

Tēnā koe

On 5 July 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The number of times WINZ staff have called police for assistance, each year for the past five years, broken down by each WINZ office.*
- *The number of assaults on WINZ staff, broken down by WINZ office, each year for the past five years.*

Between 8 July 2021 and 13 July 2021, you exchanged correspondence with the Ministry regarding a refinement of your request. The refinement was agreed upon due to the expected redactions for staff privacy reasons on your request for the number of assaults on Work and Income staff broken down by Work and Income site. On 13 July 2021, this part of your request was refined to the following:

- *The number of assaults on WINZ staff, broken down by region, each year for the past five years.*

On 10 August 2021, you were informed that the Ministry needed more time to complete the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request. As such the due date for your request was extended until 24 August 2021.

The Public Service Act 2020 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 outline the Ministry's obligation to be a 'good employer.' This includes the Ministry's obligation to provide a safe working environment for its employees.

The Ministry places a high priority on the safety of its staff and clients and has in place a detailed security approach to reduce the potential security risks. We recognise that given the frontline role of many of our staff and the nature of the work, there will always be a degree of security risk.

For the sake of clarity, I will address your questions in order.

- *The number of times WINZ staff have called police for assistance, each year for the past five years, broken down by each WINZ office.*

Please find **Table One** attached to this response, which covers the number of times Police have been contacted each year for the past five years, broken down by Work and Income site.

The Police are notified for a wide range of matters. This can include but is not limited to the following: threats of self-harm, threats to staff members, notification of anticipated trespass, and clients seeking protection (such as in a domestic violence situation). The Ministry has zero tolerance for people who demonstrate threatening and abusive behaviour towards its staff and clients, so all security events are interpreted in context of the potential worst-case outcome.

Please note these figures include incidents where someone has threatened self-harm. These threats are always taken seriously. The Police are notified so that they can check in and ensure the safety of the client. These threats, dependant on severity, are recorded as 'moderate' at minimum.

The Ministry is constantly working to improve our data capture and cleansing processes. This may result in data for some categories being reported differently to previous occasions. For example, since March 2021, the Ministry has adopted a new data cleansing technique which has recategorized some of our historic entries.

Please note that since the shift to our new reporting tool in 2019, sites such as 'Processing Unit', 'National Fraud Investigation Unit', 'Collection Unit' and specialised offices have been grouped under the category, 'Client Service Support.' Previously, these offices have been included under their own respective regions. This recategorization applies to our Ministry Contact Centres as well.

Please also note that the 'Community Links' listed at various locations were replaced by that location's respective 'Service Centre' in 2019. This explains why 'Community Link' data only extends as far as 2019, and why 'Service Centre' data only starts in 2019.

- *The number of assaults on WINZ staff, broken down by region, each year for the past five years.*

The Ministry records data for the number of assaults in Work and Income centres, which includes assaults on staff, clients, and non-clients. All assaults that take place in a Work and Income centre are recorded as 'assaults in Work and Income centres', and any specific data on whether the assault was on staff, clients, or non-clients is not centrally recorded. As such, your request for 'the number of assaults on Work and Income staff' is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information you have requested is held in notes on individual case files, each of which would need to be manually reviewed to answer your request. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

In the spirit of being helpful, please find **Table Two** attached to this response, which covers the number of assaults in Work and Income centres each year for the past five years, broken down by region.

The Ministry defines assault according to the Crimes Act 1961 which defines assault as the act of intentionally applying or attempting to apply force to the person of another, directly or indirectly, or threatening by any act or gesture to apply such force to the person of another, if the person making the threat has, or causes the other to believe on reasonable grounds that he or she has, present ability to effect his or her purpose; and to assault has a corresponding meaning.

The principles and purposes of the Act under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding data on assaults on Work and Income staff and Police calls made by Work and Income staff, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

Melissa Gill
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Organisational Assurance and Communication