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MEDIA RELEASE

AFPA OUTRAGED BY CONTINUANCE OF THOMAS MATTHEWS' BAIL

The Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) is disgusted by the ACT Government's decision not to conduct a full review of the ACT judicial system - which has failed the community again by allowing bail to be granted to Thomas Matthews. Matthews was previously granted bail after being found guilty of running down three ACT Policing (ACTP) members.

AFPA President Alex Caruana said that this represented a clear failure to meet community expectations.

"These kinds of crimes are not typical of Canberra. When I first learnt what had happened, I was flabbergasted, and I've been working in the policing sector for twenty years. Canberra's citizens aren't under any illusions that we're a sleepy little town where nothing happens, but rightly see our city as somewhere where random violence isn't the norm and police are largely well-respected.

"Mr Matthews' crime, which he freely pleaded guilty to, should have meant no presumption of bail at least until sentencing. Here is a man living with schizophrenia, described by his own lawyer as "very mentally unwell", who has made decisions that resulted in three police officers being run down by his car. The AFPA's position is that he should not have been bailed due to the ongoing risks he posed to other police members and the community at large.

"The Association is cognisant of the challenges of addressing mental health injuries within Australian society, especially with respect to the health of our own members as well as the ACT Government's excellent rollout of the PACER program to provide appropriate and nuanced care to the community. But this acknowledgement in no way overrules the fact that government has an obligation to protect the community, both through the services it provides as well as the personal liberties it must sometimes restrict.

"Bail should be a privilege. In comparison to recidivism, where bail refusal and deprivation of liberty can be used as deterrence for reoffending, remand and custodial arrangements can be used for mentally unwell persons as a measure of providing for their own personal safety as well as that of other citizens. This didn't happen this time, but it clearly should have.

Mr Caruana said that the weak actions of the judiciary were compounded by reckless media coverage utilising footage of the incident.

"My members watched the footage in court, complete and unedited. Friends and colleagues were reduced to tears as they watched three fellow police officers mown down. Media outlets have then

shown extremely questionable judgement in reusing the footage as a kind of clickbait.

"Why? We already know how the members were injured. There is a clear precedent in the industry for violent or RTA (road traffic accident) footage being redacted or moderated before being published online. Most importantly, I question whether those members involved were asked before it was used in this way."

The AFPA continues its call for an independent review into bail and sentencing outcomes in the ACT.

For comments:

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