

Office of Hon Alison Xamon MLC

MEMBER FOR NORTH METROPOLITAN REGION



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Welcome.

As another exceptionally busy period comes to a close, I am pleased that Industrial Manslaughter laws will finally be implemented in Western Australia, a long overdue reform that I have spent many years campaigning for. The State Budget 2020-21 was finally tabled on 8 October. I was disappointed at the lack of investment in the critical issue of homelessness, especially as we expect to see homelessness increase as Federal supports reduce over the next year. Aside from a welcome investment for essential services in remote First Nations communities, the Government did not announce any new social housing initiatives in the budget.

Elsewhere in the budget, we yet again see a failure to invest in community mental health. The Government continues to allocate only 20% of what is required as outlined in the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025. I spoke in Parliament on a number of mental health and suicide prevention issues arising from the annual reports from our Chief Psychiatrist and the Mental Health Advocacy Service.

I was devastated to once again need to speak about youth suicide, following the death of a young girl in our community. The ongoing issues within the systems which are supposed to protect vulnerable children are well known and I asked the Government again to, please, implement recommendations which will protect our children.

I was pleased to host Guide Dogs WA at Parliament House, as part of a function to promote the need for puppy raisers to assist with the long and expensive process of training guide dogs.

I have continued to raise issues across my 23 portfolios and, with the end of the Parliamentary year in sight, I look forward to a summer of campaigning, and working alongside our dedicated members, to achieve re-election.



With VisAbility/Guide Dogs WA chief executive Elizabeth Barnes, guide dog user Danny Van Vliet and goodest doggo, Landy, at my awareness-raising event 'Learning from Guide Dogs' at Parliament House.

CCC Committee releases report into the use of excessive force by WA Police

Over the last several months, the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission has been inquiring into the way the CCC handles complaints of excessive force made against WA police.

We brought down our report in late

September. We found that the CCC needs to put more emphasis on investigating and pro-actively seeking to identify trends and issues in relation to police use of force.

We also recommended that both the police and the CCC need to be more transparent about the complaints that

they receive, the decisions made about those complaints and the outcomes for everyone involved.

The CCC is the only group outside of WA Police themselves that has the authority to investigate complaints against police. It is critical that they actually do that work.

Guide Dog puppy raisers needed

I was very pleased to host Guide Dogs WA at Parliament House, as part of a function to promote the need for puppy raisers to assist with the training of guide dogs for blind or vision-impaired Western Australians. Guide Dogs WA is seeking the community's help to train up dogs to meet demand – there is currently a considerable waitlist of people needing a guide dog.

Puppy raisers play an important role in the training process, receiving a puppy when it is between six and eight weeks old and taking responsibility for house training and socialising. Puppy raisers attend periodic training and obedience classes with Guide Dogs WA trainers, who also regularly check on the pup's progress at home and assist with queries or concerns. When puppies

begin their formal training at between six and 12 months of age, they move in with a volunteer formal boarder, who takes the young dog to and from 'school' in Victoria Park every morning.

If you have capacity, please visit guidedogswa.com.au to find out more about specific opportunities.

Breeding program will lead to more dogs for blind and vision impaired Western Australians

Potential guide dog puppies are usually purchased from the eastern states or New Zealand, which is currently very challenging due to COVID.

Guide Dogs WA is looking to set up a world-class puppy breeding program in multiple

regions across WA. They want to increase the number of puppies that can be trained to become qualified Guide Dogs. Guide Dogs WA is also looking to raise puppies that can be trained to meet the increasing need for other kinds of assistance dogs.

If a successful breeding program is implemented here, it will lead to 100 more Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs per year being placed with Western Australians who need them.

The organisation is also looking to create about 30 cadet traineeships which is estimates will result in about 25 full time equivalent jobs, while also filling a gap in the availability of qualified Guide Dog trainers. Guide Dogs WA is seeking a one-off \$5 million investment from Government, which it will match with money it has raised through donations.



Celebrating 85 years of dog rescue at Shenton Park Dogs' Refuge Home, left, and meeting with Mel Harrison, of Free the Hounds, and Anna

Gay Conversion practices

In 2018 the WA Labor Government indicated it would outlaw harmful conversion practices (sometimes referred to as gay conversion therapy). However the Minister for Mental Health's answer to questions I asked in September made it clear that the government is not currently considering legislation that would include churches and other religious organisations. To exclude churches, religious schools and other informal settings where we know conversion practices are more likely to take place is quite frankly appalling. Real harm is taking place within these organisations, leaving participants psychologically damaged. It is simply not enough for the Government to indicate it opposes 'gay conversion therapy' - it must actually act to stop this terrible practice.

Inclusive Education WA

I was concerned to learn that the Government has failed to continue to fund the Inclusive Education WA program, an initiative designed to help teachers and other school staff support LGBTIQ students.

LGBTIQ young people are still struggling. A report released in February 2020 found that LGBTIQ young people were five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

The Minister has said that resources will remain available online for those schools who need them – but supporting often vulnerable students should never be an afterthought. I urged the Government to re-consider its decision.



With Paddy Cullen and members of WA Seabird Rescue at the screening of the poignant Albatross film, which explores the impact of plastic in our oceans on our sea life

Dogma, not evidence, informing policy as scientists routinely gagged in public debate

I spoke in parliament about the *Consequences of Information Suppression in Ecological and Conservation Sciences* report, which shows that scientists from all sectors are being routinely gagged from full participation in public debate.

The report found 50% of scientists had their work suppressed in a number of ways, including Government scientists being prevented from providing accurate advice to Governments across Australia. Scientists said they were frequently constrained when trying to discuss issues including threatened species, native vegetation, logging and climate change.

Comments contained in the report from scientists include quotes such as, "I was told to be silent or never have a job again." The threat to jobs and careers is having a chilling effect on the public and government communication of science.

The lack of expertise in public debate is deeply problematic. Our climate change policies have been hijacked by industry spin. We need our scientists free to give fearless and accurate advice to decision-makers. Policy must be based on evidence, not dogma.

Ambulance costs

My questions uncovered that the Government's new service contract with St John Ambulance will not provide free ambulance services for people on concession cards, unlike other Australian jurisdictions. The Government blamed COVID and short timeframes in negotiating the new contract for failing to provide equitable access to ambulance services. Its assertion that it will attempt to resolve this issue in future contracts is not good enough.

2020-21 Budget lacking meaningful investment to mitigating climate change risks

I concluded my reply speech on the 2020-21 WA State budget by raising my concerns about the Government's lack of action on climate change. We have an unprecedented opportunity to tackle climate change and the COVID recovery at the same time. It is beyond disappointing that the steps taken in this budget towards tackling climate change are mediocre. Although the budget contains measures for the development of battery storage and environmental rehabilitation, it falls well short of what is needed and it certainly does not put the level of emphasis on climate change that we would not only hope to see, but that is absolutely necessary.

Investment in these areas can provide the jobs that we need—we do need jobs—and also set up our future to be much greener and more carbon efficient and, ultimately, safer for our children. This budget contains billions of dollars for road building across the forward estimates. We know that those kinds of activities do not deliver the number of jobs per \$1 million invested that investment in health care and education, for example, does. They certainly do not provide the same long-term climate change-fighting outcomes that expenditure on renewable energy infrastructure does, and they do not offer the immediate and long-term benefits of a substantial environmental rehabilitation program. In many ways, those things are not only necessary, but also relatively easy to implement.

Government slow to act on horrific cattle abuse footage captured on WA farms

I have continued to question the Government about what it is doing in response to the horrific abuse of cattle on WA farms that was exposed on Israeli television in December 2019.

The Minister for Agriculture and Food deflected overall responsibility away from her Department and back on to "those in charge of animals."

The drafting and implementation of regulations has been excruciatingly slow, with the 2016 Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle still not in place in WA.

Footage shown in Israel was harrowing, with filmmakers secretly recording animals being brutalised, including de-horned without painkillers and shot but not killed. It was appalling and the Government's slow response is equally so.

Children in care separated from siblings

During my budget reply address I raised a range of concerns about our child protection system.

I spoke about the critical lack of foster carers in WA and noted that questions I had asked revealed that 2 422 children in care are separated from their siblings. That is simply devastating. We know that when children are separated from their parents, the one thing they want is to at least be able to stay with their siblings.

I welcomed the allocation of \$700 000 to trial Aboriginal family-led decision-making. It is disappointing that the community had to fight so hard for this initiative, even though AFLDM has been occurring in other jurisdictions for a very long time.

It is essential that self-determination is not just a concept in legislation but also enacted on the ground. First Nations communities should absolutely lead these initiatives, which aim to determine how best to protect and care for their children.

Industrial Manslaughter finally achieved!

I was pleased to finally debate the Work Health and Safety Bill 2019 and the Safety Levies Amendment Bill 2019, which together have the power to be transformational for Western Australian workers and workplaces. Our occupational health and safety laws will be repealed in their entirety and the new laws will apply to all sectors, with a set of supporting regulations implemented for the mining, petroleum and geothermal sectors.

The bills have a very long history and I have been speaking on the need for reform in this space since the 38th Parliament. The new pieces of legislation are broadly faithful to the model laws set out in a number of important reports over the years. I have campaigned for Industrial Manslaughter for many years and the new legislation will finally introduce this.



At the Rally for Life

Ear Bus funding

I was disappointed to learn that the Government does not intend to fund the excellent Ear Bus program beyond 2021. The Ear Bus Foundation works to reduce middle ear disease in Aboriginal and at-risk children across WA. We should be doing more, not less, to ensure better health outcomes for WA children.

Delays in Coronial Inquests on rise

I was disappointed to learn through questions in Parliament there is a current backlog of 540 coronial cases that have been in the system for more than 12 months. This number has increased more than 50% since 2016-17. The backlog is often not the fault of the Coroner's Court, as it is waiting for reports from external agencies. Of the 540 cases, 118 are subject to inquests and 30 pertain to deaths in custody, including 25 suspected suicides. These are tragic cases and delays in coronial inquests mean families are left waiting an excruciatingly long time for answers. The need for reform in this space has been recognised for a long time. Coronial inquests can prevent further deaths so it is really important that we hold these in a timely manner.

Mandatory registration of child sex offenders

Last year I made a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs inquiry into the complex and distressing issue of registration of children and young people on the sex offenders register.

The final Committee report reflected many of my concerns, finding that the current approach is not working, and recommending a number of important changes. I recently spoke in Parliament about the report and urged the Government to take up its recommendations, including funding a therapeutic treatment approach for young people who exhibit harmful sexual behaviours.

State Records Office

There is still no genuine state records archive, whether that be paper or digital, despite the need for such a service being outlined in recommendations to come out of the WA Inc Royal Commission. Government departments and agencies continue to spend millions on contracted document storage and records management consultancy every year. I raised this important issue during my Budget speech. Without solid accountability systems like an effective State Records archive, we allow opportunities for corruption.

Support lacking for people with complex mental health needs

I spoke in parliament to draw attention to the annual report from the Chief Psychiatrist who critically analysed a number of failings in the mental health system. Of great concern is the report's findings on people with complex mental health conditions living at private psychiatric hostels who have been refused NDIS support.

The report found 16% had applications with NDIS refused and 27% were not using a community mental health service. I have been told that residents are often not receiving the support that they need to undertake the application process. The failure to engage these people with services means that people continue to end up in emergency departments.

Dire picture of state of mental health system

I also spoke in Parliament about issues arising from the Mental Health Advocacy Service's (MHAS) annual report, which identifies continued serious gaps and shortages in our mental health system. The report from MHAS paints a dire picture. There are huge gaps in the availability of appropriate care right across the system.

The report details continued unacceptable wait times in emergency departments, with one person waiting 6 days for a bed. Other people are kept in hospital unnecessarily because there is nowhere in the community for them to go. The report also tragically identifies a 32% increase in children under involuntary orders this year alone. Instances of self-harm among young people have increased 312% in the last nine years. Referrals to services are taking up to six weeks and the Mental Health Act is regularly being breached.



Attending WA Mental Health Week events (above and below)



More needed to protect vulnerable children

My heart goes out to the family of the 11 year-old First Nations girl whose life support was switched off on 20 October after she self-harmed. We know that suicide is preventable. Inquiry after inquiry has reported on how our system is failing vulnerable people, including in particular First Nations children and young people. Eleven year old children do not suicide if they are receiving adequate care and support. I again spoke in parliament of the outrage I have felt for a long time that recommendations from these many inquiries and inquests have not been addressed.

Serious reform needed to reduce drug harm to users and community

I have continued to raise in Parliament issues arising from the Help Not Handcuffs report.

I shared with the Upper House a letter from the Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (WANADA) responding to the report. WANADA points out – as I have on many occasions – that with five years until the end of the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-25, meeting demand for alcohol and other drug services does not look promising. WANADA notes that in 2017, alcohol and other drug harm reduction and personal support services were only 2.5% of the 2025 optimal service levels laid out in the Plan.

We need a different approach to dealing with illicit drug use. The Government needs to show courage, follow the public health advice, and look at serious reform in this space.

Concerns over implementation of re-entry and quarantine requirements



While the Greens support the public health advice regarding borders and quarantine, I had cause to speak in Parliament on multiple occasions of my dismay about the way re-entry and mandatory quarantine is being implemented. I was appalled by reports of a WA family, including an infant, stranded at Heathrow Airport for days after being bumped off flights in favour of business class passengers.

My office was quickly inundated with several more stories of people stranded in appalling circumstances. WA residents have experienced a myriad of problems when eventually arriving home. Despite people having to pay large bills, hotel quarantine arrangements have been substandard with disability and mental health conditions inadequately provided for.

House supports my homelessness motion

The Legislative Council passed my motion expressing grave concern about the growing rate of homelessness in WA and the Government's failure to adequately address the crisis. I asked the House to acknowledge particularly the failed intersections between homelessness responses and WA Police, transport, justice, mental health and alcohol and

other drug services.

The most recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows a 4% rise in the number of clients of homelessness services from 2017 to 2018-19 – prior to the start of the pandemic.

Statistics show a disproportionate number of First Nations people, children on child protection orders and people with mental health and alcohol and other drug issues are accessing homelessness

services. The most vulnerable in our community are among those most at risk of homelessness.

There are over 1000 fewer social housing properties in WA than there were in 2017, when the Labor Government took office. We know that the Government built, purchased or transferred for use as social housing only 24 properties in 6 months – when we are facing a shortfall of 15,000 properties. At 31 May 2020, 23,709 people were seeking public housing.

Community input essential in Planning

Concerns about planning are one of the most common reasons people contact my office. I have been receiving a growing number of inquiries from people who believe there are zero avenues for them to have their planning concerns addressed. While I would ordinarily suggest a petition as one avenue, with Parliament rising soon there is now no time for the Committee that investigates petitions to properly consult and consider the issues.

Community input is absolutely essential for the planning process and we are seeing it effectively being ignored on what is becoming a disturbingly regular basis. The community has no right of third-party appeal. It cannot vote out a Joint

Development Assessment Panel. The Minister can over-ride any conditions put on any proposal and so it is no surprise the community is feeling frustrated and angry. I raised this serious issue in parliament, highlighting the concerns of a range of groups from the north to the south of my electorate. Our planning system has lost balance and must be re-assessed.

Third Party Appeal rights crucial

I debated a motion about third party appeal rights in planning and development decisions during the COVID-19 emergency period.

In WA, we currently only allow appeal rights for first parties – ie, developers – should they receive a decision or conditions that they don't wish to comply

with. The community has no right of appeal should they believe that a decision was improperly made.

The issue of third party appeal rights is not a new one, and one that the Greens have campaigned for over many decades. Third party appeal rights have been available in every other Australian state since the 1970s. They increase transparency and accountability and are often quicker to resolve than first party appeals. Third party appeals in other states are frequently upheld in courts, showing that it is possible to weed out vexatious claims.

Introducing third party appeal rights to ensure that planning decisions are fair and that decision-makers are held accountable is necessary in an environment where the community has lost nearly all ability to force compliance with planning schemes.

Ligature minimisation work moving too slowly

I have continued to question the Government about ligature minimisation in prison cells. This work is crucial to preventing suicide deaths by hanging and was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 30 years ago. My questions uncovered that just \$430,401 was spent on this process in 2019-20. This equates to eliminating possible hanging points in only about eight cells per year across the entire prison system.

Self-harm rates at Banksia Hill deeply concerning

I continue to hold grave concerns about the mental health of young people at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. There were 145 self-harm incidents and two attempted suicides in 2019. There were also 75 assaults and three serious

assaults against staff, and 56 assaults and one serious assault against other children and young people in the detention centre.

85% of young detainees return to custody within 5 years

My parliamentary questions uncovered that a staggering 85% of sentenced young people released from youth justice detention return to either youth justice detention or are sentenced to adult prison within five years of release.

This is clear evidence that our youth justice system is absolutely counter-productive and simply broken. I continue to call for Banksia Hill Detention Centre to be closed, for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised, and for investment in evidence-based therapeutic solutions to young people's offending.

Mental health care in prisons

During my current term in Parliament I have repeatedly questioned the Government about mental health care in WA prisons. Following the inquest in 2017 into the death in custody of a 20-year-old First Nations man and specific recommendations made by the WA Coroner, I asked the Government how many First Nations health and mental health workers were employed in WA prisons. At the time there were NONE – and the Government made no commitments to employing any. Three years on, my recent questions revealed that there is now ONE Aboriginal Healthcare worker – at Eastern Goldfields Prison, with a position at Melaleuca vacant. And there are now four positions dedicated to Aboriginal Mental Health across our prisons system, with one currently employed at Wandoo and three positions vacant.

Revisiting the 2017 Machinery of Government changes

The Legislative Council once again debated the Machinery of Government changes as part of a motion put before the Upper House. The evidence is showing us that the changes have not broken down silos or achieved efficiency - particularly with regards the Department of Communities. Feedback from Child Protection indicates that things are worse than they were before. Staff in that department are under enormous strain, facing mental health issues and fearing for the lives of the children in their care.

The voluntary separation scheme has meant that knowledge and expertise has been lost to the public service. I have been contacted many times including by union delegates who have expressed concern about the reduced number of public servants and the impact on their physical and mental health. They were over-worked and demoralised, even pre-COVID.

We need to keep improving how departments collaborate and communicate in order to breakdown the silos that prevent effective service delivery.

Crisis accommodation

Questions I asked in parliament revealed that as at 1 October 2020 there was crisis accommodation available in the Perth metropolitan area for only ONE young person. This is a horrifying statistic. Everyone deserves a safe place to sleep.



At the memorial service for First Nations boy John Pat, who died in police custody in 1983



Elder Abuse

I have continued to raise the issue of elder abuse and I remain committed to keeping pressure on the Government to make meaningful change to ensure our seniors are protected. Most recently, I pursued the Government about its

intentions for harmonising its power of attorney legislation with that of other states, as per the Law Reform Commission's recommendations. I have also asked the Government whether it has established a specialist Elder Abuse unit within WA Police, as recommended by the Select Committee into Elder Abuse, of which I was vice chair.

With the 2020 YMCA Youth Parliamentarians, above left, and at the annual Baha'i event at Parliament House

Get in touch.

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Public Sector

Seniors and Ageing

Sexuality and Gender Diversity

Training and Workforce Development

Veterans Affairs

Volunteering

Women

Youth

Bills debated

COVID-19 Response and Economic Recovery Bill 2020

Electoral Amendment Bill 2020

Work Health and Safety Bay Bill 2019

Safety Levies Amendment Bill 2019

Alison's committees

Joint Standing Committee on the CCC

We released our report into the CCC oversight of excessive use of force by WA Police and found that the CCC needs to put much greater emphasis on this important community safeguard.

Select Committee into Palliative Care

We are expecting to table our report into the state of Palliative Care in Western Australia this month. This inquiry has proceeded at lightning pace, with less than six months from the formation of the Committee to tabling date. We have put in very long hours during a very intense part of the Parliamentary cycle. I will be very pleased to share this report with you.