



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Motions

8 February 2018

SHELLHARBOUR GOVERNMENT CLEANING STAFF

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:36):

I support the motion moved by the member for Shellharbour. Like me, she cares for cleaners who are the most vulnerable and hardest workers in our community. The actions of this Government have made cleaners in Wallsend and Shellharbour fearful about job losses. The Government is stripping away all job security provisions and 7,000 school cleaners have been forced to reapply for their jobs under the new cleaning contract that is starting in July this year. How daunting is that? They will lose entitlements such as sick leave, which is an entitlement that the Government should consider providing for our cleaners. The new contract will affect 4,500 sites, including 3,200 schools—80 per cent of cleaning jobs are at schools as well as TAFEs, ambulance stations and the offices of members of Parliament.

I support United Voice campaigning to protect the rights of cleaners. The union will stand up for those workers and help to allay the job insecurities that will inevitably occur in July. In October, the Secretary of the Department of Finance wrote to the Secretary of United Voice and stated:

... under the new contract, all existing cleaners will be offered the chance to attend an interview with the successful tenderers.

This means they will be reapplying for the same job, which is a waste of time. Should cleaners be grateful for the opportunity to receive an interview for the job they have had for many decades? I do not think so.

I can speak from experience because my mother was a school cleaner for 24 years at West Wallsend Public School. I know how hard cleaners work. I appreciate the importance of their role in terms of the health and wellbeing of our students. I know this debate is not about hospitals, but our public and private hospitals would be in a sad state without quality cleaning. Despite a number of meetings with cleaners, the Minister for Finance, Services and Property, unfortunately, has shown no sign of caring about job security for school cleaners or maintaining cleaning standards. The Premier must intervene on this issue. Cleaners who are

currently working should be able to continue to be employed regardless of who is awarded the next contract.

I am also bothered by the whole notion of contracts. I make sure that I always know the name of the cleaner who works in my office. I have worked in this job for nearly 11 years and I have met about 12 cleaners. We are going through them at a rate of knots. They do not remain in their job. Why do so many different cleaners come and go? It is something to do with their job conditions and security, unfortunately. In the end it means that the offices of members of Parliament are not cleaned as well as they should be. I agree with the member for Kiama: We value our cleaners and know how important their job is. If the Government values cleaners as much as I do, it should make sure that they have the same job security to which they are entitled. Let us also preserve their sick leave as it is important to them. I support the motion.