



19 May 2023

Tēnā koe

On 18 April 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

*I work in Stuff's Waikato newsroom and want to find out more about threats made to Work and Income. This is a request under the Official Information Act about threats over the past five years.*

**National**

- *How many threats have been made to Work and Income nationally in each of the following years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and so far in 2023?*
- *Have any of these resulted in injury to staff? If so, where and when did this happen, and how much time off did the staff member require?*
- *A breakdown of the number of threats made nationally, for 2022 and so far in 2023, by whether threats were made in person, by phone, electronically or any other way*
- *What are the most common threats received by Work and Income?*
- *For 2022 and so far in 2023, how many times were the police called and how many times did a site have to go into lockdown?*
- *What is the longest time a site had to remain in lockdown? When and where was this, and what was the outcome?*
- *Between the start of 2018 and so far in 2023, how many people have had a warning letter and how many people have been trespassed after making threats?*

**Waikato**

- *How many threats have been made to Work and Income in Waikato in each of the following years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and so far in 2023?*

- *Have any of these Waikato threats resulted in injury to staff? If so, where and when did this happen, and how much time off did the staff member require?*
- *A breakdown of the Waikato threat figures, for 2022 and so far in 2023, by whether threats were made in person, by phone, electronically or any other way*
- *What are the most common threats received by Work and Income in the Waikato?*
- *For 2022 and so far in 2023, how many times were the police called for Waikato Work and Income sites and how many times did a site have to go into lockdown?*
- *What is the longest time a Waikato site had to remain in lockdown? When and where was this, and what was the outcome?*
- *Between the start of 2018 and so far in 2023, how many people have had a warning letter and how many people have been trespassed after making threats in Waikato?*

*I would also like to hear anything you have to add about your process for dealing with threats and making offices physically safer.*

The Ministry places a high priority on the safety of its staff and clients and has in place a comprehensive security approach to reduce the potential for harm to staff, the public or visitors. The Ministry has made significant investment in the physical safety features of offices in particular for our frontline sites.

The Ministry has zero tolerance for threatening and abusive behaviour towards its staff, clients and others we work with. All threats to staff, tautiaki (security guards) or other clients are taken seriously and assessed to determine whether further action is required.

You have submitted several queries. For clarity and convenience, I have combined your questions for national and Waikato data to align with the attached **APPENDIX** and tables. I will answer each of your queries in turn.

- *How many threats have been made to Work and Income nationally and in Waikato, in each of the following years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and so far in 2023?*

Please refer to **APPENDIX**, rows 14 to 19 which show the numbers of threats made from the year ended 2019 to 31 March 2023. Due to changes in the system of recording threats from part-way through 2018, including categories used, 2018 numbers cannot be consistently reported. We have therefore provided you with data from the year ended 2019, with 2018 following immediately below. Please note that the 2018 results are estimates only and are as follow:

**Threats made:**

	2018 (est)
NZ	892
Waikato	119

**Injuries:**

	2018 (est)
Auckland Region	1
Canterbury Region	2

**Trespasses and Warning letters:**

	2018 (est)	
	Trespass Notice	Warning Letter
NZ	136	109
Waikato	24	20

The Ministry is continually looking at ways to improve reporting and the change we introduced for recording threats part-way through 2018 is very different to the previous recording system. The information now recorded provides a more detailed picture of the different types of threats recorded. This improved system supports better analysis and enables a more nuanced approach when responding to threats made to staff and clients.

- *Have any of these resulted in injury to staff? Nationally or in Waikato. If so, where and when did this happen, and how much time off did the staff member require?*

Please refer to the attached **APPENDIX**, rows 24 to 37, which show the number of staff who have suffered injury, nationally and in Waikato.

In rows 42 and 43, the table shows the number of staff who suffered injury and the number of sites where those occurred. The names of the sites are withheld to protect client privacy. Releasing this information could lead to identifying the individuals concerned. As such, this information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs and public interest in the information.

With regard to how much time injured staff have taken off work due to injury in any circumstances, the Ministry only records this information in individual staff personal files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

- *A breakdown of the number of threats made nationally and in Waikato, for 2022 and so far in 2023, by whether threats were made in person, by phone, electronically or any other way.*

Please refer to the attached **APPENDIX**, rows 47 to 66.

- *What are the most common threats received by Work and Income? Nationally and in Waikato.*

Please refer to the attached **APPENDIX**, rows 71 to 77. You may find it helpful that we have provided the different types of threats that present to the Ministry.

- *For 2022 and so far in 2023, how many times were the police called and how many times did a site have to go into lockdown? Nationally and in Waikato.*

Please refer to the attached **APPENDIX**, rows 80 to 84 and 90 to 91.

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.

Where a person threatens self-harm, the Police are notified in order to ensure the safety of the client and to make a referral to the appropriate support and services.

- *What is the longest time a site had to remain in lockdown? Nationally and in Waikato. When and where was this, and what was the outcome?*

The Ministry does not record the length of time sites spend in lockdown. I am therefore refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or is closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- *Between the start of 2018 and so far in 2023, how many people have had a warning letter and how many people have been trespassed after making threats? Nationally and in Waikato.*

Please see the attached **APPENDIX**, rows 96 to 99. As noted earlier in this letter, changes to reporting systems were introduced part way through 2018 and the previous reporting methodology is no longer considered relevant. The system changes included reporting on any other matters associated with threats, such as warning letters and trespass notices.

The Ministry does not issue trespass notices lightly, and once issued, works to ensure the needs of the client are addressed, while maintaining the safety of staff. Before issuing a trespass notice, Site Managers will first consider:

- the seriousness of the incident or offence committed
- whether it is the first incident or offence
- whether it is likely to happen again
- the person's attitude after the incident and whether they are likely to heed a warning letter and change their behaviour.

Work and Income ensures that clients who have been trespassed from Work and Income sites continue to receive assistance. Once a trespass notice has been served, the client is notified in writing and informed that they are no longer able to meet face-to-face with Work and Income.

Clients who have been issued a trespass notice are advised they can appoint an agent to act on their behalf when dealing with the Ministry. Where no agent is willing to act on the person's behalf, or the person is not willing to have an agent, contact is made by telephone or email. Work and Income works with the client to ensure alternative contact arrangements are in place.

Trespass notices are effective for two years from the date they are issued. The physical addresses of all Ministry sites and service centres that are to be covered will be specified on the trespass notice.

Clients who have been trespassed and pose a high risk to the safety of Ministry staff may be referred to the Remote Services Unit. This unit provides specialist case management via telephone, fax, email or mail.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 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 and
- 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 and attachments on the Ministry'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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response about threats to 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pauline Stenhouse', with a long, wavy horizontal line extending to the right.

Pauline Stenhouse  
**General Manager**  
**Health Safety and Security**