

ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee for Estimates
 Summary Statement – Sean Alexander Harrison
 Corrections Officer Grade 1 – ACT Corrective Services

My full name is Sean Alexander Harrison, I am 33 years of age and I am currently employed as a Corrective Services Officer Grade 1, with ACT Corrective Services. I have held that position since I completed my Corrections Recruit Training in October 2018.

1. On 11 May 2023, while on duty at the Alexander McConachie Centre (AMC) I undertook a strip search of AMC detainee . This was done at the direction of my supervisors. As a result of the search an amount of contraband (Cannabis) was recovered and exhibited.
2. On 12 June 2023, made a complaint to ACT Corrective Services about the above search.
3. On 21 August 2023 I was required to attend a meeting with , JACS ACT Corrections, Director of Business Partnerships and Employee Relations. CO3 Correctional Officer was also present. At the meeting, explained had made a complaint about the search, and I was provided an Admission Statement. This statement was dated 21 August 2023 and signed by Acting Commissioner . stated that if I signed the admissions statement there would be no need to continue an investigation and the matter could be resolved.
4. At the end of the meeting said to me words to the effect: *“I wouldn’t go and get any lawyers involved until the end of the matter; Lawyers are expensive.”* As I believed I had done nothing wrong in the conduct of the search, I refused to sign the Admissions Statement. A copy of the Admissions Statement is included.
(Attachment A). I was then advised there would be an investigation by the Professional Standards Unit (PSU). I was later moved to work in non-operational areas of the jail. This meant that I lost my opportunities to work overtime.
5. In response to the investigation, my former lawyer submitted a letter to , dated 14 September 2023, stating that the search technique I used for the search was well known, utilised and taught by Corrective Officers in the AMC, and this had been the case for many years. To highlight this point, I included details of a recent strip search (on 11 March 2023) of another detainee (in which I present as an observer. The search was conducted in the same manner in which I had completed the search. As a result of the search, contraband (methamphetamine) was recovered, exhibited and later collected

by ACT Policing. As a result of this incident, [redacted] was charged by AMC senior management with an internal disciplinary offence. The person who supplied the substance to [redacted] was charged by ACT Policing and later convicted of introducing contraband into a prison. I assisted ACT Policing with this prosecution by providing them a witness statement. Regarding the [redacted] search, this search was conducted by 3 Corrections Officers who were senior to me (Grades 2 to 4), I was the most junior officer in the room, being a Grade 1 officer. I stood in the corner of the room and took no physical part in the search. My role was to pick up the package of illicit drugs off the floor when it was removed from the detainee's buttock cheeks. I then secured the item in an audit bag. To my knowledge none of the officers involved in this search were the subject of any sanctions, misconduct findings or criminal charges.

6. In response to this letter, [redacted] received a letter from Acting Commissioner [redacted], dated 26 September 2023. Part of [redacted] response in this letter was (quote): *"Thank you for raising, on behalf of your client, an allegation of misconduct against CO3 [redacted] who is alleged to have restrained a detainee, and conducted a strip search, including the raking search on 11 March 2023. I can confirm that this matter was not known to ACTCS Integrity Unit and has been referred for further enquires."* [redacted] letter and the response from [redacted] are included **(Attachment B)**.

7. At 11:17am on 26 October 2023, I received an email request on the internal Corrections email system from [redacted], Senior Director Accommodation, AMC, ACT Corrective Services. [redacted] requested that I attend a meeting at 0730 hours on 27 October 2023. At the time of this request, I was on leave from work and in Victoria visiting my sister. Due to being on leave at the time, I did not immediately see this email. At 9:03am on Monday 30 October 2023, I responded via email to [redacted] and advised I was currently on leave and would another time be suitable. I received an immediate email bounce-back that [redacted] was on leave.

8. At 6:41am on Wednesday 01 Nov 2023, I received an email from [redacted], Senior Director Accommodation, AMC. Via email, [redacted] and I agreed this meeting would occur at the AMC, at 7:30am on Friday 03 Nov 2023. The emails from [redacted] confirming this meeting, and [redacted] is included **(Attachment C)**.

9. On Friday 03 November 2023 I arrived at the AMC at 7:20am with my father, who was accompanying me for support. I waited in the reception foyer of the jail with my father until about 8:15am. No persons arrived for the meeting. While waiting in the foyer several dozen Corrections Officer entered the jail and I had to field numerous questions on why I was waiting there. This was very humiliating for me.

10. Later in November 2023, I received a letter via my solicitor dated 25 October 2023 from [redacted] (Chief Human Resource Officer People and Workplace Strategy). I believe this letter was supposed to have been supplied to me in person at the planned meeting on 03 November 2023, but this did not occur due to the non-appearance of Corrections staff. The letter advised me of the commencement of a Misconduct in the Workplace investigation into me, related to the strip search of detainee [redacted]. The letter outlined the allegation that; (on 11 March 2023) *“as the officer in charge of a strip search, you failed to stop another Corrections Officer from subjecting a detainee to an act that was incompatible to their human rights.”* As a result of this, [redacted] advised in the letter that I would be suspended from duty on full pay while the investigation proceeded. The letter from [redacted] is included **(Attachment D)**. I also draw your attention to the witness statement I provided to ACT Policing, referred to at paragraph 5. At the time I provided this statement to ACT Policing, I was suspended from work (with pay), related to this [redacted] misconduct investigation.

11. On 24 January 2024 [redacted] sent a letter to [redacted], ACT Professional Standards Unit, related to the [redacted] search. [redacted] was asked to particularise which offence under the Corrections Management Act 1997, or which policy or procedure had been breached by me during the [redacted] search. To my knowledge there has never been a response to these questions, and the allegations were never particularised. The letter is included **(Attachment E)**.

12. In early August 2024 I received a letter (dated 08 August 2024) from [redacted] of the PSSC. The letter advised that the PSSC had decided to discontinue the investigative process for the [redacted] search. No advice was provided to me as to why the matter had been discontinued. Subsequently my suspension was lifted, and I returned to work on 28 August 2024. The [redacted] letter is included **(Attachment F)**.

13. In June 2025, I submitted a claim to Comcare via Employers Mutual Limited (EML) for significant stress related medical conditions related to the treatment I had received from ACT Corrective Services, concerning the [redacted] searches. The initial claim was rejected by EML.

14. I appealed this decision and later received a letter dated 14 August 2025 from EML Solutions (Case Manager [redacted]). The letter contained an EML summary of advice and statements obtained by ProCare (on behalf of EML) from [redacted]. Part of the document stated: *“During this time, a detainee made an allegation to a number of escalation points, including The Human Rights Commission. Upon review of the allegation, it showed that you were the officer in charge of a strip search”*. [redacted] stated that *“rank does not apply in these situations. CCTV showed*

that you did not intervene to stop the assault of the detainee, as the officer in charge.”

From the description, I believe this relates to the search. To date, I have never been contacted by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) regarding the search, I am unaware if there was / is an ongoing HRC investigation related to this matter. In rejecting the Comcare Appeal, EML stated: *“Having considered the information available, I am satisfied that your injury was contributed to, to a significant degree, by your employment; however, I am also satisfied that the contributing factors were reasonable administrative actions, undertaken in a reasonable manner by your employer. Therefore, I am unable to accept your claim for compensation in accordance with section 14 of the SRC Act”*. A copy of the EML letter is included **(Attachment G)**. This matter remains the subject of appeal with the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART).

15. On 21 July 2025, I received notification from ACT Policing that I was to be charged with Common Assault, related to the search. I advised ACT Corrective Services of this development, and as a result I was suspended *without* pay on 06 August 2025.

16. On 12 March 2026, I sent a letter to Commissioner Close, requesting that ACT Corrections correct the incorrect information that had contributed to me being criminally charged and also the rejection of my workers compensation claim. In that letter I included a list of 6 strip searches in recent years that had been conducted using the same search technique I had utilised for the search. A copy of that letter and Commissioner Close’ response is included. **(Attachment H)**.

17. On 07 May 2026, I was acquitted in the ACT Magistrates Court of the assault charge. Magistrate Stewart found I had committed no offence and that I had performed the search as a part of my duties, and the search had been completed consistent with my training. The Magistrate also stated that had I not completed the search and recovered the contraband from , I would have been responsible for all negative outcomes that may have occurred after that time. As a result, my suspension was lifted, my pay was reinstated and I was provided backpay for the period I had been suspended without pay. A copy of the court judgement is included **(Attachment I)**. Regarding this, please see note the police brief of evidence that was provided in my earlier complaint to the Committee. Five of the Correction officer witnesses in that brief of evidence all state that the search technique was a well-known practice that had been taught and utilised for years at the AMC. In the PSU investigation report all Corrections Officers stated that the technique was well known, utilised, and trained for many years.

18. In his police record of conversation, ACT Corrections Officer CO3 stated he had been an ACT Corrections Field Training Officer since 2003. stated the strip search controlled hand / guided hand technique had been a workplace practice for at least 15 years. He also stated he had delivered training in this technique to Corrections recruit training courses, in PowerPoint displays, then followed up with physical practice.

19. In her record of conversation with the PSU, Senior Director of Custodial Operations Training, ACT Corrective Services, , stated : *“In my experience over the last 8 years in ACTS, I can confirm the action of an officer placing their hand/s on a detainee ‘s wrist and arm when the detainee is willing to retrieve an item located during a search has been used and accepted practice, whilst each situation is different and needs to be assessed on a case by case basis, it is a safety/protective measure that officers use to ensure themselves and the detainees are not injured in the event the item is a weapon or drugs etc”*. Senior Director also stated: *“The guiding technique is not specifically written into any policy and is just something that has been in operational practice and utilised to ensure officer and detainee safety.”* The police record of conversation with CO3 and the PSU record of conversation with Senior Director is included **(Attachment J)**.

20. On 10 June 2026 I was cleared by the PSSC of the misconduct investigation into the search. The PSSC found that I had not breached any protocol, policy or guideline and the search had been conducted in a manner consistent with the training I had received. A copy of the outcome letter and investigation report is included **(Attachment K)**.

Conclusion

Search Narrative:

Regarding MLA Emerson’s opening question to Commissioner Leanne Close at your Estimates hearing, which reads (in part): *“Did this practice follow standard protocol for removing contraband during a strip search, forcing a prisoners’ fingers into their anal area to do so.”* Through no fault of MLA Emerson, this narrative is factually untrue. It could have been corrected by Commissioner Close, but it was not.

This narrative is an unvarnished repeat of the allegation made by detainee , unsupported by evidence. At the hearing, ACT Magistrate Stewart found lacked credibility and had “a motive to lie.” In addition, the search was recorded on AMC security (video) footage. During the hearing, the Magistrates court reviewed and played the footage in front of multiple witnesses, on multiple occasions.

Regarding the search, after identifying a foreign object between buttock cheeks, at my request consented to remove the item himself. I conducted this strip search consistent with my training. At no time did I ever force own fingers into his own anal area. I find it hard to ascertain how such a forced manoeuvre would even be physically possible. As I did not know what the foreign object was, consistent with my training, I secured the arm of while he removed the object. The object fell onto the ground between legs. Had the item been a weapon such as a knife, screwdriver or razor blade, I considered it dangerous to allow to remove the item without control of his arm. Had I not taken control of his arm, I could have exposed myself, the other Officers present and to serious injury. In addition, I was also concerned of a risk would attempt to swallow the foreign object. If this was allowed to occur, particularly regards weapons or illicit drugs, safety could be at significant risk. During my Corrections career, I have observed detainees attempt to swallow items recovered from between their buttock cheeks or groin area, on at least 15 occasions. These issues were foremost in my mind when I conducted the strip search on .

Corrective Services Training

I would also like to raise the issue of Corrective Services Training. Amongst other information, Commissioner Close gave evidence to the committee that the search was *not a practice that was endorsed*. She also stated it was *something that became a practice that some officers thought was appropriate to try to remove contraband for the safety of the detainees and themselves*. This is very misleading to your committee. There is a plethora of evidence that this technique was taught and utilised at the AMC on a regular basis for many years. The advice provided by ACT Corrective Services that they were unable to identify a written policy or procedure does not mean the practice was not widely used. It most certainly was, and it was viewed by Officers as an important practice to ensure detainees and Corrections staff safety.

PSSC Investigation

I would also like to raise the issue of the PSSC investigation. During the estimates committee Commissioner Close advised, regarding the former PSSC investigation into me, that *“normal processes are underway in relation to the Professional Standards Unit so the Public Sector Standards Commission had this matter in abeyance, when the criminal matter was happening, and it’s up to that organisation as to whether they felt there was further need to take further disciplinary action or recommend that to me”*.

When asked by MLA Emerson if they (PSSC) have an ongoing investigation, Commissioner Close responded: *“They did have, I’m not sure if it’s completed at this point.”* This information is very misleading to your committee. I point you to an email dated 07 August 2026 from the PSSC, which states (quote): *“I can confirm that you are*

definitely not under investigation by the Professional Standards Unit in relation to the search of _____, nor in relation to any other matter.” The PSSC email is included **(Attachment L)**. I also point you again to the PSU report and PSSC outcome letter, provided in my earlier complaint, which clears me of any misconduct.

I would also like to advise that, as a result of the evidence given to the committee by Commissioner Close, The Canberra Times published an article dated 02 August 2026 that the officer concerned (myself) was still the subject of PSSC investigation concerning the strip search. My name was raised publicly at another Estimates Committee hearing with the ACT DPP on 04 August 2026. Because of this, it is not difficult to link information and identify who I am. Since the release of this article, I have received numerous inquiries from ACT Corrections Officers querying whether I am still the subject of PSSC investigation. This media article is factually incorrect and a clear example of how Commissioner Close has provided misleading evidence to your committee. This article has, and continues to, disparage my character, as to my knowledge, the article is still publicly available. Please see the Canberra Times article **(Attachment M)**.

Request / Sought Outcome:

In addressing the committee, I am respectfully requesting the committee assist with the following:

1. Communication be made with EML and advise that some information related to my claim and provided by ACT Corrections is false, which has contributed to my CML (Comcare) claim being rejected. I am requesting CML conduct a fresh review of my claim based on the correct facts.
2. To ensure accuracy and truth, your committee require ACT Corrections to account for the information they have provided and explain the information they have provided to your committee.
3. ACT Corrections be required to publicly correct the Canberra Times article and provide me a public apology, for the damage to my reputation.
4. In considering these matters I request you also factor in all the (previous) information I have already provided in my original complaint to your committee and the ACT Integrity Commission.

Thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully,

Sean Alexander Harrison
 ACT Corrections Officer Grade 1
 22 August 2026