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September 2019

Mr Rob Stefanic  
Secretary  
Department of Parliamentary Services

Dear Secretary

Recently, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) had cause to conduct an investigation into an incident of alleged sexual assault at Australian Parliament House (APH) and the subsequent actions undertaken by Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) staff.

In the early hours of 23 March 2019, two APH pass holders, both Ministerial staff, attended APH intoxicated and were escorted to a Minister's suite by Parliamentary Security Service (PSS) staff. Approximately an hour later, the male left the building via a security screening point. Following this, two separate welfare checks were conducted on the remaining female staff member by DPS staff. During the first welfare check, the female was located asleep and partially clothed lying on the lounge in the Minister's suite. Later that morning the female left the Ministerial office unescorted and the office was later found empty and insecure.

DPS response to this incident resulted in PSS staff being engaged and subsequently, later that day, the Ministerial Office involved was cleaned, including the lounge.

Throughout this concerning chain of events, PSS managed this incident as a security incident and did not notify the AFP. The incident was subsequently reported to the AFP two days later when the female pass holder made an allegation of sexual assault.

There are significant discrepancies between the response to this incident and the existing agreements that our agencies share. The AFP has necessarily made enquiries into the handling of the initial phases of the incident, including consideration of whether there was any criminality identified as a result of DPS actions such as any attempts to conceal or interfere with a suspected crime scene.

The AFP investigation established that both PSS and DPS personnel were engaged in responding to this incident. There were no disclosures of sexual assault made by the victim on the day of the incident and therefore, it appears any actions taken by DPS or PSS staff were not in response to a suspected crime.

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However, it remains unclear why the AFP wasn't notified at the time of the incident and I contend that this is unacceptable. The AFP Security Controller at APH has been delegated primacy for security and incident management and AFP inclusion in an initial response to the incident could have resulted in earlier notification of an alleged criminal offence, more appropriate handling of the alleged victims' welfare and better scene management.

Another issue of concern relates to the length of time it took DPS to share the PSS Incident Report with the AFP. Incidents such as this serve to emphasise the importance of following agreed processes and practices. Divergence from these agreements can have significant consequences to potential victims, the safety of APH staff and leave APH personnel subject to investigation and potential criminal or civil liability.

I request that DPS review their response to this security incident and engage with AFP to implement identified improvements to the application of the agreed joint security model for Parliament House.

The AFP remains highly committed to its role in providing security and policing responses within the APH environment, working collaboratively with DPS to continuously improve security practices. If you wish to discuss these issues further, don't hesitate to contact myself or Deputy Commissioner Leanne Close.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Colvin  
Commissioner