

**POLICE — MEDICALLY RETIRED OFFICERS — REDRESS SCHEME**

*Statement*

**HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan)** [9.57 pm]: I rise this evening to speak on a matter of great importance to our current and former police officers and their families across Western Australia. Earlier this month I joined officers, past and present, and their supporters for a rally here at Parliament House to demand the introduction of a long overdue workers' compensation scheme and redress for medically retired police officers. As members will no doubt be aware, Western Australia remains the only jurisdiction in the entire country that does not provide a workers' compensation scheme for medically retired officers, despite promises from successive governments to fix this woeful situation.

It would be an understatement to say that policing is a tough job. It is not an easy job. In fact, I would argue that it is one of the most difficult roles out there in the community. Our police put their bodies and their minds on the line every day to uphold community safety and witness some truly horrendous things as part of their job, yet, unlike workers in many other professions, police officers are not covered by any workers' compensation. The previous Liberal–National government proposed workers' compensation legislation for our police in late 2016 but this proposal failed to offer adequate support for the state's medically retired officers, who have been effectively abandoned.

The current government has promised to address this issue but we are now into the second year of the McGowan Labor government and we have not seen any tangible action. No legislation has been proposed to date nor any funding put in the budget forward estimates for a workers' compensation and redress scheme. Many officers are understandably exasperated by this apparent inaction. They are tired of governments sympathising with their plight and offering reassuring language but then dithering and delivering nothing of substance. They just want and deserve a bit of honesty. I urge the state government to outline when workers' compensation and redress legislation will be forthcoming and how it will be funded. I also urge the government to amend the Police Act 1892 as a matter of urgency and priority to ensure that there is a distinction between those officers who retire on medical grounds and those dismissed for other reasons. Officers who are retired on medical grounds deserve to be treated with respect and dignity rather than just dismissed under the current section 8 provisions. As a 2016 parliamentary report noted, many officers feel they have been abandoned and treated as "scrap metal", while the process of retirement has been described as convoluted and impersonal.

I just ask members to reflect on the story of Todd Rowe, a former detective sergeant in the Cannington district crime team, who served on the force for 15 years. Mr Rowe described himself as fit and active, physically and mentally, prior to a life-changing incident in the early morning of Australia Day in 2012. He states that prior to this incident, he had attended numerous serious incidents—crashes, fatalities, suicides, post mortems, sudden deaths, sexual assaults, domestic violence and so on—and they had never really affected him. In 2012, during his Australia Day night shift, Mr Rowe was patrolling the Maddington area with his partner when they stopped a vehicle. He recalls speaking to the driver but nothing after that point. At some point, the front passenger of that vehicle entered their unmarked police car, which had been left running, as per police procedure, to stop the battery going flat. Mr Rowe apparently tried to stop this person, at which point they got into the police car and reversed, knocking over Mr Rowe and trapping him underneath the police car. That car then drove backwards driving over Mr Rowe's legs. Mr Rowe suffered numerous injuries and was rushed to Royal Perth Hospital. He was left unable to work. He says that over the next two years, he attended over 200 appointments including doctors, physiotherapists, brain scans, MRIs, bone scans, blood tests, water therapy, psychologists, psychiatrists and other appointments. During all of these visits, Mr Rowe's family had to take time off work to accompany him. He was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and another condition and was discharged from the WA police on medical grounds in 2014. Upon his discharge, he was given his accrued leave and four weeks' pay. I quote Mr Rowe's own words —

I watch the news and hope for a better life for injured officers but it appears that only the squeaky wheel gets the grease, unless you take the matter to the media or make a big issue of the incident then it just gets swept under the carpet.

Sadly, he is only one of many officers who have been discarded after serious injury and left to suffer without adequate support. It is time this changed and that we better support those who protect us.