

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee  
Inquiry into the 2026-27 Budget Estimates

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**RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE**

<b>Committee member:</b>	<b>Aiv PUGLIELLI</b>
<b>Page/s of transcript:</b>	<b>Pages 13</b>

**Part A**

<b>Transcript extract:</b> Page 13
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**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. I will move on. I understand Corrections currently holds one contract with Palantir worth \$9 million over the forward estimates, according to the Buying for Victoria website, for support of the Centurion platform. Given there are multiple integrity concerns that are well reported around Palantir both here and overseas, does the department put any restrictions on how Palantir handles that data for that contract?

**Larissa STRONG:** The department has a lot of standards in terms of how data is stored and how data is managed. It must be used within the Victorian government's architecture in terms of how data must be managed and stored. So yes. They cannot be offshore, for example.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** They cannot be offshore?

**Larissa STRONG:** That is my understanding. Probably I need to double-check that with technology services, but that is my understanding.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** That would be appreciated if you could. Is the department satisfied, given the context of this company, that this contract is maintaining proper integrity with respect to the data that it is handling?

**Larissa STRONG:** I am not aware of any concerns about that contract and the use of Centurion.

**Question:** Does the Department of Justice and Community Safety (the department) have any restrictions on how Palantir handles data for the Centurion contract?

**Response:**

Under the current department contractual arrangements and Palantir arrangements supporting the Centurion platform, the department's data must be stored, hosted, and maintained in Australian data centres. Contractual provisions also require compliance with applicable privacy laws, relevant standards under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic), and associated requirements.



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<b>Committee member:</b>	<b>Richard RIORDAN</b>
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**Transcript extract:** Page 2-3

**Richard RIORDAN:** Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Minister, to your maiden voyage at PAEC. As part of the portfolio that you look after, not only do you have the correctional side, the prisoner side of it, but you also have a large staff, I am sure, that you have to keep and retain and manage in order to provide the service to Victorians. Corrections staff tell me today that the state uniform committee has directed operational staff to remove the Australian national flag from their uniform as it is not an approved adornment. This is despite the fact that other social representative adornments are allowed, such as the Aboriginal flag and the LGBTQI flag, which have been approved. Why have you banned the Australian national flag from being worn on uniforms?

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you, Mr Riordan, for your question. That was not, as far as I understand, a decision by the government. I think you are saying that this was an operational decision taken by Corrections Victoria.

**Richard RIORDAN:** I am saying that it is a very bad look that your government is saying no to the Australian flag but yes to other causes being worn by your staff. Why has the Australian flag been banned, and why as minister are you allowing it?

**Paul HAMER:** This seems to be an operational decision. I might ask the Commissioner to respond to this.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Hang on. First, Minister, we saw recently the Premier step in when an operational decision did not make sense down at down at Fed Square. The Victorian people wanted to see the soccer, and the Premier saw sense in allowing Victorians to watch the soccer. Here we have a situation where you are the representative of this Parliament. You are our representative to the people who work in the very important role of corrections. Will you stand up and say, 'No, under my watch we are not banning the Australian flag'?

**Paul HAMER:** I would like to understand from the corrections Commissioner first up about what this policy actually is, the operational policy, and allow her to give a response.

...

**Richard RIORDAN:** Minister, will you rule out and reverse that ban as a minister of the Crown of this Parliament for the people of Victoria, support the Australian flag and not ban that, while keeping other representative flags and logos on the uniform of your staff?

**Paul HAMER:** Well, as I said, the first thing that I would like to do in this committee hearing is understand from the Commissioner from an operations point of view. I know that you have made a statement that staff have raised it. I am not sure who they have raised it to, and that is why I am asking the Commissioner to provide an update to the committee on the matters that you raised so that she can respond and then I might be able to add a further response to what the commissioner provides.

**Richard RIORDAN:** So you are not outraged by that decision?

**Paul HAMER:** Mr Riordan, I am asking you to give the opportunity to the Commissioner to provide a response to the matters that you have raised.

**Larissa STRONG:** I am not aware that the uniform committee has done that. I am happy to take that on notice and advise you. I am not on the uniform committee. I have not been briefed on that issue. I can assure you that at prisons we have the Australian flag proudly displayed. But I will take that on notice; I am not aware of that.

**Question:** Has the Corrections Victoria State Uniform Committee directed operational staff to remove the Australian National Flag from Corrections Victoria staff uniform?

**Response:**

The Australian Flag is displayed at all Victorian prisons.

No flags of any kind currently form part of the Corrections Victoria uniform.

Requests to permanently alter a Corrections Victoria uniform must be submitted to the uniform committee for consideration.

The Deputy Commissioner's Instruction (DCI) 9.05 Uniform and Dress Standards sets out the standards of dress expected of custodial staff. Under the policy, only authorised adornments may be worn as part of the custodial uniform, supporting a consistent uniform.

Flags of any kind are not listed as an authorised adornment in DCI 9.05. On this basis, a staff member's request to wear a modified Australian flag on their custodial uniform was not supported by the Prison Uniform Committee.

I am advised that the committee has not endorsed any other flags as adornments to the custodial uniform.



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<b>Page/s of transcript:</b>	<b>Pages 12-13</b>

**Part A**

**Transcript extract: Page 12**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Thank you. I will move on. I understand the *Victorian Government Gazette* has authorised specified Corrections Victoria staff as well as private prison personnel to use tear gas in prisons, subject to training and compliance with the relevant commissioner's requirements, including reporting within 12 hours. My question is: how many times over the past year was tear gas used in our prisons?

**Paul HAMER:** Is that a question to me or to the Commissioner?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** That would be for the relevant official, I would say.

**Larissa STRONG:** We do not use tear gas. We do use OC spray – it is a different agent – and I would have to take on notice how often it has been used.

**Question:** How many times over the past year was Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray used in the Victorian adult custodial corrections system?

**Response:**

From 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026, there were 183 incidents where oleoresin capsicum spray was deployed.

**Part B**

**Transcript extract: Page 13**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** OC spray. Okay, thank you. I am informed that there was an incident at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre just a month ago where it has been put to me that safety protocols were not followed. I am informed that in order to move just one woman who was not given adequate time to comply, an entire unit of women were then subjected to what they have told me is tear gas – it may have been OC spray – and suffered nausea, vomiting, headaches, difficulty breathing and other medical concerns. Can I ask: has the department investigated this incident, and will the report from that incident be made public?

**Paul HAMER:** Again, I think this might be a question that is better taken by the Commissioner, as it involves an operational decision. The Commissioner might want to just talk about the general practice when incidents like this occur.

**Larissa STRONG:** One thing I would say is often what is heard about incidents is not always the case, but all use of force – all use of things like OC spray or use of accoutrements – is required to be reported. Any complaints are required to be reported, and we will do reviews into them.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** The particular incident that I described, though – is that something you are aware of?

**Larissa STRONG:** Yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** At the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre?

**Larissa STRONG:** Yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** In relation to that incident, that is being investigated?

**Larissa STRONG:** We will do an internal review. I am aware of course, but I am not going to talk specifically about this particular instance, other than to say that we do require staff to report their use of OC spray, their use of accoutrements. Any use of force is required to be reported. We do regular audits every month of use of force – just random audits to check. We will check CCTV. We will also do an audit of all actual complaints about excessive use of force.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** To make sure I heard you correctly, though, it has not yet been investigated but it will be – is that correct?

**Larissa STRONG:** I would not know which particular incident is at which point in a process.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Is that something you are able to come back to us on?

**Larissa STRONG:** I will come back on the general process in more detail but not that particular incident.

**Question:** What is Corrections Victoria's process to investigate the use of OC spray or accoutrements in the Victorian adult custodial corrections system?

**Response:**

Corrections Victoria undertakes a range of assurance functions to support a safer prison system.

Corrections Victoria use-of-force reviews assess whether force used in incidents is appropriate, necessary, and aligned to expected standards and training. Internal reviews are conducted on all use-of-force incidents where an accoutrement (e.g. oleoresin capsicum spray) is used.



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