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14 August 2020

The Honourable Mark McGowan MLA  
Premier; Minister for Public Sector Management;  
State Development, Jobs and Trade; Federal-State Relations  
9th Floor, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

By Email: [wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mark McGowan,

#### **ACCESS TO COVID-19 LEAVE FOR WA AMBULANCE SERVICE EMPLOYEES**

I write to you on behalf of the Ambulance Employees Association WA (AEAWA) in relation to the Public Sector Labour Relations circular dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 (revised 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020) regarding Leave Arrangements for the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The AEAWA represents front line operational employees within the ambulance industry in Western Australia, including Paramedics, Patient Transport Officers, State Operations Centre call takers and Dispatchers.

As you have publicly acknowledged, our members, along with many other healthcare workers, play an essential role in the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our members commend the excellent work of the McGowan government in containing and minimising the spread of COVID-19 in Western Australia. However, the virulence of the COVID-19 suggests it is likely that to resurface within our community in the longer term, despite our best efforts. This fact has been illustrated by recent events in Victoria. It is also of relevance that healthcare workers make up more than 15% of Victoria's COVID-19 cases.

We note the WA Government's Media Statement dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 which reports that public sector employees will be granted 20 days of paid COVID-19 leave *"to make sure those who are sick stay home, ensuring a safe work environment and helping to reduce the spread of the virus"*.

We note a further quote in the same media release, attributed to yourself, the Premier, as highlighting the *"responsibility to provide a safe work environment for the State's hard-working public sector employees"*. Our members are not public sector employees, but they are certainly hard working and they undertake work that is *normally* operated by the public sector in most jurisdictions in Australia. Indeed, the work undertaken by our members forms part of a contract with WA Health.

Another statement from the media release attributed to Industrial Relations Minister Bill Johnston asserts the *"new COVID-19 leave arrangements give workers peace-of-mind in knowing there is paid leave available to them, should they need to self-isolate"*. The Honourable Minister goes on to state *"as we continue to manage the spread of COVID-19, it's vital that those displaying symptoms do not feel any pressure to continue to work, particularly due to financial concerns."*

Our members are entitled to just 10 days of personal leave per annum. Many of our members that have minimal accrual hours would be unable to self isolate for 14 days without suffering financial hardship.

Our members form part of an essential workforce, with a high proportion of workers who are very mobile during the course of their normal working day and who will visit multiple locations each day including public and private hospitals, GP surgery's, public and private residences and other high risk environments such as Residential Aged Care Facilities. Our members should be supported and able to confidently access their leave balances when they feel unwell.

**We urge the WA Government to stand by our ambulance industry employees and ensure they are secure enough in their leave entitlements to stay at home when it is required of them, and therefore protect the wider community.**

Should (or when) community transmission resurface in WA, many of our members will undoubtedly come into contact to COVID-19 patients during the course of their normal work. They will therefore more likely need to self-isolate having been in close contact with patient's who subsequently test positive and they are more likely to become infected with the COVID-19 virus themselves. Others still may need to self-isolate to comply with other government advice should family members develop symptoms.

***We strongly request that the state government consider extending the 20 days of paid COVID-19 leave to our ambulance industry employees with the same entitlement conditions as public sector employees.***

We would argue that the additional burden to the State of such an arrangement would be negligible. The additional coverage of COVID-19 leave to ambulance industry employees would protect approximately 1000 extra essential workers. When compared to the size of the current public sector employee base of some 140,000 plus employees, it would seem a worthwhile safeguard against transmission, and a recognition of the important service our members provide.

An outbreak within our workforce could be devastating for the ambulance service's ability to respond to our community, and potentially deadly to the most at risk and vulnerable patient groups to whom we attend on a daily basis. It is therefore essential that ambulance industry staff who are unwell or who are displaying symptoms 'do not feel any pressure to continue to work, particularly due to financial concerns'.

Although transmission rates are currently low, there remains a significant likelihood that this disease will continue to circulate internationally and resurface more potently within Western Australia.

The potential financial burden to our members should they contract COVID-19 in the course of their employment is therefore significant. In addition, our members are acutely aware of the difficulties they will undoubtedly face in establishing a causal link for WorkCover, should they contract COVID-19 while performing their duties at work.

The AEAWA are grateful for your consideration of this proposal and would of course be willing to meet with Government officials to help give effect to the proposal outlined in this, if required.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

*John Thomas*

John Thomas BSc,ASM,MStj

**President**

**Ambulance Employees Association WA**