

From: Angus Llewellyn [REDACTED]
Sent: Mon, 15 Feb 2021 11:46:15 +1100 (AEDT)
To: Lisa Wilkinson [REDACTED]
Subject: update statement from PMO

Final statement, from a govt spokesperson:

The Government takes all matters of workplace safety very seriously. Everyone should feel safe in a workplace.

Reports today of an alleged sexual assault in 2019 in a Minister's office are deeply distressing. Throughout the entire process the overriding concern for Government was to support Ms Higgins' welfare in whatever way possible.

We understand this matter is under consideration by the police. This is an important step that the Government has consistently supported from the outset and we will await the outcome of this process.

At all times, guidance was sought from Ms Higgins as to how she wished to proceed, and to support and respect her decisions. This important best practice principle of empowering Ms Higgins is something that the Government has always sought to follow.

The Government has aimed to provide Ms Higgins with agency, provide support to make decisions in her interests, and to respect her privacy.

On Tuesday, March 26, 2019, senior staff in Minister Reynolds' office became aware the office was accessed after hours and that an incident had occurred. This incident involved two staff. It was initially treated as a breach of the Statement of Standards for Ministerial Staff.

After further consultation with Ms Higgins over the following days, it became clear to senior staff that there were previously unknown elements of the incident that may be of a more serious nature.

Ms Higgins was notified that should she choose to, she should pursue a complaint, including a complaint made to the police, and that to do so was within her rights. She was informed that she would be assisted and supported through that process.

Ms Higgins was told that if she did choose to pursue a complaint, she would have the full and ongoing support of the office and the Minister. This offer of support and assistance remains.

During this process, Minister Reynolds and a senior staff member met with Ms Higgins in the Minister's office. Given the seriousness of the incident, consideration should have been made to the location of the meeting with Ms Higgins, and in hindsight that oversight is regretted.

Minister Reynolds reiterated to Ms Higgins that whatever she chose to do, she would be supported. Minister Reynolds stated to Ms Higgins that her only concern was for her welfare and stated there would be no impact on her career.

Minister Reynolds encouraged Ms Higgins to speak with the police in order to assess the options available to her. At this meeting, Ms Higgins indicated she would like to speak to the Australian Federal Police, which Minister Reynolds supported and her office facilitated.

The Minister and her office continued to provide support to Ms Higgins through this period.

As part of this process, the Prime Minister's office provided support to Minister Reynolds and her office in assessing a breach of the Statement of Standards for Ministerial Staff by the other staff member involved in the incident.

It is important that Ms Higgins views are listened to and respected. The Government regrets in any way if Ms Higgins felt unsupported through this process.