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Mark Carroll: The government's proposed law aimed at those who spit at police is a step in the right direction. But only a step

The law would have been greatly strengthened years ago, were it politicians, magistrates and judges getting coward-punched, doused in petrol, or stabbed with scissors or knives, writes Mark Carroll.

Mark Carroll

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Most South Australians will be aware that the Police Association of South Australia (PASA) has recently mounted a public campaign to have the Government change the laws with regard to assaults on police officers and, by extension, our colleagues in other branches of emergency services.

The association acknowledges, but finds disappointing, the initial response of the Marshall Government.

Of course, we welcome the Government proposal to take the offence of assault on police out of the Summary Offences Act. And its proposed new law aimed at people who spit, or throw bodily materials, at police officers is a step in the right direction. But it is only a step.

The entirely reasonable demand of police officers and other emergency-services workers for solid legislative backing is so easily achieved. It requires nothing like a major reconstruction of the Criminal Law Consolidation Act.

The association's legal advice is that an environment with robust, legislative protection for police officers is easily created through the institution of new offences under the act and the amendment of other clauses where necessary.

It would behove the Marshall Government to recognise that the measures the association seeks have the backing of the vast majority of South Australians. And a recent poll on the association's Facebook page attracted more than 98 per cent respondent support for stronger laws and harsher penalties. To receive, as we have, a muted response from the Government – against the backdrop of this overwhelming public support – is perplexing. It would be an indictment on both the Government and the Opposition to play political football with the issue of protecting South Australian emergency-services personnel.



The Police Association's legal advice is that an environment with robust, legislative protection for police officers is easily created through the institution of new offences under the act and the amendment of other clauses where necessary.

All South Australians rightly expect a robust, bipartisan approach to such an important human issue.

Cops, ambos, fireys, doctors and nurses care nothing about how the legislation is arrived at or who puts it up to the Parliament.

For our part, the Police Association approaches these matters with the professionalism expected of it. We take practical advice from our highly experienced legal team before approaching the Government.

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Our elected representatives, regardless of political persuasion, should listen very carefully to the informed views of the sector – and act on them. It is not that hard.

I remind all our parliamentarians that, if the current laws were working, the Police Association would not have undertaken a major campaign to change them.

I can also assure those parliamentarians that my members do not get paid nearly enough for going to work each day knowing they might be assaulted by the very people they have sworn to serve.

I strongly suspect that the relevant legislation would have been greatly strengthened years ago, were it politicians, magistrates and judges getting coward-punched, doused in petrol, driven at in cars, or stabbed with scissors or knives.

One would hope that the first response the Government has made to our campaign for legislative change – in the legitimate interests of cops and other emergency-services workers – is just the start of the conversation.

From our perspective, it is certainly not the end.

The Police Association will continue to wage the campaign until it is satisfied with the parliament's response.

This journey has not ended.

Mark Carroll, APM, is President of the Police Association of South Australia



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