

28 July 2023



## MEDIA RELEASE

### ACT POLICING OFFICERS ASSAULTED AND HOSPITALISED

The Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) is appalled by the violent assault on two ACT Policing (ACTP) members in Gungahlin yesterday.

AFPA President Alex Caruana said attacks on police officers occur far too often and that the ACT Government and ACT Attorney-General must start looking after first responders.

"These officers were just doing their job — no different to anyone else in the community — and have been viciously assaulted for their troubles.

"All too often, the judiciary and the ACT Government forget that police officers can be and often are victims. Police officers have the same human rights as private citizens — yet this is routinely overlooked. A few weeks ago, we had an officer mown down while trying to stop a car, and now we've had other officers hospitalised.

"Assaults against first responders are becoming more dangerous and more violent. We anticipate it will only worsen with the decriminalisation of ice, heroin and other illicit substances in the ACT. What will the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General do to ensure that support agencies and the health system are prepared for this?" Mr Caruana said.

The AFPA urges the ACT Government, including the Attorney-General, to park their ideologies and protect police officers and other emergency service workers.

Mr Caruana said that the ACT Government and Attorney-General have consistently rejected legislation that would protect and support police officers and other first responders.

"It took way too long, and only then with support from the Canberra Liberals, to get assault emergency worker legislation in place. The penalties for assaulting an emergency service worker are still too lenient and do not serve as a deterrent.

"The Canberra Liberals floated a bill last year to reverse the presumption for bail for people who assault emergency service workers. They also called for an independent review of bail and sentencing — which the ACT Government voted down.

"Recently, Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (ACT Labor) drafted a bill to impose a neutral presumption for bail on people who assault emergency service workers. This bill is now going to debate, but there shouldn't be much debate if the ACT Government cares about the welfare of the people who ensure Canberra's safety.

"Every time my phone rings and I see that it's ACT Policing calling, I'm worried that one of my members has been killed or seriously injured. We've already had members seriously injured regularly over the last several years; will it take a police officer being killed before the Attorney-General and ACT Government do something?" Mr Caruana said.

The AFPA is committed to supporting its members and their safety and plans to make the welfare of emergency service workers a core campaign in the lead-up to the 2024 ACT elections.

Mr Caruana said all prospective candidates and political parties should consider themselves to be on notice.

"For too long, the ACT Government hasn't prioritised or supported ACT Policing as a resource comprised of human beings. Just recently, an ACT Policing crew had to drive an officer to the hospital as no ambulances were available. That's not a reflection on the ACT Ambulance Service; they do an outstanding job and always support ACT Policing members as much as they can physically and logistically; in this instance, all the ambulances were tied up at hospitals.

"That reflects on the ACT Government, the Health Minister and ACT Health.

"At the recent ACT Budget Estimates, Chief Police Officer Neil Gaughan said that ACT Policing had reached its affordable full-time employee headcount. If that is the position, and I don't doubt the Chief Police Officer, then the ACT and ACT Policing are in for a world of hurt. It is patently clear that the ACT Government hasn't committed enough funding for police numbers over the years and that this will have long-term ramifications for both ACT Policing and the wider community.

"ACT Policing, for a long time, has been dead last on police numbers per 100,000 population out of all the Australian policing services. ACT Policing officers are the lowest base-paid officers in the country, and police stations in the ACT are average at best. Gungahlin Station isn't fit for purpose, and City Station isn't far behind. The Winchester Police Centre, Tuggeranong Station and Woden Station are closing in on their end-of-life as realistically workable options.

"Whoever forms government in 2024 must significantly invest in ACT Policing to ensure that it can continue to meet the demands placed on it by the community. Twenty-five new police officers per year over five years won't replace those who retire or leave.

"If ACT Policing were to put police stations inside light-rail carriages, would they get the proper funding to support and protect the Canberra community?" Mr Caruana wondered.

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