

Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to COVID-19

Submission of Alexandra Smith

1. On 20 September 2020 I went for a walk with my friend on the Tan.
2. I was not wearing a mask because I have chronic asthma and it was a warm and windy day, so my asthma had flared up.
3. I was stopped by police and asked why I was not wearing a mask. I immediately responded that it was because I am asthmatic.
4. I had all my details taken by police and was treated as if I had committed a crime.
5. I was told by one of the officers that I needed a physical certificate to confirm that I had an exemption.
6. The DHHS website specifically stated at the relevant time that I did not need a physical certificate confirming I had an exemption.
7. I showed the officers that stopped me my asthma inhaler (which is a preventer and reliever called Seratide) and asked them if they wanted to see the prescription, which was in my bag. They had no interest in looking at the prescription.
8. I was given a formal caution for not wearing a mask when I clearly had an exemption.
9. Behind the officers that stopped me was a pack of about 30 (conservative estimate) other police officers.
10. A copy of the video is attached to my submission.
11. After the incident involving police that day, I suffered a panic attack and had to call Lifeline that night.
12. The following day, I called my doctor at Freshwater Place Medical Wellness (Dr John Newton) and he told me that it is very clear that I do not need a medical certificate to prove my exemption.
13. I also contacted the DHHS on 21 September 2020 and the people I spoke with were deliberately evasive about confirming that I did not need to wear a mask for asthma. I can only assume that they had been directed to respond in this manner, because the website itself is very clear.
14. I asked the DHHS to respond to me in writing.
15. On 24 September 2020, I received a response in writing from someone called Kay.
16. Despite my request for confirmation that I do not need to wear a mask for asthma, Kay's response was also deliberately evasive and she did not confirm what the DHHS website says, which is that I did not need to wear a mask for asthma. Again, I can only assume that Kay was directed to respond in this evasive manner.
17. I replied to Kay on 24 September 2020 stating that she had not responded to my query. I never received a response to my 24 September email to Kay.
18. A copy of the email chain is attached to my submission.
19. This is State sanctioned persecution of someone who has a medical condition. It is intimidation, bullying and harassment. The Police and Government have intentionally tried to shame people with legitimate medical exemptions into compliance with mask directives, while not providing any evidence of the science behind the directive. Daniel Andrews himself stated that it was purely because it was easier to police. The convenience of the Government and Police does not trump my medical health. The impact of this behaviour by the Government and Police on me personally cannot be understated. I have suffered a worsening of my depression and anxiety and I now have an extreme distrust of Government and Police. I will never trust the Police again after what I have witnessed (personally and in other peoples' videos) in Victoria over the time of the response to COVID.

20. I also attended the protest on 23 October 2020. I was shocked by the way the Police treated everyone and by the way they circled the protesters and corralled everyone closer and closer into a circle, preventing any social distancing. I was terrified by the Police on the day. I did not witness any “violent protesters” at the event, only violent Police. There were people with kids in prams, dogs on leads and overwhelmingly everyone was just happy to be able to exercise their human right to protest. It appeared to me that the Police were there to prevent peaceful and lawful protesting and to silence criticism of the Andrews Government.
21. Police have been used as a tool against the people of Victoria by the Andrews Government. I personally would like to know what directives were given by the Andrews Government to the Police in relation to the protest on 23 October 2020. I know that these are unlikely to be in writing, so we would need evidence from the officers involved, and I doubt that will be forthcoming.

Alexandra Smith

28 November 2020