

Environment and Public Affairs Committee

From: Smith, Charles <charles.smith@mp.wa.gov.au>
Sent: Friday, 9 November 2018 11:24 AM
To: Environment and Public Affairs Committee
Subject: WA Police Officers
Attachments: Response to police petition.docx

Good morning,

Please see attached document in support of the principle petitioner, Ms Jessica Booth.

Kind regards,

The Hon. Charles Smith MLC
Member for the East Metropolitan Region

 (08) 9250 7901
 charles.smith@mp.wa.gov.au
 charlessmithmlc.com

Suite13, 9 The Avenue,
MIDLAND WA 6056



Thank you for the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Standing Committee regarding the petition submitted by Ms Jessica Booth, ex WAPOL who served 15 years after resigning with stress. I am also former WAPOL (PD12140) front line police officer with just under 10 years' service.

My own experience was nothing out of the ordinary but it was also abnormal in relative terms to working citizens. I have cut down men who have hung themselves, recovered dead bodies that have been missing for weeks in the hot summer sun, I have pulled babies deceased from swimming pools. I have had to fight meth addicted maniacs many times who were intend on seriously assaulting me.

These stories are not unique by any means. Many other police officers have had to deal with far worse incidents then these yet there is no compulsory mental health 'first aid' offered to police after a stressful incident. We (the police) are expected to deal with it and voluntarily ask for help if we feel we can actually ask for that help.

Herein lies the crux of the problem. For all the trauma witnessed by police, I believe there needs to be compulsory counselling at least twice a year so the officer can 'check in' with a psychologist to see how he's going.

The crux of all police mental health issues arises not only from what police witness, hear and work with but from the completely overwhelming workloads.

The workload 'overload' comes from too few frontline police officers having too many jobs to attend to and too few resources such as police vehicles to actually attend the jobs in. The increase in workload also causes low moral within the rank and file and leads to greater job dissatisfaction.

It is becoming encultured within the police and amongst the retired community that the WA Government do not understand the needs of police officers or simply don't care or at worst are in fact ideologically anti-police. The obstinate refusal to provide any clear guidance or timescale for dealing with redress or compensation is also causing serious mental health harm and does in fact re-traumatise many medically retired officers.

The police viewing their own government as anti-police is a dangerous precedent. If the Government wish to regain the trust of the police, they need only recruit another 1000 frontline 'boots on the ground' over the next five years as supported by the Police Union. This will bring enormous relief to the frontline staff and immediately improve moral.

Police officers frequently sight fatigue as a major cause initiating stress and other mental health conditions. Fatigue is a result of excessive workload which of course is directly related to frontline police numbers. If the issue of lack of frontline staff is not soon addressed, the government will in the years to come have serious issues in recruiting quality people to the police which will only cause greater breakdown in law and order as we are witnessing today.

Be under no illusion WA Police are experiencing a mental health crisis as I have personally alluded to time and time again in Parliament.

"As a manger I am sick to death of advocating for more staff to get the job done as more and more is asked of the troops. It is always a case of having to choose which balls to juggle and which ones to fall to the floor and then having to justify why I let those balls fall and not the others. There is too much expected of officers and the only answer is more resources. I am amazed no officer has been killed yet due to lack of resources available to back up." – quote unnamed Shift Sergeant.