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FOI Documents Reveal Victoria Police Pushed for Stricter Arson Bail Laws

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Freedom of Information (FOI) documents show Victoria Police urged the Australian Labor Party (ALP) government to tighten bail laws for arsonists amid Melbourne's escalating tobacco wars, though most requests were ignored. This article examines the police's push for reform, the government's limited response, and the ongoing challenge of curbing firebombings linked to organized crime.

In February 2025, Victoria Police submitted a briefing note to Police Minister Anthony Carbines, advocating for stricter bail conditions for five serious arson-related offenses to combat the surge in firebombings tied to Melbourne’s illicit tobacco trade, which has seen 140 attacks since March 2023 (ABC News, July 22, 2025). The documents, obtained via FOI, reveal police sought to remove the presumption of bail, requiring accused arsonists to prove a “compelling reason” for release. However, the ALP government, led by Premier Jacinta Allan, only amended the Bail Act to remove bail presumption for one offense—arson endangering life—leaving most firebombings, often targeting empty shops at night, unaffected (ABC News, July 22, 2025). Of 23 arrests and six arson charges, four suspects were granted bail, highlighting enforcement gaps (ABC News, July 22, 2025).

The government’s broader bail reforms, passed in March 2025, prioritized community safety by reclassifying home invasions and carjackings as serious offenses and introducing a “second-strike” rule for indictable offenses committed on bail (Premier of Victoria, March 12, 2025). Carbines acknowledged police concerns but critics argue the changes fall short of addressing arson’s root causes, driven by Middle Eastern crime gangs vying for control of the \$1 billion illicit tobacco market (ABC News, July 22, 2025). A government spokesperson claimed the reforms elevated serious arson to Schedule 2 offenses, requiring tougher bail tests, but legal groups like Victoria Legal Aid warn such measures risk over-incarceration for minor crimes (Victoria Legal Aid, March 12, 2025).

Public frustration is evident, with X users like @MelbCrimeWatch calling for harsher penalties to deter repeat offenders (July 21, 2025). The limited response to police recommendations raises questions about the ALP’s

commitment to tackling organized crime, as firebombings continue to threaten Victorian communities, demanding a stronger, more targeted approach to bail reform and enforcement.