



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Mr Mark Parton MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS

Asked by **MR MARK PARTON MLA** on 28 July 2023: **MS JO WOOD** took on notice the following question(s):

Ref: *Uncorrected Hansard Transcript* 28 July 2023 [pages 3-4]

In relation to: *How many additional FOI officers will be added as consequence of the funding?*

THE CHAIR: ... So we will now proceed to questions. And I will start, minister, with this budget, includes more than \$1 million per year, over three years, for, "Supporting public access to government information". So this is—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Can you give us a page reference or something?

THE CHAIR: I reckon Budget Statement G, page 22. So, it is \$1.247 million this year, and similar figures over the next two, for you to support public access to government information. And what I am wanting to get my head around, is that money primarily intended to increase capacity for handling of freedom of information requests? Is that what that is about?

Ms Wood: Yes, Mr Parton. I can take that one.

THE CHAIR: Please.

Ms Wood: Jo Wood, Acting Director-General, Community Services Directorate.

That initiative is a whole of government initiative. It was led by JACS. And it is about capacity to support the Freedom of Information Scheme within the Community Services Directorate. We have a significant role in freedom of information. Obviously, we hold a lot of people's personal information, and quite significant amounts of information, so we have very large FOI requests often.

And we seek to process those as quickly as we can. But obviously we need resources to continue to maintain that.

THE CHAIR: Okay—

Ms Stephen-Smith: And I think, if I can just add a little bit of context to that—

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: —Mr Parton, what I have seen over the years is, as Ms Wood has said, we have seen this for many years, but the implementation of the Redress Scheme has significantly expanded requests for information for historical information, relating to historical abuse in care, that goes back many, many, years. And some of those files are very large. So that has also had a significant impact on our FOI team.

THE CHAIR: So, is someone able to clarify how many additional FOI officers will be added as a consequence of that funding?

Ms Wood: Mr Parton, we might need to take that detail on notice, because we do not have our corporate people here.

MINISTER STEPHEN-SMITH: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

Funding provided under the *Supporting public access to Government information* line item relates to the Community Services Directorate's Freedom of Information (FOI) staffing costs and \$150,000 in 2023-24 to develop a proof of concept information technology solution to improve search capability and processing of FOI matters.

Funding related to staffing costs does not provide for additional FOI positions, rather it provides ongoing funding to secure a portion of the Directorate's existing temporary positions. This initiative will provide ongoing funding for seven positions 1x SOG B, 3x SOGC, 2x ASO6 and 1x ASO4.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024

Signature:



Date:

16/8/23

By the Minister for Families and Community Services, Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA