PUBLIC

THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION B INQUIRY MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE HOBART ON TUESDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2026

POLICE INQUIRY

Leaves of Change

The Committee met at 9.36 a.m.

CHAIR (Ms Haddad) – Good morning and welcome to this morning's hearing of the Standing Committee on Government Administration B's Inquiry into police complaint handling. Thank you for attending today and thank you also for your written submission, which all members have received and had the opportunity to read in detail. Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing?

Ms MUNTING – My name is Katrina Munting. I'm here as the Director of Leaves of Change, which is a child sexual abuse lived experience, consulting, advocacy and education business.

CHAIR – Thank you very much. Can I confirm you've received and read the guide sent to you by our Committee Secretary?

Ms MUNTING – Yes.

CHAIR – Excellent. Just to remind you of the parts of that guide, including the fact that this hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, which allows you to speak with freedom and without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or any place outside of these parliamentary proceedings. That protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside of these parliamentary proceedings.

The hearing is public. There are members of the public in the gallery today. There may be others who attend throughout the morning. There may also be others, including the media, attending in person or observing online. If you would like any of your evidence to be heard in private, please just make that request of the Committee at any time and we can move into an *in camera* hearing.

I'll briefly introduce the Committee Members. We're joined online by Rob Fairs, Member for Bass; Peter George, Member for Franklin; Helen Burnet, Member for Clark; myself, Ella Haddad, also a Member for Clark; Jane Howlett, Member for Lyons; Jen Butler, Member for Lyons; and Rosalie Woodruff, Member for Franklin. We're joined also at the table by Michael and Georgia, who are our Committee Secretariat, and Lil, who's here on Hansard.

We've also made the decision as a Committee to read a sensitive content disclaimer at the beginning of each public hearing, recognising that a lot of what we're dealing with, the subject matter of this Committee is, by nature, pretty serious and confronting. We recognise, as a Committee, that during these hearings we may discuss highly sensitive matters that have deeply impacted people. This may be distressing for people listening to or participating in these proceedings. We have Lifeline Tasmania here today, providing on-site support services that are accessible for anybody needing them following the session with the Committee. They are

in a separate room to this Committee, and we can take you there if you need at any point. There are also other physical supports available in the room. We've got some information from Lifeline who people can also contact by phone on 13 11 14 or via text on 0477 1311 14 for support at any time 24/7. We also have other organisations and support contacts listed on the website for the committee's inquiry.

Ms KATRINA FAYE MUNTING, DIRECTOR, LEAVES OF CHANGE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR – Thank you. I'd like to invite you, if you'd like, to make an opening statement to please do so.

Ms MUNTING – Thank you. I'd like to acknowledge the Palawa people of lutruwita, the enduring custodians of the lands and waterways. Their continued storytelling is the foundation of the work that we are doing here. I also acknowledge the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people who have experienced harm as part of this investigation, and those who haven't had their voices heard. I'd like to acknowledge the people who have lived that harm as well. I am here with you and for you.

I'd like to make it clear that while I have experienced sexual harm as a child, I have not been subject to misconduct from a Tasmania Police officer. I attend this hearing in my capacity as an advocate for child safety, both in Tasmania and nationally, and someone who was involved in the Commission of Inquiry into Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. My perspective is informed by the understanding of the particular vulnerability of children and young people when interacting with institutions and people that hold position of authority or power, such as Tasmania Police.

CHAIR – Thank you so much, Katrina, I'd like to open up to the Committee.

Dr WOODRUFF – Thanks, Katrina. We're all aware of the contributions you made to the Commission of Inquiry, and your leadership and fearless advocacy on behalf of other people with lived experience of sexual abuse.

I have a question about your very clear discussion around how power operates in an indirect way to silence victims and to stop reporting. We could come to the details of the sort of things that you've listed, but I'm just wondering whether you know of any organisations, police bodies, independent investigative bodies that do this sort of analysis already as a standard? I think what you proposed in your submission is to look at geographic, temporal, a whole lot of other factors, that could look at clusters and might help identify police officers who are sexually abusing children or adults. Do you have any experience of how this has been done, or done well?

Ms MUNTING – Yes, thank you for your question. I'm really pleased that you've focused that piece of unlocking the data in that longitudinal and deeper look at the data beyond what the scope of your Committee is. Unfortunately, I don't have any experience with someone who has done it. As a statistician, I love that sort of thing, which is why my mind went there. In conjunction with my lived experience, I could see the sorts of work that could be done on the dataset that you may well partially have and marry that with the State Government's information that they hold, with the right provisos and controls amongst the use of that data.

As for a particular company that does that and has done it, no, unfortunately, I don't have someone in mind. I would have to go away and do a bit of research.

Dr WOODRUFF – That's all right. The evidence is that the Weiss review, which was initiated because the Commission of Inquiry pointed to Senior Sergeant Paul Reynolds, that this was a matter undone. She did a review and identified at least 52 people who had been abused or groomed by Paul Reynolds over his career. Obviously, that tells us that reports were made or were not made. I just wonder whether you have a view about what Tasmania Police should be doing when there's an identification of an officer – allegations and proven, whether they should have that kind of really focused investigation into that person's career to look beyond the individual case to other cases. What are your thoughts in that area?

Ms MUNTING – My personal opinion on that is that, yes, there needs to be a much wider – I've lost the word.

Ms BUTLER – Analysis?

Ms MUNTING – Yes, if they're thinking the incident that's reported, they need to look either side as well for patterns of behaviour. But also thinking about links to – I know it's a bit of an untrodden path but, unfortunately, in my work, there's networks of people and there's contact between perpetrators, and the network is large. Actually looking, in retrospect, at the career to see where the crossovers have been, potentially, with other people who have had reports, and looking at those crossovers in people, time and place. I do think that's crucial in forming a wider scope for that investigation because there is so much that is unsaid; for that one person who has spoken, the potential for many, many others who have not.

I think that having the capability of someone independent of police to do that work, to investigate that particular complaint but also take that sidewards into previous parts of their career and potentially where they've gone since if it is a historic matter. Yes, I think it is a crucial step, and it's not something that people widely would like done. It's not something that widely is done in the state service in any of the departments. But it does, from my opinion, form a much larger picture. And I think it's an important picture that we need to start considering because our careers are not founded just on one decision, one incident, one day or one month, one year, one person. It's a holistic thing and it speaks to the person's overall behaviour, not just this one reported incident.

CHAIR – One of the things I've been interested to ask about as well is systems to record and notice a pattern, if there's multiple what might look on the face of it as minor incidents. Sometimes I think – well certainly the Commission of Inquiry exposed that that was how offenders and perpetrators often went unchecked for a long time, because they were able to use their positions of power to hide the behaviour that they were actually engaging in. Do you have any insights into how systems might be better built to record any kind of suspicion or event that might need to be reported in some way but doesn't constitute a formal workplace complaint or something that might potentially lead to criminal charges, yet it might be enough orange flags to look for a red flag? How might that data be better harnessed and collected?

Ms MUNTING – Yes, I totally agree that this idea of yellow and orange flags, lots of those, they point towards, potentially, a red flag. For children and young people, that has started with the Office of the Independent Regulator. There are ways of bringing forward those yellow and orange flags, and having them recorded to form a larger picture between work and

volunteering and other aspects of those adults' lives. That system only works when people agree to engage in it, even though it is legislated that there must be reports by heads of organisations. My experience is that there is still a reluctance for people to report: 'Have we hit the threshold? Is this something that needs to be taken to the OIR?' For me, as soon as you ask yourself that question of 'should I report this?', you've passed the threshold of suspicion. You're asking that question of 'should I report?', you are already suspicious. But that only deals with young people, and that only deals with people who are willing to engage and go into that process. The longer that process is in place, I'm starting to see people go, 'Oh, there's this', 'Oh, but should I report to them, because that's going to start this investigative process and that's going to do this?'. I'm getting a sense, in my advocacy and the roles I play, that there are people that, even though it's legislated, are still going, 'Oh, no, that's not something that needs – because I don't want to go through this process', which is really, really disappointing.

But in that same way, they're having something similar for adults, in terms of Tasmania Police, for them, for those yellow and red flags, because they don't fall under that remit, do they? There's nowhere to go for those yellow and orange flags. It only works for our young people if the system's working. There isn't anything for misconduct or harm that's happening to adults by other officers.

Mr GEORGE – Can I call you Katrina?

Ms MUNTING – Yes, of course.

Mr GEORGE – Katrina, I want to take up that point first. It's that first step, isn't it, that seems to be the difficult one. What's missing at the moment that could be in place that would ease that step?

Ms MUNTING – Unfortunately, it's a fundamental cultural shift for people of when they see something, instead of 'otherising' it – that it's someone else's problem. Actually stepping up and going, 'No, it's actually my place to speak and to take that next step'. We are time-poor, resource-poor in many industries, so it's easier to go, 'Oh no, nothing to see here', and not take that next step because making that report, that takes time. Then going through and doing it, if it triggers a full investigation, which is what people don't want, that then takes more time and more time, and who's going to do that? In a whole range of areas, so, if that's in a funded space, who's the person doing that and how do they fit that into their already full workload? Then in a volunteer space and in the community space, again, who's got the time and the knowledge to be able to do that?

A lot of people who have information or have that suspicion, are going, 'Okay, I should be telling someone, but who do I tell?' If you're in a volunteer space, you may have done some training and you know where to go and what you should be doing, but there's still that lack of understanding of when that gets triggered. For me personally, I feel it is, in perception, it's much higher for a lot of people in terms of what will trip that, 'I need to tell the Independent Regulator'. Yes, their threshold, there's still this argument about how high that is. Whereas for myself, having been in this situation, as soon as you go, 'Mm, that doesn't seem right. Should I be telling someone?', as soon as you ask yourself that question, it's –

Mr GEORGE – Would it be easier if there was an independent body that actually cut out a front door? We talked about this before in this Committee, about the Integrity

Commission. Would it make it easier if the front door was completely divorced from the police investigation?

Ms MUNTING – Yes, definitely. Honestly, I feel uncomfortable with Tasmania Police investigating their own matters. As much as there are wonderful police officers, wonderful people that do some wonderful work, I'm concerned. Tasmania is a small state. Everyone knows everyone, everyone's got a bit of skin in the game. There are some incredibly honest people with a great deal of integrity, but they're not necessarily the people that are sitting in these positions. So, I'm concerned for that. I'm concerned that people who have had harm or misconduct by a police officer have to go back and effectively tell the same people –

CHAIR – Same organisation.

Ms MUNTING – that that's happened. For me, my harm was not by police, and I could go to police and tell them about it. I didn't have to go to the organisation and tell them about it. But where do you go, or how do you go back to the same place and go, 'Oh, by the way, this is what happened to me', and then expect them to believe you? It's hard enough to be believed when it's someone that's removed and doesn't know these people. And it's highly traumatic; I can't fathom having to go to a police station to tell the police about what police have done. It was hard enough to go and tell them about a third party, and to have trust and faith in that investigation. I can't see how that would work.

I've been really privileged to meet some people that have, unfortunately, had harm from Tasmania Police officers, and yes, their anxiety and pain, and the extra barriers that they have to be able to tell what's happened to them, it's incredible. To put that on top of the experience that I know I had, I can't see how they can move through that. It must be so much more traumatic and endlessly harder because you're placing trust in the people that caused harm.

Mr GEORGE – That you can't trust?

Ms MUNTING – That you can't trust. You fundamentally can't trust them.

Dr WOODRUFF – You could have the best system in the world, but it would kind of be irrelevant? Is that what you're saying?

Ms MUNTING – That's right, yes. So, I struggle with that, for people that are in that situation, because honestly, I don't know how they can move past the fundamental distrust that they rightfully have. But then, even if you're sitting in front of someone who's not that person, you know, that same institution that –

CHAIR – Caused the harm.

Ms MUNTING – Yes and, in some cases, that same uniform, that same look. There are so many triggering factors that are standing in the way. Like, even the number of people that have experienced misconduct and harm while a police officer is not on duty, even though at that time they may not have been wearing a uniform, but you are under that. It's almost like you're under a spell. You know, that feeling of, 'You are this – I must behave this way'.

Mr GEORGE – Like kids on the bus.

Ms MUNTING – Yes, there's so many social norms that are caught up in this that even once they are out of uniform and not performing their job, that they still hold that power. In the same way that it reflects – for me, I was abused by a teacher, and every time I saw teaching staff, even outside of school – even before I was abused, you're always on your best behaviour because the teacher was there. But imagine putting that on the next level: it's a police officer. Not only would you get in trouble; you'd go to court, you'd go to jail, you know, all of these things that kind of avalanche in your mind and you catastrophise. Even though rationally you know that that's not the case, emotionally you can't get past that. I think that's a really important thing to recognise, that even the most educated and rational people under these circumstances of trying to report harm and misconduct, that rational part of your brain, that's not working –

CHAIR – Because you're in a trauma response?

Ms MUNTING – That's exactly right. Trying to get that through and being able to speak past that. I've had to do it and it's really, really difficult. The rational brain goes out the window as soon as that trauma response kicks in. It's the emotional brain that's living here, and you just can't – yes, trying to push past those walls, those blocks, those triggers, it all avalanches together.

Mr FAIRS – Can I call you Katrina?

Ms MUNTING – Sure.

Mr FAIRS – Sorry, I don't know why my camera's not working. I apologise for that. You were talking about the orange and yellow flag system and red flag system, and people not knowing when to do it, or they're reluctant to do it and stuff like that. You mentioned training. Some might have training, some may not. Do you think compulsory training sessions or things like that would be of benefit? I gather that's a 'yes', but making it so you must do compulsory training?

Ms MUNTING – You've hit on something really important, that, yes, there needs to be some training in terms of organisations, whether paid or unpaid. But there's also a much bigger picture here. There needs to be community awareness because it's not just people who hold a position – in a paid position or a volunteer position – who can raise these flags. There are community members who can raise these flags on behalf of other people for things that they've seen, and they're not going to get necessarily picked up in any sort of mandatory training.

So, yes, that's a great way to start opening the dialogue and getting more people used to thinking about this space, but I don't think it ends there. I think it really has to be a broader community education piece, empowering people that they can speak to someone independent; and really putting forward that idea of, it doesn't have to be a red flag moment, any of these levels of misconduct or harm or discomfort. To put them out there in this fictitious system where you can raise these things, knowing that not every time something is put forward will there be a response, but it will be noted and it will be put into a system, and it forms a bigger picture. If people fundamentally understood that in a community sense, I think that would be really helpful, as well as training. That's always good but, yeah, I think it's bigger than that.

Ms BUTLER – Thanks so much for coming in today, Katrina. Really appreciate your submission and your expertise. We learned from the Commission of Inquiry that predators

seem to easily identify vulnerable people, and that they also work within quite a complex network and utilise weaknesses in the system to stay underground and continue their activities. With that in mind, in your submission and in our previous discussion, you referred to having alternative doors for people to be able to report to, especially in relation to advocacy. Do you think that having those alternate doors may help break down those barriers and assist people in coming forward and feeling quite safe in how they can report or talk to people about what could be happening to them?

Ms MUNTING – Definitely. There needs to be a multimodal approach to being able to make some sort of report. Some people are really comfortable picking up the phone, having a phone call with someone. Other people don't want to talk to anyone at all. They would much prefer just an online form. But it doesn't matter what path we go down; we need to have a really broad look at our Tasmanian cohort. The literacy rates in Tasmania are really low, so the way you educate people as to 'this thing exists' and then how it can be used, its usability has to be right. It needs to be targeted to those lower literacy rates. There also has to be ways to do it that doesn't rely on being able to write. There need to be ways to do it that you can actually go somewhere and just tell it, and that would be –

Ms BUTLER – Enough?

Ms MUNTING – Enough, yes. Because every time you add one more barrier, it makes it harder and harder. And my mind goes to, again, young people. Like, we have the ARL, be it good, bad or indifferent, the way it functions. There's a phone number, there's a website and it can be accessed by professional staff, volunteer staff, community members, and it all funnels there. If you can't use one of those channels, there's other ways to be able to access that. I'm not saying that it works really well. However, the equivalent in this space would be better than nothing at all. As much as the other system has its flaws, when there's no system, or that system is totally inaccessible because it's going back to police to do the same thing, I really think that there does need to be different ways to be able to engage. And all of those different modes, we need to think about the breadth of the community that needs to access this service to be able to have their say. It needs to be a safe space. So, part of our Aboriginal community, where can they go? People that are already incarcerated, where can they go? How do they have their say and how do they be believed? If you have a disability, how can you have your say?

Ms HOWLETT – Rural or remote areas.

Ms MUNTING – Yes, if you're remote, how can you do these things, and how can we make it equitable across the state, and across all of those boundaries and those barriers, because there are so many, one a time, I think it could – a start somewhere would be better than nothing, but I think it needs to be a wider catchment than just what the ARL currently have for their system.

Ms HOWLETT – Katrina, thank you so much for being here. It's great to be able to ask your advice on how we can improve things. In relation to submitting a complaint, are you able to do it from a video? Can you video record and then upload that to the portal?

Ms MUNTING – For the ARL, at the moment?

Ms HOWLETT – Yes.

Ms MUNTING – Unfortunately, no. You can make an appointment and give it that way. So, it's still a hole, I believe, in their system. But that would be another way to do it. At the moment you still have to do either a phone call or an online submission, and then you could supplement that with a recording. So, it's not quite there yet.

Ms BURNET – On that same topic, if there was that capturing of that information – and we've heard from many people who felt like they haven't been heard beyond that, how important is it to actually act on that or triage the information that's been provided?

Ms MUNTING – You're right. Every time there is a submission, for that person, they've shared a really important piece of themselves. The acknowledgement of the receipt of that information is crucial as part of that. Just generally being polite but in this space, in terms of trauma-informed practice, it is crucial. That feedback is really important, that acknowledgement that it has been it has been received. But then another lot of communication after it has been read. There needs to be some triage – you know, what level is this and what's going to happen next. Unfortunately, as a survivor, lack of information gives others power, essentially. We've been kept in the dark for, potentially, a long time. Entering information into a system and hearing nothing is really destructive because you ruminate on that and it just erodes in your brain. It's important, if it's gone through a triage process and it's going to be noted to form a larger picture, that's the information that needs to go back to the person. If it's going to be investigated in this format, level 1, level 2, level 3, whatever, however that looks, that the person knows that, and that there's a timeframe around that. It's great to tell someone that, 'Yes, we're going to look at this further', but like I was saying, it ruminates in your brain.

Ms BUTLER – It's the uncertainty and anxiety.

Ms MUNTING – It's that uncertainty, and not having a timeline and, again, not knowing 'When's it going to happen next?'. You're feeding back into that same loop. Making sure that there are timelines around that – 'We will be in contact again at this time; if you would like to contact us in the meantime, this is where'. Not some generic line where you have to press 6, press 2, press 9 and then have to tell your story to six different people to actually get handed to the right person. There needs to be that that way to get back in.

CHAIR – That common sense layer?

Ms MUNTING – That's right, and keeping that level of timeline and being able to get back in contact, and know when you're expected to receive contact so you're not going, 'Oh, I haven't heard for a month; should I email, should I ring, is it rude?'. I've been in that position with police as part of their criminal investigations going, 'Oh, I haven't heard from them for six weeks. Should I email, should I ring?'

Ms BUTLER – Confusing.

Ms MUNTING – Yes. Actually having that laid out is really important, and making sure it's put out to start with, the amount of information that will get fed back to them. Obviously due to the confidentiality of the information, there's only a certain amount that can go back to the person that has made that report, and making sure that they know that from the outset about how much –

Dr WOODRUFF – Expectation-setting.

Ms MUNTING – Yes. So, when you do get back in contact, they're expecting this much information, but, really, because of the *Privacy Act*, you're actually constrained to telling them this much.

Ms BURNET – And you think that's possible?

CHAIR – People can be up-front with those limitations as well. It's about having a reasonable commonsense back and forth.

Ms MUNTING – Yes. And again, that comes back to sitting in the trauma part and the emotional part of your brain. Rational brain knows that, due to confidentiality, they can't tell you these things but emotional brain, the hurt part of you, can't see that. Knowing that earlier would be really, really, really useful.

Dr WOODRUFF – Going back to your submission and your conversations about trying to identify clusters, we know from the Weiss review into Paul Reynolds that there were 52 people who had been abused by him. That investigation didn't commence. That's a matter for conversation. Obviously, every person, every victim-survivor is different, everyone's experience is different. But particularly in relation to child sexual abuse, could you share some thoughts you have about the impact of people healing when they have an investigation that occurs which may find a number of things, or an investigation that has never happened? What we've heard is that there are people who are accused who have killed themselves or have resigned, and investigations have started and then have abruptly stopped. Can you talk about general or personal experiences of victim-survivors, about the impact of not concluding an investigation?

Ms MUNTING – In terms of going from that position of being harmed and that first step of actually saying what has happened, that is so monumental, that first step. I didn't do it for 20-ish years, more than 20 years, and the statistics say it's very similar. That's not unusual. Actually making that first step to speak is really hard. When you speak, to be heard, to be acknowledged and believed, they are crucial. That's the very first step towards healing: being heard, being acknowledged, which a lot of people miss, and being believed. We all hope, from where I sit, we hope that everyone is believed. But everyone's not, let's be realistic. If any of those are missing, that is deeply hurtful for the individual. Then, if you enter into potentially having an investigation, there's lots of landmarks along the way. What seem small moments to people on the outside, each one of those milestones is impactful and does help that little notch.

Healing is continuous. Healing is never over. We may function better, we may be able to do life slightly differently. But the idea of being totally healed, I think it's a bit of a myth, personally. Each of these moments along the path do have meaningful impact and nudge that healing along in different extents for different people. Someone acknowledging what you've said and believing what you've said, okay, that's one piece. And then for someone to go, 'We believe you to the point we're going to investigate', that's another piece. Then this gets to what you were just saying, is that commence an investigation and then the person resigns. I've been there, that's devastating. Investigation stops. We've just gone forward, these tiny bits of healing, but then the perpetrator does something, takes back the power, and we go backwards in terms of healing. They've resigned. Their choice. Again, they have the power to stop the process, and that's gone and caused more harm.

CHAIR – More harm, or compounded things.

Dr WOODRUFF – Does the institution then have an obligation?

Ms MUNTING – Yes. To be able to keep getting those incremental bits of healing, yes, the institution should continue if it's a resignation. Even if someone has died by suicide, the investigation should continue because that person has spoken their truth. It has been agreed it needs investigating, it was significant enough and serious enough to be investigated but, again, through choice, it's been removed.

CHAIR – It's been removed. And like you said –

Dr WOODRUFF – In the case of Paul Reynolds, there were 52 people, only a small subset of whom had actually come forward, only a small subset or a handful.

CHAIR – Coming back to what you said at the beginning of your time today and also in your written submission. It could be very much pointing to other things.

Ms MUNTING – That's right. That investigation shouldn't stop. There's patterns there, there's information there, not only about the individual but about systemic problems. In my submission about the data, the data can point towards hotspots in patterns and behaviour and regions, and a whole range of things. But it can also pick up cold spots: what are they doing that's making it better? And that's also really crucial. Why is this region, why do they not have complaints?

Dr WOODRUFF – Yes, a really good point.

Ms MUNTING – Is it because the people in that region are being suppressed because of the level of power, or is it because their behaviours are somehow different? I'm interested in not just this hotspot thing, but this cold spot thing. In terms of getting justice and whatever, the hotspot thing; but in terms of moving forward in terms of culture and change, these cold spots are crucial.

CHAIR – They're meaningful. I hate to do this, but we've gone a little bit over time. I feel like we could speak to you all morning. Katrina, it's been so informative to hear from your experience. Thank you very much for giving us your insights, your time, your knowledge, your ideas. I think I can safely speak on behalf of the whole Committee to give you a vote of sincere thanks for giving us your time this morning. Is there anything that you didn't raise that you would really hope to?

Ms MUNTING – I'm really grateful that I had the opportunity to make a submission and to speak to you all. Yes, I could speak for a long time on the same thing.

CHAIR – Please keep in touch with the Committee. We're a little while away from the report-writing stage, so if there's other information that you go away from today's conversation and think, 'Oh, I wish that I'd raised x, y, z', please do get back in touch with us. We're happy to continue to hear from you.

Ms MUNTING – Fantastic.

CHAIR – I just have to read one formal statement before we finish up which is that, as I advised at the beginning of the evidence that you've given today, what you've has said to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that the privilege does not attach to comments that you may make to anyone, including the media, even if it's just repeating what you've said to us. Do you understand?

Ms MUNTING – Yes.

The witness withdrew

The Committee suspended from 10.23 a.m. to 3.01 p.m.

Ms Anne-Marie Bennett

CHAIR - Thank you very much and welcome to today's hearing. Thank you for your written submission, which we all have received and had the opportunity to read. Can I confirm that you have received and read the guide sent to you by the Committee Secretary?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I have.

CHAIR - Great. I'll just remind you of the important parts of that document, which are that what you say today is covered by parliamentary privilege, which allows you to speak with freedom and without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place outside of parliament. The exception to that is that the protection is not accorded to you if statements that you make may be defamatory and you repeat them or refer to them outside of these proceedings. It is a public hearing, so members of the public could attend. There's no members of the public in the room right now, but it's possible that there might be people observing online or media observing online. If you would like to move into a private *in camera* hearing at any time, either if that feels safest for you or if there's anything that you'd like to provide to us in a confidential setting, please just make that request.

I'll quickly introduce the Committee. We've got Rosalie Woodruff, opposite me here, who's the Member for Franklin; Jen Butler, who's the Member for Lyons; Helen Burnet, who's Member for Clark; and Peter George, who's Member for Franklin. My name's Ella Haddad, I'm Member for Clark. Because you're online, I'll just read a statement to you to swear you into the Committee.

Ms ANNE-MARIE BENNETT WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED via TEAMS.

CHAIR - Can I ask you to state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing, for the purposes of the committee record?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, my name is Anne-Marie Bennett. I was a serving member and now obviously civilian just wanting to give my statement in relation to this.

CHAIR - Thank you, Anne-Marie. Also, we recognise that what we're discussing in this Committee includes materials that can be highly sensitive and deeply impactful for people listening, and also for yourself. There is support available if you need that. We do have Lifeline in the building today. We've contracted them for the day to provide support to people, and we can provide that remotely. There's also a range of support organisations listed on the Committee website. I think that's all of the formalities. Did you want to make any kind of opening statement, Anne-Marie?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I have an opening statement that I'd like to make. Firstly, thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee for hearing from me and for allowing me to appear by video from Western Australia. I am a victim-survivor of child sexual abuse and a former member of Tasmania Police. I have chosen to make my submission public and to give this evidence publicly. That decision is mine. I was a police officer, and when this organisation failed me, it failed one of its own. I saw from the inside how complaints like mine are managed with words rather than resolved with action. No Tasmanian law firm has been willing to take on a claim to hold Tasmania Police accountable for how my report was handled. This hearing is the one place left where that can be heard openly. I'm here to have a voice, to speak for others in my position, and so that what happened to me does not happen to the next person. I will not name any individual; my evidence is about what the organisation did.

What happened: in 2006, I reported to Tasmania Police that I had been repeatedly raped as a child by my tennis coach from the age of 13. I gave a full statement. I named the witnesses. I told police about the medical, bank and telephone records that existed at the time. This took all my courage and strength to report. To my knowledge, not one witness was interviewed, not one record was obtained. The file was closed and I was given no outcome, no reason, no advice that I could seek a review. I heard nothing for 13 years.

In about 2019, I asked for a review. It was allocated back to the same detective whose 2006 investigation had failed. Over roughly 18 months, the file passed through five officers, several only temporarily attached to the detective section. This was a deeply private and personal matter and now was shared among junior secondees and others. My right to have this dealt with privately and with dignity was also denied. I now had to relive this over and over again, and to many different people. This takes its toll. A brief was prepared for the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] that my late partner, a serving Detective Sergeant, considered unfit to proceed. It was stopped only because he personally rang a Crown Officer. No system stopped it. A phone call did. By this time, an officer handled the file properly, and the Inspector who did so treated me with respect. The evidence was gone, the treating doctor had died, the bank and telephone records had been destroyed under ordinary retention rules. The witnesses would no longer speak to police.

A correction which I will make to my previous submission: parts of my submission say that no outcome of my internal complaint was ever communicated to me. That is not correct and I want the record to be right. On 13 October 2022, Tasmania Police wrote to me finding that the investigating officer had failed to conduct a thorough investigation, in breach of section 42(2) of the *Police Service Act 2003*, the duty to act 'with care and diligence'. Within about a week, if that, that officer was allowed to retire. The same letter records this, and it meant no further action could be taken. So, one finding was made against one officer and it produced no consequence. I have never been told of any examination of the decision to give the review to the officer whose work was under review, of the 2006 closure, or of the brief that nearly went to the DPP.

Why this matters beyond my case: the evidence in my matter was not lost to the years between the abuse and my report. It was lost in the years after I reported, while Tasmania Police held the file and did nothing with it. In a historical childhood sexual abuse case, that kind of delay does not slow justice down; it destroys it permanently. The man I reported has never been charged. Every system meant to protect children - Working with Vulnerable People checks, sporting bodies, clubs - depends on police having done their work. Nobody ever looked for other children he had access to. I cannot tell this Committee whether there were others, and neither can Tasmania Police because nobody asked. I did everything a victim is asked to do. I reported, I named the evidence. I did it again years later, and I complained through the proper channels. As a serving officer with a Detective Sergeant advocating for me from inside, it made no difference. I ask the Committee to consider what that means for people who have none of these advantages. What it cost me: my late partner died in June 2022. He was the one person -

Mr GEORGE - Take your time, Anne-Marie.

Ms BUTLER - There's no rush.

Ms BENNETT - He was the one person who pushed for my matter to be reopened after the first investigation failed. After his death, I lost my home, I was subject to constant abuse and harassment by his family and the Tasmanian Public Trustee. I cried out for help but Tasmania Police did nothing. The one person who stood by me was Matt Richman, the Director of Wellbeing. After my partner's state funeral, I was forgotten along with my 14-year-old son. We were left homeless. Throughout this process and while on my knees grieving, I was still having to fight for this matter, for maybe one small chance to be heard. I no longer had my support. In fact, I had nobody to fight for me. Not one phone call was ever received by leadership or, in fact, any other serving member to check. I made the decision to leave Tasmania Police because I could no longer work for an organisation that cared so little for its people when it mattered. The organisation I served did not stand by one of its own.

What I'm asking for, of the 13 recommendations in my submission, I ask the Committee to give particular weight to four: (1) an independent audit of historical child sexual abuse reports closed without charge; (2) a mandatory evidence preservation protocol at the point of first report; (3) an absolute rule that no officer may review or reinvestigate their own earlier investigation; (4) extending the redress and restorative engagement framework built after the Weiss review to people whose reports police failed to investigate so the remedy follows the organisation's failure, not the identity of the offender.

The reforms Tasmania Police has made since 2023 are real, but every one of them looks forward. None of them does anything for people whose files were already closed and whose evidence was already gone. The Committee may be the first body able to look at us at all. I've had enough reviews and recommendations. They are words. I ask that what comes from this Committee is acted on, because actions speak louder than words. Thank you. I'm happy to take the Committee's questions.

CHAIR - Thank you so much, Anne-Marie. Before we move into questions, I sincerely thank you for having the strength and the generosity to share your story with us, and to have to relive it in order to share it with this Committee. Committees of parliament like this one are only as useful as the evidence that we receive, and we can't do our work as committee members without hearing real stories like yours. I want to put on the record that I recognise, and the

Committee recognises, the strength that is required to share something as deeply personal and heartfelt, and heartbreaking as what you've gone through. I'm really sorry for what you've been through. I, too, hope that this Inquiry will be able to make some tangible and useful recommendations for change that mean that people don't suffer the same kind of things in the future. But like you said, that there might be able to actually be some recognition of wrongs of the past as well. Thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

I was going to ask you to speak a little bit more about that time in between your first report and your request for the review in 2019; and then in 2022, you received that letter that sounds like the police were admitting, at least to some extent, that they'd failed you. Are you able to talk through that period between 2006 and 2022 a little bit more in terms of what would have looked like best practice for you had your matter been handled appropriately?

Ms BENNETT - I really don't know what was done, and it was hard enough to report it. Being a serving member myself, it was a lot of shame and a lot of embarrassment to have to even go through someone. I don't believe that anything was ever done. My husband at the time, he was the first person to ever be told about it, and he was the witness. So, the recent complaint, he was never spoken to. Witnesses were never spoken to. All I can say is that there was plenty of evidence, including medical evidence, bank records, phone records, all sorts. There were witnesses that, if they were spoken to at the time - being a police officer myself, I don't understand that there would be anything that this person could say except for that, you know, the evidence is there. But when all that's not there, there is no case. I don't understand how you can't - like, myself, if I have even the smallest case, you'd at least take statements from witnesses and get the evidence that's there and required, but none of that was done. There is, obviously, a seven-year limit on bank records, medical records, I don't know if it's still the same, but there was. And so, it was destroyed after that timeframe. The doctor passed away. So, yes.

Dr WOODRUFF - Hello, Anne-Marie. That was very horrifying to hear that story, I must say. I'm struggling to understand so many things about what you said. Can you just talk about the process about why you had to give your story the second time to so many people? What year was that in the second time that you did it?

Ms BENNETT - 2019.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, was there any sort of encouragement for you to, I don't know, did you get talked through the process? What do you understand?

Ms BENNETT - No, I didn't even know that I could do anything. I didn't even know that I could get it reviewed. That was only because I was with Todd, who was a Detective Sergeant that had been through - that was his job, and so he knew and he said, 'You can review it, you need to send it', how to go through the avenues. Without him there I couldn't have done it, I just didn't have the strength anymore to keep going, to keep trying. Anyway, I put in and they - it was just passed from - I know junior people that had just joined the job or been in a couple of years that were seconded there, were contacting witnesses in relation to it and talking to people. It was very off-putting and knowing what I know, nothing is sacred, like -

Dr WOODRUFF - What do you mean?

Ms BENNETT - People talk and that was one of my biggest things. There's gossip, you know, and things, and I just didn't wholly 100 per cent trust that, and when you've got all different people on secondment that aren't even there, they're only there for eight weeks or a month to cover someone, or to come and learn stuff. They're not even proper trained detectives. They're just on secondment.

Dr WOODRUFF - Into the Professional Standards Unit, you're talking about?

Ms BENNETT - No, this was the detective section, when it was taken back to be reviewed.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, okay. The first and the second one, did they go through the Professional Standards Unit or were they just straight with detectives?

Ms BENNETT - No, it went straight back. The same detective that did the first one, he was allocated it, and when he was probed because it was taking so long and why he hadn't done anything again the second time, his actual statement to my partner at the time - it's on email - was, 'I wish I'd never agreed to do this', as if it was his - he'd put his hand up to do it.

Dr WOODRUFF - Do you have any sense why you think he said that and what that was about?

Ms BENNETT - I have no idea. I really don't have any idea. I don't understand why. I have no connection with him, I only know that the north west coast is small. I have no idea.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you so much for your fabulous submission and also sharing this very personal story, and we heard from a witness this morning that was talking about part of that healing process and part of it is being believed, heard, supported and understood. I think the example that you've provided us here, none of those were provided to you with what you went through as a young person, and I'm really sorry that that happened to you.

I really liked the way within your submission some of the recommendations that you put forward for us to consider - and it hasn't gone unnoticed as well, that what happened to you, there was never an investigation done. We really, as a community, we don't know who this person was and whether or not that person could have hurt other young people as well. That's quite frightening, especially when the information has been provided twice, and that's very sad.

One of your recommendations is an independent audit of historical child sexual abuse reports closed without charge. What evidence has led you to conclude that similar allegations may extend beyond your own experience? What would you hope such an audit would uncover?

Ms BENNETT - I personally was involved, just towards the end of leaving, with a matter and again, it's not my matter to talk about, but a similar matter. The person had had the same experience - not a serving member, but the same experience. It just seemed to be a little bit too common a theme that this sort of particular matter wasn't being investigated or taken seriously. I understand there are ones that aren't - I don't know, people make allegations and whatever, but they can't all be treated the same. Every matter or every complainant deserves a right to be looked at. You can't make a decision, and it's not up to the detective or the person to make a decision like that.

I just feel like I'm not the only one and there would be many that have had the system fail them and they've never had any closure. They're like me, like if I didn't have a supportive person, and now Michael supporting me, if they didn't have someone, how could they do that? It takes its toll. It's not easy for me to even come here. I thought about not doing it, doing it, not doing it, doing it - it's not easy. And then knowing that I served in an organisation, I don't like to talk badly about it either, because I'm proud of what I did and I'm proud of what my friends do. They investigate properly and my husband investigated properly. It's not everyone. I just feel like that recommendation, if they were to look at something - but the problem with that is if the evidence is gone, there's nothing. They're in the same position as me. But then at least they would be heard. At least they would not feel like you don't matter. You already feel like that from what's happened to you. When you do the right thing, you don't need to be made to feel even worse by people that you respect and work alongside. I honestly just feel like there'd be a lot if they looked into all the matters like mine there'd be a lot that never went anywhere, to be honest.

Ms BUTLER - Just quickly, we had a person talking around cold maps and hot maps of different areas where there could have been allegations or rumours or so forth. If you combined that kind of information with the historic charges, it could be a useful tool for looking at trends. What do you say to that as someone who has police experience?

Ms BENNETT - Hot maps and cold maps, meaning that the -

Ms BUTLER - A hot map would be where there has been misconduct or activity or lots of reports, and a cold map would be an area where there's really not much at all - which could be good or bad.

Ms BENNETT - It can be good or bad, but in my situation I believe that it's a cold one. Do you put more focus on someone like that or it should just be treated the same? There could be a one-off. There could be people that just never come forward. There might be people that have - I don't know, definitely if there's rumours and things going on, you definitely would look into that. I don't think you should ever focus just on that because there could be the cold one where there's no one willing to come forward. I don't know whether they're afraid or - I don't know. It's a very hard situation. Everyone deals with it differently. Some will speak up and some won't. They will take it to the grave. I just wouldn't focus just on one. I think it should be each complaint should be taken and given its due justice, and that person shouldn't be treated any different to whether someone else has got five complainants or whether they're the only one. They should still be treated with the same respect and priority.

CHAIR - Well put.

Ms BURNET - Thanks Anne-Marie and thanks for your presentation today and your detailed submission and you've probably answered this, but I just want to ask you again, how important is it as a victim or complainant or witness to have updates on the investigation and how those things are going?

Ms BENNETT - I never had any updates for 13 years and I just wondered the whole time, like when was I going to hear? Surely, I was going to hear tomorrow. Surely, I'd hear next week. Surely, I'd hear next year. I never heard anything. It's heartbreaking. It's – I don't know, like I don't know, I can't - it's like you're just forgotten. You never mattered. It's just

terrible. Like how hard would it be to just send an update? I didn't ask for much, just to be told what are you doing, like where are you at?

CHAIR - It should be standard procedure really, shouldn't it?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, and when you're already down about it, you're already struggling with it and coming forward, the last thing you feel like doing is chasing someone up.

Ms BURNET - I suppose that goes to the heart of any sort of power imbalance as well, doesn't it? If you're not being told and not involved, then it does zap somebody of their power or influence over something.

I know this is hard, but I also know that you see the importance of speaking out so that others don't have to go through a similar situation. How systemic do you think this pattern of behaviour is in relation to Tasmania Police?

Ms BENNETT - Systemic? I don't like to say that everyone is the same because -

Ms BURNET - Or is it a culture? Do you see it as a cultural thing or?

Ms BENNETT - I think certain areas are probably worse in how they treat it. I think it's not taken, or it never was taken very seriously to start with until everyone and everything started happening. So, I think it was just a - see, because personally, I take it seriously because I know what it means. I can only go on the people I know and they all take it seriously and they're all like serving members and they did take it serious, but then there were others that if it comes in the front counter, it's just like, put it on an information report and then someone else will get back to it or - it's not the way to approach something that's so serious and someone's taken so much strength. I don't think they realise the strength it takes for someone to walk in and make that complaint in the first place. Then if you're made to feel anything less than or you're not believed, you'll never come back, you'll walk away unless you have real strength or you have someone, like I said, real support, I don't see that - why would you come back if they don't believe anything? There is an element of that in the police, but then I don't like to put everyone in the same basket because I know for a fact there are some that are very good officers and they wouldn't let that happen. Sadly, I got caught up in the wrong one.

Mr GEORGE - Hello, it's Peter, Anne-Marie. Just one question about that. It's a very comprehensive submission you've put in, thanks. I'm wondering whether this is an issue that gets worse the higher up the rank you go. Perhaps there is a degree of sympathy or openness or collaboration sort of at lower levels, but the further you go through the bureaucracy of the police force the more difficult it becomes. Would that be a correct interpretation?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I would say so. It's always rank. Rank always rules over. I've always been told that. Any complaint or anything you make, if it's against someone with rank and they've got their mates there or they've got anyone there, you're never going to win. If you're a constable, it's always been that. It's not a fair system. It is what it is and things aren't looked at as soon as it becomes - if you make a complaint against someone higher up and he's got friends in the job or in the area, your matter is always going to be - I don't know, they have ways of justifying their decisions, if you know what I mean. It's not everywhere, but it seems to be a common theme. It's one of those things, everyone knows if you make an issue against rank, rank always wins, so.

Mr GEORGE - Rank always wins.

Ms BUTLER - You've provided a set of recommendations, including an independent audit of historical child sexual abuse files, which we previously discussed, about mandatory evidence preservation and stronger conflict of interest protections. If our Committee were to take one lesson from your experience, what do you most want us to understand about the reforms needed to ensure that future victims do not experience what you have experienced?

Ms BENNETT - The single most thing, and I've put it here so I don't forget, is basically the only reason mine surfaced was because I was a police officer, and I had a Detective Sergeant - that's it, because I had him by my side. That's the only reason mine resurfaced. Sadly, I think if I wasn't in that position and he wasn't in that position and well respected, there must be so many people that nobody is looking for, and the one thing I want out of this is that every single person has a right to their chance at justice.

So, every single person that comes to make a report is heard, and they're given just the decency of having a proper investigation. If for whatever reason that investigation - don't send it back to the same person who failed them the first time. Don't belittle them by sending it to somebody who's not even trained in that area or trained as a detective that's just been two years in the job. They don't have the same - they can't possibly have the same experience and they don't understand how much it took and what you've been through. Those sorts of things, I just think the importance of just giving someone the right to a proper investigation and just giving them the decency.

CHAIR - It should be the bare minimum, really, shouldn't it?

Ms BENNETT - Yes.

Dr WOODRUFF - Anne-Marie, you say in your submission that after it went back the second time, you went back the second time, and it was determined that - there was a terrible process as you outlined, where the investigation was a failure and the evidence had disappeared at that point 13 years later. You did get an outcome from Tasmania Police, which stated that the officer failed to conduct a thorough investigation of the crimes, and they're considering a breach of section 42 of the *Police Service Act 2003* and have determined that the police officer breached the requirement to act with care and diligence on that matter. Then that officer retired within a week and nothing happened again. You've never had an acknowledgement from Tasmania Police of - from the evidence you provided - of what looked like grotesque failures of administrative justice, which have had a profound impact on you. It's led to your inability to be able to seek justice and, as you say, also failed other potential victims from being identified. Would you like Tasmania Police to acknowledge that pain and suffering that's being caused and make an apology to you?

Ms BENNETT - Look, to be honest, not anymore. The damage is done. 'Sorry' is a word and, to be honest, like everything I've outlined to you, I walked away from a 25-year career, I don't want any memories - I don't want anything to remember my time. I had a great time, don't get me wrong, I loved my job, but all the damage has just taken such a toll that I don't even know that I would want them to say sorry. 'Sorry' is not going to give me back what I lost. 'Sorry' is not going to ever repay how little they thought of me and it's been so long that they could have already reached - now, it would be just because of this they're saying sorry and

that's not a heartfelt, true - like I said, I meant so little to them - not once have I received a phone call asking how I am, even after the death of my husband, knowing full well that everything is going on. Not once. Like I said, apology means nothing. All I want is for the future, for this to never happen to other people.

Dr WOODRUFF - So, an apology that would be effective for you would be that your 13 recommendations are fulfilled and are put in place so there is change to make sure it never happens again?

Ms BENNETT -Yes, that's all. There is nothing that they can say that will make anything better, but future, what I'd like that would make it better for me is that no-one ever goes through this.

Ms BUTLER - I have another question, I'm very mindful of time, and you've been very generous and brave.

Ms BENNETT - That's alright.

Ms BUTLER - You found this process almost impossible, as you said, the allegations were not tested and rejected; they were never tested, in your submission. I thought that was very well put. You were a serving police officer at that time and understood the system. Do you consider that an inhibitor on people actually coming forward with their own stories could be the fact that most of them would have to be put through Tasmania Police and if there was another open door of sorts, another place where people could go for advocacy and support and to help them through that system at the forefront, do you think that would be really beneficial, and might help address people that are too worried about what a scary process it would be?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I think so. I personally would have done that myself. I think so, people that are trained, a bit more aware of how to speak to people. I think the support that's required as well, yes, I definitely think that that would be a better way of doing it, 100 per cent. That's how I would have gone. I wouldn't have bothered even going through the police if I could have made a report through someone else. Actually, I would have preferred that, to be honest, yes.

Mr GEORGE - I was just going to follow that up, actually. It just occurred to me, do you think, from the point of view of the police themselves, that that is an avenue they would also prefer? You having worked within the police force, do you think hiving it off from the police force would be preferable to the administration?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I think so. I would think that there's all these other sections that now have branched off from police. If people are trained and I don't know, like even demeanour wise, like if they're not dressed in police uniform, and so - because you do come across a certain way, I guess, if you've also got to be hard, you've got to be - it's not like it's just a one-sided job and you can just soften. People that are trained and sometimes a bit, even dressed differently, and just a different demeanour would make a difference. I think, as a serving police officer, yes, I would be open to having a section like that where that's what they did and they were good at it and everything was done the same way, every complaint was done and acknowledged, and every witness and complainant was respected. I think you'd be silly if you were a serving member and you didn't think that was a good option.

Ms BURNET - Absolutely, and would that provide a bit more fairness or parity, I suppose, for those people who you spoke about who may not find it as easy to come forward?

Ms BENNETT - It'll also stop things like, for whatever reason, that detective, I don't know, like I don't know him. I didn't know him at the time, but you don't know if he knew someone that knew me, that didn't like me, that he's decided, 'Oh, no, I don't want her to pursue it, I don't want you to pursue', it stops that. Unfortunately, being a small police service, everyone really knows each other, especially in the north west, we know each other. It stops that sort of thing from happening. Yes. I think it would be better to be completely independent, to be honest.

Ms BUTLER - Because we do have that, not three degrees of separation, it's like one or two degrees of separation -

CHAIR - Less than one, sometimes.

Ms BUTLER - There's a good chance that everyone does know everyone inadvertently within our state.

CHAIR - Anne-Marie, is there anything that you were hoping to raise with us that we haven't gone to in questioning that you'd like to speak to more?

Ms BENNETT - No, no, I'm pretty happy with that.

CHAIR - Thank you. It's very normal to feel at the end of a hearing like this that over the next few hours, days, weeks, months, there might be other information that comes to mind that you would like us to hear about. Please do reach back out to us via the Secretariat. We're more than happy to hear from you again if you want to share any other information with us, please do. But I'll just remind you that there is support available as well. If you need that, please just give us a shout.

Ms BENNETT - Yes, will do.

CHAIR - I'll also remind you formally - I need to do this for the record - that the information that you've provided for us today in your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege, but once you leave these hearings, you need to be aware that the privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if it's repeating what you said to us. Is that clear?

Ms BENNETT - Yes, I understand.

CHAIR - Thanks so much, Anne-Marie, it's really generous of you to give us your time, especially from another time zone. So, thank you very much.

Ms BENNETT -No worries. Thank you.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thanks so much, you were powerful, to hear your testimony.

Mr GEORGE - Thanks for your courage.

Ms BENNETT - Thank you.

The witness withdrew

The Committee adjourned at 3.45 p.m.