

Open letter

22 February 2024

Attorney-General the Hon. Jaclyn Symes,  
Level 26, 121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

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## Investment in prevention strategies and health services – not more Tasers – for Victoria

Dear Attorney-General Symes,

The Australian Lawyers Alliance, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Human Rights Law Centre and the Police Accountability Project are concerned by the recent announcement that around 10,000 more frontline police and protective services officers (PSOs) in Victoria will be equipped with Tasers.

Taking into account recent examples of deaths and injuries caused by Tasers and the police misuse of other weaponry (such as capsicum spray),<sup>1</sup> we are concerned about the ongoing risk of misuse of Tasers in the hands of more police and PSOs. We also query the role of PSOs in general and whether it is appropriate for PSOs to have weapons that can lead to the use of lethal force.

We consider that the Government should be cautious when authorising and rolling out the use of tasers. We draw your attention to the cases of Clare Nowland and Roberto Curti,<sup>2</sup> which show the significant dangers of the use of Tasers.

We are alarmed by the increasing and disproportionate use of Tasers against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This reflects the ongoing over-policing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria generally, about which all of our organisations are deeply concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> See, egs, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'Melbourne man dies in hospital after being tasered by Victoria Police officers during siege arrest', *ABC News* (online, 22 July 2023) <[www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-22/man-dies-after-frankston-north-siege-tasered-by-police/102635250](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-22/man-dies-after-frankston-north-siege-tasered-by-police/102635250)>; David Estcourt, 'Police go unpunished after pepper-spraying and arresting photographers at anti-lockdown protest', *The Age* (online, 16 January 2023) <[www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/police-go-unpunished-after-pepper-spraying-and-arresting-photographers-at-anti-lockdown-protest-20221222-p5c86r.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/police-go-unpunished-after-pepper-spraying-and-arresting-photographers-at-anti-lockdown-protest-20221222-p5c86r.html)>; Ashleigh McMillan, 'Man dies in custody after police use capsicum spray', *The Age* (online, 30 May 2022) <[www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/man-dies-in-custody-after-police-use-oc-spray-20220530-p5aphm.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/man-dies-in-custody-after-police-use-oc-spray-20220530-p5aphm.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> Jordyn Beazley and Christopher Knaus, 'NSW police officer said 'na bugger it' before tasered Clare Nowland, court documents allege', *The Guardian* (online, 19 July 2023) <[www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/19/full-details-of-clare-nowlands-alleged-tasered-by-nsw-police-officer-released-by-court](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/19/full-details-of-clare-nowlands-alleged-tasered-by-nsw-police-officer-released-by-court)>; Jordan Baker and Nigel Gladstone, 'Roberto died after being Tasered 14 times. It was supposed to change everything', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (online, 20 May 2023) <[www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/roberto-died-after-being-tasered-14-times-it-was-supposed-to-change-everything-20230519-p5d9ok.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/roberto-died-after-being-tasered-14-times-it-was-supposed-to-change-everything-20230519-p5d9ok.html)>.

Instead of investing in more Tasers, our organisations support allocating public funds to invest in prevention strategies, mental health services, as well as training police in de-escalation.

We call on the Victorian Government to prioritise and fund initiatives which genuinely help all Victorians and which promote safe police conduct.



**Australian Lawyers Alliance**



**Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service**



**Human Rights Law Centre**



**Police Accountability Project**