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Cathaoirleach, Committee Members

On behalf of the Garda Representative Association (GRA) I wish to thank you Chairman, for the opportunity today to speak before this Committee on Justice and to answer any questions you or your members might have.

Our testimony to this Joint Oireachtas Committee will primarily focus on items No's 1 and 3, from our detailed submission - which we presented earlier to the committee - 'on a number of policing matters'.

Item No 2 - The deployment of personnel in Dublin is an operational matter for Garda management, but we believe many of the challenges being experienced stem from the systematic problems we will be discussing today.

Visible effective policing can only be delivered by sufficient numbers of Gardaí who are adequately trained and equipped, have access to technology and utilise systems that are less bureaucratic and administration focused.

Esteemed members, we are currently witnessing a crisis in An Garda Síochána, focused on the recruitment and retention of Gardaí, enormous challenges which are directly linked to a myriad of other issues faced by our members every day.

In the area of recruitment, we are not seeing sufficient numbers presenting to join the force, despite Government approval for Garda Management to achieve an adequate level of recruits.

It is our considered view that the amount of compensation for training, which has risen from €184, to a still-meagre €305 per week, will do little or nothing to attract the most suitably qualified candidates for a career in An Garda Síochána.

Those who do make it through training are then met with a far-too-incremental pay-scale system, for them to achieve a level of payment appropriate to match an appropriate standard of living.

It is in the area of recruitment where I believe the very sustainability of An Garda Síochána is threatened.

800 members were promised by the Commissioner in 2022, with just 300 trainees entering Garda College.

This year, we were promised 1,000 trainees, and once again that number looks set to fall woefully short, with the figure set to reach just over 600.

A significant activation to encourage the appropriate level of high-quality recruits will be needed to immediately address these significant trainee compensation issues and to address the pay scale structural inadequacies which currently exist, in addition to the substandard pensions being offered to new entrants since 2013.

For all of the issues we have in recruitment, we have parallel problems when it comes to the retention of our members.

We are currently experiencing record numbers of Gardaí leaving the force, with that number set to reach at least 150 this year, with 116 members having resigned so far – this month alone, 10 members have given their notice.

Last year the figure stood at 108 – a number which normally would equate to 45 resignations.

This is an extreme concern, where overall conditions and terms of service, general wellbeing, morale and lack of recognition, poor pension entitlements for new recruits, resourcing, bureaucracy, workload and an unfair disciplinary process all contribute to the disillusionment of the modern Garda, where a growing number are simply walking away.

One significant area where we will achieve a better work/life balance is around rosters, where we are now negotiating with the Commissioner for a system which will allow for a maximising of resources through an efficient timetable, satisfactory to all.

It is an ongoing area of extreme difference between our members and the Commissioner, that Commissioner Harris continually fails to accept that there is a morale issue in An Garda Síochána, and one which can be greatly improved by a fairer rostering system being established.

I, and GRA President Brendan O'Connor - who is with me here today - will highlight some of the details around rosters with you, and pin-point areas where morale has suffered to extreme depths, particularly in relation to training, pensions, health and disciplinary procedure.

Training is an area which the public can see most visibly, particularly given the growing level of intimidation that our members face, notably around public gatherings by groups holding extreme views and espousing hate-filled philosophies.

We look forward to discussing with you the fine balance between our unquestionable duty of care to the general public and managing extremely volatile situations, sometimes without appropriate training.

Chairman, and Members of this Joint Oireachtas Justice Committee, the life of the modern Garda is still a hugely fulfilling vocation. The job of a Garda is unique and like no other role in society, and one we all serve with pride and honour, even despite a deteriorating series of conditions put in our way.

Our number one priority is to provide security, protection and reassurance to the Irish people - and our members will never be found wanting with this great responsibility.

Once again thank you for inviting us here today and we look forward to answering any of your questions throughout this hearing, and beyond.

Ronan Slevin

General Secretary
Garda Representative Association

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