



Ms Sandra Lambert AM
Chair
ACT Remuneration Tribunal
PO Box 964
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2808

Dear Ms Lambert

I am writing in relation to the Tribunal's determination for Members of the Legislative Assembly, and in particular the resettlement allowance that is paid to those Members who are no longer Members after a Territory election, or those Members who resign.

Background

On 9 May 2019, an inaugural meeting of the ACT Legislative Assembly's Former Members' Association was held, in conjunction with a number of other events, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of self-government in the Territory.

Those present adopted a constitution and I was elected as President of the Association with Louise Littlewood being elected Vice President. The meeting resolved that the sitting Speaker would hold the position of patron with the Clerk being honorary secretary/treasurer.

Resettlement allowance

As you would be aware, the Tribunal, in 2014, decided that all members will have access to a resettlement allowance in the event that they cease to be a member, with the amount to be two weeks of the base salary for every year of service, capped at twelve weeks base salary. In granting the allowance, the Tribunal indicated that the purpose of the allowance was to enable members to move from public to private life, and to enable them to access financial and other counselling services.

Transitioning to life after parliament

The Former Members' Association is aware of a report commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria in conjunction with the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association released in August 2021,¹ which made ten recommendations in relation to former members, most of which have since been agreed to.

¹ [Transitioning to Life after Parliament: A report commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria in conjunction with the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association, August 2021.](#)

The report gives many examples of the effect on members after they leave parliament. A section of the executive summary of the report gives some flavour to this point:

While retiring allows MPs to plan their life after parliament, MPs who leave parliament unexpectedly can experience this as a devastating event with significant emotional, psychological, financial and practical implications. As one former member of parliament (FMP) interviewed for this project explained:

losing their seat was one of the most confronting things in my professional life, really, my adult life - apart from family members dying...it was incredibly confronting. It took me a very long time to get over it.

The psychological response many people experience on leaving parliament should be understood as a grief reaction. People have to adjust their lives and come to terms with a significant loss. Many FMPs who took part in this research reported symptoms of depression and anxiety and reported this psychological distress lasting several years. For some FMPs the years immediately after parliament were also marked by relationship breakdowns, poor health, and decisions to move away from the community they once represented. As another FMP reported

I'm still devastated...two years [later]...I think the thing that's the toughest is I've not been able to move on...I feel damaged.

Few MPs who leave unexpectedly have plans in place to assist them to navigate the difficult transition to life after parliament. Nevertheless, a parliamentary career is most commonly a transitory career. A better understanding of this within the broader community could go a long way to shift expectations and help MPs to plan and prepare for life after parliament.

One of the largest difficulties for former members of parliament is establishing a post-parliamentary career and identity. The stereotype of former parliamentarians being 'parachuted' into lucrative roles does not correspond with the experience of most FMPs. On the contrary, FMPs experience many hurdles to securing post-parliamentary employment, including discrimination on the basis of their previous career. All former parliamentarians interviewed for this project who sought to establish a new career had experienced this form of discrimination, and most recounted experiences of not being considered for roles to which they were well-suited. The very first recruiter I went to...said to me:

you are absolutely the perfect fit, but I'm not going to waste your time and put you forward...[because] you weren't a backbencher. You were a minister. That makes you poison.

As a result of this report, and recognising that transitioning to a new career after parliamentary service can be challenging for former members, the Office of the Legislative Assembly now offers post-parliamentary career transition support to former members.

There are two parts to the support offered:

1. An extension of current access to the Employee Assistance Program provided by our support partner Converge International, which is available to outgoing members and their families, for twelve months from the date of the election.

2. Professional career counselling, consisting of three individual coaching sessions with a focus on identifying goals, a skills audit and CV review, and action planning, provided by a local Canberra firm.

After the election for the 11th Assembly, two former members have utilised these services. Issues

At the last meeting of the Former Members' Association held in August 2024, the below resolution was passed following a discussion on the level of the resettlement allowance currently set:

That the President of the Former Members' Association work with OLA with the aim of raising the Resettlement Allowance with the Remuneration Tribunal in due course.

Attached to this submission is a summary of resettlement allowances that the Association is aware are in place in other Australian parliaments. As can be seen from the summary, four parliaments (Commonwealth, Northern Territory, Victoria and Northern Territory) have resettlement allowances of at least six months basic salary and up to 12 months in the case of the Northern Territory. Two other jurisdictions (Queensland and South Australia have similar provisions as the ACT, with New South Wales and Tasmania having no resettlement allowances for former members.

Recommendation

It is our submission that the current level of the resettlement allowance is not sufficient and needs to be increased, taking into account the above information.

It should also be noted that the fixed date of the Territory's election (i.e. the third Saturday in October every four years) means that, if a member loses their seat (particularly after a close count which may take until the first week of November to resolve) the former member needs to start looking for alternative employment right at the time where most employers will be deferring their recruitment activity to avoid December and the Christmas shutdown. This means that it is possible a member will not be able to secure a new position until (at the earliest) March the following year.

The President and/or the Secretary of the Former Members' Association would be pleased to discuss this submission should the Tribunal wish.

Yours sincerely



Mary Porter AM
President
Former Members' Association of the ACT

20 January 2025