




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 28 November 2019

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.49 pm): I concur with the words of the member for Macalister. I think this is something that we can all agree is critically important. The safety of our community in Queensland is obviously the No. 1 priority for a government. The mental wellbeing of the officers who provide that thin blue line cannot be a higher priority, and the numbers have been spoken about previously. Why was the audit held? When male police are reporting mental health distress at seven times higher than the average population, that is a concern. More particularly, when female officers are reporting at 16 times higher, that is a dramatic multiple and something that should be taken very seriously. I know the police have been working on Our People Matter. It needs to apply to sworn and unsworn officers.

Report No. 47 is a very important report, and the recommendations it contains are ones that both sides of the House can support. There were some concerns in the report. We always want our officers to be well in the job; we want them to be able to do the job well. We know that the number of officers per head of population is dropping, and when people take sick leave or seek an absence that puts more pressure on them. As the crime rate increases and as the number of police per head of population is dropping, the workload that is being placed on other officers is increasing. We cannot afford for that to impact on their mental health and mental wellbeing because they are so critically important to the safety of us all.

We should be doing everything we can and ensuring this is led from the top. I am sure that the Police Commissioner, Katarina Carroll, will be looking at this report and ensuring—this is a little bit outdated now—that the police processes are up to date and that we are putting the very best candidates forward. Some of the conclusions of the report included—

The training is poorly linked and largely uncoordinated, and employee attendance records are not up to date. Most of the training is voluntary, but even employee mandatory participation in training is not monitored.

That is just not good enough. This has to be a priority within the service to make sure people are well. The high-risk units were spoken about. If we look at appendix D—and I will not go through them—we see a number of high-risk units listed. I think it is important that the QPS maintain a special watch over them. That does not take away from the fact that, every day that general duties officers go out and do the job, they have stress put on them. They do not know what the situation will be.

As we go into Christmas—and we know many of those officers will be working through the Christmas period—it is a time when the rest of us are enjoying our family time and catching up with friends. A lot of officers will not enjoy those privileges because they are out there on the thin blue line and they will be suffering the stress that the report talks about. It is important that within the QPS—from the very top down through all of the commissioned ranks and all of the non-commissioned ranks—people do not feel stigma and that this does not affect their career. If they do feel they are suffering from mental stress or pressures it is important that they reach out.

I commend the move in relation to the peer support officers. I am pleased that Our People Matter is underway, but I think we need to be ever vigilant to make sure that as the officers go about their duties they know that the community of Queensland will support them. We will not stigmatise them, we will not crush their careers if they report, but we will encourage them to get well and continue to do the job.

Training an officer is a very expensive investment. When an officer has to leave the service because of mental stress it is a terrible cost not just to them but also to us. We should do all we can to keep them in the job.