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Action needed to address systemic failings of police integrity and oversight system

The Police Accountability Project at Inner Melbourne Community Legal welcomes the introduction of a Bill in the Victorian Parliament that would strengthen independent oversight and investigations of police misconduct.

Fewer than 1% of complaints about police are investigated by the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission because of a section of the *IBAC Act* which deprioritises police misconduct matters.

This means that most complaints are investigated by police themselves with the vast majority deemed unsubstantiated and only 1% resulting in disciplinary hearings.

The result is that victims of police brutality and other forms of misconduct are being denied justice or are forced to pursue lengthy and costly civil litigation to hold police accountable.

In some cases, IBAC's legislative requirement to prioritise potential corruption has increased the harm experienced by the victims of police misconduct.

According to IBAC's own database, just 30 out of 2391 complaints of police misconduct that IBAC received in 2024-25 were investigated by the commission.

There have been no investigations at all in the Morwell, Wangaratta, Horsham and Mildura divisions according to IBAC dashboard, which dates back to 2018.

The weakness of Victoria's police oversight system has been highlighted numerous times over the past decade, including in the Yoorrook Justice Report, the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants and a Parliamentary inquiry into the Adequacy of the IBAC Legislative Framework.

In response to the Lawyer X Royal Commission, the government has promised that Victoria would have a robust police oversight system but five years on nothing has happened.

Without an effective independent police oversight mechanism, Victoria's integrity framework will remain incomplete.

The *Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026* tabled by the Legalise Cannabis Party would repeal section 15(1A) of the *IBAC Act* so that police misconduct matters are not relegated to second order issues.

It would equip IBAC with powers to determine and shape its own investigations based on the seriousness of the matters and merits of each case.

Victims would have greater confidence that their complaints will be treated seriously, and public safety would be enhanced.

Comments attributable to Michelle Reynolds, Director of Police and Advocacy, Police Accountability Project, Inner Melbourne Community Legal:

“Victoria’s police oversight system is broken and failing people impacted by police wrongdoing.

“The numbers speak for themselves: of the thousands of allegations of police misconduct, less than 1% are investigated by IBAC.

“Police oversight should not be treated as an after-thought by IBAC, but the current system means complaints about police are relegated to a second-tier issue.

“Police cannot be left to investigate themselves, especially when people’s lives and wellbeing are put at risk. When police do investigate themselves, it is no surprise that most times they find no wrongdoing or take minimal disciplinary action.

“Victims of police harm should not have to pursue lengthy civil litigation to seek justice.

“Police have immense powers to enter people’s properties, to seize property, detain people and use force. They also carry an array of lethal and less-lethal weapons including guns, batons, tasers, and pepper spray and other weapons.

“But when they misuse these powers, they must be held to account not only to ensure justice for victims but so all communities can feel safe.

“IMCL commends Rachel Payne from the Legalise Cannabis Party for introducing this Private Member’s Bill into Parliament today and urges bipartisan support for including stronger police misconduct powers among much-needed reforms to strengthen IBAC.”

Comments from Dr Jana Katerinskaja, victim-survivor and advocate for preventing police perpetrated family violence:

“As a [report](#) tabled by Integrity Oversight Victoria highlighted, I am a living and very public example of the failings of the present police integrity system, and the harm caused by those failures. My children and I suffered further physical violence because of those failures. We still live with the consequences.

“If IBAC is to embody the first word of its name “Independent”, as a minimum it needs the legislative independence to prioritise investigation of complaints like mine based upon gravity and threat to life.

“I am in a better position than most because after a protracted fight, both IBAC and Victoria Police [apologised](#) to me for their failures: but despite the lessons from my case and efforts of reformers in both organisations, many aspects of those failures could happen again because the system is set up to fail.

“The legislative framework needs to be fixed – to make it clear, police misconduct must be taken seriously. This change is the first step – what is needed is victim-centred fit for purpose Police Ombudsman.

“Police cannot investigate police where there is an insurmountable conflict of interest or a lack of trust and confidence from victims. These issues are amplified in rural and regional areas where investigators know or work in the same local area as the officer they are investigating.

“I have spoken to many victims of police perpetrated family violence from regional areas who do not feel safe to report because they fear their complaint will not meet the high threshold to be investigated by a city unit, and so will be locally investigated by their partner’s colleagues and compromised.

“These victims don’t report. They manage their own safety without help from police. They know, if they go to IBAC that their complaint will end up referred back to police and back to the division where their perpetrator works for their colleagues to investigate. This must change.”

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