



Jenny Aitchison MP

Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

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MINISTER PASSES THE BUCK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BEDS

The Minister responsible for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in NSW has continued to pass the buck on her responsibility to provide adequate places in refuges for women fleeing domestic violence.

Today in Budget Estimates hearings Pru Goward was unable to answer questions on the effect of the Baird Government's 2014 reforms, and consequent bed reductions, in her own electorate of Goulburn.

Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Jenny Aitchison has slammed the Government for failing to provide enough crisis beds, and for having no understanding of the extent of the problem due the government's failed reforms which saw specialist women's domestic violence services merged with general homelessness services.

In June this year, in response to a request to the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), Ms Aitchison was told that the department had no idea of the number of beds in refuges across the state as the information was: *"complicated...not helpful...and subject to variances."*

Yesterday the Minister for Family and Community Services advised that there are now *"523 bedrooms, 1430 beds, and ... capacity to accommodate up to 1900 women and children"*.

When asked to elaborate on how 1430 beds provide capacity to accommodate up to 1900 people, Family and Community Services Minister Brad Hazzard admitted he had *"forgotten to ask that question... [and that he would] ...be fascinated to know the answer."*

When questioned on the same issue this morning Ms Goward refused to answer the question and deferred it to her departmental officers.

When pushed further on her knowledge of the number of beds, prior to the period between 17 June and now Ms Goward responded with: *"These are really questions for Minister Hazzard."*

The Minister has proven she is unsure of refuge capacity issues across the state despite the fact that they come under her portfolio, and even more damning, are in her own electorate of Goulburn.

In recent weeks, a woman was reportedly left for eight hours in a police station in Goulburn after an incident of domestic violence, due to there being nowhere for her to go. Workers in the sector report that refuges have been at capacity in the city for at least the last five years.

After the Government's 2014 reforms to refuges, St Antony's, a seven-bed domestic violence women's refuge was defunded. A five-unit crisis facility run by Anglicare, which houses men alongside women, now services the whole Goulburn Region. Two of the units have been set up as "secure domestic violence accommodation". This has resulted in a net loss of five specialist units for women escaping domestic violence.

A local hotel provides emergency accommodation to women escaping domestic violence, but is reportedly well known for this purpose to local perpetrators. Last July, the media reported a woman was found by her partner in the hotel and forced to return home where she was violently beaten.

During questioning on the issue of refuge beds in her own electorate, the Minister became very defensive and refused to answer further questions, referring them all to the Minister for Family and Community Services.

Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Jenny Aitchison

“The Minister referred to a co-led response to domestic violence to avoid answering questions, but the buck stops with her. There is no leadership on domestic violence in this state.

“This week we have seen that two Ministers with accountability and responsibility for preventing domestic violence don’t have a clear grasp on the actual number of beds available to women and children escaping domestic violence.

“Given the long standing capacity issues in Goulburn, it is incomprehensible that the Government would defund a specialist refuge.

“This is in the Minister’s own electorate. It is unheard of that a local member of parliament would hear of a case of someone being unable to access crisis accommodation and not get on the phone immediately.

“How can the Minister not know what’s happening in the provision of refuge beds across the state, or at the very least know what’s going on in her own electorate?”