

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

#### **MATTERS RAISED**

#### **MARE D'ALBERT – SCHOOL CHILDREN – BUS SERVICE**

**(12.04.2022)**

**Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien):** Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre du Transport, l'honorable Alan Ganoo. Je suis en présence de doléances de quelques parents habitant le village de Mare d'Albert et dont les enfants voyagent dans le bus pour aller à l'école à Curepipe, donc je fais référence à la route no.9. Il se trouve que très souvent ils doivent attendre parfois jusqu'à 1 heure le matin pour qu'ils puissent trouver un autobus la raison étant que plusieurs de ces autobus qui desservent la route no.9 ne s'arrêtent pas. Je demande donc au ministre de s'enquérir de cette situation pour une solution. Merci.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, please!

**The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo):** I thank the hon. Member. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will look into the matter but perhaps I should inform the House that no public bus can refuse access to commuters, to school children if sitting accommodation is available in this bus and if such offences are reported to the NLTA, the latter will initiate actions, probably disciplinary actions against the defaulter.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, very much. Hon. Lobine!

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

#### **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **FOSTER CARE - CHILDREN - NUMBER**

**(12.04.2022)**

**(No. B/235) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to children in foster care, she will state the number thereof over the past five years.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I propose to reply to PQ B/235 and PQ B/274 together as they relate to the same subject matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to PQ B/235, as at 06 April 2022, the number of foster children stand at 91, who are under the care and responsibility of 76 foster families registered with my Ministry.

As the House is aware, the Foster Care Programme was introduced in 2002 in Mauritius in accordance with the Child Protection (Foster Care) Regulations of 2002, as subsequently amended in 2005. With the proclamation of the Children's Act of 2020 on 24 January 2022, the Foster Care Programme is now regulated by the Child (Foster Care) Regulations of 2022 which is also effective as from 24 January 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Foster Care Programme is among one of the alternative systems of care to children placed in our shelters and who cannot be reintegrated into their biological setting immediately.

The main objective of the Foster Care Programme is to give opportunity to the children, who have been victims of abuse or neglect or harm, and who are at risk in their own family environment, and who have been removed under Court Orders and placed in institutions so that they can evolve in a substitute family environment.

The primary role of foster parents is to give support to the child and help him to grow physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of PQ B/274, 79 foster children were placed in foster care since 2017 to date.

**Mrs Mayotte:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House on the criteria laid down by her Ministry with regard to child fostering?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** The criteria, Mr Speaker, Sir, for a family to be registered at the level of My Ministry to foster our children, the applicants must –

- have a steady home;
- they must be aged between 25 to 60 years;
- they could be married or single;
- the family should be in good health emotionally as well physically;
- they should demonstrate and prove a genuine interest in parenting; and
- they should be willing to help the child reunite with the child's biological family or to be moved into an adopted family when the time is appropriate, and
- the applicant should also have appropriate and decent housing facilities with basic safety standards.

**Mrs Mayotte:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House on the follow-up that is carried out by the Ministry when a child is in a foster home?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Yes, if I can just have a second to have a look through that. The follow-up that is carried out at the level of my Ministry: we undertake monthly visits to foster homes in the first trimester and quarterly visits. Regular visits are made to the school and progress of the child is taken note of. We take note of the general well-being of the child including his health and his general outlook. Once we have placed a child in a foster family, officers of the Foster Care section, like I said, effect regular home visits, school visits, provide psychological support and counselling to both the minor and the foster parents, if required.

**Mr Armance:** Madame la ministre, permettez-moi de vous rappeler qu'aujourd'hui, le 12 avril, c'est la journée mondiale des enfants des rues, alors même que les ONG sont en

train de soutenir que la situation est en train d'empirer et qu'il y a beaucoup plus d'enfants dans la rue.

De ce fait, avec un budget de R 12m. qui vous a été attribué en juin, après 9 mois, vous avez pu accueillir que 91 enfants sur le *Foster Programme*. Que comptez-vous faire pour augmenter ce nombre d'enfants? Avec R 12m., vous pouvez accueillir jusqu'à 125 enfants – donc, que comptez-vous faire, *on a short term*, pour pourvoir accueillir beaucoup plus d'enfants pour bénéficier du programme de soutien? Merci.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a very pertinent and a very good question put by the hon. Member from the other side. The aim of foster care is obviously a rehabilitative work that is carried out between the biological parents and the child. So, the question of *les enfants de la rue*, Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot just pick up a child and place that person in a foster family. There are criteria to be met. There are social, financial enquiries to be conducted. I think the hon. Member from the other side will note that through the enactment of the Children's Act, we are in the process of professionalising the foster care itself.

A paper has been prepared by my Ministry to that effect and we shall be reiterating our request through our budgetary meetings with the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development so that we can take better care and implement a more solid foster care program for our children.

**Mrs Mayotte:** Can the hon. Minister tell us if the prospective foster parents do benefit from training? If so, what kind of training do they benefit from?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Yes, in fact, they do. The prospective foster parents do undergo training and it is actually, even after *ils ont accueilli un enfant*, the training is an ongoing feature. When it comes to foster care, regular trainings are organised for both the prospective parents as well as the foster parents who are entrusted with the child. Those trainings are organised by the Family Welfare and Protection officers, they are the legal resource persons of my Ministry, the psychologists of my Ministry, and resource persons from other stakeholders also such as the Ministry of Health and Wellness are also involved.

**Mr Armance:** I am given to understand that you have a Foster Care Advisory Committee as well to ensure that there is proper follow-up on all procedures. Can we know who are the members of this Committee and do they have regular meeting? What about the last

output of this Committee because now, I can understand that despite you have a big budget but you are not using the funds efficiently to accommodate more children?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Despite the fact that I have a big budget? Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the composition of the Foster Care Advisory Committee. I shall be very happy to table this information to the House.

We are talking about the Foster Care Advisory Committee; this has come about with the Child Foster Care Regulations of 2022, which came into play on 24 January 2022. The Advisory Committee is going to consider a broader and a well set number of procedures having to do with the smooth running of the foster care system in Mauritius.

I agree with the hon. Member the work has to be done. It is being done. We are trying to align ourselves like stipulated in the Children's Act with the guidelines of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

**Mr Speaker:** I am reminding the House that the Minister has just been replying to PQ B/235, B/274 asked by hon. Mrs Mayotte and hon. Armance.

No confusion.

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

#### **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **AFED SHELTER - MINORS - ALLEGED ILL-TREATMENT**

**(05.04.2022)**

(No. B/184) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the AFED Shelter located in Rose Hill, she will state the findings and sanctions taken by her Ministry in recent cases of alleged ill-treatment on minors thereat.

**Reply:** Following cases of allegations made against the *Association pour l'accueil des femmes et des enfants en difficulté* (AFED) regarding two caregivers in post thereat, my Ministry carried out an enquiry and submitted a report with the main recommendation to suspend them from duty.

My Ministry was informed that Mrs C.B., child caregiver was suspended on 10 December 2021, following the decision taken by the Board members of AFED and as regards Mrs M.N.F., the second caregiver, she was suspended on 18 February 2022.

In addition, Enforcement Officers of my Ministry effected surprise visits on Friday 04 March 2022, Saturday 05 March 2022 and Sunday 06 March 2022 at AFED and several shortcomings were identified.

A follow-up meeting was held on 17 March 2022 at my Ministry, with the Management of AFED and it was decided that minors placed thereat had to be relocated to other Residential Care Institutions, pending report of Police inquiry. On 25 March 2022, the minors placed at AFED were relocated to different RCIs.

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

#### **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **CHILDREN'S ACT - PROBATION OFFICERS - FACILITIES**

**(29.03.2022)**

(No. B/82) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the implementation of the Children's Act, she will state if the Probation Officers have been trained accordingly, indicating the facilities put at their disposal to effectively shoulder their new responsibilities.

**Reply:** The Children's Act 2020 was proclaimed on 24 January 2022 and makes provisions for, *inter alia*, better care, protection and assistance to children; the respect and promotion of children's rights; the protection of the best interests of children; the setting up of structures, services and means for promoting and monitoring the sound, physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development of children; the prohibition of marriage of children under the age of 18 and the age of criminal responsibility to be set at 14 years.

In light of major changes being brought by the Children' Act 2020, capacity building programmes have been planned for officers of my Ministry, the Police Department and the

Probation and Aftercare Service. To that effect, the following were held –

(i) a workshop on child sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy, organised by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, on 06 October 2021. 1 Psychologist, 1 Acting Principal Probation Officer, 1 Senior Probation Officer and 1 Probation Officer attended;

(ii) a consultative workshop on the Children's Act organised by the Police Department, with a representative of the Office of the Director of Public

Prosecutions as resource person, on 26 October 2021. 1 Deputy Commissioner, 1 Temporary Assistant Commissioner, 1 Principal Probation Officer and 1 Senior Probation Officer;

- (iii) a workshop on Capacity Building/Cum Training through policy Dialogue in line with the proclamation of the Children's Act, Children's Court Act and the Child Sex Offender Register Act, with Head of Child Development Unit as resource person, on 13 December 2021. 1 Assistant Commissioner, 1 Temporary Assistant Commissioner, 2 Principal Probation Officers and 1 Senior Probation Officer attended;
- (iv) a workshop on Children's Act, organised by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, on 09 February 2022. 2 Temporary Assistant Commissioners attended, and
- (v) working sessions on the Children's Act (policy and sharing of information) by Child Development Unit, on 16 February 2022 and on 17 February 2022. 2 Principal Probation Officers attended the first batch while the second batch was attended by 2 Principal Probation Officers and 1 Probation Officer.

I wish to inform the House that prior to the proclamation of the Act, several meetings were held and additional provision to the tune of Rs7,805,000 was made in this year's Budget to meet the expenditure in connection with the Probation Hostel and Home, acquisition of equipment, furniture and a van. Furthermore, funded vacancies for 2 additional posts of Assistant Commissioner, 3 additional posts of Probation Officer, 1 additional post of Office Management Assistant and 5 additional posts of Management Support Officer were also provided.

As regards the facilities put at the disposal of the Probation Officers to effectively shoulder their new responsibilities, I am informed by the Prime Minister's Office (Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity Division) that – (i) 20 Notebooks;

- (ii) 11 printers, and
- (iii) 1 Personal Computer were provided to enable them to perform their duties.

Necessary actions are being taken by the Prime Minister's Office for the provision of appropriate and adequate equipment to the Officers of the Probation and Aftercare Service.



The proper implementation of the Children's Act 2020 requires a coordinated approach from different Ministries/Departments. The training programme is ongoing and officers of my Ministry work in close collaboration with the Police Department and with officers of Probation and Aftercare Service on the field. The main aim is to perform at all time in the best interests of the child.

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#### **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **HUMAN PAPILOMAVIRUS - EXPANDED PROGRAM OF IMMUNIZATION**

**(29.03.2022)**

**(No. B/76) D. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the population, he will state the number of vaccinations and inoculations carried out by his Ministry as part of the routine immunization programme therefor over the past two years, indicating if Human Papillomavirus is included therein and, if not, why not and if consideration will be given for girls aged 12-16 to be immunized against same.

**Reply:** In Mauritius, the Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) remains committed to achieving and maintaining high immunization coverage by making efforts to reach all children with potent vaccines.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the statistics regarding vaccination carried out in Mauritius for the past two years, including HPV vaccination. I wish to point out that HPV vaccination has been introduced in Mauritius in 2016 as a primary prevention strategy against cervical cancer to school girls as from the age of 9 years old. Since its introduction to date, a total of 88,861 girls had already received their two doses of HPV vaccine.

There is an established calendar for administration of two doses of the HPV vaccines and these vaccinations sessions are carried out in school premises during school days by the Public Health Nursing Officers under the supervision of a medical officer. Consent of parents is sought prior to vaccination.

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

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*YEAR 2022*

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#### **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ILLEGAL OPERATION – COMMITTAL ORDER (29.03.2022)**

**(No. B/33) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to Residential Care Institutions and Day Care Centres, she will state if she is aware that some of them are operating without the required licence and that applications have been made to court for committal orders to commit mistreated children to shelters that were not place of safety.

**Reply:** There are presently 18 Residential Care Institutions (RCIs) that are regulated and mandated by my Ministry to provide necessary services, protection and “*prise-encharge*” of the child victims of harm. There are 4 Government-owned RCIs, out of which 3 are run by NGOs and 1 by the National Children’s Council and the remaining 14 are managed by different NGOs.

The Child Protection (Place of Safety for the Welfare and Protection of Children) Regulations 2019 came into effect on 1 October 2019. When I took office in December 2019, I reviewed the structural support services provided to our children and the set-up for an enforcement mechanism.

My Ministry requested all the 16 RCIs that have been providing services, since years, to register as Place of Safety. As at 12 April 2022, 8 out of the 14 NGOs have registered under Residential Care Institutions for Children Regulations 2022, 6 have yet to be registered.

Placing mistreated children in shelters is a last resort measure. My Ministry explores all avenues and alternative placement possibilities such as placement with next to kin or relatives and even willing foster homes before envisaging an application for a committal order.

I am fully aware of the challenges faced by Residential Care Institutions and Places of Safety. To that effect, I chaired a meeting regrouping all stakeholders, including the National Social Inclusion Foundation, involved in ensuring the support and compliance of RCIs to existing legislations and existing funding schemes. The Foundation is already helping to address the shortage of financial and human resources which are preventing these NGOs from complying with the provisions of the Regulations under a new funding framework agreement.

The National Social Inclusion Foundation is working in close collaboration with my Ministry on a National Programme for Residential Care Institutions for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

The provisions of the Regulations 2022 are meant to raise the standards of service being offered in our RCIs. All RCIs will, henceforth, be called upon to offer a higher quality of service. I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry will consider taking bold decisions to cease operations of all RCIs which would not comply with the Regulations.

As regards Child Day Care Centres, as at February 2022, 375 Child Day Care Centres are operational across the island, out of which 216 are operating without a Certificate of Registration.

The Child Day Care Centres Regulations 2022 came into operation on 24 January 2022 and the sanctions have been revised as follows –

“Any person who contravenes these regulations commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs200,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years.”

Since October 2021, the officers of my Ministry have requested all Child Day Care Centres to register their managers and child caregivers with the Ministry. As at 25 March 2022, my Ministry has registered 224 managers and 696 child caregivers.

A moratorium of 3 months to all managers and caregivers who have not yet submitted their registration to the Ministry is being given, failing which they will not be authorised to work in a Child Day Care Centre.

For Child Day Care Centres which have not submitted their applications for registration with all the required clearances, my Ministry is envisaging to grant them a final moratorium of 6 months, failing which they will be asked to stop operating and my Ministry will initiate procedures for contravening all those not complying with the regulations.