



RSL
South Australia

Grant Stevens APM
Commissioner of Police
South Australia Police
100 Angas Street
Adelaide SA 5000

30 January 2025

Dear Commissioner Stevens,

The South Australia Branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSLSA) is an Ex-Service Organisation that provides services to support our ex-service and serving members and their families. RSLSA also plays a key advocacy and representation role on broader matters of public concern that may impact the veteran community to ensure their needs are heard.

RSLSA was recently advised of a case of alleged inappropriate handling of a veteran with an assistance animal by serving police officers of the South Australian Police (SAPOL), which resulted in separation of the veteran from their assistance animal without clear cause. This indicates there may be a gap in current understanding or capability of some SAPOL police officers when interacting with veterans or other vulnerable people with assistance animals, and obligations to carefully manage these interactions to prevent avoidable harm to the person.

Assistance animal programs are a critical contributor to veterans' participation in the community and their clinical recovery goals. Accredited assistance animals are highly trained and can provide support to veterans or vulnerable people who may be experiencing barriers to participation including (but not limited to) those with impaired vision, are hard of hearing, are experiencing anxiety or psychiatric disorders, or require physical support. There are legal obligations to ensure that persons with assistance animals are not discriminated against or separated from their assistance animals.

RSLSA respectfully asks that SAPOL include or reinforce education on the appropriate handling of veterans or vulnerable persons with assistance animals in its training programs for police officers, and the addition of regular refresher courses. This should include protocols for identifying assistance animals by requesting accreditation documentation. RSLSA would be pleased to provide further guidance on this matter if it would assist.

I have copied the Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services, the Minister for Veterans Affairs, and the Chief Executive of Defence SA in this correspondence.

I look forward to your response.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M Burgess', written in a cursive style.

Meredith Burgess

Acting State President

E: president@rslsa.org.au

CC:

The Hon. Dan Cregan MP, Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services

The Hon. Joe Szakacs MP, Minister for Veterans Affairs

Matt Opie, Chief Executive, Defence SA