



Submission on Tasmania Police's Response to Allegations of Officer Misconduct

4 September 2026

Executive Summary

Engender Equality welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Inquiry into Tasmania Police Responses to Allegations of Officer Misconduct. As a specialist family violence organisation, Engender Equality brings expertise in coercive control, systems abuse, trauma-informed practice and victim-survivor advocacy.

Our central concern is that allegations of serious misconduct involving family violence and sexual misconduct require a response that is independent of the organisation in which the alleged perpetrator works.

When the alleged perpetrator is a police officer, the ordinary risks associated with family and sexual violence can be compounded by the officer's access to police information, systems, weapons, colleagues, professional networks and institutional authority. The victim-survivor may therefore be required to report violence to, or seek protection from, an institution in which the alleged perpetrator has status, relationships and influence. This creates both an actual and perceived conflict of interest and creates opportunities for systems abuse.

The Inquiry provides an important opportunity to consider not only individual failures, but the structural conditions that make reporting unsafe, inhibit accountability and can allow misconduct to remain hidden. The experience of Paul Reynolds demonstrates the profound consequences that can arise when institutional culture, investigative processes and oversight arrangements fail to adequately recognise the risks associated with police-perpetrated abuse.

Engender Equality recommends:

1. Embedding a gendered and specialist analysis of policing, misconduct, family violence, sexual misconduct, coercive control, systems abuse and trauma-informed responses across relevant policies, training and accountability frameworks;

2. Ensuring serious allegations involving family violence, sexual misconduct or abuse of police authority are independently received, assessed and investigated, rather than managed solely through internal Tasmania Police processes;
3. Establishing mandatory external referral for serious allegations, so Tasmania Police is not the sole gatekeeper for determining whether independent oversight is required;
4. Creating confidential reporting pathways outside Tasmania Police for victim-survivors, family members, colleagues and community members who hold concerns about police misconduct;
5. Funding independent specialist family and sexual violence advocacy for victim-survivors from the point of disclosure and throughout complaints, investigations, disciplinary processes or inquiries;
6. Developing a specific Tasmania Police policy on police-perpetrated family violence and sexual misconduct, including external referral, safety planning, conflict-of-interest management, protections against retaliation, information access controls and victim-survivor communication requirements;
7. Requiring transparent public reporting on allegations, referrals, investigation outcomes, disciplinary action and implementation of review recommendations, while protecting victim-survivor privacy, confidentiality and safety;
8. Reviewing police funeral, honour and ceremonial protocols so serious allegations of family violence, sexual misconduct or other serious harm are independently assessed before public recognition is authorised;
9. Commissioning independent Tasmanian research into the prevalence, nature and impact of police-perpetrated family violence and sexual misconduct, including barriers to reporting, systems abuse and victim-survivor experiences; and
10. Establishing formal ongoing consultation with specialist family and sexual violence services and victim-survivors, alongside an independent review mechanism to assess the effectiveness of responses and implementation of recommendations.

1. Introduction

This submission considers how organisational culture can influence the identification, reporting and response to serious misconduct involving family and sexual violence.

The submission also examines the adequacy of systems, processes and oversight arrangements for responding to serious misconduct within Tasmania Police, particularly allegations involving family violence, sexual misconduct and abuse of police authority. It makes recommendations to strengthen independence,

accountability, victim-survivor safety and confidence in the reporting and investigation of these matters.

The Paul Reynolds matter, as a case study, provides an opportunity to examine the broader systems, culture, and decision-making that apply when allegations of serious misconduct involve a police officer, including the limited scope of inquiry into Reynolds' conduct prior to the Weiss Review, the decision to cease further investigation following his death, and the decision to hold a highly visible police funeral.

Sexual misconduct by police officers must be understood not only as individual misconduct but also as an abuse of authority and institutional power. It involves grooming, predatory behaviour, coercion, exploitation of vulnerability, misuse of professional credibility, or the use of police status to intimidate, silence or discredit victim-survivors.

2. The Particular Risks of Police-Perpetrated Family and Sexual Violence

Family violence perpetrated by a police officer presents particular risks. Police perpetrators occupy a position of institutional authority with privileged knowledge, access and relationships that could influence how the matter is perceived, responded to and communicated about. There is also great potential to influence how the victim-survivor or complainant is perceived and treated. The risk of bias and the inherent conflict of interest must be handled with the utmost transparency.

Research into police perpetrated family violence remains limited in Australia however, international research and emerging Australian evidence indicate that police officers may experience particular barriers to accountability, including under-reporting of misconduct, organisational loyalty manifesting in protecting or downplaying misconduct, fear of professional consequences and a culture of silence around colleagues' misconduct.

These barriers are heightened by the privilege of police officers to possess knowledge of investigative processes, their understanding of evidentiary thresholds and reporting pathways. They may also have access to confidential information, police databases, weapons, colleagues and professional networks. These factors can be used to intimidate, discredit or otherwise undermine a victim-survivor.

Thus, we are presented with two issues. Firstly, the possibility of an individual police officer using violence. And secondly, the additional opportunities to perpetrate violence, avoid detection, influence the response to allegations and cause further harm after a disclosure has been made.

Victim-survivors may reasonably fear that reporting a police officer will result in retaliation, breaches of confidentiality, reputational harm, professional consequences, not being believed, or being required to engage with colleagues or associates of the alleged perpetrator. While each of these failings are inexcusable and should be avoided at all costs, the cumulation of impacts from multiple occasions of systems abuse, will have irreparable and life changing consequence for the victim-survivor.

Victim-survivors may experience:

- heightened fear and hypervigilance, knowing the perpetrator has access to police systems, information, weapons, colleagues and institutional authority;
- loss of trust in police and justice systems, particularly where the very institution responsible for protection is also connected to or even protecting or colluding with the alleged perpetrator;
- silencing and under-reporting, because reporting may feel unsafe, futile or likely to make the situation worse;
- fear of retaliation, including further abuse, intimidation, stalking, misuse of information;
- loss of privacy and confidentiality, particularly where the perpetrator or has actual or perceived access to sensitive personal information;
- being disbelieved, minimised or discredited, especially where the police officer is seen as credible, calm, authoritative or professionally respected;
- procedural trauma, including repeated disclosures, delays, lack of information, unsafe or opaque processes, and having to engage with colleagues or associates of the alleged perpetrator;
- isolation from support and community, because the victim-survivor may fear that services, colleagues, friends or family will be influenced by the perpetrator's status;
- damage to employment, housing, parenting, legal or community standing, particularly if the perpetrator uses their authority to undermine the victim-survivor's credibility;
- cumulative psychological harm, including distress, anxiety, shame, exhaustion, loss of confidence, and a diminished sense of safety;
- entrenchment of coercive control, where the perpetrator uses systems, processes and institutional power to continue abuse after separation or disclosure;
- loss of agency and autonomy, where the victim-survivor feels unable to seek help, make complaints, participate in investigations or make decisions freely;
- re-traumatisation through institutional betrayal, where the response of the system compounds the original harm by protecting the perpetrator, minimising the abuse or failing to act; and

- long-term life impacts, including ongoing fear, reduced confidence in public institutions, disrupted relationships, financial insecurity, and enduring harm to health, safety and wellbeing.

The cumulative impact can easily lead to experiences of enduring complex trauma. It is Engender Equality's opinion that complex trauma is almost inevitable under these circumstances and should not be treated as incidental. The foreseeable consequences of requiring victim-survivors to seek safety, recognition and accountability through systems that may be connected to, influenced by, or perceived to protect the alleged perpetrator need to be acknowledged by this inquiry.

Police-perpetrated family and sexual violence must be treated as individual misconduct, and also as a form of institutional and systems-based harm requiring independent, specialist and victim-survivor-centred responses.

3. Gender, Culture and Institutional Power Within Policing

Police operate within a highly hierarchical institution in which authority, command structures and professional relationships are central to organisational functioning. These characteristics are considered necessary for many aspects of policing, but they can also create particular risks when allegations of family or sexual violence involve a police officer.

A gendered analysis is essential to understanding these risks.

Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework identifies four key drivers of violence against women: condoning violence against women; men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence; rigid gender roles and identities; and male peer relations that emphasise aggression, dominance and disrespect.

These drivers provide a useful framework for considering whether organisational cultures reinforce or challenge the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Driver 1: Condoning violence against women

Police cultures and individual officers who ignore, minimise or downplay sexist or discriminatory attitudes towards women can create an environment in which violence and abuse are less likely to be challenged.

This can include attitudes, norms and practices that minimise or justify violence, or that support, excuse, elevate or fail to appropriately challenge men who use violence.

The risk is amplified when the man using violence is also a police officer. Organisational loyalty, professional relationships and assumptions about the credibility of colleagues can undermine an appropriate response.

Driver 2: Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence

The hierarchical and historically male-dominated structure of policing can reinforce power dynamics in which men are positioned as experts, decision-makers and authorities.

Where these dynamics influence responses to family and sexual violence, they can result in women's accounts being given less weight, the behaviour of perpetrators being minimised, or victim-survivors being expected to accommodate institutional processes rather than those processes being adapted to their safety and needs.

Driver 3: Rigid gender roles and identities

Rigid expectations about masculinity can influence organisational responses to violence and misconduct.

Where dominance, authority, emotional control or aggression are strongly associated with professional identity, there is a risk that behaviours associated with control, intimidation or aggression are normalised or overlooked.

Driver 4: Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect

Strong professional and social relationships between colleagues can provide important support within policing. However, where loyalty to colleagues becomes more important than accountability, these relationships can also create barriers to reporting and responding to misconduct.

A culture in which colleagues are reluctant to challenge one another can make it particularly difficult for victim-survivors, witnesses and other police officers to report concerns about a colleague.

Effective reform requires explicit attention to power, gender, accountability, leadership, peer culture and the consequences of failing to challenge misconduct.

4. Systems Abuse and Police-Perpetrated Harm

Systems abuse occurs when systems, institutions or processes are deliberately used to control, intimidate, exhaust or otherwise harm a victim-survivor.

When the alleged perpetrator is a police officer, the potential for systems abuse is significant.

Police-perpetrated systems abuse may include:

- using police status to intimidate or discredit a victim-survivor;
- accessing, threatening to access, or appearing to have access to confidential information;

- misusing police databases or other information systems;
- manipulating or influencing colleagues;
- exploiting professional relationships;
- using knowledge of evidentiary thresholds and investigative processes;
- manipulating reporting pathways;
- presenting as calm, credible and authoritative while portraying the victim-survivor as unreliable;
- using knowledge of police procedures to anticipate or frustrate investigative responses; and
- using professional status to create fear of reporting or consequences for the victim-survivor.

The institutional position occupied by the perpetrator has important implications for how allegations are investigated. A victim-survivor should not be required to repeatedly navigate the same institution in which the alleged perpetrator works in order to obtain safety, recognition or accountability.

The existence of an internal complaints process is not sufficient if the victim-survivor reasonably believes that the process is unsafe, compromised or incapable of protecting their confidentiality.

5. Independence, Oversight and Investigation

The investigation of serious allegations against police officers raises an inherent conflict of interest when the organisation responsible for investigating the allegation is also the employer of the alleged perpetrator.

This is particularly significant for allegations involving family violence and sexual misconduct.

Tasmania already has an independent oversight body in the Integrity Commission, which has specific functions in relation to Tasmania Police and can receive complaints, investigate alleged misconduct and undertake own-motion investigations. The Commission also monitors and audits the way public sector organisations, including Tasmania Police, manage misconduct matters. Engender Equality considers that the existence of this external oversight is important and should be strengthened rather than duplicated. However, the Inquiry should examine whether the current framework is sufficiently independent, accessible, proactive and appropriately specialised to respond to the particular risks associated with police-perpetrated family violence and sexual misconduct. In particular, consideration should be given to whether victim-survivors can access the external oversight system safely and confidentially; whether serious allegations are automatically brought to the attention of the independent oversight body; whether the body has sufficient capacity and specialist expertise to investigate these matters (including family violence proficiency and gender sensitivity as a critical requirement); and whether the existing arrangements

adequately protect victim-survivors from systems abuse, retaliation and misuse of police information.

The concern is not only actual interference or bias. Perceived independence is also critical. Victim-survivors and members of the public must have confidence that an allegation will be assessed on its merits, and that professional relationships, organisational loyalty or institutional reputation will not influence the outcome.

In particular, the system should ensure that:

- victim-survivors do not have to rely on Tasmania Police to determine whether their allegation should be externally investigated;
- serious allegations are automatically referred to the appropriate independent oversight body;
- the external oversight body has sufficient powers, resources and specialist expertise to investigate;
- conflicts of interest are identified and managed;
- victim-survivors are informed about the external pathway and their rights;
- police officers cannot use their position or access to police systems to interfere with an investigation;
- information relating to the victim-survivor is appropriately protected; and
- the outcome of the process is communicated to the victim-survivor in a timely and accessible manner.

Serious allegations involving family violence, sexual misconduct or abuse of police authority should never be managed through internal police processes.

6. The Response to Reynolds' Abuse

The Paul Reynolds matter represents a significant example of how inadequate cultural, procedural and oversight arrangements impede an appropriate response to serious police misconduct and contribute to the harm of victim-survivors.

The matter raises questions about the extent to which institutional culture, investigative priorities and concerns about the reputation of an officer can influence the way allegations are assessed.

The Inquiry has specifically identified the limited scope of inquiry into Reynolds' conduct prior to the Weiss Review and the decision to hold a police funeral as matters for consideration.

Engender Equality considers that the Reynolds matter demonstrates why investigations into serious allegations of police misconduct must be designed to serve purposes beyond determining whether criminal prosecution is possible.

An investigation may also have an important role in:

- identifying institutional failures;
- identifying risks to other people;
- establishing what information was known and when;
- identifying opportunities for prevention;
- recognising and validating victim-survivors' experiences;
- informing disciplinary and organisational reform; and
- maintaining public confidence in the integrity of policing.

The death of an alleged perpetrator does not necessarily extinguish these public-interest purposes.

The decision to cease an investigation following Reynolds' death therefore raises important systemic questions about whether existing processes appropriately recognise the interests of victim-survivors and the broader public interest in understanding institutional failures.

The police funeral

The decision to hold a highly visible police funeral for Reynolds is particularly significant from a victim-survivor and institutional accountability perspective. The concern lies in the institution's decision to publicly honour an officer, notwithstanding that it had previously received significant information about serious allegations of abuse.

For victim-survivors and affected communities, seeing an alleged perpetrator publicly honoured by the institution in which they held authority is profoundly distressing and compounds feelings of disbelief, betrayal and institutional abandonment.

The public nature of the funeral, including the police honour guard lining the streets of Launceston, meant that the institutional recognition was highly visible.

This demonstrates the need for ceremonial and employment decisions to take into account information held by an organisation about serious allegations of misconduct. Institutional honour should not be considered separately from organisational knowledge about serious harm.

The Reynolds matter therefore provides an important opportunity to establish clear safeguards for future decisions concerning police honours, funerals and ceremonial recognition.

7. Trauma-Informed Evidence and Support Pathways

The Inquiry must ensure that victim-survivors and affected community members are able to provide evidence in ways that are safe, confidential and genuinely trauma-informed.

The Committee has itself recognised the sensitivity of the evidence likely to be received by the Inquiry and has committed to a trauma-informed approach.

This should include:

- private and confidential evidence options;
- clear information about publication and parliamentary privilege;
- careful communication before, during and after evidence is given;
- opportunities for victim-survivors to be accompanied by a specialist advocate or support person;
- minimising unnecessary repetition of disclosures;
- clear information about how evidence will be used;
- timely communication about decisions and outcomes; and
- access to independent specialist family and sexual violence support.

Victim-survivors should not be required to repeatedly disclose traumatic experiences or participate in adversarial processes in order to be believed.

Importantly, trauma-informed practice should extend beyond the Inquiry itself. Any person disclosing police-perpetrated family violence or sexual misconduct should be offered immediate referral to an independent specialist family or sexual violence service and access to independent advocacy throughout any complaint, investigation, disciplinary process or inquiry.

A trauma-informed approach also requires recognition of procedural trauma. Victim-survivors can experience further harm through delays, repeated disclosures, lack of information, being disbelieved, being required to engage with colleagues of the alleged perpetrator, or being excluded from decisions that directly affect their safety and wellbeing.

The burden of navigating these systems should not fall solely on victim-survivors.

8. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Gendered and specialist analysis

Tasmania Police should embed a gendered analysis of policing, misconduct, family violence and sexual misconduct across relevant policies, training, leadership and accountability frameworks, including specific training on coercive control, systems abuse and trauma-informed responses.

Recommendation 2: Independent investigation

Serious allegations involving family violence, sexual misconduct or abuse of police authority should not be investigated solely through internal Tasmania Police processes.

The existing independent oversight framework should be strengthened to ensure that serious allegations can be independently received, assessed and investigated by an appropriately resourced external body.

Recommendation 3: Mandatory external referral

Establish mandatory referral to the appropriate independent oversight body for allegations involving serious family violence, sexual misconduct or abuse of police authority.

Tasmania Police should not be the sole gatekeeper determining whether such matters warrant external oversight.

Recommendation 4: Confidential reporting pathways

Create dedicated confidential reporting pathways outside Tasmania Police for victim-survivors, family members, colleagues and community members who hold concerns about police misconduct.

These pathways should be accessible without requiring the complainant to first report the matter internally to Tasmania Police.

Recommendation 5: Independent specialist advocacy

Fund independent specialist family and sexual violence advocacy for victim-survivors involved in police misconduct complaints, investigations, disciplinary processes or inquiries.

Advocacy should be available from the point of disclosure and continue throughout the relevant process.

Recommendation 6: Police-perpetrated family and sexual violence policy

Develop a specific Tasmania Police policy addressing police-perpetrated family violence and sexual misconduct.

The policy should include:

- mandatory external referral requirements;
- safety planning;
- conflict-of-interest requirements;
- protections against retaliation;
- restrictions and auditing of access to police information;
- appropriate management of weapons and other safety risks;
- information-sharing protocols; and
- clear requirements for communicating with and supporting victim-survivors.

The policy should be developed in consultation with specialist family and sexual violence services and victim-survivors.

Recommendation 7: Transparency and public accountability

Require transparent public reporting on allegations, referrals, investigation outcomes, disciplinary action and implementation of recommendations arising from reviews of police misconduct.

Reporting must protect victim-survivor privacy, confidentiality and safety while providing sufficient information to enable public confidence in the integrity of the system.

Recommendation 8: Police honours and ceremonial recognition

Review police funeral, honour and ceremonial protocols to ensure that decisions about public recognition take into account serious allegations of family violence, sexual misconduct or other serious harm known to the organisation.

Where serious allegations are known or under investigation, an independent and documented assessment should occur before police honours or ceremonial recognition are authorised.

Recommendation 9: Tasmanian research

Commission independent research into the prevalence, nature and impact of police-perpetrated family violence and sexual misconduct in Tasmania, including barriers to reporting, organisational responses, systems abuse and victim-survivor experiences.

Recommendation 10: Formal specialist sector consultation and independent review

Establish formal and ongoing consultation with specialist family and sexual violence services and victim-survivors in the design, implementation and review of systems for responding to police-perpetrated family and sexual violence.

An independent review mechanism should also be established to regularly assess the effectiveness of Tasmania Police responses to these matters and the implementation of recommendations arising from inquiries and reviews.

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