LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

1989–90 BUDGET FUNDING FOR AN ADDITIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REFUGE FOR WOMEN

Report Number 3 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

December 1990

RESOLUTION OF APPOINTMENT

On 23 May 1989 the ACT Legislative Assembly established a Standing Committee on Public Accounts with the following terms of reference:

(1) Examine –

(a) the accounts of the receipts and expenditure of the Australian Capital Territory Executive;

(b) the financial affairs of authorities of the Australian Capital Territory; and

(c) all reports of the Auditor–General which have been laid before the Assembly.

(2) Report to the Assembly, with such comments as it thinks fit, any items or matters in those accounts, statements and reports, or any circumstances connected with them to which the committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be directed; and

(3) Inquire into any question in connection with the public account which is referred to it by the Assembly and to report to the Assembly on that question.

MEMBERSHIP

Ms Rosemary Follett (Presiding Member)

Mr Norm Jensen

Ms Carmel Maher

Secretary: Ms Karin Malmberg

Background

1. Following a question to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee during Question Time on 1 May 1990, the Committee adopted the following terms of reference in relation to the funding of an additional domestic violence refuge for women in the 1989–90 Budget:

- investigate whether a sum of $142,000 was set aside in the 1989–90 Budget to build a second womens domestic violence crisis refuge;
- determine whether this amount was for a part–year cost only and that the full–year effect is $238,000; and
- if so:
  - why were those funds not separately appropriated in the Appropriation Bill 1989–90; and
  - advise how the former Government's Budget process allowed nearly the entire additional Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) additional funding which is required for urgent ongoing grants in the area of youth homelessness and other support to be allocated to a domestic violence crisis refuge under the guise of a separate appropriation.

2. The Committee sought and received submissions on the terms of reference from the Minister for Finance and Urban Services and the Minister for Housing and Community Services. A second submission was received from the Minister for Housing and Community Services as well as a submission from the General Manager, ACT Housing and Community Bureau.

3. Comment on the matter was also made during the 1990 Estimates Committee public hearings by the Treasurer and Treasury officials.

4. The Committee also had the benefit of a minute tabled in the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Housing and Community Services which provided background information on the issue.

Comment

5. The Committee found much of the information provided to it unclear and conflicting. In addition, a number of practical problems became evident during the Committee's investigations:

- the time lapse since the 1989–90 Budget preparation process;
- there had been a change of Government between the passage of the Appropriation Bill 1989–90 and the decisions being taken regarding the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP); and
- there had been changes to the administrative arrangements in the ACT Government Service.

6. The Committee did not hold public hearings on this matter as it was of the view that little would be gained from conducting what could be considered a "witch hunt" amongst various agencies of the ACT Government Service.

7. The Committee, however, is of the view that the intentions of the Follett Government in proposing that a second domestic violence refuge for women be established were clear, publicly stated and included in the 1989–90 Budget Papers.

8. The Committee notes that the intention was that the refuge should be funded from SAAP funds. The Committee has been advised that at the time of passage of the Budget, the decision making process for allocation of SAAP funds had not been completed. The Budget Papers did not indicate this.

9. The Committee is of the view that whilst Budget Papers 5, and in particular, 9, indicated the Follett Government's intentions, a qualification should have been added to state that the funding for the refuge was predicated on SAAP funding being made available for that project.

10. The Committee believes that future Budget Papers should indicate if projects included for funding in a particular year rely on formal approval through processes other than an ACT Government decision, such as funding decisions subject to Commonwealth–State agreements.

11. The Committee received clear evidence, however, that the funding level for the proposed refuge was $142,000 for a part year and $238,000 for a full year.

12. The Committee also received evidence that there was no requirement under the ACT Audit Act and Finance Regulations for a separate appropriation of funds for the establishment of an additional refuge, whether it be funded from SAAP or non– SAAP funds.

13. The Committee is of the view that the question of funding for youth homelessness was not relevant and did not affect the funding for a domestic violence refuge.

Rosemary Follett MLA
Presiding Member
12 December 1990