Committee will examine the portfolio for Women. I need to make some procedural comments. In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In recording the proceedings of the Committee, the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available on the table by the door.

Messages need to be passed through the Chamber and support staff, or the Committee clerks. Minister, your staff are free to pass notes directly to you while you are at the table. Please turn mobile phones off or to silent. However, if a mobile phone receives or sends any data, please keep it well away from the microphones. As only a limited time is allocated there will not be a break during the hearing. Minister, the return date for answers to questions on notice is within 21 days. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Minister, you do not need to be sworn in. I ask the witnesses to state their full name, job title and the agency they represent, and take either the oath or affirmation.

**GILLIAN FERGUSON**, Executive Director of the Office for Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, and

**VICKI D'ADAM**, Assistant Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Minister, there is no provision for an opening statement. We will start directly with questions. Minister, on how many interdepartmental committees, known as IDCs, do officers of the Department for Women sit?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I ask Gillian Ferguson to respond to that.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The Office for Women's Policy staff are members of 10 interagency committees.

**CHAIR:** Could you tell the Committee what committees they are, or will you take that on notice?

**Ms FERGUSON:** I can do that now. We chair the Domestic Violence Senior Officers Group, and are members of the Premier's Council on Preventing Violence Against Women, the Premier's Council for Women, the Council of Australian Governments Officials Working Party to Develop a National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women, the Housing and Human Services Senior Officers Group, the Staying Home Leaving Violence Executive Committee, the Homelessness Working Group, the Domestic Violence Standardised Information Package Steering Committee, the Apprehended Violence Legal Issues Coordination Committee and the Intersectoral Domestic and Family Violence Education and Training Reference Group.

**CHAIR:** For clarification, your office chairs only one of those committees?

**Ms FERGUSON:** That is correct.

**CHAIR:** Do you set performance criteria for officers attending or participating in those committees?

**Ms FERGUSON:** I need to take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. What role do they play in influencing policy?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** In relation to government officials within those committees, the role would be to participate. But, those committees are made up also of representatives from the community, from peak organisations and it is the overall committee that would set policy and provide advice. It is not just setting policy; it is also providing advice and a place for consultation and negotiation.

**CHAIR:** You mentioned the Staying Home Leaving Violence Executive Committee. Why has that not been rolled out across the State?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** For the benefit of everyone, that program has been going now for a little over 12 months. It has been very successful in the communities where it has been established.

**CHAIR:** Yes, I know.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Those new communities are Blacktown, Campbelltown, Moree, Newcastle and Wyong. At the moment they exist in Bega and south-east Sydney. I have had a long conversation with the woman who was part of the Bega exercise. I really learnt from her just what it would mean for her to be able to stay at home. But, in answer to your question, the program will be rolled out in five new sites, as I said, in Blacktown, Campbelltown, Moree, Newcastle and Wyong. A further 10 sites will be rolled out in 2010-2011. It is not in every single part of New South Wales, but because it has been so successful and is a different way of looking at dealing with the issue of domestic violence, its rollout across those communities through to 2011 will be substantial.

**CHAIR:** Why has it not been rolled out right across the State?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** The places that have been selected are obviously places where there is the right sort of infrastructure and where we believe it would be successful, and also, obviously, where there are issues around this. When you consider that it will be in 18 communities across the State, it really is a fairly broad distribution of this innovative program. Also, it is important to say that it fits in very well with a whole range of other initiatives in the domestic violence area. I really like it because it looks at domestic violence in a very different way; that is, in particular, the benefit to children because they will not be disrupted and they can stay at school. That has been one of the great successes of the program.

**CHAIR:** Could you take it on notice to provide the Committee with a timeline of the rollout of that?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I am absolutely happy to do that.

**CHAIR:** In relation to the Office for Women, how much of the workload is taken up with servicing the Premier's Council for Women?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I will defer to Gillian.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The Office of Women's Policy provides secretariat support to the Premier's Council for Women and we generally support four meetings a year.

**CHAIR:** Which committees in the Department of Premier and Cabinet do your officers sit on?

**Ms FERGUSON:** The committees that I outlined previously are those that the department's officers are on.

**CHAIR:** With regard to victims of domestic violence, what are you doing to support information sharing between Government and non-government agencies so that they do not have to repeat their stories to each agency they deal with?

**Ms FERGUSON:** Information sharing is an issue that has been raised in consultations on the domestic and family violence framework and we will be looking at that in relation to the framework, which is due to be finalised by the end of this year.

**CHAIR:** What moneys are given to the New South Wales Domestic Violence Coalition?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I will defer to Gillian.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The funding administered by the Office of Women's Policy in relation to domestic violence is the \$2.9 million New South Wales Domestic and Family Violence Grants Program. That supports a small grants program offering up to \$1,000 for local domestic violence committees.

**CHAIR:** Is that a one-off grant or is it increased?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** It is not a one-off grant. It goes to 80 or so local communities and many of those communities have local domestic violence committees. One of the changes to that program over the next 12 months is that they will be able to use the \$1,000 at any point during the year. Essentially the money is to raise awareness, particularly through community education campaigns. Whilst some people might say it is not a huge amount of money, the innovation and the way in which that money has been used throughout the State is really interesting. The peak of these local committees is the Domestic Violence Coalition, which you referred to.

These committees are located across New South Wales, including far western New South Wales and the lower North Shore, and they are very united on the issue of public education. This is the second year of the grants. In previous years the grants were \$600, but that has been raised to \$1,000. I am not sure if you would be interested in hearing about some of the things they have done.

**CHAIR:** We are well aware of the good work. How does that compare with the funding for other peak body welfare organisations?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** The money goes to the local communities.

**CHAIR:** How much does the Domestic Violence Coalition itself receive?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I will ask Gillian to answer that question.

**Ms FERGUSON:** As I mentioned before, our funding is limited to a grants program, so annual funding would be dependent on any non-government organisation submitting a successful application.

**CHAIR:** But you must know what the coalition receives.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The coalition has not applied for funding under that program.

**CHAIR:** So where do they get their funding?

**Ms FERGUSON:** I would need to take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** Just going back to the Premier's Council for Women, how much staff time is involved in supporting the council, what sorts of positions are involved and how many staff are in the office overall?

**Ms FERGUSON:** There is not a dedicated officer providing staff support for the Premier's Council for Women. Support is provided by policy staff within the office as the need arises. The council's secretariat is primarily provided by the manager of the Women's Policy Development Unit and other members of that unit. In relation to staffing of the office in general, the office has 17 positions.

**CHAIR:** Could you provide a breakdown of those positions?

**Ms FERGUSON:** Certainly. There is an executive director, the Violence Prevention Coordination Unit has six policy officers, the Women's Policy Development Unit has six officers and the Policy Support Unit has four officers.

**CHAIR:** There is an issue with police domestic violence liaison officers not really having a career path. What do you intend doing about that, Minister?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** That is not a question best directed to me. I suggest that is best directed to the Minister for Police.

**CHAIR:** What representations are you going to make on their behalf? Has the department perhaps under the previous Minister made representations to the Minister for Police?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I am not aware of that. I will take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** Do you support part-time executive roles for women on maternity leave in the public school system?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Obviously the New South Wales Government public sector has a very well understood and established maternity leave arrangement. Quality part-time work is obviously very important not only for women but for all employees. I know that the former Minister convened a round-table discussion in February this year of 80 business, union, government, academic and industry leaders to look at ways of promoting the quality of part-time work. This focused in particular on solutions in use in New South Wales on this issue. It looked at some of the sticking points preventing employers and employees from capitalising on the capacity of the part-time workforce. One of the themes that were looked at at the round table was that the lack of quality part-time work contributes to considerable underutilisation of women. It looked at issues that related not just to women and at some of the conversations that needed to be had.

**CHAIR:** What I want to know is what you are planning to do about equal opportunity for women who apply for part-time executive positions in the teaching profession.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** As I understand it, that question would probably be best referred to the Minister for Education and Training, who I understand appeared before the Committee this morning.

**CHAIR:** Has the previous Minister or the department made representations to the Minister for Education and Training?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** We will take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** Minister, what are you doing—or what did the former Minister or Office for Women do—to support young pregnant women in the school system?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** As I understand it, some work is being undertaken in the school system. Once again, that question is best directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Clearly, extensive work is being done on the issue of maternity leave. Work is continuing with the Commonwealth relating to some of these issues, in particular, a number of programs for young women at school. I will have to take that question on notice. I refer to a family and childcare service on the Central Coast called Babes with Babes—a program with which I am familiar. This project assists young women and mothers to ensure that they further their education. That program is funded through the Minister's discretionary fund.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Minister, I refer to a case in Queensland where a young couple are being charged with procuring a medical abortion. Effectively, hospital-provided medical abortion services have been suspended throughout that State in an impasse between doctors and the Queensland Government over the legality of the procedure. I am not asking you to comment on the case in Queensland or to comment on what that Government is doing. However, I am asking you to comment on whether your office is doing anything in New South Wales, given that the legal situation in New South Wales is similar and an overly zealous police prosecutor in New South Wales could plunge this State into a similar situation. Have you or your office made representations to the Premier or to the Attorney General in respect of abortion law reform in New South Wales?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I will take on notice that part of your question relating to whether or not representations have been made. I am sure all members are familiar with the law on abortion in New South Wales. It is my view that this State provides an appropriate balance to protect women and their health, and women in this State have the right to choose an abortion. The law in this State prohibits abortion only when there is no reasonable belief that the abortion is necessary to preserve a woman from serious danger to her life or her physical and mental health. Obviously, this is a sensitive issue and people hold a wide range of views in relation to it. On my assessment most people in the community support a woman's right to have an abortion. It is not necessary for me to go through the situation in New South Wales, but there is a sensible and appropriate balance.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** That balance exists because of current practice—the current interpretation of law in New South Wales.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** My question relates to the situation in Queensland where a similar law and a similar set of practices have been destabilised by an overly zealous prosecutor.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I would like you to address the concerns that have been raised by a number of people, including Pro Choice New South Wales, that as long as abortion remains a crime that same risk is possible in New South Wales. In your view is that vulnerability acceptable to you?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** In my view the balance that we have in New South Wales is the appropriate balance.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Do you include the law in that?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I heard what the member said about the capacity of an overzealous prosecutor. However, I reiterate my view and the view of the Government. In the broader sense, in New South Wales the rights and the welfare of a woman are properly and appropriately considered when any decisions are made about such a procedure.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Does the Office for Women do anything to assess the impact of pay differentials between men and women?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** This Government has been working with the Commonwealth Government on that issue. Pay equity—a perennial matter—is an important issue in women's policy. We are aware that there is a gap between men's earnings and women's earnings in a number of fields. Over the past year the gap in New South Wales between men's earnings and women's earnings has remained largely unchanged. However, the member is referring to the fact that there is a gap. Obviously, the policy unit would not be doing its job if it did not believe that work should be done in that area. I will not go through all the pay differentials, but they are substantial. New South Wales has been a leader in instituting equal remuneration principles in its industrial relations system, with other States only recently catching up in this area.

The New South Wales Government acknowledges and welcomes the recent changes to this system under the Commonwealth Government's Forward with Fairness reforms, and the commencement of the Fair Work Act. I will not canvass the issues relating to WorkChoices, but those reforms were one of the outcomes. I refer also to the important role being played by the Commonwealth, with the States in tandem. Through the Ministers Council we established a national pay equity working group in which New South Wales participates. In fact, that working group will soon be undertaking further discussions. The New South Wales Government is committed to ensuring that the public sector workforce that is addressing these issues will have some influence.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You described the policy formation processes relating to the gender pay equity gap. What will be the outcome of that process? What is happening? Is there any rubber on the ground? Australian Council of Trade Union figures for August 2009 suggest a \$1 million difference in the lifetime income of a man and a woman starting work today. What are we doing to address that? What steps are being taken in New South Wales to reduce that \$1 million difference?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I will ask Ms Ferguson to answer that question. Federal and State Ministers established a working group to pursue the issue.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The Minister outlined the key policy initiatives in New South Wales. In relation to those initiatives it is important to note that industrial relations mechanisms are a key way forward, but there is also a need to examine wider issues relating to women's workforce participation. The Office for Women's Policy has an active work agenda in this area, for example, in relation to the quality part-time work to which the Minister referred earlier.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I could not find anywhere in the budget a line item that established how much money was being spent on programs and activities being run or funded by the Office for Women. Could you take that question on notice and provide the Committee with details relating to how much funding has been allocated this year compared to last year's figures for women's programs administered or run by your office?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Could you also refer that back to equivalent funding pre-2004 when there was a separate Department for Women before it was rolled into other departments?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes. I am happy to take that on notice. The Committee would be aware that the Office for Women's Policy does not have a separate line budget. It is part of the global budget of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I can certainly give you a sense of the 2009-10 expenditure, which was \$5.284 million, but it does not go to the specifics of what you are asking. Employee-related costs were \$1.675 million, other operating costs were \$5.58 million and the grants we referred to earlier were \$3.05 million. I wanted to make the point that there has been an increase of more than 50 per cent between 2007-08, for which the budget was \$2.405 million, and 2009-10 when it was \$5.284 million.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Where was most of that increase?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I defer to Gillian.

**Ms FERGUSON:** The bulk of the increase is in relation to the Domestic and Family Violence Grants Program. There also was additional funding to support the office's new functions in relation to violence against women.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Were they the \$1,000 grants?

**Ms FERGUSON:** The \$2.9 million grants program comprises a major grants program and a small grants program. The \$1,000 grants relate to the small grants.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** How many of those were there?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** About 80 across the State.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** How many major grants?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Can we take that on notice? I am happy to provide you a list.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Could you give the Committee a breakdown of those and where they went geographically?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Yes. One of the important things to note about those major grants is that of the \$2.9 million, whatever the exact amount is, \$900,000 is dedicated to grants that deal with domestic violence in the Aboriginal community, which people well understand. In respect to the major grants program, funding has been provided to 40 organisations, 10 of which will deliver specific Aboriginal projects. That is the money to which I just referred.

**CHAIR:** In providing that information could you give the Committee some information about what the office is doing with leadership programs for women?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Absolutely. I will not go into the detail now. I am happy to provide that, but certainly work is being done around leadership.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Minister, recognising that you have already discussed domestic violence committees, could you give us more detail about what financial support the Government provides to local domestic violence committees across the State?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** That is the small grants of \$1,000 allocated to those committees, about which we have just been speaking. Some of you would be aware that last year the committees used the grants to run activities during the 16 Days of Activism to Stop Violence Against Women campaign. That began in November with White Ribbon Day and ran through to World Human Rights Day on 10 December. As I indicated earlier, the grants in the next allocation can be used across the year. They do not have to necessarily just relate to that particular time. I am fairly new to the portfolio, but discussions I have had over the past couple of days have revealed that some grants go to really innovative things like shopper dockets that have a message on them.

In Gloucester a hairdresser launched a campaign called Cut It Out. They are doing innovative things that have a strong influence in a local community. The Committee may be aware that in Tenterfield the funds went to a camp for young Aboriginal men. A really important and significant thing to think about when we are



dealing with domestic violence is that much of the focus is on women and children, which rightly should be, but we also need to think about the role of men, particularly by talking to young men and influencing them on what respectful relationships are about. Bellingen had a multilingual safety camp for local women. They are some of the good things that can happen at a local level through that small grants program.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Pay equity was spoken about in a question from Dr Kaye. Minister, under the John Howard administration, as you would be aware, Australian workplace agreements were introduced and contributed significantly to opening up the pay gap between working men and women in Australia. Recent utterances of the Opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull indicate that he wants to reintroduce Australian workplace agreements. Would you like to comment about the potential impact as you see it on the pay equity issue in New South Wales and beyond?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** No doubt there is—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Point of order: the standing orders clearly state that questions to Ministers must relate to their portfolios. The member has made no attempt whatsoever to specify the Office for Women in the Premier's department portfolio.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I said, "pay equity in New South Wales".

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Where is that in the budget papers, the issue to which you refer?

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** To the point of order: earlier questions were allowed because they dealt with the Office for Women but not necessarily directly with that portfolio. This is the same issue.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am sorry. I took the question to be one about the industrial relations policy of the Federal Government.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** No. It is about the issue of pay equity in New South Wales in the context of individual work agreements in New South Wales.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Where does that fall within the Minister's portfolio responsibilities?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Women's affairs.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** To the point of order: I think the question was completely in order. The Minister said that part of the focus of the Office for Women is on the issue of pay equity. I have already adduced that from the Minister in my questioning. The Minister identified that there was actually an issue of industrial relations associated with that. An office like the Office for Women will be broad spectrum in all areas. It is within the leave of budget estimates to ask questions about the activities for which money is allocated. One of the activities Mr Donnelly is asking about is the Minister's response to the industrial relations environment and the way in which it has discriminated against women. The objective evidence is that that is the case.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Further to the point of order: I understand the member's interest in this matter. It is an interesting issue, but was made quite clear to us by the Minister when she was asked a question regarding training in the New South Wales Police Force, which is a State Government agency—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Can I just make sure that the clock is turned off while we have this debate?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** —and does not relate to her actual portfolio. Therefore, it was indicated that that question would be for the Minister for Police. That was dealt with as an appropriate response.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Further to the point of order—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Can I just clarify that? The member's question concerns the Leader of the Opposition in the Federal Parliament and the policy of a previous Government about which he gave a great deal of description in the preamble to his question. I suggest that given that the New South Wales police training issue does not relate to the Minister's portfolio, I fail to see how this could relate adequately to

the Minister's portfolio responsibility. I just do not think you have made that clear and I would ask you to make that clear.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Further to the point of order: the Hon. Catherine Cusack is quite right in that it was a preamble to my question. But the question then went on to be very specific about asking the Minister to talk in the context of pay equity and the issue of the impact of individual work agreements, which is clearly within the domain of this budget estimates and her responsibility.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You are contextualising.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The question is clearly in order.

**CHAIR:** I think we had better finish this or we could go on all day. The comments the Hon. Greg Donnelly made in his preamble are out of order, as there was no evidence provided for those comments. We would all like to know what the Office for Women is doing, as that would be great elucidation. That preamble was not substantiated, however, perhaps the Minister can answer the specific question. We would love to know what you are doing in terms of pay equity issues—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** In your portfolio.

**CHAIR:** —in your portfolio.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Thank you. Madam Chair, I have already canvassed the involvement that the New South Wales Office for Women has in pay equity discussions and the national roundtable as well as the role that we have at a ministerial level in terms of pay equity, so I do not propose to go over that. As to the Hon. Greg Donnelly's question, I would say that under the WorkChoices regime of the previous Commonwealth Government—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am sorry, just to the point of order, you have answered it in relation to your portfolio and you said you do not propose to add anything further—that is the answer you have just given.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Are you taking a point of order against the Minister?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** No. The Chair ruled the earlier part of the question out of order.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Yes, so you are taking a point of order against the Minister.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am asking the Minister to answer in relation to her portfolio.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** You are taking a point of order against the Minister.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** That is what she has done. The Minister has said that she is not going to add further in relation to—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Ministers may answer the way they see fit. You know the Standing Orders.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Minister, please continue.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** There is not a lot more to add. I have partially canvassed it, but under the WorkChoices regime, the mechanism established to enforce the pay equity principle was seriously eroded. As I have mentioned, the New South Wales Government has welcomed recent changes in the Commonwealth Government's Forward with Fairness reforms with the commencement of the Fair Work Act—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** That is an absolute loser's answer.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Do not take any notice.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** —and we believe this will help prevent further widening of the gender pay gap. We are particularly pleased to see that, under the Forward with Fairness reforms, pay equity considerations have been incorporated within the new institutional frameworks of wage setting. That is probably the most fundamental point. The issue of pay equity is in fact at the heart of the framework. The Fair Work Act, which came into effect on 1 July—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** You are talking about a Federal Act of Parliament.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** —contains important provisions regarding remuneration.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Can I clarify that? It is a Federal Act that you are now talking about?

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** The Minister is talking about the effects on women in New South Wales.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Minister, do not answer. You do not have to answer.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am just trying to clarify this in terms of the Minister's portfolio.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Chair, I am almost finished, so if I could be allowed to do that; I have just two more points to make. These particular provisions include the removal of the threshold sex discrimination test and, finally, the inclusion of equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value as an object in the exercise of the new Fair Work Australia Award, which makes minimum wage setting powers. Of course that really goes to the heart of some of the fundamental issues around pay equity.

**Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES:** Madam Chair, may I apologise to you and to the Minister for being late.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Thank you.

**Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES:** I have been chairing a very contentious public forum on the future of the ordination of women in the Anglican and Catholic churches.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Thank you for that apology, Reverend Moyes. I am pleased that you, unlike the Hon. Catherine Cusack, apologised for being late. Minister, could you please advise the Committee what the Government is doing to ensure that women and children who are escaping domestic and family violence have access to safe and affordable housing?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I thank you very much for that question. On becoming the new Minister for Women, going through the papers and being briefed on the various initiatives underway in New South Wales around domestic violence, this is the one that excited me the most. In essence it is a scheme that the New South Wales Government has put in place and it involves a whole range of things, for example, domestic violence not disrupting tenancy, and the ability for women to maintain housing. Many women who are living in substandard or marginal housing or who are in crisis accommodation are doing so as a result of escaping domestic violence. Our Government is very serious about this and we are developing a domestic and family violence strategic framework. Within that are housing options for women escaping domestic violence, which is one of the key problems.

The program, Safe Start, is a rental subsidy initiative to the value of \$16 million. I have to say that this, along with Staying Home Leaving Violence, is a very innovative and new way of thinking about domestic violence. Safe Start is a statewide private rental subsidy scheme, and this relates to the beginning of the first question asked by Madam Chair. The scheme facilitates access to affordable properties in the private rental market and provides financial relief for victims of domestic violence, I am advised for up to 12 months, after leaving domestic violence. It can do things like pay for bonds and can help to subsidise rent for the people involved. The program has been piloted in three locations, the Hunter, Illawarra and western Sydney. It is an integrated support program.

For a mum and children who have experienced domestic violence very often one of the challenges in getting out of a domestic violence situation is economic and the other is: Where else can I go? The fact that we

have Safe Start means that we can resolve problems that must seem overwhelming to some people—the provision of a bond and rent in the private sector. To me it is one of the most interesting, innovative and exciting programs that we have.

**The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON:** Minister, the time being 2.45 p.m., the Government has questions on notice that we will be providing.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the session. There will be 21 days for return of questions on notice.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** Thank you all very much.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**

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