

2020.02.25

5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the allocation of emergency housing to victims of domestic abuse: (OQ.49/2020)

Will the Minister please state whether victims fleeing domestic abuse have priority in terms of accessing emergency housing?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

The short answer is yes, but the system is not perfect. The homelessness review has been going on for the last year and I am imminently awaiting its report, which will highlight some of the things we need to do to help people facing homelessness and that does include people who are fleeing domestic violence. We know that organisations like the Women's Refuge and Shelter do excellent work supporting people in emergencies, but we need to do more to help provide permanent solutions, so the emergency provision is able to cope. In the last few months, a homelessness cluster has been operating, which brings different agencies together to find solutions for specific cases and I am aware that they are experiencing success in dealing with sometimes complex cases, but more has to be done to formalise this and more has to be done to provide more permanent solutions as well.

3.5.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister has accepted that more needs to be done, could he elaborate on what he thinks an ideal situation might be for Jersey and what he would like to put in place?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

If we are talking an ideal situation, part of that would involve having significantly more homes, so that there is less demand on the Housing Gateway, because that enables us to provide a way of providing permanent solutions, especially when there are children involved. We want permanency and stability and it frees up the emergency provisions for those cases where something needs to be done imminently before then a permanent solution is found. I will openly say that the most difficult cases that I have come across that will require some tough thinking, not just by me, but by the rest of the Assembly, as well, relates to those instances where the partner who wishes to flee does not have housing qualifications; that can be a serious complication here. We have got to find ways of supporting those people, so that nobody is left in a situation where they are staying in a home which is unsafe for them,, or unsafe for their children.

3.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Surely the person who wishes to flee is protected under human rights legislation with a right to family life?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

That is certainly my view and there have been difficult instances where cases are reviewed for hardship and setting precedent is something that we receive advice on, that I often consider to be unwelcome advice, given the circumstances that we face. That is also a bureaucracy though that can take a while to deal with and in some of these instances they need solutions much quicker than that. It is very early in the policy development stage of this, but Children's Services I know are looking at some provisions they think would help them be able to help the families they support when they face that as well.

3.5.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Would the Minister agree to have a discussion with me about the next steps, so that I can feed back to interested parties?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Absolutely. I mentioned that I was imminently awaiting a report from the homelessness review. I am aware that a draft is ready; I have not yet seen it. It might be worth waiting until that point where I have seen it. I will chase that up and find out when that is going to be but I am more than happy to have that conversation with Deputy Doublet.