

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ambulance Victoria

Melbourne – Friday 29 August 2025

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Joe McCracken – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Renee Heath

Ann-Marie Hermans

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David Ettershank

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Sonja Terpstra

Richard Welch

WITNESS

Danielle North, Executive Director, Regional Operations, Ambulance Victoria.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I am Joe McCracken, the Chair of the inquiry. We are going to go through and introduce the rest of the members of the committee.

Michael GALEA: Morning. Michael Galea, Member for South-East Metro.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Georgie CROZIER: Georgie Crozier. Good morning.

Rachel PAYNE: Rachel Payne, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good morning. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: We have got two members online as well. We have got Dr Heath and Dr Mansfield. They can give you a wave. You can see the names there anyway, so that is fine.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered contempt of Parliament, and all evidence is being recorded.

You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript, and that will ultimately be made public and put on the committee's website. Just for the Hansard record, can you say your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, please.

Danielle NORTH: Danielle North. I am the Executive Director of Regional Operations at Ambulance Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. We have got 2 minutes for an opening statement, and then we will do a lot of six questions for each of the different groups here. Given the significant change in the evidence that you have given, I am hoping that responses are short, sharp, clear and to the point. I will hand over to you for your 2 minutes, and then we will go to questions. Over to you.

Danielle NORTH: Thank you, Chair. As you know, I appeared before the committee here on 20 June 2025. On that occasion committee member Ms Crozier asked me about what I knew of issues relating to funeral events of paramedics that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. On that occasion I answered that I did not know anything about that event until it became public this year in the media reporting in April. Since that time some materials have been identified and brought to my attention relating to the answer that I provided. I have had an opportunity to review those materials, and it is now apparent to me that the answer I gave to the committee on 20 June was incorrect. This was my mistake, and for this I am incredibly sorry. I offer my sincere apology to the committee. I would also like to apologise directly to Ms Crozier, noting it was her question that I was responding to specifically. At the time I believed my answer to be true. The information I provided was not deliberately incorrect but rather an oversight due to me not recalling historical matters when I provided my response. I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak again today to provide further clarification.

As it became apparent that I had made a mistake in my evidence, I worked with my executive colleagues to ensure that you were proactively notified of this error. As you will be aware, AV provided a letter to the committee on 13 August, which I seek to clarify today further with some brief contextual remarks. As set out in AV's letter, I have recently been shown an email thread from September 2021, which made reference to a guard of honour being held following the funeral of an AV staff member. The email primarily related to a message received from the family of the member who had passed thanking AV for its support, along with internal AV emails responding to that message. In my capacity as the director of wellbeing and support

services, I responded to acknowledge the feedback received and to recognise the AV staff for the care and support they provided to the family at that time. I did not review this email thread in preparation for my earlier appearance and did not recall it when I answered Ms Crozier's question on that occasion. Having now reviewed the email, I acknowledge that, whilst the focus of the email was of appreciation for the care provided, it did refer to a guard of honour. I received this email in 2021, and I did not appreciate the relevance of its reference at that time.

The CHAIR: Ms North, I am sorry; time has run out. Are you happy if we take questions now?

Danielle NORTH: Certainly.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. I will hand over to Ms Crozier first.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. Ms North, when you were acting CEO last year, you attended a number of legal briefings and were copied into an exchange of correspondence in relation to an employment matter from an Ambulance Victoria staff member.

Danielle NORTH: Yes, correct.

Georgie CROZIER: Those legal briefings were from who?

Danielle NORTH: The legal briefings were provided by our legal counsel.

Georgie CROZIER: Did it involve Work Smart Legal Solutions?

Danielle NORTH: I do not know the answer to that. I am sorry, I cannot recall.

Georgie CROZIER: Clayton Utz, the reports that have been made? There have been two reports.

Danielle NORTH: Yes. The briefing I received in that period of time, in September 2024, was in relation to an employment matter. The primary briefing did not relate to the guard of honour, but I have been reminded through contemporaneous materials that the background to that briefing did relate to the guard of honour.

Georgie CROZIER: Was it in relation to a staff member who was unfairly blamed for the illegal gathering that occurred?

Danielle NORTH: It was in relation to a staff dispute.

Georgie CROZIER: Was she cleared?

Danielle NORTH: Sorry?

Georgie CROZIER: Was she cleared of any wrongdoing?

Danielle NORTH: That information in relation to the briefing is held in legal privilege, and I am not at liberty to be able to share that information.

Georgie CROZIER: Did it concern you that there were breaches of the COVID protocols given your role at the time?

Danielle NORTH: I was unaware until that time that there had been a breach of the COVID protocols, so I was not involved –

Georgie CROZIER: You were unaware at the time?

Danielle NORTH: I was not involved in any way in relation to the guards of honour that occurred. I did not organise or participate in the guards of honour.

Georgie CROZIER: Who authorised them?

Danielle NORTH: I do not know the answer to that.

Georgie CROZIER: You do not know?

Danielle NORTH: No, I do not know the answer to that.

Georgie CROZIER: Not even – with all those legal briefings that you had, you do not know?

Danielle NORTH: No. I have not been actively involved in the investigative process. I was not aware that there was a referral to IBAC in relation to the guards of honour, and I have not been actively involved in any management of the guards of honour.

Georgie CROZIER: You were the director of wellbeing and support services in September 2021.

Danielle NORTH: Correct.

Georgie CROZIER: Two paramedics tragically died.

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Georgie CROZIER: You have just admitted that the mother – I mean, surely you must have recalled these incidents given they were so traumatic and at the time. Are you telling the committee again that you knew nothing about the guards of honour that were going on for those two paramedics, that you had corresponded with their mother – one of their mothers –

Danielle NORTH: There are two components to that. There were the funerals that were provided to the paramedics that passed, and then subsequently to the funerals there were the guards of honour that were held.

Georgie CROZIER: You are telling the committee you were not aware?

Danielle NORTH: No. I was aware of the funerals, and the funerals were held – in line with the COVID-19 restrictions.

Georgie CROZIER: The guards of honour?

Danielle NORTH: The guards of honour were not organised through wellbeing and support services, and I was not aware of the details around those, no.

Georgie CROZIER: Ms North, I will go back to that issue. Are you aware who attended the guards of honour?

Danielle NORTH: No, I am not.

Georgie CROZIER: Are you aware who approved the helicopter flyover?

Danielle NORTH: No, I am not.

Georgie CROZIER: So even after those briefings that you have been provided through two legal firms –

Danielle NORTH: The legal briefing that I was provided was in relation to an employment dispute matter.

Georgie CROZIER: But it was in relation to the guard of honour, wasn't it?

Danielle NORTH: That was secondary to that. The matter at hand when I was the acting CEO was in relation to an employment dispute secondary to the guards of honour. I did not review the detail. There was no decision required in my role as acting CEO for an outcome, so there was no reason for me to review the file in full detail. I was unaware there had been a referral to IBAC or a complaint, and I had not been actively involved in the management of the COVID-19 guard of honour issue. The issue that I was briefed on was specifically in relation to an employment matter that I cannot go into detail on because it is protected by Ambulance Victoria legal privilege.

Georgie CROZIER: There are a lot of protections going on here, but you have misled this parliamentary inquiry. You have misled it.

Danielle NORTH: That was certainly not my intent, and as I said, I am incredibly sorry for the error in my evidence that I have previously provided.

Georgie CROZIER: I find it incredible that in your role, in that wellbeing and support role, when two paramedics had died and you had corresponded with one of their mothers that you could not recall that.

Danielle NORTH: I had not corresponded with one of the mothers. I was copied in. So I was copied into an email from somebody else –

Georgie CROZIER: Could we have copies of those emails?

Danielle NORTH: I am happy to take that on notice.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. And could we have any of the documentation and emails and what you have provided in those legal briefings that you did when you were the acting CEO?

Danielle NORTH: I am happy to take that on notice. My understanding is, and the advice that I have received is, it is protected by Ambulance Victoria legal privilege. But I am happy to take that on notice.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. Ms North, in relation to what you and Mr Carlyon have said, did you give him any handover about what you were working with, about the legal advice that you had been provided?

Danielle NORTH: Not that I recall. The week that the legal briefing was held was the week that we resolved the Ambulance Victoria enterprise bargaining agreement and signed the heads of agreement as part of the in-principle agreement with the industrial representatives. Our focus that week was very much on resolution of the protected industrial action and moving forward and supporting our workforce in resolving the enterprise bargaining dispute that had been longstanding. That was the primary focus of my role when I was the acting CEO, and that was the focus of any briefings that I provided to Anthony as the incoming acting CEO – Mr Carlyon. I do not recall specifically a briefing in relation to this.

Georgie CROZIER: Who did you take over from?

Danielle NORTH: I took over from Mr Carlyon at short notice when he had to take unplanned leave.

Georgie CROZIER: Sorry, that was the wrong question. When you took over from Mr Carlyon, that discussion – yes, the EBA was ongoing – this employment matter was very contentious, wasn't it?

Danielle NORTH: When I took handover from Mr Carlyon it was not a feature of the conversation. The employment industrial agreement was the primary focus of our conversation at that time. I was unaware of the detail of the background of this matter, and as I said, there was no decision required in the time that I was in the acting CEO role. There was a legal briefing in relation to an employment dispute, the detail of which I was not across because there was no outcome required during that time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The time has expired. I will now hand over to Mr Galea and Mr Batchelor.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms North. In 2021 the emails or email that you received – in the letter we have from Mr Emery it says that you responded to note the feedback.

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Michael GALEA: You have put to Ms Crozier, unless I am incorrect, that you have not corresponded directly with the family.

Danielle NORTH: Correct.

Michael GALEA: Who was that email sent to – internal to AV or external?

Danielle NORTH: Internal.

Michael GALEA: Internal. And that was to the staff to acknowledge their work?

Danielle NORTH: Yes. So I received an email – I was copied in on an email that was secondary from the family relaying their appreciation for the support that had been provided given the circumstances. And I had acknowledged the staff that had provided the care because the premise of the email was around the care provision; it was not specifically around the funeral or the guard of honour. But in retrospect when I looked back at that email from 2021, it did make reference to the guard of honour. I did not realise the relevance of that at the time.

Michael GALEA: How significant a portion of that email was discussing the guard of honour? Was it one line or was it –?

Danielle NORTH: One line.

Michael GALEA: One line. And how long was the email roughly?

Danielle NORTH: Having reviewed it recently, approximately four or five paragraphs.

Michael GALEA: And this was forwarded to you, which you then forward on to acknowledge the –

Danielle NORTH: To acknowledge that the family had appreciated the care that had been provided.

Michael GALEA: Based on the theme of the email.

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Michael GALEA: So you were not aware, or you did not, even if you had seen the email – are you saying that you did not pick up on the ‘guard of honour’ line in that email?

Danielle NORTH: No – or the relevance of it, because I think at that point I was unaware that there had been one that had occurred. I certainly was not involved in the approval or planning involving the guard of honour. I was subsequently not aware that there had been a complaint or a referral to IBAC in relation to the guard of honour, and I have not been actively involved in any aspect of the management of the guard of honour issue.

Michael GALEA: Is a guard of honour a common practice in AV?

Danielle NORTH: For a funeral?

Michael GALEA: Yes.

Danielle NORTH: It can be. It is really dependent on the family’s request or any requests that a staff member may have made forthcoming to us. So it may be provided depending on the family’s request.

Michael GALEA: Is there a particular way in which it is done? Like is there a set size of people that would take part in it, or is it based on the circumstances of the paramedic?

Danielle NORTH: In normal circumstances, so excluding a kind of COVID environment, it would be that any operational staff or former operational staff or AV members that would like to participate in the guard of honour would be welcome to do so if it was offered and supported by the family.

Georgie CROZIER: But it was illegal at the time, the breaches with COVID.

Michael GALEA: Excuse me, Ms Crozier, it is my time for questions.

The CHAIR: It is time for Mr Galea’s questions.

Michael GALEA: In September 2024, when you were given legal briefings on the matter, which included background reference to the guards of honour, how relevant to the main substance of the case were the guards of honour?

Danielle NORTH: It was a background issue. So the issue that we were debating at the time – well, the issue that was relevant to me at the time – was an employment dispute matter, which was secondary to the guards of honour, but it was not pertinent to the issues at hand at that time.

Michael GALEA: Was it included in any significant way in the verbal or written briefings, the guards of honour issues?

Danielle NORTH: Not that I recall, no.

Michael GALEA: And it did not affect the nature of the matter, is that what you are saying?

Danielle NORTH: No. So in the time that I was acting CEO, there was no decision or outcome to be made during that period of time. What I would ordinarily do in my normal practice is if a decision or an approval is required, then I would look at a full brief and go through the full detail. But that did not occur in the three weeks that I was acting CEO.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And you were first made aware of these issues from Ambulance Victoria?

Danielle NORTH: Yes, correct, from CEO Jordan Emery.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Ryan BATCHELOR: In your preparation for the initial evidence that you gave to this committee on 20 June, did anyone direct you to provide misleading evidence to the committee?

Danielle NORTH: No, absolutely not.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And when you were made aware of the references in these emails and this legal briefing to these matters by the CEO – is that correct?

Danielle NORTH: Yes, that is correct.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What was the course of action that was suggested?

Danielle NORTH: That we would very quickly identify and remedy my evidence and provide a correction.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And that was a conversation with the CEO?

Danielle NORTH: Yes, correct.

Ryan BATCHELOR: In preparation for today, you have had the opportunity to go back and review the evidence that you gave previously and the materials that were provided to you in 2021 and 2024 when you were the acting CEO, is that correct?

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Is there anything else that you feel is relevant to the committee on that? I know there were a couple of instances where you were cut off from answering Ms Crozier, so are there any further things?

Danielle NORTH: No, and I am happy to provide, if there is an opportunity, AV's letter to the committee referring to the fact that I was the acting CEO from the 9th to the 29th. I attended a legal briefing. Specifically, the guard of honour was not pertinent to the matter at that time, though I have been reminded by contemporaneous materials from that period that the background did include a reference to the guard of honour. While the content of the legal briefing and the advice is confidential and subject to legal professional privilege belonging to Ambulance Victoria, for the reassurance of the committee I wish to confirm that I did not approve, arrange, support or participate in the guard of honour. I was not aware of a complaint or a referral to IBAC in relation to a guard of honour. I was not involved or a party to any investigative processes and have not been actively involved in any aspect of the management relating to the guard of honour.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you. My time is about up.

The CHAIR: You have got about 8 seconds. You do not want to –

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am okay, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now hand it over to Ms Gray-Barberio and Ms Payne.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Chair. I note the tragic circumstances of what we are talking about today. The deaths of paramedics are not okay and it is very sad. I just want to ask you, Ms North, you spoke about your evidence being identified later after you came to the committee on 20 June.

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Who actually identified that? You might have said in your opening statement, but I did not hear you. Was that you, or somebody from Ambulance Victoria?

Danielle NORTH: No. My CEO, Jordan Emery, contacted me and advised that information had been identified.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Also in your opening statement, you said you were copied into an email, but the letter refers to ‘emails’, implying a multiple –

Danielle NORTH: Yes, so there was an email chain around the single source of the email, which was the appreciation email from the family. And then there were the internal emails responding to that email in recognition of the staff that had provided care to the family at that time.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Just to understand how Ambulance Victoria works, with the guard of honour in terms of like approval of that, how far up the chain does that go?

Danielle NORTH: Ordinarily, outside of a COVID environment or outside of any other restrictions, it would be offered as part of our normal service offerings for an employee that subsequently passed, depending on what the family’s requirements and preferences are.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Would that ever come across the CEO’s desk at any point – during a board meeting, leadership meetings et cetera?

Danielle NORTH: Not ordinarily. I would not expect it to, no. It is something that we do offer as part of normal business practice, and it is something that is longstanding across all emergency services. Given the circumstance of being in COVID, I cannot speak to the decisions made; I do not know what consultation occurred in that circumstance. But in normal business, in normal activity, no I would not expect it to be.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Thank you. That is it for me.

Rachel PAYNE: I do not have any questions, Chair, so I am happy for other committee members to use that time.

The CHAIR: You are happy for other committee members – okay. Would you like to transfer to anyone else, because it is your time?

Georgie CROZIER: I have more questions.

Rachel PAYNE: Ms Crozier.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you. Following on from Ms Gray-Barberio’s questions, given you said it is standard practice that guards of honour are offered and your role as director of wellbeing and support services, surely you would have known.

Danielle NORTH: No. We were involved in the provision of the funeral service for the individual, and that occurred within my team. The guard of honour was held, as I understand it, separately to the funeral. It was not held at the same location, it was held separately to the funeral, and that aspect of it I was unaware of.

Georgie CROZIER: But if it is standard practice, as you have just stated, for a CEO – and you have had that acting role, so you know that role –

Danielle NORTH: Yes.

Georgie CROZIER: how did you not know or ask about it during the dispute?

Danielle NORTH: Well, it was three years post, at that point in time, so I was unaware of the relevance of it. I was unaware that there had been an IBAC referral. I was just unaware of the context that we were working in, and I cannot speak to the decisions that were made around why a guard of honour was offered at that particular point in time.

Georgie CROZIER: But you are aware that was approved by the CEO, aren't you?

Danielle NORTH: I do not know who ultimately approved it. I cannot speak for the senior leadership –

Georgie CROZIER: You know it was approved by the CEO.

Danielle NORTH: I do not know. I am not across the detail.

Georgie CROZIER: Surely, given your knowledge of the emails that have come across your desk in your role and in your subsequent dealings with the legal representatives that were looking at this matter, you know who approved this, don't you?

Danielle NORTH: I do not know the detail of who approved what or who implemented –

Georgie CROZIER: It was the CEO, wasn't it, at the time?

Ryan BATCHELOR: The witness has given her evidence.

Danielle NORTH: and the briefings that I was provided are protected by Ambulance Victoria's legal privilege.

Georgie CROZIER: Ms North –

Danielle NORTH: But I do not know the detail of who approved or who was involved.

Georgie CROZIER: I am not asking for the detail, I am asking – you know who authorised it, and it was the CEO, wasn't it?

Danielle NORTH: No, I do not know, and I have not been involved in any of the investigative processes.

Georgie CROZIER: I understand that, but you are aware of it.

Danielle NORTH: I am now aware of it, yes.

Georgie CROZIER: You have had emails, and you have been briefed by legal firms on employment dispute issues that are related to this.

Danielle NORTH: Yes, correct.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes. So you know the details.

Danielle NORTH: The employment dispute matter that I was briefed on was not in relation to former senior leaders of our organisation.

Georgie CROZIER: No, it was not. It was about the person who was asked to organise the guard of honour, wasn't it?

Danielle NORTH: I cannot talk to the detail of that. That is protected by privilege.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, you know that.

Michael GALEA: Chair, this has been asked and answered.

Georgie CROZIER: I am sorry, but this is important, because Ms North has misled the parliamentary committee once and I am concerned that we are not getting the true facts, Mr Galea, so I will just continue on this very important issue. As acting CEO what discussion did you have with the board around this employment matter and this legal issue?

Danielle NORTH: I do not recall any specific discussion. There was no decision required from me in the role as acting CEO. I was briefed that there was an employment matter and an employment dispute. I was not required to provide a decision and was not required to provide an outcome, so I did not review the pack, the details and the attachments in any detail at all at that time. My focus –

Georgie CROZIER: You did not review any of them?

Danielle NORTH: There was no requirement for me to make a decision and my delegation was not required at that time. My focus at that time was the resolution of the enterprise bargaining agreement. I was present in those negotiations, and that was the focus of the three weeks.

Georgie CROZIER: I understand that was an important issue –

The CHAIR: Hold on. I am going to go to Mr Batchelor now.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Just to clarify an accusation that my colleague has made in her questioning to you, Ms North, are you being truthful with the committee today?

Danielle NORTH: Absolutely.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Is that it?

Ryan BATCHELOR: That is it.

The CHAIR: Do you have any more questions, Ms Payne?

Rachel PAYNE: No. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Okay. We will call time then. Ms North, thank you.

Georgie CROZIER: May I have one more question? Have you read submission 129?

The CHAIR: No, we are going to finish up there. Thank you, Ms Crozier. Thank you for your time today, Ms North. We appreciate you coming in again and giving your evidence. You will get a proof version of the transcript after this to review, and we will go from there.

Witness withdrew.