

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

19 April 2021

Response: Police Station for the Molonglo Valley

I thank Mr Hanson for bringing this motion to the Assembly, however, I do not support the motion.

Mr Hanson states that the ACT has the lowest number of police per capita in Australia. This is a misrepresentation of the data: The ACT also has the smallest geographical area of any jurisdiction. You are aware, Mr Hanson, as you were in the Estimates hearings with me as Chair of the JACS committee when the Deputy Commissioner of the AFP, Mr Neil, stated this.

Mr Hanson draws comparison to New South Wales and asks that the ACT Government match their number of per capita officers by 2024. This is unrealistic in a city-state such as the ACT, whereby police response time from the Woden station to any suburb within the Murrumbidgee area is around ten minutes. In New South Wales, this response time is much longer – either due to slow moving traffic in dense city and suburban areas, or across the vast expanse of regional areas. More police officers are needed in NSW given its entirely different context – geographically and demographically.

Mr Hanson seems to suggest, by bringing this motion forward, that police stations solve crime. I would like to point out that there has been a Police station in Woden for 16 years; yet - as a proportion of the population - Woden Valley has a substantially higher crime incidence rate than Weston Creek.

However, I would like to take this conversation a step further - January to March 2021 saw Weston Creek and Molonglo have the lowest crime rates in all of the ACT. I did some analysis on the publicly available statistics on crime reports.

Let's look at the number of reported offences over the last 5 years in Weston Creek, for the first quarter of the year. The rate of offences has dropped VERY significantly in Weston Creek, decreasing by 39% over five years. In the same timeframe, the Molonglo Valley has seen a doubling of the reported crime – from 82 offences in 2016 to 160 in 2021. However, the population of Molonglo Valley has near tripled in that timeframe. And, ultimately, the number of offences is in proportion, per population, to other suburbs in Canberra and even, as I noted earlier, is actually lower than other suburbs.

Mr Hanson, you, Mrs Jones and I, all live in one of the safest parts of Canberra.

I argue that your long-held calls for a new police station in Molonglo are for political expediency only. Your motion calls for a police station to be built in Molonglo by the end of next year – you have been in this game long enough to know how these things work and the impossibility of that timeframe, given budget processes and planning. - Your motion is disingenuous. Your constant rhetoric on crime comes to the detriment of our community and the relationship between the community and police.

Nobody wants crime in their neighbourhood. No one. But, unfortunately it does happen. And what we need to stop it happening is a highly engaged community that has trust and confidence in the Police, and that supports police to do their job.

What is brilliant about Weston Creek and Molonglo is that we have hyper-active, highly engaged Community and Neighbourhood Watch Facebook pages. I commend the Administrators of those pages for creating an inclusive space for the community to connect – which they do in droves. It means that often within minutes of anything taking place –good or bad-, it is posted online. There is a significant positive in this, in that the community really rallies around to help people with information and support – and there is an awareness of what is going on – which I view personally as really important. However, it can also be used as a political tool to exaggerate a perception of crime and inadequate policing.

I want to change that. I want to speak to Weston Creek and Molonglo Valley: we live in one of the most spectacular parts of Canberra. We live in the safest part of Canberra. We are a highly connected, integrated community with a strong sense of identity. We also have a police force that works day and night to keep us safe and deserves enormous credit for the part they play in the creation of this amazing community.

However, I also want to speak to the victims of the crimes that have been committed. I am so sorry for the experiences you have had. Every single one of those crime statistics has a victim or multiple victims. I also want to make the point of how distressing property crime can be as well. Any violation of your space, your place or your person – can hugely impact your life. For those victims, our community has not been a safe place for you.

And your experiences and your input into this conversation are greatly valued.

The next point I want to make is that although I believe that Mr Hanson's point of a police station is political rhetoric, that does not mean that I will not advocate very strongly for police time and resources to be spent in our electorate and in the areas of Weston Creek and Molonglo. I am excited to see money put into police jobs and community engagement rather than stations, through the Police Services Model. I want to support the Weston Creek and Molonglo community to better understand how the police work and how we can support them to do their job, what information is useful to them, in what manner do we present that information, - I also think it would be useful for the community to understand how the information we give police is used, what becomes a police report, what doesn't, for example.

I want to see the crime rate reduce, and I want to support the community to work together to do this.

The Weston Creek community is currently working together through a challenging issue that falls somewhere in the cracks as a social welfare/crime/public nuisance issue – it is distressing, and it is frustrating and the community is aligned in desperately wanting the behaviour of the particular individual to stop. I think the community should be commended for coming together to address this, for raising awareness, and supporting older and vulnerable people in our community - and I can only imagine the amount of police call outs and resources that have gone into responding to the constant calls regarding this individual's behaviour. Unfortunately, we still have a way to go to resolving this.

I have no doubt that down the track as Molonglo Valley's population and geographic footprint grows that there will be legitimate conversations and planning regarding a police station in Molonglo Valley. However, I look forward to seeing the Police Services Model in action – a prevention and community engagement approach - I also want to see investment in youth and social welfare programs, and community and sports facilities to get to the real heart of crime prevention.

To finish, this Thursday 22nd of April ACT Policing is joining ACT Neighbourhood Watch and Legal Aid ACT at the Kambah Village Shopping Centre for a Community Engagement Stall. They will discuss a variety of issues and programs, including crime trends as well as home security and safety. The

community is encouraged to head on down and have a chat with local police officers between 10am and 3pm.