



**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 9 December 2025**

**By authority of the Victorian Government Printer**



## **Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

### **60th Parliament**

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Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

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Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,  
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Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

#### **Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

#### **Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

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#### **Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>7</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Berham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>9</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>5,6</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>11</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>10</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,

Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Tuesday 9 December 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 11:03 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Announcements***Photography in chamber**

**The SPEAKER** (11:04): I welcome everyone to today's sitting. I remind visitors that mobile phones must be on silent and no photography is allowed. However, I advise the house that I have given approval for a photographer to take photos from the public gallery, the media gallery and the Hansard box. The photographs will be used by the Parliament for community engagement purposes.

*Motions***Apology to First Peoples**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (11:04): I table the statement of apology to First Peoples.

**Ordered to be published.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I move:

That this house endorses the apology to First Peoples tabled today, acknowledges the past laws, policies, and practices that have contributed to systemic injustice for First Peoples and affirms that under treaty, Victorians will move together toward a new and better future.

This Parliament expresses our formal and sincere apology to First Peoples of Victoria for the harm inflicted upon them through the actions and inactions of the state and the colony that came before it in the following terms. Decisions made in this Parliament over its long history have long denied the First Peoples of this land their rights and their self-determination. Today this Parliament becomes a place of reckoning, and that reckoning has meaning for all of us who call Victoria home. We acknowledge the harm inflicted on generations of First Peoples and mark the beginning of a new era, one that embraces truth, honours justice and creates space for a shared future built in full view of the past.

We acknowledge that many of us did not know about the true extent of this harm until the work of the truth-telling Yoorrook Justice Commission. Whether we came here 174 years ago when the colony of Victoria was formed or in the decades since, we came dreaming of a better future. The commission has transformed the way we reckon with this state's history and face the truths shared by elders, survivors, families and community leaders. But the better futures for many came at the expense of others, making plain what was long buried beneath denial and shame. The Yoorrook Justice Commission found that sovereignty of First Peoples in Victoria was never ceded. This is what traditional owners have always maintained. Colonisation of what is now called Victoria was not peaceful; it was rapid and violent. Lands and waters were taken without consent. Communities were displaced, languages silenced, children removed, lives lost. The Yoorrook Justice Commission heard that the laws and policies of the colonial and Victorian governments enabled these acts, not by accident but by design. The actions and inactions of the state and the colony that came before it, carried out through words spoken and laws passed in the chamber of Parliament, resulted in profound and undeniable harms, the effects of which we are still grappling with today. We can no longer look away.

Now that we have a Statewide Treaty, a negotiated agreement between equals, we can begin to say what should have been said a long time ago. To ensure that the wrongs of the past are never repeated, we say sorry. To all the First Peoples in the gallery today and to every community across this state, we say sorry. For the laws, the policies and the decisions of this Parliament and those that came before it, laws that took land, removed children, broke families and tried to erase culture, we say sorry. For the tears shed in the dark, for the silence that shadowed their years, for the childhoods taken never to return, for the stolen generations, we say sorry. For the violence committed under the banner of the

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state and the colony that came before it, and for the neglect that allowed it to continue without consequence, we say sorry.

For the laws that criminalised culture and punished survival, we say sorry. For the wealth built on lands and waters taken without consent while First Peoples were locked out of prosperity, we say sorry. For the silencing of language and the erasure of words that carried knowledge older than the state itself, we say sorry. The loss of those languages is a loss for all of us, for they held truths about this ancient land that we may now never fully understand.

For the forced removal of families to missions and reserves where culture was controlled, movement restricted and identity denied, we say sorry. For the policies that stripped First Peoples of the right to move freely, to marry without permission, to work for fair wages or to live with dignity on their own land, we say sorry. For the laws and policies which removed First Peoples from their lands and allowed the sale of sacred sites without consent, we say sorry. For the laws that filled institutions disproportionately with First Peoples and made this seem ordinary, we say sorry. For the harm that was done and the harm that continues, we say sorry with resolve to work with you to address injustice in all its guises. And to those who carried the truth their whole lives but did not live to hear it spoken here, we say sorry. From today our hope is that your descendants and all Victorians hear these truths and move forward together in the knowledge of your legacies.

We offer this apology with open minds, open eyes and open hearts. We know that words alone are not enough. This is why the state of Victoria has pursued treaty – to create the enduring change that must follow. So let this be one act, one act among the many, that honours the truth and upholds justice. Through treaty we commit to building a future where the power taken is returned, where the voices silenced are heard and where the relationship between First Peoples and the state is remade, not in the image of the past but in a future of equality and respect for all our peoples. If this apology is to carry more than words and the intention of members today, then we must certify through what we do next that treaty is not merely a gesture, it is a pathway to healing and change. It is how we begin to right the wrongs that apology alone cannot mend.

So to those who held the truth close, both present and gone, and to those yet to carry its weight and wisdom, we offer this promise: Victoria will not look away – not from the truth, not from the work, not from you. I commend this apology to the house.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (11:14): I rise on behalf of the Liberal and Nationals coalition today, and I acknowledge the remarks of the Premier. I also acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, and through them I acknowledge all members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and all Indigenous people who are here today. I want to thank Rueben and Ngarra for their advocacy and engagement with me, my colleague Melina Bath and other members of the coalition. This engagement has always been conducted in good faith and from a place of respect, and I give you my commitment that this will continue.

Today I start by acknowledging the deep hurt that has been experienced by Aboriginal people since the arrival of the first Europeans to these shores. I acknowledge the courage of elders and community members who have shared their stories through the Yoorrook Justice Commission and other processes. I acknowledge the immense contribution that Aboriginal Victorians make to our state – as leaders, carers, workers, parents, volunteers and custodians of the world's oldest living cultures.

To all Aboriginal Victorians listening today, I say this plainly: I see the injustice in our history, I see the disadvantage that still exists today and I am determined that we must do better. We accept that this Parliament and governments past have authored laws and policies that have hurt and caused injustice and disadvantage to Aboriginal Victorians, and for that we say sorry.

Today is a historic day, but it is not an unprecedented day. Nearly 30 years ago in this place, on 17 September 1997, Premier Jeff Kennett put forward a motion apologising to Aboriginal people on

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behalf of all Victorians for the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. In his speech on the motion Premier Kennett said:

... Aboriginal people occupy a special place in Victoria as members of an indigenous community that suffered greatly in the past through acts of discrimination.

He went on to say:

This discrimination and its long-term effects must be understood and acknowledged if Aboriginal people and other Australians are to achieve genuine reconciliation within the context of a truly multicultural Victoria.

Almost 30 years on from this important moment in Victorian history we in the Liberal and National parties continue to support every word of the apology motion that was passed by all sides of the Parliament in Victoria. Unlike the motion before us at present, the apology in 1997 was brought forward by both sides of Parliament, with Premier Kennett working in collaboration with then opposition leader John Brumby on a form of words both sides of the house could endorse. The text of that apology reads as follows:

That this house apologises to the Aboriginal people on behalf of all Victorians for the past policies under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families and expresses deep regret at the hurt and distress this has caused and reaffirms its support for reconciliation between all Australians.

Thirty years ago these words were effectively unprecedented. They preceded Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology by a decade. And perhaps most significantly, when Jeff Kennett delivered his apology he made this very important remark:

The Victorian government is committed to working with Aboriginal communities to deliver programs to address their undoubted disadvantage but, more importantly, this government is committed to assisting Aboriginal communities to become economically sustainable ...

I want to bring to the chamber's attention this remark, because I believe this is where governments have failed over the decades that have followed to make meaningful improvements in addressing the disadvantage that continues to persist in the lives of too many Aboriginal Victorians. I do not believe that anybody in this place could argue that the progress we have made in addressing Indigenous disadvantage in the period between Premier Kennett's apology and today is acceptable. We can and we must do more. We must take meaningful steps to address Indigenous disadvantage and empower Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities.

I want to emphasise that the difference in approach between the coalition and the government represents a policy disagreement on the most effective method to achieve meaningful outcomes and improvements for Indigenous Victorians. It does not represent a disagreement on the need to achieve these outcomes and improvements. As Prime Minister John Howard said in 1997 in his opening address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention here in Melbourne:

It cannot seriously be argued that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not, as a group, profoundly disadvantaged.

Sadly, almost three decades on, the truth of this statement remains largely unchanged. Again, I emphasise that the policy difference is a matter of approach, not a dispute on the substance of the issue, which is that governments have a responsibility to do more, much more, to address Indigenous disadvantage and empower Indigenous communities.

There are meaningful steps that can be taken without delay. We must fund education programs to improve attendance and learning outcomes for Indigenous children in our schools. We must invest in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. We must implement diversionary programs to keep Indigenous youth out of the justice system. We must empower Aboriginal community controlled organisations with secure funding and genuine decision-making authority. We must act to create job readiness programs to lift economic participation for Indigenous Victorians. Good intentions matter, but so too do good outcomes. Actions matter, and they matter far more than mere sentiments. Too often we hear a sentiment expressed in the community that we have inherited a collective guilt. I

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believe what we have inherited is a responsibility to address persistent and unacceptable Indigenous disadvantage.

Speaker, through you, I want to address my remarks now to Rueben and Ngarra and through them to the others who are here today who have worked to establish the framework enacted by the Statewide Treaty Act 2025. I give you my word that if the Victorian people elect a Liberal and Nationals government in 2026, we will work with you to progress our shared goals of addressing disadvantage and creating opportunities for Indigenous Victorians. We will work with Aboriginal leaders, elders and communities, including those who disagree strongly with us, to seek practical, measurable improvements in people's lives. If we are going to deliver for Indigenous Victorians, we must bring all Victorians on the journey towards closing the gap.

Noel Pearson speaks of the three great threads of our shared Australian story: our rich Indigenous heritage, our significant British inheritance and our incredible migrant success story. All three strands are worthy of acknowledgement and of celebration, but in acknowledging that we must also acknowledge the significant disadvantage still confronted by our First Peoples and commit together to addressing it. My appeal to all Victorians is simple and goes to the love of this great country and how we as a nation have always prized a fair go. The continued disadvantage of our Aboriginal people diminishes us all. On behalf of the Liberal and Nationals coalition, I commit to addressing it if elected in 2026.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (11:22): It is with deep respect that I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the lands on which this Parliament meets, and I pay respects to the elders, ancestors, leaders and knowledge holders of that group. I also acknowledge and pay respect to all the traditional owners across the lands and waters now known as Victoria. I also want to acknowledge the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, the elected members and co-chairs. Thank you for working with us to make the apology happen by representing your communities with heart and skill and for trusting in our new relationship together. I extend my gratitude to members of Parliament present here today, to the Premier for her leadership, to Sheena Watt MP, to Christine Couzens MP and to the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gab Williams.

For tens of thousands of years First Peoples cared for country, living with rich culture, languages and knowledge systems. I acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Peoples in Victoria, who have fought to defend their right to practise law, lore and culture on their country. Yoorrook found that the colonisation of Victoria was characterised by dispossession, by violence and by injustice. I encourage all Victorians to engage with the Yoorrook Justice Commission's *Truth Be Told* final report. *Truth Be Told* draws on thousands of stories shared bravely and generously across the state to form a powerful record of Victoria's history from the perspective of First Peoples. It is because of this shared history that we are gathered here today.

It was with anger and sorrow that I read in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's *Truth Be Told* that the period of 1834 to the 1850s was characterised by rampant displacement and violence. It is now known that at least 50 massacres happened here in Victoria against First Nations peoples. It was with anger and sorrow that I read, in *Truth Be Told*, that it is estimated that in the 1850s 2000 First Peoples remained across the lands we now call Victoria, a once-thriving population reduced by 90 per cent in less than two decades. It was with anger and sorrow that I read, in *Truth Be Told*, about laws and policies of our predecessors in this Parliament that disrupted First Peoples' connections to their traditional lands and waters, that separated families, that prevented language from being taught and cultural practice from being engaged in. It was with anger and sorrow that I reflect on past governments' policies, such as the Aborigines Protection Act 1869 and its successor acts through which First Peoples were forced off country and onto missions and reserves. Under these acts many First Peoples – adults and children – were denied their basic human rights.

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As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from 2014 to 2018 and Minister for Treaty and First Peoples since 2023, I acknowledge that since the passing of the Aborigines Protection Act in 1869 there have been 74 acts about Aboriginal people passed through this Parliament. The majority of these were created without Aboriginal voices, but they had a huge, immense impact on their everyday lives. Yoorrook found that these laws, policies and practices enacted by people who have sat in these chairs before us subjugated Aboriginal people, including the stealing of their children, the creation of stolen generations, the taking of wages, the disregard of the service conducted by Aboriginal service men and women at war, the silencing of language and exclusion from political, economic and social life. Aboriginal families, communities and cultures were dislocated in a way that can never be reversed. The gap between First Peoples and other Victorians in life expectancy, education, employment and health has not closed.

As Minister for Treaty and First Peoples I too extend my apology to First Peoples for the profound injustices endured by First Peoples since the start of colonisation. Aboriginal people have lived on this land, they have practised their culture, they have spoken their language and sung in their language. They have connected to their songlines, to the stars and to the sacred places all their lives for over 65,000 years. Aboriginal people have developed sophisticated societies, economies and political decision-making. We only have to look here in our own backyard at the legacy that leaders of the Wurundjeri left when they were present here on this very site of Parliament. The Wurundjeri negotiated, they conducted ceremony, they upheld relationships with their many neighbouring Aboriginal nations. The strength, the love, the respect and the resilience of Aboriginal people are evident in every corner of Victoria, from the Aboriginal-run tourist enterprises like Budj Bim through to Aboriginal health organisations in each community, to the ovals of the Rumbalara and Fitzroy Stars football clubs, to the halls of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, to the rallies that happen on Melbourne's streets.

Aboriginal people have survived persecution on their own lands. They continue to resist systemic injustices. We all know the facts. Aboriginal women are more likely to have their children removed from them. They are more likely to be victims of family and domestic violence. We all understand that Aboriginal people experience worse life outcomes than other Victorians. The time has come to stop these injustices. It is up to us to act in love and respect, to make equity and justice a reality for First Peoples and therefore for all Victorians. Aboriginal people are resilient. Victoria's First People are strong. First Peoples cultures are intelligent, they hold incredible wisdom, and we all have something to learn from Aboriginal resilience and knowledge. That is why we have treaty. Treaty acknowledges and affirms this truth that should have been told many years ago. Treaty builds a future where past harms cannot be repeated and where Victorians can move forward together.

Treaty ensures that our children and future generations grow up understanding the truth of our past. Treaty ensures they grow up not feeling the burden and weight of our past, not feeling immobilised by guilt or shame, but proud – proud that we share this state with the oldest living culture on earth and proud to be a part of a society that embraces truth and honours justice to create a better shared future together.

This is a better future for all Victorians, and this apology today is a line in the sand. Here, as a community, we stand strong and we say no to exclusion, no to culture wars, no to racism and no to discrimination. To the First Peoples, we hear you, we see you, we love you. We respect your culture, and we will not turn our backs on you – not now, not ever.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (11:31): To begin, I acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung of the Kulin nation, whose lands this Parliament sits on, and pay my respects to elders past and present and to all First Nations people here today and across the land we now call Victoria.

It is a deep privilege to stand here today to add my voice to the apology to First Nations peoples for the wrongs inflicted upon them by the state and the colony of Victoria, by the colonisation of their home – of your home. When I was growing up there was a lot of talk about reconciliation, but as we

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know from so many postwar healing processes around the world, true reconciliation can only come after truth and justice. To move forward we must deeply and honestly reckon with the past, and this apology today is part of that reckoning. So it is my privilege and honour to stand here on behalf of all Greens MPs and members and on behalf of our constituents and the Victorians we are elected to represent to apologise to the First Nations people of so-called Victoria for the deep harms, the dispossession, the trauma and the genocide that was perpetrated by our ancestors against yours, to say clearly and loudly and solemnly: I am sorry – we are sorry – for the injustices of the past and the decisions that were made in this building, which we know still have deep impacts in the present.

I want to acknowledge everyone in the gallery today and watching online for their generosity at being here today for this apology. I know the apology will mean different things to different people. For some, the state government finally admitting and officially acknowledging the wrongs of the past will be a deeply healing event. For others, the meaning of the apology will be in the action or inaction that comes after it.

In preparing for this speech I reflected on the immense work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission and all those who shared their stories over five years. The evidence was laid out – clear and undeniable – about the true history of how most of us came to live in so-called Victoria. It is not easy reading, but nothing changes the facts, no matter how uncomfortable we may find them. It is important to talk about what we are saying sorry for. In Victoria, unfortunately, it is a little hard to know where to start, such was the swift, brutal and systematic nature of attempts to wipe out Aboriginal people – to wipe out their culture, their language, their children and their future.

Many of my ancestors arrived in the mid-1800s, mostly Irish Catholics escaping famine, oppression and the law. Many in this place, I imagine, have a similar family history. Just a few years before this, in 1839, two Aboriginal men from Lutruwita / Tasmania, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, were brought to the colony of Victoria. In 1841 they were among a group of guerrilla resistance fighters who fought throughout Victoria. A year later they were caught and convicted of the murder of two whale hunters, and they became the first people to be hanged in Melbourne in public, to communicate a political message to Aboriginal people considering armed resistance to colonisation. A memorial to these two men sits just down the road from this building, but most of us were not taught this history, because it did not fit the narrative that our predecessors wanted to tell about this country. Victoria's colonisation was not peaceful, it was brutal.

Growing up I was taught a story, which I think would be fairly common to many of us in this room, of the frontier, of struggle and of Australia providing a place of peace, freedom and opportunity. But this peace and freedom and opportunity was not granted to Victoria's original inhabitants – quite the opposite. We were not taught about 1842, when six settlers in western Victoria found a group of Gai-wurrung and Djab Wurrung families sleeping under a clump of tea-tree and then shot them, killing a boy and four women, one of whom was pregnant. Historians believe that the massacre was premeditated and carried out simply to relieve the boredom of a summer evening. When two survivors reported the incident, all the way up to the decision-makers in Melbourne, the perpetrators faced trial for only one count of murder and were swiftly declared not guilty by a jury.

We were not taught about what happened in 1834 when a whale washed up at the beach at Portland, and when the Gunditj clan members went to collect the meat, as they had done for thousands of years, they were massacred by white settlers who wanted the whale for themselves, killing around 60 people with no-one held to account. I certainly was not taught about the story that we found hidden in tiny print in a copy of my husband's family history book, where it mentioned his great-great-great-aunt, who 'kept the blacks at bay' with muskets on the farm in western Victoria. As the minister mentioned, there were at least 50 massacres across Victoria that are officially recorded in historical evidence, showing that people knew and governments knew. And now we all know. That is why today we say sorry.

## MOTIONS

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I feel very fortunate, having grown up with parents who lived in and worked in communities in the Tiwi Islands and in Mparntwe / Alice Springs, that I received perhaps more of an education about our true history than many people of my generation. But as a child and a teenager it was still hard to make sense of what I saw around me. Why was it that the Aboriginal kids in my town went to one school, while the white kids mostly went to another? Why was it that so many Aboriginal people were sent to live on the outskirts of town on particular streets, where few white people ever ventured? Why was it that my best friend in high school did not find out she was Aboriginal until she was a teenager because her family told everyone her grandmother was Italian rather than admit that she was Aboriginal? Why was it that my mum was told when she was a child that there were no Aboriginal people in Gippsland? Why was it that Aboriginal people had such immensely worse outcomes in health and education and were so over-represented in the justice and child protection systems? As the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* pointed out, it was not because there is something inherently different about First Nations people. These inequalities, this shame, were created as a result of 190 years of deliberate decisions and deliberate actions and then a concerted effort to hide and erase this history.

And it is not just the massacres that we are apologising for today. It is the racist policies of the past, many enacted in this very building: the children stolen from their parents; the human remains stolen from graves as curiosities; the forcing of Aboriginal people onto missions and reserves and then the passing of a law in 1865 that prohibited people on these missions from voting; the people forced into slavery-like conditions and never paid the wages owed to them; and the act of Parliament passed here in 1869 that gave the state power to determine who people could marry, where they could work and what they could do with their earnings. These are not things that are a matter of opinion. They are matters of fact. They happened.

I encourage people as they sit in this place to look at the ceiling. That is 24-carat gold leaf decorating the walls and ceiling of this building. Since 1851 more than \$290 billion worth of gold has been extracted from Victoria, but as Yoorrook heard, First Peoples have never received any of that wealth. Not only that, but deliberate policies enacted in this building – this building covered in gold – meant that Aboriginal people were not even allowed to own land, let alone pass that wealth on to their children. Those who committed these atrocities, who made these decisions, were overwhelmingly never held to account or brought to justice for their actions. But it is us, non-Aboriginal Victorians, who overwhelmingly benefited from these policies and decisions. We cannot go back in time and undo what has been done, but we can admit that it was deeply, profoundly wrong and apologise. There is a power in accepting that this is part of our history and then doing something to change it.

That is why it was a privilege to vote yes to treaty six weeks ago, to embark on a different and more hopeful path and to hand back some of the power to First Nations communities to have ownership over their own affairs so that things can be better in the future. Today is about not only saying sorry but committing to do better, so it would be negligent to ignore the fact that this apology comes during a time that is very difficult for many First Nations people. Last week the Victorian government passed laws to introduce life sentences for children and put children through the adult court system, which we know will have a disproportionate impact on First Nations children. Ngarra Murray, co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly, put it eloquently when she said:

Our peoples are already over-policed and over-represented in prison populations. Aboriginal communities will again bear the brunt of the government's proposed changes, which will result in Aboriginal children being locked up in prison and kept away from their families for longer.

We know Aboriginal women are also already bearing the brunt of the government's recent changes to bail laws, with the rate of First Nations women being held in prison before trial having risen drastically. Sue-Anne Hunter, the national commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, has called the recent youth justice laws:

... a moral failure that will have a resounding impact for the next generation and beyond.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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Looking back now at Victoria's true history, back to the actions of people in the 1800s and the 1900s, I believe most of us in this place would be horrified and say people should have known better. Right now we cannot deny it; we do know better. I fear that in 10 or 20 years time a new Parliament will have to stand in this exact same place and apologise again for policies enacted this year that governments knew would destroy more First Nations people's lives.

Many people deeply affected by the effects of colonisation did not live to see this apology. So as we take this important step in acknowledging and apologising for the wrongs of the past, we think of them. We think of the old people who endured so much, those who survived to share their culture with us and those who did not. But we also think of the young people, the future, and it is for their sake that we must not allow ourselves to repeat the same mistakes of the past. This apology is an important step for all of us. It is a first. I sincerely hope it will not be needed again. I commend the motion.

**The SPEAKER:** I thank members for their contributions on the motion and all members for attending today. I thank the Legislative Council members for attending today and advise that they must leave the chamber so the Assembly members may vote.

### Assembly divided on motion:

*Ayes (56):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

### Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 11:48 am until 12:03 pm.

### *Business of the house*

### Notices of motion and orders of the day

**The SPEAKER** (12:03): General business, notices of motion 18 and 19 and orders of the day 10 to 12, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

### *Documents*

### Documents

### Incorporated list as follows:

#### DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

*Financial Management Act 1994 – 2025–26 Budget Update (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report for the quarter ending on 30 September) – released on 5 December 2025*

Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission – Report 2024–25

Mental Health Tribunal – Report 2024–25

## BILLS

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*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Ballarat – C249

Wangaratta – C83

Warrnambool – C216

Yarra Ranges – C230

Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Account – Report 2024–25 on the disbursement of revenue

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* – SR 131

*Criminal Procedure Act 2009* – SR 131

*Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* – SR 129

*Magistrates' Court Act 1989* – SRs 132, 133, 134

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – SR 130

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 129, 135

Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing – Report 2024–25

**PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Act 2025* – Division 1 of Part 5 and ss 9, 14, 23, 24, 29 to 37, 40 to 42 and 62 to 64 – 3 December 2025; Part 7, Divisions 3 and 4 of Part 9 and ss 82 and 83 – 1 January 2026 (*Gazette S672, 2 December 2025*)

*Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Act 2024* – Remaining provisions – 1 February 2026 (*Gazette S648, 25 November 2025*)

*Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Act 2025* – Part 1 and ss 3, 4 and 5 – 3 December 2025 (*Gazette S672, 2 December 2025*)

*Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Act 2025* – Whole Act – 1 January 2026 (*Gazette S672, 2 December 2025*)

### *Bills*

#### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Bill 2025**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:04): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Bill 2025 without amendment.

#### **Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025**

*Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (12:04): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.**

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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### **Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025**

#### **Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025**

#### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Bill 2025**

#### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025**

#### **Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:04): I inform the house that today the Governor gave royal assent to the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025, the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Bill 2025, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

#### **Integrity Oversight Victoria**

*Performance audits*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:05): I move, by leave:

That:

- (1) Under section 170(1) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Act 2011 and section 90D(1) of the Integrity and Oversight Victoria Act 2011:
  - (a) O'Connor Marsden and Associates Pty Ltd (O'Connor Marsden) be appointed to conduct the performance audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) and Integrity Oversight Victoria (IOV);
  - (b) in accordance with the agreement for the provision of services for the performance audits of the IBAC and IOV;
  - (c) the level of remuneration be \$397,485 (including GST) in respect of the performance audit of IBAC, to be paid upon completion of the following:
    - (i) \$79,497 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's audit plan, representing 20 per cent of the total fee;
    - (ii) \$119,245.50 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's progress report, representing 30 per cent of the total fee;
    - (iii) \$198,742.50 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's final draft report, representing 50 per cent of the total fee; and
  - (d) the level of remuneration be \$205,700 (including GST) in respect of the performance audit of IOV, to be paid upon completion of the following:
    - (i) \$41,400 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's audit plan, representing 20 per cent of the total fee;
    - (ii) \$61,710 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's progress report, representing 30 per cent of the total fee;
    - (iii) \$102,850 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's final draft report, representing 50 per cent of the total fee.
- (2) A message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

**Motion agreed to.**

## MOTIONS

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### *Motions*

#### **Motions by leave**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:07): I move, by leave –

**Leave refused.**

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Caulfield! When leave is not granted, members are required to resume their seat.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:08): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Israeli forces have killed at least 375 Palestinians –

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:08): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 3 February 2026.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Felicitations**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (12:09): I want to wish a very merry Christmas and happy new year to everybody in the electorate of Nepean as we head into the holiday period. I wish you all a safe and happy new year, and I look forward to welcoming many members of this chamber and their constituents to my electorate over the summer. I pass on a huge thank you and merry Christmas to my staff – Barry, Julia, Edward, Ben and Marshall – for all their work this year. I also say thank you to all the clerks and everyone who works in the Parliament for the work they have done through 2025. I know everyone in this place appreciates the work that all the people that work in this chamber do.

I also, on behalf of my wife and my family, say a deep thank you to Sue Chrysanthou and Patrick George, as well as their teams. These are two people, along with Scarlett and Jeremy and everyone they work with, who have done an unbelievable service to my family in a professional capacity but also they are two of the greatest humans I have ever had the pleasure of dealing with. What they have done for my family over the course of the last six months is nothing short of amazing. I will be – and I know my wife Brit will be and our kids will one day understand – forever grateful to Sue and Patrick for everything they have done. I just want to put on the record in this house before 2025 finishes my absolute gratitude to Sue and Patrick for the work that they did. Thank you very much.

#### **Greensborough Baseball Club**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:10): I rise today to acknowledge the Greensborough Baseball Club, the oldest and most successful baseball club in the Diamond Valley, proudly celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. The club was founded back in 1955 by Alf Davey, a local resident who grew up on Sellars Street, Greensborough. Alf's passion for baseball inspired him to gather a small group of friends, including Leo Hoyt and Dave Stuble, to form a local team. They began practising in the area and soon approached the Victorian Baseball Association to enter a team, and thus began the Greensborough Baseball Club.

The club lives by its ethos 'Bigger than baseball', reflecting its commitment to inclusion, connection and community spirit. This year Greensborough honoured four extraordinary volunteers Matt Davine, David Hargreaves, Phil Cleary and Ken Butterworth, each celebrating 50 years of service. Their decades of contribution span the president, secretary, junior and senior coaching, assisting across the 3s and 4s and running the canteen, showcasing extraordinary dedication and community spirit. The club's junior program has produced 17 players who have gone on to compete in collegiate and professional baseball in the US and professional leagues in Japan. Today Greensborough Baseball Club supports 40 senior players, 25 juniors and around 60 social members, all contributing to its vibrant, welcoming and community-focused culture. I congratulate the president Michael Sullivan and the entire Greensborough baseball community on 70 years of success, service and sporting excellence in the Diamond Valley.

**Peranbin Primary College Swanpool campus**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (12:12): The sudden and silent closure of Swanpool primary school has left many in the community with unanswered questions. The school that has educated generations of local kids and sat at the heart of Swanpool for decades was shut without warning, without consultation and without respect for local families. The school has now quietly disappeared from official websites. Even the speed signs on the highway have been taken down. This is not transparency. This is not how you treat a community. So I am calling on the Minister for Education to explain to the community why he closed a school in regional Victoria without consultation.

**Shepparton rail line**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (12:12): Locals in Seymour and Shepparton were promised a V/Line train signalling upgrade would be finished by last month. The community fear the deadline has blown out again, and communities are left frustrated and in the dark. The upgrades are critical for safety, reliability and confidence in our rail network. People plan their lives around these services. They deserve honesty, not shifting timelines and excuses. Can the minister for transport confirm that the V/Line trains will resume, as my community is sick and tired of bus replacements? They want a clear date, accountability, delivery and not another delay, not another bus.

**Felicitations**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (12:13): As the year comes to a close I want to wish every family across the Euroa electorate a safe and happy Christmas. I hope this season brings you a moment to slow down, share a meal and spend time with the people you love. To my team Carmel, Nathan and Katie, you are absolute heroes. I love everything you do and how you support our region. To everyone working through the holidays keeping our communities running: thank you. Stay safe on the roads, take care of each other and may the new year bring hope and good news for our region.

**Oakleigh electorate schools**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:13): As the academic year has drawn to a close for some classes and some teachers and students and will for the rest over the next couple of weeks, I want to acknowledge the incredible work of our teaching community, from principals to teachers to all the staff at our fantastic schools both government and independent. I have 24 excellent schools that service my electorate – at least – and every year, like other members do, I present an award called the community spirit award to different students in each school. But I want to just acknowledge at the end of what is always a difficult year, an academic year, all students and teachers and parents, particularly, and carers.

**Oakleigh Glendi**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:14): The other thing I want to just acknowledge

is a few weeks ago I attended the annual Glendi festival in Oakleigh. This is a festival that has grown from strength to strength. Thirty thousand people attended over the weekend. It was just extraordinary, from cultural dances and food to incredible music and musicians from overseas – a well-known act from overseas – and the incredible students from Oakleigh Grammar and the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox community of Melbourne and Victoria. It is the proud commitment of the Allan Labor government to have four-year funding for this festival so they can plan for the future. We have funded this festival \$100,000 each year for four years. I could not be prouder of the Oakleigh Greek community and the festival they put on.

### Government performance

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:14): If the Allan Labor government released an album for 2025, it would be titled ‘Crisis and chaos, hits and losses’. Track 1 would be *Money for Nothing*, because Victorians pay record taxes while Labor wastes billions of dollars and delivers less; *Highway to Hell*, because we have a crime crisis with surging youth offending spiralling and communities feeling abandoned; track 3, *Under Pressure*, because we have a health crisis – our hospitals are overwhelmed, ambulances are ramped, patients are waiting for months for care; track 4, *Don’t Dream It’s Over*, because we know we have a housing crisis – housing is slipping out of reach, Labor’s latest tax slaps more than \$11,000 on new units near transport, and the member for Pascoe Vale knows that; track 5, *Another Brick in the Wall*, because we have an education crisis – education outcomes are falling, teachers are burning out and classrooms are struggling.

**Nick Staikos** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK**: Track 5, *Another Brick in the Wall*, member for Bentleigh, because we know education outcomes are falling. Track 6, we have *Oops! ... I Did It Again*, member for Bentleigh, because we have got another blowout, another crisis, another new tax – because Labor never learns. Then we have track 7, *I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*, member for Bentleigh, because the search on accountability and transparency is missing by this government.

### Ashleigh Riddell

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (12:16): Ashleigh Riddell is a superstar, excelling at every sport when at Our Lady Help of Christians and Catholic Ladies’ College, particularly football and basketball. Her parents Carole and Tony encouraged Ash’s footy passion at Eltham footy club, despite no girls teams. Ash put on her boots and played alongside boys, many bigger and stronger, holding her own with her pace and skills. Over time, being a girl became an administrative challenge for some and her junior footy playing sadly ended. Through tears and disappointment, Ash turned to basketball and Eltham Wildcats, becoming a valued player and coach. Once the AFLW began, Ash saw possibilities never available previously. It was not easy. Ash stared down critics of women’s footy and used the self-belief and determination she had shown as a junior. Picking herself back up after every disappointment, she kept working hard, and maybe Vinnie’s tips actually did help. Wholly motivated to succeed in the only sport she truly loved, Ash found her place at North Melbourne. At every step she has had the unwavering support of her parents, brother Chris, Vinnie and her cheer squad of friends and family, including my dear friend Jenny. Congratulations, Ash, on your co-captaincy, on winning two premierships and being awarded the AFL Coaches Association AFLW Champion Player of the Year, North Melbourne Club Champion and the 2025 AFLW Best and Fairest. Eltham is very proud of you, Ash Riddell.

### Avril Baker

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (12:17): Congratulations and thank you, Avril Baker, of Research Primary School for your extraordinary 50 years of service to education and the Research community. Avril’s career is a remarkable testament to her dedication to education, leadership and compassion, which has

helped shape so many local lives. Her teaching and caring are woven into the stories of family, staff and students. I was a grade 1 student at Research Primary when Avril started teaching there, and while not my class teacher, I know first-hand how respected she is.

**Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:18): Victorians must be under no illusion about what the Allan Labor government is doing. They are desperately trying to deceive the public, hiding the full impact of their reckless spending and spiralling debt until after the state election. Take the so-called emergency services tax: make no mistake, Labor still plans to slug Victorians with a \$3 billion tax hit over the coming years. The truth is most families are already paying it. This arrogance, this sudden discovery that farmers are struggling is insulting. Farmers have pleaded with Labor for relief yet only now, when it suits their political agenda, does Labor pretend to care. This is not fairness. This is not leadership. This is not empathy. It is a cynical cash grab dressed up as reform, and it is Victorian families and farmers who will be paying the price.

Regional Victorians in particular have been treated as second-class citizens by this government. Time and again Labor have failed to deliver the services, the infrastructure and the respect our communities deserve. Only a Liberal and Nationals government will ease cost-of-living pressures by scrapping Labor's unfair emergency services tax. Let me say this: I will always do what I say. What you see and hear from me is what you get. I do not play games with people's livelihoods and I do not make promises I cannot keep. Victorians deserve honesty, they deserve relief, they deserve respect, not more spin, not more taxes, not more deception from a desperate government trying to cling to power. That is why if elected next year we will abolish this tax.

**88.3 Southern FM**

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (12:19): Congratulations to our local community radio station 88.3 Southern FM on 35 wonderful years. Back in 1978 the department of communications called for expressions of interest for community radio licences. Southern Community Broadcasters formed in the 1980s, and a series of test broadcasts followed from a couple of locations, including the East Bentleigh community hall. The station was granted a licence in March 1990 and started broadcasting full time in November that year.

The station's studio was moved several times over the years but recently moved into Moorleigh Community Village in East Bentleigh, with brand new equipment. Our area no longer has a local paper, but we have Southern FM keeping locals entertained and up to date. At various times throughout the week you can tune in and hear about virtually any topic, hear every genre of music or hear commentary from local sporting matches. Just last Sunday we tuned into Southern FM to listen to the live broadcast of the City of Kingston's carols event. The current president of the station is Walkley award winning journalist Colin Tyrus, who also hosts *A Newsman and His Music* every Monday morning. In fact the next time that you are on a tram and you hear 'The next stop is Spring Street', that is Colin. I enjoy my regular appearances on Colin's program every few months and always advertise my appearances and the station on the front page of my regular newsletter the *Bentleigh Broadcast*. As locals, we should get behind our local radio station.

**Neighbourhood houses**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (12:21): It is hard to fathom that the Allan Labor government would spend \$200,000 on office indoor hire plants for the Suburban Rail Loop project yet deny recent critical food funding grants to a number of neighbourhood houses across the Shepparton electorate. At a time when local families are under immense financial strain and support is needed more than ever, with increasing demand and just weeks before Christmas, this government have their priorities all wrong. We are in a cost-of-living crisis, and neighbourhood houses are often a lifeline to many. Yet the Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre, the South Shepparton Community Centre and the Nathalia community centre have all had their critical food funding denied. These centres are already

struggling to support those in need. One of the house representatives said that it was a shock they did not receive the grant, despite supporting around 250 presentations for food each week, supporting up to a thousand community members.

This government must urgently restore funding to historical levels through a 25 per cent increase. Without increased funding, many houses will be forced to close their doors. Current funding does not even cover basic wages or operational costs, and nearly half of Victoria's houses are operating at a loss, putting enormous pressure on them to meet daily needs. More than 1000 of our locals have written a message on the 'Keep our doors open' postcards to the minister, sharing personal and often heartbreaking messages about what their neighbourhood houses mean to them. I urge the minister to read them. These voices are powerful. They cannot be ignored, and increased funding must be provided.

**Armenian National Committee of Australia**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (12:22): The electorate of Mulgrave is home to the highest concentration of Armenian Australians in Victoria, and recently I joined them to celebrate 50 years of the Armenian National Committee of Australia. This year's keynote guest was Siranush Sahakyan, a human rights lawyer from Armenia with 15 years of experience, currently leading over 600 cases against Azerbaijan at the European Court of Human Rights. She spoke about how she currently represents many Armenian hostages who remain imprisoned by Azerbaijan since the 2020 Artsakh war. It had been extensively reported by groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that Armenian hostages face extreme levels of torture. Such fears were heightened after the International Committee of the Red Cross, a nonpartisan body which monitors the safety of hostages, was expelled from Azerbaijan. Here in Australia many have called for the immediate release of the 23 Armenian hostages who remain in captivity. Former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans has called for their release, as well as the Labor governments in New South Wales and South Australia. I join my Labor colleagues across the country in echoing such sentiments and urge Azerbaijan to immediately release all Armenian hostages. I congratulate the ANCA and their community for 50 years of advocacy here in Australia, and I thank them for continuing to raise issues of concern to Armenian Australians.

**Melbourne Holocaust Museum**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:24): The Melbourne Holocaust Museum is the largest Australian institution dedicated to Holocaust education, research and remembrance. This year 30,000 students will visit from 330 schools. Unfortunately, due to a lack of government funding, the number of teachers able to attend the museum for professional learning was too low. Congratulations to the board and the new chief executive officer Dr Breann Fallon.

**Brighton electorate hoon driving**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:24): Residents around St Kilda Street in Brighton are living with unbelievable noise. As Michael recently said:

Our windows rattle and even if they are closed, the noise from revving motorbikes or cars with loud exhausts hooning down St Kilda Street has become unbearable.

For years our community has sought help from the state Labor government. As Michael further said:

Sadly, the Minister, VicRoads and the Police have done nothing, and as residents, we have had enough of the continual noise and speeding.

I have raised the issue with the government for years. Most recently the Minister for Roads and Road Safety said that the government 'continues to work hard to improve regional roads'. That is right. The minister's response was not even updated to note the issue related to Melbourne. My community deserves better. We deserve action.

**Felicitations**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:25): I wish my community of Brighton, Brighton East, Elwood, Hampton and Hampton East a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. I would also like to thank my staff Elouise Ager, Allie Hawkins, Victoria Morgan and Edward Bourke for their hard work. And closest to my heart, thank you also to my beautiful family – as has been said, you are not important, you are everything.

**Werribee electorate Christmas card competition**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (12:25): It is Christmas card season. As a new MP I wanted to have a design that shows what this festive season means to our young people in the Werribee electorate. After seeing many brilliant, colourful designs from primary schools across the district, I settled on a brilliant design by Lauren Li of Riverwalk Primary School. Lauren captured the fun at our local skate park under the iconic level crossing removal bridge at Werribee Street, including the iconic emu claw. Congratulations on being the winner. I look forward to seeing Lauren at Riverwalk soon.

**Werribee electorate school innovators awards**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (12:25): As a former teacher, I have a passion for innovation in the way that we teach and support young people at school. This year I introduced my innovators award for staff who roll out a program or change at a school that improves teaching and learning. While there are a few more awards nights to go – as all MPs know, it is award nights season – I want to congratulate the following winners: the refugee education support program implementation team, Francis Lockyer, Serena Ripari and Hsa Mu Hen Tun at Werribee Secondary College; Claudia Squires from Good News Lutheran College in Mambourin; and the teaching and learning team, accepted by Angela Landy at Christway College on behalf of them.

**Fire preparedness**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (12:26): As we head into the fire season, I would also like to wish my fellow volunteers a safe fire season and remind the community to download the VicEmergency app and make sure, if there is a grassfire in our growing community, to move two streets back and make sure the roads are kept clear for our volunteer firefighters.

**Hoffman Brickworks**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:26): I was pleased to hear from the Minister for Planning's office, shortly after my colleague Mr Puglielli raised the matter in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, that Heritage Victoria are commissioning a report on how to fix the deteriorating historic chimney at the Hoffman Brickworks site in Brunswick. They will send the bill to the owner, a joint property development venture between Ninety Four Feet and Glenvill Homes, who were ordered to have this done in April but have still done nothing. In fact Ninety Four Feet have consistently failed to protect this heritage site over the years and seem to prefer to pay lawyers rather than bricklayers. Residents stuck next to the scaffolding-clad chimney have been wanting to see it repaired for four years, since the scaffolding went up.

Some residents are in an even worse trap set by Ninety Four Feet, which lumped them with the responsibility for public liability insurance, while Ninety Four Feet retain ownership of the chimney and pay next to nothing. While Ninety Four Feet twiddle their thumbs with the scaffolding, residents are stuck paying more than double in insurance premiums. It is hard to imagine a shonkier outfit than the Rzechta family's Ninety Four Feet. I urge the Labor government and Heritage Victoria to go further, get the chimney fixed and make the developer pay for that as well, because they seem quite happy doing nothing.

**Felicitations**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:28): On another note, I am proud to be here on such a historic day. I wish everyone a great summer break and look forward to seeing you next year.

**Felicitations**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (12:28): I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who helps this Parliament function and to wish all members and staff a safe and happy Christmas. As we come to the end of the year, I want to acknowledge the clerks and the team in the table office, the Serjeant-at-Arms, the security staff, the PSOs, the attendants and the dedicated people who keep this building running smoothly day in and day out. My thanks also go to our catering staff, the cleaning teams, the groundskeepers and building maintenance crews who work tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to ensure the precinct is welcoming and safe and operational for all who work here and all who visit. I also want to recognise the Hansard team, our parliamentary librarians, the drivers and everyone across the parliamentary departments who supports the work of members in this place. To my cabinet secretary staff, you have been a great support and assistance to me, and I cannot thank you enough. Finally, I acknowledge my own electorate office staff for their hard work supporting the Melton community throughout the year. Their commitment to helping local people makes a real difference. To you, Speaker, I want to thank you for keeping the place operational. To the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers, well done. I wish all members, staff and their families a very merry Christmas and a safe and restful break. I look forward to continuing our work for my constituents in Melton and for the rest of the Victorian community in the new year.

**Mentone Girls' Grammar**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:29): The year 3 students at Mentone Girls' Grammar recently wrote me some lovely, lovely letters. I went and visited them, and we went through them one by one. Some of the issues that those year 3 students raised with me include keeping our community safe, supporting homeless people, their parents facing taxes that are far too high and access to health care – all very important issues. I put the Premier on notice: the girls also raised with me that they were very keen to see capybaras introduced into Victoria. I put the Premier on notice that she will be receiving correspondence from me advocating on behalf of these magnificent students for that outcome.

I have proudly stood and continue to stand with the community at Sandringham College in my community. Stage 1 of their development has been delivered, but it is not complete. I again call on the government to do the right thing by Sandringham College. Sandringham College is a wonderful community with a wonderful culture of teaching and learning and wonderful staff, but they need the buildings to match. I again put on record my enthusiasm for Sandringham College in advocating for their needs.

**Simon Collis and Lachie Foott**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:30): Finally, I want to pay tribute to two very decent educators amongst us in our community: the leaving principal at Sacred Heart Catholic primary school Simon Collis and Lachie Foott at St Agnes' primary school in Highett. I hope that the seed of wisdom that they have planted in the children that have been in their care flourishes.

**Box Hill electorate neighbourhood houses**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (12:31): I would like to give a shout-out to all the wonderful neighbourhood houses that we have in the Box Hill electorate: the Avenue Neighbourhood House, Bennettswood, Blackburn North, Box Hill South, Burwood, Clota Cottage, Kerrimuir, Louise Multicultural Community Centre and Surry Hills. Our local neighbourhood houses bring people together from across the community and provide a huge range of different services. Whether you want to improve your digital literacy, want to have a play in a ukulele band or want to cook dumplings, the

local neighbourhood houses have something for you. It is not just about learning new skills, it is a social outlet. It is bringing people together who may not have that social interaction and those opportunities for social interaction. What our neighbourhood houses can do for the community is just wonderful. And I just want to also put on record my thanks to all the staff and volunteers at all our neighbourhood houses in the Box Hill electorate, who do a wonderful job in managing these programs from term to term.

**Felicitations**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (12:32): In the final few moments of 2025, can I put on record my best wishes to the Box Hill community for a very safe new year and Christmas, and a shout-out to all of the essential workers that will be working through the new year period and keeping us safe.

**Northcote electorate neighbourhood houses**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (12:32): In Northcote we love our neighbourhood houses, and we are fortunate to have some of the very best: Bridge Darebin, Jika Jika Alphington Community Centre and Span Community House. These are places where people come to learn, connect and feel supported. They are places where isolation is met with kindness, where people find community and where dignity is upheld in small but powerful ways. We know that rising costs and growing demand are placing enormous pressure on their ability to keep programs running. Despite this, they continue to show up for our community every day. Recently the hardworking volunteers and staff from all four houses visited my office with colourful wheelbarrows overflowing with more than 400 'Keep our doors open' postcards. Each one was signed by a local resident and held a clear message: neighbourhood houses are essential. I was proud to stand with them and sign their placard because, as they put it so beautifully, strong communities start here.

**Community food relief**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (12:33): I am deeply moved that three local organisations have received state grants to deliver more food relief in our community. Jika Jika received \$20,000 for seniors lunches, Bridge Darebin received \$70,000 for weekly community cooking sessions and Alex Makes Meals received \$270,000 to deliver 70,000 culturally appropriate meals.

**Felicitations**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (12:33): Finally, I thank all the people and organisations keeping our community running. I wish Northcote a very merry Christmas and safe holidays, and I thank my staff – Campbell, Heidi, Shanae, Vangelis, Marion and Vritika – for all their hard work this year. Thank you very much.

**Port Phillip EcoCentre**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:34): The Port Phillip EcoCentre is a not-for-profit, community-led environmental group that provides a base for affiliate groups involved in activities that promote biodiversity, environmental sustainability and community action. The EcoCentre's research, education, citizen science – a really unique citizen science lab, I should say – and practical action reaches 19,000 people per year across 160 suburbs of Melbourne. The EcoCentre's teachers, scientists and community development staff have wideranging expertise in topics such as urban wildlife, climate change, plastics waste management, biodiversity, Port Phillip Bay, clean energy and sustainable living.

Recently I had the great pleasure of attending the official launch of the new building that they have had constructed, completely energy efficient and otherwise. I am proud to say that our Victorian government contributed \$3.35 million, and the City of Port Phillip matched that to meet the full construction costs. They had an official community launch, which was really beautiful. We had the Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos there as well. It was really great to see everyone together fostering biodiversity and the environment in our area. It also fulfils another important element, and that is as a beautiful community hub, bringing the community together for the betterment of all.

**Peninsula Aero Club**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (12:35): I love going to community events and talking to the community about what is important in the work that they do. I love talking about the fact that community supporting community is so incredibly vital, and we could not do anything without them doing that. As a case in point, on Saturday I went down to the Peninsula Aero Club at the Tyabb airport, where they had their toy run. It is the sixth year in a row that I have been able to go there, and it really is a wonderful event. I want to thank the Peninsula Aero Club for the work they do. I want to thank the volunteers, the mums and dads and also the community that come out with their families and their dogs. They bring unwrapped toys and put them in the old Holdens from the Holden enthusiasts club that turns up every year. It really is an important part. All the toys this year will be going to Western Port Community Support to support kids and families that are doing it tough.

**Gail Gailey**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (12:36): I would also like to take the opportunity to thank a very, very generous, wonderful community member Gail Gailey. She started the Baxter pantry many years ago. Unfortunately she has now stopped that for a number of reasons. Gail is an amazing person. She is generous, she is giving and she has worked tirelessly to help the community and those in need, and I thank her and also the volunteers that have supported her. To everyone else, especially my wife and family, thank you.

**Frankston electorate book awards**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:37): It has been my pleasure over the last couple of weeks to visit Frankston primary schools to hand out Frankston parliamentary book awards for students that love books, engage with a wide range of genres and explore new and challenging vocabulary.

**Felicitations**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:37): I would also like to take the time to thank all our Parliament staff and the Frankston community coming into Christmas after a big year. I would also like to thank my electorate team – Karen, Elizabeth, Michelle, Aileen and Barb – who are just amazing, and also thank my family. It has been a huge year. If Frankston Hospital is anything to go by, we are going to see a massive year next year. I just want to make sure that everyone knows that they are appreciated. Keep safe during the Christmas period.

**Sima Samar**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (12:37): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak about an incredible woman I met at an event hosted by the Victorian Afghan Associations Network, and I would like to thank VAAN for hosting and celebrating this extraordinary woman Dr Sima Samar, a woman from Afghanistan and a physician, humanitarian and human rights advocate. She has demonstrated lifelong courage and inspired people all around the world. Dr Samar has devoted her career to advancing women's rights, education and access to health care, often in the face of tremendous risk. As a doctor she provided medical care to women, often widows and families who had nowhere else to turn. As the founder of Shuhada Organization, she established schools and clinics across Afghanistan and created opportunities and hope for tens of thousands of people. Dr Samar was a minister for women in the interim government and the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Sudan. I was very grateful to have Dr Samar visit the south-east and to be able to be alongside people who hosted her.

**Felicitations**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (12:39): In the last seconds, I would like to thank my electorate office team and say how grateful I am to Jamie, Saira, Margie, Alison and Vasu.

***Bills***

**Electoral Amendment Bill 2025**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:40): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill amends the *Electoral Act 2002* (**Act**) to implement recommendations and findings from a range of independent reports relating to the Victorian electoral system released since the last significant reform of the Act in 2018, as well as issues identified by government and the Victorian Electoral Commission (**VEC**). The changes are aimed at modernising the Act to ensure the smooth running of elections and enhancing public trust in the democratic process through increased transparency and accountability.

The Bill's amendments implement recommendations from:

- the Electoral Matters Committee of Parliament's (**EMC**) report on its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian State election (**EMC Report**); and
- the VEC's Report to Parliament on the 2022 Victorian State election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election (**VEC Report**).

The Bill implements one recommendation from the Electoral Review Expert Panel's (**EREP**) Main Report on its Independent review of Victoria's electoral and political donations system (**EREP Report**).

Key reforms in the Bill include:

- introducing measures to increase the clarity and transparency of information voters receive at the point of casting their vote, including by tightening requirements for the registration of party names and logos, and amending the nomination process to ensure the dis-endorsement of a candidate by a registered political party or a change to a grouping of candidates is reflected on the ballot paper;
- clarifying the legislated process for supplementary elections and re-elections, to provide greater certainty about the requirements for the conduct of supplementary elections and re-elections and protect against future legal challenges arising from gaps in the Act regarding processes and timings;
- amending legislated timings and other outdated requirements for electoral processes to ensure the continued efficient conduct of elections in the context of modern State elections and minimise the risk of failed elections;
- making minor and technical amendments to improve the overall clarity and operation of the Act, including modernising and simplifying language and updated definitions as necessary; and
- amendments to the political finance laws under Part 12 of the Act.

**Human Rights Issues**

In my opinion, the human rights under the Charter engaged by the Bill are the:

- right to equality before the law (section 8 of the Charter);
- right to privacy (section 13 of the Charter);
- right to freedom of expression (section 15 of the Charter);
- right to protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter); and
- right to take part in public life (section 18 of the Charter).

For the reasons outlined below, I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. I consider that other provisions of the Bill promote human rights.

**Right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)**

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has a right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. Section 3(1) of the Charter defines discrimination, in relation to a person, as ‘discrimination within the meaning of the attributes set out in section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*’ (**Equal Opportunity Act**).

**Expansion of section 75 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* to secondments**

Section 17A of the Act currently provides that the VEC may discriminate against a person in relation to offering employment or an appointment as a member of the audit committee of the VEC on the basis of that person’s political belief or activity, in accordance with section 75 of the Equal Opportunity Act. Any refusal by the VEC to employ or appoint a person under section 17A must be in accordance with criteria which must be set out in guidelines issued by the VEC and published in the Government Gazette. The purpose of section 17A is to protect the integrity of the electoral system and support public trust and confidence in the independence and impartiality of the VEC by enabling it, in making employment or appointment decisions, to consider whether a person’s political allegiances, or any perception that they hold such allegiances due to their beliefs or activities, should preclude their holding a role which may enable them to influence electoral outcomes.

Clause 9 of the Bill amends section 17A to extend the permission for the VEC to discriminate on the basis of political belief or activity to secondments under new section 17AA, which is inserted in the Act by clause 8. Under new section 17AA, the VEC may enter into an agreement or arrangement with a public sector body Head for the secondment of persons employed under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004* to the VEC, where necessary to conduct an election.

By expanding the VEC’s ability to lawfully discriminate on the basis of a protected attribute under the Equal Opportunity Act, this amendment increases the existing limitation by section 17A of multiple planks of the Charter right under section 8, including the rights to enjoy human rights without discrimination under section 8(2) (the relevant Charter rights being freedom of thought, conscience and belief under section 14 and to freedom of association under section 16), and to the equal and effective protection of the law against discrimination under section 8(3).

The rights expressed in sections 8(2) and (3) play an integral role in the protection of human rights provided by the Charter and the law more generally. The right of every person to enjoy their human rights without discrimination under section 8(2) has been described as essential to the operation of the Charter as a whole, as it ensures that the discriminatory operation of any act, decision or law does not prevent access to the protections provided by other Charter rights.<sup>1</sup>

The right under section 8(3) is recognised as being ‘of fundamental importance [and] high in the hierarchy of rights recognised in the Charter’<sup>2</sup> and ‘the centrepiece of the right to equality’.<sup>3</sup> It contains two distinct but overlapping components: the right to equality before the law and the equal protection of the law without discrimination, and the right to equal and effective protection from discrimination itself.<sup>4</sup> In expressly removing the protection of anti-discrimination legislation for certain people on the basis of attributes which are clearly protected by Charter rights, section 17A clearly limits the important rights under sections 8(2) and (3) of the Charter, and by extension clause 9 of the Bill exacerbates this limitation by extending the exemption from anti-discrimination law.

However, I am satisfied that this further limitation is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. Weighed against the importance of the Charter rights it limits, is the important purpose of the amendment made by clause 9 of ensuring that the new pathway to filling positions from which a person may influence an election provided by new section 17AA does not undermine the purpose of section 17A of protecting the integrity of, and public confidence in, Victorian elections. I consider this purpose to be of fundamental importance to Victoria’s electoral system and representative democracy. In forming the view that the limitation is reasonable and justified, I also take into account the nature and extent of the limitation, being an extension of an existing limitation to encompass directly related matters; the relationship between the limitation and its purpose, being logical and direct; and the absence of any less restrictive means of achieving the purpose of preventing real or reasonably perceived political allegiances of people holding positions that could influence elections from undermining public confidence in democracy.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to recognition and equality before the law under section 8 of the Charter.

**Right to privacy (section 13) and right to protection of families and children (section 17)**

Section 13 of the Charter states that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. Section 13 is intended to be interpreted consistently with Victoria’s existing information

privacy and health records framework, including Victoria's Information Privacy Principles enshrined in Schedule 1 of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Privacy and Data Protection Act)*.

Section 17 of the Charter states that families, as the fundamental group unit of society, are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interest and is needed by the child by reason of being a child.

**Expanded protection for silent electors**

Clause 16 expands the existing requirement under section 31 of the Act for the VEC to ensure that the address of any person who successfully applies to be a silent elector is not entered on any electoral roll and this information is removed from existing electoral roll products. The amendment requires the VEC to remove the address of the requester from any previously published or issued document over which it has control. The effect of this amendment is to provide the VEC with a legislative basis for removing previously published confidential information to ensure stronger protection of the personal information of silent electors.

This amendment promotes the right to privacy under section 13 of the Charter by enhancing the VEC's ability under the Act to protect the personal information of silent electors. As the ability to become a silent elector is contingent on the VEC's satisfaction of a risk to the personal safety of a person or of their family if their principal place of residence were to be shown on an electoral roll, on the same basis, the amendment also promotes the right to protection of families and children under section 17 of the Charter, by expanding the protection of the safety of silent electors and their families, which section 31 of the Act is intended to provide.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter and the right to right to protection of families and children under section 17 of the Charter.

**Right to freedom of expression (section 15)**

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

**Expanded access to nominated entities**

The Bill amends section 222F of the Act to enable independent candidates and independent members to appoint a nominated entity. A nominated entity may hold funds and assets which may be transferred between the nominated entity and the appointing entity without being counted towards the general cap on political donations under section 217D for the appointing entity. Currently, only registered political parties may appoint a nominated entity.

This amendment promotes the right to freedom of expression as it will enhance the capacity of independent candidates and independent members to engage in political communication for example, through advertising, by providing access to a source of funding which was previously only available to registered political parties. While, due to other amendments made by the Bill, funds received from a nominated entity will not be permitted to be used to incur political expenditure directly, the amendment will make available to independent candidates and independent members a source of funds that may be used for other kinds of expenditure, including expenditure on office accommodation and staffing. This will mean independent candidates and members will be able to use more funds held in the State campaign account, including political donations, to incur political and electoral expenditure.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with, in that it supports, the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter.

**Right to take part in public life (section 18)**

Section 18 of the Charter states that a person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Further, every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination to vote and be elected at periodic State and municipal elections that guarantee the free expression of the will of the electors.

**Changes to the early voting period**

Clause 53 of the Bill amends section 99 of the Act to prescribe the length of the 'early voting period', which is the period before an election day during which a person who has applied to do so may vote at an early voting centre. Currently, the early voting period for all elections must begin at 9 a.m. on the Monday before the final nomination day and end at 6 p.m. on the day before the election day. In practice, this has normally resulted in an early voting period of approximately two weeks. Clause 53 will amend section 99 so that the early voting period is 10 days' duration, beginning from the Wednesday 10 days before the election day.

This amendment engages and may limit the right to take part in public life under section 18 of the Charter in potentially limiting access to voting for electors who are unable to vote on the election day by enabling a

reduction in the period in which they can do so. However, I consider any limitation of the right to be reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

In forming that view, I take into consideration the fundamental importance of the right provided by section 18 of the Charter, which is modelled on article 25(a) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, considered to lie ‘at the core of democratic government’.<sup>5</sup> The exercise of the right to take part in public life through voting in elections is also protected in Australia by the implied freedom of political communication under the Commonwealth Constitution and in Victoria by section 48 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

However, I also take into consideration the modest extent to which the Bill’s amendment will limit the right provided by section 18 in order to achieve the purpose of ensuring that voting centres remain a safe and secure environment for electoral participants and members of the public. The amendment of section 99 of the Act will reduce, rather than remove, the opportunity for electors who are unable to vote on the election day from doing so before the election, by setting an early voting period of 10 days, encompassing both weekdays and a weekend.

#### Strengthened restrictions on party names and logos

Clauses 23 and 24 of the Bill amend sections 47 and 47A of the Act respectively to extend the existing restrictions on the registration of party names or logos similar to those of an existing registered political party name or logo to encompass abbreviations or acronyms, and other names or logos which are likely to mislead, including by suggesting that a relationship with an existing registered political party exists which does not in fact exist, or the holding of a parliamentary office. The amendments will also prohibit the registration of a name or part of the name of any political party that has been registered at any time within the past 10 years. Certain words used commonly in the context of political party names will be exempt from the restrictions.

The amendments address findings of Parliament’s Electoral Matters Committee that some electors’ votes in the 2022 State election were not directed as intended due to the confusing way in which some parties’ names appeared on the ballot paper.

The amendments strengthen restrictions aimed at ensuring information on ballot-papers for elections is clear and registered political parties are clearly identified and distinguished, so that electors can be confident their vote as indicated on the ballot-paper will reflect their intentions, and election results in aggregate reflect electors’ intentions. Consequently, the amendments promote the right to take part in public life through voting at State elections that guarantee the free expression of the will of the electors as expressed in section 18(2)(a) of the Charter.

#### Alternative voting centres

Clauses 51 and 52 amend the Act to provide greater flexibility for the VEC to make alternative arrangements in the event of unexpected circumstances affecting the conduct of an election at particular locations, by providing a new power for the VEC to appoint an alternative voting centre. Clause 51 amends section 97A to provide that, if voting has been suspended at an election day voting centre and cannot be resumed on the election day, the VEC may either adjourn the election in accordance with current section 97, or appoint an alternative voting centre at which voting can be resumed. Clause 52 inserts new section 98 empowering the VEC to, if due to a past or ongoing event it is, or is likely to be, impossible, unsafe or impracticable for an election day voting centre to open by the day before the return day for the election, close the voting centre or decide not to open it for voting, and instead open an alternative voting centre. The alternative voting centre will be subject to the same advertising and notification requirements as other voting centres under section 65(1) of the Act.

Clauses 51 and 52 also amend the Act to make clear that the VEC may exercise its new and existing powers in any order or combination as appropriate in the circumstances.

By providing an additional power for the VEC to make arrangements to ensure that an election may be held in localities affected by unanticipated events, such as flooding or fires, and introducing greater flexibility to the exercise of existing powers, these amendments promote the right to take part in public life under section 18(2)(a) of the Charter by supporting access to voting of electors in affected areas.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to take part in public life under section 18 of the Charter.

#### Conclusion

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some of the provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**The Hon. Jacinta Allan MP**

Premier

<sup>1</sup> See *Lifestyle Communities Ltd (No 3)* [2009] VCAT 1869, [280]–[281] (Bell J).

<sup>2</sup> *PJB v Melbourne Health* (2011) 39 VR 373, [42] (Bell J).

<sup>3</sup> *Lifestyle Communities Ltd (No 3)* [2009] VCAT 1869, [283] (Bell J).

<sup>4</sup> *Lifestyle Communities Ltd (No 3)* [2009] VCAT 1869, [284] (Bell J).

<sup>5</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *CCPR General Comment No 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote)*, 57<sup>th</sup> sess, 12 July 1996.

*Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:40): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The *Electoral Act 2002* (the Act) is a fundamental piece of legislation supporting our democracy by legislating for fair, transparent and efficient elections in Victoria. It is vital that this legislation is up-to-date and can support the operational realities of conducting elections.

The Bill before the House makes amendments to the Act to implement recommendations of various reports on Victoria’s electoral system released since the last significant reform of the Act in 2018. These include:

- the Electoral Matters Committee of Parliament’s (EMC) report on its Inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian State election (EMC Report); and
- the Victorian Electoral Commission’s (VEC) Report to Parliament on the 2022 Victorian State election and 2023 Narracan District supplementary election (VEC Report).

The Bill also capitalises upon opportunities to improve and modernise the Act identified by the Government and the VEC, to ensure the Act is up-to-date and fit-for-purpose in the context of modern State elections.

*Political finance reforms*

One of the key areas of reform in the Bill relates to the political finance scheme in Part 12 of the Act. The Bill will address an operational deficiency by enabling the VEC to enforce residual financial obligations of former registered political parties and former elected members. Due to the current drafting of the Act, the VEC is not able to recover overpayments of administrative expenditure funding from a former registered political party after it has been deregistered, or a former independent elected member after they have left Parliament. This issue also applies to the recovery of excess payments of public funding and policy development funding to registered political parties. Like administrative expenditure funding overpayments, if a registered political party is deregistered before an obligation to repay excess funding payments arises or before the VEC may seek to recover any overpayment in court, the VEC has no means of enforcing these debts.

The Bill will amend the Act to reduce the possibility of these scenarios occurring by:

- inserting an additional step into the process for deregistration of a registered political party which requires registered political parties to disclose to the VEC all relevant information for the calculation of administrative expenditure funding, public funding, and/or policy development funding entitlements for the relevant reporting period and repay any overpayments to the VEC before deregistration takes effect; and
- inserting requirements for former independent members to submit an annual return in relation to administrative expenditure funding within 30 days of ceasing to be a member and extending the requirement to repay any overpayments of administrative expenditure funding to former independent members.

The Bill will extend the offences and penalties for non-compliance with existing disclosure obligations in relation to funding received under the Act to the new disclosure obligations for registered political parties in the process of deregistering. However, the amendments to the deregistration process for registered political parties will not completely preclude the possibility of a party being deregistered before any funding overpayments are repaid, as they will include a requirement for the VEC to complete the deregistration after a certain period has elapsed, regardless of whether the repayment has been made. This is to balance the aim

of increasing the VEC's capacity to recover outstanding debts with the need to ensure that the Register of Political Parties remains up-to-date and accurate, in line with the purpose of the VEC's obligations to deregister parties in various circumstances under the Act.

Another important reform of Part 12 of the Act is to enable the VEC to exclude GST from claimable expenditure for which funding may be claimed under the Act. The Bill will address a gap in the current Act which prevents the VEC from excluding GST from the expenditure for which electoral participants may claim any of the three funding streams. The VEC is currently prevented from excluding GST from this expenditure even in circumstances where the claimant is eligible to receive a tax credit in relation to that GST expenditure. The VEC has calculated that the requirement to calculate claimable expenditure inclusive of GST costs an additional \$60,000 per State election on such payments for the public funding stream alone. To address this issue, the Bill will amend the definitions of 'electoral expenditure' and 'political expenditure' in the Act, to specifically exclude expenditure for which an entity is entitled to any credit, rebate, refund, reimbursement or other kind of reduction in tax liability under any law. This will have the effect of preventing expenditure on GST for which a claimant may claim a tax credit from also being claimed for the purposes of calculating an entitlement to administrative expenditure funding, public funding or policy development funding.

The Bill will also insert a provision in Part 12 of the Act to clarify that nothing in the Act is intended to make the internal documents or disputes of political parties justiciable. This is intended to ensure that the Bill and any future amendments of the Act do not have the unintended consequence of disturbing the well-established precedent that an unincorporated political party's internal conduct does not give rise to any cause of action in an Australian court, on the basis that political parties are voluntary associations, and, unlike corporations, their creation and membership are not intended to create legal relations. The Bill will insert an express provision into the Act which provides that nothing in the Act has the effect of making the constitution, rules, resolutions or other internal documents or decisions of a registered political party, in and of themselves, enforceable in an Australian court. This amendment is based on a similar provision in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918.

The Bill also contains amendments to the nominated entities provisions in Part 12 of the Act to address any risk that those provisions produce unfairness in the electoral system by creating a disparity in electoral participants' ability to fund political communication.

In broad terms, these reforms will:

- allow all registered political parties, independent candidates and independent members to appoint a nominated entity, on the same eligibility criteria; and
- prohibit funds received from nominated entities from being placed in a State campaign account, so that those funds cannot be used for political expenditure; and
- introduce transfer caps to set a limit for how much funding a nominated entity can transfer to a registered political party or independent.

The Bill will extend the ability to appoint a nominated entity to independent candidates and independent elected members ('independents'). An independent will be eligible to appoint a nominated entity on the same basis as a registered political party. To ensure equal access to a nominated entity, the Bill will remove the differential eligibility criteria for the appointment of a nominated entity, so that the less stringent criteria applying to nominated entities appointed before 1 July 2020 will apply to the appointment of all nominated entities. Registered political parties and independents will not be able to appoint an entity as a nominated entity if the entity already appears on the Register of Nominated Entities – that is, no entity can be the nominated entity for more than one registered political party or independent, nor can an entity be the nominated entity for both a registered political party and an independent.

The Bill will prohibit funds transferred from a nominated entity to a registered political party or independent from being placed in a State campaign account. This will prevent funds from nominated entities being used to incur political expenditure, reducing the advantage of electoral participants with nominated entities in funding political communication. It will also make clear that such funds are intended to be used for administrative and operational expenses incurred.

The Bill will also introduce a cap on transfers that can be made from nominated entities to the appointing registered political party or independent, to further mitigate the risk of financial advantage that electoral participants with nominated entities may have over electoral participants without. The cap will initially be set at \$500,000 for registered political parties and \$50,000 for independents, aggregated over an election period. This cap for registered political parties is likely to be a fraction of the actual administrative and operational costs incurred by the major political parties in Victoria, balancing the independence of political parties to decide how to finance their operations with their access to other sources to fund administrative expenditure, such as membership fees and levies. The cap for independents is lower than that for registered political parties

to reflect that an independent has lower administrative and operating costs. The Bill will also allow the Governor in Council on the Minister's recommendation to prescribe a different cap in regulations in the future. This supports flexibility to ensure the cap remains reasonable and proportionate with reference to actual administrative costs in the future. Any transfers that are above the cap must be repaid to the nominated entity within 30 days or forfeited and recoverable as a debt to the State from the registered political party.

The cap will apply to transfers of money only, and will not apply to:

- transfers made for Commonwealth purposes;
- transfers made from a registered political party or independent to the nominated entity;
- loans on commercial terms from a nominated entity to the registered political party or independent and required to be repaid within 6 months after the next general election.

The existing anti-circumvention offence will also be amended to make clear that it prevents registered political parties and independents from accepting real property from their nominated entity for the purpose of placing money derived from liquidating that property in their State campaign account.

Key amendments in relation to nominated entities will apply retrospectively to the date of the Bill's second reading, so that no funds received from a nominated entity from that date may be placed into a State campaign account and no amounts already held by a registered political party from a nominated entity in the State campaign account can be used to incur political expenditure.

The Bill will also require registered political parties to remove from their State campaign account, within one month after the date that the Bill receives Royal Assent, any funds received from a nominated entity that:

- were paid in after 1 September 2023;
- remain in the State campaign account at the date of the Bill's second reading; and
- are above the general cap on political donations.

September 1 2023 is the cut-off date by which all costs and debts related to the 2022 general election were to be acquitted by. This means that any contributions to the State campaign account of a registered political party from a nominated entity after this date are no longer related to the previous general election and should be paid out. Any such funds that continue to be held in the State campaign account after this date will be forfeited and recoverable by the VEC as a debt owed to the State.

To ensure that funds from nominated entities can still be used to fund expenditure on office accommodation (other than the purchase or gift of ownership of premises) and expenditure on staff and volunteers, the Bill will amend the definition of political expenditure to expressly exclude those kinds of expenditure. The Bill will also amend the definition of claimable expenditure in section 207G of the Act to expressly include these kinds of expenditure, so that eligible registered political parties and eligible independent members of Parliament can claim these expenses under their administrative expenditure funding entitlements.

This reform will mean that expenditure on office accommodation and staff and volunteers can no longer be paid for using public funding claimable under section 211 of the Act, except in limited circumstances. An electoral participant who is not otherwise eligible to receive administrative expenditure funding (for example, an independent candidate who has not been elected and so does not receive administrative expenditure funding) will continue to be able to claim public funding for these kinds of expenditure to the extent that they are incurred in relation to an election.

The Bill will also amend the definition of 'gift' in section 206(1) of Part 12 to clarify that any political or electoral expenditure incurred by any person or entity that benefits another person or entity is not a gift, and therefore does not count towards the general cap on political donations for the beneficiary. This amendment provides clear permission for all persons and entities to engage in political communication and the political process directly, including in ways that benefit a political party or candidate, whether or not that is the intention, without any related expenditure being regarded as a political donation to that political party or candidate. It is not intended that this clarifying amendment of the definition of 'gift' has any impact on the existing definition of third party campaigner or the limit on political donations to third party campaigners.

#### *Delivering safe and secure elections*

The Bill changes the commencement day of the early voting period to be the Wednesday that is 10 days before the election day.

The current length of the early voting period (which in practice is usually approximately two weeks for elections other than by-elections) is unnecessarily lengthy and increases the resource demand of delivering elections, including providing adequate security arrangements for early voting centres throughout the early voting period. The Bill will amend the Act to create an early voting period of 10 days. This is considered an

appropriate duration for the early voting period, to balance the need to provide sufficient opportunity to vote for electors who are not able to do so on the election day, while minimising the demand on security resources.

*Privacy Protections*

The Bill will increase protections for personal information of silent electors. Currently, a person can request to become a silent elector if the person considers that the appearance of their principal residential address on the electoral roll places or would place their personal safety or that of their family at risk. If the VEC is satisfied that this risk exists, it must ensure that the person's address is not entered on any electoral roll. However, this requirement applies prospectively and will not prevent a silent elector's address from being publicly available on past electoral rolls. The Bill will amend the Act to provide a legislative basis for the VEC to remove the information of a silent elector from documents that it has published or issued before the person became a silent elector, by inserting a requirement for the VEC, as soon as and to the extent practicable after a request to become a silent elector is approved, to ensure that any confidential information of the silent elector does not appear in any documents which the VEC has previously published or issued, or which the VEC is required to make available for public inspection under the Act, and over which the VEC has control.

*Improving voter information*

To support informed voting and reduce the possibility of confusing information on ballot papers and other election materials, the Bill will strengthen restrictions on the political party names and logos that can be registered. The EMC Report found that it was likely that during the 2022 State election, some electors' votes were not directed as they intended because they were confused by the way parties' names appeared on the ballot paper. Some party names were overly similar to those of other, more well-known parties and other party names suggested party affiliations that did not in fact exist. The Bill will address this issue by strengthening existing restrictions on the registration of political party names and logos that are similar to those of existing registered political parties by extending the restrictions to encompass abbreviations and acronyms of party names and similarities to the name of any registered political party that was registered within the previous 10 years. The Bill will also prohibit the registration of any party name or logo likely to mislead because it falsely suggests a relationship with an existing registered political party or the holding of a parliamentary office.

A further amendment made by the Bill that will help ensure that the way political party and candidate affiliations are presented clearly and accurately on the ballot-paper is the insertion of a provision to enable a registered political party to formally withdraw, by providing written notice to the VEC, the nomination of a candidate that it has endorsed. Currently, only a candidate may withdraw their own nomination, so that, in circumstances where a political party has dis-endorsed or ceased supporting a candidate between the final nomination day and the election, if the candidate does not withdraw the nomination, the candidate will nevertheless appear on the ballot-paper as being endorsed by the party. To ensure fairness to a dis-endorsed candidate, the registered political party will be required to provide notice to the candidate of its intention to lodge the notice before doing so.

*Operational improvements*

While the Act clearly sets out requirements for the processes and timings for State general elections and by-elections, there are gaps in respect of many of those requirements in relation to supplementary elections and re-elections. The Bill will clarify and provide missing details for the processes that must be followed for supplementary elections and re-elections. Timings and requirements for the conduct of supplementary elections and re-elections have been developed in consultation with the VEC on its operational requirements.

The Bill's other amendments to update timings for electoral processes will provide for the more efficient conduct of elections, support access to voting and control the risk of failed elections. The EMC Report identified numerous legislative barriers to efficient election delivery by the VEC. In particular, tight statutory timeframes for electoral processes, which do not take into account the increased complexity and scale of modern State elections, heighten the risk of failed elections in the future. The Bill will reduce these risks to Victorian elections by amending the Act to update timings for electoral processes, allowing more time for the VEC to complete various mandatory processes in the conduct of elections. These include:

- bringing forward the deadline for applications for registration of political parties from 120 days to 180 days before the day of a general election resulting from the expiration of the Assembly;
- bringing forward the day for the closure of the roll from seven days after the issue of the writ to the day that the writ is issued, providing an additional seven days for the VEC to complete processes such as enrolment processing;
- bringing forward the final nomination day forward from 10 days after the expiration or dissolution of the Assembly to six days after the issue of the writ, providing additional time for the VEC to design, print and distribute all the materials needed for commencement of early voting;

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- amending provisions in relation to postal voting such as ensuring that the VEC may send ballot papers to all postal voters as soon as practicable after the final nomination day and before the commencement of early and mobile voting, clarifying an existing ambiguity which creates a risk that some voters may not receive their ballot pack in time to vote in an election.

Other amendments that will improve the operation of the Act include:

- Providing more flexible powers to the VEC to make alternative arrangements in the event of an emergency preventing voting at an election day voting centre. The Bill will create a new power of the VEC to appoint an alternative voting centre, including a mobile voting centre, if the VEC considers that it is not possible, safe or practicable for the election to be held at a particular election day voting centre.
- Clarifying that, pursuant to the arrangement with the Commonwealth for a joint enrolment process and the exchange of information necessary to support that arrangement, the VEC may apply administrative decisions of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) relating to a roll maintained under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to electoral roll products prepared or maintained under the Victorian Act. This amendment will reduce unnecessary double-handling of routine administrative decision-making by allowing the VEC to simply apply decisions relating to enrolment, such as on requests to become a silent elector, already considered and made by the AEC, without the need to re-make the decision independently.
- Modernising requirements for electoral materials by removing any requirement to display the name and place of business of a printer or publisher and providing greater clarity in relation to the electoral materials to which authorisation requirements apply.
- Other minor and technical amendments such as modernising and simplifying language, updating provisions to ensure that processes and transactions can be performed via electronic communication and requiring the VEC to publish determinations on its website to increase the transparency of its operations.

### Conclusion

The Bill makes significant improvements to current electoral processes to ensure that elections continue to be conducted with the greatest regard to transparency, accessibility, and efficiency. The Bill will go a long way to ensuring that Victorians retain trust and confidence in the electoral system.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:40): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Tuesday 23 December.**

### **Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:42): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 (Bill).

In my opinion, the Bill as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

#### **Overview**

The Bill will implement savings decisions of the Victorian Government, deliver public sector efficiencies, and make consequential, related, and other changes to various Acts.

To achieve this the Bill will:

- abolish, reform, and consolidate a number of entities and boards across the Victorian public sector;

- streamline certain Victorian public sector entity governance structures and functions;
- where required, subsume residual required functions and other matters to the Crown;
- streamline or remove regulatory, reporting and compliance requirements;
- improve the general consistency of certain Acts with other enactments and existing Victorian Government policies;
- repeal two Principal Acts; and
- put in place other reforms for other purposes.

**Human Rights Issues Overview**

The Bill engages the following human rights under the Charter:

- privacy and reputation (section 13);
- freedom of expression (section 15(2));
- taking part in public life (section 18); and
- property rights (section 20).

For the following reasons and having taken into account all relevant factors, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable and justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

I note that, unless a contrary intention appears in this statement, a reference to a 'person' is a reference to an 'individual' as only humans can hold human rights in accordance with section 6(1) of the Charter.

***Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)***

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home, or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with, and the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

The Charter contains internal qualifications on this right, being that interferences with privacy only limit the right if it is unlawful or arbitrary. An interference will generally be lawful where it is precise and appropriately circumscribed and will generally be arbitrary only where it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim being sought. Therefore, the right to privacy protects a person from government interference, and excessive and unsolicited intervention by other persons.

Privacy is a right of considerable breadth and is difficult to define, and there is considerable jurisprudence, legislation, and policy with respect to the right. However, this broad right can still be subject to reasonable limitation under section 7(2) of the Charter. Further, interference with privacy will not be arbitrary if it is reasonable in the circumstances and in accordance with the Charter.

To the extent that the right may be engaged by the Bill, I have set out an analysis of how it is engaged, and why any engagement is a reasonable limitation.

***Transfers of various matter from old entities to new entities by the Bill***

The Bill (including Parts 2 (and Schedule 1), 3, 4, 6, and 9) amends a number of Acts to facilitate the transfer of duties, functions and powers, and associated assets, liabilities, matters, obligations, and rights from a range of entities (old entities) to other entities (new entities).

In each instance, the transfer of the above matters (or the enabling of the transfer of them) from each old entity is clearly defined, lawful, and proportionate to the Bill's objective that each new entity can effectively and validly perform its conferred statutory duties, functions, and powers.

Broadly, the Parliament has previously examined the human rights implications of many of the existing entities' duties, functions and powers under previous legislation. Accordingly, this statement need only assess any additional or new impacts on the right to privacy that may arise from the transfer of various matters to the new entities established under the Bill, or due to new engagements with the right to privacy.

With that in mind, to the extent that the right to privacy may be engaged by the Bill, I have set out how the right to privacy is engaged by the Bill by exception, and why any impact is limited, justified and reasonable.

***Transfer of assets old entities to new entities containing or relating to information about persons***

A number of Parts of the Bill will require or enable the transfer of matters from an old entity to a new entity.

The matters transferred, including assets, may incidentally include or refer to information relating to persons. In each instance, the transfer (including disclosure of information) will be to another public body or public

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entity and is required to enable the new entity to undertake their new lawful duties, functions, or powers and fulfil any relevant liabilities or obligations.

While the transfer of information in this context may limit the right to privacy in the Charter, such a transfer would be lawful, precise, and appropriately circumscribed to the legitimate aims of the Bill of ensuring administrative continuity and effective delivery of public functions and services following required machinery of government changes.

Further the new entities are subject to legal obligations in relation to the handling, use and protection of information. Various laws will apply (as relevant) to each new entity, following the transfer including: the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*; the *Health Records Act 2001*; the *Public Records Act 1973*, the Charter, and any applicable information protection, secrecy, or confidentiality provisions in the relevant statutory framework for each entity.

Where a body, entity or office is abolished by the Bill, any information must be managed in accordance with existing information, privacy or public record laws. This includes the lawful handling, disclosure or transfer of such information, where appropriate, to the Public Records Office of Victoria.

Any necessary administrative action to comply with relevant information, privacy or public record laws as a result of the Bill's reforms will be undertaken and there is work underway across the Victorian public sector to give effect to these necessary changes.

Accordingly, while the transfer of functions, powers and assets under the Bill may incidentally involve the transfer or disclosure of information about persons, any such interference with privacy will occur in accordance with law, will pursue a legitimate and proportionate objective, and will not be arbitrary.

### *Information collection and information sharing agreements in Part 8 of the Bill*

Part 8 of the Bill amends provisions of the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022* (MHW Act) that relate to information collection and information sharing agreements. These amendments are relevant to the right to privacy.

Clause 137(1) of the Bill amends section 525(1) of the MHW Act to provide that the exercise of powers by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (MHWC) to collect information about a person, including health and personal information, from a specified body must be for the Commission's exercise of its powers under Parts 9.2 to 9.6 or 9.9 of the MHW Act, including in relation to complaint resolution, investigations and inquiries or complaint data reviews.

The Bill also amends section 526 to provide that the MHWC may no longer collect data and information from data sharing bodies (clause 138) and amends section 527 to clarify the purposes for which the MHWC may enter into an information sharing agreement with a public sector body (clause 139). Further, the effect of the amendments that clause 139 makes to section 527 is that the MHWC may no longer enter into an information sharing agreement on behalf of others. This change is intended to more closely link the MHWC's ability to access information to the delivery of its functions and reduce third party access to information to specific legislated.

In my view, any interference with the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter would be in accordance with law and proportionate to the legitimate aim of ensuring that the MHWC can effectively discharge its functions, as amended by clause 116 of the Bill, including in relation to dealing with complaint resolution, and conducting investigations, inquiries or complaint data reviews.

### *Abolition of certain bodies, entities and offices*

As set out above, section 13(b) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

The Bill provides for the abolition of certain bodies, entities and offices and enables the transfer of certain persons, as part of broader machinery of government or administrative reforms. The abolition of a body, entity or office, or transfer of a person, under legislation of this kind is a structural measure concerning the efficient and effective reorganisation of government functions in public administration.

The abolition or transfer does not amount to an assessment of the conduct or competence of any current or former officeholder, or current or former employees (or agents or contractors) of any body, office or entity. Any incidental reputational impact that may arise from the abolition or transfer of a body, entity, office or person, is a lawful and proportionate consequence of the decision to restructure public entities and offices for legitimate administrative purposes.

Relevantly, where transitional provisions apply in the Bill, they preserve accrued rights and obligations and provides for continuity of decisions, actions, and liabilities. These measures ensure that the integrity and effect of the former office, officeholders and persons lawful actions are maintained. For completeness, I note there

are also provisions in the *Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* (including sections 14 and 16) that address the effect of the repeal of an Act, or any provision of an Act repealed by the Bill.

Although the Bill's provisions may engage the right to privacy and reputation, in my view any limitation is negligible or minimal, reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society consistent with section 7(2) of the Charter. Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the rights in section 13 of the Charter.

***Freedom of expression (section 15(2))***

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds orally, in writing, in print, by way of art or in another medium of their choice.

Section 15(3) also provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, and that lawful restrictions may be reasonably necessary to respect personal rights and reputations, and to protect national security, public order, public health, or morality.

The right is not absolute and can be also subject to reasonable limitation under section 7(2) of the Charter. To the extent that the right may be engaged by the Bill, I have set out an analysis of how it is engaged, and why any engagement is a reasonable limitation.

As set out above, the Bill will abolish bodies, entities or offices and reduce the number of certain offices. These include Part 2 (abolition of the Head, Recycling Victoria (RV Head)), Part 3 (abolition of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC)), Part 4 (abolition of the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority (MLRA)), Part 5 (abolition of the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) Advisory Board (VPSC Advisory Board)), Part 6 (abolition of the Victorian Government Purchasing Board (VGPB)), Part 7 (abolition of the Road Safety Camera Office (RSCC)) and Part 8 (reduction in the number of Directors and Board members of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing (VCCMHW) and the number of MHWC commissioners).

The abolition of these bodies, entities or offices and the reduction in number of offices does not prevent persons from expressing their views. Alternative avenues to consult will remain open to those wishing to express their views, including through correspondence and invitations to provide feedback on issues, papers or policy proposals via public and other consultation processes. This will be with responsible Ministers, relevant departments and other bodies or entities.

In terms of some examples:

- The abolition of the VPSC Advisory Board will not prevent persons from expressing their views. Alternative avenues to consult with the VPSC include correspondence and other consultation processes. The VPSC will maintain ongoing engagement with relevant stakeholders, where appropriate.
- The abolition of RV Head will not prevent the expression of views to the new entity, being the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), nor the Minister responsible for the EPA.
- The abolition of VEAC will not prevent the expression of views to the new entity, being the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (CES), nor the responsible Minister responsible, or the relevant Department (presently, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)) for the CES.
- The abolition of the Marine and Coastal Council will not prevent the expression of relevant policy issues to the responsible Minister administering the Marine and Coastal Act 2018, or the relevant Department (presently, the DEECA).
- The abolition of the MLRA will not prevent the expression of views to the new entity, being the relevant Department Head, nor the responsible Minister or the relevant Department (presently, the DEECA).
- The abolition of the RSCC will not preclude persons from expressing their views about road safety camera system issues to the responsible Minister or the responsible Department (presently, the Department of Justice and Community Safety); and
- The abolition of the VGPB will not prevent the expression of views to the responsible Minister, or the relevant Department (presently, the Department of Government Services (DGS)). The VGPB was established in 1995 to enable greater consistency in and better governance of goods and services procurement. The reforms in the Bill do not change what previous important reforms in 2013 and 2021 achieved. They simply move relevant remaining matters from the VGPB to the responsible Minister with support from their department (presently, the DGS) and views can be put to them in lieu of the VGPB, in addition to other departments and agencies. Therefore, the Bill does

not prevent persons from expressing their views about government procurement policies, processes, or issues.

- The reduction in numbers of Directors and Board members of the VCCMHW and the number of MHWC commissioners also does not prevent the expression of views to the VCCMHW or the MHWC, nor the responsible Minister or responsible Department (presently, the Department of Health).

For these reasons, although these provisions may engage the right to freedom of expression, in my view any limitation is negligible or minimal, reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society consistent with section 7(2) of the Charter. Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the right in section 15 of the Charter.

#### *Taking part in public life (section 18)*

Section 18 of the Charter states that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs (directly or through freely chosen representatives), and to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office. This right applies to all people in Victoria.

The right to access the Victorian public service is not defined in the Charter and there is limited Victorian judicial consideration of the full scope of the right (which is modelled on Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

It is likely that this right is intended to only apply to a person's ability to be appointed to or employed in, a public service role or public office, and does not extend to accessing public services provided by the Victorian public service. Noting there is limited judicial consideration, it has also been found to be engaged when a person is participating in public affairs in a local government context, but it has also been noted it does not mean a person can dictate the terms of their engagement in public affairs at least in that context (see *Dickson v Yarra Ranges Council* [2023] VSC 491). Additionally, some commentators have suggested that the right does not allow a person to dictate the terms of an outcome of any engagement.

To the extent that the right may be engaged by the Bill, I have set out an analysis of how it is engaged, and why any engagement is a reasonable limitation.

For the reasons set out below, although the Bill may engage the right to public life under the Charter, any limit is negligible or minimal, and reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society consistent with section 7(2) of the Charter. Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the right in section 18 of the Charter.

#### *Right to be appointed or employed in a public service role or public office*

As set out above with respect to the right to freedom of expression, the Bill will abolish a number of offices or reduces the number of certain offices. A number of these offices may be considered public offices for the purposes of section 18(2)(b) of the Charter and therefore their abolition or reduction in number may engage the right to take part in public life.

By way of example, Part 8 of the Bill will reduce the number of positions in MHW Act entities. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioners may hold public office for the purposes of section 18(2)(b) of the Charter. However, I do not consider that the right to take part in public life in section 18(2)(b) would be limited by the Bill with respect to Part 8 of the Bill. The right would not be limited by clause 141 of the Bill because the operation of new section 791 in relation to Commissioners ceasing to hold office would not, in my view, constitute discrimination within the meaning of the Charter and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*.

Further, Division 1 does not engage rights under the Charter because no Director of the VCCMHW, and no member of the Board of the VCCMHW, will cease to hold office as a consequence of the Bill.

Whilst clause 107(2) substitutes a new section 659(1) of the MHW Act which will reduce the number of Directors to be employed for the Victorian Collaborative Centre from two to one, clause 113 of the Bill inserts new Part 18.4 and new section 788, of the MHW Act which provides that, on the commencement of this provision, the person who held office as a Director of the VCCMHW immediately before continues to hold office as the Director of the VCCMHW on the same terms and conditions. There is currently only one Director of the VCCMHW, and it is intended that the Centre will continue to have only one Director when the Bill commences.

With respect to the Board of the VCCMHW, clause 101 of the Bill amends section 647(3) of the MHW Act to provide that the Board of the VCCMHW consists of a chairperson and at least four other members, instead of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, and between seven and ten members. No current Board member will cease to hold office as a consequence of the Bill. New section 789 of the MHW Act, inserted by clause 113 of the Bill, is a transitional provision. Its effect is that the VCCMHW Board as constituted immediately before

the commencement of Division 1 continues until 30 April 2026. This date aligns with the intended end of the appointment term of VCCMHW Board members holding office immediately prior to commencement of Division 1 of Part 8 of the Bill.

By way of further example, the right to take part in public life is engaged in relation to abolishing the VPSC Advisory Board as it precludes people from holding membership of the VPSC Advisory Board. Abolishing the VPSC Advisory Board may also be perceived to limit participation on matters relating to the functions of the VPSC and access public services. However, there are alternative avenues to advocate or consult with the VPSC and the State of Victoria as set out above.

To the extent the Bill makes changes of this nature, consistent and similar analysis applies, such that there is either no engagement with the right or there is a negligible or minimal limitation which is justified with respect to section 18 of the Charter.

#### *Access to public services*

In the event it were considered the right did extend to accessing State public services, which is not certain, I refer to my analysis with respect to the right to freedom and expression regarding participation in public affairs, as it applies similarly to accessing State public services, with alternative new entities or other avenues, that could be pursued by a person to take part in public life.

#### *Right to property (section 20)*

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law.

There are three elements to this right:

- the interest interfered with must be ‘property’, which includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law, which would encompass income, remuneration and allowances;
- the interference must amount to a ‘deprivation’ of property, that is, any ‘de facto expropriation’ by means of a substantial restriction in fact on a person’s use or enjoyment of their property; and
- the deprivation must not be ‘in accordance with law’ in that the law is not adequately accessible and formulated with sufficient precision to enable the person to regulate their conduct. Conversely, for deprivation of a person’s property to be in accordance with law, as required by section 20 of the Charter, the legal authorisation for the deprivation must be publicly accessible, clear, and certain, and it must not operate arbitrarily.

The Bill will provide for the deprivation of income, remuneration or allowances of various offices or officeholders as a statutory consequence of those persons ceasing to hold office, or the reduction in number of offices by the operation of the Bill. However, these provisions are public, clear, certain and would not operate arbitrarily.

Further, for similar reasons explained under my analysis with respect to the right to take part in public life, Division 1 of Part 8 of the Bill does not engage rights under the Charter because no Director or Board member of the VCCMHW, will cease to hold office as a consequence of the Bill.

Accordingly, I consider that the Bill would not limit section 20 of the Charter as it is consistent with the right to property.

#### *Other reforms in the Bill*

The following reforms do not engage rights under the Charter:

- the reforms in Part 5 of the Bill which amend the due date of when the VPSC must submit a draft of its Annual Plan to the Premier each year, from 1 May of the preceding financial year to 31 July of the relevant financial year;
- except as noted above, the reforms in Part 6 of the Bill which relate to amending the *Financial Management Act 1994* (FMA) to transfer the setting of goods and services procurement policy to the responsible Minister, for the accountable officer of a department or other entity to which the Part applies to ensure compliance with the goods and services policy made by the Minister, and for the Minister to declare any entity to be exempt from the application of the Part;
- the reforms in Division 1 of Part 9 of the Bill which amend the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*, as they relate to changes to the functions of the Essential Services Commission (ESC) which is not a person, or they are otherwise minor and technical in nature changes;

- the reforms in Divisions 2 and 3 of Part 9 of the Bill alter the regulatory setting and review arrangements for the non-cash payment surcharge, applicable unbooked services and accident towing service charges, including minor and technical consequential changes to enforcement provisions to align with the altered arrangements;
- the reforms in Division 4 of Part 9 of the Bill which amend the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024* to clarify that the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser (an office presently held by one person) is not a ‘public body’ for the purpose of the FMA, applying retrospectively from 31 December 2024 so that person was never subject to certain reporting requirements of the FMA;
- the reforms in Division 5 of Part 9 of the Bill relating to the power to transfer staff from Parks Victoria to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority; and
- for completeness, the automatic repeal provisions in Part 10 of the Bill.

*Other human rights considerations*

I make the following further observations about the Bill:

- departments, agencies, and Ministers implementing the reforms are required to consider and to comply with the Charter;
- the cessation of certain offices (and officeholder terms), the substitution of old bodies, entities or offices for new bodies, entities or offices (in Acts, instruments and otherwise), and similar matters, as a statutory consequence of the Bill, are not civil proceedings nor impact decision-making exercises that would engage the fair hearing right in section 24(1) of the Charter; and
- the Bill’s transitional regulation making powers have been carefully designed having regard to previous comments of the Parliament’s Scrutiny and Act’s Committee on their use and they do not displace the Charter.

**Hon. Danny Pearson MP**  
**Minister for Finance**

*Second reading*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

**Introduction**

I am pleased to introduce the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Others Matters) Bill 2025 today, which implements a series of amendments to reduce duplication across government, clarify roles and responsibilities with the public sector, and streamline reporting requirements to ensure effective and efficient governance.

This Bill is the latest action the Government is taking to ensure the public service is focused on Victorians and their priorities: good schools, good hospitals, safe communities and help with cost of living. By focusing on inefficient and duplicated spending, Government can continue investing where it matters most: the frontline.

The Bill represents a collaborative effort across government, creating efficiencies in multiple portfolios. Its proposals share a common goal: to enhance the effectiveness of government.

It will reform government entities and reduce regulatory and administrative requirements. This will also remove instances of duplication and ensure that programs meet the changing needs of Victorians. By consolidating functions, the Bill contributes meaningfully to the Government’s commitment to tailored and responsible policy outcomes.

The Bill arises from the Government’s commitment to deliver the highest standard of government service in a fiscally responsible manner. It is responsive to the State’s commitments in the *2025–26 Budget* and reflects an important part of our five-step fiscal strategy.

It is expected that the Ministers responsible for the Acts being amended will be responsible for the amendments made by this Bill.

**Purpose**

The Bill will consolidate waste management and recycling functions by amending the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* to abolish Recycling Victoria and move its functions to the Environment Protection Authority. Existing responsibilities, functions and duties of Recycling Victoria will be conferred to the Environment Protection Authority to ensure proper waste management and recycling oversight. At the same time, it will remove overlapping functions, reduce duplication and improve regulatory efficiency by enabling fewer review requirements and less reporting.

Reducing duplication is a key priority of this government and is consistent with the Bill's proposal to repeal the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* to abolish the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council.

The Bill proposes to amend the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003* to expand the functions of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability to enable investigation and assessment functions currently performed by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council to be conducted when directed by the Minister.

Also in the environment portfolio, the Bill proposes to further improve efficiencies by amending the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* to abolish the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council. This council's responsibilities in supporting the development and implementation of the Marine and Coastal Policy and Strategy were fulfilled in 2022. Any ongoing need for monitoring and reporting will be delivered through the existing work of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability and through additional non-legislative mechanisms.

The Bill will amend the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* to abolish the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority and transfer some functions to the Department Head. This change will eliminate duplication between the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority's mine rehabilitation and work currently undertaken by Resources Victoria Group within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. At the same time, it will ensure priority functions relating to community engagement and post-closure plans can continue.

To streamline governance process, the Bill will amend the *Public Administration Act 2004* to abolish the Victorian Public Sector Commission Advisory Board. Important reporting functions of the Victorian Public Sector Commission are also updated in the Bill to allow sufficient time for high quality reports to be delivered.

The Bill will abolish the Victorian Government Purchasing Board and transfer powers to the responsible Minister by amending the *Financial Management Act 1994*. Monitoring of government procurement compliance will be prioritised through strong, well-established governance and oversight mechanisms such as Standing Directions and other discretionary audit processes, removing the need for a standalone Board. To ensure the *Financial Management Act 1994* is consistent with procurement policies introduced by this Government in 2021, minor amendments will also be made to the way that 'specified entities' interact with the legislation.

The Road Safety Camera Commissioner and the Commissioner's Reference Group have made significant contributions to improving the effectiveness of the road safety camera system since being established in 2011. With initial work now complete, the Bill proposes to abolish these roles through amendments to the *Road Safety Camera Commissioner Act 2011*. Next steps have been put in place to continue to support the ongoing accuracy, transparency, and integrity of the road safety camera system. Two key functions from the Commissioner will be referred to the Department of Justice and Community Safety, including the receiving and investigating of complaints from the public regarding road safety cameras, and a biennial review of the road safety camera system's accuracy by an independent expert, to maintain public confidence in the road safety camera system.

Reforms in the Health portfolio are proposed through amendments to the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022* to decrease the number of board members and directors in the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing and remove legislated appointment and employment criteria to increase flexibility and responsiveness while maintaining core functions.

Further amendments to the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022* are included in the Bill to clarify responsibilities for system performance monitoring and reporting by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, reducing the number of Commissioners from four to one. This will increase transparency while safeguarding the Commission's promotion of lived experience leadership. The Commission will remain an independent statutory body, supported by robust governance arrangements and reporting obligations.

Streamlining regulation to improve services continues to be a top priority of this government. The Bill will amend the *Local Government Act 1989* to remove the Essential Service Commission's advisory function in relation to the setting of the average rate cap. It will also remove the requirement for the ESC to prepare a biennial report on outcomes arising from the caps.

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Other functions of the Essential Services Commission are amended in this Bill to streamline processes and governance. It will amend the *Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017* to modernise regulation of unbooked taxi fares and non-cash payment surcharges, by removing the Essential Services Commission's role in determining fees and instead moving to annual indexation.

The Bill will amend the *Accident Towing Services Act 2007* to remove the requirement for the Essential Services Commission review of charges for accident towing and other services every four years. It will also improve the way accident towing fees are indexed each year by removing the productivity adjustment figure and replacing the 'transport group consumer price index (CPI)' with the 'all groups CPI'.

The Bill will amend the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024* to clarify the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser is not subject to certain provisions in the *Financial Management Act 1994*. This will reduce administrative burden and allow the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, currently a single appointee working on a sessional basis, to allocate its limited resources more effectively towards upholding the integrity of Victoria's parliament.

The Bill will amend the *Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020* to allow staff to transition from Parks Victoria to the newly established Great Ocean Road Coasts and Parks Authority to support important responsibilities and oversight of sensitive coastal public land by 1 July 2026, ensuring staff resources are available where needed.

In summary, the Bill will achieve:

- Better value for money by creating government efficiencies and reducing overlap;
- Realigned policy and program functions to ensure Government priorities are delivered to the highest possible standard; and
- Tailored program capacity where necessary to respond to changing needs of the Victorian community.

This Bill sits squarely within the Government's priorities of delivering high quality public services in a financially responsible manner.

I commend the Bill to the house and look forward to the constructive contributions of all members.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:42): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Tuesday 23 December.**

### *Motions*

#### **Community leaders**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:42): I move:

That this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

I want to take this opportunity as the Leader of the House to speak on behalf of the government and give my thanks to the people who make this place possible and help us to ensure that it runs as smoothly as possible in order for us to be able to deliver for the people of Victoria. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk for all of their work here in the house. I also want to thank the Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services. To the entire team at Hansard, to whom we are ever indebted, thank you very much to you all for your work. Thank you to the broadcasting team, the library staff, the grounds and maintenance staff and the hospitality and catering staff, particularly for my half serve of porridge every morning, which keeps me going – a good, hearty breakfast. As Minister for Health I feel obliged to give that a little bit of a promo. I want to thank everyone there. Can I thank the security team as well for the important work that they do. You are absolutely the backbone of this Parliament.

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I should also have mentioned the guides and all of the attendants for the work that they do in helping ensure that we build the knowledge and understanding of the community and so seek to grow the civic understanding of the community, which I think we could probably all agree is, rather unfortunately, not as great as it should be. That is perhaps evidenced sometimes by some of the correspondence that we might receive; nonetheless I thank them. I thank all the staff here because I think the staff, like the MPs, share a great love of this place. It is kind of special. We are part of a unique group that really understands how the Parliament works, and we love it, so thank you again.

Can I acknowledge the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the quality of legislation that comes before this house, and of course the clarity of the laws that we are charged with developing rests with the members of that team. We thank them for their work in helping us turn policy into legislation, so thank you.

I will take the opportunity too to thank all the electorate staff. I am sure other members will want to name their own people. I am going to take this opportunity to thank in my team Sue West, who served me for almost four years but has just recently left to take up a new opportunity – I wish Sue all the best – local legend Kate-Ida Lee, who is well known by everyone in my community as an absolutely awesome and responsive electorate officer; Georgia Garvey, who is my comms and social media guru; and we have just recently welcomed Carolyn McKenzie to the team, so I want to thank them as well.

Can I take this opportunity to thank the member for Evelyn and the member for Brighton. I have had the opportunity to work with both of them through the year. We all know that Parliament can be noisy and we disagree on many, many things, but I do appreciate the opportunity to pick up the phone to the member for Brighton and before him the member for Evelyn, and we do work cooperatively to ensure that the house runs smoothly. I am still seeking some agreement from the member for Brighton in relation to how the rest of the day is going to run. I am sure that I will get his cooperation in the interests of more members being able to get on their feet to say thank you to important people in their community and indeed to share the love across the chamber as we approach Christmas.

Deputy Speaker, can I thank you and the Speaker, obviously, and the Acting Speakers. It has been a very big year. A lot of important things have happened in this chamber. I wish everyone a restful and peaceful Christmas and new year period. I look forward, of course, to getting back here early February. Bring it on. I cannot wait to see you all in 2026. Merry Christmas and happy new year.

**Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (12:47):** Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** You were expecting a sledge.

**Matthew GUY:** I was.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** And now I've given you something really nice, and you have to work with that.

**Matthew GUY:** You have. Correct.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** I have set the tone.

**Matthew GUY:** The minister has. I thought it was a motion on multiculturalism; instead it has become a Christmas felicitation. I will save that till the end. I cannot understand why we have given up the Christmas felicitations, but we used to do that. In fact when I was a member of the other place we used to have a Christmas felicitation.

But I am not here to talk about Christmas felicitations. I am here to talk about something a little bit more serious than that, and that is the motion that the manager of government business has put on the notice paper, which is that this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria. This side of the house certainly does not oppose people standing up against vilification under

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any circumstance. In fact I will go through a long list of points where this side of the house, particularly over the last two years, has been very clear about our views on this topic and our views on how, particularly in this chamber, words matter and actions matter. They matter to many Victorians and their families, who have been here for many, many decades, who have been persecuted by people in this chamber or left exposed by actions that have not been followed through by this chamber, as per this motion.

As the motion says, ‘targeted by vilification and division’ is very important in a modern, multicultural Australia. I say this as a former minister for multicultural affairs and as the son of a refugee who came to Australia from a displaced persons camp in between Hamburg and Bremen post the war, because Australia has been one of the migration success stories, particularly since World War II. I was at the Veneto Club, a big Italian club in my electorate, on Saturday night – a very, very good club and a very powerful, important and institutional part of Melbourne, not just Manningham.

The people in that club are not responsible for, in many cases, founding businesses and founding industries; they built them – their families built them – and they are examples of postwar Australia which I think we should all be looking at and appreciating more. And indeed modern migration in this country has been a huge success story. Where some migrant nations like Brazil and Argentina decided to turn off their migrant tap, this country has not, ostensibly at all, since World War II. It has gone up and down in numbers, and that debate is always had – and I would say have it in the context of population policy. You do not just talk about immigration – that is a very juvenile way of doing it – you talk about population, and it is about all of us. It is not about some of us, it is about all of us, and in a sensible discussion about what you want your state or your country to look like – in a sensible and mature way – you do not say ‘It’s these people’ or ‘those people,’ you say ‘It’s about all of us,’ and you have a sensible discussion.

As this motion says, it is about people who have been ‘targeted by vilification and division’. I wish to move an amendment to the motion, if I can, now. I move:

That the word ‘anti-immigration’ be omitted.

I formally move that because it is not just a debate about immigration and the protests we have seen across Melbourne for particularly the last two years, and I will obviously come back to why it has been those last two years. This motion says ‘targeted by vilification and division’ in a ‘multicultural Victoria’. That is what this motion says. I intend to expand upon what the motion says, because it is important. The government has raised an important point, so let us talk about it. Let us talk about what has happened in terms of vilification and division in our multicultural Victoria particularly over the last two years. Why do I say the last two years? We all know – every Melburnian, all 5.4 million of us now know – exactly what has been happening. We are all aware of what has been happening in our CBD literally every week for the last two-plus years. Melburnians are not foolish. Whether we are new arrivals to our city, recent arrivals, Indigenous – as we have seen from this morning – or others, we know what has been happening in our city. We have seen what has been happening at the front of Parliament. And all of us can see, without any shadow of a doubt, who the target of the – as the motion says – vilification and division in a multicultural Victoria actually is.

It is not in some kind of hushed-tones shock that we say the target of that has been our Jewish community. It has been relentless and it has been obvious, and in my view it has been quite shameful to people whose families have been here for 100-plus years or more. I think it was in the Second Fleet that came out to settle this country that there were Jewish people in that group that came out. It is not as if Jewish Australians have not been here for a long period of time. It is not as if people from other faiths have not been here for a long period of time. Obviously people of the Christian faith – people who came out to colonise and settle in Australia – and of the Buddhist and the Sikh faiths were here well before recent arrivals, and Islamic Australians, the first mosque being in Marree in South Australia. The Overland telegraph, which went between Darwin and Adelaide – with a place halfway where there was fresh water, called Alice Springs – was built by people who, literally, came from

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everywhere but Afghanistan but they got the name Afghans. They were Australia's first Islamic immigrants to this country. In the 1860s in Marree the first mosque was established. The train the Ghan bears its name from the first Islamic immigration to Central Australia. So it is not as if our country has not had a multicultural past from day one. It has.

As the motion says, let us talk about those who have been 'vilified and divided'. The government has raised it, and I want to raise what has occurred in the last two years. When I was Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, if I had seen some of the behaviour that has been happening toward our Jewish community, I would have intervened very, very early. The breakdown in relations that has clearly taken place between some elements of our community and the turning on Jewish Australians for no reason has been quite shameful.

What happened in Israel in October 2023 was the most abhorrent of terrorist incidents, and no-one has denied that – certainly not from the Labor, the Liberal or National parties. It has been felt deeply by the city that is the home to the largest per capita proportion of Holocaust survivors anywhere outside Israel – that is, Melbourne, with the largest Jewish community in Australia. Melbourne's Jewish community was the home of people such as Sir John Monash, Isaac Isaacs and Sir Ninian Stephen, whose family originally came from here as well. As a city with such a proud, rich cultural heritage in our Jewish community, we know what has been dealt out by people toward our Jewish community. I say this with this in mind: my mum's family is from the east of Ukraine. Our family has been bombed. My great-aunt was making Molotov cocktails on the first three days when we sat in this chamber and talked about quite a lot of great work where we came to oppose the Russian invasion a couple of years ago. I have seen WhatsApp messages, I have seen Viber messages, all from my family back in Ukraine about the devastation, the killing of children in childcare centres, children being taken from places like Mariupol and sent out east for re-education by the Russians. How many times has there been a demonstration out the front of a Russian ethnic facility or the Russian churches in this city? The answer is never by the Ukrainian community, and we would never allow it, because we did not come to this country to then go and protest against people who came to this country for the same reason as us, and that is to find peace and safety and security away from war-torn Europe.

We do not then bring that division, however painful it is for many in the Ukrainian community today to watch what has happened to Kherson, to Kharkiv, to Kyiv, to Lviv, to all these cities in Ukraine. We do not, and it is shunned, particularly by our now departed and dearly loved leader Stefan Romaniw, who would always say, 'You never, ever take these issues out on those people who are your neighbours in Australia. We're all here for a reason.' That is not the same attitude that some people have taken, and some of them might not be from the traditional backgrounds you would expect. That is not the same attitude that some people have adopted toward Jewish Australians, and it is shameful. Some people in this country – and I have noted them, and I see some of these people at demonstrations and they look like white academic types from the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne – have turned up to start turning on Jewish Australians for no reason. What have those families done at Adass? What have they done? What did they do to deserve their place of worship being firebombed, to have their people's cars vandalised, to have schools attacked and vandalised in Australia in the 21st century, in 2023, 2024 and 2025? Many of those people's grandparents, a number of whom fled Europe for the same reason as mine – many in this chamber and many others – to escape war, to find a place of peace and sanctity and security in this country came here and what have they found 80 years on? They have found the same hate in some quarters that they ran away from quite rightly after the war and tried to get away from in Europe in the 1930s and 40s.

This is modern Australia, and this motion quite rightly says, 'Victorians targeted by vilification and division'. That is this motion. I say on this motion: there are a group of Victorians who have clearly been targeted, and it has not been hidden. There was an example in 2024 of 600 Jewish Australians being doxxed. I did not even know that term: 'doxxed'. That is someone entering a group where they are talking about sensible topics, whether it is providing cultural entertainment or other topics, and all their names being released to groups who want to – let us go to the motion – vilify them and target

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them with division. What have they done as Australians, as Victorians, to deserve such treatment being meted out? The answer is nothing. No-one deserves that treatment. Everyone should find this country as a place of sanctity and security from what happens elsewhere. We do not ask you not to bring your emotions with you to this modern country of ours, or your children or children's children. I was born here; my sons were born here. We have been to Ukrainian rallies but never once have we held up signs that attack Russians. Why would we? They are in this country for the same reason as us, and their children are and their grandchildren are, and we may have to live next door to them. So why on earth would we then target them and make life uncomfortable for them in Australia, the home of peace and prosperity, as is on Victoria's coat of arms?

I just found it really shocking, annoying and infuriating to read in the Jewish committee report – it is a bit dated now, from 2024; it was released a couple of months ago – about the rise in antisemitic attacks in this country, particularly that 40 per cent of them are occurring in this state, which is a greatly disproportionate amount. From totalling 495 incidents in 2023, it went up to 2062 in 2024 and probably more in 2025 – ask the member for Caulfield. What has his community done to deserve that, when they have come to this country to do well; to live in peace; to practise their faith in peace; to have a Shabbat dinner with their neighbour; to have, as they do every year, an open day for synagogues for every Victorian, regardless of your faith, whether you have one or not – no matter who you are? That is what the motion says, and that is why I think it is important to put that on the record.

It goes even further. I looked at the incidents by state, and I say again that Victoria has 905 of the 2062 – 40-something per cent in Victoria. I simply ask this: why is this problem more acute in Victoria as a percentage? What are we lacking? What have we not done in this time to protect, as this motion says, people targeted by vilification and division in a multicultural Victoria? What have we not done to protect Victorians who have done no wrong but simply exist peacefully, abide by the law and practise their faith? What have we done? Well, we had move-on laws, with respect, which could have dispersed any demonstrations out the front of Jewish schools. Jewish schools and Jewish kindergartens in Melbourne, the home of the largest per capita number of Holocaust survivors anywhere in the world outside of Israel, have to provide security for kids to go to kinder.

I went to Buenos Aires a couple of months ago; it was in the media. I tell you one thing that I could not believe was how many synagogues I walked past and how many Jewish schools I walked past, and not a single one of them had security. The member for Narracan and I went in and asked two of them about it. They said, 'We have no problem. There is no concern.' That is in Buenos Aires. I think everyone will know that historically a large number of, shall we say, people from central Europe who changed their last name went to settle in Argentina after World War II. They have now got a government who will stand up for their communities. They have now got a government who says, 'You will not be left alone. You will not be left in the cold. We will stand up for you to practise your faith, and anyone who says otherwise – out.' And when I say out, that means – not out of the country if they were born there – there will be penalties. What have we not done in Victoria? Again, I say move-on laws were a way to disperse people who behaved like this out the front of Jewish centres.

We had a discussion about masks and masks at protests, and we brought into this chamber – I think it was the member for Caulfield and the member for Berwick – powers which could then enforce penalties on people having these violent demonstrations wearing masks. You notice that all the gutless ones have got these masks on. They have got these flags, they have got these signs – some in the past, until it was thankfully criminalised, with swastikas on them – and they have all got a mask on. They are all strong; they are all ready to stand up for what they believe in. It is a disgrace. We can do more to protect people who come to this country to abide by the law and live in peace.

I just want to talk about one issue in relation to these demonstrations, which are targeting one group of Australians shamefully and disgracefully. When I was multicultural affairs minister under the Kennett government some decades ago, we established the Victorian Multicultural Commission. It was an Australian-leading model. New South Wales copied the VMC. Other states copied our VMC. Steve Bracks kept it and expanded it, because he also recognised that the structure of the VMC was

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something that sat above politics, and good luck and best wishes. I mean, they did the right thing: the Kennett government established it, Bracks kept it and Baillieu–Napthine kept it. It has now been disbanded.

I was horrified that a member of the commission, Mohamed Mohideen, made comments supporting Ayatollah Khomeini and retweeted comments that supported Hamas. This was in the media; this was not disputed. In fact he made comment on it. In other posts he called Khomeini a hero and amplified conspiracy theories accusing Jews of creating terror cells across Europe. This is a member of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Going back to the motion – ‘targeted by vilification and division’ – the VMC, as the pre-eminent body in this state charged to uphold people not being targeted by vilification and division, has a member saying this about Ayatollah Khomeini and his regime, which, I might add, the federal Labor government identified for sending out operatives to burn down a synagogue in Melbourne. He called him a hero, and he was not sacked. I would have sacked them on sight if I had found out a member of the VMC had put out such posts. He said he made the posts in his capacity with the Islamic Council of Victoria, not as a commissioner. It does not matter what your faith is or whether you have one or not; do not make comments about other Victorians like this. They are deeply hurtful, and you are a member of the pre-eminent body that is there to uphold our state’s multicultural values. The government did not move on this person. In fact the Premier simply said, ‘I’ll take some more information,’ when she was asked about it. ‘I’ll get some more information.’ What more information is needed? I just ask this. This motion refers to Australians targeted by vilification and division. What more information should be needed that that person should have been removed forthwith?

You ask in this chamber, ‘What would you do?’ Well, I will tell you what we would have done. I have no doubt that that person would have been removed, because we do not tolerate that kind of behaviour. Look what has happened to the Jewish community since the Adass synagogue: Jewish schools graffitied, people’s homes graffitied and apartment blocks scribbled with ‘Jews live here’. This is Melbourne, and we have got people on the VMC board – now departed, but he was not dismissed like he should have been – making comments like that.

As I said at the start of my comments, I find them stunning, some of these protests. I have seen them on Saturdays totally disrupting our city and totally destroying traders’ ability to prosper post COVID. Melbourne has a terrible reputation for these demonstrations which – this motion says ‘targeted by vilification and division’ – seek to vilify and divide. What I notice, and I see it in some of the documentation from the Jewish community, is the prevalence of antisemitism in what you would describe as left-wing elites. In this chamber we have seen it manifest in the form of the Greens. Never would I ever have thought, in my time in politics, that we would see a political party that obtains one in 10 primary votes, for now, running into this chamber and supporting claims, supporting conspiracy theories and attacking deliberately one group of Australians based on their faith.

**Ellen Sandell:** Come on, Deputy Speaker – a point of order on many grounds, but in particular that a motion is not a chance to attack another political party.

**Matthew GUY:** Deputy Speaker, on the point of order, the motion actually reads ‘have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division’, and I was pointing out a group of Victorians that I believe have been behaving with vilification and division.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will rule on the point of order. That was not a point of order.

**Matthew GUY:** I simply say, whatever political parties, whatever political movement, there is no excuse in this country for running in and using the protection of Parliament, by any member, to simply start attacking law-abiding, peaceful Australians based on their faith, and that is what we have seen in many parliaments around this country.

I think our Jewish community have been, I would say, incredibly patient – maybe too patient – because what has been meted out to them by many people is totally and utterly disgraceful. For the work that

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our Jewish communities have put into building our state – whether it is investing through philanthropy in our healthcare systems, in education or in sport – suddenly some say that they are responsible, those exact Victorians, for conflict on the other side of the world. Going back to my point earlier, no-one from the Ukrainian community is running around saying to Australians of a Russian background in Australia, ‘You’re the fault,’ because we know they are not. They are not in charge of the Russian government. We are not going to blame our neighbours. They came here for the same reason as us. Why would we attack? Why would we turn on them? It would be ridiculous, it would be juvenile and it would fundamentally undermine what our modern country is: a multicultural country of many people from around the world who have come here for the same reasons – to live in peace, to raise children, to get ahead and to abide by the law. That is the vast majority of Australians who have been here since settlement and who have come here to found a new life, particularly since World War II.

I could go on on a number of other matters, but I am going to choose not to. I think this motion, to me, has had enough said on what I believe is very important, and I again note my amendment to the motion, which is to omit the word ‘anti-immigration’, because we have seen on our streets not protests but demonisation of a group of Victorians who do not deserve it under any circumstance. No Victorian does, and I get very angry when I see this played out in this chamber.

I am sorry, but the Jewish community have their function every single year. It is the same function every single year, and every single Premier goes. Only one did not want to give the toast to the State of Israel. All of us go down there because we support the Jewish community and believe in them living in peace, both overseas and here. We want everyone in the Middle East to live in peace; it is not about one or the other. But when we are particularly talking about Australians and we hear people using the terms ‘Jews’, ‘Arabs’ or ‘Palestinians’ or this or that, we are Australians in this country. We are Australians, and it is the most important thing to remember. First and foremost, we are Australians, and on this side of the house both the Liberal and National parties believe all Australians should come equally under the same law. The law should apply to every Australian with the same weight, not some this and some that. We believe the criminal code and every facet of law in this state apply to people no matter what their background is and no matter how long they or their family have been here. It is an important point to note because that is the fibre of our being on this side of the chamber, and we will stand up for people who we believe are being persecuted.

This motion says ‘vilification and division in a multicultural Victoria’. We always support multiculturalism. I have been a constant, constant supporter of multiculturalism. I have been a constant advocate for Indian communities and for South Asian communities for the near 20 years I have been in this Parliament, going to Sikh gurdwaras before many people on either side discovered what they were and actually engaging with members of these communities in India many years ago, in temples in Melbourne, in mandirs and in gurdwaras. We welcome everyone, and that is what this country is about. That is what this side of the house is about. We will always stand up for people, no matter where they are from, because we believe unequivocally in a multicultural, multifaith Victoria, and unlike others, we do not shirk that debate and we do not say it with platitudes. We say it with strength and the conviction of our actions, hence the motions we have moved in this chamber to protect our Jewish community.

**Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (13:15):** I will keep my contribution short, because I know that we have a long list of speakers on this motion. I am proud to rise today as part of the government that recognises that whoever you are, whatever you believe in and wherever you are from, you are welcome and you are valued in this state, because diversity is one of our greatest strengths here in Victoria. We come from hundreds of different backgrounds and from all walks of life, and we are one of the world’s greatest multicultural success stories. We treasure and celebrate our diversity. It is essential to the success and vibrancy of our state. Today with this motion we have another opportunity to reflect on the amazing contribution and the amazing stories of many different Victorians and communities and to celebrate our diversity, what makes each of us unique and what makes each of our communities so proud. These contributions are significant in terms of not just culture and traditions but vital everyday

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contributions to the community in academia, business, industry, skills and the like. We are so lucky that Victoria is such a vibrant and wonderful place, and we are thankful for all of these contributions and experiences which enrich our state.

I would like to thank all the amazing community leaders in my electorate. The Clarinda district is one of the most multicultural districts in the state and across the country. We are an amazing example of a strong and cohesive community, and that is a testament to the work and courage of our local community leaders, our community organisations and our many volunteers, which make those organisations what they are. I am reluctant to start naming any particular community leaders or individuals or community organisations, because I know that if I start I will be here all day. There are so many amazing people in my electorate, and the strength of our community is the result of your hard work and courage, and I thank all of you. I thank you for all of your wonderful contributions over many years, and I stand with all of you in your commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (13:17): I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion:

That this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

I also support the amendment moved by the member for Bulleen that the word ‘anti-immigration’ be removed, because these are important issues, but we also need to be consistent in what we say in this place and as leaders in our community. I find that on the issues of multiculturalism, of faith and of racism too often politicians but also commentators and others in our community tend to be somewhat selective in what they choose to condemn and the behaviour they choose to condemn, depending on who is undertaking that behaviour. I think it is right that the member for Bulleen’s amendment takes out the words ‘anti-immigration’, because we have seen, over the past couple of years in particular and most particularly since 7 October 2023, a number of different groups operating that are going beyond peaceful protest and that are causing disharmony within our communities.

I certainly endorse the comments of the member for Bulleen when it comes to the Jewish community. I have spoken to many of them over our time, and I reflect on the strong defence given by the member for Caulfield and also the member for Box Hill and others in this place of the Jewish community, its right to peaceful existence in our state and its right to go about its business unmolested, unharassed and not attacked. We have seen some frankly shameful activities over the past couple of years. Everyone has the right to protest on issues of concern to them, including the behaviour of the Israeli government in Gaza, but that should not be reflected on Victorian Jewish members. Again, this debate needs to be fair and equal.

The motion obviously stems from the anti-immigration protests, and I wholeheartedly and unreservedly condemn neo-Nazi activity. That is not what we are in Victoria, and it should never be tolerated. But I also note that there are people involved in protests who are concerned generally about the level of immigration in this country, and I think it is unfair to paint everyone with the same brush just simply because neo-Nazis or people who are racist or people who are violent have turned up to some of these events. As I said, we have seen very clearly through some of these protests, counterprotesters who have been there to pick a fight. We note the commentary only a month or so ago from police commander Wayne Cheeseman, who specifically called out left-wing protesters, those who turned up for a fight and who turned up with ballast rocks from railways to throw at police. We know that a female sergeant suffered a broken hand after being kicked and a male senior constable suffered a deep gash to his leg. Yet we still have the people behind those protests saying that somehow it was the police’s fault. The police are not there to be punching bags for protesters, hard left or hard right. They do an important job in our community.

I think from a regional perspective in particular, we have been frustrated over the past couple of years to see how resources have been taken from our communities to constantly be here in Melbourne on weekends to ensure the peace is kept in the city because of ongoing protests of any sort. Not for a

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moment do I take away the right of people to protest and to protest peacefully. But too often over the last couple of years, and particularly in Victoria over a couple of decades now, we have seen people who are not there to protest peacefully. Again, that goes back to some of the COVID protests, where clearly people of whatever description you might give them turned up to have fights with police. That is something that I condemn in the strongest possible terms.

In terms of our multicultural communities, it is sometimes seen as being an urban thing and that our rural and regional communities are white European by background. Whilst that was probably historically true to some degree, it is certainly not now. We have increasing numbers of Indian Australians and Chinese Australians in our communities. I think particularly in many of our rural communities the Indian communities have taken up the small business cudgels with great enthusiasm. Many of our smaller rural towns that might only have a shop or a service station have actually been picked up in the last couple of years by Indian Australians bringing their families there. And Filipino Australians – I think of the Port Welshpool store, where Magno and Cel do a fantastic job, having taken over from long-serving proprietors there and having now become loved and treasured members of the Port Welshpool community. Those sorts of stories are repeated right around rural and regional Victoria.

I grew up in the Latrobe Valley, where compared to just down the road in Sale, where I now live, we had multiple different multicultural communities, particularly coming out post Second World War to work in the SEC and the power industry. We had Italians, Greeks, Dutch and Singaporeans, and even Japanese at a time when we had a coal-to-oil plant in the Latrobe Valley. There were Maltese, Germans, many from Europe and a growing number from Asia. And of course in more recent decades, in the last decade or two, both in the Latrobe Valley and even in Sale, there is a growing African community coming to our rural and regional communities. In some contexts I know that some of our historical or traditional industries in rural areas would not survive if it were not for the migrants that have come to work – particularly, for example, in abattoirs, where the African communities have been very active; people from Afghanistan, Korea and all sorts in many of those businesses have actually helped keep our community going.

As best we can, I think we have welcomed those newcomers. I am sure they still do face challenges; no doubt they face racism from time to time. It is part of the role of this place to ensure that we continue to work to educate the community and to be clear that we welcome all comers. It is a great project, the Australian migrant project, and it is frustrating when I hear people opposing immigration, indeed often people who are first- or only second-generation Australians themselves. I do think we need to work hard to educate newcomers and to ensure that they understand our Australian values and work harmoniously within our society, but I think we actually do it pretty well.

I would argue that the left in particular likes to say that we are a racist country and that there are problems here, but if you travel the world, you will pretty quickly realise that there are few places that are as harmonious and multicultural as Australia. It can be confronting for some people, particularly older Australians who are used to effectively a white Australia, to see different peoples in our streets and communities. But we also know that those migrants of every colour, creed and race from around the world have brought great benefits to our nation. While we welcome them with open arms to the culture and the values that we bring, we expect them to share that culture and values of tolerance, of respect and of a willingness to ensure all faiths and all cultures are accepted. I think Australia has done that well. If you look around the world, there are not too many better examples of how we have been able to do this great nation-building exercise with peoples from every land on earth we have come, as the song says. So I think it is important that we do thank those multicultural leaders but that we also note that it is not just one group that is a problem. We need to work with all as we go forward.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:27): Earlier this year I had the great privilege of attending Poland, but more specifically Auschwitz, as part of a cross-parliamentary tour. I guess among all the emotions and experiences that came to life through that event, so to speak, was seeing human beings and what they can become at their worst when hate is allowed to thrive. We saw inhumane conditions,

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obviously a targeted extermination of the Jewish people, and in addition, of course, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. It seemed like the inhumanity knew no bounds, with the accumulating of vast quantities of human hair and personal items. It was just horrific to see such evidence of what human beings can become when we do not fight or we do not truly counteract hate.

Thankfully, though, we have many wonderful people in our community who work hard each and every day to foster the opposite of that, to foster love and understanding and respect. I started from that very serious premise because we know that when so many community groups work so hard and multifaith organisations work so hard to foster love, respect and understanding – it is not just about symbolism, though that can be important – we realise how important it is, because without that constant working with each other and fostering those good relationships, the very worst of humanity can start to emerge.

I have to say, when I was Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, the then Attorney-General at times would delegate many activities, and one of them was to attend some of the multifaith and multicultural meetings whereby the anti-vilification and social cohesion reforms were being discussed and their contributions were being taken on board. Of course for those very laws to have the meaning and to have the impact that we all wanted, we needed to have the input from so many in our community who can bring that universal understanding and kindness. I will include with that also the leaders in our LGBTQIA+ community as well, because we know that those reforms were far reaching in terms of being able to better protect Victorians all round when it comes to not fostering discrimination and some of the very worst attributes that human beings can display.

I should note we would have preferred that the opposition did support those reforms, because they are incredibly important and because of the very strident advocacy from multifaith and multicultural communities to ensure that they would provide the very basis for a more positive way forward and to really send that strong message – but also action; action is inherent in those reforms – that in Victoria, racism and hate are never welcome. They are never to be allowed to flourish. I am afraid to say we have seen aspects of deep discrimination and racism displayed by some in the community, but I know that the majority of Victorians are good people, have good will and want the best for all and want particularly future generations of Victorians to know that everyone is safe and supported, regardless of their race, regardless of their gender and regardless of their sexuality.

On that note, I would like to seek to support and foster the best of us, knowing that we have shown many times as a collective, as a culture, in Victoria that we can be very understanding and show the best love, compassion and respect, and may that continue to be the case.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (13:32): I rise to support the member for Bulleen's amendment to this motion, which notes:

That this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent ... protests –

omitting the word 'anti-immigration' and broadening the term to 'protests' –

for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

Before turning to the broader issues raised by this motion, I want to begin by acknowledging the remarkable multicultural community groups and organisations in my own electorate, whose work strengthens our community every single day. In the electorate of Warrandyte, specifically, it is a very multicultural community. It is a peri-urban seat; however, there are pockets in Doncaster East, in Donvale, in Ringwood, in Ringwood North, even in Chirnside Park and, I would say, across the whole electorate at large that have diverse communities, one of which I am proud to be a member of. Recent data shows that 23.7 per cent of the electorate of Warrandyte comes from Chinese heritage, me included. There is a great amount of diversity in the electorate. If you go into Doncaster East

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specifically, you will find some of the best dumplings that you can find in the state of Victoria – I kid you not.

It is a wonderful place, my community, my electorate, and we are home to vibrant cultural groups that promote connection, belonging and mutual respect. Their leadership is essential to the harmonious and welcoming Victoria that we all want to protect. One of my favourite things to do as a member of Parliament, in the privileged position that we get to have, is to welcome our new migrants and our new citizens, as well as people who have been here for a long time who have finally got around to getting their citizenship, at these citizenship ceremonies, which we have the privilege of attending as members of Parliament. What I love to do is to stand up and welcome each and every one of them. Some of them will have gone through really difficult journeys to become citizens. For some of them it is a long time coming. There are all sorts of people that we get to welcome into our community each and every month in Manningham, Maroondah, Nillumbik and the Yarra Ranges as well. In all of these communities we welcome each and every one of them.

I just want to thank the Australian Iranian Senior Citizen Society of Victoria for all their work. I acknowledge the Chinese Senior Citizens Club of Manningham, who do incredible work in our community in Manningham; the Chinese Fellowship of Victoria; as well as the Melbourne badminton association in Doncaster East. I recently visited the Doncaster East Badminton Centre, and they ran rings around me in their ability to play badminton, I tell you what. In particular I want to recognise the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse, which in conjunction with the Jackson Court Traders Association just yesterday launched their very first Chinese New Year festival, which is going to take place on 7 February at Jackson Court in Doncaster East, where we will all get to celebrate, as my family is very proud to do each and every year, Chinese New Year. It is of such cultural importance to every member of the Chinese community at large, whether you are of Malaysian Chinese descent, Australian Chinese descent; whether you are from Hong Kong, whether you are from Taiwan, whether you are from Thailand, everyone just loves getting around Lunar New Year or Chinese New Year, as it is also called, so I give a big shout-out to the Asian business association.

Back to the motion at hand, it is pretty rich of the Allan Labor government to stand up here and talk about multiculturalism. It is pretty rich because I am the first woman to represent the seat of Warrandyte. Not only that, I am the first Asian woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly here in the Victorian Parliament. I remember saying in my maiden speech that I am:

... the first of my community to enter this place. May there be many more.

Then I had join me the member for Prahran, who was the first Thai woman elected to represent her community here in the Victorian Parliament – the first Thai woman elected to the Legislative Assembly here in the Victorian Parliament. It only took until 2024 and 2023 – my word – and here we are. This is not to mention a member for Western Metro, Mr Trung Luu, a Vietnamese refugee who is now a member of the Victorian Parliament, and a big credit to him. So it is rich of the Allan Labor government to talk about multiculturalism and talk about supporting multiculturalism when every time I have gotten to my feet in this place this year, every time I have made a contribution, I have been mocked, I have been jeered, I have been interjected on and there has been some kind of direction to silence what I have to say here in the Victorian Parliament.

I speak to young people and I speak to people of diverse communities and different backgrounds. In fact I have young people writing to me who say, ‘Thank you for standing up for us. Thank you for representing us.’

*Members interjecting.*

**Nicole WERNER:** While they continue to interject and continue to say all sorts of nonsense, we know it to be true. What does it say to every young woman of colour, what does it say to every young woman wanting to enter this place when they see the behaviour – the disgusting, appalling behaviour;

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the mockery from the member for Tarneit; the member for Werribee calling the member for Kew, now the Leader of the Opposition, a grub. What does it say to every young woman in this place –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** Order! Thank you, member. While I appreciate your passion on this, I would appreciate you speaking through the Chair.

**Nicole WERNER:** As I return to speaking about this, what does it say to every young woman of colour seeking to enter Parliament, seeking to have a life in public office, seeking to enter politics when this is the behaviour that comes across from the members of the Allan Labor government, who make these interjections, who taunt, who mock, who interject, who bully, who slander, who vilify and who target the first Asian woman to enter this place? What does it say about the microaggressions from members of the Allan Labor government, who on a daily basis here in this place get us confused – get me and the member for Prahran confused. They do it every single day. In fact it has happened from members in the chair, who have sat in the chair –

**Anthony Cianflone:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, with the greatest of respect, my point of order is on relevance. The motion is actually about providing a sincere thanks to the community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification arising from the recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria. I put that point of order to you as a son of Italian migrants on this side of the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** There is no point of order, but I do encourage members to stick to the motion.

**Nicole WERNER:** In speaking to multiculturalism, a safe and united multicultural Victoria, this is why it is important: 75 per cent of young women do not feel that Australian politics is an inclusive or equal space for them. Almost a third, 30 per cent, of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds said they would never consider a career in politics due to their cultural or ethnic backgrounds and because Parliament is not diverse enough. I ask you: if this is the treatment that the Allan Labor government has towards women of diverse backgrounds, in the member for Prahran getting mocked for the way that she speaks and me getting interjected, interrupted and targeted in trying to send a message and speak to people in our communities – every single time that I have gotten up in this place and they have tried to silence me from speaking to our communities, being criticised for the way that I speak to our communities when I am simply trying to make this place an inclusive place for women of colour, an inclusive place for migrants and an inclusive place for multicultural Victoria.

That is what I seek to do in this place, and that is what we are here for – to make this place accessible, to make this place relevant and to make this place engaging so that people do not feel excluded. This is the people's house. This should be a place where every young person, every young woman, feels like they belong, feels like they have a place, feels like they have a voice, feels like they can enter this place without being mocked, jeered at, taunted and bullied by the Allan Labor government. Here I speak in favour of a safe and united and multicultural Victoria. That is what we believe in. That is what we stand for on this side of the house. On that side of the house – absolutely not. But on this side of the house we stand for that and we represent that. We are here representing diverse communities. I commend the member for Bulleen's amendments to the house.

**Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (13:42):** I also stand to support, give my commitment to and talk to this motion about a safe and united multicultural Victoria. I particularly would like to talk a little bit about how this relates to the Bellarine electorate. I was born and bred on the Bellarine. I have always found the Bellarine a very caring, thoughtful and deeply respectful community – and various communities across the Bellarine that have little pockets of their own suburbs. We are certainly, though, united in looking after each other. We are very good at listening to each other and checking in on our neighbours. We do not approach challenges that we have in our community with anger or with suspicion. We use empathy, and we use common sense, really, across the Bellarine. I think that that is

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what is very unique and very special about the electorate that I very proudly represent. We are certainly small communities across the Bellarine that are very connected and very much have a genuine commitment to each other's wellbeing. That is why attempts to provoke fear or fuel division have no home and no place on the Bellarine. For our communities, we do not fall for those, I suppose, rage-bait politics and the loud tactics that thrive on conflict. We do not allow ourselves to be dragged into the noise of this manufactured outrage that we see sometimes.

The Bellarine has been built on many generations of families who have come to Australia seeking a better life, and that life has been defined by having a safe life and an opportunity to thrive and come with hope. They come to raise children in small country towns, where it is very much hard work that is valued and our freedoms are protected and every person has a chance, regardless of their background and regardless of where their story has begun, to thrive. They have enriched our communities across the Bellarine. Those journeys, though, obviously can be marked with sacrifice and courage and belief in a brighter future. As this house has remarked today, we have seen some people in this community attempt to use fear as a tool to divide communities, to pit our neighbours against each other and turn that into this fuelling of anger and fear. But that is not leadership. Leadership is not about stoking fear. It is not about exploiting tensions. It is about resolving issues. It is not about creating enemies but building communities.

We cannot ignore, though, that across the world and indeed here in Victoria we have seen a troubling rise in vilification. Most of the time it is being fuelled by misinformation, maybe global conflicts, polarising commentary and online spaces that reward outrage over truth. Obviously, Victoria has not been immune to this, and we have seen attempts to inflame those tensions. But it just reminds us that cohesion is not automatic and that it must be protected. It calls on our leaders and our community groups and government and places like this to stand firmly against any of that form of discrimination, reject extremism in all its forms and actively build a society where each person is safe and valued.

It is about having leaders that bring people together. They listen before they speak. They seek solutions, not headlines. They take responsibility for calming a community, not inflaming it. And they stand with those who feel isolated or targeted and remind everyone that our strength comes from unity. In every moment we are tested. And when we have seen protests in the streets – I never thought I would see what I have seen in my lifetime in this state – many community leaders have stood up to show strength and compassion and courage by calling that out.

We certainly, today with this motion, thank those leaders. We thank our faith leaders, our cultural organisations, our community volunteers, teachers, local advocates and everyday residents particularly who simply refuse to look away. We thank them today with this motion. It reminds us that leadership does not come with a badge or a title. Leadership is sometimes shown in the quietest of acts of solidarity and public statements of support and maybe calm voices of reason. It is a willingness to say in this state and in this community when we see these examples of vilification that we will not have that in our communities; we will not stand for that.

As we have noted, this work is not finished, and to maintain a united, multicultural community requires ongoing effort. In speaking to this motion, I commit to working on that for the Bellarine community, where our diversity is celebrated, where racism is rejected and where division will not take hold. The Bellarine community knows that unity is not an aspiration, it is actually an action. I thank the leaders, and I thank the Minister for Health for her motion today to thank our leaders for standing up.

**Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (13:48):** I rise to support this motion while supporting the amendment put forward by the member for Bulleen to remove the word 'anti-immigration' before 'protests', because I think the issue is much broader than that. I thank the community leaders across Prahran who have demonstrated courage and moral clarity when some have sought to divide us along the lines of race, religion and origin.

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Before I speak about my community, I want to acknowledge something personal. My father came to Australia as an immigrant from Thailand of Thai Chinese heritage. His journey is the story of millions of Australians. It is the story of modern Australia, and it is the story of Prahran. Prahran is not merely tolerant of diversity. In fact I really do not like the word ‘tolerance’ because it suggests a willingness to tolerate opinions or behaviours that one disagrees with. In my view, diversity in all forms is something to celebrate and not to tolerate. Prahran, and indeed Victoria and Australia, is built on diversity and is defined by it. Walk down Chapel Street, Greville Street, Commercial Road or Inkerman Street and you will encounter different languages and cuisines, different histories, traditions and people of diversity in all shapes and forms with dreams all woven together into something that is very much distinctly Australian.

I want to speak specifically about the Jewish community in Prahran, whose presence and leadership have shaped our area profoundly. They have established schools, community centres, places of worship and charitable organisations that serve not just their own community but the broader community. In recent months I have met with Jewish community leaders who have expressed their deep concerns about the rise in antisemitism in Australia, in Victoria particularly. They have spoken to me about their fear for their families, about the desecration of sacred places and about casual prejudice that has re-emerged in public discourse. Let me be unequivocal: there is no place for antisemitism in Prahran or Victoria or indeed Australia – simply none. The Jewish community deserves to live and work and worship and raise their families free from hatred and fear. That is not a courtesy, it is an absolute right, and I will stand with them in defending it.

I also want to acknowledge the Greek community. The Greek Orthodox Church of Sts Constantine & Helen in South Yarra, under the leadership of Father Pantaleimon, is more than simply a place of worship. It is a cultural anchor where traditions are kept alive and where language is preserved, but it is also embedded deeply into the local community, helping those in need and ensuring they have got food and support when they need it most. The Greek community in Prahran has shown us what successful integration looks like. They have maintained their cultural identity while contributing deeply to the Australian story.

I want to turn now to a more difficult subject, because this house owes Victorians honesty, not just sentiment. Immigration has made Australia, and it has made Prahran. But immigration policy cannot be separated from planning policy, from infrastructure policy and from housing policy. You cannot increase population without increasing capacity, and when governments fail to do that, the consequences are borne disproportionately by the communities we claim to support. Prahran is the most densely populated and smallest electorate in Victoria. Under the Allan government’s proposed activity centres, that density is set to increase dramatically, affecting all five train stations in our local area. This policy was imposed without adequate consultation, without proper infrastructure planning and without consideration of existing community capacity. High-density development can be done well, creating vibrant, livable communities and neighbourhoods with strong public amenity and affordable housing. Or it can be done poorly. It can create the slums of the future: overcrowded, underserviced and disconnected from the infrastructure needed to support them. And the higher we go, the more we lose a sense of community, and that is a deep concern to me.

When I go to speak with community leaders, including those from migrant communities who have chosen to make Prahran home, they do not ask for less immigration. They ask for competent government. They ask for schools that can accommodate their children. They ask for childcare places. They ask for public transport that works. They ask for housing they can actually afford. They ask to be heard. Meeting them is not anti-immigration; it is pro-community, it is pro-integration and it is the foundation on which successful multiculturalism depends. But instead of delivering these essential services the Allan government has saddled Victorians with a runaway debt level and increased taxes to pay for it. Victorian families and small businesses, including the many migrant-owned businesses that are the backbone of our economy, are now facing higher land taxes, increased payroll taxes and the expansion of the congestion levy.

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These increased costs fall heavily on the very communities we should be supporting. Take the Windsor Community Children's Centre. For decades this centre has served families across Prahran, providing early childhood education and care to children from every background imaginable. When Swinburne University announced plans to sell the property that houses the centre, threatening its closure, the community rose up. That centre is infrastructure. It is the kind of investment that makes density livable. Last night Swinburne advised that it had rejected the joint Stonnington and Commonwealth government offer to purchase the site. They have, however, granted the Windsor Community Children's Centre a 12-month stay of execution, and they will enter into exclusive negotiations with the parties for six months. While this is encouraging, it has not secured the centre's future. One hopes Swinburne is not simply gaming the situation. The Labor Party's activity centre planning changes will likely increase the property's value, and the state election will only be months away at the end of the exclusive negotiation window. What have we heard from the minister through all of this? Nothing – zero. When a centre that embodies family support and multiculturalism hangs in the balance, the Allan government, sadly, in this instance is nowhere to be found.

I also want to address community safety, because it is inseparable from the question of whether people feel secure in their neighbourhoods. Chapel Street has experienced rising crime levels and retail crime. When people do not feel safe in their streets, when businesses are repeatedly targeted and when families feel uncomfortable walking home at night, it erodes the social trust multiculturalism depends on, a safe community and a cohesive community. The government's decision to abolish move-on laws has left Victoria Police without essential tools to manage disruptive behaviour. Victoria stands apart from other mainland states by not requiring protest permits, despite repeated calls from Victoria Police and the opposition to introduce such a system.

I now return to the reason why we are debating this motion: the recent anti-immigration protests that have sought to scapegoat particular communities, particularly the Indian Australian community, for problems that are the result of policy failure and not migration itself. Let me be clear: we condemn those rallies and the abhorrent messaging associated with them. Victoria is a proudly multicultural, multifaith state, and we will always stand with all Victorians, no matter what their background. Rejecting the policies of division also requires the rejection of the policies of complacency. It requires us to be honest about pressures facing communities. Concerns about housing, infrastructure and services are legitimate, even when they are cynically exploited by others. We will not allow that to happen.

I want to thank community leaders in Prahran who have stood against vilification and division, leaders from the Jewish community, the Greek community and the many others who have refused to be silent in the face of absolute hatred. Prahran is rich and vibrant because of immigration. Its diversity is not a challenge to be managed, it is a strength to be celebrated and protected. But strength requires foundations and requires infrastructure.

I am deeply passionate about standing with Victorians from all backgrounds and fervently oppose any form of vilification or division. It is one of the reasons I entered politics – to have a voice on the very issues such as these. I commenced my speech discussing my father, who came to Australia just after the White Australia policy ended in the 1960s. When he arrived, he went to boarding school in Ballarat, and what a culture shock it was. He was from the bustling streets of Bangkok. He was welcomed by the most wonderful families, who would host him over school holidays. But he also encountered significant racism and targeting. Even as a child, I recall him being targeted on trams with racist slurs and being told he was a boat person and should go home. As a child growing up in Noble Park and Springvale, I remember being told I was not invited to a friend's birthday party because I was Asian, and so my determination grew, as an adult, to ensure my own children never experienced this exclusion. I worked to ensure I had a career that contributed, that I had tertiary qualifications that were actually competitive and that my English and my pronunciation were as perfect as possible, and I volunteered on boards such as the board of the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors. Yet even now my youngest daughter, who looks more like me than

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my other two children, was only six when she was at her ballet concert and was shouted at by a young boy who referred to her by colour. Even in this house, I am often confused with my colleague the member for Warrandyte, and I am assuming it is because we are the only two Asian women on our side. Whilst I would love her social media following, we actually are different. There are also comments made about how I speak.

We are in Australia, a country built on diversity, where overseas conflict should not be brought. Our great country has been built on immigration and contributions, not on division and difference. I commend this motion to the house with the moved amendment to remove the word 'anti-immigration', because my concerns are broader than simply an anti-immigration protest.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (13:58): With the couple of minutes or less that we have left, I am absolutely proud to be standing up in support of this motion as a member of the Victorian Labor government that stands with our multicultural community, that stands to support social cohesion and that is here with all of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities right across this state. But I am even more proud to stand here as the member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West –

**Sam Groth** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE**: Have you ever been there? Probably not. It is one of the most multicultural communities in this country. I stand as the son of Italian migrant parents who came here with nothing but a suitcase on their back that was filled with dreams for a better future for themselves, their children and their grandchildren and who worked hard to contribute and to give a better life to their children, their grandchildren and their community too. And I am proud to be here as someone standing with our First Nations community. Here as a government, we support the apology. We support treaty, voice and truth. But the opposition came to the smoking ceremony at the front, came in here and opposed the apology and then went for lunch in Queens Hall and took the sandwiches. They have got no shame at all.

**Brad Rowswell**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to the member for Pascoe Vale's contribution at the moment –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! I am required by sessional orders to interrupt the house for question time. The member can continue his point of order after that.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Child protection**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. A report by the commissioner for children and young people has found 10 child deaths occurred in circumstances where case management advice was not followed. Why is the government failing to protect vulnerable children?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): In acknowledging the question from the Liberal Party leader, I want to at the outset acknowledge that the death of any young child is indeed a tragedy, particularly when it goes to those children that are the responsibility of and in the care of the state and are therefore brought to the attention of the children and young persons commissioner. It is indeed a tragedy because they were already vulnerable ahead of the tragic circumstances surrounding their deaths. I will say, though, that given the vulnerabilities around each child, given the individual circumstances around each case of each child, I most strongly and strenuously disagree with the political characterisation by the Leader of the Liberal Party around the observations about state care. Anyone who has had any responsibility – portfolio or shadow portfolio or as members of Parliament – knows the tremendous work that those who work in child protection and in caring for the most

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vulnerable children do. They care deeply for the children in their care. They work tirelessly, and I will not have this political characterisation by the Liberal Party as put forward today by the leader.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this question went to the government's lack of responsibility in relation to those 10 tragic deaths, and I would ask you to bring the Premier back to that very tragic set of circumstances.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta Allan:** As I was saying, I was strenuously rejecting the substance of the question, and indeed I was using this as an opportunity to thank everyone who works in this area. It is one of the most difficult areas of government service delivery, which is why we support workers in this sector. We will continue to support them as they work with the most vulnerable children in the state.

**Jess Wilson** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): The commissioner's report also found this included a failure in one case to respond to repeated reports of neglect of very young siblings. Premier, why were repeated reports of neglect of a vulnerable child ignored?

**Jacinta Allan** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): Again, the report went into a range of circumstances around each of these families. These are incredibly vulnerable families, and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children is indeed a priority of everyone who works across the child protection sector. That is why I will always continue to thank them for their work, support their work and not politicise their work like the Liberal Party is doing today.

### Ministers statements: education system

**Ben Carroll** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:05): As the year comes to a close I want to say thank you to all our teachers and school staff. Thank you for showing up every day with patience, creativity and heart. Thank you for giving everything you have for our young Victorians, not just teaching them but believing in them, inspiring them and making sure they get every opportunity in life to shape their own futures. The Allan Labor government will always deliver for students, teachers and families. The number of teachers we have on our government benches shows that teaching and education are in our DNA. Nothing we have achieved this year could have been achieved without our hardworking schoolteachers – not the record NAPLAN results, not our cost-of-living relief and not the support for student safety and wellbeing.

Teachers impact more lives in a single year than most of us do in a lifetime, and their influence echoes across generations. That is why it is crucial we always recognise their importance, because how can we expect them to be respected if we do not show respect for teachers inside this place? Respecting educators is exactly what the Allan Labor government has done every day since we have been in office. We have invested an extra \$38 billion for our schools since 2015. We have grown our school workforce year on year since we have been in office. We have supported them through less paperwork and doing more of what they love, investing in future generations.

Others have not always shown this respect. Others have cut \$1 billion from education. Some have driven teachers out of the workforce. Some others today have quoted Jeff Kennett. Jeff Kennett's legacy, when he was in office, was the closure of 350 schools right across our state. Some things never change, and the fact is we build and they cut.

### Post-sentence supervision orders

**James Newbury** (Brighton) (14:07): My question is to the Attorney. I refer to Theo Briggs, a sex offender who went on to commit two home invasions, steal a car, kidnap an Uber driver at knifepoint and attack a woman in a park after being approved for release into the community by this government. How many other dangerous sex offenders have been approved for release into the community?

*Members interjecting.*

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**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Finance and the member for Nepean can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Minister for Finance and member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:08): I thank the member for Brighton for his question. I understand that the question was asked of the Minister for Corrections in the other place, who is the appropriate minister and the minister responsible for this matter. Having said that this matter is for the Minister for Corrections in the other place, what I will say in relation to crime, and adult time for violent crime here in Victoria, is we know that we are doing everything we can to protect our communities and to provide Victoria Police with the resources –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Attorney addressed the question at the start of her answer. I cannot tell the Attorney how to answer the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I will use the opportunity to remind those in the house about the reforms that we have brought in to ensure that we are protecting and keeping our communities safe. Adult time for violent crime passed this Parliament just last week, and this is all about keeping communities safe. It is all about listening to the voices of victims and ensuring that there are consequences for violent offenders.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, a number of these crimes do not fall within the bill.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I will take up that point by the Shadow Attorney-General. He said these offences do not fall within the bill. I remind the Shadow Attorney-General that before he makes points he should read the bill and understand exactly what has been before the Parliament and in fact what is going to happen. What we said very clearly through debate – and I pulled up the Shadow Attorney on a number of occasions, because there was mischief, there was misinformation being peddled in relation to this –

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, the minister is not even going anywhere near the original question. I do not know what this is. I do not know if it is a debate on another motion or what it is.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** Again, for the benefit of the Shadow Attorney, the member for Brighton, I was picking up the point that he made that the offences that he raised have nothing to do with adult time for violent crime. They have everything to do with adult time for violent crime. The laws that have now passed this Parliament are directed at those offending that are causing great harm in our community. We went through this matter and, as I said, I have pulled up the Shadow Attorney on a number of occasions. I gave him the benefit of the doubt, thinking perhaps he had misread –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Attorney will come back to the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I will finish here by reminding those opposite of all of the work that we have done this year to reform our laws to make Victoria safer and to keep communities safe, and that is: our massive reforms to bail that have passed this Parliament twice this year; electronic monitoring of children on bail; our post-and-boast laws; and giving police more powers to search and seize and get rid of dangerous knives off our streets.

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**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:12): How many times have sex offenders released under supervision orders reoffended?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:12): I do believe that this question was also asked of the Minister for Corrections in the other place earlier today, and I will refer this matter to him as the relevant minister.

### Ministers statements: health workforce

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:13): I rise to thank our hardworking healthcare workers for their commitment to delivering world-class care to Victorians wherever they live. Over 123,000 Victorians work in our public healthcare system, and we know that our healthcare workers are absolutely committed to delivering the highest quality of care. Whether it is the more than 212,000 planned surgeries that were delivered last year, the 400,000 code 1 ambulance call-outs or the 2 million presentations to our emergency departments, behind each and every stat is a team of nurses, midwives, ambos, allied health professionals, cooks, cleaners, doctors, admin teams, orderlies, pharmacists, theatre techs and so many more that come to work every day to do what matters and to deliver for the people of Victoria.

Our healthcare workers continue to innovate and look at opportunities to expand health care right across the state, including for Naja, the very first patient to receive care from our virtual hospital here in Victoria, building of course on the hundreds of thousands of people who have received care through the virtual emergency department; for Sue, who was the first regional patient to receive a cochlear implant at a regional hospital, at GV Health in Shepparton; over 64,000 consultations delivered through our Chemist Care Now program; for the hundreds of families who have had their babies born as a result of our government's investment in public IVF; and new services that have been brought online at all of our community hospitals. And of course we have seen our healthcare workers embrace and contribute to our nation-leading work on women's health and pain. We thank our healthcare workers for their work.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning, member for Tarneit.

### Meningococcal B vaccination

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Health. Levi Syer passed away less than a day after contracting meningococcal B. He had turned just 16. Meningococcal B kills 5 to 10 per cent of patients and leaves 10 to 20 per cent of those who survive with brain damage, hearing loss or learning disabilities. Will the government commit to funding the meningococcal B vaccine?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:16): I thank the member for Berwick for his question. Like me, the member has had the opportunity to meet with Levi's mum Norliah Syer-Peterson. I understand Norliah is present today, and I want to thank her for her extraordinary advocacy in the face of such great loss. I acknowledge that and I thank her for it, and I thank the member for his support of his constituent.

The meningococcal B vaccine is currently available under the national immunisation program for specific vulnerable groups. While Victoria does fund specific vaccines outside of the NIP to address identified local public health risks, outbreaks and local epidemiology, we have always relied on independent health advice to determine the vaccine schedule. As we know, meningococcal B is a terrible disease. It is rare, but the consequences are significant. While Victoria has a very low rate of infection when compared with other states and territories, I have asked the chief health officer to review the need for a localised vaccine program. The CHO has also advised me that there has been a

significant period of time since the vaccine was last considered for listing on the NIP and that a reassessment is due.

On that advice I have written to the federal health minister, Minister Butler, advocating for the implementation of a broader meningococcal B vaccine program. The CHO also, on behalf of Victoria, raised the meningococcal B immunisation at the Australian Health Protection Committee's November meeting, specifically concerns about whether the program as it stands is equitable. The Commonwealth of course requires an application from the manufacturer to consider a vaccine for the NIP, and as a consequence of this I have written to GlaxoSmithKline encouraging them to reapply to have the vaccine listed on the NIP. I am hopeful that they will come forward and participate in the process.

Again, I want to acknowledge Norliah and thank her for her committed advocacy. In doing so, I want to acknowledge other grieving parents and families that have been impacted by meningococcal B. But I want to advise the house that serious work is underway here in the state of Victoria to address this issue.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:18): Thank you, Minister. The meningococcal B vaccine can cost up to \$300 a dose. South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory have already committed to funding it. Why did you state to Norliah that there is not an endless bucket of money to fund it here in Victoria?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:19): The issue here that we need to address is the need for vaccines to be delivered via the national immunisation program. I understand – and Norliah knows this because she and I have had these conversations – this does take some time, and that is why I have committed to doing some serious work here in Victoria. We need also to understand why vaccines are so expensive, and it is worth knowing that one of the issues is the actual price that is charged by the pharmaceutical company in this instance. Again, on behalf of all taxpayers, I do encourage our pharmaceutical companies to consider, rather than pitting one state against the next, the opportunity to – *(Time expired)*

#### Ministers statements: State Theatre

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:20): Lovers of the performing arts have got an early Christmas present this year with the news that the Ian Potter State Theatre, our much-loved State Theatre, will be reopening six months earlier than expected, in October next year. Speaker, I know that you know that it is the biggest and best stage in Australia. The refurbished theatre will have new sound, new climate control and new safety features and will be more accessible. For the first time all three levels of the theatre will be accessible for people with mobility issues. It is part of the Labor government's \$1.7 billion transformation of the Melbourne arts precinct.

The State Theatre opened back in 1984, well after the member for Rowville was first elected to this Parliament. The first performance was the Australian Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty*. I was there at the last performance before the refurbishment started, which was the Australian Ballet's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. There have been plenty of different adaptations of that particular classic. My favourite version is where Alice falls down a rabbit hole into a fantasy world where you can reduce debt, reduce taxes and spend more at the same time – what a fairytale. Alice then has to negotiate with the Mad Hatter's tea party of former leaders and has to also avoid the menacing Queen of Hearts, with a propensity for dealing swiftly for people she does not like, who I have nicknamed Bev.

The first performance at the Arts Centre back in 1984 was not at the State Theatre –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to standing order 118, which I know you will understand refers to imputations or improper motives, Speaker Andrianopoulos mentioned in *Rulings from the Chair* that making repeated references to a member or members does not necessarily

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need to mention the member's name for it to be disorderly. I would ask you to counsel the minister accordingly.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will be very careful with his ministers statement and not impugn other members of the Parliament.

**Colin BROOKS:** Actually the first performance back at the Arts Centre in 1984 was not in fact at the State Theatre, it was actually at the smaller Playhouse theatre in the same building. It was Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Medea*, which I think is probably the Leader of the Opposition's favourite Greek tragedy. For those who are not aware of the Greek classics, let us just say that Medea has a ruthless streak and knocks off quite a few people around her. In fact in the Greek classic she even chops one bloke, Absyrtus, into pieces and throws him off a ship. The really unfortunate ones end up in Backroom Baz with a crisis tattoo.

### Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Health. The world's first health promotion foundation VicHealth was established in 1987 by bipartisan agreement to promote health and prevent many of the diseases filling our public hospitals and adding to the massive health budget. VicHealth is an internationally respected independent voice able to speak out against and take on well-funded corporations, whether it be the tobacco, gambling, alcohol or junk food lobby. But now the government plans to close VicHealth and absorb it into the department, which is not independent of government. Will the minister heed the growing outcry from the community and public health experts and reverse the decision to dissolve VicHealth?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:24): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. Of course VicHealth was proudly established by a Labor government some 40 years ago.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I just interrupt the Minister for Health to remind members that this is part of a bill that is before the Parliament, the entities bill, so just be careful with your response, Minister. You can talk about the policy.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Okay. As I was saying, it was proudly established by a Labor government some 40 years ago, but it is true to say that the health landscape has changed rather significantly during that time. When we look back at its original function, it was to buy out tobacco sponsorship, which at that stage played a large role in funding sport and the arts and so on. What we know now, as I have said, is that we have seen significant changes, and our government has only ever increased its commitment to investing tens of millions of dollars, supporting a range of organisations to deliver health promotion and prevention, including our community health organisations, our ACCHOs, not-for-profits and a new innovation of our government, which are the local public health units. The LPHUs were established in 2021, and they are very well placed to deliver localised prevention and promotion support to communities.

The LPHUs, if I think of some of the things that they have done over in the south-east, for instance, have promoted community awareness of cervical cancer screening and the importance of the HPV vaccine. This is so that we can become the first jurisdiction in the world to eliminate cervical cancer, which is something that we are on track to do. In the Goulburn Valley the LPHU has received funding from us to focus on breast and bowel cancer screening in community languages. Similarly in Barwon South, again in community languages, they are providing cancer screening information advice. The point that I am making is that the government has, over that time, changed the way in which it is delivering health promotion and prevention, including through our own LPHUs.

It is important anywhere in health that we avoid waste and duplication, and that is the intention of the government. The government will continue to invest in some very significant programs. Chief amongst these is the funding that we deliver to Cancer Council Victoria, some \$9.682 million, which

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of course delivers Quitline, which continues the work, I might say, that VicHealth was initially established to deliver, as well as the Vic Kids Eat Well and achievement program, as well as a range of cancer screening initiatives. It is a great legacy, but it is time to do things differently.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:27): Minister, LPHUs are important, but they play a very different role. VicHealth supported the SunSmart and Quit campaigns when government withdrew support. They have supported healthy initiatives in regional communities and multicultural communities, and surely public health is as relevant now as ever. It makes little sense to abolish a 38-year-old institution to save the government the equivalent of a day and a half's interest payment. Will the minister guarantee that VicHealth will retain its independence, which is such a key element of the organisation, and its protected funding?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:28): While I thank the member for Melbourne for her question, the member for Melbourne is focused more on an entity and an institution rather than the value of the programs and the best place to deliver programs. I have already mentioned Quit and the important work that they do, and I have also mentioned the Cancer Council. I could mention also Diabetes Victoria, which is another organisation funded directly by our government to run the Life! program. The point is that our government continue to invest in a whole range of health promotion and prevention programs, and we will continue to do so. We are proud investors also, I might say, in our women's health service organisations – again, organisations that deliver prevention and promotion programs in our community.

### Ministers statements: gendered violence

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:29): Today I want to express my deepest thanks to frontline family violence and sexual violence workers who show up every day, often in the hardest moments of someone's life, holding space for safety, dignity and hope. I want to speak to something that sits at the heart of their work and the work of so many in this chamber here on this side: a fairer Victoria, and that is respect. As we near the end of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, this year's focus on ending digital violence is a powerful reminder about why respect must sit at the centre of prevention.

I have experienced online abuse in recent weeks, and I want to thank those who sent messages of solidarity. But what it has shown me is how disrespect online harms women and girls. It silences their voices, it undermines confidence and it pushes them out of public life. We know culture does not shift on words alone, but through respect in action. Respect Victoria has led this work with clarity, showing us that prevention means challenging unhealthy stereotypes early, raising boys like Rex, who knows that strength can be gentle, or raising girls like Tilly, who knows their voice carries weight, and building a society where equality and respect are expected and not exceptional.

This commitment extends beyond prevention. This year Victoria has shown respect in action through the passing of treaty and the Premier's apology today in this house. These are not symbolic gestures; they are acts of truth-telling, accountability and genuine respect. Respect is not the soft part of leadership; it is the absolute substance of it. I have been proud to serve in this government, which has shown respect through action, reform and fairness. Thank you for showing me again and again what respect can build.

### Government procurement

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:31): My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, why is a contractor from Epping being employed by the Department of Education to travel a 722-kilometre round trip to the Nowa Nowa Primary School site to cut grass every month?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:32): I do not want to rain on the member for Gippsland East's birthday, except to say we have invested

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\$38 billion maintaining all our schools, and the Victorian School Building Authority does an excellent job at –

**Tim Bull:** On a point of order, Speaker, I know the minister has only been speaking for 16 seconds, but he is already indicating that he is not going to be relevant to the question that was asked.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has only been speaking for 16 seconds. The minister will come back to the question.

**Ben CARROLL:** I was going to the maintenance of the Victorian School Building Authority, and as the member for Gippsland East knows, the Victorian School Building Authority deals with the whole state. We invest in every school in every postcode, and we take pride in making sure our schools are maintained.

**Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:33):** An arborist from Mordialloc has also been engaged by the Department of Education to undertake tree works on this site. That is a 632-kilometre round trip. Minister, how much money is the government wasting by employing contractors hundreds of kilometres from this school site, rather than employing local businesses from a town that was hit by your native timber industry closure?

**Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:34):** Schools are unrecognisable from the ones we inherited from those opposite. We will always invest in education, support our schoolteachers and continue to make sure we are the Education State. This Premier will open up 100 new schools next year; she will not be closing 350.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded his answer.

### Ministers statements: emergency services and essential workers

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35):** As we head towards Christmas, most Victorians are preparing for a well-earned break, a chance to slow down, switch off and spend some time with people they love. But we know that for thousands of workers across our state the next few weeks will be some of their busiest times of the year. So to the hospitality staff serving crowds of Christmas shoppers, to the nurses, ambos, police and emergency call takers working through the night, to the transport workers who keep our great state moving and to the retail workers in shopping centres, service stations and supermarkets right across Victoria: thank you for everything you do. You keep our communities running when the rest of us have the opportunity to pause. You make Victoria work not only in December but each and every day of the year. Certainly, these workers deserve our respect, whether they work in retail, hospitality, transport or emergency services.

On emergency services, as we head into a summer period we know there is another group of Victorians who will be called on again and again to serve our community: our firefighters – the men and women of the CFA, the FRV and our forest fire management crews, and the volunteers that support them as well, who will be on the ground protecting lives, homes and communities over summer. They do this work knowing the risks. They do it with great courage and skill, and they do it for all of us to keep us safe in our homes and in our communities in one of the most high-risk, bushfire-prone areas in the world. So on behalf of our grateful state, thank you for the sacrifice to all these workers and volunteers. But also let us remember the families who stand behind them and the work that those families do to support their loved ones, who in turn are working hard to keep Victoria safe. This summer and every summer, we stand with you and we thank you.

*Constituency questions***Evelyn electorate**

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:38): (1458) Bushfire season is upon us, and the Yarra Ranges has been identified as Victoria's highest bushfire-risk region, with thousands of people, homes and livestock at risk if a major fire occurs. My question is to the Minister for Environment about bushfire preparedness. What fuel reduction burning has been done to prepare for the 2025–26 fire season in the Yarra Ranges region and in my electorate? Given the seasonal outlook for 2025–26 has a significantly increased bushfire risk and with our community suffering the Montrose bushfire recently, locals are concerned about fuel loads and whether there has been sufficient back-burning to reduce fuel loads ahead of summer, especially because fuel reduction burning under the Allan Labor government has averaged just 1 per cent over the past five years, well short of the Black Saturday bushfires royal commission's recommended rolling 5 per cent target for proactive land management. As always, thank you to Forest Fire Management Victoria and our local CFA fire brigade firefighters for their dedicated work to help keep our communities safe.

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:39): (1459) My constituency question is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Why is the Victorian Labor government continuing to invest to support statewide sport facilities, pathways and outcomes from grassroots to elite, including for the world game of football? As the co-convenor of the Victorian Parliamentary Friends of Football, I am honoured to welcome the mighty South Melbourne 'Hellas' Football Club to Parliament today to celebrate their historic and inaugural Australian Championship win over the weekend in a magnificent display against New South Wales arch rival Marconi. South Melbourne navigated their way through a highly competitive and first-ever nationwide, 16-team round robin competition to take out the title, making the entire Victorian football community proud along the way in what is essentially Australia's newly created second division, only behind the A-league. As one of Victoria's longest standing, most iconic and successful clubs, proudly built by a hardworking Greek migrant community, I encourage all members to join celebrations at 3 pm in the south library today and meet with club leaders, players and supporters to celebrate South Melbourne's history-making performance. Commendations to the entire club community, including co-presidents Bill Papastergiadis OAM and Andrew Mesourouni. In doing so I also acknowledge that the win coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Socceroos historic qualification for the 2006 World Cup through the legendary match against Uruguay – Mark Schwarzer and obviously Marco Bresciano – *(Time expired)*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the member for Mildura, member for Pascoe Vale, can you explain, through your constituency question, how that relates to your electorate?

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** It relates to my electorate because I have one of the highest participation rates in football in this state. South Melbourne won the Australian championship on behalf of Victorian teams, and there are local connections to the club as well, with the greatest of respect, and in terms of the Australian side as well, Marco Bresciano, the former Socceroo, is a Victorian –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind members that constituency questions must relate specifically to their electorates.

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:41): (1460) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and my question is: when Mildura and Red Cliffs residents call for ambulances this week, why are they being sent taxis? I understand that our hardworking ambulances in Mildura and right across the region have been ramped at the hospital. This is nothing unusual, and being sent a taxi at times is not that unusual, but my office has received three calls in the last two days about this happening, and in two cases this was for abdominal pain. A Red Cliffs man called an ambulance for severe abdominal pain. It turns out he had appendicitis and needed an appendectomy. The taxi driver had a lot of trouble

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trying to load him into his taxi to transport him to hospital, because obviously it is not his job and not what he is trained for. My question for the Minister for Ambulance Services is: why are Mildura and Red Cliffs residents calling for ambulances and getting taxis?

### Box Hill electorate

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:42): (1461) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. When will the government's laws to stamp out illegal underquoting be introduced into the Parliament? Over recent years many residents in the Box Hill electorate have told me of the battle they face trying to bid on a home of their own. They turn up to auctions in good faith. They do their research, arrange their preapproval and get their deposit in order, only to have the rug pulled out from under them when the property sells for way more than what was advertised. An investigation by the *Age* earlier this year showed that in Blackburn North and Blackburn South at least eight in every 10 properties sold above the top end of the price guide quoted by agents. Under the proposed changes announced by the minister last month real estate agents will be required to publish the actual reserve price at least seven days before auction day or the fixed day of sale. This contrasts with the current situation where vendors can set a reserve or asking price as late as auction day and at a level higher than advertised. For those buyers looking to get into the property market, these changes will make the system fairer and more transparent. I look forward to the minister's reply.

### Warrandyte electorate

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:43): (1462) My constituency question is to the Minister for Youth. Warrandyte is a community shaped by its young people as well as its history, and two buildings sit at the heart of this: the Warrandyte Scout hall and the Warrandyte Historical Society building. Manningham council's community facilities review has identified both as noncompliant and proposes relocating their users, with no commitment to preserving these much-loved buildings. Local Scout leaders are deeply concerned. They warn that this will effectively kill scouting in Warrandyte because they will be expected to share a space with several groups. My question to the minister is this: will the minister commit to working with Manningham council to secure funding that protects, preserves and keeps the Warrandyte Scout hall and the historical society building so that they remain available for future generations of young people?

### Broadmeadows electorate

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (14:44): (1463) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask: how many constituents in Broadmeadows have taken up the latest round of the power saving bonus? The Victorian Labor government's \$100 power saving bonus for concession card holders helps with the cost of living, especially at this time of year. I know that the Glenroy Neighbourhood House, Banksia Gardens Community Services and Dallas Neighbourhood House have been doing a wonderful job of helping people apply. The fabulous staff at my office have also helped hundreds of people. I encourage anyone who has not yet applied to drop in with your power bill or jump onto the Victorian Energy Compare website, and while you are at it, make sure you are getting the best electricity deal. Our Labor government is on your side with cost-of-living relief when and where it is needed most.

### Melbourne electorate

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:44): (1464) My question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Minister, my electorate is home to several incredible neighbourhood houses. They bring together the community in ways that are just amazing. Between them they run so many wonderful programs: English and language classes, playgroup, study, social support, dance, exercise, art, music, choir – I could go on and on. They support some of our most vulnerable community members with food relief, employment pathways and financial and digital literacy. But their funding has been slowly whittled away over the years, and they need urgent help. Neighbourhood Houses Victoria is calling on the state government to increase annual funding by \$11.7 million or risk the closure of

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200 neighbourhood houses across Victoria, including many in my electorate. Hundreds of people in my electorate have signed postcards calling for neighbourhood houses to be saved. Minister, will you commit to properly funding our neighbourhood houses, particularly those in my electorate, so that they can continue their incredible work supporting our wonderful communities?

### Kororoit electorate

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (14:45): (1465) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. What support is available for Brimbank City Council to improve facilities for Balmoral Football Club in Derrimut so that this growing multicultural club can continue to thrive and provide opportunities for men, women and people in the west? Balmoral Football Club is a proud Bosnian community club that has been part of the Brimbank community for more than 30 years. Over that time, it has grown into a diverse and inclusive club, with over 300 players, 500 members and more than 20 teams across juniors and seniors. The club has made significant progress in promoting women's participation in sport, growing from just a handful of female players in 2023 to three girls-only junior teams and a senior women's side in 2025, and has worked hard to keep football accessible for families from low socio-economic backgrounds. Despite these achievements, the club's progress is being held back by inadequate facilities. The club has ambitions to compete in higher leagues and is set to host the 2026 Australian Bosnian Cup, a national event, but at the moment the current facilities are limiting this.

### Morwell electorate

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (14:46): (1466) My last constituency question for the year is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, and the question is: how many of the promised 59,000 renewable energy skilled tradespeople jobs have been created and based in the Latrobe Valley? The government promised that bringing back the SEC would create 59,000 renewable energy jobs as part of the Victorian renewable energy transition. With the Yallourn power station set to close down in mid 2028, representing thousands of jobs, there has been no investment by the SEC in the Latrobe Valley despite it being the epicentre of energy generation. Locals fear these jobs will not happen here. Minister, the workers in the Latrobe Valley look forward to hearing how many of these promised 59,000 renewable energy skilled tradespeople jobs have actually been created and based in the Latrobe Valley.

### Melton electorate

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (14:47): (1467) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Similar to the question the member for Box Hill asked, when will the government's nation-leading laws to stamp out illegal underquoting be introduced into the Parliament so that homebuyers in Melton can have a fairer go at purchasing their dream home? Over recent years, many residents in the Melton electorate have told me about the battle they face trying to bid on a home of their own. They turn up to auctions in good faith. They do their research, arrange preapproval and get their deposit in order, only to have the rug pulled out from under them when the property sells for far more than the advertised price range. This is not bad luck. It is illegal underquoting. Again, the investigation by the *Age* earlier this year showed that in Melton South, out of 74 tracked sales, 41 per cent of the properties sold above the top end of the price guide quoted by agents. Families in Melton cannot afford more years of this, and only the Allan Labor government is prepared to take on these dodgy practices. Under the reforms announced by the minister last month, real estate agents will be required to publish the actual reserve price at least seven days before auction day or the fixed date of sale. I look forward to the minister's reply.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: It is my favourite time of the week, Speaker. I have a point of order on unanswered questions overdue now, some overdue for as long as six months.

**The SPEAKER**: Please state your point of order and which minister.

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**Bridget Vallence:** Yes. A number of questions overdue from the Treasurer are questions on notice 2421, 2512, 2777, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861 and 2862, and I think I have raised this point of order a couple of times already. Also, questions overdue from the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 2763, 2764, 2765 and 2776. An unanswered and overdue question to the Minister for Education is question on notice 2932. And questions overdue from the Minister for Public and Active Transport are questions on notice 2935 and 2936. I will provide that list to the clerks.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have got five overdue questions. I have just emailed the numbers to the Clerk.

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have a couple of unanswered questions I would like addressed before the end of the year if possible: 1282 to the Treasurer and 1341 to the Minister for Health.

### *Motions*

#### Community leaders

**Debate resumed.**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:50): I am delighted to again rise to speak on this very important motion, which is all about supporting multiculturalism and our cultural and linguistically diverse communities.

**Sam Groth** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** I will get there, member for Nepean.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Pascoe Vale, I will sit you down unless you speak through the Chair. Member for Nepean, you are not in your place.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** I am very happy to rise again to speak in support of our multicultural communities. Again, as I was saying, as someone who is from a multicultural community myself, my parents proudly migrated here from Italy. My mum came in 1968 on the ship called the *Galileo Galilei*, and my dad came a couple of years later on a ship called the *Angelina Lauro*. They were originally born in southern Italy in little towns called Nicastro and Pianopoli. Growing up at a time just after the end of the Second World War, there was very little opportunity to no opportunity for a future. My mum tells the story really retrospectively, where she heard these echoes from Australia that really were echoes from then Prime Minister Ben Chifley and immigration minister Arthur Calwell, which was the call for Australia to populate or perish. They answered those calls by coming to Australia, like so many migrants of that generation. From Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Turkish and Maltese heritage, they came here, and the Irish of course too. My mother-in-law came from County Tyrone and my father-in-law came from Cyprus. They came here with nothing but a suitcase on their back, a suitcase that was filled with dreams – dreams for a better future for themselves, their children, their grandchildren.

When they first got off at Station Pier they became Merri-bek locals for life. My parents first rented a home in Edward Street in East Brunswick, just off Lygon Street, before renting in Vincent Street in Coburg, before buying the family home in Jamieson Street, Coburg – the still very humble Californian bungalow my mum is in – for \$30,000, my mum tells me, back in 1977. She moved in the day that Elvis Presley died, she consistently reminds us, so she remembers the anniversary as the day she moved into the house. But that is the house that we grew up in – me, my brothers and my sister as well. We went to the local primary school at Coburg West with many other people from multicultural backgrounds, and my brother and sister went to Coburg High at the time, before it was closed by the Kennett government in the 1990s, which left us with no viable secondary school for some time in the 1990s, which caused me to go to Northcote High and make many new friends over there.

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Just like previous generations, as a local member now for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, I remain an absolutely staunch advocate to want to continue welcoming new generations of communities to my electorate and also giving young people the same chance that previous generations had to buy a home in our electorate that is close to family. My wife and I, when it came time for us to buy a home, bought off the plan in Pascoe Vale, and it is still our family home now. It was thanks to the doubling of the first home buyer stimulus by the Rudd government that allowed us to get into the housing market then. So whether it is immigration, whether it is housing, whether it is jobs, I am absolutely committed to doing everything I can to support future generations to have the same opportunity.

That is why I stand with multicultural communities all over. Regardless of where you are from, everyone is welcome in Victoria, and that is why I stand with our First Nations communities as well. That is why I support our approach to voice, treaty and truth. That is why I support the apology that was put today. I am very disappointed, as I was saying, to conclude, in the approach of the opposition, who have opposed voice, treaty and truth. They have opposed treaty in this state, yet at the same time today they were out the front, part of the smoking ceremony, part of the formalities. They had the hide to show their faces there. They had the hide to come in here and vote against the apology. And then they supported –

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Speaker, I was quite enjoying the member for Pascoe Vale giving me a history of his family and –

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order, member for Nepean?

**Sam Groth:** Relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Pascoe Vale to come back to the motion.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** I will conclude by saying that I support multicultural communities, I support our First Nations communities and – unlike the Liberals, who oppose treaty but support the tuna sandwiches in Queens Hall – I stand with all of our communities.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:55): I rise to speak in support of this motion. Melbourne is a great place to live, and we are blessed to have an extraordinary multicultural community here. It is a privilege to represent an electorate that is so diverse, so vibrant and so caring and compassionate. In Melbourne people have come from more than 160 countries. They speak over 150 languages. More than half the residents in the inner city of Melbourne were born overseas, almost half speak a language other than English at home – how lucky are we to have all of these languages around us? – and around 80 faiths are practised in my electorate. This diversity is one of our city's greatest strengths. It is part of who we are, and it is something we must continue to nurture and protect, especially in times like these.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the community leaders that I have had the privilege of working alongside over the past few years, particularly those from the African Australian community, the public housing residents, our Muslim community and our First Nations communities who it has been an absolute pleasure to work alongside over the last 11 years. Our diverse multicultural communities have been through a lot in the last few years, but they have stood strong in the face of vilification and division and continue to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

Our public housing residents in particular are among the most diverse parts of my electorate, and they have lived through a lot in the last few years. They have lived through the traumatic, hard lockdowns, in North Melbourne and Flemington, during COVID that no other residents were subjected to. They are now facing displacement again as Labor pushes ahead with the privatisation of their public housing homes. Our young men in public housing have faced unfair targeting by the police over the years – and that is not just me saying it; court cases have found this to be true – particularly our young African

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Australian men who have often been targeted for nothing other than the colour of their skin. Conflicts overseas often have a very significant impact on my community in the electorate of Melbourne, as people feel a deep solidarity with their brothers and sisters that are often facing similar things, similar conditions, that our refugee communities faced when they came to Australia. Our Muslim community in particular has deeply felt the pain of the genocide of their Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine and the ethnic cleansing in Sudan. And it is the African Australian community that I most often see running community fundraising events for charities in Palestine or Sudan or elsewhere, often giving so much when they themselves do not have a huge amount. I am so proud to have these communities in my electorate and of how much they have welcomed me into their communities with open arms.

Despite everything that our multicultural communities have been through, they continue to show extraordinary strength. Our African Australian community leaders are constantly going above and beyond, supporting individuals and families who are struggling and holding communities together. I want to give a personal shout-out to a few of these people. First, I would like to start with, Barry Berih, who runs Young Australian People, empowering the next generation of African Australian leaders. He also volunteers on the boards of other community organisations and runs local soccer tournaments and any number of other things. Barry continues to fight tirelessly for the rights of public housing residents, becoming the public face of post-lockdown advocacy and leading the class action to save public housing.

I also want to acknowledge Farah Warsame, a leader in the Somali community who I have known for almost my entire 11 years in Parliament as a wonderful leader in that community, bringing community members together and providing a link often between government organisations and the Somali community; Salah Ibrahim, for his advocacy and individual support for families across his community; Sara Ali, who works tirelessly for the Eritrean community in North Melbourne; Awatif Taha, supporting the Sudanese community across Melbourne; and Khadija Hashi, who empowers and supports Somali women in particular. Each of these leaders go above and beyond every day to support and strengthen our community, often working after hours and in addition to their work and other commitments – their family commitments et cetera. Even in the face of deep grief and rising division, our Muslim communities continue to thrive, creating vibrant community spaces, supporting one another and really enriching the lives of Melburnians in countless ways.

They are people like Sheikh Adam Salam. He is the sheikh at the Australian Muslim Social Services Agency, our mosque in North Melbourne. He is a wonderful leader who provides support, advocacy and care for our local Muslim community and offers young people safe spaces for connection and learning. He is always available, whether it is to provide wise counsel to young people or whether it is to provide translation services, which he often does off his own bat, for community meetings where he feels like the community really deserves to have information from government agencies – he is often there providing those translation services. They have been trying to get a basketball court at the back of the mosque to ensure that young people have safe sporting facilities to come to. Sheikh Adam is just a wonderful leader in our community.

Our public housing residents are fighting quite hard right now. They are fighting for their neighbours and for their right to stay in their homes, even as the Labor government pushes ahead with a plan that will displace more than 10,000 people from their public housing homes. There are too many leaders in this space to name who have been leading this campaign, and I want to thank each and every one of them for standing up for public housing. But in particular I would like to give a personal shout-out to Mahdi Sudi, who leads the North Melbourne Public Housing Residents Association – a resident-led group making sure that the people directly affected have a real say in decisions that shape their homes, services and communities – and to Shu'aib Ali and all the volunteers at the Melbourne Public Tenants Association, who are fighting to make sure that residents are not pushed out of their homes into unsuitable properties.

A thank you should also go to Awil Hussein, who works closely with the Somali community and my office and champions local issues affecting his community in North Melbourne. He is an absolute gun

at writing petitions. He knocks on people's doors, he goes around and collects petitions from his neighbours to make sure that everyone's voice is heard, and he is very good at taking issues to the local media and to the government and advocating tirelessly for the things that his community needs. One of his recent wins was ensuring that the local public housing kids were not locked out of the local school zone when a change was going to be made; he was able to advocate to make sure that kids in public housing got to go to their local primary school just the same as anybody else. Last but not least, an incredible shout-out to Mukhtar Mohamed, who works with us every year to provide a free iftar to our Muslim community members during Ramadan. He has worked with us over the last 11 years in a huge number of capacities. These wonderful community leaders are rarely thanked. They do not often get invited into the halls of power, but they absolutely deserve to be celebrated, and it is my privilege to read their names into *Hansard* today.

I also want to make some comments more specifically on the motion itself. It is clear that anti-immigration sentiment is rising. It is clear that the far right is rising. We see it on our streets, online and sometimes even in our parliaments. It is something that should frighten all of us, and I would hope that everyone across the political spectrum should consider it their responsibility to do everything in their power to stop this. Back in 2018 the Greens initiated a parliamentary inquiry into the rise of the far right. We heard worrying evidence that the far right are deliberately targeting young men with their violent and extremist views. One Nation is rising in the polls despite holding openly racist and anti-immigration views. Neo-Nazis have been emboldened to hold rallies in the streets of multicultural Melbourne and are even planning on starting their own political party. They could even get a seat in the Victorian upper house with less than half a per cent of the vote due to our undemocratic, vote-buying, preference-whispering group voting ticket system that Labor still has not committed to remove, and this needs to change. We will not be supporting the Liberals' amendment to remove the words 'anti-immigration' from this motion, because we need to confront this.

Recently neo-Nazis marched through our city and attacked First Nations women and elders at Camp Sovereignty, just a short distance from where we are today. It sent a chill through our community, and it raised very serious questions about how these men were allowed to move through our city, masked and armed, without consequence. Many people I speak to tell me they cannot help but wonder if their skin was a different colour, would the police response have been the same? It is the kind of threat that governments need to take action to condemn but also to stop, rather than making multicultural communities sign social cohesion pledges before receiving government grants, as Labor wants to do, which is something that the government does not require of any other group except for our multicultural communities. This is not the way to increase trust; it is a way to make multicultural communities feel othered, excluded and unwelcome in our city.

But I believe we should celebrate our multicultural communities, because here in Melbourne we completely reject division and hate. We reject racism. We are a city of inclusion, of love and of diversity. We celebrate it, and we are fortunate to have both: on one hand, the oldest continuing living culture in the world, and on the other, newly arrived migrants who bring all the richness and vibrancy of their own culture to share with us all.

As we head into the Christmas period, or whatever celebration that our multicultural communities are celebrating over this summer period, I would like to thank my incredible staff who work so hard to support our diverse multicultural community, in particular to Jayda and Jordy, who sit one-on-one with community members who need help with housing or other issues and do that week after week after week, who work closely with our public housing communities and who run incredible events and campaigns to get real change for our local residents, and they do incredible work. Whether you come to us with an issue that just affects you or whether you come to my office with an issue that is affecting a large group of neighbours, they will give you their absolute, undivided attention and they will do their absolute best to create change for you, and I cannot thank them enough for that. Thank you to Amy for managing our office, budgets and communications and for keeping our team together and on track – a huge job that she does fabulously; to Chris for managing all our stakeholders and policy and

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keeping me organised for Parliament, and for the incredible amount of amendments and legislative change that they have been able to achieve this year – it is quite extraordinary; and to my parliamentary advisers across the Greens team, Matt, Rose, Claire, Anushka, Iliana, Domenica, Tim and Caitlin. They work more than anyone should be reasonably expected to work because they believe so much in our communities and the hope that we have for a shared future. And to my wonderful MP team and all their staff: it is a privilege to work with a team that is smart, principled, compassionate and very, very hardworking. We have faced lots of new challenges this year, but they have done us absolutely proud. They all deserve a long sleep and to read a good book by the beach.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:07): I rise to support this extremely important motion and hope that it receives the strongest support in this house. We are recording our sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those that have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, and we support and thank them for their steadfast commitment to working for a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

It is time for all of us to stand up and speak out against racism, vilification, hate and division, and we applaud those who do this. There are so many community members and leaders within, for example, the Thomastown electorate, and I am sure across Victoria, that work every day to support each other and uphold values of equality, peace and care for others. I condemn the March for Australia rallies, scapegoating immigration for all the woes of society, when in fact migrants have contributed so much to this country's prosperity, wealth and cultural richness. I am so proud that the overwhelming majority of Victorians reject racism and celebrate multiculturalism and diversity. We are united in our humanity. It makes me both angry and sad that the anti-immigration rallies have emboldened a small minority of Victorians to become loud with their views of racism and hate, unconcerned about the hurt and pain they cause other Victorians who are helping to build our state and increase its prosperity.

Recently I visited the Board of Imams Victoria in the electorate of Thomastown and was advised through their Islamophobia project that reports of racism and discrimination have skyrocketed. Most of these complaints have been against women. Similarly, just recently I was talking to a well-respected lawyer, who told me that since these rallies she has noticed increasing incidents – just an extra elbow as she is walking down the street, or refusal to serve her first even if she is in the queue first at a shop. These seemingly fleeting issues that cause so much pain and just show so much hate are examples of how the forms of this racism can be perpetrated in different manners. Similarly, when I go to schools I hear about the abuse directed at young Australians just because of the colour of their skin, yet they are contributing, again, so much to make our society and state a good place to be, as we know it is.

The Thomastown electorate is very multicultural. More than 50 per cent of households have at least one parent that is born overseas. The leaders in our community, these parents and young people that live in the Thomastown electorate, they are so strong, they are so courageous. They provide guidance, support, advocacy and care to all, not just within their own households or community but across the electorate of Thomastown. The extent of volunteering is phenomenal. As the year comes to an end, I thank you for all the incredible work that you do to fight against racism, to uphold values of equality and justice, and how you fight for all Victorians to work and live their life in a state of equality and prosperity.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (15:11): It is my pleasure to make a contribution to this motion. I want to take the chamber through a little bit of a journey as seen through my eyes as obviously a white bloke growing up in Melbourne. One of my first experiences of the really difficult and really challenging parts of Australian political life was with the rise of Pauline Hanson. She became a member of the federal Parliament as a recently disendorsed Liberal in 1996. I was in year 12 that year, and it was the first time I think I knew of someone that I could identify in authority speaking in such appalling terms about my peers, the students I went through school with, particularly students of an Asian background. When she uttered that famous phrase, 'I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians' in her inaugural speech in September 1996, I was horrified. I am still horrified, but what I am additionally

horrified about and what I am really, really sad about is that was 30 years ago, and I am just not sure we have actually made any progress at an aggregate level.

In 1998 I attended a rally outside Hawthorn town hall – that well-known bastion of socialist activity, Hawthorn – with I reckon 10,000 people who were there to protest One Nation holding a meeting. Nothing more or less than that – not a rally; just a meeting. They were just there to hold a branch meeting. They rolled into their organisation a similarly morally bereft organisation called Australians Against Further Immigration. The AAFI and One Nation had merged and were having this meeting to talk about their racist agenda in 1998. Ten thousand of us were there outside Hawthorn town hall, linking arms, singing songs, chanting chants, united in our view that there was no place for Pauline Hanson in our body politic. There was no place for that sort of hatred and racism in our body politic. It saddens me enormously that 27 years since that rally, here we have all of a sudden Pauline Hanson being spoken about as being a viable alternative to the coalition. Well, I will tell you, if there is one thing I will give Pauline Hanson credit for, it is this: she has not changed. She has probably been the most consistent political leader in the last 30 years in Australia in many respects. She has not changed, not changed one iota. None of her bigotry, none of her hatred, none of her racism, none of her small-mindedness – none of it has changed. Yet here we are, watching the coalition vote collapse, and much of it, it would seem, running to the right, running and joining that racist party of protest, One Nation.

That saddens me enormously, and it horrifies me, because what has run parallel to that of course is the rise of populist right-wing movements right across the globe, be they purportedly Christian nationalist movements like in the US and the MAGA Republicans, whether it has been Reform UK – previously the Brexit Party – whether it has been those parties in France and in the Netherlands and in Germany and in Austria. These parties of the hard right – the anti-immigrant, nasty, populist rhetoric of the hard right – have been on the rise. Pauline Hanson has not changed, but sadly the Australian electorate, I feel, may very well have.

I want to spend a little bit of time today talking about this absolute furphy of mass migration. One of the reasons that Pauline Hanson is presently allowed to enjoy some oxygen and talk about her party in terms of being the alternative party of the right, not just a fringe party, is because of this furphy around mass migration. I am a longstanding champion of multiculturalism. In fact if I could point to anything that has been completely consistent in my views and perhaps has not enjoyed any great evolution because I started there, it is my unbridled championing of multiculturalism and rights for LGBTIQA+ Victorians. It saddens me enormously that we are now in an environment where that is under challenge by these nuffies who insist on putting about this suggestion that mass migration is the cause of all our problems.

Mass migration, with that word ‘mass’ being added to migration, is a complete furphy. If you go back all the way to World War II and run a line all the way through to today, basically net migration into Australia has averaged 0.9 per cent per annum – that is, the population has grown in net terms by 0.9 per cent as a result of immigration. So from World War II all the way through until today – 0.9 per cent; call it 1 per cent in round numbers. It is not a big number, nothing approaching a big number. There was a little correction around COVID, because in 2020–21 net immigration was basically nothing and then in 2021 and 2022 it was 2 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively. But the average, which we are now returning to, was about 1 per cent. If I can say one thing in the clearest possible terms, it is this: there is no mass migration, there is just migration. It is migration that is completely consistent with all the immigration that has occurred in the eight decades since World War II ended. Of course there are moments in our national story as a nation of migrants when there have been difficulties that have attached to social cohesion, and people have at times pointed at immigrants – largely irresponsibly – and immigrant communities as being the source of that problem. But Australia is fundamentally a successful and multicultural nation because of migration, not in spite of it.

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This is so easy for the hard right to jump on. They peddle this furphy that there is mass migration when in fact there is not. You do not need to look far to find completely dumb things said by the hard right on this topic. Nigel Farage said in response to a question on the campaign:

I think people in this country –

being Britain –

whether they admit it or not, are deeply concerned about the fact that since the EU opened its doors we have seen an unprecedented rise in violent crime, and a lot of that is to do with migration from Eastern Europe.

That is not an assertion supported in any way by the data of course, it is just naked bigotry. He said on the BBC in 2013:

We have a population of 485 million. There are 485 million people who, if they wished, could come to Britain tomorrow.

Again, that is another furphy. I do not need to look too far into Donald Trump's legacy to talk about ridiculous things said about immigrant populations:

You have people coming in from the Middle East. You don't even know where the hell these people are coming from.

This was in relation to a migrant caravan that had originated in Central America. The racism is so wildly non-specific as to just point to a general bigotry, a general fear and hatred by the billionaire white Christian nationalist right and a fear and hatred of, it seems, just about anyone but their own. We have an environment where Nazism is on the rise and where antisemitism is on the rise – all of these things are significantly worse, on my assessment, than they were back in 1998 when I locked arms with a bunch of other protesters outside a One Nation meeting at Hawthorn town hall – and it saddens me that that is where we find ourselves.

Migration has done so much for Australia. We know that areas with a higher share of migrants have higher labour productivity and that an increase in migration inflow produces an increase in employment for the workers that are already here. We know that a 1 per cent increase in the share of highly educated migrants is associated with a 5 per cent uplift in patent applications. We know that migration materially supports long-run GDP growth through higher labour force participation. Migrants tend to come in with a lower age profile than the balance of the population, so the participation rate improves and productivity improves. Over that same period that I spoke about, where there has been 1 per cent net migration, the birth rate has gone from 2.5 per cent to sub-1 per cent. Migration has delivered so much for our nation. It continues to deliver so much for our nation. The Productivity Commission has gone over this again and again. We have had a migration variation due to COVID, and political actors on the right are seeking to take advantage of it. It is simply outrageous. There is no such thing as mass migration in Australia; there is only migration. It is good. We should welcome it, and we should endorse it at every possible opportunity we have.

**Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:21):** I am pleased to rise to thank leaders in my community today. It is a privilege to work with so many great, strong leaders within my community and the leaders who have worked so hard in the fight against division, hate and racism. It is fitting today that my focus will be on our Aboriginal leaders in the Geelong community, on Wadawurrung country.

I want to start with Corrina Eccles, who is a strong Wadawurrung woman, who has dedicated her life to culture. Corrina has worked tirelessly on Wadawurrung country to strengthen First Nations knowledge of language and particularly history and to support up-and-coming young Aboriginal people in our community who need those strong role models. I really appreciate the work that Corrina Eccles has done in our community, supporting the next generation of young Aboriginal leaders, and of course her sharing of culture with all of us.

I also want to acknowledge Simon Flagg, who is a strong and proud Wemba Wemba man. Simon continues to demonstrate his commitment to the community and has worked tirelessly to ensure that

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their culture is shared, initiating things like having a smoking ceremony every Monday morning for everyone in the community, not just for First Peoples but for everyone that lives in our community, inviting people to come into their space. As an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, they provide so many services to their community, but they also have a huge focus on culture and on sharing their experience around racism, division and hate and trying to stamp that out throughout our great community of Geelong. It is really important that we acknowledge the work that they do.

Given that we now have the anti-vilification legislation that was passed some time ago and having worked on that, I drew my strength and energy from what our Aboriginal leaders were doing in our community. Uncle Mark Rose, for example, is an extraordinary Gunditjmara man, who has such a strong focus on education and educating the general community about racism and hate and the damage that that does, the generational trauma that we see and that we heard about in this place today, and the important role that Aboriginal communities play in making sure that their young people in particular get the right education and get a culturally safe education so that they can move on in their careers. All of those people have taken such a strong stand on racism, hate and division right across our region, on Wadawurrung country.

I also want to give a shout-out to Marsha Uppill, who is a proud Adnyamathanha woman, who is held in really high regard in my community for the work she does, particularly in organisations and businesses and entities across Geelong, in educating them about Aboriginal culture, about what racism and hate does to her community and how important it is that we continue to address those issues that we know are still out there in our community. She is an incredible woman and an incredible educator, as I said, which is held in very high regard, and takes a very strong stand on these issues in our community.

I also do want to call out Jack from the QHub and the work that he does and how he leads that community around homophobia and supports families, in particular, of young people who are transgender who are going through some difficult times, and addresses the hate and division that they have to experience on a regular basis as well. So I do want to give a shout-out to QHub and in particular to Jack and thank him for all the work that he does.

I do want to finish by acknowledging and thanking the clerks here at the Parliament, the parliamentary staff, the Speaker and her office and Tom in there, and wish everybody a safe and happy Christmas and festive season – and make it safe, because I think it is really important that we all return here next year. Being an election year, we all want to be on board. I really do want to thank the staff, because without them and the clerks and the catering crew we would not be able to do what we do. So I do want to pass on a huge thank you to them and wish everybody a safe and happy Christmas.

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:27):** Speaking on this motion on vilification and multiculturalism can I acknowledge that multiculturalism has been for decades the secret ingredient that really brings Victoria together. It is something that we harness and we cherish, and those that come to Victoria and make this state their own, that embrace our traditions and values, make it better. That is the reason why Victoria has been so successful for hundreds of years. But unfortunately that has changed, and the reason why it has changed is because we have seen a government that has been complicit in so many issues of allowing hate to be fuelled on our streets. And it is not the problem of the far right solely, it is also the problem of the far left. What we have seen since October 2023 is a horseshoe of hate, where the far right and the far left have come together and have particularly targeted those people that they do not like, and we have seen that especially with the Jewish community of Melbourne, that have been targeted on our streets simply for being Jewish. Whether it be the Nazis in their filth that they have peddled out there, or whether it be the far left that have signs calling all Zionists terrorists and putting Jews in the bin with this graphic, horrible imagery, all of that stuff is unacceptable.

And all we have heard from the government over this period is words but no action. We saw a plan to bring in masking laws to de-mask these gutless cowards. We know that the people that hide behind a

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mask are the extremists. They are the people that are too gutless to put their name to what they do, so they hide behind a mask – and they do that quite deliberately. We saw the protesters that went off on a Friday night, on the Sabbath, to Miznon, the Israeli-owned business, turned the chairs upside down, threw food and everything in the alleyway up in the city and made many of those staff that work in that store fearful of turning up the next day. What happened? Nothing. We have seen these protesters, whether it be the far left or far right, continually do this. What does the government say? ‘We are going to de-mask these gutless cowards.’ They bring legislation with more exemptions than you have ever seen – cultural, religious, health reasons; if you have got a reason for doing it, you have to be committing an offence before actually being de-masked. None of this stuff works. Victoria Police have said that.

We know that the Liberal–Nationals have been calling for move-on laws. The move-on laws, which were the first thing that the Andrews government cut when they came to power in 2014, were the very laws to be able to take those extremists and say, ‘If you want to target people for their faith, for their background, for being from another country, for ethnic reasons or for multicultural reasons, then you will be moved on.’

What did this government do? They completely took the move-on powers away, allowing the extremists to go out there and do whatever they like on our streets. And that is what we have seen – our streets being hijacked by extremists, whether it be from the left or from the right – and all we hear from the government is excuses. Motions will not take these extremists off our streets. Words will not; actions will. This has been a weak government that has not delivered the consequences necessary to do it. We have been calling, and the Jewish community has been calling, for permits, for stronger masking laws and for move-on laws. All three have been knocked back by this government. The government are hypocrites. They bring on a motion today saying that we need to embrace different communities that are being targeted but they do not do anything to bring the laws in to protect them. It is no use talking about it; you actually need laws to be able to support communities that are being targeted. This government are the ones that have been gutless in their acts and weak on the consequences, and the multicultural communities in Victoria, unfortunately, are weaker for it.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (15:31): I rise today to speak in strong support of this motion, which seeks to record this house’s sincere thanks to the incredible community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood steadfastly with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests. I do so with the lived experience of representing the vibrant, diverse community of Mulgrave and with the deep understanding gained from my time as the mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong. Greater Dandenong is proudly one of the most multicultural communities in the entire country, a place where over 60 per cent of residents were born overseas and speak more than 150 different languages. I know firsthand the immeasurable strength that diversity brings to our state. Recent protests filled with rhetoric and designed only to divide and to spread hate are a profound disappointment and, frankly, disgusting. They are a direct attack on the very foundations of our social harmony.

I do not speak about these issues only as a representative; I speak about them as a Victorian of Indian heritage. I have seen, and unfortunately I have felt, the sting of prejudice. I have witnessed the impact of racism on my own mother – being told to go back to where she came from – and I have been subjected to it myself, and I have seen this increase over recent months with vile commentary online about my own place in society and what visa I might be on. It is a deeply personal betrayal when someone attempts to tell you that you do not belong in a country you call home simply because of your background or the colour of your skin. This is why the reaction to this division, the response from our community leaders, is so vital.

In the face of this ugliness we have seen something truly wonderful in our communities: the courage and resolve of our community leaders. These individuals – often volunteers, often unpaid – are the genuine pillars of our society. They are the ones who step up when their community is fearful and hurting, and they do so with messages of unity, acceptance and love. These are our interfaith leaders

who bring different faiths together to share a common commitment to peace, including those that represent both the Monash and Greater Dandenong interfaith networks; our cultural associations and their presidents who ensure that their members feel safe and supported; and our local business owners and associations who treat every customer with respect, regardless of where they come from. In my community it is the Springvale Asian Business Association with all their work in bringing not only businesses together but our entire community. I am blessed to have such a diverse community, whether they be from Vietnam, China, India, Greece, Italy, Burma, Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu, Armenia, Ukraine – there are probably a lot more that I am missing. It is a culturally diverse community that I am so proud to be part of. Every weekend and every night of the week there is a cultural celebration going on in my electorate, and I am honoured to be part of those events every week. These leaders share with us their strength, and I like to see it as the gift that they bring to our community. They share their culture. They share their language, tradition, music, dance, food – everything that goes with the beauty of cultural diversity.

Vilification attempts to isolate us, it fearmongers and it turns us against one another. It has no place in Victoria, and the views of a small, vocal minority do not represent the spirit of this state. Victoria's commitment is absolute. We are a place of belonging and opportunity for all, regardless of background, faith, where you were born or the colour of your skin. For people like me, whose families chose to build their lives here, our diverse background is our absolute strength, and I commend the Allan Labor government's continued work in upholding and strengthening our multicultural framework, including our recent anti-vilification laws. But the true work is done on the ground.

To the community leaders of Victoria, particularly those in the diverse community of my electorate of Mulgrave, who have faced down hate with dignity and courage, I say thank you. Your steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria is not just appreciated, it is the very heart and soul of our state. I wish them all a happy end of the year, I hope they feel rested in this time, and I look forward to celebrating more multicultural events over the coming months, because I know it is going to be a big year ahead next year. I commend the motion to the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** It appears, after some consultation with the clerks, that we had a clock error when the member for Caulfield was on his feet. Under the standing orders, members are given 10 minutes to speak, and the member only spoke for 5 minutes, so we will extend this out for another 5 minutes. Over to you, member for Caulfield. You have the call. Sorry for the interruption.

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:36):** Thank you for the indulgence of the house. As I was saying, the protests that we are seeing, particularly over the last two years, which have been hate fuelled, have certainly triggered many things in the Jewish community, which is a large part of my constituency. One of the things that we need to be very mindful of is some of the messages that we are seeing in those weekly protests going to the very young people that we are trying to educate. When we talk about multiculturalism, one of the important things that we need to do is ensure that we have people who are properly educated to a point where they do not use things that they might see or hear second- or third-hand to incite and vilify others. We have seen that in a report today, in which 30 schools across Victoria have been using horrific, vulgar Nazi slogans, using Nazi Heil Hitler remarks, saying things like 'Jews should go back to the Holocaust' – I mean, that also shows just how ill-informed these individuals are – and doing a whole range of other things. This has been happening in our schools. That is a direct correlation with ignorant people, uninformed young people – the very groups that we need to educate – that have experienced two years of these protests going unchecked on our streets. Now that hate is spewing into the classroom, which is unacceptable. Somebody should lay blame for that, somebody should accept responsibility for that, and it is the government's responsibility to make sure these things do not happen.

But it is not the only time when this has happened, and I want to draw the house to a situation that happened back in 2013, between 2013 and 2020, which was the *Kaplan v State of Victoria* case, in which the state of Victoria was found vicariously liable for a school principal's failure to adequately

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respond to bullying by students. Here was a situation where a school had a number of bullying incidents from Jewish kids at the school, and the school was found to have failed in its obligation to keep kids safe. This very principal, who resigned in 2023 as a result of this, was still kept on with the Department of Education. What message does that send, when you have got a principal that has failed to keep kids safe in a school, in Brighton Secondary College, that not only resigns afterwards but gets given another cushy job within the department? No wonder we have headlines today which talk about these further things happening within schools when it comes to hate and antisemitism.

As I say, it is no use just talking the talk, you actually have to walk the talk. That is not happening at the moment. We are seeing a failure by this government. I want to put on record, those people that stand up against hate: we support you and we thank you. There are many in my community, there are many in the broader community and there are many in the various community events that I attend, whether it is with the Chinese, the Indian, the Islamic – there are many communities – or the South American community. I attend their events. I love going to multicultural events. I love supporting our multicultural communities. I think it is really important.

We have two great schools teaching bilingual language programs in our schools. Caulfield Primary School runs a very good Japanese program and Caulfield Junior College runs a very good French program. This is how it should be done – kids learning at a very early age, being embraced in the culture, in the language, and also being able to understand and be great champions for multiculturalism. I support that, I encourage that, but we need to do more as a Parliament. We need to do more than just talk about it or put motions on the agenda. We actually need the laws. I would call on the government to strengthen our laws: our move-on laws, our protest permit system, which we have been calling for, and proper masking laws to de-mask the gutless cowards and extremists that march on our streets and try to vilify and target others. This is unacceptable in the state of Victoria, and it should be stopped.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:41): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a contribution to this motion that records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification. It is a motion that goes to the heart of the anti-vilification legislation that we moved through this Parliament just this year. As you could imagine, as the member for Tarneit – one of the most multicultural places anywhere in Victoria, a district where over 50 per cent of residents were born overseas, with many first-generation and second-generation migrants, particularly from South Asian communities – this is a motion and indeed anti-vilification legislation is legislation that is deeply important, deeply personal to them and legislation that they lobbied for for many, many years.

As I said, I have a significant South Asian population in my electorate. I am lucky enough to have two gurdwaras, several Hindu temples and three mosques in my electorate as well. They are all multifaith communities, typically first-generation migrants, who contribute significantly to the community there in Wyndham. It is in saying that that it deeply saddens me to report to the house that on Friday evening one of my beautiful mosques, Virgin Mary Mosque, the first mosque in Wyndham, was targeted and vandalised with hate speech. Some clown on Friday evening thought it was the right thing to do to vandalise the Virgin Mary Mosque and write something deeply offensive to our Muslim community – deeply, deeply offensive.

That mosque was the first mosque in Wyndham, and the Imam Sheikh Abdulla Hawari, the president Hanif Shaik and also the secretary Dr Seyed Sheriffdeen are absolutely amazing members of our community. They came to Australia and chose to make Wyndham their home. Many live in Tarneit or Hoppers Crossing, and everybody that attends that mosque is a person of charity, of goodwill and of faith, having come to this country to contribute – and all do so in absolutely amazing ways. We are talking about TAFE teachers, university lecturers and doctors. They are people that have come to our community and have been a part of making Wyndham the absolutely amazing place that it is. Representatives, obviously from Virgin Mary Mosque, which was the target of that horrible attack, Melbourne Grand Mosque and Golden Wattle Mosque all gathered there on Saturday evening for a

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community meeting to talk through the issues. Then Minister Ingrid Stitt from the other place and I, and also the federal member Joanne Ryan, went out on Sunday to speak to the community and to consult with the community and work through what is an ongoing police investigation.

That was devastating to that community, who have done nothing but the right thing since making this country home. For them to rock up on Saturday morning and read those words spray-painted on their mosque, and for Muslim children to rock up on Saturday at the mosque to see that as well, has just made that community feel a little bit more unsafe and, frankly, saddened that somebody in the community that they call home would wish to do that to them.

That was a horrendous thing on Friday when I found that out. What was even more frustrating was during the drive to Parliament this morning I was listening to Raf Epstein's program on the ABC as I was coming in and he had Ms Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell from the other place, who apparently is a member of One Nation or something, on the program. For her to describe Muslim immigration and the Muslim faith in Australia as dividing Victoria, I thought was one of the more abhorrent things that I have heard on mainstream radio. Let us be clear: the only people seeking to divide our state and divide our country are those like Pauline Hanson and those that belong to One Nation and the others that choose to rally through the streets on Saturdays or Sundays, some of them Nazis – not all. They are the only ones seeking to divide our state and divide our country. It is not those from our multicultural and multifaith communities that do nothing but good work.

I have spoken a lot about my Muslim community, but we have also got the Sikh community. We have got two Sikh gurdwaras – we have got Amrik from the Hoppers Crossing gurdwara and Pritam Singh from the Tarneit gurdwara. They are consistently first on the scene when there is a natural disaster, whether that be flood or whether that be fire. They are first on the scene to help and to help feed those that are needy. They also set up at the Werribee train station every Saturday afternoon and feed people in our community that are hungry through their food truck.

I have got to wind up because we are only going for 5 minutes, but I will reiterate: the only people seeking to divide our community are those like Pauline Hanson and Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell that belong to One Nation, those that stand with them and those that march with them on Saturdays and Sundays. I commend the motion to the house.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (15:48): I also rise to speak in support of the motion to record sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division. Sometimes we find leadership in the form of a child, and today I wish to speak with thanks about a local constituent who has demonstrated leadership in our community despite her young age, not with tricky words or arguments but with a sure and simple understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

I speak of Khya Isailovic, who is a young woman graduating grade 7 this year. She first came to my notice last year on Anzac Day when she stood in front of the hundreds and hundreds of people gathered and spoke with incredible dignity and pride about her ancestors and their role in World War I and World War II. She spoke of the role of the five Lovett brothers, all from one set of parents, who went and defended Australia in World War I: Alfred, Leonard, Frederick, Edward and Herbert, the sons of James Lovett, an Aboriginal man from South Australia, and Hannah Lovett, nee McDonald, a descendant of the Kerrup-Jmara clan of the Gunditjmara nation in western Victoria. Khya spoke of the mighty fighting Gunditjmara, which they were and are and continue to be. She stood and spoke with incredible pride of people who fought to defend a nation that did not always defend them at that time. All Lovett brothers returned safe and well, and some of them, of those five and then other Lovett family members, signed up for World War II. If we consider the fight in World War II against the Nazis, we thought it was history. Unfortunately, we see in Victoria today that ugly spectre raising its head.

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People like Khya, who with the certainty of what is right, with the pride in her ancestors and with the willingness to speak in front of such a large crowd about the fantastic legacy of her family, demonstrate leadership for the whole community. This young woman is going to go on to amazing things. I was very happy to find that she went on to become my daughter's NetSetGo coach. She has been awarded many awards locally in the community. She recently designed the Aboriginal round jerseys for the local cricket club. Her leadership is something that inspires me and should in fact inspire the whole community. So I thank Khya for her leadership.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (15:51): It is terrific to be able to follow the member for Yan Yean, as I was being interrupted by the member for Wendouree. But I am here, and I rise to talk on the motion on vilification and multiculturalism and to stand in support of the amendment moved by the member for Bulleen. Listening to people get up and talk in the chamber on this, I think it is right across the board that everybody here realises and stands united that vilification and antisemitism, which does go on in our community right across the board, not just here in Melbourne but around regional Victoria too – we do not miss out on it as well – is not right. We need to stand firm in here and make sure that we do bring in tough laws that stamp it out.

As other members have today spoken about issues that are going on currently in schools around regional Victoria, I sat back and thought: well, what has changed from back in the day when I was going through school? Yes, you had your issues with other students – we used to work it out – but not to the level that we do see nowadays. Walking the streets, the hatred – and it is a hard word to use, 'hatred' – that is pushed out towards certain members of our community regarding their religious beliefs or their ethnic backgrounds is something that I think we have let slip, standards in our community that we have let slip. We have let it roll on for too long, and now we are trying to catch up and make laws that are going to work and put things in place that are going to make our community a better place to live. You have only got to listen to my friend the member for Caulfield and also my friend the member for Box Hill when they get up and talk; they have had massive issues that have gone on in their own communities.

We need to be seen to be doing something here in the chamber. This is where it all happens. We can talk about it outside. We can listen to people ask why we are not doing this and why we are not doing that, but the people that actually stand in this chamber can actually change what goes on in Victoria, what goes on on the streets and what happens in our schools. That is one of the privileges of a sitting MP. We get the opportunity to actually change laws and to actually change people's lives and keep them safe.

I spoke before about letting certain standards slip. We see the rallies that happen here in Victoria, here on Spring Street, and rallies where we allow people to come up onto the steps of Parliament and protest. I find that strange, because this is the house of the people and we should be protecting that. We should be pushing back against those rallies and making sure that we draw that line in the sand to say, 'Hey, enough is enough.' We also see those standards slipping on our streets with our criminal element running amok, whether it be here in Melbourne, whether it be through country Victoria, because we have walked past them. We have got to get to a certain time in this place where together we all move forward and make sure that we are keeping our community safe.

Down in the Latrobe Valley we are the same as every other seat around Victoria with our multicultural pot of people that come together. You have only got to walk down the streets of Moe, Morwell or Traralgon and surrounds and you will see various communities doing the most wonderful things together to make sure that we do stay safe. As the member for Tarneit said, they are the first people to put their hands up to be able to come and feed people that are in need, or if there is a flood or a bushfire, these people put their hands up first. We welcome them wholeheartedly into our community. I certainly enjoy being able to walk down the streets of Traralgon of a night-time past all our different restaurants. We are very, very blessed in Traralgon to have many, many restaurants, and Acting Speaker Edbrooke, I am sure you have been down through there before with your connection to the Latrobe Valley. We are very lucky to be able to welcome such wonderful people into the community.

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You have only got to go to our medical centres now, where our doctors and the people that actually work in our hospitals are doing the right thing trying to keep us safe medically, looking after our health. We know we need to give back to those people and make sure that we are doing things here in the Parliament to keep them safe. These are first generations of certain ethnic backgrounds that are coming out now that are needing our protection. I think that what we in this place need to be able to do is change laws, give police more powers to disperse people and make sure that if we do have an issue with antisemitism and vilification we do jump on it straightaway and actually stamp that out.

As with others, we are trying to wind this up a little bit for our speaking spots on this so that everybody does get a go. I think that we do need to be very, very mindful that this is the place here, inside these four walls, with our members sitting here in the chamber, where we are the ones that have the opportunity to bring changes for Victoria to keep all Victorians safe. No matter where you come from, no matter what religious beliefs you do have, we are all Victorian. Our job here – and we will do it – is to make sure that we keep the community of Victoria safe.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:59): I too rise to support the motion and make a contribution on the motion that has been put forward today by the Minister for Health. My contribution will really be about the community-building work that my multifaith and my multicultural community in Narre Warren South are doing. It is not about division out in Narre; it is about forming meaningful connection and it is about making sure that everyone has a place. It does not matter where you are from and it does not matter what faith you believe in, it is all about connection and it is all about community.

There are several leaders in our community of Narre Warren South who do some really heavy lifting. While I was initially remiss, or while I was initially thinking I would not go into mentioning names, because of course in a couple of minutes there will be names and organisations that I will miss, I do want to give them all a special shout-out. First and foremost to Rahimi Barylalai, an Afghan community leader who is doing some tremendous building work, and to Marlena Kupczyk from the Afghan Women's Organisation Victoria, thank you very much. To Nazir from the Victorian Afghan Associations Network and to Shugoofa Bakhtary from the Shugoofa Organisation, thank you very much. To Bassir Qadiri, thank you so much. To Harpreet Kandra of Gurdwara Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Officer, thank you, and also to Jasbir Singh. To Peter Aguto of Multicultural Youth Support Services I say thank you very much for the work that you are doing in our African community and especially with our young South Sudanese, and also to Deng Kor of Community Abundance. Thank you very much to Therese Taylor of the Hampton Park Senior Citizens Club, who is really doing some fantastic work with our elderly Sri Lankans. Thank you so much to Kim Hassan from our Turkish community, who is over at the Hallam Senior Citizens Centre. Thank you to Zohra Hasib from Hampton Park Community House. And of course let us not forget the terrific bigger picture work that Sylvia Coombe does together with Viv Nguyen as well.

To Dur Aschna of the Afghan Australian Philanthropic Association we say thank you very much, and to Andrew Gai, founder of the South Sudanese–Australian Academic Society Inc. I say thank you to Alok Paudel, the president of the Nepalese Association of South East Melbourne, and thank you very much to Ramesh Khadka, vice-president of the Nepalese Association of South East Melbourne. Thank you as well to Ed Zaid, president of the Malay Council of Victoria, and of course to my good friend Temese Leilua from the Victorian Samoan Advisory Council. For those of us who have been to that basketball club of a Friday evening, what a riot that is – a riot in a good way. To Anthony Sofe, Pasifika community leader, we say a very big thank you for his work on the Victorian Samoan Advisory Council. To Dr Damitha de Mel from Lankan Fest, putting on that extraordinary festival that he does each year, thank you. To Siva – K Sivasuthan – the chair of the Tamil Festival Australia and to Pradeepa Saram, a fantastic Consul General of Sri Lanka we say thank you.

Of course, the member for Cranbourne and I will always argue about where the Sikh Volunteers Australia actually sit. I believe it is in Cranbourne North. But anyway, we will argue the toss of that. She believes it is in Cranbourne. I think it is –

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**A member** interjected.

**Gary MAAS:** Up in Hastings – okay. They do terrific work, and of course thank you very much to Jaswinder Singh. To Usha Gullapalli of the Hindu Society of Victoria and Ruchir Patel from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir as well – thank you.

They are the ones I could think of in about an hour. As I said, I do know that I have certainly missed some leaders. But to all of our community leaders who are doing that really hard work of making sure that we are lifting rather than dividing, I say, thank you very much. And in closing, I would just like to say a very big thank you to my electorate staff, who are absolutely amazing and ensure that when I do get up here I do not look so foolish. I thank Myles, Stella, Di and Suzanne. I commend the motion.

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (16:04): I rise to speak on this motion before the Assembly today not only as the member for Mornington but as the shadow assistant minister for multicultural and multifaith affairs. In recent weeks, since I have been in this role, I have had the opportunity to attend many multicultural and multifaith events. These include, for example, the Armenian National Committee's event the other day; a Greek Orthodox church event in Red Hill over the weekend; a pan-Macedonian event as well involving the Greek as well as the Assyrian, Armenian and Indian communities; an Indian event, recently, for Diwali; a Pakistani and others event yesterday; a South Vietnamese dual identity event over the weekend; a Chinese event; and an African cultural music event – and so much more. They are just a few examples in just several weeks in this role of some of the many, many events I have attended, and it shows and reflects the huge range of people we have in Australia and in Victoria from all across the world and from all different faiths.

We have the opportunity in Australia and Victoria through celebrating these different cultures and so forth to share music, to share language and to share dance, food, culture and much more. When we do share this with each other we aid integration in Australia. We aid the development of a shared culture, which Australia has perhaps done more successfully than many other countries around the world in recent decades. And by developing that shared culture we can bring about the best ideas from all around the world, which can aid us in so much, whether it is in business, in our community or in agriculture, much as the Greek communities and Italian communities in Mildura and so many other places have contributed to the way we do horticulture. I know many of my in-laws are from an Italian background up in Mildura and elsewhere, and I am sure Jade – sorry, I should say the member for Mildura – knows a number of them. I know growing up in Horsham in western Victoria my immediate neighbour came from Italy and went through the period of conflict over there and really appreciated the opportunity to be here in Australia and the opportunities that we provided her and her family.

My wife Grace has also benefited from Australia's openness. She came to Australia from South Korea at the age of just three or four years old and became a citizen at a young age. So without the opportunity of Australia being so open and being able to integrate people from all around the world and grant citizenship, I would not perhaps have met Grace and we would not now have our 10-year-old and now seven-year-old children, who I know the member for Frankston knows well. My seven-year-old was six-seven over the weekend – he turned seven on Sunday. I was at multicultural events all day, so I felt really bad; I actually did not get to spend time with him on his birthday, so we celebrated a six-seven birthday the day before, which as we know I have to mention a few times given it is a very popular thing at school awards and everything else recently.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Chris CREWTHER:** Something for socials, as the member opposite said. The member for Bulleen has moved an amendment to this motion, and I will read the motion again:

That this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

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Much as the member for Bulleen has said, I think the issue is around the word ‘anti-immigration’ because, yes, there are some people who are anti-immigration altogether, but there are others who are against very high levels of immigration, where they are not against immigration but they are against certain levels which are not optimal or are not sustainable. That is much like with one’s own household. I can easily accommodate, say, three or four people or even 10 people maybe in my house, but if I have 30 or 40 people come all at once, that is a stretch on resources and my ability to support them. It is the same in our society in Victoria and Australia. We need to provide the resources and support for people coming into Australia so they can access banking, they can access services and they can integrate well into Australia, develop that shared culture and share their identity and background. But they need that support, and without that support there we also have issues with housing, with roads and with many other things where you put pressure on our systems that are in place. I am a supporter of immigration, but it needs to be optimal and sustainable immigration. We of course do need immigration, in particular because we have our lowering birthrate in Victoria and in Australia, and we need to offset that with immigration. We also have skills that we do not always have in Australia and Victoria, where we need to source talent from overseas. Perhaps we can benefit from that as well by bringing in people who may have been educated elsewhere, and we are bringing in talent from around the world so we can actually develop Victoria and Australia better. But we need to get the balance right and it needs to be sustainable and optimal, which is why I support the member for Bulleen’s amendment to this motion.

I want to note that many Victorians either have a parent or parents who were born overseas or were born overseas themselves. Half of all Victorians either were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. That includes my wife Grace and my two kids. I note I have probably got a little bit of a boring background, with a Welsh, Irish, English and Scottish background. I also have part Indian heritage, which many people would not know about. I was actually the first member of the federal Parliament with an Indian heritage in Australia’s history, but not many people would know that. Maybe the member for Frankston does. It is only a small percentage. They came from what was Goa, Daman and Diu in the gold rush era – so the 1850s, 1860s – when many people came from all across the world to seek an opportunity to seek gold and everything else, whether they found it or not. Indeed I went to a Chinese event recently, and we noted that the percentage of Chinese in Victoria in 1861 was about 7 per cent, whereas it is about 6.6 per cent now. We have always been a nation of people from all around the world. There are not many people who have a solely Indigenous heritage, so we all have a bit of an element from people who have come from all across the world.

I mention that opportunity because we are a country where many migrants share the values that we have and the values that we have in the Liberal Party as well, those values of hard work, reward for effort, freedom – many have come to Australia seeking freedom – opportunity, aspiration and hope. They want hope for themselves, their kids and their grandkids for a bright future, no matter their background, no matter their culture and no matter their religion and so forth. I know that my wife’s parents had a similar background as well. My wife’s father was qualified as an engineer in South Korea, and he worked in Libya on the man-made river project. He worked in Saudi Arabia building dams over there. But when he came to Australia his engineering qualifications were not recognised at the time. That has since changed, thank goodness, but he entered the building industry because of that. I know that he and my mother-in-law worked extremely hard at Australia Post and at all sorts of jobs, often to the point where my wife and her sister were home alone watching TV and doing all these things growing up because their parents were often working two jobs. That is the story of many migrants. They grew up in Blacktown in western Sydney, and they had to work hard to achieve success in Australia. I know my wife now has achieved success – she is now a special counsel at Norton Rose Fulbright – and her sister is a dentist. They are just two examples of the many people who have come to Victoria and Australia who have achieved success.

I do actually commend a number of elements of this motion, except for the part that the member for Bulleen talked about before. We also have people fleeing conflict from all around the world. I mentioned the Armenians earlier, and there is obviously an ongoing conflict there. But many people

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have fled, whether it was from ISIS or during World War I or World War II. They have come to Australia seeking freedom, seeking life and seeking opportunity. I know that we are the best when we can celebrate those different identities, those different cultures and those different religions from all around the world.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:14): I rise in support of this unamended motion. It is an important motion that speaks to the values that I think we ought to be representing in this place. I certainly do, along with the member for Broadmeadows, represent one of the most heterogeneous communities in all of Victoria, where our constituents have come from all parts of the globe and where effectively all faiths are represented as well. While a few people in this debate have touched upon protests and policy debates around the level of population growth, suggesting that some of the actions we have seen on the steps of this place are legitimate actions, I do not think that those clomping around in black shirts like some Roderick Spode wannabes from PG Wodehouse are in any way constructing a legitimate debate. They are not talking about the level of population growth or the level of immigration, noting of course that these are federal government domains. They are talking about the composition of our immigration intake. They are talking about our communities, those of the member for Broadmeadows's electorate and mine – communities who are deeply proud to be Australian, communities that we see reflected at citizenship ceremonies on a weekly basis. Each week 150 or more people and their loving and supportive families profess their belief – their faith if you will – in Australia and the values that we share: freedom and democracy and everything that this country represents. I think it is important that I disabuse the member for Mornington of the idea that somehow those values are quarantined to the Liberal Party. They are not. They are proud values that we share and any democrat should believe in in this country – the belief in the unalienable right of people to express and engage fully in the political process, to join in our democratic institutions. They are not quarantined to a political party; they are Australian values. They are Labor values too.

I want to thank the community leaders in my area in the seat of Greenvale but also those in Broadmeadows. It is such an interchangeable, permeable border between the wonderful electorates of Broadmeadows and Greenvale. The community leaders in our part of the world do so much to advocate for their own communities and to give them a voice to their parliamentary representatives and to civil society more broadly. I think of the Islamic Community Milli Gorus team in Meadow Heights; the Quba Mosque team on Somerton Road; the many Islamic schools and mosques that are represented by the member for Broadmeadows; the Chaldean Catholic parishes of St George and Our Lady Guardian of Plants; the Syriac Catholic Church; the Holy Spirit Church; the Maronite Catholic community represented by Father Charles Hitti; and the St Charbel parish in my own electorate of Greenvale. Those faith communities are often comprised of relatively recently arrived migrants, many of whom came to this country as refugees. I thank them for the contribution they make to our community – both individual members of those communities and their leaders – in advocating to us as their parliamentary representatives but also in engaging so closely with each other across what might otherwise be faith boundaries and ensuring that we have such a strong and positive interfaith community in our part of the world, in the City of Hume but also on a more informal basis within the communities that the member for Broadmeadows and I represent. I thank each one of those leaders.

I recognise that what we have seen take place in our community has caused harm. It has caused a deep sense of hurt to those who have come to Australia and who are effectively being told, on account of their skin colour, their ethnic background, their nationality or their faith, that they are not welcome. I stand here to repudiate that. I thank them for the pride they have in our community – the pride and belief they have in Australia and Victoria and its freedom and its tolerance and the things that we celebrate. We do not just tolerate those from different backgrounds, we actively celebrate them. The member for Broadmeadows and I see every single day the extraordinary impact that those communities have, both collectively and individually, in building our state to be a better place. They contribute so actively – through sports clubs, through schools, through churches, through mosques, through temples, through mandirs, through gurdwaras – to making our community whole.

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Just very briefly, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs I get to see this replicated across the state as well. It was a joy and a privilege to be with the Governor of Victoria at Government House last Thursday for the Victorian Multicultural Awards for Excellence, where I saw so many members of our community – in particular, I might note, the member for Broadmeadows's community and my community in Greenvale – represented on the day. I very quickly want to acknowledge the Centre for Muslim Wellbeing, Arabic Welfare, Northern Health and Australian Chaldean Family Welfare, who were awarded special awards in recognition of their contributions to our community, and all those who joined the multicultural honour roll. They include many friends and those with connections to Greenvale: Dr Raju Adhikari, Dr Teresa De Fazio, Sunny Singh Duggal, Rana Shahid, Ange Kenos, Tammy Nguyen, Kifarkis Nissan from Foundation House, who does an amazing job, and Dr Bruce Wong among so many more. Thank you for the contribution that you all make to our great state. I commend this motion unamended.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (16:20): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

#### **Integrity Oversight Victoria**

#### *Performance audits*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage)** (16:20): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to appoint O'Connor Marsden & Associates Pty Ltd to conduct the performance audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and Integrity Oversight Victoria.

### *Bills*

#### **Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025**

#### *Council's amendments*

#### **Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 1, page 3, lines 24 to 30, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Clause 1, page 4, lines 1 to 6, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
3. Clause 1, page 4, lines 11 to 31, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
4. Clause 1, page 5, lines 1 to 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
5. Part heading preceding clause 150, omit this heading.
6. Clause 150, omit this clause.
7. Clause 151, omit this clause.
8. Clause 152, omit this clause.
9. Clause 153, omit this clause.
10. Clause 154, omit this clause.
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220. Clause 362, omit this clause.
221. Clause 363, omit this clause.
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- 239. Clause 381, omit this clause.
- 240. Clause 382, omit this clause.
- 241. Clause 383, omit this clause.
- 242. Clause 384, omit this clause.
- 243. Clause 385, omit this clause.
- 244. Clause 386, omit this clause.
- 245. Clause 387, omit this clause.
- 246. Clause 388, omit this clause.
- 247. Clause 389, omit this clause.
- 248. Clause 390, omit this clause.
- 249. Clause 391, omit this clause.
- 250. Clause 392, omit this clause.
- 251. Clause 393, omit this clause.
- 252. Clause 394, omit this clause.
- 253. Clause 395, line 21, omit “Chapter 4” and insert “Division 4 of Part 3.2 of Chapter 3”.
- 254. Clause 395, line 29, omit “Chapters 2, 3 and 4” and insert “Chapters 2 and 3”.
- 255. Clause 396, omit this clause.
- 256. Division heading preceding clause 397, omit this heading.
- 257. Clause 397, omit this clause.
- 258. Clause 398, omit this clause.
- 259. Part heading, Division heading and Subdivision heading preceding clause 399, omit these headings.
- 260. Clause 399, omit this clause.
- 261. Subdivision heading preceding clause 400, omit this heading.
- 262. Clause 400, omit this clause.
- 263. Clause 401, omit this clause.
- 264. Clause 402, omit this clause.
- 265. Subdivision heading preceding clause 403, omit this heading.
- 266. Clause 403, omit this clause.
- 267. Clause 404, omit this clause.
- 268. Clause 405, omit this clause.
- 269. Clause 406, omit this clause.
- 270. Subdivision heading preceding clause 407, omit this heading.
- 271. Clause 407, omit this clause.
- 272. Clause 408, omit this clause.
- 273. Clause 409, omit this clause.
- 274. Clause 410, omit this clause.
- 275. Subdivision heading preceding clause 411, omit this heading.
- 276. Clause 411, omit this clause.
- 277. Clause 412, omit this clause.
- 278. Subdivision heading preceding clause 413, omit this heading.
- 279. Clause 413, omit this clause.
- 280. Clause 414, omit this clause.
- 281. Subdivision heading preceding clause 415, omit this heading.
- 282. Clause 415, omit this clause.
- 283. Subdivision heading preceding clause 416, omit this heading.

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- 284. Clause 416, omit this clause.
- 285. Clause 417, omit this clause.
- 286. Clause 418, omit this clause.
- 287. Clause 419, omit this clause.
- 288. Clause 420, omit this clause.
- 289. Clause 421, omit this clause.
- 290. Clause 422, omit this clause.
- 291. Subdivision heading preceding clause 423, omit this heading.
- 292. Clause 423, omit this clause.
- 293. Clause 424, omit this clause.
- 294. Division heading and Subdivision heading preceding clause 425, omit these headings.
- 295. Clause 425, omit this clause.
- 296. Clause 426, omit this clause.
- 297. Clause 427, omit this clause.
- 298. Clause 428, omit this clause.
- 299. Clause 429, omit this clause.
- 300. Clause 430, omit this clause.
- 301. Clause 431, omit this clause.
- 302. Clause 432, omit this clause.
- 303. Clause 433, omit this clause.
- 304. Clause 434, omit this clause.
- 305. Clause 435, omit this clause.
- 306. Clause 436, omit this clause.
- 307. Subdivision heading preceding clause 437, omit this heading.
- 308. Clause 437, omit this clause.
- 309. Clause 438, omit this clause.
- 310. Clause 439, omit this clause.
- 311. Clause 440, omit this clause.
- 312. Clause 441, omit this clause.
- 313. Clause 442, omit this clause.
- 314. Clause 443, omit this clause.
- 315. Clause 444, omit this clause.
- 316. Long title, omit “the **Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018**, the **Disability Act 2006**,”.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (16:21): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The amendments to the Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025 were moved by the government and passed by the Legislative Council. The amendments remove parts 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of the bill and amend part 1 to reflect the purpose and commencement, which are impacted by the removal of other parts. The removal of these parts of the bill omits the proposals to merge the functions of the disability services commissioner, the Victorian Disability Worker Commission and the Victorian disability worker registration board into the Social Services Regulator; to establish a complaints function; and to consolidate worker prohibition schemes across disability and out-of-home care.

Importantly, these sections of the bill responded to the rapid review into child safety, which called out that children in out-of-home care and children with disability are at a greater risk of abuse and therefore need more joined-up systems and better oversight. Recommendation 8.1 of the rapid review said that common foundations across social services and disability were needed to ensure better safeguarding for these children. However, members of the coalition, the crossbench and the Greens did not support these sections of the bill, so the government was forced to remove them to progress the rest of the reform in the bill. The government regretfully moved these amendments due to the lack of support from the coalition, Greens and members of the crossbench because, as the Premier said, ‘The safety of children is my highest priority and the highest priority for the government.’

As such, the bill still contains the following important reforms: reforming the reportable conduct scheme and transferring it, along with the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s remit for the child safe standards, into the Social Services Regulator; two, reforming the working with children check scheme and transferring this function and the NDIS worker-screening function into the Social Services Regulator; and, three, amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, including in relation to specialist disability accommodation. In essence, these amendments maintain the existing silos within which disability entities exist with the same powers which they have exercised to only prohibit five workers this year and respond to seven of the 69 complaints they have received. The government listened to the coalition, the Greens and the crossbench that they wanted the status quo to be maintained, and so while we are disappointed, we thank and acknowledge the many stakeholders that got in touch to say these aspects of the bill could not be delayed.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (16:23): I think the minister at the table just gave a good summary, and I think we need to recap why we have arrived at this particular point in time on this bill. It comes back with some very, very big amendments. The merger of the disability complaints and oversight services into the Social Services Regulator has been completely removed. A similar bill sat between chambers for 18 months. For 18 months it sat there because the government and the minister knew it was unpopular with the sector – for what other reason would you not bring it on? They then withdrew that bill and reintroduced it into a bigger bill to try and sneak it through. They reintroduced it into a bigger bill, knowing that we would support those reforms. They tried to get it through that way, and it was done with 24 hours notice to the chamber. We got the bill less than 24 hours before we were asked to stand up and talk. There was clear opposition from a great cohort within the disability sector. How this transpired was that we indicated we would move a motion to split this bill. When it was clear to the minister that we had the numbers to do that, the minister took the option of moving house amendments to withdraw those elements.

The upper house crossbench is a fairly diverse group; I think everyone would agree with that. It is not very often you get the Liberals, the Nationals and all of the crossbench on the same page, and the reason they are on the same page is because this is flawed policy. The minister had to back right down after getting it so wrong, and the reason was not doing the consultation. I am shortly going to run through some of the organisations that opposed this. The minister and her parliamentary secretary, the member for Greenvale, who is here in the chamber, said that they consulted extensively. This is not true. Of those that did provide feedback, a large cohort were not listened to. These are the advocacy and disability representative groups, not the service providers. The minister in the other place stood up and provided a letter from those that supported these amendments, but they were all service providers. It is service providers and their staff that are the subject of the complaints. That is not a blight on the great workers that we have in the sector that do a good job, but, as the disability royal commission showed, there are some issues amongst the workforce. To stand up and say ‘We’ve got the support of the sector’ and hand over a letter from all the service providers, who are going to be investigated, is just ridiculous.

The other point I want to make is that the minister spoke about a number of groups that were consulted, but a number of those groups indicated to me in correspondence that they were consulted about how this merger would be implemented. They were not consulted on whether they wanted this in the first

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place. The consultation consisted of ‘We’re going to merge the services into the Social Services Regulator, and we want to consult with you on how we’re going to do it.’ That is not consultation. The consultation has got to come back to the starting point.

It is also not in line with the royal commission recommendations. When the royal commission into disability recommendations were released, the government spokesperson said that they:

... welcome the opportunity to work closely with people with disability throughout the implementation of our response to the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.

Those are great words, except the government did not do that. The pertinent recommendation, 11.3, was to establish or maintain an independent one-stop shop complaint reporting, referral and support mechanism to receive reports of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with a disability. This infers a standalone entity. It does not recommend merging the complaints services into a bigger umbrella organisation. The minister has been caught out. We now say to the minister: go back and do what you should have done in the first place, consult with the groups that represent those with a disability, listen to them and let them mould this framework, as the disability royal commission says that they should.

I want to go back to some of the comments from the minister and the member for Greenvale, the parliamentary secretary in this place, who said that consultation on this issue was exhaustive. Here are some of the groups that say they were not consulted with or did not agree with the final proposal that was put forth in the bill: the Association of Employees with Disability Legal Centre and the Association for Children with Disability, a big group representing the peak body within Victoria. The Australian Education Union opposed this. Here is what the Australian Education Union said:

Reversing the proposed abolition or merger of the Victorian Disability Workers Commission and the Office of the Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner ...

is not something they support. They support reversing the proposed abolition or merger of the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria. This is the education union. They further said:

To this end we are supportive of amendments being considered by The Nationals. These amendments are essential to protecting the integrity of disability services in Victoria and ensuring that people with disability continue to receive safe, high-quality support.

The Barwon Disability Resource Council is not supportive. The Blind Citizens of Australia is not supportive. Brain Injury Matters is not supportive. Deaf Victoria is not supportive. Blind Victoria is not supportive, and Disability Advocacy Victoria is not supportive of these changes. Disability Advocacy Victoria is the peak body for independent advocacy organisations in Victoria. They said:

... there remain significant areas of concern for us that go to the heart of the Government’s understanding of the needs, rights and interests of Victorians with disability.

The Disability Discrimination Legal Service opposed these changes. Here is what they said – this is not me; this is the Disability Discrimination Legal Service:

The government’s false claims in relation to this legislation are disturbing and seem designed to thwart the disability community, and put the safety of its members in jeopardy through providing incorrect information to parliamentarians and the wider community, in order to force us to access a regulator which we do not support ... which has minimal if any knowledge of disability culture.

I suggest strongly this bill is withdrawn and your government does what it keeps claiming it has already done, but has not, and that is consult with the disability community. Please note, that disability service providers do not in any way shape or form represent the disability community, and indeed have been heavily involved in subjecting them to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, as per the Disability Royal Commission Report.

Another group that opposed it – we are up to number 11 – is Disability Justice Australia. Here is what they said:

The disability community was given no notice of this – which in itself is extremely disturbing – as was a comment by Iwan Walters (ex-Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities) who **incorrectly** claimed in Parliament that the disability sector had been consulted ... “exhaustively”.

Disabled People’s Organisations Victoria – organisation number 12 that opposed this – said:

An informal suggestion that there be, within the Social Services Regulator function, a dedicated Associate Regulator responsible for Disability does not address some key issues of concern we hold about the proposed changes.

They went on to say:

We propose that a disability led review of disability service regulation is commissioned, a review that would be informed by the findings of the ... Royal Commission. This review should precede any further decisions regarding the absorption of disability regulators into the SSR.

The Disability Resources Centre, or Disability Rights and Culture, opposed this move, saying:

We are ... extraordinarily frustrated by the lack of consultation.

First Step Legal opposed this. Grampians DisAbility Advocacy opposed this. Here is what the Health and Community Services Union, HACSU, had to say:

The Health and Community Services Union ... is appalled at the Allan Government’s ... Bill ...

Without consultation, without transparency, and without any regard for the voices of disability workers or people with disability, the government has moved to dismantle the very safeguards it once claimed were essential to safety, accountability, and professional respect in the sector.

This is HACSU. The state secretary Paul Healey said:

The Allan government has once again abandoned people with disabilities and disability workers. This is a slap in the face to every worker who has fought for safety, dignity, and professionalism in this sector, and shows that this government has lost touch with its Labor values.

HACSU demands:

... that the Allan Government immediately withdraw these amendments and undertake full consultation with disability workers, unions, and people with disability before making any changes to the existing regulatory framework.

Do we still think that this had widespread support? Number 18 – cop this one – is Labor Enabled. We got a letter from Labor Enabled. Labor Enabled are the card-carrying members of the Labor Party with disability. Here is what Labor Enabled had to say:

This Bill represents a profound betrayal of Labor values. It undermines the independence, accountability, and hard-fought rights of people with disability in Victoria.

This is from Labor Party members:

... there has been a total lack of genuine consultation. At no time has Labor Enabled Victoria been contacted to engage in a meaningful consultation process.

Disability advocacy groups – the very people and organisations who live by the principle “*nothing about us without us*” – have been clear and united in their message: the sector needs a stand-alone, independent complaints body –

it seems the minister is the only one not hearing this message –

not one buried within a broader social services structure where disability voices will again be sidelined.

On my comments – they watched my speech in this chamber a couple of weeks ago – they said:

It is a damning indictment that Labor Enabled Victoria finds itself agreeing with these words. When even our political opponents are articulating what our own government refuses to hear, something has gone badly wrong.

Group 19 that opposed this: Leadership Plus, a disability housing organisation. Group 20, Melbourne East Disability Advocacy, opposed this. The Mental Health Legal Centre opposed it. Here is what the Mental Health Legal Centre had to say:

The proposed takeover risks diluting the focus of disability regulation and undermining its ability to provide dedicated advocacy and oversight. The Social Services Regulator, while important in its own right, does not possess the same depth of specialised knowledge nor the direct connection to disability communities that the current regulators have carefully built over the years.

If the member for Greenvale's consultation was exhaustive, as he termed it, this would indicate that is not the case. But if they were spoken to, then they did not listen, because these are the groups that do not want it: group 22, Northern Community Legal Centre; group 23, Occupational Therapy Society for Invisible Disabilities; Regional Disability Advocacy Service, group 24; and number 25, Rights Information and Advocacy Centre. They said:

Our concerns remain about the appropriateness of placing disability regulation under the SSR, and the lack of genuine engagement with/respect for disability representative organisations leading the Government to the flawed decisions ...

it has made. Group 26, Southwest Advocacy Association; Southern Disability Advocacy; Star Victoria; Tandem Carers; VALID, the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability, another peak body – one of several peak bodies that I have read out. Here is what VALID had to say:

Consultation on these changes has been selective and inadequate, and has failed to include Victoria's disabled people's organisations and disability peak bodies –

it was meant to be exhaustive –

who have the authority to speak on behalf of people with disabilities.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service opposed it, and Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Women's Legal Service Victoria, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Working Women's Centre Victoria, Youth Disability Advocacy Service. With this exhaustive consultation either they were not listening or they did not get the email, I am afraid.

I say to the minister – that is not all the groups, by the way – clearly you have not consulted with an enormous cohort of the disability sector: not service providers, those that get investigated. Those that represent disability groups, either through advocacy or membership of those with disabilities, are the ones that need to be consulted, the ones that need to shape and mould this, as the disability royal commission indicated. So we need to now go back to them and let them shape this, and when we bring this back into the chamber, let us not come back with another piece of flawed legislation jammed in a wider omnibus bill. Let us debate it, standalone, on its merits. There is a lot of consultation to be done over the December, January, February and maybe even into March period. But the disability sector is quite rightly exceptionally disappointed with how this has been handled. It has not been handled well.

I have been here for a little while – there are others that have been here for a lot longer than I have – but I do not think I have seen a bill come in that has been so poorly shaped, when the initial guideline was to consult with the sector. I do not think I have come across a bill in my long three terms, unfortunately as a shadow minister, that has generated the level of opposition and genuine angst from a sector – and we are talking about the disability sector. What was put forth is not in line with the findings of the royal commission. It is not in line with what the disability sector wanted, and the minister knew this. That is why it sat between chambers for 18 months and was not progressed. There is no other reason a bill sits between chambers for 18 months. The reason is because it has got problems. But what do we do? Do we use that 18 months to go and engage in the genuine consultation

that is required and needed? Do we use that time? 'No, no, no. We'll just sit on it, do nothing, and then we will jam it into an omnibus bill with a whole heap of things that the opposition won't be able to vote down because they're going to have to support the other elements.'

Did the minister not think we would split the bill? Did the minister think we would cop this, when it sat between the chambers for 18 months because it was flawed, and just wave it through? When you have got groups like the HACSU and the education union – Labor enabled – the upper house crossbench, every one of them and everyone else saying this is no good, it is a blight on this government and this minister that they tried to push this through in a bigger bill.

I know that the honourable member for Eildon wants to speak, so I will pull up stumps on that. But for goodness sake, Minister, take one message away from this absolute disaster you have overseen. This is not a problem that is that difficult to solve. This is a structure that we can put in place as a Parliament if we work together and work with the sector. It is not a tough one to solve. There have been a lot tougher issues solved in this place than this predicament we are facing now. Please go away and do the consultation. As I have said right through this process, if you want to tackle this in a manner whereby we sit down and have a yarn about what the best model or method is and include us in discussions to get a better outcome for those in Victoria that have special needs, the most vulnerable in our community, the offer is there; it has been there for 18 months. Let us do it this time, and let us get it right.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:42): I rise to speak on the amendments that are on the table, and I do so with some deep misgiving. I note that they were moved by the government in the upper house, but I think they lessen this bill. They lessen the bill that is on the table. They mean that while some children will have better protection from those who seek to do harm and those who we have seen do harm, others will not. Others will still exist in a system that is profoundly fragmented from a regulatory perspective, where there is no single door, a system where the Disability Services Commission will receive 69 complaints in a year and all but seven of those will be deemed out of its scope and it will refer them onto others, highlighting the profound confusion that exists for the most vulnerable Victorians in our system at the moment.

I also profoundly disagree with the characterisation of the process that the shadow minister the member for Gippsland East has put forward. I do not doubt his passion for these issues. I do profoundly disagree with his assessment of the process and also his characterisation of the consultation that has taken place.

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**Iwan WALTERS**: The member for Eildon no doubt will make her contribution shortly, but this is the time that I am allocated. The bill sought to unify the regulatory framework and to bring it together in the Social Services Regulator, in fulfilment of recommendation 8.1 of the rapid review, which said that common foundations across social services and disability were needed to ensure better safeguarding for children. However, members of the coalition, the crossbench and the Greens did not support these clauses of the bill, so we removed them. I am not surprised to see the Greens and some of the crossbench being so wholeheartedly committed on a kind of Brezhnev ossification of regulatory settings where nothing changes and the purity of the institution and perhaps the title of the institution rather than the outcome, rather than the efficacy of the regulatory framework itself and its capacity to work for people with a disability in our state and other vulnerable Victorians. That is what the bill sought to do, not in an underhanded way but in a way that sought to bring together regulatory functions into the SSR, where disability would have a very significant place through an associate regulator role.

I do not propose to rehash the entirety of my second-reading contribution, but I do note that the bill still contains some important reforms. It reforms the reportable conduct scheme and transfers it, along with the Commission for Children and Young People's remit for the child safe standards, into the Social Services Regulator. It reforms the working with children check scheme and transfers this function and the NDIS worker-screening function into the Social Services Regulator. But in essence

these amendments maintain those existing silos for people with a disability and in which disability regulatory entities exist with the same powers that, as I say, they have exercised to only respond to seven of the 69 complaints that they have received. This is clearly profoundly problematic. It is indicative of the difficulty with which Victorians with disability, their families and their carers engage with the regulatory system.

The member for Gippsland East talks about a lot of things. He talks about consultation. He also talks about the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The bill, as it stood, would have established a dedicated complaints mechanism for social services users within the independent Social Services Regulator, which would have aligned with the royal commission's recommendation for an independent one-stop shop for people with a disability. We are not doing that today. We are retaining a fragmented and siloed system, which I would contend diminishes the safeguards for people with disability in Victoria.

The member for Gippsland East also talks about consultation. I do not think it is especially edifying to engage in a tit-for-tat game of who has spoken to whom and to often, in some respects, seek to verbal people. But the member for Gippsland East talks about consultation. The government listened to the coalition, the Greens and the crossbench. They noted that they wanted the status quo to be maintained. While we were disappointed, we also thanked and acknowledge the many stakeholders who got in touch to say that these aspects of the bill could not be and should not be delayed. Many stakeholders recognised that the bill, as it initially stood in the Legislative Council, would have increased the clarity for people with disability, simplified and streamlined the regulatory framework and assisted to keep Victorian children with disability safer from harm. I will list them: the Association for Children with Disability, National Disability Services, Down Syndrome Victoria, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare – whom the shadow minister knows full well wrote a very powerful and compelling letter explaining precisely why these reforms were needed – Australian Childhood Foundation, Mallee Family Care, Anglicare, Child and Family Services Ballarat, UnitingCare, Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, Catholic Social Services Victoria, MacKillop Family Services, Odyssey Victoria, Access Health and Community, FamilyCare, Safe Steps, Kids First Australia, CREATE Foundation, Yooralla, Berry Street, Melba Support Services, Able Australia, Alkira, Gateways Support Services, Golden City Support Services, Grace Professional Services, Kids Plus Disability Services, Scope Australia, MiLife-Victoria, Pinarc, the Bridge, Wallara, Early Childhood Intervention Australia Victoria/Tasmania, Amaze and the list goes on.

I am profoundly disappointed in many respects that these amendments are here. They go in the face of the Leader of the Opposition's comments when this bill was debated in this place the first time. Ms Wilson, the Leader of the Opposition, said:

Families have been calling for a consistent approach to worker regulation across disability and social services for many years.

She called it 'overdue reform', but she has been rolled by those in her party room and the shadow spokesman, and in the process, people with a disability retain a fragmented regulatory framework. That is what is on the table today.

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:48):** I have been in this place for some time now, the same amount of time as the member for Gippsland East, and some things are almost a first. I would say this comes pretty close. We have got now a bill before us. The amendments have come back. This particular bill has gone to the upper house, and it has come back. That is not in itself unusual, but what is unusual are the changes being made to the disability complaints and oversight bodies. Eighteen months ago a bill was brought into this place, and it became a little bit hard for the government, so they sat on it between houses for 18 months. That in itself is fairly extraordinary. That speaks volumes, that it sat there for 18 months. Clearly there was a problem.

I had to pinch myself almost listening to what the member for Greenvale was talking about. He said he disagreed with comments that were made by the member for Gippsland East, the shadow minister,

who did point out a number of the problems and the flaws and the fact that this sat between houses for 18 months because the process did not work. The process was not what it should be. The member for Greenvale seemed to think that it was. But I will tell you, in all my time here to have something sit between houses for 18 months is one thing – so the bill was sitting between houses, and then what the government decided was to bring in a voluminous bill, one of the biggest that I have seen in my time. Gosh, it is nearly 5 centimetres thick, possibly more. In that bill they slipped in some of the changes that they wanted to make with regard to the disability sector.

They slipped it in and thought that as it is such a big fat document that we were not going to notice. People working in the disability sector and the opposition, they thought, would not notice that in this big fat bill, which contains some very important elements, and they just slipped these in. Lo and behold, what happened? It is still a problem. During those 18 months that they had it sitting between houses, you would think they might have learned and made some of the relevant changes, but in fact they did not. They have just slipped them into another bill to try and see if they can get these through.

What they slipped them in with were a lot of really important child safety amendments. The child safety amendments were so overdue. We have known that there are problems, for six years or so, in this area, as in 2019 the commissioner for children Liana Buchanan warned about problems with the working with children check. She warned that the current legislation was limiting and stopped her from passing on information that was so important that it would have seen somebody lose their working with children check. What happened? These changes did not get made. The government ignored it. It took, in 2022, an Ombudsman's report into a matter of sexual assault – a pretty horrible matter of sexual assault, actually. That report exposed a whole bunch of shortfalls in Victoria's working with children check scheme. In 2022 that report was tabled, on top of something that happened in 2019 and comments made by the children's commissioner, so we knew that these things were so overdue and had to get through. The government, true to form, put something forward that they knew that we would absolutely need to support, because these changes to the working with children checks need to be made because we have too many issues of failures in the system. The allegation in the Ombudsman's report is around a particular individual where the system in place did not prevent him from obtaining a working with children clearance and permitted him to work with vulnerable children and young people, and that was one of the worst possible outcomes that happened.

The Ombudsman noted at the time that the powers of Victoria's screening authority are among the most limited in Victoria. In 2022, three years ago – and three years on top of those comments made by the children's commissioner – the Ombudsman at the time Deborah Glass found a particular data breach was facilitated by inadequate privacy measures put in place by the department, which had failed to audit access to the information system despite multiple warnings. So up until 2022 they had had multiple warnings. The government were so behind the eight ball here that they had to then act hastily. They have acted so terribly slowly, but they made it look as though this had to be done quickly because there had been another horrible instance of abuse in the early childhood sector – some of the worst. It plays out every single day, and we know that the government have stuffed this up for such a long period. So we have had these exceptionally important changes that needed to be made in relation to children's safety, and the government had known about these ones that needed to be made. The Ombudsman had previously called on the Attorney-General and the Department of Justice and Community Safety – they are the ones that administer the working with children check – to consider much-needed amendments.

We knew because of the government's failures that these were important. We knew that they were important. At the same time, we understood that the government had issues trying to get their legislation through – their social services regulation changes regarding the disability complaints and oversight body. We knew that that had been parked between houses. True to form, the government tried to slip one in and hope we did not notice. But they did not understand the depth of the situation, the depth of the problem that sat before them – surprisingly, because it had sat between houses for 18 months – and they had a second go at it. We looked at it and talked to the crossbench and talked

extensively to the sector, the providers, the groups that have an interest in this area. The member for Gippsland East did an enormous amount of work, and he outlined very eloquently the multiple groups within the disability area who had problems with this. When they had issues and the crossbench had issues and we had issues the only option was to look at splitting the bill, and that was going to be a major embarrassment to the government. Instead of that major embarrassment, we have got this major embarrassment where the bill has come back to us with some very, very big amendments. The merger of the disability complaints and oversight bodies into the Social Services Regulator has been completely removed. It has been scrapped completely. I just find that appalling. The government now is going to have to have another crack at this, probably the third crack at it, which is going to take time. Let us look at early next year and let us give them the benefit of the doubt that they might get this through in March. That will be two years that they have not been able to bring about changes to the disability sector that they want. The government should have their heads between their tails. This is absolute disrespect and disregard for those in the disability sector.

So many groups have had problems: Deafblind Victoria, Deaf Victoria, disability advocacy groups, Brain Injury Matters, Blind Citizens Australia, the Barwon Disability Resource Council, Disability Justice Australia, Disabled People's Organisations of Victoria, Disability Discrimination Legal Service, Leadership Plus, Melbourne East Disability Advocacy, Mental Health Legal Centre – the list goes on. The shadow minister outlined a lot of their concerns, and I applaud him for that. Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council and the Women's Legal Service Victoria – these are people who would normally stand with the government but are standing against them here. The government have a serious amount of work to do, and they should hang their heads in shame. It is going to take them two years to try and make some changes. I am pleased to see that these amendments have been made.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

*Rulings from the Chair***Constituency questions**

**The SPEAKER** (16:58): I have reviewed the constituency questions from today. The member for Pascoe Vale asked a broad policy question and did not sufficiently demonstrate how it was specifically relevant to his electorate or his constituents. I have therefore ruled the member's question out of order.

**Announcements****Felicitations**

**The SPEAKER** (16:58): Members, with the indulgence of the house I would like to once again thank our clerks and the staff of the Victorian Parliament for everything that they do for us during a sitting week and indeed today, an extra sitting day. Can I make a special mention of our Hansard team, who are wearing their beautiful bow ties today, as is their tradition on the last sitting day of the year; thank you so much. Also, to members, can I again offer my best wishes to you all for a safe and happy Christmas and an enjoyable new year. I do hope that you will all be very safe and get to spend some time with your families, have some downtime and come back reinvigorated for 2026.

Personally, can I just express my thanks to everyone who has been supportive of me this year. It has been a particularly challenging year, as many of you know, and I really have appreciated the warmth and the support that I have received not just from members obviously from the government side but from members more broadly across the spectrum. It truly is a credit to this place when we can all be so kind and so generous to each other. I thank you from the bottom of my heart as Speaker but also as a person. Thank you again for all your great support during the year.

**Business interrupted under resolution of house of 3 December.**

*Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Clyde North police station**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (17:00): (1479) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. The action I seek is that the minister comes out and visits the Clyde North police station. We have all heard of the pub with no beer; this is the police station with no police. They have built a wonderful new police station out in Clyde North. Where they have put it is a great location if you manage to call 000 when you have been home invaded out in Clyde North, which let us be honest, happens quite often, or if your car gets stolen from your driveway or if you are down the road and you are one of the retail workers and you need the police support – you can ring 000. Isn't it magnificent? We have got a \$30 million police station, but the one thing we are missing is Victoria Police who can come out and respond to the crimes, and that is a real problem out in Clyde North, because if you want them to get there at the moment, you are still calling them from Cranbourne or Narre Warren. But let us be honest, Narre Warren is partly shut at the moment as well and not open to the public because of the renovations going on there. If you need to get a police car down there, the coppers in the area know what all the community know: you are going to get stuck on Clyde Road. You cannot get down Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road. You simply cannot get out to the places where help is most needed, where these offences are happening over and over again.

One of the most common emails I get from people out in Clyde and Clyde North is about the amount of crime that has been happening in the local community – the aggravated burglaries, the car thefts, the continuous ongoing crimes that people have seen every single day. At one stage I know that one in 19 houses had been burgled through the area; I am sure that stat has changed since then. We have seen the growth and the new people moving into the local community, which is great to see. We have got a great growing community and many people that are involved and active in their local area, but they have continuously said we need to make sure we have got police there.

The government came out and promised a police station in 2018 and to have it ready, up and going by 2022, and we all know that was a lie because it was not ready by 2022. In fact it had not started by 2022. Then when they came out and said to the community 'Don't worry, trust us' and they all went out and got their little happy snaps on the site and said 'We're here to build this wonderful building,' what they did not say to them was, 'We're not putting police in them.' When the government comes out and says, 'We are putting police in them,' they are putting the traffic patrol and the criminal investigation unit in there. If you call 000, there is no police van, there is no uniform officer and there is no way you can walk into the station to go and make a report or get a stat dec signed. All of these things cannot happen because the doors are locked. Only Labor could lie to this community so much that they have convinced them that they are going to build them a police station to protect them, when the outcome is that the Clyde North community is no safer after building a police station with no police – as much as I am still thirsty going into the pub with no beer.

**St Oliver Plunkett's School**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:03): (1480) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the investments the Victorian Labor government is continuing to make to support local schools across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, including for St Oliver Plunkett's School in Pascoe Vale. Located on Landells Road in Pascoe Vale, the school of Blessed Oliver Plunkett was first opened in January 1942, with 87 students from prep to grade 8, taught by two nuns. The original church school building was built in 1941 at a cost of £3000 raised through fundraising efforts by the many committed and hardworking families of Pascoe Vale at the time. The parish of Blessed St Oliver Plunkett was officially established in 1948. In 1954 the main school building, which still stands, was opened. In

1958 over 1000 students were enrolled at the school at the time. On 19 January 1959 the school church building was, sadly, destroyed by fire, with the current parish church reopened again in July 1961. In 2022 St Oliver's celebrated its 80th birthday. Today it is home to 380 students, providing for a truly nurturing, vibrant and welcoming school community. Every student is supported to succeed and aspire through its breadth and depth of curriculum offerings from STEM to arts, an explicit teaching of English and maths and accompanying wellbeing supports.

I was very pleased to have supported and visited the school on several occasions throughout the year, including the school production of *Emotions in Motion* facilitated by Sara Belante-Tankard, the deputy principal, and Alessia Del Campo, the production lead, and all the teachers and students who participated, including the leading cast members Georgia Coviello and Sofia Saccone. The unveiling I attended of the school's new peace pole was an initiative by Pascoe Vale Rotary led by Deborah and Bruno D'Aprano. I attended a school assembly recently to announce the winner of the Pascoe Vale Christmas card competition, Mila Flint, and to present the annual Pascoe Vale endeavour award to Georgette Weston for her efforts in helping bring the school community together.

In my recent trip and catch-up with hardworking, outstanding principal Delfina Pieri she briefed me on the school's new concept master plan, which I would like to draw the house's attention to. It puts forward a staged approach to the school's facility, infrastructure and resource growth, including stage 1 accessibility upgrades – namely, via a new external lift to ensure all areas of the school are accessible; stage 2, with capacity expansion to accommodate increased growth via the extra classrooms and flexible learning spaces; stage 3, a proposed new administration building to streamline school operations; stage 4, proposed new dedicated specialist learning spaces; and stage 5, proposed new landscaping and outdoor environments. These proposed upgrades would of course build on the previous \$1 million investment we have made as the Victorian Labor government to provide the school with a magnificent new and ongoing indoor gymnasium and hall.

I welcome the minister's, the Department of Education's and the Victorian School Building Authority's ongoing consideration of that master plan. I commend all the school's students, staff and leaders, including the principal, as I said, Delfina Pieri; Cecilia Garden, deputy principal; Sara Belante-Tankard, deputy principal; and all the other staff members and hardworking teachers and families who are there. This is of course part of our ongoing investment to support the school community outside of the school gate as well, with our investments in local high schools, the Merri-bek North education plan, free kinder, upgrades to road safety on Gaffney Street, the new Metro Tunnel and Craigieburn services and much more.

#### Gippsland South electorate road maintenance

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (17:06): (1481) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an explanation for the very, very poor roadworks that have been occurring in my electorate, most specifically this week with the Sale to Traralgon duplication at Kilmany. Literally only a year ago the duplication was opened, and the railway bridge at Kilmany was part of that. This week there were contractors there tearing up the road, digging it up to replace a section. This has happened time and time and time again, particularly on this project, the Sale to Traralgon duplication. Indeed I previously raised concerns with the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure just after the project had finished on the Flynn section, when within 12 or 18 months after that opening there were probably a dozen 50- to 100-metre stretches of patching that had been done. When I raised it with the previous minister, he acknowledged that it was an issue and that contractors were still examining whether there were any local environmental factors that may have led to that. Well, this has been a freeway or a highway for about 130 years, so if there were any local environmental factors the government and the contractors should have known what they were. This section now at Kilmany is just ridiculous. How we can be having to patch a brand new stretch of road less than 12 months after it was completed is beyond me.

This is the frustration of Victorians right around the state: the poor quality of works that are done and the poor quality of repairs that are done that are regularly then having to be repatched. It is an issue of accountability, and we need both the minister to be accountable and the Department of Transport and Planning to be accountable. We need the contractors to be accountable, but I am conscious often that the contractors are doing what they are told with the specifications they are given. People are frustrated about this. Our roads are in such an appalling state, and then we have them patched or a new section built and not actually addressed properly, and they are breaking up again within 12 months on a brand new section. It is simply not acceptable. The minister should explain what has gone on and explain to taxpayers whether this is being rectified by the contractors or whether it is coming back to taxpayers again, because it is not good enough and it needs to be addressed.

**Thomastown electorate school road safety**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (17:09): (1482) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on how schools in the Thomastown electorate are benefitting from road safety programs. Recently I visited the Road to Zero program at Melbourne Museum, where I met with students who were examining road safety through an evidence- and science-based program, providing them with unique experiences outside the classroom. It is an outstanding program, and it is a world-first initiative. I encourage all schools in my electorate to take part.

I also note the important road work being done through the school crossing risk assessment framework – SCRAF it is called – which determines how safe a school crossing is and what safety measures, like signs or other upgrades, might be needed to improve the crossing for students. Of course road management is always an issue at schools. The schools in my electorate are also having access to school engagement officers from Road Safety Education Victoria, who work directly with school communities to tailor their approach to road safety within their local environment. These are invaluable programs for schools in the electorate, and I am keen to find out more so I can share that information with the local community.

**Prahran electorate small business**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (17:10): (1483) My adjournment matter is directed to the Treasurer, and the action that I ask for is a comprehensive update on the cumulative impact of the government's increased taxation, the congestion levy and the growing regulatory burden on hospitality venues, retailers and small businesses operating along Melbourne's iconic inner-city shopping strips, including Bridge Road, Chapel Street, Acland Street and Burke Road. As Shadow Assistant Minister for Hospitality and for Melbourne, I rise with deep concerns about the viability crisis facing our local shopping strips. These are not just commercial precincts, they are the cultural heart of our suburbs and the economic backbone of countless small business owners who have invested their life savings into serving their neighbourhoods. Yesterday Justin Smith wrote in the *Herald Sun* about Bridge Road's depressing high vacancy rates, describing the strip as once lively and groovy, now filled with tobacco shops, massage parlours and \$2 reject stores. Chapel Street, Acland Street, Sydney Road and Burke Road are all struggling, all fighting with what Smith describes as 'a losing battle for survival'. These iconic inner-city shopping strips have everything they need to thrive – residential density, public transport, community demand – yet they are failing. While COVID-19 and online retail play a part in this, this government's policy settings are making a difficult situation basically impossible. Let us be clear about what small businesses are facing: payroll tax increases; a congestion levy that makes it harder for customers to reach them; in the case of Chapel Street, an expanded congestion levy that takes effect from 1 January 2026, with Stonnington council already adjusting parking fees in anticipation of the \$4.1 million annual cost that this government is imposing; energy costs that continue to climb; and a regulatory environment that hits small businesses hardest, with compliance costs consuming a far larger share of their revenue than corporations with a dedicated compliance team.

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The contrast is stark: Centre Road in Bentleigh maintains a 1 per cent vacancy rate and thrives, yet Bridge Road struggles with empty shopfronts. The difference is not geographic, it is policy settings that either support or suffocate small business viability. Mr Smith asks:

... what are the council's plans, other than their once-a-year weaponry of trees, tinsel and carols squawking from speakers?

But council can only do so much when state government taxation and regulatory settings stack the decks against viability. These shopping strips set the culture for entire suburbs and become destinations for tourists and people from all over Melbourne. When they are defined by vacancy, graffiti and decline, that is what the suburbs become.

This government must assess how its taxation settings, the congestion levy and regulatory frameworks are collectively impacting small business viability along Melbourne's iconic inner-city shopping strips. The Labor government brags about its big projects, with over \$50 billion in cost blowouts, but as Mr Smith correctly observes, the small ones need a little more love. Our shopping strips deserve better than being left to fight a losing battle while this government adds weight to the wrong side of the scales.

### Metro Tunnel

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (17:13): (1484) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister visits Cranbourne to meet with the healthcare workforce. The conversation, I am sure, is going to centre around the impact that Metro Tunnel has on our health workforce. Anyone who has spoken to me for more than about 5 minutes will know that I have the highest number of nurses in Cranbourne than any other part of the state. I recently doorknocked and came across five nurses in 1 hour. I know that our nursing workforce love their jobs and love the work that they do, but they need to be able to get to work easily. Melbourne Metro Tunnel is a game changer for our health workforce. It does not matter whether you are employed in a nursing role or an ancillary role or if you are an allied health practitioner, a clinician or an administrator, the Melbourne Metro Tunnel is going to make getting to work much easier. I would like to say how grateful I am, as always, to the nursing workforce, particularly the nurses who live in Cranbourne, conscious that they will be able to get on at Cranbourne and get off at the Royal Women's, at the Royal Children's and at the Royal Melbourne, the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre and Peter Mac. I look very much forward to the minister's response.

### Public sector review

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (17:15): (1485) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is to reverse the public sector job cuts, stop the abolition of VicHealth and Sustainability Victoria and halt the damaging restructure underway at the State Library of Victoria. Victoria's public institutions are being hollowed out at a scale we have never seen before. Across Victoria 1000 workers are being shown the door, 29 agencies are being dismantled or merged and librarian numbers at the State Library will be halved, and it is not to improve services but to create an illusion of budget discipline ahead of next year's election. The Silver review has become a convenient shield for cuts that threaten the capability, the integrity and the independence of some of our most important public agencies.

This government wants to dissolve VicHealth into the Department of Health – VicHealth: admired globally, copied nationally and responsible for world-leading reforms in tobacco control, alcohol harm reduction, nutrition and physical activity and anti-racism initiatives. Public health experts, former chairs from across the political spectrum and unions have all condemned the move as boneheaded and misguided. Once VicHealth loses its independence and its legislated budget, prevention will inevitably give way to acute care pressures, chronic disease rates and future hospital costs will rise and all Victorians will pay the price. Sustainability Victoria too is slated for abolition. This agency has supported more than 1600 schools, run vital recycling and hazardous material disposal programs and

driven innovation in the circular economy. Scrapping it weakens Victoria's environmental capacity at the very moment we need it to accelerate, not abandon, our climate and waste solutions. And at the State Library management proposes eliminating dozens of librarians and halving research support. Writers, artists, historians, professors and researchers, including Helen Garner, Alexis Wright, Geraldine Brooks and JM Coetzee, have warned that this will fundamentally damage one of Victoria's most treasured public institutions.

Premier, these are not abstract restructures; they are decisions that will have both immediate and long-term consequences for public health, environmental sustainability, cultural knowledge and the quality of life here in Victoria. I ask the Premier to reverse these cuts, protect the independence of VicHealth and Sustainability Victoria and ensure that the State Library remains a place of learning, of discovery and of public good and is not another casualty of short-term political accounting.

**Gendered violence**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (17:18): (1486) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is an update on the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and how these events support communities in the Mordialloc district to end gendered violence in a generation. We have seen Victorians and Australians come together for 16 days of activism like we have never seen before. 11,000 people marched through the streets only a little while ago, and it was great to see so many men and boys turning out, because we know that ending gendered violence starts with men and boys in our community. To see a march in my local constituency in Greater Dandenong, seeing so many people from a range of different communities come together – faith-based organisations, sporting clubs, municipalities – was really inspiring. But a big shout-out has to go to people who are working in this sector each and every day. It is a really hard bit of work, and it is a recognition of everything that they do. We pause as well during the 16 days of activism to reflect on those who have been lost to femicide and on the kids that we have lost to gendered and family violence. Every bit of purpose to the work that we do is about recognising the horrific toll of their loss of life, the ripple effect this has and the trauma it causes, which is intergenerational, and that every waking moment to try to end gendered violence in our community is on the back of them. And we reflect on the huge toll that family violence and intimate partner violence has on our communities.

It was great to be part of the Kind of Man launch that was part of Respect Victoria's What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be? campaign. In the words of men and boys in our community, the pressures and the rigid gendered stereotypes around how boys are raised, the pressures that men feel and how the Man Box work has been done by Jesuit Social Services and Respect Victoria are really the evidence base we have to then drive forward change.

I give a big shout-out for the Adolescent Man Box report that was launched recently at the National Press Club, with Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Matt Tyler, two amazing Victorians and Australians who are leading work in primary prevention in this space. The 16 days of activism started, I remember, with the magnificent former minister Fiona Richardson, who was an absolute champion in this space, someone that this Parliament dearly misses, and it never forgets the sacrifices that she made in sharing her lived experience. We give a big shout-out to Fiona's legacy. She would be, I hope, very proud of everything that has been achieved today. To the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence: Respect Victoria would not exist without you, Nat. You are an absolute superstar. For everything that you have done in the prevention of family violence, the work that you have done over the 16 days of activism, the rolling action plan and everything that you have done with treaty, thank you. I will give you one last question. It might be work for the next minister, but I thank you for all your service and legacy on behalf of Victorians.

**Polwarth electorate emergency services**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (17:21): (1487) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is to be given a full list of the outstanding requests from

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the emergency services outlets right across Polwarth – SES, CFA, surf lifesaving clubs and others – that are still waiting for essential equipment and services for their brigades, for their services and for their surf clubs. As we reach this summer holiday period in the electorate of Polwarth, the Great Ocean Road region will be inundated with tens of thousands of visitors, whose lives will be changed forever, for many of them, by adverse events, whether it is a wildfire, a terrible accident down at the beach or a car accident. All manner of tragedies, sadly, will occur in Polwarth over the coming months, and it will be the volunteers who respond – it will be the SES volunteers, it will be the CFA volunteers, it will be the surf club volunteers in particular and it will be even our volunteer ambulance drivers that we have looking after some parts of the Polwarth electorate. It is a huge commitment from an amazing cohort of locals that will step up every time. At every opportunity when someone's life is at risk or in danger, they will be there to look after our community.

What concerns so many of these volunteers is that often they are waiting for simple things. I received a letter only this past week from one of my brigades. All they want is a \$1500 thermal imaging detector for when they get a hay and silage fire, and we will possibly have some of those – as there has been a pretty good hay and silage season this year, that will possibly happen. On that one little device, at \$1500, it is not the money so much as the evidence that says to that community and to those volunteers that this government values the endless time, effort and energy that they put into keeping people safe. It might be a new motor for one of the rubber duckies down at one of the many surf clubs in Polwarth – Torquay all the way through to Port Campbell. These are just simple things. Unfortunately for the emergency services volunteers right across Polwarth, they find themselves having to wait far too long for some basic equipment and services. Minister, not only is it really important that I be kept abreast of what the outstanding requests are from my community, but it is also vital for the community to understand where they sit in the pecking order. How much longer will the Yeodene CFA have to wait before they get a vital piece of equipment for the thermal imaging, for example? And many of the other groups and services have the same issue.

### Aldercourt Primary School

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (17:24): (1488) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the amazing Aldercourt Primary School block A redevelopment, which should be almost finished. The students at Aldercourt Primary told me that they deserved better. They wanted a newly refinished basketball court and netball court and also building A. Having seen the plans for that building, it looked amazing, and it is even more amazing to see in person. I invite the minister to come and visit and take a tour.

### Responses

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (17:24): A number of members raised matters for ministers. I will ensure that these matters are referred to the relevant ministers. I also take the opportunity to wish everybody a very merry Christmas and a happy and safe new year. And thank you to everybody that makes Parliament operate in a smooth and effective way. And thank you to you, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. The house now stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:25 pm.**