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MEDIA RELEASE

AFPA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW FOLLOWING THOMAS MATTHEWS' IMPRISONMENT

The Australian Federal Police Association has issued a statement calling for an independent review of judicial processes, including the ACT Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), on behalf of its membership.

This call comes after the ACT Supreme Courts today continued a custodial sentence for Thomas Matthews, who was found guilty of negligently causing grievous bodily harm to two ACT Police Officers in July 2021 when he ran over them in his car.

"These members have been let down by the ACT DPP and the entire ACT Judicial system. I think about the ACT Policing members who were run down and about those colleagues who supported them in the courtroom today- and the continuing impact this incident has on their families when I say this: the ACT Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the ACT Judicial system must do better."

AFPA President Alex Caruana has expressed severe disappointment in the outcome but said there is some relief that Mr Matthews remains imprisoned and that the Chief Justice worked within the constraints of the case presented.

Mr Caruana said he believes that there is a pressing need for comprehensive improvements to the entire ACT judicial system.

"The Association's call for an independent review of the ACT Judicial system remains necessary – and an urgent inquiry into the leadership, training, resourcing and staffing in the ACT DPP is clearly needed.

"Chief Justice Lucy McCallum stated that the case the DPP presented to the Court paid inadequate attention to the substantial harm caused to the ACT Policing members."

In Mr Caruana's view, the charges and the prosecution's case constrained how the Chief Justice could effectively and fairly sentence the offender.

"Everyone remembers the four police officers who died after being struck on the side of the road in Victoria. In that case, the driver claimed diminished responsibility due to psychiatric conditions and being drug-affected. Unfortunately, this case is not too dissimilar.

“A continuation of Mr Matthews’ custodial sentence for a further six months does not reflect the enormity of the incident or its impact on the victims. It also does not provide surety of rehabilitation for a recidivist offender who needs structured help.

“Mr Matthews had offended on three earlier occasions putting himself and others in grave danger and risking the lives of police officers called to attend incidents where violent behaviour and property damage ensued.

“This case, in particular, emphasises the importance of protecting the community while also providing better alternatives for individuals identified with mental illness – there must be judicial outcomes which both deter and punish crime, coordinated with appropriate custodial arrangements to facilitate better pathways for people living with mental illness.

“Anything less than an independent review of the judicial processes in the ACT will not realign bail and sentencing in line with our expectations for true justice, compassion and community safety,” Mr Caruana said.

“The AFPA repeats its call for an immediate review and urges ACT Government and lawmakers to work with law enforcement and other first responders to restore community trust in the ACT Judicial system.”

For comments:

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