

POLICE TRANSFER POLICY — IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Grievance

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [9.12 am]: I rise today to grieve to the Minister for Police about the transfer policy of the Western Australia Police and the impact it is having, particularly on women in the system. It does not exclusively impact on women—indeed, many men find themselves in difficult transfer and tenure arrangements—but today I will focus on women in policing. In particular, I will reference the issues that some women in the Pilbara are having.

I put this issue in the context of a state government that has admitted that Western Australia has one of the lowest rates of women in policing in the country. In fact, the Premier launched a campaign in November last year, which was reported by Ashlee Mullany in a 16 November article on PerthNow. The article reads —

WA Police have launched a new advertising campaign to boost the number of female and multicultural recruits.

Premier Colin Barnett today launched the new TV, radio and print advertisements, which call for more women to “step forward” into policing.

WA has one of the lowest rates of female police officers in the country - with about 1200 women in the ranks compared to about 4650 men.

It’s hoped the \$1 million advertising push will lift the rate from 21 per cent to the national average of 25 per cent.

She goes on. I highlight the fact that there is no point recruiting more women into policing if WA Police cannot keep them in policing. I also make the point that women police officers are well trained and competent, and earn a range of qualifications, competencies and experience. If the WA Police’s tenure policy results in good police officers being pushed out the door—be they male or female—it needs reviewing. Today I will ask the Minister for Police whether she is prepared to do that.

I will reference the tenure policy. Although I am aware that some women police officers and other officers have written directly to the Minister for Police and/or the Commissioner of Police, many applications are stopped at a much lower level within Western Australia Police. I will reference the tenure policy and the kinds of responses that have been given. I refer to an email from a senior sergeant, who writes —

With respect to the below application I have not progressed the application and it is returned for Constable —

Let us call her Constable “B” —

information.

I have attached two paragraphs below from HR 14.10 in my response that clearly articulate my reasons why I have not progressed the application.

That means that the application to continue tenure at a certain place is not forwarded up the chain. The email continues —

I understand that Constable ... is a very competent officer, and her personal circumstances are noted, but unfortunately the guidelines and policy provide very clear guidance to both officers and district officers on the Appendix D Locations like South Hedland and the last line of highlighted in Red is very specific.

I am more than happy to discuss the issues, but as can be seen the policy and guidelines are very clear.

It continues down the page —

Exceptions to an Extension of Maximum Tenure

Police officers in a Regional WA location, as outlined in Appendix D — Regional Locations (Maximum Tenure) are excluded from extensions of maximum tenure. The maximum tenure for a police officer in these Regional WA locations is not to exceed four years.

Under the heading “Extension of Maximum Tenure” it continues —

Step 1 - Consideration of organisational need

Extension of maximum tenure may only be considered for organisational needs. For example, to complete a long term investigation or to allow for succession planning for specialist/technical positions. A request for extension initiated by an officer for personal reasons is not to be considered or progressed.

Point blank, there are no exemptions. I have a copy of a detailed and long letter from one officer who has extensive history in Western Australia Police; indeed, she has been in the service for some time. She is a trained land search and rescue officer, a trained disaster victim identification officer, a trained breath testing operator, an Australian national child sex offender register officer, a trained officer in the use of four-wheel-drive vehicles in off-road conditions, a trained officer in the counterterrorism awareness program, a FMG-trained culturally competent officer, and has extensive local knowledge and so forth. The woman's reason for tenure extension relate to the situation with her husband and children. In some cases when people first take up policing they do not have children, but they have children after becoming police officers. I can reference cases from South Hedland, Karratha and Newman in which at least five or six women have been forced into the position of having to split from their marriage or split from their job. They either have to live apart from their marital partner or give up the job. The circumstances and timing of this are imperative. All members understand that those of us with children—be they at day care or at a primary or secondary level—have to make arrangements for their transfer from one location to another. Pressure is put on women in particular and other officers, so they put in for a transfer to a region of their choice. In one example, the woman's home was in Mandurah. She put in to go back to Mandurah; if she did not, she was threatened with the south east metropolitan area. This concerns me. There must be a form of review. I highlight to the minister that many of these applications stop very low down the chain. Some women have looked at equal opportunity and other avenues. I am happy to provide the minister with further information. The workplace relations health and welfare branch has provided no assistance to these women. It is a very difficult situation, and we are losing valuable women police officers.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police) [9.19 am]: I thank the member for Midland for raising the grievance with me. The issue of tenure is one that comes up from time to time and I am often contacted by and receive letters from police officers and their family members regarding the Western Australia Police tenure policy. I am very sympathetic to a lot of the issues and the very difficult decisions that police officers make, particularly for those police officers and their families who move from one regional posting to another to help accommodate the operational needs of WA Police.

The tenure policy was reviewed in October 2013 and the new tenure policy was published in the *Police Gazette*. The policy was tweaked, and tenure applies for not only people in regional areas, but also the specialist areas within Western Australia Police and within districts. That tenure has been put in place in response to various inquiries and royal commissions that have indicated that it is advisable and, indeed, desirable for police officers to move around and not stay in the same position or area for extended periods because that helps to refresh the workforce and allows for skills to be shared. The member for Midland mentioned the extensive skill set of the officer she referred to. I put it to the member that an officer with that skill set would be highly desirable for a number of locations around Western Australia and in a number of different areas within WA Police. There have been —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Her personal circumstances —

The SPEAKER: I do not want to hear any cross-talk.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: If the minister —

The SPEAKER: Listen, member for Midland. I do not want any cross-talk. You were heard in silence; let the minister speak.

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: It has long been the practice in this place to allow a cooperative dialogue when the member on her feet is prepared to take interjections. That has been allowed by every Speaker I can ever remember in this house. I do not intend to keep interjecting if my —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: If I can just conclude. I do not intend to interject if my interjections are unwelcome by the minister, and if she chooses not to respond to them, I perfectly understand that. But often in grievances there can be a little across-the-chamber comment and that has usually been permitted.

The SPEAKER: Point taken, member for Midland. Thank you.

Grievance Resumed

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Getting back to the issue at hand, the premise of the tenure policy is that it provides greater opportunities for officers to transfer, which can increase job satisfaction and promotes professional development. It also reduces the organisational risk associated with officers working in the same area for extended periods. Generally, extensions to maximum tenure will be entertained, but it is always based first and foremost on the operational needs of WA Police. Although this is always a difficult issue for police officers when they get to the point at which they are reaching maximum tenure, negotiations on the tenure being evoked occur about two months before the point of transfer. If a good case is put for the extension of an officer's maximum tenure, that is considered, firstly, based on the operational needs of WA Police and, secondly, based on specific issues around family circumstances when that can be accommodated by WAPOL. For example, I am advised by the assistant commissioner (regional) that WAPOL will do its best to ensure that officers are transferred towards the end of the school year if the officer makes a request for that sort of family circumstance.

The member for Midland raised a valid point about women in the police force; we do need to increase the participation rate of women in WAPOL generally. Although it is fair to say that from time to time police officers leave WAPOL when they are unhappy about reaching maximum tenure and an extension of tenure at a particular location being refused, the reasons for female police officers leaving WA Police are varied. A lot of them are centred around the dangerousness of the work and women not wanting to put themselves in physical danger after having children.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: That is what a lot of men say. What I am saying to you—I will give you another case after this; I have given you one already—is that is not the case. These people are happy to work at the front-line in the Pilbara.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I was making a more general point about why women leave the police force and why we have difficulty retaining them in the police force. Often it is very difficult when an officer comes back from maternity leave to raise her children to find a day-care provider that will fit in with the requirements of shiftwork. We are looking at job sharing and part-time arrangements in WA Police to try to encourage people to keep their currency, particularly women after they have children. There are a range of reasons, and we understand those reasons, that women are either not joining or not staying in WA Police. Tenure is not one of the reasons that generally come up as one of their issues at the exit interview. Usually it is linked to the difficulty in trying to maintain a family and also accommodating the shift requirements of working for WA Police.

Another matter of tenure that gets raised is forcing tenure on police officers and enforcing that policy, which allows other police officers to move into desirable locations. The Pilbara and Kimberley have become desirable regions; we have officers queuing up to work in those locations because it is very financially lucrative for them to work there now. There are very good work arrangements and often the rent is free. They are the sorts of things police officers consider when looking to transfer to regional locations. We need to free up those positions and enforce tenure so that other police officers have the opportunity to work in those locations. Indeed, some police officers have been enjoying those generous benefits in the Pilbara and Kimberley in excess of six years. We need to take into consideration that we have a queue of police officers who also want to have that opportunity. In addition, there is an opportunity for officers to complain through the chain of command in WA Police. The assistant commissioner (regional) can approve the extension of tenure based on organisational needs, and the family circumstances of the individual officers will also be considered if they are pertinent.