

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Name: Ms Kelly Holland

Date Received: 23 July 2017

Partially
Confidential

Parliamentary Submission

(Partially confidential - I am happy for my submission to be published)

I work for NSW Ambulance, commencing employment in March 2008, after previously being employed by QLD Ambulance.

My experience of bullying and intimidation commenced in _____ 2009, at the hands of _____ who is a _____ and had periods of Acting as the _____ during this time.

My experiences included:

- wrongful demotion from dispatcher to call taker by _____
- Non recognition of RPL from same role (with higher qualifications from QAS) by _____
- Demotion to lowest pay point as a call taker by _____
- _____ accusing me of fraud on my timesheet for 7 hours that I "fraudulently claimed" when I attended a compulsory first aid course on my rostered days off. Subsequent investigations by NSW showed that NSW actually owed me 8 hours for this attendance.
- _____ used white out on my timesheet and entered false information (illegal)
- _____ falsely accused me of a breach of the NSW Code of Conduct when I refused to attend a meeting with her one on one, and I properly requested a third party attend.
- _____ told me my lunch smelled like PAL dog food
- _____ belittled my sister (in a conversation at work to me, whilst the emergency was occurring) for calling Triple zero when her child was having an anaphylactic reaction
- _____ denied me a request for new uniform pants that were two sizes too big.

From _____ 2009 to _____ 2014, I tolerated this relentless behaviour (obviously I have many more examples not listed) by _____ toward me until I worked up enough courage to finally submit a grievance against _____ in the hope of putting a stop to her malicious behaviour toward me. I submitted my Grievance on _____ 2014.

A grievance is submitted under the NSW Ambulance police of "Raising a Workplace Concern" and this SOP stated it takes 21 days to resolve.

This grievance was submitted to the _____ Control Centre Manager, _____ (both and my superior), however, he did not manage it as per the SOP due to _____ having submitted her own grievance against _____

Therefore, _____ escalated my grievance to his superior,

_____ and _____ had been colleagues and maintained a personal friendship, which was also evidenced by photos on their personal facebook pages. However, _____ did not consider himself compromised and managed this grievance himself.

Firstly, the grievance was not resolved in 21 days. To date, there are still 7 outstanding issues 994 days after I submitted my grievance that was supposed to take 21 days.

Secondly, I had never lodged a grievance before. Within 3 months, nothing had occurred

except for an acknowledgement of my grievance and initial meeting between [redacted] and u myself. During those 3 months, [redacted] verbally threatened me on 9 occasions, I changed roster lines to avoid working with and reporting to her as my supervisor, I took 3 individual extra weeks of annual leave, received 11 anonymous phone calls on my personal mobile and home phones, and became very distressed.

Eventually, after I sent many emails to both [redacted] and [redacted] a meeting was finally held in [redacted] 2015 (95 days after I submitted my grievance - well past the 21 days per the SOP) as an update on where [redacted] investigation was at.

During this meeting, [redacted] advised me that my demotion should not have occurred in the way that it had under [redacted] management, and [redacted] offered me my previous role back 6 times without agreeing to properly reinstate me (I requested full reinstatement which included back pay for the previous 6 years and this would have been a substantial amount of money. However, I only wanted full and proper reinstatement if it was proven that I was wrongfully demoted, which was the case).

[redacted] advised me that he had not yet requested a response from the respondent ([redacted] at that stage ([redacted] 2015) and was still seeking her response on other outstanding issues raised in my grievance.

I consider that [redacted] wanted me to accept my old job back and that would "keep me happy and make all of this go away".

After this meeting in [redacted] 2015, the bullying and intimidation by [redacted] continued to escalate, and I continued to take extra sick leave, annual leave and request shift swaps to avoid working the same shift as [redacted]

In early [redacted] 2015, I received my first GIPA report. This information cost me more than \$300 to receive information that was held on my personal and employment files by NSW that they would not give to me when I requested.

This GIPA report showed more than 90 file notes written by [redacted] of which I was never provided a copy of any, and to not provide a copy of each file note was against NSW against protocol. It also included file notes of [redacted] slanderous comments about me, diary notes, and a specific file note whereby [redacted] had deliberately moved to a phone at work that was not hers that had the capability of recording, and she recorded a call to me about a personal leave matter. [redacted] did not inform myself or my mother (whom initially answered the call) that she was recording the call. (As a side note, this leave matter was [redacted] declining my request to be approved for one weeks annual leave when my husband came home from a month in hospital after a serious motorbike accident. I subsequently had to take 1 week carers leave).

In late [redacted] 2015, [redacted] and I had a 1.5 hour "crossover" of shift and [redacted] berated me whilst I was on a live Triple Zero emergency call. [redacted] had threatened me 12 hours earlier on another shift crossover warning me that she will "make sure this comes back on me" whilst we were both in the bathroom. This was all reported.

When [redacted] interrupted my emergency call, she also put false and untrue notes in the back of the CAD (computer aided dispatch) job and degraded and insulted me whilst standing behind

me.

After ending the call, I went home, unable to complete my shift and extremely upset.

In 2015, I submitted a second grievance recording all of the latest incidents, including the verbal threats and interrupted call. To date, more than 2 years later, has never even acknowledged this second grievance, let alone actioned it.

In 2015, I had a second follow up meeting with whereby he found no improper behaviour by This included her denial of every example I raised, including the point where she blatantly lied in her grievance response about denying my uniform pants (and had the email typed and dated by proving that she had denied the pants), a file note written and signed by that stated she had recorded a call that she made to my home without notifying me (which is illegal and a breach of the telecommunications act), having no issue with the false accusation of fraud and Breach of Code of Conduct etc. To say this outcome was shocking would be an understatement. However, had that long standing friendship and work relationship with so I really shouldn't have been surprised. I had simply hoped that the truth, and the proof in the documents supporting my complaint, would prevail.

In 2015, I had my first panic attack and subsequently was advised by my GP that I was unfit for duty and put on Workers Compensation with a diagnosis of an "adjustment disorder".

What followed was 11 weeks without pay whilst my Workers Compensation claim was investigated and subsequently approved, appointments with "independent" medical providers, depression that was so horrific that I had suicidal ideation and attempted to end my life. I was referred to a local psychiatrist for treatment but for the first 11 weeks, I had to pay for this treatment myself, whilst receiving zero income and awaiting the outcome of the Workers Compensation investigation. This money was then paid back after the Workers Compensation case approval.

I was assigned 3 different NSW return to work coordinators in the space of 6 weeks, and the third RTW coordinator advised me that the grievance would not progress and mediation would not occur between and myself until I returned to work. By this stage, it had been more than 9 months since I submitted my grievance and I just wanted it over with. This 3rd RTW coordinator was aware of my suicidal ideation and attempt to suicide, however was not concerned about that in returning me to work.

I returned to work for short shifts, 2-3 days per week, but didn't last long. I took an emergency Triple zero call from a young man of similar age to my son, whom had found his mother (of same age as me) whom had found his mother hanging (my method for my suicide attempt). It was too much and I immediately was unable to work again, suffering another panic attack and deep depression.

I was subsequently referred to a psychiatrist and heavily medicated, as well as continuing with my treatment with a psychologist.

Around the same time, approximately 2015, my Workers Compensation claim was approved. Thank goodness we had some savings and an incredibly supportive family,

otherwise this would have sent us bankrupt.

In 2015, I nominated my father to act on my behalf in all communication with NSW as I found it too distressing.

On , 2015, the first anniversary of my grievance Submission, whilst my husband was overseas and my son was in his bedroom at home with me, I attempted to bang myself with some wired fairy lights from the railing on our back deck. I was unsuccessful. I wanted to end the distress and pain that was so relentless from this whole process. It had gone on for so long, and there seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

I called my father in Western Australia whom organized immediate support for me. I got through it. This support was from (a NSW Grievance Contact officer whom has been a wonderful support to me over the years) and (my manager mentioned earlier). They talked me through it.

reported this incident and his concerns about the handling of my grievances in the following days to his superiors, including the Acting Commissioner of NSW and the Director of Healthy Workplace Strategies, and, to date, almost 2 years later, he is still awaiting a reply.

I continued to receive psychological and psychiatric assistance, my medication was increased to the level that I was taking 11 different tablets per day (I am 39 years old), and I was deemed unfit for work. In 2015, my psychiatrist diagnosed me with PTSD. As well as depression and anxiety, I also suffered from slurred and stuttered speech and body twitches that I experienced whilst awake and asleep. Two appointments with a neurologist confirmed these two symptoms were due to stress.

At this stage, there had still been no progression on the grievance, outstanding outcomes or mediation, as herself was now on Workers Compensation as at 2015.

Emails were sent by my representative over the following months requesting updates on the grievance and mediation, with limited or no response.

In February 2016, NSW was appointed a new Commissioner.

In 2016, my representative requested a meeting with the new Commissioner whereby he requested outcomes on my outstanding grievance matters.

It was noted by all of my treatment providers (psychologist, psychiatrist and GP) that I needed an outcome to be able to move forward. My representative raised many concerns about the mishandling of my grievance, the outstanding issues that had not been investigated, and the issues that had been investigated that had documented proof of bullying, intimidation and malfeasance.

The PSU (NSW Professional Standards Unit) "reinvestigated" my grievances and found there was no case to answer. They apologized for the delay (by this stage more than 20 months) in the handling and stated that they would change the SOP so that it did not indicate 21 days as this was unrealistic.

The PSU also stated that there was a period of 2 months in / 2015 whereby mediation could have occurred but was not organized by and also apologized for this. The PSU found no problem with being untruthful in her response to the uniform pants allegation (and supporting documentation provided by me that proved her dishonesty). The PSU also found no issue with the illegal recording of the phone call.

I consider that the PSU made these findings as they are employed by NSWA and are therefore not impartial. The PSU refused to investigate any of the outstanding issues still not addressed by nor anyone else.

Eventually, after several more "false starts", my speech had mostly improved and my twitches were mostly occurring at night, I returned to work in my PID (pre injury duties) in 2016, after a risk assessment was completed and I was assured by the new Control Centre manager that I would not have to report to (she was still on Workers Compensation) before mediation had taken place. The risk assessment performed also indicated that there was a "less than 5 percent chance of interacting" with and the form also showed this chance of interaction was less than once in 6 years.

Six weeks after I returned to work, the new Control Centre Manager (took me into his office, gave me an envelope and advised there was a letter inside that was advising me that was returning to the Control Centre. advised me that he had looked at the roster and there would be times that I would have to report to I immediately became distressed and burst into tears. advised that had agreed to mediation and he would organize for it to occur. I was unable to calm myself in the following hour on shift, and felt the beginnings of another panic attack, and went home sick from my shift.

Two week later, the panic attacks had increased, and my psychiatrist noted that my symptoms of slurred and stuttered speech had returned, so she declared me unfit for duty, and the Workers Compensation process started all over again. Ten weeks without pay this time (lucky I had annual and long service leave available to me this time) whilst my "new injury" was investigated. After 10 weeks, the Workers Compensation was finally approved, but I had already returned to work before it was approved.

was "still organizing" the mediation after 3 months and eventually replied to my emails, advising an external mediation group would conduct the mediation.

A meeting was held between the mediation company (WC) and myself immediately after a 14 hour night shift.

A second meeting was held with the mediation company (WC) in 2017, whereby they requested for me to write down what I wanted from the mediation. This was just prior to me taking one month annual leave and traveling overseas with my husband for a much needed break. The mediation company (WC) advised me to submit my outcomes and requests when I returned in 2017.

During this second meeting with the mediation company (WC), they raised concerns regarding the outstanding issues that were still not addressed by NSWA from both of my grievances, and advised me that without these outstanding matters being resolved, and NSWA participating in that and providing proper outcomes, mediation with would be difficult.

I submitted these outcomes to the mediation company (WC) on [redacted] 2017, and received an email from them (WC) on the [redacted] 2017, advising me that "WC engagement in this matter had concluded".

Again, I was completely devastated. I wanted this over, after almost 3 years.

I finally received an email from [redacted] on Friday [redacted] 2017 advising that the mediation was not going ahead, with no offer of an alternative.

On Saturday [redacted] 2017, I was unable to work my rostered shift due to my lack of sleep from increased distress based on this information in [redacted] email.

I am yet to reply to this email but will do so in the coming days.

So, to summarize, the NSW Ambulance SOP states that a grievance usually takes 21 days to manage, with the final step being mediation. Today marks 994 days since I submitted my grievance, and there is still no outcome.

I submitted the grievance in good faith, hoping to put an end to the years of bullying and intimidation by [redacted]. All it has done is cause [redacted] behaviour toward me to intensify.

I have been diagnosed with PTSD, situational anxiety and depression disorder, as a direct result of [redacted] bullying and intimidation, as well as the complete mismanagement of my grievance.

I have suffered from slurred and stuttered speech, as well as body twitches, palpitations, increased blood pressure, insomnia, nightmares and flashbacks, just to name a few symptoms.

My psychologist is treating me with neuro feedback and EMDR in the hope of "retraining my brain" to not easily recall the constant trauma and memories.

This process has nearly caused the end of my marriage (my husband is also employed by NSW as an emergency call taker - [redacted]) and massive financial distress to our family.

My son wants his mum back. My husband wants his wife back. My family miss the confident and outgoing girl I used to be.

Me? I want my job back. I want to be able to go to work, help people, and go home. That's why I joined the ambulance service nearly 15 years ago.

I consider that there are so many staff at NSW acting in higher duties and proving themselves that they have forgotten what is proper and ethical.

I consider that the PSU cannot be impartial whilst they are employed by NSW.

I consider that my grievance should be reinvestigated by an external, genuinely impartial body, so that a fair and reasonable outcome can be reached.

Should you require any supporting documentation or any further information, please don't

hesitate to contact me via return email.

Kind Regards,

YDN