

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

### ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES – 2 MARCH 2017 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Information release – media article 26 February 2017

**Question reference number:** 1 (HS 1)

**Senator:** Watt

**Type of question:** Hansard pages 9-12

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 21 April 2017

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

- a) Senator WATT: What time did the minister's office provide that information to the journalist?

Mr Hutson: I do not have that information.

Senator WATT: Senator Ryan, do you have that information?

Senator Ryan: No, I do not. Obviously, it has not been my portfolio—the officials—

Senator WATT: Sure. So no-one in the department's media team—I have worked in ministers' offices. There is obviously a lot of interaction between ministers' offices and the department's media team. There is no-one in your media team who knows when the minister's office provided that information to the journalist?

Mr Hutson: No.

Ms Campbell: We can take that on notice and ask the minister.

Senator WATT: Could we have an answer on that after the morning tea break, please?

Ms Campbell: We will take it on notice.

- b) Senator WATT: .... In this particular situation, were there a number of drafts of that statement prepared before it was ultimately released?

Mr Hutson: I expect so, but I do not have detail on that.

.....

Ms Campbell: No. Ms Sear, who is here today, might be able to assist us. We will ask her to come to the table.

Senator WATT: Ms Sear, I take it you were involved in the preparation of the statement?

Ms Sear: Yes.

Senator WATT: You have heard what we have been talking about and you know the dates we are talking about and the responses, that kind of stuff?

Ms Sear: Yes.

Senator WATT: Do you know whether, in this particular instance, a number of drafts of that statement were prepared before it was ultimately released?

Ms Sear: It is usual to have a number of drafts go back and forth between the business areas and, in this instance, our colleagues in legal services.

Senator WATT: I understand what might be usual; I am asking about this particular situation. What occurred in the situation?

Ms Sear: I do not have the details of that.

Senator WATT: Is there anyone here who does?

Ms Sear: No.

Senator WATT: Could you find that out and come back to us.

Ms Sear: Certainly.

- c) Senator WATT: ..... Ms Sear, do you know whether the minister's office had input into that final statement, at any point along the chain?

Ms Campbell: We will take that on notice and get the information, because Ms Sear has already said that she does not have that information at hand. We will get that information.

Senator WATT: No, what Ms Sear said is that she does not know how many drafts were prepared. I am asking a different question now. Do you know whether the minister's office had input into the wording of that final statement?

Ms Sear: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator WATT: So you do not know?

Ms Sear: No.

**Answer:**

- a) This information was provided by Senator Ryan later in the hearing. See excerpt from Hansard (Page 43) below:

**Senator Ryan:** On the morning of 21 February 2017, Paul Malone made inquiries with the Department of Human Services and the office of the Minister for Human Services regarding a customer's case. The minister's office then sought information from the department. The following morning on 22 February at 11.29 am, the minister's office responded to Paul Malone with answers to his inquiries that had been cleared for public release by senior legal officers of the department. Two further quotes were provided to Paul Malone by the minister's office at 4:17 pm that day. The department also responded to Paul Malone that same day. All of the information provided to Paul Malone by the minister's office about the customer was cleared by senior legal officers of the department.

- b) and c) This matter is currently under evaluation by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The AFP has advised that it would be inappropriate to comment on the matter while it is under evaluation.