

POLICE — EXPERIENCED OFFICER RECRUITMENT

Grievance

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [10.24 am]: At the outset, noting that my grievance is to the minister representing the Acting Minister for Police, I would like to take a moment to extend to the Minister for Police, who was present in the chamber this morning, my deepest condolences for the loss that she has suffered.

It is appropriate that I bring this grievance to the chamber this week when the WA Police Union has elevated concerns about the welfare of our police officers, particularly medically discharged officers and officers who are injured psychologically or physically in the course of their service. The acting minister is aware of these cases, as he responded late last month to letters that I sent to the minister in September. What I have here is extraordinary. Two long-term former serving officers, both of whom had, I understand, impeccable records and no disciplinary actions against them during their service and who left for different reasons, have sought to gain re-entry to the police service and have been rejected and given no explanation. I find that extraordinary in light of the fact that, as I understand it, the government is trying to recruit an additional 550 police, and we have recently lost around 170 police through redundancies, so I assume we have to replace those officers as well, and we have a normal attrition rate of 120 police a year. In that context, it strikes me as extraordinary that we are rejecting without explanation two experienced and trained officers.

I have their permission to name them and I will give a brief outline of their situations to the house. The first gentleman I will talk about is Joe Zampogna. He served for 17 years as a police officer. Prior to that, he was an Army physical training instructor, so he is a very fit gentleman. People who meet him do not believe his age. He is fit and strong and maintains that fitness. He served for 17 years as a police officer and then, due to personal circumstances, decided that he needed to take a year's leave from the force. He tried to get leave without pay, but he was not able to so he was compelled to resign in February 2013, with the intention of returning to work a year later. When he tried to do that, he submitted his application. Psychological testing has been outsourced for entry to the police force, so he was compelled to go through the private operator that won the tender for that role. The long and the short of it is that he did two tests and was ultimately rejected and was told that all future applications would be rejected. He is physically fit, so that is not an issue. If his psychological wellbeing or his psychological status is not adequate to be a police officer, one has to wonder how he got through the first 17 years of his police career. If he has become psychologically unwell as a consequence of that career, should that not be acknowledged, particularly in light of the discussions that have been raised by the WA Police Union this week? Should the fact that his service, I assume, created the psychological damage that is preventing him from being acceptable to the service now not be acknowledged by the service and he be given the opportunity to pursue that matter? That is his issue. He would like to get back in the police service. I would like a better explanation from the Commissioner of Police. I am not talking about the acting police minister. I believe that the acting police minister is willing to pursue this matter on this gentleman's behalf; I hope he is. The only chance he has of getting a better explanation is for the minister to go to the commissioner and ask for a better explanation.

The other gentleman, Craig Bryan, is younger. He was medically retired in June 2008 after 14 years with WA Police. He had a physical injury and sought medical corrective surgery and got himself fit again. I have seen this gentleman, too. I have had a lot to do with fitness training for men and getting them fit to face all manner of threats to life and limb. I call tell the minister that this gentleman would pass a physical fitness test, but he has been rejected outright. His recent application was rejected but he was not given any explanation. It has been suggested to him that he might be eligible for another role within the police service, and I hope that is the case. He wants to be a police officer again and he is physically fit and capable of it. The only explanation he was given was, "You have been rejected." I am told that WA Police uses this standard response because it has 500 or 600 applications at one time so it says, "We can't give any greater explanation because the administrative burden would be too great." I believe long-serving former police officers, who have put their life on the line on behalf of the state, and perhaps in this case have been damaged as a consequence of that service, deserve a greater explanation than a letter from the Commissioner of Police that says, "Your application was rejected and I'm not going to tell you why." I believe they deserve better than that.

We have a moral obligation as a state, and the Commissioner of Police, as the head of that department, has an obligation to provide those gentlemen with a better explanation and perhaps a reassessment of whether or not they could be recruited back into the police force. I am grieving to the minister representing the Acting Minister for Police for a better explanation for some gentlemen who have put their lives on the line, and who have suffered as a consequence physically and potentially psychologically. I think they deserve a little better than a one-liner saying, "Bad luck; we don't want you." That is not good enough, particularly in light of some of the circumstances witnessed recently in the treatment of police officers after the unfortunate shooting incident in

Carlisle. We know that we do not treat our police officers well enough. Here is an opportunity for WA Police to respond in a more charitable fashion. I think these gentlemen are thoroughly deserving of it.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [10.32 am]: I thank the member for Warnbro for the grievance. I will state at the outset that employment decisions within WA Police are at the sole discretion of the Commissioner of Police. The Minister for Police has no role in these matters. I also acknowledge that the member for Warnbro seeks to represent his constituents by raising this matter in a grievance in this house.

By way of background, as a consequence of the Liberal–National government’s commitment to grow WA Police by an additional 550 officers, the Western Australian police force is undertaking an aggressive recruitment process as we speak. Therefore, applicants who are able to meet the entrance requirements for Western Australia Police actually have a high probability of being offered a police officer position by virtue of that expansion of 550 positions that this government is implementing as a result of its election commitment. Those who meet those entrance requirements would be required to undergo a six-month recruitment training program. I am also informed that there is an extremely high level of interest in these positions. Decisions on those 550 positions and other replacements remain highly competitive, so the standards are quite rigorous in their application. The WA Police recruitment assessments are comprehensive. They take into account considerations of integrity, psychological suitability and physical ability, and they also assess against essential criteria relevant to this job role.

The member for Warnbro has gone into the details of the two individuals he grieves about today. I do not know those individuals. I have seen the letters that have gone around so I know that the member has copies of letters from the Minister for Police’s office. Out of respect to those individuals, it is best that I do not go into individual cases. With the member for Warnbro’s indulgence, I think he has done that well in raising his grievance. I noted from reading the correspondence that at least one of the men also raised his concerns with the WA Police Union.

Mr P. Papalia: Is the minister giving an indication that the Minister for Police will raise the matter again with the commissioner?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will. As I said, employment decisions within WA Police are at the sole discretion of the Commissioner of Police. I know the member for Warnbro understands that as well. I have no role in these matters. The Minister for Police also has no role in these matters, but I acknowledge that the member seeks —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Member for Midland!

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member for Midland had not interrupted me —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Midland, it is not your grievance. The minister is not taking interjections. Grievances will be heard in silence.

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I believe the Minister for Environment has misled the house by saying the Minister for Police has no role in the termination of employment.

Grievance Resumed

Mr A.P. JACOB: Mr Acting Speaker, that is not what I said. If the member for Midland had just waited for me to finish my sentence before rudely interrupting me, she would have heard that I was about to acknowledge —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

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

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I did not hear the Premier make any comment.

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member for Midland had let me finish that sentence, she would have heard I was about to acknowledge that the member for Warnbro seeks to represent his constituents by bringing this matter into the house today. Having said that, matters related to an employment decision of WA Police are not something about which we can intervene. In order to assist the member for Warnbro in this grievance, I give an undertaking that I will ask the Minister for Police to refer to the *Hansard* of this debate, particularly the member for Warnbro’s comments that he has permission from those individuals to outline more of their personal details in this matter. I will also refer the *Hansard* of this debate to the Commissioner of Police to request that he give it further consideration.