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## Overworked police prosecutors can't keep up with offenders in SA court system

STRESSED and overworked police prosecutors are struggling to crack down on law-breakers because there are not enough of them to deal with the tens of thousands of cases crossing their desks each year, the police union says.

Elizabeth Henson  
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STRESSED and overworked police prosecutors are struggling to crack down on law-breakers because there are not enough of them to deal with the tens of thousands of cases crossing their desks each year, the police union says.

The Police Association of South Australia says the state's 140 police prosecutors handle more than 65,000 files a year on behalf of victims of crime and their families.

The cases include sexual assault, serious assault, theft and fraud.

Police Association president Mark Carroll said the organisation recently held a meeting with prosecutors at the Elizabeth Magistrates Court to discuss their concerns and was told "there is an acute lack of resources" to deal with the volume of cases.

"Our police prosecutors have been saying repeatedly that there's simply not enough of them to do the work," Mr Carroll said.

"If this situation is not addressed it will have a deleterious effect on members' health, morale and, ultimately, service delivery to the public."

Mr Carroll said he would raise the concerns with Police Commissioner Grant Stevens.

SA Police is conducting a trial using experienced solicitors as prosecutors in a bid to ease some of the pressure.

Mr Carroll told *The Advertiser* the handful of solicitors who had taken part in the trial had provided welcome relief for the police prosecutors.

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However, SA Police has refused to say how many solicitors it plans to employ if the trial is successful or whether they would replace all police prosecutors or continue to work alongside them.

A police spokeswoman said the use of solicitors aimed to "introduce a different level of expertise into the prosecution function in response to increasing complexity in the law and rules of evidence".

"While we would not release specific details about the trial while that evaluation is occurring, overall it has been regarded as being a success," she said.

Commissioner Stevens earlier this month told Parliament he expected the outcomes of the trial to be known "within the next month or so".

A proposal to use law graduates, rather than experienced solicitors, to replace police prosecutors was first mooted in 2013 and but was blasted by the Police Association as a cost-cutting measure.

The association is in talks with the State Government about fast-tracking recruitment targets to address insufficient officer numbers.

The Government came under fire earlier this year when, for the third time, it broke a promise to increase police numbers.

It pledged in 2010 to boost the force by 313 officers by 2014.

Last month it extended the deadline to 2020.

### Police station cuts 'put more cops on road'

CHANGES to police station opening hours will return 37 police officers to the frontline, SA Police Commissioner Grant Stevens says.

Opening hours at the Aldinga, Glenelg, Golden Grove, Henley Beach, Netley, Norwood and Salisbury stations [have this month been reduced to Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm](#).

All except two of these stations had been open seven days a week, with hours ranging from 7.30am to 11pm.

The Holden Hill and Sturt stations will continue to open seven days a week but their hours have been cut from 24 hours to 9am to 9pm.

Mr Stevens said the changes were designed to better serve South Australians, not cut costs.

"The overwhelming majority of South Australians interact with SAPOL via phone, and increasingly, using our online services," he said.

"There is no relationship whatsoever between the opening hours of a station's front

counter and the availability of our members to respond to calls for assistance."

However, Opposition police spokesman Dan van Holst Pellekaan said police officers should maintain a visible presence at stations.

"In our fast changing world moving towards more and more digital interaction ... people still say "I need to see you", and this is regularly the case when seeking help from the police," he said.

"Not only do people need the support of an officer, but often also the support that access to an open police station can offer."

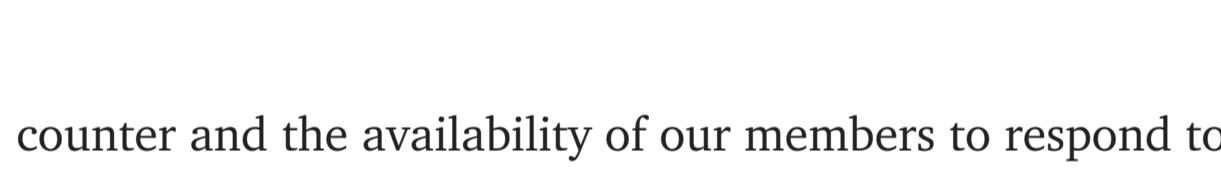
Mr van Holst Pellekaan said Labor's 2010 and 2014 election promises to fund at least 300 extra officers in SA had been put off to 2020.

The number of recruits each year was "only just ahead of the number leaving the force while the work they are expected to do grows and evolves every year", he said.

SA Police Association president Mark Carroll has previously expressed concern about SA Police staffing levels.

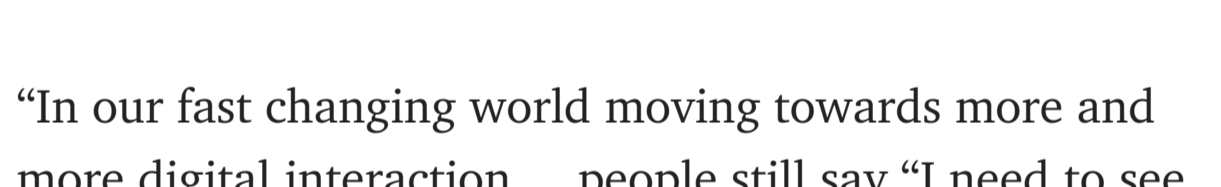
"We will be very eager to watch what (police officer) numbers are returned to front line duties," he said.

— **Police Reporter Jordana Schriever**



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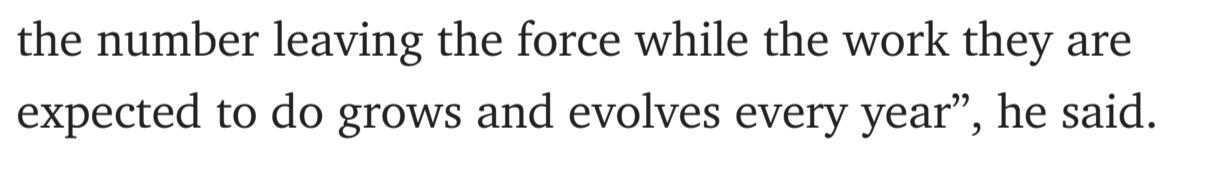
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