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MEDIA RELEASE

AFPA SUPPORTS ACT LIBERALS' MOTIONS FOR GREATER POLICE RESOURCING AND BETTER ONLINE REPORTING TOOLS FOR SEXUAL CRIMES

The Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) welcomes the motion from Deputy Leader of the ACT Opposition Jeremy Hanson MLA for greater police funding and resourcing in the ACT, which was made earlier today in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The Association is disappointed that the Assembly did not support the motion.

Mr Hanson's motion decried the \$15 million reduction in ACT Policing's budget in 2013. At the time of the funding cut, the AFPA said it was clear that ACTP could not be expected to provide a consistent level of service to the community alongside the record growth in Canberra's population.

Ten years later, AFPA President Alex Caruana said that along with being the lowest-paid in the country, Canberra police numbers are also the lowest per capita out of all jurisdictions.

"Just last year, the ACT Government acknowledged that the population had been under-reported by around 20,000 people in the greater Canberra region. How is it possible that records can be that far out, and more importantly, how can the Government make any reasonable claim to having enough police in Canberra if they don't actually know how many people are living here?"

"The Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded an increase of 85,000 people living in Canberra in the period 2011-2021, with Canberra's population growth rate of 23% being the highest of all capital cities¹.

"To meet the adjusted Australian average of 264 police officers per 100,000² people, there would have needed to be a net increase of 225 more police in the ACT from 2011-2021.

"Even if we were not to attempt to regain parity with other state forces, to simply match ACT police numbers to population growth would mean another 201 sworn police are needed. Yet instead of a 23% increase, the period of 2011-2021 saw a 4% decrease in sworn police numbers^{3,4}.

Mr Caruana acknowledged the pressures this placed on the AFP, in particular the ACTP Executive.

¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release>

² <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/justice/police-services>

³ <https://www.police.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF/act-policing-annual-report-2010-11.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.police.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/Publications/actp-ar-2020-2021.pdf>

“Commissioner Kershaw and Deputy Commissioner Gaughan are being forced to obfuscate or withhold real data on numbers and readiness.

“The government-driven narrative about there being a pipeline of recruits ready to hit the ground in the ACT represents a disconnect between wishful thinking and reality,” Mr Caruana said.

As well as the issue of police numbers, Mr Caruana highlighted inadequate police infrastructure in Gungahlin, the fastest-growing region in the ACT.

“Gungahlin station is a disgrace. My members hold real concerns about the effect that this cramped and unsafe station will have on the forensic integrity of evidence, their own physical safety and mental health, and, most importantly, community safety. It’s not a comforting and welcoming location. We are still waiting for either a new Gungahlin station, or for ACTP to take over the entire Joint Emergency Service site. If ACTP does take over the site, it will need a significant refit to make it suitable.

“I hope any debate about resourcing is a holistic one, assessing numbers as well as infrastructure.”

Mr Caruana and the Association continue to engage with community groups representing the Gungahlin region, as well as the ACT Policing Executive and local politicians such as Mr Hanson of the Canberra Liberals (Deputy Leader and Shadow Minister for Education, Police and Veterans’ Affairs) and ACT Police and Emergency Services Minister Mick Gentleman.

The AFPA also welcomes the motion from Shadow Minister for Women Nicole Lawder MLA for more dynamic and empathetic avenues to report sexual crimes to be made available in the ACT. Ms Lawder’s motion draws comparison to the NSW Police Force’s online reporting tool as a benchmark and proposes a deadline of July this year for a new system to be up and running.

The Association thanks Ms Lawder for making the motion and the ACT Legislative Assembly for passing it.

AFPA President Alex Caruana said that Ms Lawder’s motion represented a clear commitment to community expectations, as well as an improvement to the police investigatory and intelligence-gathering toolkit.

“We certainly echo Ms Lawder’s call today: it must always be a focus of government and its agencies to improve support services involved in the aftermath of sexual crimes.

“Any system which facilitates anonymity and de-identification while remaining available 24/7 regardless of when and where the information is being submitted represents an improvement. The NSW reporting tool is excellent, and the ACT model must either match or better it.

“One of this paradigm’s major strengths is that the person(s) being assisted at this particular time is not solely dependent on whether an officer is available to conduct an interview with them.”

The AFPA is also committed to improving the synergy between police and support services after the initial report. Mr Caruana said the call for a better reporting tool for sexual crimes had a lot of commonalities with the Canberra Liberals’ other motion regarding police resourcing, moved by Jeremy Hanson MLA.

“We need more police on the ground in Canberra, and we also need more resources such as this tool to protect and support Canberran victims of crime.”

For comments:

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