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MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 22 October 2024

APA Qld calls on Government to cease using public funds and public resources to defend public sector employees who engage in sexual harassment

On 24 July 2024 and 11 September 2024, the current Labor Government released Media Statements about its position on sexual harassment and discrimination.

The Media Statements included:

“Quotes attributable to the Minister for Women and Minister for Health and Mental Health Shannon Fentiman said:

“The statistics show that nearly every woman has reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace at some point in their lifetime.

“As the Minister for Women, this simply isn’t good enough and I am proud to be part of a government which is taking action.”

Quotes attributable to Premier Steven Miles:

“It’s simply unacceptable that this sort of harassment could take place in the workplace, which is why I’m sending a clear message that it must stop.

“These laws now put the onus on an employer to take reasonable steps to eliminate and prevent discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace.

“It’s just one of many important protections that are now law.

“My message to Queenslanders is simple – we hear you, we see you and we will do what matters to protect you.”

APA Qld firmly holds the view that there is no place for discrimination, sexism, sexual harassment or sexual assault in healthcare, or anywhere. We regularly educate APA Qld’s membership on this topic.

Earlier in October, APA Qld was informed that the Queensland Ambulance Service (**QAS**) is using Queensland State Government public funds and resources to defend a public sector employee (found by QAS to have sexually harassed and discriminated

against another public sector employee) in personal legal proceedings. QAS has not supported the victim of the sexual harassment and has instead, arranged and paid for legal representation (paid for by using public funds) for the individual who perpetrated the sexual harassment.

On 9 October 2024, APA Qld wrote to the Minister for Women and Minister for Health and Mental Health Shannon Fentiman seeking amongst other things “*Confirmation that immediate steps are taken to address QAS spending public funds on defending employees who have been found guilty by QAS of sexual harassment and discrimination.*” Minister Fentiman has not responded.

We provided the Government with an opportunity to communicate its position and respond to the concerns we raised in the hope of avoiding the need to release a public statement. It is disappointing that we now need to do so. Members and the public have the right to know how public funds are being spent, and that the decisions made by Government are contradictory to the position communicated in media statements about the Government’s stance on sexual harassment.

APA Qld is committed to advocating on all matters relevant to the mental health of APA Qld’s members. People who are harassed commonly experience a range of mental health conditions including stress, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research has shown that more than 1 in 3 people harassed have reported stress and negative impacts on their mental health.

APA Qld takes an unbiased position with regard to political matters. APA Qld will be providing a copy of this media release to all political parties to call on each party to provide its position on public funds being used for personal legal fees, particularly where the individual has been found guilty of the conduct by the Government agency.

APA Qld will continue to support, advocate and educate on matters involving sexual harassment, discrimination and victimisation.

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