



Get tougher

Call for harsher assault penalties

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TASMANIA has joined the push for violent assault offenders to be dealt with more severely in the courts.

The Tasmanian police union has called for mandatory sentences for people convicted of assault, especially against police and other emergency service workers.

The union wants minimum sentences for violent offences against police to be introduced.

The Tasmania Law Reform Institute said mandatory sentences were too broad but Tasmania's Sentencing Advisory Council should consider whether the courts should come down harder on those involved in violent assault cases.

Last week former Victorian Supreme Court judge Philip Cummins called on judges to make offenders more responsible for their violent crimes.

The tougher stance has been backed by the Police Association of Tasmania.

Association president Sergeant Randolph Wierenga

said attacks against police had increased and become more violent.

The Tasmanian Ambulance Service has also reported a rise in both the number of attacks and the level of violence involved.

In early December vandals attacked an ambulance while officers treated a patient in Cornelian Bay and the service has now compiled a list of addresses it does not want officers to attend without backup.

"While police accept that their job is dangerous, police and the community expect that all that can be done to make the job safe should be done," Sgt Wierenga said.

"What we have seen in sentencing is people being let off with slaps on the wrist and inconsequential fines.

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Push to get tough on assault

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"Attacking a police officer or emergency service worker is a choice, as Justice Cummins notes, and it must be accorded in judgements.

"Given the track record in sentencing, we need to have a level of minimum sentencing to ensure the community can have confidence that sentences include the personal responsibility of

assailants," Sgt Wierenga said.

Tasmanian Law Reform Institute professor Kate Warner said mandatory sentences did not act as a general deterrent.

"It is assumed that violent crime is on the rise but there is no evidence to support that," Prof Warner. "Often these offenders are drunk and out of control.

"They are not aware of what the sentences are when they commit the crime."