

I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion to the Assembly. As highlighted yesterday, it's imperative that we continue to keep the focus on gender-based violence in the ACT to ensure we address this very significant problem in our community. Enough is enough.

A holistic, evidenced-based approach is needed to ensure we have a meaningful and effective responses to sexual assault reform. I commend the Minister for Women, Yvette Berry, for yesterday establishing the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Working Group, that will go some way to a coordinated approach to this multi-faceted problem. As I said yesterday, I will be a strong advocate for victims and survivors and am personally committed to talking to the community broadly about this issue - culture change will come from education and from having the hard conversations.

In bringing about reform, there are many aspects and angles to come at this. Mrs Jones Motion focuses on the frontline services that work with people who have experienced sexual assault. We need to be looking at best-practice in other jurisdictions and internationally in the models of service we offer. As expressed in the motion, perhaps flexible, mobile models of support are appropriate in some contexts.

Another point I wanted to bring to the Assembly is that we pay attention to our language around this issue. The language we use impacts. Language can unintentionally perpetuate the very cultural constructs and stereotypes we are trying change.

I point to point b) of the motion as a small example - which states 'in the event of a rape or sexual assault' - I understand the intent, but the language diminishes the seriousness of what has occurred, and implies an inevitability. What has occurred is a traumatic, criminal act, a violation of human rights - that should NEVER happen. This is semantics – but I strongly encourage members to check their language on this issue so that they are not inadvertently perpetuating the very things we are trying to stop.

Earlier this week I met with ACT Commissioner for Victims of Crime Heidi Yates; Canberra Rape Crisis Centre Chief Executive Chrystina Stanford; and Assoc. Professor and Director of Sexual Health and Forensic Medicine at The Canberra Hospital Dr Vanita Parekh to hear their concerns and priorities for improving sexual assault service and support provision in the ACT. These are women at the frontline in this work. They know what is needed. They see it day in and day out.

A key message that came from that meeting was that we need to lead with a message of 'hope'. This is itself is challenging, because survivors of these crimes at times can feel so isolated, so alone and so hope-less.

However, I want to flip this – I want the perpetrators of these crimes to feel no hope – they know what they did, what they don't know - is when they might be called-out, exposed, charged. I want them to fester in a world of uncertainty.

I want victims to feel hope, to be secure in the knowledge of what happened to them, what happened to them was wrong, it was a criminal act, and I want survivors to know that they will be supported to move forward with their lives.

I'd like to finish with a quote of Grace Tames - "When we share, we heal, reconnect, and grow. Both as individuals and as a united strengthened collective. History, lived experience, the whole truth, unsanitised, and unedited, is our greatest learning resource.