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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Youth Homelessness

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I speak on today's matter of public importance, youth homelessness. I thank the member for Bankstown for raising this important issue.

We all come to this place to represent our communities and to advocate for the most vulnerable people in those communities. There are few people more vulnerable than the homeless, and particularly young people who are sleeping rough. As a State, we need to do much more to address the growing issue of homelessness.

Today the report "The state of homelessness in Australia's cities" was released, which showed that more than 4,000 people are sleeping rough nationwide. Tragically, the average time they spend on the street is six years.

In New South Wales the situation is deteriorating. Our youth homelessness rate is increasing, in contrast to the national trend of youth homelessness declining. This Government often boasts that under its leadership New South Wales is leading the nation. That may be the case for Government members' top-end-of-town mates and those who enjoy corporate boxes in Sydney stadiums, but this Government is failing our youth by failing to address the issue of homelessness. The true test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable. Right now in the State of New South Wales this Government is failing that test.

Today the shadow Treasurer and the shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault met with some representatives from the housing sector. The shadow Treasurer told a wonderful story about work being done in the Illawarra to reduce homelessness. He spoke about the importance of service providers such as real estate agents being in regular contact with support services to ensure that individuals who may be on the path to homelessness are supported in order that they can maintain their housing.

Unlike this Government, the Labor Opposition will work relentlessly to reduce the rate of homelessness in New South Wales. It is a commitment of this party to support those in need of a helping hand.

Addressing the growing rates of youth homelessness in this State is not simple but it is possible. Labor is committed to ensuring that we tailor our frontline government services to wrap around and support people who are at risk of homelessness. Labor also has a strong plan to address housing affordability in this State, which is just one of many issues that contribute towards homelessness.

I mentioned the member for Maitland, the shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, who is committed to ensuring that the victims of family violence, including young people, can escape violent homes and be housed safely and securely. In her absence, I give this speech on her behalf and echo her thoughts.

Homelessness is a tragic issue that is affecting far too many people in the State of New South Wales.

Under this Government the vulnerable are being neglected. Under Labor they will be a priority.