



12 March 2010

Mr Randolph Wierenga
President
Police Association of Tasmania

Mr Richard Warwick
Secretary
United Fire Fighters Union of Australia Tasmania Branch

Mr Tim Jacobson
Assistant Secretary
HACSU

Dear Gentlemen

Thank you for your letter of 5 February in relation to common issues of concern for emergency service workers in Tasmania.

I have pleasure in responding to you on behalf of all Liberal Members and candidates.

Protection of Emergency Services Workers

What steps is your party prepared to take to provide greater protection for police, ambulance and fire officers in the performance of their duties? Specifically, does your party have a policy the aim of which is to reduce the incidence of assault and abuse of emergency services workers by members of the general public?

A Hodgman Liberal Government will implement a tough range of measures to improve our system of justice, support our police and other emergency services workers and make our prison system more effective and accountable.

Assaults against police officers have steadily increased from 867 in 2004 to 1,133 by Christmas 2009. The number and seriousness of assaults against police in Tasmania has now reached a level which we believe is unacceptable to the community.

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After careful consideration, the Tasmanian Liberals believe the time has come to act. A Hodgman Liberal Government will introduce new laws for serious assault against police and emergency service workers. We will introduce a new crime of serious assault committed by adult offenders against police and emergency service workers. It will have a minimum penalty of 6 months' imprisonment where the assault results in bodily harm to the victim.

The new crime will apply to serious assaults against:

- Police officers;
- Emergency services workers, including ambulance officers, fire officers, volunteer fire officers and SES volunteers;
- Hospital workers;
- Prison officers;
- Child protection, community corrections and youth justice workers;

If a person over the age of 17 commits a serious assault which results in bodily harm to the victim, the court must impose a term of imprisonment of at least 6 months.

This legislation will be introduced within six months and will be drafted after consultation, including with the Law Society of Tasmania and the Police Association of Tasmania.

The legislation will provide that an evidence-based review of this new provision will be undertaken after the second anniversary of it becoming law.

Emergency Services Workers Wages

Is your party prepared to give a commitment to ensure the wages of Tasmanian Police officers, Tasmanian Ambulance Service officers and Tasmanian Fire Service officers remain at comparable levels to their mainland counterparts?

The Tasmanian Liberals are fully supportive of the current arrangements in place to maintain the 'national average' of the salaries of Tasmania Police officers, Tasmanian Ambulance Services officers and Tasmanian Fire Service officers on a continuing basis. In government, we commit unequivocally to a nexus formula to maintain that national average measure

Emergency Services staffing levels

Is your party prepared to give a commitment to improve current staffing levels of police officers, career ambulance officers and career fire officers?

For police, the Liberals have already committed to employing an extra 30 police to help safeguard the Tasmanian community and removing police from court duty in Launceston, to put even more police back on the beat. The latter commitment was consistent with an internal business case developed for this purpose.

For ambulance officers, we have also committed to an independent study for a detailed analysis and long-term plan for sustainable and safe staffing and resourcing for ambulance

services in Tasmania. We understand there has been no major analysis or long-term strategic planning conducted into the Tasmanian ambulance service since a Parliamentary Inquiry in 2001, despite calls for an independent assessment of ambulance services by the College and unions. The Banskott and Sharley report looked specifically at patient transport and medical retrieval respectively, while *Future Health* plans do not fully analyse ambulance needs for the State into the future.

An independent study was an official request to both Liberal and Labor parties prior to the 2006 State election, but was not pursued by the State Labor Government. Instead, the Government pursued the option of a levy, but after two years of investigation, dumped the option. The Health Minister said the levy was needed to ensure a 'sustainable' ambulance service into the future. It is also the Liberals' desire to see sustainable ambulance services into the future, but the Liberals have never agreed with, and will not introduce an ambulance levy in this State.

An independent study will advise current and future governments on precisely what is needed to deliver sustainable ambulance services in Tasmania into the future. The terms of reference of the study would be negotiated with the College of Ambulance Professionals and unions, and should include long-term planning for the State's ambulance workforce, including training, attraction, retention and ongoing training, fleet replacement, equipment, stations (upgrades and new) and services into the future, beyond electoral cycles.

The study could also research trends in other countries and jurisdictions which are increasingly involving their highly trained ambulance officers in community and primary health initiatives. It is the Liberals' desire to see not only proper resourcing of our ambulance services, but consideration of utilising highly-trained ambulance personnel as a key part of our *Smarter health* care system in Tasmania.

The Liberals commit to this study to bring together a 10 year forward plan for ambulance resourcing, together with priorities for staged upgrades of fleet, equipment, stations and staff. This study should get underway by 1 July 2010 for prioritisation of expenditure for the 2011-12 budget and thereon.

In relation to career fire officers, we have stated, in a questionnaire by the United Fire Fighters Union, that we are prepared to commit to an independent review into the adequacy of the human and physical resources available to the Tasmanian Fire Service, with specific regard to the urban bush interface risk in Tasmania, and would be pleased to discuss such a review the UFU.

Critical Incident Stress Disorder

While successive Tasmanian Governments have put in place a world leading program to mitigate against the impact of critical incident stress among emergency services workers, it remains an objective fact that this injury cannot ultimately be prevented. In addition, a generation of emergency service workers remains particularly vulnerable to this disorder because of their service prior to the establishment of the Multi-agency Critical Incident Stress

Disorder Management Program (police, ambulance, fire and SES) in 1988. Is your party prepared to give a commitment to provide a better deal for emergency service workers who are diagnosed with critical incident stress disorder?

We share your concerns over the often life-changing outcomes from Critical Incidents and we accept that we will never be able to completely eliminate this condition, given the nature of emergency service work.

We believe it would be in the interests of all Tasmania that those workers who sustained their disorder in the time prior to the establishment of the multi-agency program, ideally be assessed and, if necessary, be treated as though the event took place post the establishment.

Generally, we also believe that Tasmanians would want our treatment of emergency services workers who suffer this disorder to be the best in the nation, and we would want to work to that standard.

Specifically, is your party prepared to give a commitment to giving priority in redeployment for such persons to other non-operational work in the state public service?

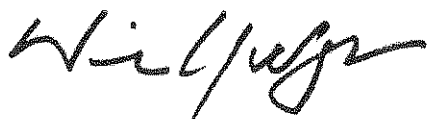
Redeployment clearly should be a prime option for dealing with emergency services workers with this disorder as it is generally understood that the quicker a return to appropriate work circumstance can be achieved, the better the management of the disorder.

Alternatively, is your party prepared to give a commitment to put in place means by which employment separations (including workers compensation) can be expedited in circumstances where this is medically regarded as the best option for such employees?

In some cases, where redeployment is not possible, employment separations would need to be considered but not dragged on for extraordinary lengths of time and this only adds to the symptoms of the disorder.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely



**Will Hodgman MP
Leader of the Opposition**