



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 27 August 2025

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O'Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

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)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

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

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

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 ⁷	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	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 ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁸	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 ⁹	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	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 ^{5,6}	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 ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹¹	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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ 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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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Notice given.

The SPEAKER (09:35): General business, notices of motion 23, 24 and 70 and orders of the day 7 to 10, 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:

Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 – Advancing the Victorian Treaty Process – Report 2024–25

Auditor-General – Financial Management of Local Councils – Ordered to be published

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria – Report 2024–25.

Bills

Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025

Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025 and the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025.

Motions

Motions by leave

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house mourns the tragic loss of two Victorian police officers near Porepunkah, extends its deepest condolences to their families and pays tribute to the bravery and service of all police, who risk their lives each and every day to keep us safe.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK: I move, by leave:

That this house notes the revelations linking Iran to terrorist attacks on Australia's Jewish community and calls on the government to urgently review funding of anti-Israel groups behind rallies, encampments and harassment of Victorian Jews and to investigate individuals threatening social cohesion and community safety.

Leave refused.

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Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemn the Labor government for weakening laws such as bail, which has resulted in increased crime in South-West Coast, retailers terrified in their workplace, home invasions, carjackings and machete attacks, things we have never had to think about in our community before.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for its failure to deliver on its commitments to addressing homelessness and providing adequate housing in Victoria. Shamefully, the government has not released current Victorian housing register data, with the most recent figures dating back to March.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for its failure to address the housing crisis. Successive housing and planning ministers have done nothing to address the single biggest issue of housing affordability. The Victorian government now claims up to 45 per cent of the cost of a new home in taxes and charges.

Leave refused.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am concerned. I think I heard the Leader of the House refuse this house having time to consider the terrible incident that occurred yesterday but instead move a sledge motion in this chamber. I am concerned that this house has not got the time to consider this tragic incident, yet this government wants to play dirty politics over allowing this house the opportunity to talk about this incident, which we all think the time should be afforded for.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, that is not a point of order.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Australia's cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity should be celebrated, that the government must urgently combat bigotry and hatred and condemn far-right groups who are currently organising to promote racism and xenophobia in our community and that it is all of our responsibility to build a safe and inclusive Victoria.

Leave refused.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I am just after some guidance about the operation of the house. Yesterday the house took a dinner break at 7 pm, came back at 8 o'clock and then immediately adjourned off. I would be grateful for some guidance about what the conventions are around the communication of those changes to the sitting schedules. I am not the only member in this place who has family commitments, and it would have been helpful for me to have known in advance (1) that the adjournment was going to happen, (2) that we were going to come back and (3) that it was immediately going to get adjourned off. I understand there are conventions from the government communicating with the Manager of Opposition Business, but for those of us on the crossbench and perhaps even in the minor parties, I think it would be helpful to understand what the protocols are.

The SPEAKER: Member for Ringwood, that essentially is not a point of order. These are matters for the house; they are not matters for the Speaker. However, I encourage members to have open conversations with all parties in relation to the running of the chamber.

Members statements

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (09:41): Today I rise to stand and support the Australian Jewish community, particularly the community here in Victoria. As more details emerge, it is increasingly clear that this was not a terrorist attack in Victoria, it was a deliberate and

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targeted attack on the Jewish community. Adass board member Benjamin Klein has rightly raised concerns about foreign interference. He said:

It is distressing to think an overseas government could orchestrate and conduct such terror attacks on Australian soil ...

That is a chilling reality and one that should be a concern to us all. Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler also warned:

Iran's objective here is not just to attack Jewish institutions and instil fear in the Jewish community, it's an attack on Australian values and the social cohesion we have had in this country for over a century.

Philip Zajac, president of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, has called on the community to stand strong – proud Jews, living a Jewish life with courage and resilience. His words are a reminder that these terrorist attacks seek to incite hate and fear but goodness will prevail over all. But the most powerful message I have heard recently came from the rabbis I have shared a coffee, a Shabbat or a meal with, and that message is simple. It is about hope. Even in times of despair, they carry hope. That is something we must all support. Today the Liberals and Nationals reaffirm our commitment that every Victorian must feel safe in their home, on the streets and in their workplace, and this includes the Jewish community. To the Jewish community: we will stand with you, we will work with you and, above all, we will prioritise your safety for strong laws to combat hate and keep you safe.

Ivanhoe Primary School

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:43): I was pleased to attend question time with grade 3 students at Ivanhoe Primary School last Friday. Everyone can make a difference in our democracy, and it is never too early to start. I have lots of good memories of Ivanhoe Primary School. My mother taught there for very many years under principals Mr Clark and Mr Hunt, and it was great to be back there. The students in grade 3 are going to make a great contribution to our democracy.

Rosanna Fire Station Community House

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:43): Making chip packet blankets for the homeless or enjoying great company and watercolour painting classes are just part of the fun you can have at Rosanna Fire Station Community House. I was there on Lower Plenty Road just last Friday to catch up with the house coordinator Jasdip Singh. There is a \$44,000 grant for the revamp of the hall there, and that came from a North East Link community grant. I am really pleased that Rosanna Fire Station Community House was successful. They provide great services, and Jasdip Singh is just a tour de force there.

Digital jobs

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:44): I also want to take the opportunity to thank my colleague the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs Mr Pearson for the \$4.25 million digital jobs program, which upskills workers in construction and advanced manufacturing. There are 1000 training places out there in West Heidelberg at an industrial estate at iBuild, a prefabricated building supplier, including kit homes. I want to thank Jackson Yin, the co-founder, an international student who came to Australia 25 years ago with 700 bucks in a suitcase, for employing all these people across Victoria and exporting to the world, backed by our government. I congratulate him.

Victoria Police deaths

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:44): I rise today on behalf of the Nationals to extend our condolences to the family and friends of those police officers tragically killed at Porepunkah in the north-east yesterday. This is a tragedy beyond compare that highlights yet again the risk and the threat that our officers are put through every day. To the family and friends of the 59-year-old detective from the north-east, who was apparently just weeks away from retirement, to the family and friends of the

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35-year-old senior constable who was also killed and to the wounded officer, another 35-year-old senior constable, we send our best wishes and our hopes for a speedy recovery.

This is a tragic incident, a horrific incident, something that should never occur, but it is a reminder of the danger that our force put themselves in every day. To the north-east community as well and to my colleague the member for Ovens Valley, who is representing that part of this state, this is a difficult time. We are with you, and we send our thoughts and prayers to that area as well. I have family members in the force and I have friends in the force, and I have sent messages around last night, and I know that everybody in the force is hurting today. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of those killed and with the officer who was injured. We are also deeply respectful and thankful for the work officers do every day.

Tarneit electorate bus services

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:46): The member for Werribee and I believe that walking is overrated. That is why we hopped on one of the newly scheduled route 170 bus services at Pacific Werribee then travelled down to the Hoppers Crossing train station. It was great to check out the new services, which are already making a difference for our communities. From 1 July the Allan Labor government has delivered 470 more weekly trips right across Wyndham. These include routes 170, 180, 190 and 192. This means more services, longer operating hours and buses running later into the evenings. For locals in Tarneit that means more freedom to get around, whether they are a student getting home after footy or cricket training, a shift worker finishing late or a family heading out for the weekend. This is all part of a record \$162 million investment in new and improved bus services around the latest Victorian budget. Here in Melbourne's west that means seven new or upgraded routes. This investment is about strengthening connections. It is about linking our growing suburbs directly to the train stations, shopping centres and schools that keep our community running. That is why we are making sure residents have reliable and accessible public transport right on their doorstep. The Allan Labor government knows that communities in the west are growing faster than almost anywhere else in Victoria. That is why we are making record investments in the services people rely on every single day.

Victoria Police deaths

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:47): Today I rise with a heavy heart and offer my condolences to the families and the friends of the officers that were killed and injured in that incident yesterday in Porepunkah. Those police officers went to work yesterday expecting to come home last night, and two of them did not. They do a sensational job for us. Two of them were from Wangaratta themselves and one from Melbourne. Every day they go out and they keep us safe. I want to offer to the people of Ovens Valley: you have our support. The police resources that are out there now are exceptional, and they are doing the best they can to track down this guy. To the people of Porepunkah, particularly around Porepunkah: stay indoors, stay safe. We have certainly got your back as well. It is a tragedy, a senseless act that words cannot describe, and until this person is caught I encourage everybody in the north-east just to stay vigilant and keep an eye out. The people of Porepunkah did not deserve to have this reputation. They are already saying, 'We don't want to be known as the town of the double murder of police.' Well, it is already too late. There will be a time for healing for the community, but at the moment, today, it is about the families and friends of those officers that we lost yesterday and certainly the one who is in hospital. I just want to let the people of Porepunkah and the Ovens Valley know that we are all thinking of them.

Working from home

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:49): I too align myself with the words of the member for Ovens Valley.

Two-income households are the norm in the community of Point Cook, and so is having kids in education, whether that is child care, kindergartens or primary schools. That is why, if you can do your

job from home, you should have the right to do so. Working from home really matters, and it matters to the people in the community that I represent. At the moment there is community consultation available online. The link will be below in the comments. Please get involved and have your say about this wonderful initiative of the Victorian Labor government.

Point Cook electorate Chinese community

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:49): The Chinese community forum I had on Friday with the community that I represent was simply wonderful. The Premier was there, and we had members of the Chinese community. You may not know that the most multicultural suburb in the country is Point Cook, and more than 10 per cent of the community are of Chinese background. Thank you to everyone there for their insights, and we look forward to hearing about Victoria's China strategy, which we hope will be announced soon.

Warrina Park School

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:50): Finally, Warrina Park School have celebrated their new building. The member for Tarneit and I are so proud because we both have campuses of Warrina Park in our communities. Congratulations to principal Ashwini and the assistant principals, particularly Tim, for all their work on it and to the original principal Claire Baxter and her daughter, who now works at the school. She opened the school in 1975 with just seven students, and there are more than 700 today. What an enormous job they do for our community so well.

Eildon electorate sporting clubs

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): A big shout-out to the Healesville Junior Football Club under-15 girls and the under-14 mixed team, who both won their grand finals against Mount Evelyn last Sunday. It was a good season for the Bloods.

Congratulations also to the Wesburn Junior Football Club under-17 girls for winning their premiership against Belgrave. There was a great turnout on the day with hundreds of players, families and supporters across the day flocking to Yarra Junction, where the local club did a great job as hosts.

The Mansfield community are always on the front foot, and the launch of the first solar and battery installation at the Mansfield Football Netball Club was no exception. Mansfield are the first AFL club to have solar panels – sixty-six 440-watt panels with battery storage of 40 kilowatt hours – installed as part of Power Forward, a Footy for Climate initiative. This initiative will save the club an impressive \$8000 each year on their power bills and is cutting 740 tonnes of emissions over the project life cycle. Footy for Climate was founded by AFL players Tom Campbell and Jasper Pittard. Tom visited Mansfield in November last year with the Melbourne Football Club for a community event and got the ball rolling very speedily with club president Bo Christopher and Michael Bretherton, the junior footy club president. It was great to see everyone from the footy and netball club get around the launch and be supported by other community and AFL leaders: Ben Brown, Matt Genever, Greg Madigan and Andy Randall from Easy Being Green, as well as Lex Lynch and Lisa Kyle. It was a great event and well supported.

Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:52): Over the weekend I had the privilege of attending three incredible events across Melton, each showcasing the spirit, dedication and achievements of our community. The weekend kicked off with the Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre soccer tournament in Kurunjang, a vibrant celebration that brought the community together for a day of fun, activities, delicious food and spirited competition. The highlight was the multicultural soccer tournament, featuring 16 teams, which perfectly showcased KMCC's commitment to using sport as a way to unite people from all backgrounds. Supported by the Victorian government's multicultural events grant, the tournament was another great success and a reminder of the vital role community organisations play in strengthening connections across Melton. Congratulations to Shiyas Khalid and his organising team.

Country Fire Authority Melton brigade

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:52): On Saturday night I attended the Melton fire brigade's 90th anniversary celebration. It was another fantastic celebration of the commitment and service of the long-serving officers of the Melton fire brigade and the many volunteers that have served along the way. The night was a chance to reflect on and relive some of the events of the past and see some of the equipment used in the good old days. The Melton fire brigade are essential to the Melton community, and their unwavering commitment to the safety of all does not go unnoticed. I thank the entire Melton fire brigade, including current and past serving officers, for their commitment and service.

Djerriwarrh District Scouts

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:53): The final event for the weekend was the Djerriwarrh District Scouts awards presentation. It was an opportunity to celebrate the last year in scouting, including all the adventures and milestones, as well as recognise the service of their adult volunteers. The event brought together Scouts across the City of Melton and Moorabool shire for the celebrations. I congratulate all award recipients as well as all the Scouts.

Brighton Philatelic Society

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:53): On 12 September 1950, at the former dispensary committee rooms opposite North Brighton station, the Brighton Philatelic Society was formed. The minutes of the first meeting reveal that 20 pioneering souls were present. The society was officially launched on 10 October. It has had several homes since then, including St Luke's church hall, Higginbotham Hall, the Baptist church hall and the former Congregational church in Gardenvale. Their success has been long recognised. The 1966 Stamp News judged the club to be the most active philatelic society in Australia; it still is. Today the club is the biggest stamp-collecting society in Australia, with 350 members. Over the weekend the society celebrated their 75th anniversary with a stamp fair at the Brighton town hall. Congratulations to president David Shutler and the society on the anniversary.

Bayley Arts

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:54): The Bayside community recently filled Dendy theatre for the Bayley Arts film studio's short film festival. Bayley House is a Bayside-based not-for-profit organisation that provides exceptional support for people with an intellectual disability. The films were exceptional, from a clever stop-motion recreation of the Steven Bradbury gold medal race to a wickedly clever vampire horror. Congratulations to Tess Hens, the Bayley Arts program manager, and the clients on their wonderful work.

Mayflower aged care home

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:54): Mayflower is a Brighton-based residential aged care home with 150 beds and additional independent living units. I recently joined the new chief executive officer Paul Gregersen and residents to talk about local challenges and opportunities. Their active interests were incredibly insightful. Welcome, Paul, into the role.

Aintree sustainability festival

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:55): I had the pleasure of attending the sustainability festival and tree planting day as part of National Tree Day in Aintree. After seven years this local event has become an absolute highlight on the community calendar, with this year being the biggest – more than 5000 native plants were planted by hundreds of passionate volunteers. Since 2019 over 2000 volunteers have come together, planting nearly 20,000 native plants. This means that next year someone will be planting the 20,000th seedling into the ground, a remarkable milestone for our growing community. Alongside the tree planting, the community enjoyed a vibrant sustainability festival complete with hands-on arts-and-crafts activities for kids, a stunning native animal

photography exhibition and educational displays that brought important environmental messages to life. There was literally something for everyone and it was a productive, joyful and inspiring day. I want to give a huge shout-out to Jono and the organising team from We Love Aintree. From chatting to students about the artwork on display from aspiring artists at Aintree Primary School to viewing the photography from Pete Cornell of local native wildlife, enjoying a chai latte from the We Love Aintree coffee cart, having a sausage from the Caroline Springs RSL and getting my hands dirty planting a tree, it made the perfect Sunday start to my weekend. Thank you very much to We Love Aintree. I look forward to participating again next year on the National Tree Day as part of the festival.

Early childhood education and care

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (09:56): I am sure almost everyone here in this chamber at one point in their working lives has accessed child care delivered through either the not-for-profit, the for-profit or the local government delivered childcare sector. And I am sure all of us have been absolutely appalled by what has happened here in Victoria but also across the nation with respect to how vulnerable young children have been exploited. I very much commend the work that has been done by the national government and by the leadership of all of the states and territories in addressing some of these issues. However, there has been, I think, a very big gap in the conversation to date, and that is of course the wages of those workers in this particular sector. It is dominated by women, it is dominated by workers working in a casualised environment, and it is dominated by, I think, far too low mandatory education requirements for those education workers. I very much want to see this issue addressed as a part of the reform agenda. I think if we can address the wages of these workers, we can further improve this sector.

Lara electorate schools

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:58): Last week I toured the construction works at Nelson Park School, Illinois campus, made possible by a \$6.4 million investment from the state Labor government. This funding enables the first stage of the school's master plan, modernising facilities to enhance student learning opportunities. The upgrade includes a six-room learning centre comprising four classrooms and two specialist areas as well as a new administration building, decking, landscaping and a basketball court. It was inspiring to tour the school site with student representatives Ameliah Stevenson and Liam Keating, who shared their enthusiasm for the project. Ameliah even suggested a disco party on the basketball court for the official opening – what a great idea. Special thanks to principal Libby Gatgens, assistant principal Nathan Bush, school council president Lorraine McKay and the entire Nelson Park School community for their advocacy on this project. The school truly prioritises student wellbeing and nurtures future community leaders. I look forward to seeing the completed works.

Last week I visited the grade 4 students at St Anthony's Primary School. This group has been studying politics and are learning about the three levels of government in Australia. It was great to speak to them about the role that we have as local members and answer their very thoughtful questions. They had some great ideas about new laws for us to consider, including no school uniforms and free ice cream. Thank you to classroom teacher Karen Whitford for organising this session, and to all the teachers at St Anthony's for the incredible work that you do.

Treaty

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:59): History is being made, right here, right now: after decades of leadership from First Nations people, Australia's first ever treaty with First Peoples has been agreed and will be voted on by the Victorian Parliament. The Greens and I are incredibly proud to support it. I want to thank the First Peoples' Assembly and all the First Nations leaders who have been not just leading this journey over the last 10 years since the process has been set up but calling for treaty for many decades. Many did not live to see this historic day, but their work and struggle is a deep part of this achievement. Treaty is a remarkable and generous gift. As a mum, I am so thankful and proud that my children will grow up knowing that they live in a state that has a treaty with First People and they

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can be part of walking into the future, creating a future together – what a powerful thing. As a Victorian I am incredibly proud that we are the first state to take this important step forward, and I hope that it will lead to other states and territories and the federal government also committing to their own treaties. This is a historic moment. All Victorians are invited to walk together with First Nations people to share in and celebrate the oldest living cultures in the world, and I hope all Victorians will embrace this.

Wendy Symons

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:01): I rise to pay my respects to the life of Wendy Symons, a proud member of the Australian Labor Party and Wendouree branch, born on 28 March 1947 under the Chifley Labor government and passed away on 8 August 2025 in Ballarat under an Albanese Labor government. She was a Labor woman through and through, living her values and supporting Catherine King and me on pre-poll even when she was unwell. I got to know Wendy when she moved from Minyip to Ballarat with her partner and Labor life member Terry Grange. Terry and Wendy were an incredible partnership, inseparable companions who did everything together, from going to Bunnings to daily coffee outings to attending Wendy's dialysis sessions. Terry was lucky to have Wendy, and Wendy was lucky to have Terry. Wendy was a good person in the truest of senses. She cared deeply for others and was always concerned about those who were down and out. When Wendy saw someone who needed help, she did not turn a blind eye, she acted. Wendy had experienced hard times herself, and this gave her great empathy and compassion for others, approaching the homeless, offering to buy them a meal, but more importantly, letting them know they mattered and she cared. Wendy was also a woman of great strength and resolve. She will be deeply missed by her soulmate Terry, her family, friends and the Ballarat Labor Party members. We send our love, support and deepest sympathies to Terry. Vale, Wendy Symons.

Lowanna College

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:02): I recently had the privilege of visiting Lowanna College in Newborough and was very impressed by an onsite cafe which allows staff and year 12 students to enjoy a space to buy coffee, study quietly and meet with colleagues. I was excited to learn that in 2026 the school will launch the Lowanna Institute of the Arts, a merit-based program for year 9 and 10 students offering opportunities to excel in the arts. Lowanna is also home to the highly sought after sports academy, supporting students to balance academic achievement with elite training across basketball, netball and football. The academy has developed strong partnerships with Gippsland Power, Gippsland United basketball and local allied health providers, with several students progressing to professional levels and even being drafted to the AFL. While touring the school, it was clear that Lowanna is committed to engaging and empowering students in diverse and meaningful ways. Thanks to Julia and Kelly for the tour.

John Smethurst

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:03): I stand here today to talk of the passing of John Smethurst. John was a great person of the Latrobe Valley. He was a teacher and an educator, and my involvement with John started back in the in the early 1990s, when I was lucky to be drafted to the Hawthorn Football Club. John used to drive me from Morwell down to Glenferrie Oval. On our trips we discussed all things about family, life, sport, education and also the great Hawks. We have lost one of life's true gentlemen.

Port Melbourne Chargers

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:04): It was amazing to take part in a celebration of a decade of women's footy in Port Melbourne, from our 2015 premiership heroes to the junior trailblazers and the women who launched the game at the Borough to help build towards VFLW. This is a tribute to the foundation that made the rise of the Port Melbourne Chargers possible. And a special shout-out to Kerry Ashbrook: she gives so much to our community and is always supporting fellow women to shine.

Port Melbourne Netball Club

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:04): It was wonderful to attend a huge family-friendly awards night for the Port Melbourne Netball Club. It was my pleasure to salute the club's achievements, including the players council, comprised of young women in the club who are encouraged to have their say in how the club runs. I also presented awards alongside Melbourne Vixens netball champion Maggie Caris, a great mentor for female sports. So that was a thrill on the night as well.

Park Towers Community Pantry

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:05): There was a fantastic turnout for the inaugural fundraising event for the Park Towers Community Pantry. Every Victorian should always have access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food. The Park Towers Community Pantry was started by renters and is run by renters for the wellbeing of renters – a great initiative. We are proud to back, as a government, frontline food relief organisations, and we have been proud to support the work of the Park Towers Community Pantry. A shout-out to Troy, who works long hours for the Park Towers Community Pantry, the many volunteers and the board – a terrific collaboration – and also thanks to the Middle Park Bowling Club for being such a great host.

Cranbourne Football Netball Club

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:05): I was very pleased to have the opportunity to send my oldest daughter to the Cranbourne Eagles football club all-abilities grand final game last Sunday. They had a great attempt at bringing the granny to Cranny, and they did play courageously, as reported back to me. I would like to congratulate them all on their terrific work.

Sikh Community Gurmat Centre

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): On another matter, I visited the Sikh Community Gurmat Centre in Devon Meadows on the weekend, and I was given a great tour and an opportunity to meet with families. I would particularly like to thank Sukhjit Singh, Bikramjit Singh, Ramandeep Singh and Harpreet Kaur and their families, especially the children. We had really wonderful conversations. But watching the children in the classrooms and also as they undertook their lessons in martial arts was a real joy.

Cranbourne electorate schools

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): I would like to congratulate Cranbourne Secondary College. They have started work on their \$9 million refurbishment. It is going to be an incredibly exciting time watching the work come out of the ground. I visited and was able to spend time with the student leaders, and I would like to say how proud of them I am all the time.

Last Friday I joined the member for Geelong in her capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples and the member for Narre Warren North at Barton Primary School with Dalal Smiley from Wellsprings and principal Ben Vevers. I would like to thank the Bunurong Land Council for an amazing welcome and the way that they conducted the smoking ceremony.

Preston electorate housing

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:07): I would like to raise again the issue of the former housing commission flats on Eric Street in Preston and the ongoing local concerns about the condition of the site and the safety of squatters, young people and others who are accessing it. There are some short-term steps underway, but I think in the longer term we do need to amend the heritage overlay that currently applies to that site in order to be able to build new housing, get people off the priority waiting list and make best use of that public asset. We will continue to work with Darebin council and the Minister for Planning to ensure that key first step of at least winding back some of the built-form components of that heritage overlay happens as soon as possible.

Newlands Primary School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:07): I would like to thank principal Luke Cripps and assistant principal Graeme Woodward for giving the Premier a comprehensive tour of Newlands Primary last week along with the member for Pascoe Vale and me and recognise, as he does, their ongoing advocacy for the facilities and the support they need to deliver their fantastic Spanish bilingual education programs.

Middle East conflict

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:08): I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing violence in Syria, including the horrific attack in June at the Church of the Prophet Elias in Damascus, and express our continuing condolences and support for the Antiochian Orthodox community, the Alawite community, the Druze community and all those whose loved ones are caught up in this very difficult time.

Preston High School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:08): Finally, I would just like to put on the record our hope that land on Cramer Street owned by Melbourne Polytechnic and land on Gower Street owned by Darebin council can be considered as part of a long-term solution to enrolment pressures at Preston High.

Upwey Community Market

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:08): We have such a vibrant community spirit that continues to thrive across the hills and foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. Only this weekend I had the pleasure of setting up a stall at the Upwey Community Market, which is a really fantastic showcase of local creativity, great produce and connection. It was wonderful to see so many families and stallholders and volunteers come together and celebrate the sunshine, enjoy it all, soak it all up and have a fabulous day out. We had so many great conversations with people there. It was wonderful to be out and about, and I will be at many, many more markets to come over the rest of the year.

Country Fire Authority awards

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:09): Over the past few weeks I have also had the honour of attending four different CFA annual awards events – two dinners for Monbulk and Belgrave and a couple of other events for The Basin and Ferntree Gully CFAs. It is always great to see the long service, some even receiving recognition of service of up to 40 years, which is extraordinary, and some life members too. Our CFA volunteers help us sleep better at night because of the work that they do. They turn out when we need them most, and I just want to congratulate all award recipients and thank them once again.

Living Libraries infrastructure program

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:09): At the Emerald Library I was delighted to be joined by the Minister for Local Government for the launch of the Living Libraries grants, and it was also the beginning of Book Week. How wonderful to continue to encourage joy in and a love of reading amongst people of all ages.

Pascoe Vale Scouts

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:10): On 17 August I had the absolute pleasure to visit the Pascoe Vale Scouts for a very special and rare celebration, the awarding of the King's Scout Award to young Mason Howard and Peter Dent. Held at Pascoe Vale Scout hall at 177B Cumberland Road, the ceremony was a wonderful recognition of the contributions both Mason and Peter have respectively made in support of scouting across Pascoe Vale, Victoria, the nation and the Commonwealth. The King's Scout Award is the highest honour that can be earned and is considered the pinnacle of one's scouting life, requiring countless hours of dedication, hard work and volunteerism. I commend the entire scouting community for hosting such a warm and welcoming

event to celebrate Mason and Peter's achievements, including the mayor Cr Helen Davidson; Rod Byrnes, the chief commissioner of Scouts Victoria; Neal Wise, the group leader of Pascoe Vale; and the many volunteers who participated, including Evana Harris, Solomon Dent, Daisy James, Alex Papadopoulos, Charley Baden-Powell, Zoe Cohen, Sam Parfuss and Greg Howard. I very much look forward to working with the Scouts community and Minister for Youth to progress their priorities.

Coburg North Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:11): On 15 August I was delighted to again visit Coburg North Primary School's assembly to congratulate students who participated in the Victorian parliamentary speech prize of 2025, and I commended Pheonix, who spoke about more mountain bike tracks; Aria, who spoke on why kids need more parks that kids in wheelchairs can access; Madison, who spoke on youth mental health; Elisavet, who spoke on the rights of animals to live free; Emmi, who spoke on more community meals; and Evie, who came third across the entire state of Victoria, speaking on the shortage of and need for more water taps across our community. We also celebrated the installation of the new peace pole, thanks to Bruno and Deborah D'Aprano from the Pascoe Vale Rotary Club.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Standing Orders Committee

Inquiry into Including Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:11): It is my great pleasure to relay to the house our recent committee report from the Standing Orders Committee, which I know you are the chair of, Speaker, and we are very lucky to have you there. This was an inquiry into including sessional orders and ongoing resolutions in the standing orders. Our standing orders are a moving feast, just like every other law in this place in the green books on the table, and it is a case of chipping away as we evolve as a state and as a Parliament. I note that next year we will be celebrating 170 years of this place, and I have no doubt that our standing orders have changed quite a lot since then. Just a few weeks ago, Speaker, while in your absence, I do recall reading out I think a ruling from the Chair from 1933, which seemed relevant at the time to instruct – well, ‘instruct’ is the wrong word – or to encourage members of the house to understand.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Matt FREGON: I would argue that the member Point Cook is currently being disorderly, but obviously that would be reflecting on the Chair for me to say that, so I will not do that, because that would be against the standing orders.

Before I waffle on too much, I do want to cover the inclusions that we have made in this committee report, and there are two main inclusions here. We did discuss other things, and I will come to that if I get time. I might come back to speak on another committee report and continue on this very important topic. But we have done two things: firstly, we have sorted out electronic petitions, which, when you think of 170 years, is a relatively new phenomenon in this place. We have incorporated those petitions, which we did get consensus on, and I will come back to that again if I have time. The other thing that we have now formally put in the standing orders is that when you get ejected – sorry, not you, Speaker, which obviously would be inappropriate. When one gets ejected from the house during question time –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Matt FREGON: I will take that interjection. It does happen. I have done it myself. But when one gets ejected from the house during question time, that time that you are ejected is just for question time. Ironically, if you get ejected just before question time, it continues. I have got to use the word ‘one’. I thank our Clerk of the Parliaments for pointing this out. Part of our problem with the word ‘you’ in this house is that we used to, as a state, use the word ‘one’ and we do not do that anymore because it sounds a little bit like *Rumpole of the Bailey*. We now in our colloquial language say ‘you’,

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but of course ‘you’, Speaker, refers to you, the Speaker, and we need to as members get a handle on this. I am not suggesting that we are all going to turn around and start using the word ‘one’, because that would sound a bit odd, but we do have problems with the evolution of language in this place in that the standing orders do not quite keep up. This is maybe something we can raise at future standing committee meetings.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Matt FREGON: You cannot do a point of order. I saw this earlier. There is a member in this place who raised a point of order. I apologise, Speaker. This is turning into a stream of consciousness.

Vicki Ward: For you or us?

Matt FREGON: For me. Thank you, I am enjoying myself. I have seen points of order raised in this house which are essentially ‘I’ve had a thought. Can we have a chat, Speaker?’ That is not what we are doing here. As you, Speaker, eloquently put it yesterday, we are here for a debate, not a conversation. We are trying to relay points. If one has a conversation with the Speaker in their mind, they should, as you have rightly pointed out, Speaker, come and see the Speaker outside the house – just a friendly tip to whoever that member was. I would like to thank the subcommittee members, and I will get to that next time.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:17): Thank you to the Deputy Speaker, the member for Ashwood, for a very enlightening –

Members interjecting.

Nicole WERNER: No, it was enlightening. I thought it was fascinating to hear about the standing orders not changing with the times, and I appreciated his sentiments on it. I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) report on the 2024–25 budget estimates, specifically subsection 5.1, as it relates to funding of the CFA. Funding for our emergency services is something that I have spoken oftentimes in this place about. It is something that I am passionate about. It is a really key part of my electorate in Warrandyte – the CFA and the SES – and that is what I rise to speak about today.

It was wonderful to recently attend Thunderball, held on 16 August at Bramleigh Estate, and it was a triumph of community spirit. The night raised \$80,000 for Manningham SES, and it was more than a fundraiser; it was a celebration of these unsung heroes. Manningham SES leads our region in swift water rescue. They also undertake land-based rescue and storm and flood recovery and support police, fire and ambulance across a wide range of emergencies. The funds from Thunderball will help purchase a new four-wheel drive crew cab to boost inter-agency support, with capacity for marquees, stretchers, boating equipment and specialist tools for missing person searches, crime scene searches, casualty extraction and storm and flood response.

I thank convenor Sandi Miller and the Thunderball committee of Deirdre Diamante, Jeff Hughes, Carli Lange, Margaret Kelly, Mandy Edge, Belinda Mascitti, Jenny Horvath, Don Hughes and Zeus for their tireless work. I also thank our generous supporters Mary Anne McPherson and Bramleigh Estate, Warrandyte Riverside Market, Warrandyte Lions, Warrandyte Donvale Rotary, Manningham city, the community banks of Warrandyte, East Doncaster and Templestowe Village, 42K Media, the *Manningham & Nillumbik Bulletin*, Quintons IGA Warrandyte, the Grand Hotel Warrandyte, Jellis Craig, Ruby Tuesday Jewellery and Milwaukee. As you can see, there are a lot of generous people in our electorate of Warrandyte – and a special acknowledgement of the Michael Parker Foundation for pledging the additional \$10,000 the Monday after the event, taking the total that was able to be donated and fundraised for Manningham SES to \$80,000 – really amazing stuff. Thunderball will return in

2027 to raise funds for Nillumbik SES to replace its road accident rescue vehicle. To every SES volunteer who turns out day and night in all conditions, thank you. Our community is safer because of you.

I speak to the PAEC report, again pertaining to the funding for emergency services. This time of year I am always honoured to join our local CFA crews for their annual brigade dinners. It is always wonderful to join with volunteers, families and supporters who come together to celebrate another year of dedication and service to our community. It is a wonderful opportunity to recognise not just each brigade's tireless commitment to emergencies but also their amazing work in our community and to be able to acknowledge their families.

It was wonderful to join Wonga Park CFA for their annual dinner and to celebrate the achievements of their members. Congratulations to captain Aaron Farr and to all award recipients: Luke Brown, Aaron Gill, Luke Summerscales, John Greenwood-Smith, Jacob Lee and again Aaron Farr, with 1500 turnouts as well as being the captain, Peter Dick and Shamus Gillen.

I was pleased to join members, families and supporters at Chirnside Park CFA's 10-year anniversary dinner. In just a decade the brigade has made an extraordinary contribution, serving our community with distinction during emergencies such as the Montrose and Grampians fires and being recognised with honours for their courage and commitment. Thank you to former captain Ben Cash and new captain Paul Simpson. I look forward to seeing you at your open day, where I and the member for Casey in the federal Parliament will be dunked in the dunk tank. That will be fun.

I was delighted to attend the South Warrandyte CFA annual dinner. The professionalism and courage of the brigade are notable, whether it be responding to bushfires, house fires, motor vehicle accidents or medical emergencies. A special thanks for the evening to organiser Laura Simos as well as captain Cameron Mackay and president Trish Cridland. Thank you for everything that you do at South Warrandyte CFA. As I speak about South Warrandyte CFA, I must shout out the Grand Warrandyte, which this weekend celebrates its 130th birthday. It is an institution and an icon in our community where locals can go for everything from Friday night beers with the boys to first birthday parties. We celebrate with you today.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:22): I am delighted to follow the member for Warrandyte, a proud member – former member, sadly – of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, but a key member when we did our inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply. I am very pleased to say that what we undertook was a major investigation into how Victoria can safeguard its food systems amid rapid population growth and urban expansion. The reason I am talking about this committee report today is because the government's response to our committee findings was tabled in this place on 31 July, just two sitting weeks ago. I am really pleased, as chair of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, to talk through what we recommended and how the government has responded.

Also, as always, I want to pay my great thanks to the member for Morwell, the member for Ripon, the member for Bass, the member for Monbulk, the member for Croydon and of course the member for Warrandyte, because we really work together so well and we enjoy each other's company. As a result of this we did some really great work, including making 29 findings and 33 recommendations aimed at ensuring long-term access to healthy locally grown food for all Victorians, something that is important to every single person in this place. I would also like to thank Samantha Leahy – I see that she is in the house – our researcher, who did the most outstanding job. We were so lucky to work with you, Sam, and for the work that you have done more recently on our regional housing inquiry we are indebted to you. I also thank Igor Dosen, who has moved on to the Public Accounts and Estimates

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Committee – we miss you, Igor; we hope everyone is treating you well in PAEC, but you did a great job with this – as well as Helen Ross-Soden and Imogen Bacon.

The key finding of our committee report was that urban sprawl is impacting farmland, especially near major cities and regional towns. This is very much an issue for my electorate when we see the growth of suburbs like Alfredton and Winter Valley. When I was a kid growing up in Ballarat, kids used to live on farms, and when they would come to my primary school they would walk across them. It is all housing estates now, so we know that that is impacting. We know that Victoria's population is projected to exceed 10 million by the 2050s, increasing demand for food and fresh produce, and that food insecurity is rising, particularly in peri-urban and regional communities. I know, like many people in this place, just what a big issue this is for far too many people in our electorates. I want to give a shout-out to all our food services, particularly Foodbank. This is why we are doing our breakfasts at schools, and this is why we are doing our lunches at schools – because we know that food insecurity is a real issue to many families across Victoria.

We also know that climate change and water scarcity are emerging threats to food production as well as local food manufacturing. We recognise the great workers, particularly the workers in my former union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, for the critical role they play in food supply, and I give a shout-out to them.

We had a number of major recommendations, including the importance of protecting agricultural land from urban encroachment, developing a statewide food security strategy with clear targets and investment plans, support for peri-urban farming, improving access to locally grown food, investing in climate-resilient farm practices, strengthening local food manufacturing, enhancing data collection and promoting education and awareness. I am very pleased to talk to this house about the Victorian government, the Allan Labor government, supporting 29 of the committee's recommendations either in full, in principle or in part, and we have already advanced several programs and initiatives since the report was tabled in this place back in November 2024.

I would really like to thank the work of the ministerial offices and the great workforces across departments in providing the response to the Legislative Assembly. What we have been doing as a government is continuing to provide expert advice and access to land data. We have been progressing planning for Melbourne's green wedges action plan 2024. We have been supporting organisations to deliver pop-up food relief markets across metropolitan Melbourne. We have been involved in grant programs, including the agricultural college modernisation program, and we have also done \$5.5 million for the Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund. There is so much to talk about. I commend the report.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:27): I would like to debate the Public Accounts and Estimates committee 2024–25 budget estimates report, which was tabled in October of last year. There are a number of recommendations and findings that that committee have accumulated and put forward in this report, and the first finding I would like to refer to is finding 38 in regard to Victoria Police experiencing recruitment challenges similar to other Australian jurisdictions.

In reflecting upon this recommendation, or this finding, I would like to pay my respects to Victoria Police members today. We have had a horrific situation unfold yesterday, which certainly I think has hit home hard to every family member of Victoria Police, every current member, every past member and everybody who has had any contact with Victoria Police over the years. We know that Victoria Police members are there for Victorians on their worst day, and every single day they put aside their sense of risk for their sense of duty. I pay my respects to the two members that were killed yesterday. As the police commissioner Mike Bush said, they were murdered in cold blood. I wish them the best in their activities today, which include putting aside dealing with the trauma of losing someone who

has been a workmate, a colleague, someone who potentially many people in Victoria Police were working with and finding the suspect today. They knew him, and they have to put aside the realisation of the risk that they take each and every day to do their job, to do their duty; they turn up to protect Victorians. That has to be commended; it has to be commended. We all attend blue ribbon remembrance or police remembrance day services, and I would just put the call out to anybody: if you see a police officer on the street, thank them for what they do, because without them Victoria would be in a horrific state.

I have spoken to some of my local members, and while they might not be assisting to deal with the matters in the north-east of the state, they have been equally rattled by these events. We have had local police who have been injured or harmed on duty. We have had local police officers who have taken their own lives. I would urge any member of Victoria Police, or their family members, because we know that family members sit at home wondering and worrying about where their loved ones are and if they will come home – when we are reminded of a situation like this, it is particularly impactful on children of our members: if you require support, please use the helplines that are available and the supports that are provided. Because it is understood that part of Victorian policing requires you to deal with issues that most humans could not deal with, often people do not reach out for help, because it is just expected that they have to deal with mental trauma and compartmentalise it and just get on with the job. But if you have those conversations early, whether you are a police officer or whether you are a family member, reach out to support and it may help you on your journey going forward.

Again, I thank all the police officers who are working very, very hard in the north-east of Victoria and right across the state. I pay my respects to the colleagues of the two members who were killed yesterday. I pay my respects to the third member, who I understand is in hospital and has had surgery to help manage a gunshot wound to the leg; I wish him a full and speedy recovery. I send out my respects to all of the family members and friends of the deceased. I also send out my appreciation, my thanks and my gratitude. On behalf of the members of the National Party, the members of my electorate of Lowan and every single Victorian, thank you for what you do day in, day out. We appreciate what you do, we are thankful for what you do and we highly respect everything you do for our community.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:32): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's *Securing the Victorian Food Supply* report, which was tabled in Parliament on 24 November. As highlighted by this report, securing the Victorian food supply is an existential issue for our state now and into the future. As Victoria's population continues to grow, urban sprawl in Melbourne and regional cities is impacting our food producers and farming industry. But also the increasing demand on food, the cost of living and access to fresh, healthy and affordable food impacts many across our community, including mine, particularly from vulnerable socio-economic cohorts, which we must continue to remain focused on supporting. That is why I commend the work of the committee, which highlighted a number of ongoing priorities for government to consider when it comes to food policy, including securing Victoria's food supply by continuing to support our state's critically important local agriculture sector as drivers of economic, employment and social equity outcomes; by protecting agricultural land regions and peri-urban areas, particularly in the context of urban growth and population sprawl; and via working to foster a more resilient food system, especially in the context of geopolitical developments, economic and cost-of-living shocks, biosecurity events and climate change.

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The committee put forward 29 findings and 33 recommendations, which I am glad to hear from the member for Wendouree the government has recently responded to and is supporting. It is recommendations 1, 2 and 33 that I particularly draw the house's attention to. Recommendation 1 is:

That the Victorian government develop a whole-of-government Victorian Food System Strategy. The strategy must address the food system as a whole (including agriculture, processing, manufacturing, supply and consumption). It should be centred on access to adequate, nutritious food as a human right and as a determinant of health.

Recommendation 2 is:

That the Victorian Government consider establishing a Minister for Food with responsibility for the Victorian food system in its entirety ... The Minister should coordinate the development and implementation of the Victorian Food System Strategy.

The Victorian Government also establish a Victorian Food System Council to support a Minister for Food to coordinate the development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy.

And recommendation 33 is:

That the Victorian government support community food initiatives which enhance productivity or resilience of Victoria's food supply at the local level. It should consider supporting the development and implementation of local and state government food strategies, including community food enterprises, urban agriculture projects, co-ops, school farms, crop swaps, farmers markets, etc. It should also prioritise communities with few alternative food sources to the major supermarkets.

This outstanding report also complements the work of course of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's report into food security in Victoria, also tabled on 24 November, which identified, according to the Victorian Population Health Survey, that at least 8 per cent of Victorians experienced severe food insecurity as of 2022. A further 41 per cent of Victorians were reported to be worried about food insecurity with hunger since 2014. As of 2023's hunger report, 35 per cent of households experienced some levels of moderate to severe food insecurity. Food insecurity is closely linked, the report identified, with poor mental health, chronic stress, anxiety and depression. Particular cohorts that are vulnerable to food insecurity include young people, low-income groups, First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and in severe cases of food insecurity households have been reported as having been forced to make difficult choices between basic necessities such as food, housing and health care.

Nearly 30 per cent of food is wasted across the entire food supply chain. That is why, along with progressing the recommendations of these respective parliamentary reports, I also draw the house's attention to the magnificent work being undertaken across my communities of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West when it comes to food relief services. The Victorian government's free school breakfast program has been rolled out across a number of local schools, providing free healthy breakfasts for students, and I recently had the chance to pop in and support Pascoe Vale Girls College's program, with principal Kay Peddle and I serving up a healthy breakfast and making 800 hot chocolates for students that morning.

The Presentation of Our Lord Greek Orthodox parish in Coburg has been proudly running the Our Daily Bread food relief program. Originally envisaged in 2011, it provides an increasing number of services, supporting thousands of marginalised people every week through food relief, meal relief, outreach support and addiction programs. Parish priest Father Leonidas Ioannou and coordinator Sophie Koutoulas and the dozens of volunteers do an amazing job in supporting thousands of people over the year and every week. We can do more by supporting their application to the community food relief grants program, which I encourage the Minister for Agriculture to favourably consider.

We also have the magnificent Hope Cafe, first established in 2011, which operates every Thursday from St Mark's Parish in Coburg North and Fawkner and offers a restaurant-style dignified dining experience for disadvantaged community members, serving at least 50-plus hot meals and food hampers every week. I commend the volunteers Maria Costanzo and Marilyn Duchenne for their

work. We also have the Salvation Army in Coburg North, Sydney Road, every Tuesday and Friday, doing community breakfast to support those marginalised, lonely or in need of support. Thank you to Melody Lamb, Steph Glover and the many other volunteers who help that program. The Reynard Street Neighbourhood House also does a great job.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:37): I rise this morning to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) report on the 2024–25 budget estimates. In particular I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the types of emergency accommodation that are available to those fleeing family violence. There is a report that has been put in the field by the Council to Homeless Persons and Safe and Equal, who have jointly published a report, and it finds, amongst other things, that family violence is the single biggest driver of homelessness for women, young people and children in Victoria. It is a frightening statement, and it is one that I think warrants close attention from government.

The committee in its report identified that there are a number of gaps in Department of Families, Fairness and Housing’s data regarding emergency accommodation for victim-survivors. If you do not know what is going on, it is impossible to be able to do anything meaningful about it, and I remain concerned that DFFH’s response to this does not reflect the urgency of the problem. In fact whilst DFFH have accepted in principle a recommendation about this, they have said that they are hoping to have a more robust dataset from 1 July this year. I do not know to what extent that work has been progressed. I certainly hope it has been well progressed, but it is important to note that we are still seeing, anecdotally, a very large number of victim-survivors being placed into motels simply because refuge accommodation is full. So DFFH do not necessarily know what the splits are in terms of nights spent or families that have had contact with motels as opposed to refuges, and we know that it is happening. We know it is happening to a very high prevalence, when in fact it should not be happening at all. It was described as a common occurrence in this report, and the Royal Commission into Family Violence indeed found that individuals were being placed into motels while awaiting refuge accommodation and in fact that the majority of women – not just a majority but a startling majority of 95 per cent – had spent part of their emergency accommodation in a motel. That speaks to a very, very substantial problem in this sector, a problem that needs the focused attention of government to remedy.

The committee asked DFFH about the number of women and families who stayed in motels and hotels for more than a week, and their response was that households are coming to motels on more than one occasion throughout the year – more than one occasion. We have data systems that at the moment are still not talking to each other. So this report, which goes back to the previous budget period – it was published in October of last year – said they had data systems that were still not talking to each other, so it is clearly a problem that predates the PAEC hearings. Yet the deadline for getting a more robust dataset – not fixing the problem but just getting a more robust dataset – was not until 1 July of this year.

My concern is that not nearly enough is being done to address this problem. And if you care about it, you should count it. Government needs to look properly at this problem and ensure that victim-survivors, people fleeing family violence, are not shunted into a system that sees them put into wildly unsuitable accommodation like motels. We would all know that motels do not have kitchens. The ability to run often a young family, a small family, out of a motel room is extremely difficult. We need to make sure that refuge accommodation is available, we need to make sure that refuge accommodation is built and we need to make sure the government is at the very least monitoring, counting and assessing what number of families, and particularly women and children, fleeing family violence are being put into this wildly unsuitable type of accommodation. Safe Steps, a family violence service – this is a finding of the committee – accommodated more people in motels than refuges on average in the six-month period ending March 2024. More people in motels than refuges – clearly

massive investment is required and clearly the government needs to do much, much more in addressing this very serious problem and the scourge of family violence.

Bills

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:43): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Casino and Gambling Legislation 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 Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (Bill).

In my opinion, the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, 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 *Casino Control Act 1991* (CCA) and the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* (GRA).

The Bill amends the CCA to increase scrutiny of the casino operator, support the implementation of certain recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence (Royal Commission) and make minor technical changes.

The Bill amends the GRA to increase the number of gaming machine entitlements a club venue operator may hold and make minor technical changes and consequential amendments.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the rights to:

- privacy and reputation (section 13)
- be presumed innocent (section 25).

Section 13 – Privacy and reputation

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.

Clause 18 of the Bill engages the right to privacy because new section 167(1)(da)(va) of the CCA provides the Governor in Council with authority to make regulations imposing requirements on the casino operator for checking player cards and verifying a person's identity before allowing a person to play a game. These processes will likely involve the collection of personal information.

However, the amendment does not limit the right to privacy in a way that is unlawful or arbitrary. The regulation-making power is lawful and supports existing provisions in the CCA, requiring the use of an identity-verified player card. Any potential interference with privacy is not arbitrary as it will apply only to patrons seeking to gamble at the casino. The new head of power will not expand the current carded play scheme but merely empowers the government to set processes for the checking of cards and identification. This represents a reasonable and proportionate response to concerns raised by the Royal Commission, which recommended that the casino operator should be able to identify all patrons gambling at the casino, in order to reduce the incidence of money laundering.

Section 25(1) – The right to be presumed innocent

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty. The introduction of a new offence that includes an exception, exemption, excuse or other defence may affect rights under section 25(1).

Clause 8 of the Bill inserts new subsection 28AA(1A) providing an offence where the associate of a casino operator (other than a corporate associate) fails to comply with the requirement to notify the regulator of a change in situation. The offence is accompanied by a penalty of 20 penalty units. While the amendment introduces an offence, its effect is essentially to amend the scope of the existing offence provision at

section 28AA(1) of the CCA so it is limited to associates who do not fall under the new category of ‘corporate associate’.

It is my view this amendment does not limit the right under section 25(1) of the Charter because it is a technical amendment and because it does not impose a burden of proof on the accused in a manner that would engage the right to be presumed innocent.

Hon. Anthony Carbines
Minister for Police
Minister for Community Safety
Minister for Victims
Minister for Racing

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:43): 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 Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 will amend the *Casino Control Act 1991* to deliver on government commitments to ensure the casino operator continues to run the Melbourne casino to the highest standard while reducing gambling harm. It will increase scrutiny of Crown Melbourne and support the modernisation of casino operations and implementation of Royal Commission reforms. The Bill will also amend the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* to provide additional flexibility in the electronic gaming machine (EGM) entitlements market for Victorian club venues.

Casino suitability amendments to support Royal Commission reforms

Following the Royal Commission, the government established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (regulator) as a regulator focused solely on the gambling industry. This Bill enhances the powers of the regulator by enabling it to take disciplinary action against the corporate associates of Crown Melbourne. It also increases the disciplinary action the regulator can take against Crown Melbourne for non-compliance with a direction specifically related to the Melbourne Transformation Plan (MTP).

Melbourne Transformation Plan

The MTP was developed by Crown Melbourne. It includes over 100 initiatives and outlines its program of improved compliance, operations, customer experience, gambling harm minimisation and investment.

To incentivise Crown Melbourne to continue its transformation and deter against loss of momentum and delays, the Bill ensures that non-compliance with a direction issued by the regulator that relates to the MTP, can be met with specific and strong disciplinary action.

Such action includes an additional fine not exceeding \$1 million for every day of non-compliance with that direction.

Corporate associates

The Bill further strengthens the regulator’s powers in relation to corporate associates of Crown Melbourne to address the material influence such corporate associates have over compliance behaviour.

Amendments to the Casino Control Act in 2022 expanded on the new definition of ‘associate’ to capture the broad range of individuals and organisations that could influence the casino operator. The Bill builds on this by inserting a new definition of ‘corporate associate’, which is a subset of an associate and captures associates that are companies within the meaning of the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth).

Companies related to Crown Melbourne are likely to have influence over its operations and transformation and currently, the regulator is unable to compel information about Crown Melbourne from such companies without initiating Court proceedings. The Bill addresses this by inserting new grounds for disciplinary action that the regulator may take against a corporate associate. Such grounds include where a corporate associate has failed to comply with a duty to the regulator, with a notice issued by the regulator, and of a change in the situation of a corporate associate. A further ground includes where the regulator considers the corporate associate unsuitable to be associated with the business of the casino operator.

If a ground of disciplinary action is met, the Bill provides that action the regulator may take includes a letter of censure process, and fines of not more than \$1 million for non-compliance with a direction regardless of

whether the corporate associate has already been fined in relation to the same matter. Certain current penalties that apply to associates will not apply to corporate associates.

To continue to uphold the high standards expected of Crown Melbourne and its associates, the Bill further amends the Casino Control Act to provide that any disciplinary action taken by the regulator against a corporate associate can be considered in determining the suitability of that associate.

Modernising casino operations and supporting Royal Commission reforms

The Bill will make several amendments to the Casino Control Act to support the casino to modernise its operations and allow sufficient time for Royal Commission reforms to be properly implemented.

Phasing out cash at the casino to increase transparency and deter crime

As a cash-intensive business, a traditional casino is vulnerable to criminal activity, such as money laundering and terrorism financing. With these concerns in mind, the Royal Commission recommended phasing out the use of cash at the casino, save for transactions under \$1,000. Amendments to the Casino Control Act in 2022 inserted a requirement that the casino operator must, from 1 December 2025, limit the amount of cash it can accept from, or pay as winnings to, a patron. The limit is \$1,000 per 24 hours.

The Bill extends the deadline for the daily cash acceptance and payment of winnings limits, from 1 December 2025 to 1 December 2027. The extra time will enable the casino operator to develop, test and roll out cashless technology and transition its staff and customers. Consequential amendments will be made to other provisions that relate to that date.

The Bill introduces new provisions so a patron will be able link their digital wallet at the casino to a personal bank account in their own name. This means they can top up electronically, without ever bringing cash into the casino. This expanded approach to cashless gaming will transform the casino environment, removing anonymous transactions and deterring criminal activity.

Safeguards around cashless gaming will ensure patrons have an opportunity to reflect on their spending when adding money to the digital wallet. Under the Bill, a debit card may be used to top up the account, but only if that transaction is processed by a member of staff or via an app or website. The Bill also inserts a regulation-making power so that future regulations can be made to restrict or prohibit automatic top-ups to cashless gaming accounts. Other potential future regulations – such as requiring the casino operator to allow patrons to set a transfer limit on their account – are already within regulation-making powers.

The Bill also makes a technical change to the period to which the daily cash limits apply. Rather than a rolling 24-hour period, the Bill aligns daily limits to a calendar day to make it easier for patrons to follow their cash spend and simplify how the casino puts this into practice.

The Bill also makes technical amendments to the Casino Control Act to clarify the difference between everyday cashless gaming accounts and the types of accounts used by high rollers.

Phasing in account-based play on all games at the casino

The Royal Commission recommended making the use of a player card mandatory for all gambling at the casino. The Casino Control Act was amended in 2022 to make carded play mandatory and establish a framework for phasing in the requirement at different times for different game types. A player card has been required to play any EGM at the casino since December 2023, and it is intended that mandatory carded play will be declared to apply to electronic table games in December 2025.

More time is needed for Crown Melbourne to adapt its business model to the impacts of carded play on traditional table games. The Bill will extend the implementation deadline for the use of player cards on this remaining undeclared game type to 1 December 2027.

Once carded play is implemented at traditional table games in 2027, the casino operator will be penalised if a player card was not used at a table game because of wrongdoing or recklessness on the part of the casino. The Bill also includes regulation-making powers to support carded play requirements.

Clarifying collection of player activity statements

Player activity statements at the casino provide information on electronic gaming and help players keep track of time and money spent. The Bill will specify that a player activity statement may be collected anywhere in the casino complex. This change will not materially impact a player's ability to access their gambling records.

Club EGM entitlements limit

The Bill will also amend the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* to increase the number of gaming machine entitlements that can be held by a club venue operator. The club cap will be increased from 840 to 1260 entitlements.

The new cap will continue to support balanced ownership across the industry, as a single operator will not be able to hold more than about 10 per cent of club entitlements.

However, this increase will create additional flexibility in the entitlements market. It will provide more options for clubs seeking to reduce or exit the pokies business by making it easier to find a buyer for their entitlements.

Statute law revision

Finally, the Bill removes obsolete references to bodies corporate in the Gambling Regulation Act, updating the body corporate definition to bring it into line with the Corporations Act.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:43): I move:

That this debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 10 September.

Statute Law Revision Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (10:44): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. This bill contains many things, with amendments across a whole range of acts, and while Labor is happy to tidy up the commas and the full stops through this, there is so much more work that needs to be done here in Victoria. Given that Labor is making amendments in these acts, this would have been a prime opportunity for them to address the issues, particularly around the youth justice system, youth crime and the crime crisis here in our state. They could have fixed it up in relation to emergency services response times or support for victims or within our courts. Today I am going to be focusing on a few of those and areas that can be done.

In Victoria at the moment, youth justice and youth crime are simply out of control. We have seen crimes here in Victoria increase by 18 per cent from offenders under the age of 18, up 42 per cent over the last 10 years of the Allan–Andrews Labor government. On top of this, we have actually seen a massive increase when it comes to crimes against the person committed by people under 18. That has gone up 74 per cent here in our state in the last 10 years. A crime is committed in Victoria every 50.3 seconds. Under every minute a crime is committed somewhere in our state.

To make it harder – and this is why those crimes are happening – we have over 1100 vacancies on the rosters of the Victorian police force. That means we are seeing stations being closed and hours reduced. It is not just in metro Melbourne, it is through regional Melbourne and it is in the outer growth areas. Even worse, we have got stations that do not have Victorian police in them at all – stations that remain shut while the crime crisis continues here in our state. There are 22,000 shifts from those hardworking men and women of the Victorian police force that have to be spent in Melbourne with the protests that have been happening in this city because the government fails to act when it comes to addressing the crisis we have got with the violent protests that continually happen on the streets of Melbourne.

The government are trying to answer these massive crisis issues, particularly around knife crime, with the machete ban that they have put on Victorian streets, and their answer to that was to put machete bins outside police stations at a cost of \$325,000 for each and every bin that is put across the state. The question will be: how many machetes will be dropped off? How many machetes will be put inside these bins to be taken off the street? What is worse is the government never consulted even with the Les Twentyman Foundation on this to find out ways that we can get knives off the street and reduce crime.

A violent youth offender in Victoria at the moment is facing 400 charges – one person. He has been bailed 50 times here in Victoria. If they are going to go through and change the commas on the Youth Justice Act 2024 to ensure that it complies with today's standards, then we say that they should also introduce into that the Liberals and Nationals' 'break bail, face jail' because a comma is not going to keep the streets safe. A comma is not going to make a difference to what is happening here in the state, and the Liberals and Nationals know that we can make a difference. 'Break bail, face jail' is the primary spur to make sure violent offenders do not continuously get out on bail every single time they commit violent crimes here in Victoria. We will restore the police numbers. We will make sure we fill the vacancies here so we can reopen the police stations and get proactive policing back on the street. We will deliver sentences in line with community expectations, because at the moment the court system, under the laws from this government, is simply failing. Offenders for violence are not afraid of the court system here in Victoria. They are not afraid of going to jail, because they do not get there. The system at the moment lets them go in and out, and it recycles them through as fast as that, leading to these offenders committing so many different crimes across the state.

We also look at the Serious Offenders Act 2018 and the statute law amendments in relation to this. Just to get some figures for you, murder is up 37 per cent here in Victoria. Family violence related serious assaults are up 19 per cent; there is one offence every 58 minutes when it comes to family violence here in Victoria. Rape is up 8 per cent. Aggravated robbery is up 21 per cent; there is one every 2.6 hours in Victoria. Residential aggravated burglary is up 30 per cent; there is one every 1.1 hours in this state. These are real people, these are real stories and they are real victims.

Every single hour when we have an aggravated burglary here in our state there is a new victim, and those victims we can go through. Many we have met with and spoken to in the past. There was the murder of Dr Ash Gordon. A gifted 33-year-old GP, Dr Ash Gordon was fatally stabbed 11 times defending his own home in a burglary in Doncaster. The teenage attacker, just 17 years old, has now been found guilty of murder, and his friends reported he boasted, 'Shit, just killed a guy.' This chilling case shows the lengths that violent offenders are going to and how they simply do not care what is going to happen to them when they go through the court system, and that means more Victorians are at risk.

Then there was the machete attack on Saurabh Anand. Saurabh is a 33-year-old man who nearly lost his hand in a machete attack at a shopping centre. He spent weeks in hospital and now faces potential permanent disability from the severity of that attack. Two of the alleged offenders, after this offence of nearly cutting someone's hand off, got bail under the bail laws of this government. That is not acceptable. When you go and speak to Saurabh he genuinely fears he may never be able to use his hand again, while two of those offenders are back out on the streets with the potential of putting more people at risk. Why? Because they do not care; they are not scared. They are not worried about the system, while the community is worried that the system is not protecting them, it is simply protecting the offenders. It is time, instead of making technical adjustments to these bills, that we actually have serious offences and make substantial changes to ensure Victoria is kept safe.

On top of this, we know that post-sentence supervision is failing here in Victoria. Dangerous offenders, including rapists and murderers, are being downgraded or released without any oversight. This is a huge issue here in our state. You cannot have serious offenders going out without the supervision that they need to ensure that we can protect Victoria. The Labor government, as we have said, is content with changing and formatting some of the definitions in the Serious Offenders Act, but it will not confront the reality that post-sentence supervision is failing, high-risk offenders are slipping through the gaps and the community remains unsafe under a system designed and implemented by the Allan Labor government. We must prioritise community safety as the absolute priority here in our state.

If Labor are willing to open this act, why won't they strengthen eligibility for post-sentence detention? Instead of just fixing the commas, fixing the full stops and changing the spelling mistakes, they could strengthen the system to protect Victorians. Why won't they ensure the 'serious offender' definition includes emerging patterns of repeat violence, a simple change they could have added during this, so

when you have patterns of repeat violence it is automatically picked up. Why won't they decide to change these acts to put victims and safety first, ahead of ideology to suit their own backbench? This has got to be about protecting Victoria.

We have already introduced legislation on this side that the government have knocked back to then introduce their own. I say on this side of the house that we were proud to put forward the Corrections Amendment (Parole Reform) Bill 2023, in consultation with the families at the time, to prevent Paul Denyer ever getting out of the prison system. That came from this side, and we were told it was a stunt from the other side. That legislation then came in from the other side to say that they were strong on crime, and they could stand up and say that this man was not getting out of jail. It was time, at that stage, that they should have had a no-return period after any parole refusal. These were all things that we were good at, exactly as the member for Bulleen said. They were strong on press releases but not on changes to make sure these people never get out of jail. The unfortunate thing was Labor voted down that bill at first, putting more pressure on that family, who had to live through it yet again and again as the government failed to act, until such time as it was nearly too late. They should have just acted and put politics aside and let that legislation go through.

On the Corrections Act 1986, in the past decade the number of persons in custody has fallen 19 per cent; in the same period crime offences have increased by 36 per cent. If you are going to have a reduction in those people that have been locked up in our community, you could do that on the expectation that crimes are going down and Victorians feel safer, but they do not. In the same decade the number of persons in full-time custody fell 4 per cent as the crime rate rose 36 per cent. Victoria is the only state in Australia to reduce its prison population over both one-year and 10-year periods, at the same time as having the highest increase of crime-related incidents across the state. What are their failures with this?

When we are talking about corrections, the failures are so broad. \$1.1 billion was spent on a prison that sat idle for over 18 months, costing \$35 million a year to operate with no prisoners. Nearly 300 staff were hired on an \$8000 sign-on bonus, and there is still a critical shortage. There will be fewer prison beds despite the record spending. Port Phillip Prison, which has 1117 beds, is closing. They are closing this down based on ideology rather than outcomes, and we know that this is going to result in a net loss of between 300 and 600 beds in the prison system. At the same time, the government are out there saying, 'We're not introducing new bail laws, and they won't come into effect next year, because we don't effectively have the beds to put them in the prisons.' Well, you are closing a prison at the moment. The government is currently closing one prison in our state. They have already closed the youth detention centre. Dhurringile was closed as well – another prison. The government is bragging about closing prisons, yet where are these offenders managing to find themselves? They are finding themselves in people's lounge rooms with knives, committing more crimes, because there is nowhere to house them. \$727 million was budgeted, and there are still no operational beds at Barwon and the Metropolitan Remand Centre. Do you know why? Because the build was that bad – this government oversaw one of the worst builds – and it is absolutely covered in toxic mould. A government that spent \$727 million to have no additional beds in the prison system is still out there saying, 'We're doing well when it comes to crime.' It is time to get your head out of the sand.

Even worse than this is the loss of mental health and hospital infrastructure within the prison system. Victoria's only prison hospital and forensic mental health unit is going to be closed, in Port Phillip Prison. These are people who have the highest level of needs when it comes to mental health. Some of them are not sentenced. They are basically held at high risk. The system that Port Phillip has put in place allows them, somewhat, to have a life where they are protected, but a life where the community is protected. There is no replacement for it. I am going to go on record with this. Let me assure you, when they close this unit and they move these inmates across to the standard prison system, they will either have to lock them up for 23 hours a day for safety, or if they do not, only one of two things will happen: one of them will be killed or they will kill someone. That is the problem in this system. The government is failing to identify the safety risk, not just for those that are not sentenced but for those

who are sentenced and the staff inside the prison system – the other inmates inside the prison system. It has worked, it continues to work, and this government is closing it based on ideology because it wants to go back to a state system rather than the efficient, effectively run private sector prison that has been there for the last 15, 20 years.

We know we have a staffing crisis across the whole state when it comes to the prison system, with 94 per cent of corrections officers having voted no confidence in their leadership because they cannot trust them to deliver the leadership to keep them safe while they are at work. The Dame Phyllis Frost Centre was locked down for 129 days between October and April. I do not expect people to have sympathy for people who are in prison, but I do expect that if a government is going to lock people up it gives them the human rights that every person should be entitled to. You cannot lock people down for 129 days in just six months because you cannot control the system and you cannot get the staff on board because of the failures of what you have done as a government.

The government needs to take responsibility, because the outcome of this was that there were 442 assaults recorded in one year, including sexual assaults, and six hospitalisations. The system continues to fail to protect the staff. Why would you apply for a job when all you are hearing is that the government are failing to protect those who are working within the prison system and effectively are saying to them, ‘You’re on your own.’ Now we see the outcome of that, because the staff are being assaulted and people do not want to join. Those that are taking the bonuses are coming into the prison system and saying, ‘The eight grand’s not worth it. No-one here is going to protect me. It’s an unsafe environment and no-one cares.’ That leads to more crisis and more chaos within the justice system and within our prison system in Victoria.

There is no clear plan for the transition either – for those patients who have mental health issues or for inmates in hospital beds. With the closure of the 40-bed Port Phillip Prison hospital, which has been projected by this government – and let me assure you, post election there is nothing surer than that they will want to get rid of this as well – where do those patients go? If you are in the prison system and a patient at the moment, you would go to Port Phillip Prison, which has a hospital that was expanded just five years ago. The government are delaying this decision. There is nothing surer than that after the election those prisoners will end up in the public health system with security guards and prison officers with them at a massive cost to every single Victorian. But it does mean that, if anyone in here or anyone in those communities where those hospitals are has someone in hospital, they should not be surprised if they see two prison officers standing at the bed guarding someone who has to come in for treatment instead of being safe when they go into the hospital system in Victoria.

I want to go to family violence and some of the key stats that have been happening here in Victoria. Again, these are the victims across Victoria. There has been a 12 per cent increase in family violence incidents since 2019. These are all directly from the Crime Statistics Agency; this is not us saying it. There is a \$32.5 million cut to primary prevention programs – I will repeat that one, a \$32.5 million cut to primary prevention programs – and at the same time a 12 per cent increase in family violence incidents. How can any government honestly think it is okay, because they cannot control the budget, to cut funding for family violence prevention programs at the same time family violence is increasing?

There is a \$169.4 million cut to housing assistance, limiting safe exits for victim-survivors. I reckon nearly every person in this Parliament has had someone come into their office who is a victim of domestic violence and has said to them, ‘I can’t find a place to go,’ because the emergency accommodation waitlist is over 19 months. That is the impact when you cut services for those that most desperately need it and at the time that they most desperately need it. The message they are sending them, when the government makes this cut, is they have to make a choice: do they go and live in their car with their kids, do they live under a bridge in the local area, or do they go back to a place where there are domestic violence risks for them? Unfortunately, some choose to go back. Imagine being in a position where you choose to go back to an environment of domestic violence because the external risk is far greater. The only reason that is happening is the \$169.4 million cut to housing assistance here in this state. Refuge development projects have been delayed six months; Aboriginal

family violence refuge, delayed 15 months; a \$24 million cut to family violence service delivery in the 2025–26 budget – another cut from this government; and \$8 million slashed from primary prevention programs. 120 households per night are being housed in motels and not proper shelters. That is the state we are in here in Victoria, because the Allan Labor government have lost control of the budget. They are trying to find ways to save money and at any cost. The cost of that is to those women who are trying to escape domestic violence with their children, and that is a tragic outcome. That is not something that we can stand by and see here in this state.

Labor's amendments to this bill, whilst cosmetic, fail to address the absolute crisis we have. The Liberals and Nationals know that we can make change. We can make change when it comes to domestic violence and make it better. The first and biggest priority for us would be to introduce our 'right to ask, right to know' policy. Why would we do that? Because it empowers the individuals to find out their key partner has a history of violence and it gives police and services better tools to intervene early, because we know that prevention is the best model, if we can stop it, if we can give people the ability at the start to say, 'I understand there's too much risk here; I'm not going to go down that path of moving in with this person.' The police can make people more aware. I know my colleague Cindy McLeish, the member for Eildon, has said previously that over 1100 women in South Australia have used a similar scheme, showing clear demand there. Victoria Police and others have acknowledged the importance of balancing this with careful risk assessments to ensure that the Liberal–Nationals' 'right to ask, right to know' policy would deliver and would protect Victorians.

The member for Malvern has spoken a lot about the courts, and there are massive concerns through our courts – a \$30 million cut from court services in the latest budget. Court delays are increasing the number of offenders granted bail under Labor's weak bail laws. The member for Malvern knows 'break bail, face jail' is the only way that we can put the pressure back onto the court system to say it is not okay to keep releasing violent offenders onto the street. This is the problem with our courts. Victoria finished only 947 commercial cases in the last 10 years. By comparison the Federal Court finished 3607 and New South Wales finished 3019. That is because this government continues to cut the budget for our courts. If that is happening on the commercial side, imagine what is happening on the crime side. The Supreme Court of Victoria now has the slowest average judgement time in the country, taking 40.4 days. Victorian courts have been ordered to find \$106 million in savings over the next four years. Not only have they already cut enough and not only are we seeing delays in justice, we are now seeing the government – because of their failures when it comes to controlling the economy, their failures with the amount of debt, their \$20 million each and every day in the interest bill – going back to the court system, which is already struggling, and saying, 'You've got to save another \$106 million.' How is that going to deliver justice for victims here in our state? Why are victims continuously left behind under this government? Why do victims have to pay the price for an incompetent government that has failed to protect them on the street and is now failing to stand up for their rights in court?

The government has also tweaked the Health Complaints Act 2016, and this will not fix the real and urgent problem here in Victoria. 42,478 patients waited longer than clinically recommended. These are people that are waiting for surgery in pain, often cannot work and cannot socialise and end up with social isolation issues and mental health issues, and this government continues to cut the budget when it comes to health in our state. Only 75 per cent of them had been treated by March 2023, and as of May 2025, 583 remain waiting more than three years for the surgery that they desperately need. The negligence in this system is an absolute failure of the government. It is a 13 per cent spike in hospital-related cases for complaints alone. Each one of these complaints, again, is a person who needs to get the treatment that they desperately need.

Finally, I am going to go on to the Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023. Only 65.3 per cent of Victorian code 1 emergencies met the 15-minute response mark between April and June 2025, well below the 85 per cent benchmark that is required. The reason for this is because Victorians are waiting continuously for ambulances and ambulances are stuck, ramped outside of hospitals all the way across

the state. Each and every day, ambulances are ramped and waiting. I recently did a tour of the Casey Hospital, and I went and met with the staff. I spoke to one person waiting in the hallway for 27 hours to go in for treatment. That is far too long – not on a bed, not on a seat, sitting on the ground in the corridor because the waiting room was absolutely full. We went through to the emergency department, and we had a chat to the staff in there. Whilst we were there a person on a trolley came in from the ambulance. Who was working on them? The paramedics. They could not hand over the patient, because there was no room. The emergency department was full.

This was not a Friday night or a Saturday night or one of the busy periods. This was a Tuesday morning, and they were waiting in the corridor. We had paramedics working on the patients. When we spoke to the staff there, we asked, ‘What is the biggest issue? What’s creating the biggest problem with delays?’ and they said, ‘It’s because government have effectively closed or removed access to so many of the mental health patient beds in our state that when they come into the emergency department we have them here for an extended period of time.’ At the time I was there, there were five patients who deserved treatment for their mental health. They deserve that treatment, but not in the middle of an emergency department where the noise is up, the tension is up and it creates higher risk for them. Yet they were there for five days. They took up five beds of the Casey Hospital for five days. The average bed gets turned over in Casey in the emergency department once every 8 hours – that is about average. When you have five days with five patients sitting in there, that is a huge concern, because so many people end up waiting. And you know what, they end up stuck in a corridor where they are crook, injured and waiting for these services that they so desperately need.

In Victoria alone, a 60-year-old man, Phil Burns, died at home after waiting 4 hours for an ambulance. He passed away alone, pleading for help. A 70-year-old man suffered a head injury and waited 5 hours for assistance while ambulance crews were ramped at a local emergency department nearby. A Victorian woman with a brain bleed waited 3 hours for an ambulance and then endured a 7-hour journey to reach surgical care. Christina Lackmann, a 32-year-old woman, died of a caffeine overdose waiting 7 hours for an ambulance. A coroner has deemed the delay unacceptable. Ambulance transfer times are well and truly below the target. Transfers continue to miss the benchmark of within 40 minutes.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Brad BATTIN: Exactly, member for South-West Coast. This is the example. People are dying waiting. I remember when Labor was in opposition and we were told how many times from their side, ‘Every second counts.’ That was the message we got. Well, to the Allan Labor government: you have been in power for 11 years, and more than every second counts now. Unfortunately, we are now talking every hour counts. People are waiting hours, not minutes, for ambulances in Victoria. People are literally dying. And despite having fewer patients, delays are worsening across the state. The Allan Labor government have only got themselves to blame.

Then they have gone into other areas – they have looked at the emergency services tax – to try and get more money in. With this emergency services tax they are using the volunteers’ name to say, ‘This is the way we’re going to collect money to pay for emergency services,’ when we know it is just to fix the big black hole that they have created and the money is effectively going straight into trying to pay off the debt that they have created here in our state. They are cutting the funding for services for the CFA, they are cutting the funding for services for the SES and they are cutting the funding for services for FRV. FRV is another organisation that goes out to support the ambulances with code 1 and code zero calls, and they are cutting their funding. They cut funding continuously across Victoria, and we have seen it too often.

Whilst we understand this bill before the Parliament today has to go through – there have got to be certain parts of it – the government is missing a massive opportunity. They could fix the parole system. They could restore consequences for youth crime, which we would do if we were in government. They could protect women and children. They could support our emergency services, they could clear the

courts and they could reduce the ambulance delays. The Allan Labor government, by choice, has not done that. They are choosing to cut the funding in these areas. They are choosing to ignore the fact that people are dying waiting for ambulances. They are choosing to ignore the victims of home invasions all the way across our state. They are choosing to increase the debt here in Victoria, which means we are going to have to pay more in interest, cutting more money from services here in Victoria. They have clear choices, and each person who gets up from the Labor side should outline those choices and explain to the community why their loved one is not getting the treatment they deserve, why they are not getting the police arriving on time and why people are dying in Victoria – because of the cuts of the Allan Labor government.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (11:14): I rise to contribute on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. As we know, bills like these come before the Parliament from time to time – dots-and-dashes bills, as they are sometimes known – and are passed as a part of the Parliament's regular housekeeping just to ensure that legislation across the statute book is accurate, clear, maintained in an orderly manner and accessible to the public. As this portion of the house decides to exit, it would be remiss of me not to say that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. I have got to say it was quite a performance, really, by the Leader of the Opposition to use a dots-and-dashes bill to stand up and perform in front of this portion of the chamber. They have all gone. Look at them; they have all gone now.

Members interjecting.

Gary MAAS: No, it is true. They have all gone. They have exited the chamber. They front up to work, just for a little bit, just to impress the opposition leader. But I come back to those who do not know history being condemned to repeat it. I seem to recall the member for Hawthorn standing up about four weeks before he was chopped doing exactly the same thing, bringing his own team in –

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, surely a bill debate is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): There is no point of order. It has been a wideranging debate.

Gary MAAS: Those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it. The same mistake that the member for Hawthorn made is the same mistake that the member for Bulleen made is the same mistake that the member for Malvern made. You come to this place and you do not turn up to work normally. They are not here normally. They do not come to work. They come here for a performance, and what we saw was a performance. What we saw was a performance and history condemned to repeat itself.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Statute Law Revision Bill is in fact quite broad, but I understand that the member on his feet is not referring to any of the 70 bills that are in here. Instead, he is looking to slag off at the government, and I ask you to bring him back to the bill.

Ros Spence: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, as the member opposite just referred to slagging off the government, we just listened to half an hour of slagging off the government. That was the broadest, most wideranging contribution that I have heard for a very long time, and I think the member should continue.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I will rule on the point of order. It has been an incredibly wideranging debate. The bill does cover many, many, many acts. I will draw the member back to one of those and to the bill at hand.

Gary MAAS: All I will conclude that part of my contribution on is: the truth really does hurt. The bill makes amendments correcting typographical errors, grammatical errors, numbering and section reference errors in many of the bills that are detailed. By way of example, the bill updates references to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975. As we know, in the Commonwealth our

Administrative Appeals Tribunal has been replaced by the Administrative Review Tribunal, so it makes amendments to those words in corresponding acts. It amends a number of acts to correct references to names of departments that are out of date, because the orders were made under the Administrative Arrangements Act 1983, and these include, for example, changing the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and the Department of Justice and Regulation to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

These are the types of amendments that are made, and it is not a waste of time at all. It is appropriate that bills such as these are passed periodically through the Parliament to ensure that our statute books are clear and in good order. As I said, it is not a time-wasting exercise. I wish to point out the incredibly important role this and other acts of legislative scrutiny play in the legislative process, from which we all ultimately benefit. Commas, full stops, punctuation errors all add to what the meaning of words are, and words can have different meanings when we do not have those correct grammatical phrases in place or those punctuation parts in place as well.

I would also like at this point to speak to the role that our Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, or SARC, play when it comes to bills that come before this place. I have the great pleasure of being chair of that committee, and SARC examines all the bills that are introduced into Parliament, including all private members bills. Its role is to clearly explain the nature of those various bills, including this one that is before us today. It provides legal oversight to ensure that legislation passed works to the best of its ability, and it is important work in the functioning of government and our lawmaking process here. SARC can bring attention to amendments. It makes laws clearer and much more accessible to all of those who read the bills that come before both houses. The committee follows the best traditions of nonpartisan legislative scrutiny through the joint committee of members from both the other place and our chamber. To that end I acknowledge the member for Hawthorn, the member for Mulgrave and the member for Broadmeadows, as well as Mrs Broad, Ms Payne, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt from the other place. It would also be remiss of me not to mention the extraordinary work that the secretariat does for our committee. We have a fabulous secretariat at SARC, and I would like to say a huge thank you to Helen Mason, Alex Kershaw, Simon Dinsbergs, Sonia Caruana and Professor Jeremy Gans.

The comparative nature of scrutiny of legislation bodies is integral to the proper running of our democracy, ensuring that we have that proper oversight. It allows for differing perspectives based on the unique experiences, skills, frameworks and communities that we have within our respective jurisdictions. Similarly, as members of our own committees, we all bring different thoughts, opinions, experiences and skills to inform our work. These differences ensure that this very small cog in a very big wheel is doing its job in the machine that is the legislative process and indeed democracy in this great state of Victoria. Crucially, we are all united by the same goal of ensuring that bills and legislation go through all the appropriate checks and balances to keep government and the lawmaking process in check. I also want to acknowledge the Australia–New Zealand Scrutiny of Legislation Conference, which our secretariat did a fabulous job of putting together and which the Victorian Parliament was able to host late last year. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet those who work across various jurisdictions and undertake a role in their respective scrutiny of legislation committees. It included an array of MPs, academics and lawyers from this place, across the country and different jurisdictions, who each brought a wealth of knowledge from their work and communities.

In closing on this bill, I will just say that the legislation amended will otherwise be unaffected by this bill, and the bill does not create any new policy. Nevertheless, this place has an obligation to ensure that laws are as clear as they can be and as accurate as they can be, as everyone in this place, even the opposition, can appreciate, and on that basis I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:24): I rise to make my contribution on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. I want to spend most of my time talking about schedule 2, which is changes to the administrative arrangements and the department structures. I was going to start off with the first one,

being the shifting of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. I suppose the Allan Labor government have finally got their ideological wish with this in that they have taken away any reference to primary production or any reference to farmers in the department structures. They have spent a long time doing this. They have this ideological dislike of country Victoria, this ideological dislike of farmers, and I will come back to that. But they finally erased it from the department structures. There was a time when there was a department of primary industries, a standalone department in this state, because agriculture, food production and particularly food security for all of us are vitally important. Now the department of ag, Agriculture Victoria, or whatever it is going to be called, is an office right down the back of a great big other department – no longer a standalone department, just an office down the back. We have just seen announcements again about cuts to AgVic staff and cuts to pest plant and animal officers – the annual cuts to the department of ag in Victoria. This government has been in place for 11 years now, and nearly every year there have been cuts to department of agriculture staffing over that time, not only to service delivery but to key scientists as well. So the government are getting their wish. They are slowly getting rid of it. In my home town of Echuca the rumour mill is absolutely rife that the department of agriculture office in Echuca is going to close. The ABC is hunting around on that. Where there is smoke there is usually fire, so I would ask the minister at some stage to give some assurances that the department of ag office in Echuca actually will not close.

I suppose what I have just outlined is probably why a recent survey from the Victorian Farmers Federation found that nine out of 10 farmers that were surveyed do not believe that the Allan government has a positive plan for agriculture and to grow agriculture here in Victoria – a \$20 billion industry and one of the major regional employers in this state and an urban employer as well if you look at value-adding to food production here in Victoria. It is major export driver: one of the biggest users of the container port in Melbourne is the primary production of this state. And nine out of 10 farmers do not believe that the government has a positive plan for how to grow that industry or how to support that industry.

But also, more importantly – and I think this is a real concern for faith in governments, plural, but particularly in the Allan government – those same farmers do not trust the Allan government to understand their issues. They do not believe they are actually telling the truth when they talk about things. A classic example of that is a recent story in the *Weekly Times* about the renewable energy zones that the government was saying will only take up 7.9 per cent of the agricultural land here in Victoria. Farmers are saying that is a deceptive calculation and that, based on the department of agriculture's, or AgVic's, estimate of the number of hectares that are used for farming in Victoria, the REZs will actually take up something more like 17 per cent. How can you build trust if you do not use the correct figures when you are talking about things that are actually going to impact farmers? Grain grower Gerald Feeny, who I know very well, said the government is 'using deceptive and misleading language' on the impact of the renewable rollout on productive agriculture in rural communities – again that issue about deception, about misleading language.

If you want to go through and look at what the government are planning now as part of that story they are trying to spin about how renewables are going to be good for the communities they are going to be put into, they have just advertised for 13 positions for regional communication and engagement officers. Each of those people is going to be on a salary that most people in regional Victoria can only dream about. You are going to have these regional communication and engagement officers – spin doctors – go out and try and actually snow farmers that somehow this is good for them. They are going to be on a salary of between \$188,000 and \$256,000 a year to go round and actually try and convince farmers of something they know is fundamentally wrong. It is more spin doctors, and who is going to pay for those? It is power users that are going to pay for that. It will go onto everyone's power bill. For all those on the other side that think this does not really matter, your constituents' power bills will actually go up to pay for these officers.

The director of portfolio strategy and development, who is going to sit above these people that are on up to \$250,000 a year, is going to have a salary of up to \$419,000 a year. The person that is going to control these spin doctors and set the agenda for these spin doctors is going to be on a salary of \$419,000 a year. Go to a country hall. Go to the fire shed at Gooroc where Gerald Feeney lives and stand up and say, 'I'm here to convince you this is all great. I'm earning \$250,000. My boss is earning more than \$400,000. Suck it up so I can get my pay and just let the government come onto your farm and screw you over.' It is absolutely crazy that this could be happening. No wonder nine out of 10 farmers in the Victorian Farmers Federation survey do not trust the Allan government. It is just obscene what they are doing to country people.

Then you come to the Department of Economic Development, Jobs and Transport and Resources, which has gone into the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. The Department of State Development, Business and Innovation has gone into DEECA. Once, they had status in the government and meant something. If you go back to when we were in government and you had the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, there were things actually happening in country Victoria. Regional Development Victoria was a brand that had respect, had people that were dealing with communities and had people that were dealing with industry to create jobs in regional Victoria. That has all gone. There are effectively no funds for Regional Development Victoria to administer other than some small community grants.

The last one I want to finish off on – and there is a lot more I would love to talk on – is how this bill amends the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. If you think about the circular economy – how the government has talked up what the circular economy is going to do – I think everyone should be very, very concerned about the recent Auditor-General's report that was tabled in April that reveals that five years into the 10-year plan for the circular economy the government is falling short. The report found that waste diversion has stagnated at around 69 per cent, well below the interim target of 72 per cent by 2025. What has been in the media in recent times is that our tips statewide are filling up faster than everyone planned, and we are actually going to run out of tip space. The classic example is in the eastern suburbs. When the Hallam Road tip is full, all that waste is going to go across the West Gate Bridge to Ravenhall – a million tonnes a year across the West Gate Bridge on top of everything else is going to go over there as waste because that tip in the east will be full.

What is the government's solution to this? 'We'll tax people more. We'll solve the issue of not enough waste being recycled and the circular economy not working. We'll put the waste charge up from \$129 a tonne to effectively \$170 a tonne.' That went up on 1 July this year. For all those on the other side that think, 'We're solving all these problems' – the way the Allan government solves problems is to find a way to tax that issue so they can get some more money to supposedly solve it. So everyone's red-bin charge is going to go up to reflect that. Councils cannot afford to absorb it. The government is getting around their own rate cap because the bins are outside the rate cap. So we will tax, with the waste levy, more and the price of red bins will go up, but the council does not get the money – that is the catch here. That money goes straight into the coffers of the Allan Labor government and sits there in the waste levy fund, which supposedly is being spent to actually keep more waste out of the system, but as we know, it is siphoned off for departmental costs.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (11:34): That was some wild speculation from the member for Murray Plains. I would like to acknowledge the hardworking Minister for Agriculture at the table. I know how tirelessly she works for our rural and regional communities. I am very pleased to make a contribution on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, and I am going to dedicate my contribution to my great affection for the Oxford comma.

These bills obviously do not make the front page of the newspaper, but they are comparable to legislative parliamentary housekeeping – Spring Street cleaning, if you will. This housekeeping ensures that legislation across the statute book is accurate, clear and maintained in an orderly manner that is accessible to the public. Other speakers today have – well, one has – spoken on the specific

changes made by this bill, and they are comprehensive whilst being diverse in their function and purpose. Changes to the names of departments, boards, committees or other groups named in legislation have to be updated of course to ensure that the legislation remains contemporary, and ensuring that statutes are not only current but can be understood is quite important to our democracy. Open access legislation ensures that anyone can read, understand or interpret the law wherever or whenever they may need to do so. The efficacy of open access to legislation requires it to be readable not just to lawyers or to experts but to anyone who may wish to do so, and ensuring our laws are understandable and accessible helps to ensure we are not all indentured to lawyers and lawmakers to understand our democracy – not that there is anything wrong with lawyers or lawmakers. Indeed there are reasons that supersede even democratic values as to why statute repeal bills are required, and what can be more important than democracy? That is grammar, in my opinion, and poor grammar in legislation can have real legal consequences.

I am going to tell you a little bit of a story about a place called the Oakhurst Dairy in the state of Maine in the United States of America. The state of Maine has an overtime statute that is aimed at ensuring workers are properly paid for their overtime work, which is what we would refer to as penalty rates. The statute has some exemptions. One exemption is for workers who deal with perishable food. The underlying idea is that such workers should not have an incentive, such as overtime pay, to take longer than necessary to complete their work. At the time of the dispute that engulfed the Oakhurst Dairy, perishable food exemption F covered the canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storage, packing for shipment or distribution of perishable foods. The dispute was over five words at the end of the list of activities: ‘packing for shipment or distribution’. Oakhurst Dairy’s position was that those five words denoted two separate activities, ‘packing for shipment’ and ‘distribution’, so no penalty rates were owed for the packing of the dairy products or for distributing them. The Oakhurst Dairy truck drivers disagreed. Their view was that ‘packing for shipment or distribution’ was a single activity, not two activities. In effect they read the five words to mean ‘packing, whether for shipping or distribution’. This would mean that the drivers, who do no packing but plenty of distribution, would be eligible for penalty rates. The company disagreed with this interpretation, so the drivers brought an action in the US District Court for the District of Maine to recover their unpaid overtime under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act 1938 and the Maine overtime law.

The drivers’ case rested almost solely on the Oxford comma. The absence of the Oxford comma in front of ‘or distribution’, they argued, meant that the distribution was not a separate activity – that it was not the last item in the list of activities. The last item, indicated by a preceding comma, was ‘packing for shipment or distribution’. If distribution by itself was the last item, the legislature would have put a comma in front of ‘or distribution’. This case was argued through various courts for some time. Both parties’ arguments ultimately centred on the interpretation of legislative intent as well as references to legislative drafting manuals to infer meaning by the presence or lack of an Oxford comma. An appeals court decided that the case should remain open and that the ambiguity should be resolved in favour of the workers the legislation was designed to protect. Ultimately the case settled, with Oakhurst Dairy paying the drivers US\$5 million in a settlement. The Maine state legislature also then had to amend the statute to provide greater clarity and to remove ambiguity. What this case tells us is that proactive efforts to introduce certainty in legislation are necessary to avoid protracted court battles that waste the time and resources of the judiciary as well as promote uncertainty for employers, workers, unions and other associated groups.

Statute revisions, such as the one before us today, serve an important purpose. Grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, a syntax faux pas or any other drafting calamity that occurs can in fact have real-life consequences. I think we would all feel that it would be a travesty if a worker had their penalty rates compromised because of something as simple as an Oxford comma. The pen is indeed mightier than the sword, which is why when the pen is used to govern our lives, it must be done with great care. This bill reflects the hard work of the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, in consultation with departments, to ensure that our legislation is kept in good working order. I cannot imagine that filing through pieces of legislation looking for minor errors is a particularly glamorous job, so I thank all of

those who undertake this work for the betterment of our democracy as well as for the sanity of English teachers and grammar fanatics everywhere. Statute revision bills are commonplace across all jurisdictions, whether they use a parliamentary system or otherwise. Legislative housekeeping is just another part of what goes on in the busy work of running our complex societies. It is not going to make the front page of the paper or do the rounds on social media, nor is it particularly glamorous work.

The work continues. We are getting on with the job of governing, including building schools, hospitals and infrastructure, and even statute revision. The bill makes, of course, minor and technical amendments to various acts, including updating references and correcting typographical errors, and it serves the broader purpose of ensuring these acts remain relevant and accessible to the Victorian community. I commend both the Oxford comma and the bill to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (11:43): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. This bill contains mechanical amendments across a range of acts, as the previous speaker spoke to. While Labor is happy to tidy up legislation on paper, it remains unwilling to tackle the real reforms Victorians need in practice. The bill amends a number of acts. I speak, firstly, to the Youth Justice Act 2024. There are 7 million people in Victoria that we are here in this house to represent – 7 million people that the Allan Labor government is absolutely failing. While the government sees fit to spend time all day today debating things that fix up Oxford commas and grammar and punctuation through the Statute Law Revision Bill, a crime is now committed every 50 seconds in Victoria. An aggravated burglary happens in someone's home in this state every single hour. A thug breaks into someone's home whilst they are sleeping – I am speaking to the Youth Justice Act 2024 –

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the member for Warrandyte might need to be reminded of the purpose of statute law revision. I feel that she is rapidly transcending away from the purpose of this legislation today.

Tim Bull: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member referred to the element of the bill that she was making comment on. Although it has been relatively short, it has been a rather wideranging debate, and I hope that you would allow her the flexibility that has been afforded to previous speakers.

Nicole WERNER: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, you did actually rule earlier that it was a wideranging debate, as the lead speaker spoke to a number of items, which then allows for the debate to be wideranging.

Ros Spence: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, whilst it has been ruled a wideranging debate, you did bring one of our previous speakers back to the bill because they had drifted a bit, and I would say in this case there has been a very large drift.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I will rule on the point of order and the further point of order and the further, further point of order. It has been a very wideranging debate. However, I draw the member back to the bill and to the acts that are covered within this bill.

Nicole WERNER: Again, I rise to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill, if only those opposite would allow me to speak. But here we are. Why don't we just minor on the majors here while we are trying to represent the people of Victoria here in this state? But no, Labor wants to play politics. They want to talk about Oxford commas or whatever they want to talk about. They want to talk about everything but. Youth criminals are running rampant on our streets because of your weak bail laws.

Ros Spence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, again I would ask you to bring the member back to the bill. She has even said that she does not want to speak to aspects of the bill and wants to speak about something very different, so I would ask that she be brought back.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I draw the member back to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025.

Nicole WERNER: We are here speaking to the Youth Justice Act 2024 and we are speaking to the Statute Law Revision Bill, and that includes elements of this act as well as a list of other acts that I would like to speak to: the Corrections Act 1986, the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023, the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the Health Complaints Act 2016. There are a number of different acts in this, and whilst I appreciate that members on that side would prefer to speak to Oxford commas and other things, we on this side of the house would like to speak to other matters that are also in the bill. It is not just constrained to commas. The member for Murray Plains spoke to Agriculture Victoria.

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is defying your ruling. She is actually stating in her contribution that she does not wish to speak to the bill. I request that either she sit down and stop contributing or you bring her back to the bill.

Tim Bull: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask for the clock to be stopped, for a start, so this does not impinge on the speaker's rights. I will be very brief. The member on her feet, in her commentary before the point of order, said she was about to speak to other elements of the bill apart from the grammatical matters, and I would encourage you to give her the freedom to do so.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I will rule on the point of order. It has been an incredibly wideranging debate thus far. The member has been referring to other points raised within the chamber over the course of this debate. I will draw the member back to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, and I consider that my ruling.

Nicole WERNER: Well, I rise again to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill. It is I think the fifth time I have actually been point of ordered in the chamber simply for standing up for Victorians, because Labor absolutely hate the truth and they hate letting us on this side stand up for Victorians. I rise again to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill while the members on that side of the house try and compel me to speak to things that they would like for us to speak about, like Oxford commas. Well, we are here on this side, standing up for Victorians. We here on this side, like the member for Murray Plains, want to speak to the matters at hand within the legislation that Labor has failed to act upon, that Labor has failed to legislate upon. That is why we are here, and I will continue speaking, even though they would like to silence me on that side of the house. Again, the Statute Law Revision Bill –

A member interjected.

Nicole WERNER: Sure, I will continue taking interjections, if that is what they would like to do. I will continue taking interjections because I would like to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill. Again, the Youth Justice Act – let us come back to that one –

Members interjecting.

Nicole WERNER: In the 2 minutes I have left, Labor obviously have no desire to allow us to stand up for Victorians on this side of the house. All they want to do is interrupt. All they want to do is interject. All they want to do is attack the opposition while we are trying to stand up for the 7 million Victorians that we represent in this place. In case you forgot that, this is what we are here for. Returning to the Youth Justice Act, youth offences are up 18 per cent in 12 months. They are up 42 per cent in 10 years –

Ros Spence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is getting ridiculous. The member is completely ignoring your ruling. It may have been a wideranging debate, but it still needs to be within the bill that the member is speaking about. The references to the Youth Justice Act are really quite specific. Can you please ask the member to speak to the aspects of the bill related to the Youth Justice Act. If that is what she wants to talk about, fine, but there are half a dozen provisions in the bill in regard to the Youth Justice Act, none of which the member is speaking about. You cannot pick another part of the act to talk about in relation to this bill.

Jess Wilson: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, to your ruling previously, this has been an incredibly wideranging debate. The lead speaker from the opposition spoke about a variety of different factors that will then lead the debate from here on out. I ask you to take back your previous ruling.

Nicole WERNER: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like to note in this chamber today that I have been silenced time and time again.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): That is not a point of order, and the time is up.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (11:53): I just want to take a moment to bring some calm to the place. I do wish to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025 and actually speak on the bill, whether it be on Oxford commas or dots and dashes and whatnot. There has been a lot of excitement about this bill on the other side. Who would have thought the Statute Law Revision Bill would bring such excitement? But at the risk of that, I might just bring the tone down a little bit. It is that time of year where we do look to previously passed legislation and ensure –

Nicole Werner: Acting Speaker, I would just like to call quorum.

Quorum formed.

Eden FOSTER: As I mentioned, it is that time of year when we look to previously passed legislation and ensure that any errors are corrected and that language used is clear and consistent. While it is not the cutest bill – although some might try to make it quite cute and exciting – in the chamber, the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025 represents this government's commitment to transparency and accountability. While I could spend my time in the chamber going through the typographical errors that are corrected in this legislation – I could go one by one if I wanted to; I could spend the next 10 minutes listing periods and commas and spelling mistakes and other changes – I am sure that would put everyone who is present to sleep, and we cannot have that, although we are a bit hyped at the moment, just based on the previous speaker. So instead I would like to use the opportunity to speak about some of the legislation that is amended in this bill and the relevance it has to my electorate of Mulgrave.

The first piece of legislation included in the Statute Law Revision Bill that I would like to speak on is the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012. This act is a more than 230-page document that includes law on several matters relating to the regulation of fair trading practices and the protection of consumers. One of the areas covered by this legislation is the functions of VCAT and what matters it has the authority to rule on. In my electorate office consumer disputes, particularly relating to renters, are a common issue that constituents seek assistance or advice on, and I am sure this is the case for many of my colleagues across the Parliament. The Mulgrave electorate ranks 29th in percentage of renters, with almost 30 per cent of residents in my district being renters. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that supports maintaining a fair rental market. Recently this Parliament passed numerous protections to support renters, including banning no-fault evictions, banning rental bidding, increasing the required notice period for rental increases or notices to vacate from 60 to 90 days, making annual smoke alarm safety checks mandatory and granting the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria and VCAT additional powers when considering rent increase reviews. Imagine how if we had the terminology, the wording, incorrect that would really impact on such legislation. The purpose of this bill is to ensure that we are dotting our i's and crossing our t's. In this housing crisis renters face unique challenges, and many do the right thing, saving up frugally for a future down payment. But something as small as an unjustifiably high rent increase or a no-fault eviction can set them back for years, incidents that will not happen under Labor's rental reforms, passed in this Parliament, which I am proud to support.

Another piece of legislation that is amended in this bill is the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022. As somebody with a mental health background, I am very proud to be part of an Allan Labor government that is treating mental health resources as a priority. This act commenced on 1 September 2023 and is the key piece of legislation covering mental health and wellbeing support. It was designed

to improve our mental health system in line with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The royal commission recommended that this new act represent a complete reset of the legislation providing the foundation of our mental health system. It put lived experience at its centre and created the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. The commission is the independent statutory authority that holds the government to account for our mental health and wellbeing system. Its reforms include the creation of the commission, which improves the quality of our mental health resources long term under governments of any political persuasion or party.

The act also prioritises voluntary treatment over compulsory treatment wherever it is feasible. As somebody with experience in this field, I can confidently say that you simply will not get better outcomes without supporting autonomy of individuals needing treatment. Getting mental health support is not about locking people up in an asylum until they are magically fixed or imposing a treatment on somebody without their input; it is about empowering people in need to make the best decisions in their own interest. A reform of this scale is a complex undertaking, and it is entirely normal in this sort of bill for minor technical issues to be identified post enactment. This bill does not in any way alter the core principles, vision or policy intent of that groundbreaking act. We are not changing the law as it was debated and passed by this Parliament. We are instead providing the necessary technical corrections and fine-tuning that are essential to its effective and efficient operation.

Consider some of the examples that this bill addresses. It corrects minor inconsistencies in the definitions of key terms to ensure there is no legal ambiguity. It ensures that a cross-reference to a specific section within an act, such as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, is precise, preventing confusion for clinicians, for authorised psychiatrists and for the families who rely on the services provided under the act. It clarifies procedural points that were not fully resolved in the original drafting, thereby eliminating potential legal friction. These may be technical changes – they may be boring changes – but their impact is anything but. By ensuring the legal foundations are solid, we empower the new entities and roles established by the 2022 act to work as intended, we ensure that the principles of supported decision-making, the rights of individuals and the role of families and carers are upheld with absolute legal clarity, and we are solidifying the foundations upon which our new compassionate mental health system is being built. This is why this bill is important, that we look at dotting our i's and crossing our t's and the dashes and dots and commas – and I have been informed not to forget the Oxford comma – which are key to ensuring that our legislation is enacted effectively and legally.

I could go on. I could talk a little bit about, I do not know, different fonts maybe. We all have our favourite font. Mine is Arial, just to put that on the record. I do like a 16 font. I know that is quite big, but it is great on the eyes; it is easy on the eyes. I do not have to strain; I do not have to go to Specsavers or one of the optometrists for that. But this is an important bill. It is a type of bill that we regularly do to ensure that our legislation is on key and binding. I could say more, but I might leave it there. I commend this bill to the house.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (12:03): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. On its face this bill is technical in nature. It corrects typographical errors, updates cross-references, ensures that Victorian statutes reflect current Commonwealth law, updates things like Oxford commas and aligns departmental names with recent machinery-of-government changes. It introduces no new policy, no new obligations and no new costs. The act will repeal itself once its job is done, ensuring the statute book remains uncluttered. Specifically it amends over 35 acts to correct spelling, punctuation, formatting and cross-references as well as replacing references to repealed Commonwealth tribunal legislation with the Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024. We also have another 30-plus acts amended to align departmental names with current structures. The opposition will not oppose this bill, as legislative housekeeping is of course necessary. Clear, consistent statutes help courts, public servants, businesses and ordinary Victorians understand the law and navigate sophisticated government systems. It is good governance of course for Parliament to maintain a tidy statute book.

I do want to make the point very clearly, though, that the sheer scope of this bill, amending more than 70 acts across government, does epitomise the degree of chaos and inconsistency we see under the Allan Labor government: constant rebranding of departments, constant reshuffling of administrative arrangements and a litany of errors to correct. Victorians do not want endless revisions and technical clean-ups; they want competent government and real policies that deliver real results. They want this Parliament talking about more important issues. While this bill does deal with things like typographical errors, let us take this opportunity to consider the much larger errors that Labor has made in governing our state, as covered by each of these 35-plus pieces of legislation, which of course the member for Mulgrave just before on the Labor side recognised by talking broadly across these pieces of legislation about things like the housing crisis, the need for assistance for renters given rent increases, mental health support and much more, because Victorians do not need corrections to legislation as much as they need corrections to policy, corrections to priorities and corrections to leadership.

Let us start on one of these acts, the New Tax System Price Exploitation Code (Victoria) Act 1999. Victorians indeed are being exploited on taxes, with 62 new and increased taxes under this Labor government. Why is this happening? It is because of that most glaring failure, Victoria's spiralling debt. Under Labor our state is heading towards a projected net debt of \$194 billion by 2028. That is the highest debt in Victoria's history. To put it in perspective, Victorians will be paying over \$7.6 billion in interest in 2025–26 alone. By 2028 that interest bill will rise to \$10.6 billion every year. That is \$29 million just on interest being paid for by taxpayers that could be used, for example, on a school redevelopment or much more every single day. Every dollar spent servicing Labor's debt is a dollar not spent on hospitals, schools, police or infrastructure that actually serves Victorians. Victoria has become the most indebted state per capita, and we carry the lowest credit rating of any state in the nation. Standard & Poor's has already issued warnings. If fiscal discipline is not restored, things will get even worse. This is not just an accounting problem; it is a problem for every Victorian family, every small business and every community project that misses out because this government cannot manage money. The coalition, in contrast, has a clear and credible plan to tackle this debt crisis and restore economic responsibility so we do not have to continue increasing taxes and introducing new taxes like this Labor government has been doing. As referenced with respect to the New Tax System Price Exploitation Code, Victorians are indeed being exploited.

We have to look further at one of these other acts mentioned here today, the Corporations (Victoria) Act 1990. We have a government bringing in their annual statute bill, but the plight of small and medium businesses is all too real. In 2024 alone 2863 Victorian businesses entered insolvency, a 33 per cent increase year on year. Across the economy more than 129,000 businesses closed their doors. The construction, accommodation and food services sectors have been hit the hardest. Victoria recorded in fact the slowest business growth among mainland states at just 2.4 per cent in 2023–24. Over 152,000 businesses closed in that period, and Victoria recorded the highest unemployment rate at 4.6 per cent. Everywhere I go I hear the same story from small business owners. They are drowning under cost pressures, red tape and taxes. Surveys confirm that many are considering closing altogether, if indeed they have not already closed. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the biggest employers in our state, yet under this Labor government they are more stressed than ever. Recently in the Mornington electorate we have had the closure of several small businesses, many of which have been around for decades – for example, John Pugsley's Mornington Village newsagent, Mickey Blue, Peter Young Shoes, Wok on Bay, Le Feu SingToHo, Page 8, Bottega 188 – and many of these businesses report that the cost of doing business under this Labor government is a major factor contributing towards their closure. These businesses are drowning in red tape, planning fees and high state taxes. Indeed Victoria is officially the worst place in Australia to start, operate and grow a business due to high property taxes, a thicket of red tape and more. Meanwhile this government is spending this whole day correcting spelling and minor typos.

Further acts are mentioned in this Statute Law Revision Bill, such as the Corrections Act 1986, the Court Services Victoria Act 2014, the Crimes Act 1958 and other justice, corrections and crime related pieces of legislation. While this government is focusing on a legislative housekeeping bill, amending

many failures, Victorians' homes are being broken into, families are having machetes waved in their faces and their cars stolen, violent crimes and assaults are being committed and young hoodlums are running amok.

One of my team members in the last week had their car stolen. Their wheelchair was stolen, and the hand controls were ripped out of their car in the last week after four young people broke into their house. They cannot even get to where they need to go. It is not just getting a replacement car; they need hand controls installed in there. So a person who cannot walk –

Members interjecting.

Chris CREWTHER: You do not care about a person who cannot walk? It is not a joke.

Paul Mercurio: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I have been listening very carefully. The member has been germane to the bill and the acts he has been talking about within it. There is no point of order.

Chris CREWTHER: This has been a wideranging debate. The member for Mulgrave and many others have spoken on wideranging issues, as referenced in the pieces of legislation here today. As I mentioned before, I am talking with respect to acts relating to crime and going to that particular issue that I mentioned with one of my team members, who cannot get to their work helping other people with a disability because they had four young people come into their home. They are still on the run. Many of these people, as we know, have been getting away with things because of the weak bail laws in this state. They are committing crimes while on bail. We have many people getting away with things over and over and over again. Where there are little or no consequences, people go and commit more and more crimes, as we know.

We also have of course a 1100-plus police shortage across Victoria. We have a reduction in reception hours, for example, for Mornington police. Police on the front line are struggling. We know that they are putting themselves in harm's way every single day, as we have seen with what has happened this week. We have the example of what happened in Porepunkah, and my condolences go out to the family, friends and others of the two police officers who have lost their lives, as well as the other police officer who was injured. Of course the perpetrator is still on the loose, and I know that police officers are putting themselves at risk even just going out to try and find that person, because that person is reportedly heavily armed and more. This is an example of why we need more resources and funding towards police and more resources and funding towards tackling crime, because our police do such an important job. They really put themselves on the line every single day in our state.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:13): I am very pleased to rise to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. Just a couple of notes I want to make ahead of speaking to the deeper elements of the bill: I think the exception that has been taken on this side with regard to some of the commentary by the member for Warrandyte and then followed by the member for Mornington was to the premise that by seeking to adhere to the ambit of the Statute Law Revision Bill somehow we do not care about Victorian citizens and we are not representing the people of Victoria. That very negative, unwarranted and unfair inference is what actually was offensive. I have to say, because I have listened to a fair bit of the discussion today, I think that there has been a significant amount of generosity shown in terms of the wideranging elements of the debate. Just to be really clear, I think it is important to adhere to the central tenets of the bill at hand, because otherwise we are just making up rules as we go, and we are not necessarily adhering to the parliamentary code, so to speak. There is order in debate for a purpose: to make sure that we do properly scrutinise the bill at hand and that bills are given due attention as they are transacted in the chamber.

Another key element raised by the member for Footscray that I think is also important is that whilst we may make jest of grammar, full stops and otherwise, the significant ramifications of not duly revising bills to make sure that they are clear, that they are accurate and that they are accessible to the

public – and what I mean by that is that of course language changes over time and therefore inferences can change over time too – is we could have dramatic negative ramifications were we not to conduct these processes. So I do wonder whether the opposition are suggesting – and I am not suggesting all of those opposite have suggested this – that we should not revise bills, that we should just be laissez faire, let it run, not worry about contemporary language and not worry about accuracy. So there is another bow that we could draw when rebuttals from those opposite are suggesting that there is no purpose to revising bills and conducting the process that we have at hand.

The other thing is making sure that there is sufficient rigour in debate. I am not here to test the rigour of every single parliamentarian here. I would like to think that everyone is seeking to transact as best as they can with what is important or a priority to them or their respective party or if they are an individual. I think what was most offensive was implying that somehow adhering to the rules of the debate that are conventional when you are speaking to a statute law revision bill should not at the same time be inferred to mean that we do not care about Victorians and the people in the seats that we represent. So I would hope if that point was well understood by those opposite then they would find there would be a better tolerance. Although I would argue there has been significant tolerance of a wideranging debate by the government today, as I have listened to a lot of it.

That was the particular element that I found to be unhelpful, but it also implies that in particular the member for Warrandyte does not see value in drafting or the discipline of accurate drafting, that somehow that is not meaningful or purposeful or needed when you are looking at the governance and the manner in which bills are compiled. I would hate to think that that member would in any way infer that the way bills are drafted does not matter and we can just let any word rip simply for the purposes of social media or otherwise. So I hope that that is understood by those opposite, that showing some respect to the purposes or to revision of bills and otherwise, and other parliamentary processes is understood. Then I think we can progress in a more productive way in the chamber.

Now that I have transacted that element, which I felt was important in order to fully explain where my particular concern was coming from, what is paramount when we are looking at legislation that is reviewed through a statute law revision bill, however laborious it may be and may seem, is to ensure – and I am going to reiterate this point – that the statute book is accurate, clear, maintained in an orderly manner and accessible to the public. And I proffer that whilst it may not be the most riveting element of parliamentary debate, at the same time this does not and should not undermine the significance or importance of debate on these matters.

For instance, I could speak to the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. I note that elements within the Statute Law Revision Bill are pertaining to grammatical syntax and otherwise – dots and commas and making sure that such bills are accurate. But I note, for instance, that if you were going to speak to the central premise of the circular economy, noting the importance of major reform in this space in our state, with the container deposit scheme we have reached 2 billion containers returned by fellow Victorians. Now, does me speaking to that suggest also that I do not care about fellow Victorians? No, I am actually very proud of them and the achievements that they have made in our state in terms of being able to show good recycling practice and thereby reducing landfill in the long run and also in the immediate term as well, because when we repurpose parts of the various containers or otherwise that we use, this is certainly going to have an immediate but also a long-term effect that is to the betterment of all Victorians.

Another thing that is very important – ‘thing’ is probably not the best word that I could use, thinking about grammar and syntax and the calibre of language that I am using when we are speaking on this matter – is the four-bin system that is being rolled out around this state. I was on a waste inquiry a few years back when I was in the upper house, and I note that part of the imperative for changes in this space, on the one hand, was that when you have cardboard intersected by shards of glass, you actually render both unable to be repurposed. So the incentive to properly separate out things such as cardboard and glass and to have the four-bin system – on the one hand, we want to really target landfill, because we have a target of reducing landfill by 80 per cent by 2030, but also make sure that glass, which is

certainly a wonderful resource, can be appropriately repurposed as well as cardboard. Whilst change can be a little intimidating and might be uncomfortable, in the long run all Victorians will be better off when we are able to repurpose as much as possible. Of course the real driver, I should say, when we are looking at reducing waste in our state, is to not create it in the first place, but at least we have put in appropriate systems such as the container deposit scheme and the four-bin waste system, which are already having a very beneficial effect.

I know that Victorians are increasingly using the food organics and garden organics system, and it is really terrific when they can, instead of compounding landfill, which we know ultimately is an extraordinarily expensive waste stream to manage in the long run; it is toxic, it costs a bomb and it lasts way too long. Thereby they redirect their organic waste to a much better purpose, and that is that it can go through a proper sophisticated composting process. I have actually been to a factory out in Dandenong, and I saw the process by which that composted waste can be repurposed for agriculture. So ultimately we are all better off, and the more that we can do of that and do it accurately – and I am coming back to a theme of the Statute Law Revision Bill, accuracy. We certainly value that on this side of the house, and it is certainly an underpinning premise of making sure that legislation is duly reviewed for the purposes of not only accuracy but making sure that it is in line with the changing language. Language evolves over time; it is never static, and therefore terms that might have been used once upon a time – you only have to look at Shakespeare and other another plays et cetera – although still very much loved, are not necessarily used today. Just to be absolutely clear, this is why bills such as these have importance in our state.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:23): To be or not to be – that may be the question that we need to ask today. I rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025. As we have heard from a lot of members that have stood up in this place today, this is an omnibus statute law revision bill which is going to correct grammatical and typographical errors that are through a plethora of different laws that we do have here in different acts across the journey. I will focus my attention on a few of the bills that are related to crime, because I think at the moment that is affecting my community down in the Latrobe Valley the most. But there are other areas too that if I do get time to touch on I will. In making these changes, the government says we need to do this to make sure that the house is in order and there is no wriggle room that people, when reading the legislation, can use to their advantage, and we need to make sure that that is done properly.

I have had a little bit of a read of what we are trying to do here. It is like back in the day when I used to get my homework returned to me from my teacher and they used to pick up my grammatical errors, my commas and full stops and so forth. We need to make sure that we are getting that right, and it is why this needs to be done. One of the ones that I would like to pick up on, and I am not sure if the government has picked up on it – I was just thinking about it as I was sitting here, as we are looking at typographical errors. The other day we did get a release of the machete law bins, and I think there might be a decimal in the wrong place with the machete law bins, because it has come through that they are costing \$325,000, each bin, and I think it might be \$3250. Maybe we need to go back and just have a look. If you have not seen the machete bins, go and stand beside them and have a look. For them to be worth \$325,000, I do think there is an issue there somewhere.

Talking about the crime that we have at the moment in the Latrobe Valley, I want to make sure that when crime is committed and people face court, the rules and regulations and the law of the land are perfect so there is no wriggle room for anybody. I want to talk about a 91-year-old man down in Morwell. His name was Harry Wright. Harry was 91, and he was within a few days of heading away with his family on the trip of a lifetime, and unfortunately, during an aggravated burglary in his house, Harry was killed, so he never got to go on that trip. The family, obviously, are devastated. Harry was a man that was often seen down the Morwell bowling club engaging with the community, even though he was 91 years of age. We need to make sure that the perpetrators that carry out these acts are held to account. We need to make sure that if we are reading laws and revising laws to make sure that

everything is all right, they are tough laws that can show Harry and his family that we do care. I think everyone in this Parliament does care and wants to make sure that we are doing the right thing.

Another person that has been impacted, and his life was lost, was Dr Ash Gordon, and I have spoken about him a lot. The opposition leader spoke about how Dr Ash, in saving his personal assets, was stabbed 11 times in the street. As harsh as it is to actually utter those words, we need to make sure when the time comes that the next person's life does not end in that way. I know the family of Dr Ash Gordon is pushing hard constantly for changes in laws that we make here, and we need to make sure that we are doing the right thing.

In the 5 minutes I have been on my feet there would have been five criminal acts committed throughout Victoria. An average of every 50-odd seconds there is a crime being perpetrated, whether someone is breaking into someone's house or whether someone is stealing a car. We have shop owners obviously everywhere throughout metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria that are having people walking into their premises and shoplifting items. Every 50 seconds on average these acts are taking place. No wonder the cost of living is exploding here in Victoria, because it is we at the end of the day that are covering the costs of what is going on with people that are doing the wrong thing in our community. They are stealing items, and those items need to be replaced. Whether it is our insurance going up or it is the cost of actually restocking facilities, that is just the way it is. So we need to make sure that we are hard on people that are committing these crimes.

I know as the opposition we have committed to: if you break bail, you will face jail. These are cut-and-dried situations where there need to be consequences for your actions. I know in here we all want to try and do the right thing, but I am sure every single sitting MP that walks into this chamber every single day has constituents from their area that are consumed by crime, whether it is someone stealing a car or whether it is someone – from my former field – stealing a tradie's ute with his tools. The roll-on effects of that are sometimes greatly diminished in the media, where it can be people's livelihoods. That is what we need to make sure of: that if we have got people walking around on our streets wanting to commit these crimes, they need to face tough ramifications, because it is getting worse, it is not getting better. We hear the government say we are having more people go through court and being remanded, but there are a lot more that are being let out and are still on our streets, making us unsafe, whether it be down in the Latrobe Valley or whether it be in other parts of regional Victoria.

We do have issues also on our bus services and our train services. It is a conversation I often have with the Minister for Police – he has just walked in and sat at the table – having PSOs on our railway network, especially in regional Victoria, so they can help and stop the violence that does sometimes occur because of that visible presence of officers that are uniformed and people can see. We have only just had the court case of – I will call her this – the mushroom lady go through the streets of Morwell when it was held there, and having police officers on the street visibly seen by everybody cleaned up all the issues that we were seeing through Morwell. I do not want to bang on and make everybody feel that Morwell and the Latrobe Valley are the most unsafe places to come to; I can guarantee safety and invite everyone to come on down, because we have a wonderful police presence there that is keeping us safe. But these are issues that we need to fix. We need to give our police some more powers and make sure that they are doing their job and staying safe themselves while also helping us stay safe.

As I draw into my last 30 seconds, once again, I gave an update that at the 5-minute mark five criminal acts would have been committed; well, I have gone just about 10 minutes now, so at the moment there would have been 10 criminal acts on our citizens, as I said, whether it be stealing from the shops that they own, stealing a car or someone breaking into their house. So we know these revision laws need to be done.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (12:33): I also rise to make a contribution on this bill. We did hear at the top of the debate the member for Berwick take advantage of the longstanding conventions around statute law revision bills to speak for over 10 minutes on the Youth Justice Act 2024, and indeed the member for Morwell, who has just left the chamber, did the same. So I would like to take

a similar approach, though with respect to the Therapeutic Goods (Victoria) Act 2010 and specifically to the Gene Technology Act 2001. I would like to do that of course in the first instance because gene technology is a very important area, but I would also like to build on some discussions that took place at a recent event held here in the Parliament by Dr Andrew Kornberg and co-hosted by the member for Caulfield and me. Dr Kornberg was raising funds for a new genetic medicine centre at the Royal Children's Hospital. I am very grateful for those MPs who attended that event, and perhaps I will apologise in advance for repeating some of that discussion, but I do think it was an important discussion that was had. As members might know from my inaugural speech, our daughter has a degenerative genetic condition, so I suppose we have more reason than most to be interested in genetic medicines and their advancement. We are fortunate that there is an existing antisense oligonucleotide therapy and a CRISPR-based therapy, the first of which is in human trials, so there is a reason for hope.

But I think the experience of families in the US in a similar position is that the existing regulatory framework for drugs is largely built for drugs that affect very large numbers of people in very similar ways – things like amoxicillin or Prozac or metformin, so-called blockbuster drugs that apply to very large amounts of the population. The framework is not built for drugs that affect a small number of people who have a specific, genetically based condition in ways that are very different to the rest of the population. So I do just want to flag for this chamber that I think there is work coming both for our federal colleagues and for us to adjust our regulatory framework to allow for the very significant pipeline of genetic medicines that is now coming through. I think at the moment in this state we only have a handful that are actually being administered to patients. There are very promising therapies for spinal muscular atrophy and for, I think, one of the forms of muscular dystrophy. But there are thousands of these drugs in development and, as I said, work to do to get the regulatory framework right and work to do, as Dr Kornberg is doing, to get those very practical things, which I know you, Acting Speaker Walters, will appreciate. You need the right manufacturing facilities. You need pharmacies. You need cold storage. You need, of course, the wonderful staff who know how to administer these therapies. And we appreciate the work of Dr Kornberg and many others in making sure we are ready for these therapies on that front as well. It is work that will help thousands of Victorian families and thousands of Victorians with very difficult conditions, but I also think it is work we should pay attention to because of its very significant long-term potential.

We did have the opportunity in that same sitting week – I think we had a Parliamentary Friends of Transplant Australia event hosted by the member for Pascoe Vale and the member for Euroa. We had a World Hepatitis Day event hosted by the fantastic member for Melton. I do not want to take anything away from those important events, but it is notable that when you look at what is happening in genetic medicine, it is really on another level, even compared to other very important life-changing medical developments. At that particular event to which I referred, I made this remark that there is a crude way of thinking about the future of the world – that either it will be taken over by superintelligent robots built by AI or superintelligent humans that come to us via genetic modification and selection. That sounds silly. It is silly. That is a crude way of putting it, but there is a grain of truth in it.

As someone who studied computer science and has been involved in it for over 30 years, the developments in the last three years in AI are truly remarkable. For the last 75 years, effectively, software development has been a business of precision engineering. We all carry around smartphones in our pockets. The fact that they can do something like look up an address and give you the directions to it is the product of hundreds of millions of lines of very precise code put together very carefully – a bit like today's bill – by very, very intelligent programmers, and we are very grateful to them for that work. But when you load up ChatGPT on your phone, it is radically different to Instagram or Google Maps or any of your other apps. It does not do what it does because someone very carefully programmed it to do so. It does what it does because someone took a massive training dataset – of text, generally – fed all these tokens through a huge model and adjusted all the weights in that model, effectively to try and accurately generate sentences, and repeated that process for months and months. What ChatGPT does is entirely emergent from that process. People did not realise that if you did that for long enough, it would effectively give the impression that it is able to reason.

We heard on the weekend the federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers, the great federal Treasurer, talking about some of the concerns about AI and jobs, which are very real concerns. But those who caught the show might have seen a friend of mine, James Massola, a journalist, wearing a Skynet T-shirt. Those of us of a certain age will remember the *Terminator* movies in which Skynet was the fictional AI that took over the world, and he was wearing it as a bit of a joke. But if I think back, if you had asked me 10 years ago – as I say, someone with some knowledge of the area – ‘What is the chance that there will be a Skynet taking over the world?’ I would have laughed and said, ‘One in a billion; it’s just not possible.’ You would now not unreasonably say the odds are one in 100 or something. I still do not think it is likely to happen, but if you look at what large language models can do in an emergent way that we did not decide that they would do but simply observed coming out of the way in which we build them, it is something that is worthy of concern.

I do feel personally that if I get to the end of my life and AI has not taken over the world, I will actually feel a little bit of gratitude on behalf of my children. I say that because really the only other area that matches AI in terms of its significance I think technologically is genetic medicine. Of course we already have medicines that change RNA in millions of cells and alter the protein production pathway, but increasingly we have medicines that can actually change people’s DNA in millions of cells. If you look at companies like Genomic Prediction, Orchid Health, Nucleus Genomics and Herasight, these companies are now doing polygenic embryo screening in the US. It is a real thing. Our third daughter was born with the help of technologies that allowed her to not have the condition that I mentioned at the start of my contribution. These are now very real technologies. As I said at Dr Kornberg’s event, anyone in our circumstances would be very conscious of the fact that genetic mutations, which are the cornerstone of evolution, are something we have as humans been slaves to, effectively, for as long as humans have existed. Genes have randomly varied; generally it has worked out badly. Occasionally it has conferred an evolutionary advantage, those different gene patterns have fought it out and that has, in a way, shaped the way we live and love and raise our families for literally millions and millions of years. We are now at the point where potentially we are no longer enslaved by those things but have the ability to consciously make our own modifications to them, and that really will be quite extraordinary.

You will appreciate this, Acting Speaker Walters, as in fact you joined me when we studied in the United Kingdom a few years ago now. I remember speaking then to someone very heavily involved in this area, and she said to me that the first person to live a thousand years has not been born yet but people who know them have. This is not something that is 500 years away; this is something that is just a couple of generations away. I flag all that because I think that the amendments made today to the Gene Technology Act 2001 will certainly not be the last that we are making to that act. I think there is – not now and perhaps not for a few years but certainly within the parliamentary careers of those of us around the chamber today – some very significant work to do on that topic, so I am very grateful to have had the opportunity just to make that contribution on the Gene Technology Act. It is the first time I have spoken on one of these statute law revision bills, which I believe have been in the Parliament since 1916. I am grateful also for what I think is – and we have had some debate today – a good convention, that speakers may speak at some greater length about any of the acts that are set out within the bill, as others have done.

I do see the Minister for Finance is here, and I would just note that in a previous version of one of these bills he gave a most remarkable contribution that is worth checking out. Orwell, I think, was in there. Steve Jobs was in there. His opinions on Arial Narrow – some typography – were in there. I did afterwards look up the Minister for Finance’s contributions to some other of these statute law revision bills that have come through, and I can only commend them to the house. I was not there for the 2014 or 2017 versions, but I am told they were apparently done entirely without notes as well. That is a different way to approach these bills. As I say, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at some length about gene technology and grateful for those who have contributed – as the Minister for Finance has done previously and may do again today – and I commend the bill in front of us to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:43): I too rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025 before us today – a page turner, as it always is. In a previous life, much like the Minister for Finance, I have had the carriage of this bill for the opposition and had to find 30 minutes, so I am delighted today I will only have 10 minutes to speak on the Oxford comma and the importance of capitalisation in a number of sections of the acts that are being amended through this bill before us today.

Can I start by highlighting what the Leader of the Opposition spoke to this morning around the priorities of the Allan Labor government. Today we have before us a bill that seeks to make technical and minor amendments to various acts, dozens of acts, within the statute books here in Victoria. The government is dedicating hours of debate to this bill today, yet if we just cast back to yesterday when we were debating in this place an incredibly important piece of legislation around reforming Victoria's working with children check system, it would seem that those opposite are more focused on the debate we have on commas, capitalisation and where corrections need to be made in statute books than on making sure that when we are drafting laws to improve the safety of children in this state those laws are drafted so that there are not loopholes, so that there are not mistakes – so that those laws are drafted in a way that ensures children's safety comes first.

Let me return to the bill before us today, because, as I said, there are dozens of acts that this bill seeks to amend. I will turn first to the Country Fire Authority Act 1958. This is an issue that we have spoken a lot about recently in this place, because of course this is a government that taxes Victorians at any opportunity to plug their big black hole when it comes to the \$194 billion of looming debt in this state, when Victorians will be paying more than \$1.2 million an hour in interest repayments just to manage that debt. The Allan Labor government are making amendments to the CFA act today, but it is ironic that they are doing so after they have refused to listen to the thousands of CFA volunteers who in recent months have travelled to Melbourne to rally outside this place and send a very, very clear message to the government. It might not be a message that the government wants to hear – that is very, very clear, because we do not see in the bill before us today any changes that would actually make the lives of CFA volunteers any better. No, the government ignores the CFA volunteers on the Parliament steps outside, ignores the CFA volunteers who left their homes, who gave up their time to keep their communities safe and came down to Melbourne to send this government a message. Their message, for those opposite who may be unclear on what their message was when they came to the steps of Parliament on a number of occasions now, was that they do not want to be taxed by this government. They do not want a big new tax that would see \$3 billion raised simply because the Allan Labor government cannot manage money.

The fire services property levy is the big new tax grab by the Labor government, and it is going to hit every single household and every single business in this state. We know that people are receiving their rates notices in the mail at the moment. They are seeing an incredible rise in that levy, particularly those primary producers, our farmers and our CFA volunteers. This is a government who, at a time when farmers were doing it incredibly tough in one of the worst droughts on record, decided to put a great big new tax on them. How does this government get its priorities so wrong? If we look at households and commercial properties, now they are copping a 100 per cent tax increase on top of their usual rates bill. We are seeing them arriving in letterboxes right across the state. Industrial properties are now being slugged 64 per cent extra. Farmers have got a one-year reprieve – just one year: 'We'll give you a reprieve, because it's a bit too much pressure' – before they get a 150 per cent rise.

Juliana Addison interjected.

Jess WILSON: 150 per cent, member for Wendouree. This is a government that is taxing Victorian farmers, taxing CFA volunteers, taxing every Victorian household, taxing every Victorian business, because it has mismanaged the books for a decade. For a decade this government has mismanaged the budget to the extent that now farmers are paying the price, CFA volunteers are paying the price, every single household in Victoria is paying the price and every single small business is paying the price. This is a government that has its priorities so wrong.

While I am on the topic of tax increases, another amendment this bill makes is to the Transfer of Land Act 1958. We know that stamp duty is one of the biggest up-front costs faced by homebuyers in Victoria, and we know how hard it makes it, particularly for young people trying to buy their first home, to get into the property market. It also distorts the property market by discouraging people from moving, particularly downsizing, when their housing needs change. We know that Victoria's reliance on stamp duty is costing the economy up to \$5 billion a year, while the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimates that 340,000 property transactions are forgone annually because of the stamp duty burden in this state.

I have commissioned research by the Parliamentary Budget Office that shows that Victoria's reliance on property tax is the highest in the nation. Victorians are paying the highest property taxes in the nation. What does that do – it makes it harder to get into the property market, it makes it harder to buy your first home and it drives up rents. It is making housing less affordable in this state, and it is putting home ownership further and further out of reach. So the government has missed an opportunity today, when it is amending the Transfer of Land Act, to actually deal with the issue of stamp duty in this state – to deal with the fact that it has, time and time again, put up property taxes in this state. Is it any wonder that there is a housing crisis in Victoria? Is it any wonder that this government is failing to meet its own target of 80,000 new homes each and every year, because at every opportunity it is putting more taxes on property, making it harder for people not only to own their own home but to even get into the rental market.

Finally, with the time I have left, this bill today amends the Serious Offenders Act 2018 and the Youth Justice Act 2024, and it would be remiss of me not to speak to the horrific home invasion that occurred in my electorate a couple of weekends ago. At 4 am five alleged offenders broke into a home in Kew East and separated a father, a mother and grandparents who were in the house at the time and then proceeded to stab the father in the face, in the arms and in the eyes. It was an absolutely horrific incident that has scarred not only that family but every single member of my community, who are scared to be home at night in their own homes. Too often we hear, night after night, that there are attempted home invasions, that there are home invasions. We see it in the statistics, in the incredible rise in these violent crimes, not only in my electorate but right across this state. Once again, in the bill before us today, the government has failed to prioritise what needs to happen in this state – to actually take the crime crisis seriously, to fix the government's own weakened bail laws, to make sure we have got police on the beat. This is a government that has its priorities all wrong, and the bill before us today just demonstrates that.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:53): I am delighted to join the debate. At the outset I do want to place on the record my heartfelt condolences to the families of the officers who were slain yesterday as well as the broader Victoria Police family. I was the acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services during the pandemic, and I got to know Victoria Police well in that time. I can only imagine the grief that they are feeling today.

These bills are often derided as being dots-and-dashes bills. I have always taken the view, though, that language is really important. In a previous contribution I outlined to the house my loathing of Times New Roman as the font of colonisers, but I have actually done some further research, and I am wrong. Obviously, Gutenberg established the black letter font back in 1440, but I think it is important to note that we often fail to recognise the contribution that the Song dynasty made to humanity as we know it. The Song dynasty created the compass. They discovered the clock. They established public hospitals, nursing homes and public pharmacies. The Song dynasty was 400 years before the Gutenberg Bible, and Bi Sheng, in 1040, invented the first printing press. It is probably fair to say that Nicolas Jenson created the first roman typeface in 1470, and he was closer to developing a font that colonised nations. But if you look at it from the point of view of the United Kingdom, copperplate was used as a font in the UK's administrative documents. What I found fascinating is that from the mid-15th century to 1836 the chancery hand was the primary form of font used for official documentation.

I have spoken previously about how Steve Jobs dropped out of university and studied calligraphy, and it was that experience that led to the multitude of fonts being used in Apple computers. But while he did that, when I was at university in the 1990s, I studied the chancery hand, and the chancery hand is an incredibly difficult font to read; it is quite tight and prescriptive. I remember trying to transcribe the writings of Sir Julius Caesar. Sir Julius Caesar was one of the senior public servants at the time. He was a member of the House of Commons from 1589 to 1622, and he wrote – and I remember this line, which has stayed with me over the decades – ‘to dent the enemy and plant the country with good people’. He talked about that in relation to the colonisation of Northern Ireland. And so you could say in the 21st century it is a form of ethnic cleansing. You could say that so many of the troubles that beset Northern Ireland, where the Scots were transplanted into Northern Ireland, came from that proposition to dent the enemy and plant the country with good people.

I am also reminded of Gaëtan Dugas. Gaëtan Dugas was a Canadian flight attendant, and he contracted HIV/AIDS, and when they started doing contact tracing in the early 1980s, they named him patient zero. They thought he was the primary source of HIV transmission in the early 1980s, but they were wrong. It was not zero, it was O – as in the letter O – to mean that he was from outside California. So it is interesting. And the reality is that – I remember talking to Sharon Lewin about this – HIV/AIDS really was a function of the jet age. Previously if you had contracted HIV/AIDS in Africa, you could not travel, and Sharon Lewin thinks that the period from contraction to death was about 10 years. It was only with the jet age that you started to see HIV/AIDS come about. But Gaëtan Dugas was named as patient zero when really he was just from outside California.

On my loathing of Times New Roman, I loathe it. It is the most boring, bland font that could ever have been imagined. It was actually created in 1931, so it is not the progeny of colonisers, it is the progeny of the Great Depression. But what a boring font. And I have got great aspirations for the statute books of this state. We should have flexibility. We are a plural, diverse, tolerant community. Why should we subject ourselves to having statutes that are purely bound by the Times New Roman typeface? Surely we can do better. I would have thought Helvetica would be a more worthy font. Helvetica, otherwise known as Die Neue Haas Grotesk, was founded in 1957 by Max Miedinger, who was Swiss. I would have thought that we could hope for some diversity in our types of font, because I feel that Times New Roman does not meet our needs; it does not meet our aspirations as a community. I feel that really, when you come down to it, Times New Roman limits our vision and our perspicacity with its shallowness. In my first term all my speeches were written in Comic Sans, and I like a purple font; every single speech I delivered in my first term was written with Comic Sans and a purple font.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): In accordance with standing orders, the time has come for me to interrupt that exposition on typography.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Environment

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Agriculture will answer questions for the portfolios of environment and outdoor recreation and the Minister for Creative Industries will answer questions for the portfolio of tourism, sport and major events.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Early childhood education and care

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Government Services. Two weeks ago the Premier said of a man who was sacked in 2020 after an investigation found he was grooming and kissing toddlers that ‘immediate steps have been taken to cancel his working with children check’. Despite this, yesterday the minister said that ‘the legislation requires change for that to happen’. This legislation has now passed the Parliament. Will the minister guarantee that this man’s working with children check will be cancelled by the end of the day?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:03): To cut to the chase of the answer, the bill is expected to get royal assent today and will become effective as of tomorrow.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Given the delays again by this government, is the government monitoring this known threat to ensure he is not working with children?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will repeat what I said yesterday. The chamber is a chamber of debate; it is not a chamber of conversation.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:04): Families must be able to trust that their children are in a safe environment. We understand that. That is why the Premier and the ministers involved have acted quickly to have a rapid review of this sector and to put a range of changes in place.

Brad Battin: Speaker, my point of order is relevance. The question is very clear: is this person being monitored or not?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The minister has been on her feet for less than 20 seconds. She was directly addressing the question, so I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and let the minister get on with answering the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: As I said in my original answer, the legislation will come into effect as of tomorrow. I have every confidence that the Department of Government Services –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance yet again, the minister is not going in the direction of ‘Is this person being monitored?’ and trying to answer the first question. It has nothing to do with the legislation; it is to do with ‘Are they being monitored to protect children?’

The SPEAKER: I remind members of the appropriate way to raise a point of order. I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question, but I do remind the minister that the question was quite direct.

Natalie HUTCHINS: As of tomorrow, when the legislation comes into effect, this government will be taking action. My department will be taking action to suspend those we have been alerted to that need to have their working with children check revoked. We have also committed to ensuring that, if anyone is banned from having a working with children check in any other state, that is relevant to our state too.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the question is: was this person and is this person being monitored? It is not about tomorrow. Is the person currently being monitored working with children?

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: emergency services

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): These past couple of days have been among the toughest our state has known. After yesterday’s tragedy in Porepunkah, two families are now living with grief most of us just cannot imagine: the loss of people they loved most, taken by the most senseless act of violence. And just this morning outside of Geelong a school bus carrying kids on their way to school has overturned. We know that there is more information to come to light, and our thoughts are with those kids, their families, the driver and the broader school community.

In both of these tragedies, our emergency responders have been there. At the side of families, at the scene of great heartbreak, they have carried out their duties in dangerous, confronting and deeply difficult conditions. On behalf of everyone in this place I want to thank them – Victoria Police, paramedics, firefighters, SES workers and volunteers – for the courage, professionalism and great care they have shown through the most trying of circumstances. Also to the community of Porepunkah – this great community has been scarred. A long shadow is hanging over what is a beautiful, tight-knit community, a welcoming community, and our thoughts are with the community of Porepunkah.

Victoria Police, together with our emergency responders, continue to go to work, doing their job, keeping us and our community safe in the most difficult, treacherous and dangerous of circumstances. Our government and indeed this Parliament are grateful. Victorians are grateful. And as a response, too, each of us has a responsibility to walk beside them, to wrap our arms around them and to provide every support they need, not just now but for as long as it takes. This is a time of grief. It must also be a time of unity, a time to stand with these families, to stand with these communities and also to stand with every member of Victoria Police and every one of our emergency services, and that is exactly what we will do.

Early childhood education and care

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:09): My question is to the Attorney-General. Last night, when asked if the government’s working with children check bill closes the loophole identified by the Ombudsman in 2022, the minister in the other place said ‘today’s bill will not close that loophole’. After three years of inaction, why did the government not close these dangerous loopholes continuing to put children at risk?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:10): I thank the member for her question. What you have seen from this side of the house is immediate action to put the safety of children front and centre and to make immediate changes to working with children to ensure that child safety is put first. For many weeks now I have sat back here and watched those on the other side politicise every aspect of this matter.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney-General is debating the question. This is about the Ombudsman’s report three years ago.

The SPEAKER: The Attorney has been on her feet for only a short time. I will give her an opportunity to come back to the question.

Sonya KILKENNY: For several weeks now we have undertaken significant work to bring legislation into this Parliament at the first opportunity. That legislation immediately strengthens our working with children check, and I am so pleased that it received the unanimous support of all parties in this place to pass the Parliament last night – as it should do, because all of us in this place must be united in putting community safety and the safety of our children first and foremost. The legislation that passed this place yesterday is the first step in an overhaul of the child safety system, an overhaul that is being led by the recommendations of experts. It is experts that we will listen to to strengthen –

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

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BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is about closing a loophole, and the Attorney-General is going nowhere near that. I would ask you to ask the Attorney-General to come back to that.

The SPEAKER: The Attorney was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Sonya KILKENNY: As I said, this legislation is a first step in an overhaul of the child safety system that puts the protection and safety of children front and centre. Yesterday's legislation takes immediate steps to ensure that people who hold a working with children check who are under reassessment will be suspended immediately. That is a significant first step. As well, as you heard from the Minister for Government Services, the legislation will ensure that if you are banned in any state or territory in this country you will automatically be banned from working with children in Victoria. That is a commitment that was made by all attorneys-general just 10 days ago, and here we are having already introduced and passed legislation that gives effect to a commitment made 10 days ago. I would say that is pretty fast and immediate action. But as I have said, this is a first step in ensuring that we overhaul our child safety system.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:13): When the minister in the other place was asked if an individual who is under police investigation for child sexual abuse who has not had a formal charge, conviction or formal disciplinary finding can still hold an active working with children check and engage with children, the minister said those changes 'are not included in this bill'. How many of the 173 individuals the Attorney-General identified yesterday are under police investigation for child sexual abuse?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:14): As I said yesterday, we introduced and passed legislation that will ensure that any person whose working with children check is under reassessment will have that check suspended immediately. Yesterday there were 173 people in that category – that is point in time. When this legislation takes effect – following royal assent today, it takes effect tomorrow – there will be suspension of every single person who is holding a working with children check that is currently under reassessment. That suspension will take effect immediately. That is the very point of the legislation that we passed yesterday with the support, I might say, of every single member in this house, as it should be, putting child safety front and centre.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is: how many of the 173 individuals are under police investigation?

The SPEAKER: The Attorney was being relevant to the question. The Attorney has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: Victoria Police deaths

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:15): Two officers lost their lives upholding the right to serve and protect our community yesterday and another is in hospital but out of surgery. Chief Commissioner Bush visited that officer today – life-changing for that officer. Seven other officers who attended the property at Porepunkah with their colleagues are being debriefed and supported at this time. Those two fallen officers are among now 175 others who have lost their lives in the line of duty here in Victoria, and in spite of those harrowing events police members continue to hunt for an armed and dangerous offender at large to bring him into custody to ensure community safety for people in the north-east. People in the north-east can act on the chief commissioner's advice and contact 000 and Crime Stoppers if they are concerned or see anything at this time. I acknowledge the member for Ovens Valley in getting that message out to the people of his electorate.

I want to thank Chief Commissioner Bush for his leadership and Wayne Gatt, the association secretary. They were in Wangaratta last night offering welfare and support services to police members and their families, and that continues. For police ministers and chiefs in other jurisdictions, sadly, these losses

are too well understood. Every support and resource is being offered, and we thank our colleagues in other jurisdictions.

Every fortnight at the academy new graduates pass through, and they take an oath to serve and protect the community that they are members of. What would we do without them? When you see them, you should thank them. It is very inspiring to see them make that commitment on behalf of all Victorians. While they are hurting and their families are hurting, they are still on duty and working today and tonight, tomorrow and every day. I know, on behalf of everyone in this Parliament who represents communities, that we will thank our police every day for the work they do.

Retail workplace safety

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. Retail crime data shows there has been a 41 per cent increase in threatening events in Victoria, compared with a 13 per cent increase in New South Wales. Coles chief executive Leah Weckert said yesterday:

... it is definitely the case that in Victoria, retail crime is escalating more than we are seeing in other states.

Likewise Rebel Sport chief executive Anthony Heraghty said:

We've seen a disproportionate increase in Victorian stores. No doubt about that.

Why are retail workers in Victoria less safe than workers in other states?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): Retail workers most certainly do deserve to feel safe at work, and that is why later this year we will be bringing legislation to the Parliament to strengthen the protections and increase penalties for those who threaten the safety of retail workers in their workplace. This is going to be important legislation, and in anticipation perhaps we are seeing some bipartisan support for the legislation that will come before the Parliament later this year, because retail workers are an important part –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the promise for legislation was some 18 months ago. I would ask you to bring the Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think it is well understood that retail workers deserve additional protection and support, because we have seen too many of them subject to both unnecessary and disgraceful abuse simply for doing their job. That is why legislation will come before the house later this year to strengthen and support retail workers who just simply go to work to do their job.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:20): Premier, this week Reece chief executive Peter Wilson said Victoria is the 'toughest place in the country' to do business. This follows the co-founder of SEEK Paul Bassat saying:

Whenever something ... is done in this country that's anti-business, the reality is there's a good chance it is being done in Victoria.

Premier, why has this government made Victoria unsafe for workers and bad for business?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed without warning.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): The data tells us that Victoria is creating more jobs than any other state, Victoria is attracting more business investment than any other state, Victoria is building more homes than any other state –

Members interjecting.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

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The SPEAKER: Leader of the House! Leader of the Opposition! Premier! Member for Tarneit, off you go – an hour.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and Victoria has the longest unemployment streak in this country.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta Allan: I will take the ABS every day over the member for Brighton. I will take the advice of –

James Newbury: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, I just referred to ABS data.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question. The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta Allan: Again, the member for Brighton might want to desperately talk down the workers of this state who are creating the jobs, the workers of this state who are building more homes than any other state and the workers of this state who are supporting more business investment than any other state, but I will not. I will not talk down Victoria.

BrIDGET Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. Retail workers are being attacked with machetes at this point in time. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta Allan: Our economy is strong, and it is built on those working people and families who work hard every single day. Those families and working people know that our government is on their side and the Liberals just want to keep cutting their services.

Ministers statements: healthcare workers

Mary-Anne Thomas (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:23): I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Victorian healthcare workers in responding to the tragedy in Porepunkah. Our healthcare workers are there for us on our darkest days. Yesterday was one of those days, and we mourn the loss of two Victorian police officers. Our thoughts are with their families, the officer who was seriously injured and all of those who are impacted by this terrible event.

Earlier today I spoke to Ambulance Victoria CEO Jordan Emery to pass on the gratitude of all in this place to Ambulance Victoria staff who were first on scene and to all those who are delivering care during this time. This includes our helicopter emergency medical service, the MICA paramedics, including those embedded with Victoria Police, advanced life support paramedics, ambulance community officers, the regional incident management team and of course those in the AV comms and wellbeing teams. I would also like to thank Susan Plath, acting CEO of Alpine Health, and her team for the immediate assistance that they provided under very difficult circumstances. I would also like to acknowledge hospital staff across the region who have been there to provide assistance, including those at Beechworth Health, Albury Wodonga Health and Northeast Health Wangaratta. As fellow frontline workers, our healthcare staff extend their deepest sympathies to all members of Victoria Police and their family members.

As the house knows, our paramedics and our health service staff are also responding to a bus rollover out of Geelong earlier today. It is a difficult reminder that the work of our frontline healthcare workers never stops, and for that we are eternally grateful.

Medically supervised injecting facilities

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:25): My question is for the Premier. 584 people died last year from a drug overdose. Three-quarters of them were in metropolitan Melbourne. That is the highest number of deaths per year in a decade, each one a life tragically lost – a family member, a loved one. Coronial data and health experts warn that the death toll will just keep rising without urgent intervention, and that means more supervised injecting rooms. The only one in Victoria, in my electorate, has safely managed thousands of overdoses, but it is simply not enough. Medically supervised injecting centres save lives and provide pathways to recovery. We desperately need more, and we came so close to having one. With this new tragic figure – 584 people dead – will the Premier now reconsider the government’s position and open more supervised injecting rooms?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): In acknowledging the member for Richmond’s question, can I reiterate the government’s position, which was outlined in the statewide drug action plan that we released early last year. It reiterated our commitment to the medically supervised injecting facility in Richmond in acknowledgement that it saves lives. It is a facility that saves lives and is supporting many with the challenge of dealing with their drug addiction and the need to have a supported environment. But our statewide action plan went further than just the inner city. It acknowledged that people with addiction and people who need mental health and drug and alcohol support live in all parts of our state, which is why, as part of our response and to provide more supports on a statewide basis, we have moved to undertake a number of measures – for example, rolling out an increased number of naloxone vending machines. It is a life-saving treatment for people who are experiencing an overdose. Making that life-saving treatment more available statewide will save lives.

We are also increasing the support for access to pharmacotherapy services – again, an important life-saving treatment and something that needs to be supported on a statewide basis. The challenge of dealing with drug addiction is not just found in the inner city; it is found in the suburbs, in regional centres and in country towns as well. Also I am proud that we have introduced pill testing, both at fixed and mobile service sites across the state, again providing particularly young people access to not just a potentially life-saving service but also the opportunity to be educated and to receive advice as well, hopefully minimising their potentially dangerous and risk-taking behaviour. This is just some of the action that we have already taken and will continue to take on the advice of experts to ensure that we are providing appropriate treatment services on a statewide basis.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:28): I thank the Premier for her answer. Of course the Greens fully support the statewide drug strategy. I am really proud to host many of its initiatives in my own electorate. But still I regularly hear from residents who support harm reduction, who support the supervised injecting room and who are concerned about the increase in drug use and overdoses in our community and on our streets. Limited outreach services do an amazing job, but they simply cannot keep up with the scale of the problem. It is clear the drug strategy is just not enough. The pharmacotherapy hydromorphone trial, for example, is for just 30 people across the state, when deaths reached 600 last year. Premier, what modelling has the government done to show that the statewide drug strategy will actually reduce overdoses in Melbourne and across the state?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): The experts – the health experts – who work in this field every single day. I want to acknowledge, too, the leadership of the Minister for Mental Health. I only mentioned some of the initiatives that we have taken. We also introduced for the first time a chief medical officer who will be responsible for dealing with matters of addiction so that there is more support, and more coordinated support, on a statewide basis. These are just some of the measures, and we will continue to work with those drug, mental health and alcohol experts so we can continue to provide more support to people right across the state.

Ministers statements: Victoria Police deaths

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:30): I want to begin by echoing the words of the Premier and ministers: what occurred in Porepunkah yesterday was shocking, senseless and utterly heartbreaking. This morning I was in contact with the mayor of Alpine shire Cr Sarah Nicholas to offer the full support of the Victorian government at this most difficult time. The mayor has committed her council's support to helping the community recover and heal, and I acknowledge her leadership and the efforts of everyone at Alpine shire in standing with their community. Whether it is in the face of natural disasters or tragic events such as this, local councils play an integral role in offering comfort and in offering practical support.

In small towns the impact of events like this reverberates deeply. These officers were just doing their job. I know the people of Porepunkah will carry the memory of what has occurred for years to come. I well remember back in 1998 when Sergeant Gary Silk and Senior Constable Rodney Miller were tragically murdered in Moorabbin and how that incident shook my local community. Decades later the grief still lingers, and the community carries a disbelief that this could happen. No doubt the close-knit community of Porepunkah will feel the same, and our task now as a government is to support them every step of the way.

The Department of Government Services has been in contact with Alpine Shire Council since yesterday and will continue to work closely with council over the coming days to identify where additional support is needed, whether for council itself or directly to the community. This is a moment of sadness and shock but also a time when people across our state come together to support each other, and we will ensure that in the days and weeks ahead every possible support is made available. I once again extend my deepest condolences to the families affected, to Victoria Police and to the entire Alpine shire community. We stand with you in grief, and we will stand with you in recovery.

Agriculture sector

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. A recent VFF survey found nine out of 10 farmers do not believe the Allan Labor government has a positive plan to grow the agriculture industry. How is sacking more than 200 AgVic staff over the past three years alone going to help Victoria's agriculture industry grow?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:33): Thank you for the question, shadow minister. We know how important agriculture is to Victoria. I am not going to talk it down and say that it is not able to grow. That is just not right. We continue to invest in the sector. We know what it is worth not just to Victoria; it is worth a lot to the whole country. It is incredibly important, and I just reject that we are not allowing it to grow, because exactly what we are doing is ensuring that it does grow.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, you have to leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:34): The VFF survey also found those same farmers outlined their lack of trust in the Allan Labor government. Minister, is forcing unwanted renewable energy infrastructure onto farms the way you are going to rebuild trust with Victorian farmers?

The SPEAKER: It is a very tenuous link between the first question and the second. I am going to allow it because of the survey.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:35): I thank the member for Lowan for the supplementary question. Farmers are going through an incredibly difficult time right now right across the state. I am not going to add to that by talking them down –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narracan can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Narracan withdrew from the chamber.

Ros SPENCE: The current drought experience is incredibly difficult for all farmers. I understand their frustration. I understand that they are not feeling great at the moment, which is why we have a drought support package of \$144 million not just to help them now while they are in drought but to also provide some critical infrastructure –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question is not about drought support; it is about building trust and renewable energy projects being pushed onto their farms.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question.

Ros SPENCE: The tenuous link was farmer sentiment, and I am going to that in saying that I understand their current frustrations. They are doing it really tough, and this government will continue to support them whilst they go through and recover from some very difficult circumstances.

Ministers statements: Victoria Police deaths

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:36): I rise to inform the house on the support that is being provided to the school communities in north-east Victoria following yesterday's horrific events. Yesterday's events left our state and our nation shocked and the community of Porepunkah shattered. Our thoughts are with all those that have been impacted, particularly the families of the police officers that lost their lives in the line of duty.

Early this morning I spoke with Jill Gillies, the principal of Porepunkah Primary School. First and foremost, Jill wanted me to convey to the Premier, the Minister for Police and the Chief Commissioner of Police that the thoughts of the whole entire school community are with them. When the worst happens, it is so often that our educators are the best of us. Porepunkah has been around for more than 150 years. It is a close-knit community and has a very long-term teaching staff of 12. In Jill's words to me this morning, she said, 'They're a brilliant bunch of adults.' As these horrific events unfolded yesterday, Jill and her staff worked hard to make sure the students under their care were secure and safe. I want to thank Jill and her team for their calmness and their steadfast leadership.

As I said yesterday, a teacher's influence stretches far beyond the classroom and the curriculum. The students yesterday will remember that day for the rest of their lives. Often you do not remember much when you are young, but you always remember your schooldays. They will remember that in their time of need the teachers stood up, that during the lockdown and in the classrooms, their teachers – from their music teacher to their specialist teachers to their homeroom teacher to the occupational therapists – all came in and made sure throughout the school day they continued their learning. To that, I say thank you.

I also want to pay tribute to all the other schools in north-east Victoria who were also in lockdown yesterday – their procedures and their professionalism to ensure that all the students and staff were kept safe. I have assured Jill and all the staff in regional Victoria that the Department of Education stands ready to support them. This includes ongoing wellbeing support and trauma counselling for any students, staff and families that need it, as well as support from our student support services and the team at Converge, the Department of Education's wellbeing and support service provider.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:39): (1260) My question this afternoon is to the minister for public transport. Minister, could you please tell the people of Polwarth who travel on the Warrnambool V/Line service when they can expect to get an extra three carriages for the new VLocity service?

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Regular patrons of the Warrnambool V/Line service are now becoming very accustomed to having to stand from Spencer Street all the way through to Colac and beyond on some occasions because there are simply not enough seats on the train service. In fact there are some 8000 fewer seats per week now on the train service after this government and the federal government spent more than \$450 million on an upgrade. There is no reason why we cannot have the extra three train carriages that on many occasions leave Spencer Street but are then left in Geelong. Minister, when will we see the extra three carriages added to the Warrnambool service?

Clarinda electorate

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (14:40): (1261) My constituency question is for the Minister for Ageing, and my question is: what benefit will the Boollam Boollam Aged Care Centre at Monash Health Kingston Centre in Heatherton bring to my community? Earlier this month it was fantastic to have the minister out to announce the completion of the \$139.6 million Boollam Boollam Aged Care Centre, with residents set to move in next month. It is an amazing new multistorey facility that features 150 modern single rooms with private ensuite bathrooms for residents with a range of complex care needs. The rooms are warm and provide the familiarity of home. It has been designed to promote independence and mobility. Residents will also have easy access to a range of integrated healthcare supports, including dementia memory services, clinics for falls and balance, and age-appropriate mental health services.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:41): (1262) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and I am seeking clarification if the Cobrawonga beaches between Cobram and Yarrawonga will be accessible into the future. There are seven beaches on the Cobrawonga Island, which is on a stretch of the Murray River, and there is a small bridge that allows access to the island for people to camp, fish and recreate. The wooden bridge has been closed, and we await knowledge if Parks Victoria intend to shut this permanently without consultation or if there is a plan to rebuild this bridge or simply put a culvert in to regain access to the island. Parks, to me, are becoming a law unto themselves, and we are finding beaches, tracks and other bush areas being closed on a whim of Parks Victoria. Parks are for the people. We must ensure they remain open for all Victorians to use, and I seek this clarification at your earliest convenience.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:42): (1263) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport: how is the Victorian government supporting sporting clubs in the Lara electorate to boost inclusion within their clubs? I would like to acknowledge the Bell Park Dragons for the work they are doing in this space. They are a fantastic local club in the Lara electorate who have a strong reputation for on-field and off-field success, with a genuine commitment to developing players. They run a trailblazing women's program and all-abilities programs that promote inclusion, participation and belonging. I would like to acknowledge Jeff Jarvis, the longstanding president of the Bell Park Dragons. His immense contribution to the Dragons was acknowledged just last weekend. They have officially renamed their clubrooms the Jeff Jarvis Social Rooms. Congratulations, Jeff. Thank you for everything you have done for the Bell Park Dragons, and good luck to the Dragons against Leopold this weekend.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:43): (1264) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. For quite literally years I have been working with our local community and calling for the government to remove the level crossings at Wickham Road and Highett Road in the suburb of Highett in my constituency. These level crossings are a hazard to my community and cause excess congestion on our roads. Our residents are stuck at these level crossings every single day and are deeply concerned about the Graham Road development, the Gas and Fuel development, the development of the Suburban Rail Loop just down the road and the impact that will have on congestion

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in the area. Further, constituents are also concerned about the possibility of sky rail being developed instead of a rail-under-road option and not being consulted by this government. I ask: when will this government actually consult with my community and simply get on with getting this project done?

Eureka electorate

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:44): (1265) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it is about the benefits the upgrade to Sunshine station will have for constituents living in my electorate. Can the minister please update me on what the Sunshine superhub project will mean for those travelling to and from Bacchus Marsh, Ballan and Ballarat? Sunshine is a key interchange for those travelling from my electorate, and improvements there will give my community more options when deciding how to travel and where to go, whether in metropolitan Melbourne or throughout the regions. Sunshine is where my constituents will be able to change to a Metro Tunnel train when it opens later this year, connecting them to health services, universities and new employment precincts, which will build up thanks to this further investment in Melbourne's growing west and western Victoria. I look forward to hearing how the Labor government's Sunshine superhub project will benefit my community when it is completed in 2030.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:45): (1266) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: when will the promised study into road upgrades for Warragul and Drouin be completed? In the state budget \$1.9 billion was listed for another road blitz, and in the fine print right down the bottom of page 13 was the mention of Warragul and Drouin arterial road network planning works. This funding was secured following the recent federal election, and the federal government matched our policy to deliver this planning, which was supported both by me and our federal member for Monash Mary Aldred. Given the funding is in the budget in black and white, we now need to know when this planning will commence and when it will be completed to ensure there are no more delays to the critical infrastructure upgrades we so desperately need.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:46): (1267) My question is for the Minister for Education. Victorian students have achieved their strongest NAPLAN results ever. These lead the nation and are testament to our hardworking teachers and education support staff and the record investment this government has made in our schools, not just in new and upgraded buildings but in evidence-based resources that are being used in classrooms every day. I pay particular tribute to principal Dave Warren and the entire team at Bethal Primary School in Meadow Heights. As reported in the *Age* last month, over the last three years Bethal has launched itself from the bottom 10 per cent of NAPLAN performers among comparable schools to the top 10 per cent. It is always a joy to visit Bethal and to see its community in action, where explicit teaching and evidence-based learning have led to standout results. As Mr Warren told the *Age*:

... we don't believe that postcode determines destiny ...

...

When you combine that belief with passionate teaching and evidence-based practice, you can elevate student success beyond what many think is possible.

So I ask the Deputy Premier: how is the Allan Labor government's investment in evidence-based practice empowering schools like Bethal Primary to provide the best start in life to our young people?

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:47): (1268) My question is to the Minister for Police. When will the minister and the state Labor government fix the current crime crisis, particularly the brazen youth crime spree exploding right across our televisions and smartphones each day, leaving many of my Rowville electorate constituents living in fear and believing that they will become the next victims?

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Local residents are contacting my office on a daily basis to express their deep concerns about living in fear of the current spate of terrifying crimes, which are occurring daily across Melbourne suburbs, including machete attacks, violent home invasions and carjacking. One recent constituent advised me that they and their partner had been forced to move home to a more secure, gated community in the Rowville electorate since crime had become out of control so badly where they had previously lived that they no longer felt safe and feared becoming the next victims of the crime crisis.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:48): (1269) Like the member for Eureka, I too am very interested to know about the Sunshine superhub, and that is why my question for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is about the benefits the upgrade of Sunshine station will have for the good community of Wendouree. Sunshine is a key train station stop for us, and we are very excited about the upgrades and the transformation that is happening at Sunshine. Minister, what will the Sunshine superhub project deliver for the Ballarat community? We already know that Metro Tunnel is going to be stopping at Sunshine station, and that is going to be providing another gateway to Melbourne, whether it be to access Melbourne University or Peter Mac cancer centre, whether it be to access the Royal Children's Hospital, whether you are studying at the University of Melbourne, whether you want to go to the State Library or whether you want to go shopping at the amazing retail precincts.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can I raise with you questions 984; 1049, which is an adjournment matter; 1060, which is a constituency question; 1094, a constituency question; and 1120, which is a constituency question – all to the Premier and all of which still remain unanswered. I am concerned that these questions all remain unanswered by the Premier, and I am not quite sure what this house does with this delay in responding to questions.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity for a statement to the house. I ask you to hand your list to the clerks.

Martin Cameron: On a point of order, Speaker, I have the following question – only one this time – waiting on a response: question 1985 to the Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health. I ask you to follow up again.

Bills

Statute Law Revision Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:50): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, was the bill announced?

The SPEAKER: You do not have to announce it. We are continuing on, so it does not need to be reintroduced.

Motions

Budget papers 2025–26

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this house takes note of the 2025–26 budget papers.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:51): It is some time since the budget was handed down – more than three months ago now – and it is fairly easy, actually, to remember what is in it for my electorate, because it is pretty well zippo, not much at all. In all of that time not much more has happened, but we have now got the take-note motion, which allows me the opportunity to reflect on the budget. The budget title this year was ‘Focused on what matters most’, and it begins with spin. I did note at the time when the Treasurer came in from the other place to hand down her speech that her speech was considerably shorter than they had been in previous years, which to me indicated that there was no good news and she pretty well wanted to get in and get out, because that lack of depth and lack of substance in the budget was certainly glaring.

We are all aware that the budget provides for appropriations of money out of the Consolidated Fund for services and that expenditure lets us know what is happening, and as well with the parliamentary appropriations – I know we are all very keen for the Parliament to be appropriately resourced and continue to run. I do hope actually that within the parliamentary appropriations there were allowances for the carpet, which is rotting in so many places down in the lower part of the annexe. We have those dryers running sometimes 24 hours a day, and I am sure that the energy bill must be enormous to keep those blowers going. There are several spots. We have had carpet cut out in one area, and it needs to be cut out in further areas. The cost to the Parliament really must be growing, and I hope that there is enough money in the parliamentary budget appropriations for that to be dealt with.

Usually when the budget comes out people are kind of keen to look at it: ‘Where is the spending? What’s there for me, and what’s there for my constituents, more to the point? And where’s the money coming from?’ And of course we are always looking to see what else the government is doing to slug the taxpayer and what the debt is. Is that debt looking as though it is on a downward trajectory, or is it escalating? Sadly, in recent years it has continued to escalate. I think after a decade or more in office, we know that under Labor taxes are up, debt is out of control and confidence in Victoria’s finances has collapsed. I think for so long Labor has hidden its economic incompetence behind misleading forecasts, manipulated figures and indeed broken promises. The budget put down by Labor is showing that life is not going to get easier; it is actually getting harder as more Victorians are slugged. We know they cannot manage money and the budget, and it is Victorians who are paying the price.

I want to start just with a little bit on the debt and the economic overview from that time. First of all, the simple overview: Victoria is pretty well broke. The net debt is expected to reach \$194 billion by 2028–29, and that is another \$6.7 billion over last year’s forecast. I remember last year, when this became apparent, it was about \$188 billion. I thought, ‘Surely it can’t get more. The government can’t continue to borrow. They have to manage their finances better and stop the overruns and the blowouts.’ And lo and behold, that did not happen at all, and it has gone up by another \$6.7 billion. I contrast that to when the coalition were in government under former Treasurer O’Brien, the member for Malvern, where it was about \$22 billion, with a downward trajectory over the forwards. I cannot believe that we have blown out by such an extraordinary amount in 10 years.

Taxation revenue is forecast to be almost \$42 billion before growing by an average of 5 per cent each year over the forward estimates. That is an over \$2 billion increase per year. This just shows how much the Victorian government is slugging the ratepayers, the people of Victoria, so badly with taxes. I cannot believe it. The government is running a cash deficit of almost \$10 billion. They are not delivering the \$611 million surplus that was forecast. They have proven that year after year, with the average operational expenditure \$14 billion worse than forecast. And people out there know that. People out there tell me that they see now why we are not getting services, particularly in country areas, because they know that there is no money. Any surplus is on paper only because that net debt is just climbing and climbing.

Interest payments – many people have mortgages, and people are often looking at how much they are paying in interest. It is I think a particularly good measure. Well, boy, interest payments are going to hit \$10.6 billion in 2028–29, and look at what could we do with \$10.6 billion. That is \$28.9 million a day, \$1.2 million per hour. Can you imagine: with \$28.9 million a day we could have the hospital in

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Mansfield rebuilt within a week, with all of the latest mod cons to replace what is becoming an older building. They keep it in reasonably good shape so that it always looks good, and they present a terrific front. One day's worth of interest is equal to the total build of an early parenting centre.

Total expenses in last year's budget were expected to grow by just 0.2 per cent in 2025–26, but they have blown out by \$8.2 billion. What is the common theme here? Rising dollar figures, rising percentages. This was 41 times the amount forecast. Since Labor came to office government employee expenses have increased by \$20.3 billion – a 110 per cent increase. Unemployment in Victoria is forecast to be 4.75 per cent, which has worsened from the 2024–25 forecast. At the same time, the federal government is forecasting a 4.25 per cent figure for the nation. There have been 14 consecutive months of Victoria having the worst unemployment rate of any state. Things are not great at all.

I want to look at a couple of the cuts. In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) we heard that the budgets for Fire Rescue Victoria, CFA and SES have been slashed by a collective \$165 million as compared to the 2023–24 budgets. The TAC is that cash cow that they are pulling money out of, which is going into consolidated revenue. Rather than dealing with the black spots and the road toll, which is not getting better at all, they are using the TAC to pump up the budget elsewhere. The police budget – goodness me – has gone from \$4.55 billion to \$4.5 billion. However, they have been asked to find significant cuts – significant savings, I think they call it, rather than cuts. It is a nice way of decorating cuts – look for some savings. We know that the police cannot afford that. We know how under-resourced they are at the minute, with the number of shifts every week and I think about 1100 positions remaining open at the moment.

Agriculture, which is close to my heart, has been cut by \$77.6 million – almost 13 per cent. We have had a crippling drought. People might look now and say it is getting green, but the grass is not growing. We need grass to grow. Farmers are having enormous expenses to get hay or grain from around the state and from interstate, and the transport costs are quite large. Hay in particular has been very hard to get. If you have got to get a truckload of hay from Queensland, you are paying a lot of money, not just for the hay itself but also for the transport costs. The regional development funding takes a hit year on year on year – a 17 per cent hit this year, Labor slashing it from \$296 million to \$245 million. At the same time, the government have put in the emergency services tax to replace the fire services property levy, expanding it significantly beyond just emergency services, as we would know the CFA and the SES. It is covering the costs of the FRV, Triple Zero Victoria and emergency alert. There are so many areas that the government is using this new tax to pay for what should be coming out of consolidated revenue.

I want to have a look now at one of my portfolios, the family violence area. The government talk a big game here, and the government fail time after time. The numbers, the stats are going in the wrong direction in family violence and in crimes against women full stop. Reducing the funding by \$32.5 million for primary prevention, as outlined in the budget, is extraordinary. Last year they tried to talk themselves out of it in PAEC, to say that had been a carryover figure from the year before. Well, it is happening again, so I do not think it is. It is just the way that the government operate. We have too many women and too many women with children not getting the services they need in a timely manner because the budget has been cut. I hear constantly of the need to do more in the primary prevention space. Of course we have to deal with the issues as they are at hand. If people are subject to family violence here and now, we do have to have those services, but we also have to try and curb that by preventing, and that is just not happening. They have cut housing assistance by \$170 million, and that is going to impact safe housing options for victims fleeing family violence. They have delayed key housing initiatives supposedly to support victim-survivors. Refuge development projects are delayed, crisis accommodation is delayed and an Aboriginal family violence refuge in Wimmera south-east was delayed as well.

We have had \$8 million slashed from primary prevention, with \$24 million from service delivery. One of the things that bothers me greatly is that the Allan Labor government have failed organisations that do a good job. Now they have failed Safe Steps. Safe Steps needed \$3.9 million to operate 28 new

high-security crisis centre shelter units funded by the federal government. The federal government thought it was a great initiative to fund these new units for people at that really pointy end of being in need in a crisis. This shelter could accommodate nearly 1000 women and children each year, but the government could not find it within themselves to find \$3.9 million to help Safe Steps. It is not a huge sum. They have a great record. They have got the runs on the board to show how well they do. A \$30 million cut to the court system means that those that are going to court are waiting longer and sometimes being subjected to very harsh and trying conditions for that longer period of time.

Locally, not much happened in my electorate. We have had emergency services screaming for upgrades. The Mansfield SES has been on the radar for at least a decade, and the ambulance station. They are both outdated and outmoded and need to be rebuilt in the emergency services precinct that Mansfield have identified. Hoddles Creek CFA: I think maybe – this is really a maybe only of this week – things are starting to move again after such a long period of time. I know the late former captain Leonie Turner did so much to push that, and the brigade, in honouring her, are continuing to do so. We might finally get a station there. There are sporting clubs that need upgrades that were left out. Wesburn Junior Football Club at Queens Park, Healesville, are getting a little bit of money now, but not a lot. We have got school projects that we need. Wesburn Primary School have been desperate to have electronic flashing speed signs at the front of the school.

And the roads – goodness me, the roads budget. The budget revealed road patching targets have been cut by 93 per cent. Road patching is only filling in a little bit here and there. Whilst we have had some work done in my area on one part of the Melba Highway, not all of it, it is starting to fall apart again quite quickly. On the Goulburn Valley Highway between Yarck and Mansfield, there are some terrible spots at Maindample near Bonnie Doon, near Yarck, that are in great need of work. Don Valley had a real patch-up job on Don Road there. The Whittlesea-Yea Road had little bits of patching but not enough. Pedestrian safety in Hurstbridge needs to be improved. There are some simple, cheap alternatives there for the government to do things, to slow traffic, to make things slower, because Hurstbridge is a little village, and it has got a fairly main road. It is a busy road as people go through it sometimes going way too fast heading up the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road there. We have got roads in the Yarra Valley, including the Warburton Highway, that need work. The government just do a little bit and try and say they have done a great job, but it is not cutting the mustard. We know that we have been neglected, people in the country. Even as recently as this week there were newspaper articles saying that they feel left behind. I will tell you we are left behind, because all the money is going into big projects in the city, the Premier's pet projects, and not helping those in the country, where the people from the city like to go and visit and recreate.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:06): I am delighted to speak on the state budget from 2025, and I have great news compared to the member for Eildon and her contribution and the fact that she feels she did not get anything in her electorate. I am happy to say we got a lot, member for Eildon, so let me tell you what we have got.

But I do want to start on a serious note. To the children involved in the bus accident this morning in Geelong, to their families and to the school community, I pass on my sincere thoughts to all of them and for the trauma that has come from that accident this morning. I know the Geelong community will rally around those families. I did want to make a note of that.

Getting back to the motion, I think this is a really sensible budget, because what it has done is look at not cutting and slashing, as those opposite would say that we have done. It is a sensible budget to make sure that we continue to provide the things that people need in our communities. In particular addressing the cost of living has been one issue that we have focused on very strongly and for good reason, and we all know that. I think the \$100 power saving bonus, which is being promoted now, is a really important one. It does impact on families when they get those energy bills and have to find the money to pay them. I think the \$100 power saving bonus is a great thing for people in my community.

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There is \$30 million which is helping households install electric heat pumps and solar hot-water systems, and \$12 million for insulation upgrades under the Victorian energy upgrades. These are really important commitments, because I know in my community people are relying on those subsidies to get solar panels, to get hot-water services, to get the things that they need to help reduce those energy costs moving forward. They have been very welcomed in my community.

There is an \$18 million commitment to food relief organisations. Geelong Food Relief is an extraordinary organisation, and I do want to do a shout-out to Andrew and the team of volunteers there for the work they do every single day in that community. In the set-up that they have got there it is highly respectful. They value people coming in and using them and getting the food that they need but through a supermarket system. It is not about getting a bag of food and being sent on your way. It is about you being able to move through with a trolley like you would in a normal supermarket and get the food items and essentials that you need. So as I said, a huge shout-out to Andrew and his team there.

Also I think one thing that I have always really supported is Mortgage Stress Victoria – that program – and making sure that we continue to fund them, which we have with \$4 million. This is a really important program because what it is doing is keeping people who are under mortgage stress in their homes. It is avoiding homelessness in our communities. I fully support the work that they do, and the fact that they will continue to do that work over the next year is really important. We have also committed \$5.1 million to expanding access to Good Money's no-interest loans – again, another really important one in my community. I know a lot of people rely on it. When the fridge is broken down and they have got no money, they can go and get a no-interest loan to get that fridge replaced. It is similar for car repairs or any of those sorts of things that occasionally and unfortunately do come up – the washing machine, for example. Families rely on those whitegoods in particular. So to have that no-interest loan scheme continue the way it has is really fantastic for my community, that is for sure.

We also saw quite a number of specific programs funded in my community. The member for Bellarine, the member for Lara, upper house member Gayle Tierney and I advocate very strongly for our communities. Although I am the member for Geelong – everybody thinks I live in Geelong – we work very closely together to make sure that we are accommodating those organisations in our communities. To have the Strong Brother Strong Sister suicide prevention program re-funded is enormous for the Aboriginal community in Greater Geelong. They received that funding initially about four years ago to provide support after a suicide cluster of Aboriginal students in Geelong happened, and we advocated very strongly to get that funding so they could put that support program in place, and it has proven to be highly successful. I take my hat off to the work that Strong Brother Strong Sister do in our community. They provide a culturally appropriate space to access mentoring, empowerment, guidance and health and wellbeing support in a very safe environment, which is making a difference, particularly to the lives of young Aboriginal people in the Geelong community.

Again, QHub, which I have always strongly supported and which was established a couple of years ago by the Allan government, has been an incredible program that supports young LGBTQI+ community members and their families. I have been there numerous times and met not only the young people but their parents as well. I have listened to the challenges that they have gone through, but I have also heard of the importance of the QHub and the work that they do. Jack and his team there are just extraordinary in what they do, and they have been a great support for me and other members around the Geelong community. We need to continue to support them, and that is exactly what we have done in this budget.

The Geelong and District Anglers Club – it is a bit odd that they have a hall based within old Geelong West, but the reason they do is because the club is over 100 years old. I have been working with them for the last couple of years, and they need that building upgraded. We supported them to get a new roof a couple of years ago, but there are no accessible toilets and the kitchen is probably something you would see back in the 1930s, so we have made a commitment to providing funding to upgrade that hall. Let me tell you, they were so excited at the fact that we had given funding to get that hall up

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to speed. What they were wanting to do, also, was to open up to the rest of the community. I do not know about other members in this place, but I know in my community, finding community space that is affordable to have meetings or gatherings at is almost impossible in my electorate.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Chris COUZENS: I will not go to Frankston, member for Frankston. I think Geelong is better. We will enable that to happen now, because once it is upgraded and the disability access is there, people will be able to use that facility, which is really exciting for that area of Geelong West.

We also needed to provide the funding for the operations of the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, which will open early next year. If you have not driven past it yet, member for Frankston, you are welcome to. It is an extraordinary building. In fact it has been highlighted in international journals as equivalent to the Guggenheim that is being built in the US somewhere. It is an extraordinary building, and probably what makes it unique for Geelong, or for Victoria, is that it is the very first time that traditional owners have been involved right from the very beginning, right from the time that the discussions were being had about the architectural design of the building, which is quite extraordinary. They have been involved right from the beginning, as I said, and this has included the fabric of the building and how it is built and what it represents. Nyaal Banyul means, in Wadawurrung language, 'eyes to the hills', as it looks towards the You Yangs over the bay. It is an extraordinary building, but obviously it is going to require money to operate. I know, as we speak now, they are taking bookings. There are numerous – I think over 100 – bookings or inquiries that have been made, and they are now looking at staffing that, so there are many, many opportunities in my community for the Aboriginal community, for disadvantaged young people and for people with disabilities to actually be employed in that environment. We are really looking forward to that. Alongside that of course is the Crown Towers hotel, which will accommodate people when they go to the convention centre. This is a great asset for Geelong. We are really excited about that.

There have been so many projects and investments that we have made for Geelong. We also have the 10-bed youth residential mental health service.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Chris COUZENS: Yes, you have got one too, member for Frankston. That is well underway, and of course there will need to be funding to service that as well, so I am very excited to see that come through the budget recently. We are also making sure that we continue to operate all the services and fund the organisations that we have in the past, and we want to make sure that Geelong continues to be well serviced. There is always more to do, there is no doubt of that, and I will be knocking on doors for the next budget round, I can assure you.

There are so many opportunities in Geelong, and many of these projects are very much about delivering employment in my community. Over the last 10 years, with the major infrastructure projects that we have had, we have had people that started in 2015 who are still working either on the convention centre or on the women and children's hospital, which is under construction as we speak. So the construction workers have not been unemployed and all those surrounding workers that support them have not been unemployed. They are all working, and there are the local businesses surrounding them, because local procurement has been a big thing for us in Geelong. Our local businesses obviously are benefiting from all of that too. So there is a huge amount that has gone on in the Geelong community, but of course it is well deserved as well.

I do want to talk a little bit about Yoorrook and self-determination for First Peoples of this state and the commitment that we have made. Obviously the Yoorrook Justice Commission handed down its report recently, and there has been \$167 million more of funding to support self-determination and culturally responsive services across health, education, housing and more, including \$25 million to empower Aboriginal community controlled organisations supporting First Nations children and young people in the child protection and family services system. These are really important services that we

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need to continue to fund but also to improve as we move forward through the treaty process. We know very well that they are part of closing the gap, they are part of that commitment that we have made to treaty and to First Peoples of this state. There is an \$18 million pilot Aboriginal community controlled vocational education and training model to grow the First Nations VET workforce, and \$18 million for a First Nations led diversion program and legal service to reduce the over-representation of First Peoples in the criminal justice system.

We know that we need to do more in that space. We need to do more in ensuring that young Aboriginal people in particular are not being incarcerated. We know the damage that is done from that. We are not meeting our targets on closing the gap, and we admit that as a state government. But we truly believe that treaty will help close the gap, and that is the direction we need to be going. Obviously the treaty bill will come into Parliament soon, before the end of this year, and that is something that I know the First Peoples of Victoria have been looking forward to, particularly the First Peoples' Assembly with the work that they have done and people like Aunty Jill Gallagher, who helped start the process. There are so many First Nations people and leaders involved. I commend the motion to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:21): In 2014 then opposition leader Daniel Andrews announced a bold new strategy to revolutionise Victoria's education offerings. The plan: change Victoria's car numberplates to read 'The Education State'. At the time Andrews said:

Under Labor, education will be more than just a word – it will be a rock solid foundation for our economic future.

Fast-forward 11 years, and I have to say that foundation is crumbling under the weight of consistent underinvestment. In what now seems like something of an own goal for Victorian Labor, the number plate strategy did turn out to be an effective bit of marketing – so effective that every number plate now reminds us of Labor's failure to meet that ambition.

Not content with Victoria's already dubious distinction of having the lowest funded public schools in the country, this Labor government has decided to make things worse. The *Age* reported in May that in secret the Victorian Labor government quietly cut \$2.4 billion previously promised to public schools by delaying their commitment to fully funding public schools to 75 per cent of the schooling resource standard, or SRS, from 2028 to 2031. Not only did Labor delay this commitment until six years from now – or, put another way, two elections from now – but they also did this knowing their decision would deprive Victoria's schools of much-needed Commonwealth funding. The Commonwealth was prepared to provide hundreds of millions of dollars in funding if Victoria met its SRS commitments, but Labor's backflip means our schools will not see this money, so our kids are missing out twice – or is it three times? Victoria rolled over its 12-month bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth in 2024 and 2025 with no growth in its share of SRS funding, despite what was agreed in the 2019 bilateral agreement. This has further short-changed Victorian public schools by over \$500 million in each of those years. Labor's decision to delay state Gonski funding until 2031 means a child who started prep this year will not receive proper ongoing school funding until their final year of primary school, while the kids starting year 7 will miss out entirely.

While every other state and territory is busy investing more into their students' education and futures, Victorian students, who already receive less per student in state and Commonwealth funding than those in all other states and territories, are being left behind. And it is not only students who will continue to suffer under this decision. SRS funding is mostly spent on school staff, without whom of course our schools would not be able to function at all. But Victoria's teachers are the lowest paid in Australia, and midcareer and experienced teachers are exiting the profession in record numbers, citing underpay and overwork. When you fund public schools to fail the way Victorian Labor has done, you really cannot be surprised when teachers leave for private school jobs or other career paths altogether. This budget does have some money in it for teacher recruitment, with a few decent-looking initiatives mostly aimed at teaching students and early career teachers, and that is very welcome. But as some of my colleagues have said, the real shortage is of teachers willing to work in the conditions that Victoria

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is offering. What is needed is adequate funding to ensure that schools can employ enough teachers and school staff, reduce class sizes and make sure all students have sufficient resources and support for their needs, and teachers need to be able to earn a decent living wage doing what they love.

We understand the problem, and we understand that Labor is making secret decisions to delay the solution. But to add insult to injury, Labor will not even admit that they have made any changes. Since the *Age* broke this story in May the Greens have joined a chorus of voices demanding that the Labor government come clean with us about their plans for public education, but at every turn they have denied and deflected, often making poor attempts to distract us by talking about maintenance and capital works funding instead. For years I have stood here in this chamber pleading with the government to fix the crumbling heritage schools in my electorate, so I can personally attest that it does not work for the government to say, ‘Look over there,’ when what they are pointing at is something that is falling down.

In the other place my Greens colleague Katherine Copsey asked the Treasurer how much money in the budget bottom line would be stripped out of education funding over the forward estimates by delaying Gonski funding from 2028 to 2031. The Treasurer deflected by replying:

It is fortunate that the budget is only days away and will be delivered next Tuesday. I will respond to budget questions once it has been delivered.

That was perhaps clever on the government’s part. However, details about this change cannot be seen in this year’s budget. There is no line item when there is no funding. But you do not have to spend long looking to find yet another Labor disappointment, even if it is not the one you were looking for. Other education cuts are clearly visible that have not even made the news, like school enrolment based funding receiving about \$40 million less per year than was projected in last year’s budget and school-wide positive behaviour support funding roughly halved from last year’s projections.

Fortunately, for transparency’s sake, the Greens now have established a parliamentary inquiry into the impact of the SRS funding delay on Victoria’s public schools, and I thank all other members who supported the Greens motion. This inquiry will look into the following:

1. the State and Commonwealth funding per student in Victorian government schools relative to funding in other states and territories;
2. the impact of this delay on Commonwealth funding;
3. the impact of this delay and funding cut on the education of students enrolled at Victorian schools today and those starting prior to 2031;
4. the consequences of this funding cut on Victoria’s teaching and school workforce; and
5. the effect the funding cut will have on the ability of Victorian government schools to purchase educational resources, teaching materials and capital equipment, as well as fund much needed building and school grounds maintenance.

While the Greens are glad this inquiry will be going ahead and we hope it will bring some much-needed transparency to the education funding process in the state, it would all be a whole lot easier if this government could just be honest about it. But they seem more inclined to just stick a few words on a number plate and hope that is good enough. Well, it is not. It is not good enough to put out media releases spruiking our Education State while secretly cutting billions in school funding and not even having the decency to admit it. It is not good enough to deny funding to students and school staff, who are already the lowest funded in the country. And it is not good enough to pretend you just cannot do any better because you do not have the money while out of the other side of your mouth you are giving billions to prisons and luxury corporate boxes at the grand prix. Budgets are about choices, and it is clear that the Victorian government have made theirs.

Active transport is another area where I have to question Labor’s choices. It is good to see that the budget includes funds for shared-use paths around Melton, where they are no doubt much needed, but that is about it as far as I can tell from the budget. About half a per cent of the funding for public and

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active transport discussed in the minister's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee presentation was for bikes. Road maintenance was given 10 times as much funding as active transport, which is funny when you consider how much less we would have to spend on road maintenance if this government were encouraging more people onto bikes, which do not degrade roads nearly as quickly as cars.

Meanwhile, \$1 billion was allocated to level crossing removals, a fine but car-centric project that does nothing to encourage people to leave their cars at home. Sadly, that shared path from Melton to the Watergardens station is about the only piece of Victoria's vast network of planned strategic cycling corridors to be funded in this budget. These corridors are mapped out in blue and magenta on a Victorian government website, where they have sat for years – a giant, unfunded spiderweb of aspiration. This inaction allows bikelash to flourish and takes us all backwards. We recently saw an example of this when the newly elected Yarra City Council voted to make the Elizabeth Street bike lanes narrower and more dangerous, despite the fact that Elizabeth Street is identified on the state's strategic cycling corridor map. If the state government were more proactive in building the active transport infrastructure they have said they want to build, it would be harder for anti-bike councils to endanger everyday commuters in this way.

In fact I just heard that the Municipal Association of Victoria have called on the Victorian government to support the development and implementation of an investment program to ensure that strategic cycling corridors are delivered in a transparent, equitable and efficient manner. Well, that did not happen in this budget. The MAV want the state to partner with councils in more detailed planning so that bike routes connect areas of population growth, employment and public transport, and they say we need a long-term funding stream to deliver improved bike infrastructure. This sounds entirely reasonable to me, and funding should have begun in this budget. Instead it seems there is nothing in the state budget to make our roads more suitable for bikes, despite their importance as a cheap, convenient, zero-emissions mode of transport. Fear of cars remains a major barrier to many people who would otherwise use their bikes to get around, particularly women.

It is not only that this government is doing almost nothing to encourage people to take up bike riding, it is worse: it is actively taking steps to make it harder. We see this in the threat of e-bikes and e-scooters being banned from trains, a deeply misguided and ineffective overreaction to exactly one e-bike fire that occurred on a train in Victoria. Lithium ion battery fires are dangerous and should be taken seriously, but banning all e-bikes from trains is an ineffective mistake that will only serve to deter people from leaving their cars at home. A much more rational solution would be for the government to listen to coroner Audrey Jamieson's 2018 advice to better regulate noncompliant e-bikes, namely illegal home conversions and low-quality imports, which the government itself says are the source of these fire risks. But instead this government seems poised to cut off a vital mode of transport for many Victorians, whether their bike is compliant or not, while ironically increasing the overall risk of fires – just bushfires – due to emissions-induced climate change.

Recently, when I asked the government to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 to allow riders and pedestrians to be covered by the TAC for road accidents, they told me it was not possible because of – wait for it – the way the Road Safety Act is written. Well, yes, Minister, the whole point of my question was to change the way the act is written. I had to go back and tell my constituent, who had suffered severe injuries to both his body and his bank account when he swerved on his bike to avoid a pedestrian who had suddenly run onto the road, that this government just would not help him, even though he is a registered vehicle driver who has been paying into the TAC for decades.

The reality is that our transport landscape is changing for the better, and a good government would be responding and doing everything it could to make it safer and easier for people who choose active transport in their everyday lives. So where in the budget is the funding for the separated bike lanes, the redesigned intersections, the bollards and the bike-priority lights to protect riders and encourage more of us to leave our cars at home? I will just single out one intersection, which is at the south end of the incredible St Georges Road bike lane running through Northcote. There is a massive and very

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dangerous intersection forcing bike riders onto the footpath to cross the Merri Creek and rejoin the Capital City Trail. Leaving intersections like that and the lack of funding in the budget for active transport leave riders feeling demonised, unsafe and unsupported. With federal tax incentives for supersized utes and with car makers producing ever larger models of SUVs, the roads are becoming a playground for automotive dinosaurs that scare people off their bikes and endanger those who remain. I have had enough close calls with oblivious truckzilla drivers to be able to speak to this from personal experience, and my apologies to the driver of the Dodge Ram with whom I lost my temper when he tried to remove me from the planet.

I wish this government would take active transport seriously and treat it like the healthy, hip-pocket friendly, community-minded, environmentally sustainable and traffic-reducing opportunity that it is. Active transport investment also helps those who cannot ride bikes for whatever reason by reducing congestion and thinning out crowded car parks to make space for people who have no choice but to drive. Despite the growing popularity of EVs and hybrids, I fear that if the government releases the data we may see transport emissions continuing to rise just because of the sheer size of vehicles people are driving these days. At the moment, Labor's failure to harness active transport as a climate-change mitigation strategy is yet another in a long line of missed opportunities. Pathetic though this budget's funding was, it feels like we put more funding into active transport back when the minister did not have active transport in their title. I hope that that will change very soon, and I will do all that I can to make sure that it does.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (15:36): What an act to follow. It was quite the frolic into a utopian universe in part, sometimes bordering on dystopian. There were aspects of the member for Brunswick's speech, just aspects, which demonstrated a very low knowledge base, particularly those that went to the dangers of certain technologies in certain environments. I will take the opportunity offline to educate the member about said dangers at another time. His contribution was also somewhat myopic in realising the extent of this government's investment in active transport, not just through dedicated active transport streams of funding but indeed through the government's Big Build, which has delivered record investment into active transport avenues, whether that be shared user paths or dedicated cycling paths or a great number of other avenues that actively facilitate the use of different active modes of transport. Indeed in the very near future we will be launching an active transport strategy that I think will demonstrate a very clear vision about greater coordination in how we plan these things and invest in these very important connections, which aligns very closely with our housing and precincts work as well.

But I digress, and look, it is probably best to put it this way: despite any other positions that we might hold in this place, we are first and foremost all representatives of our local communities. It is our local communities who put us here, and so in that spirit I want to start by reflecting on what the budget delivered for my local community in Dandenong. As we have done as a Labor government consistently over the last roughly 11 years, we have continued to invest where it matters most, and I am very proud of what we have been able to deliver in Dandenong over that time.

This budget continues on a trajectory of investment in schools, in particular putting the finishing touches on Lyndale Secondary College, which some who have been sharing this chamber with me since 2014 might remember was a commitment that we made back in 2014 – to rebuild the entire school. It had not been touched since it was built in 1961, and we have now comprehensively rebuilt that entire school to give young people in Dandenong North the educational facilities that they truly deserve and that facilitate the very best educational outcomes – because the staff are already brilliant, the kids are already brilliant, and now they have got brilliant facilities to match. I think that is very important, so it was great to see that bit of extra funding go towards the finishing touches on that rebuild. That was \$520,000 that builds on about \$27.5 million allocated to that school for its rebuild. We also, though, importantly, got funding to support the operations of the new Dandenong tech school, which is currently under construction – another very exciting addition to our educational landscape in

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the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It is located at Chisholm TAFE, and I cannot wait to get out there and check progress later this week.

We also got some important funding to upgrade Greaves Reserve. This is important because for many local communities, their open spaces are well utilised by many in the community for many different purposes. The funding that has been allocated to Greaves, which is quite a big open space used by many different clubs but is the site of the Dandenong showgrounds as well, will ensure that there is some much-needed uplift and additions for community amenity as well. Of course alongside that sit the benefits of a number of announcements and investments in that budget that were statewide but have particular benefit for my community, in particular the power saving bonus, offering much-needed cost-of-living relief, and also that expansion of the ability to get basic health care through your local pharmacist, which I know is incredibly valuable in my local community as well. And of course there is free public transport for kids under the age of 18, which I will have a little bit more to say about shortly, and free public transport for seniors on weekends, perhaps one of the most significant cost-of-living measures that any government could introduce, particularly when you look at what that saves families – who might have one, two, three or four children – each and every year. That level of empowerment will mean young people are able to get to where they need to go, to become fluent from a very young age in our public transport network and to take that passion into adulthood.

I will park that just for now, because I wanted to reflect on the fact that 2025 is an enormous year in the transport scene. It is an enormous year because it is the year that we will switch on the Metro Tunnel project, which has of course been causing some disruption for the best part of a decade and has been a part of a vision that has existed for several decades. This has been a project that experts have been saying needed to be done for a very, very long time. The former federal Liberal government, if you remember, withdrew their investment in it. Victoria was left carrying the can, and we delivered it on our own, without a cent of federal funding. It is a project that I am so excited to be able to share with Victorians later this year.

When you switch on a project like that, you also get the opportunity to finally share with the community the benefits of that program. That is what we have been able to do through this budget in allocating \$727 million over five years to switch on those turn-up-and-go services along the Metro Tunnel corridor itself – that is, the Cranbourne and Pakenham to Sunbury corridor. But more than that, we allocated further funding of almost \$100 million to uplift services across significant parts of the rest of the corridor, because that is what the Metro Tunnel does. By taking three of our busiest lines out of the city loop, we increase the capacity of the loop and therefore we can add extra services across the network. This is an infrastructure project that is all about delivering more trains more often, not just in that corridor but across our whole network. This is a project that is all about futureproofing. We talk a lot about growth in this chamber, and it is incumbent upon any government – every government – to make sure that they are investing in the things that ultimately cater to that growth and meet expectations of livability. That is exactly what we have been doing in investing in that big vision that sits behind the Metro Tunnel. Funding of those additional services is a key part of that, but it is just the beginning, because it is not just what we can deliver from day one, it is what we can continue to deliver across our network for a very long time to come.

I just outlined that we have invested in funding for uplift to services across a number of other lines outside of that Metro Tunnel corridor itself, and that includes the Werribee, Sandringham, Craigieburn and Upfield lines and also some key regional lines, being Gippsland, Seymour and Bendigo. We are adding over 220 additional weekly services across those metro lines that I just outlined, and we are also adding up to 200 additional weekend services across the regional network progressively from this year, including 50 new or extended services on the Ararat, Ballarat, Bendigo and Warrnambool lines, which commenced on 13 April. The Gippsland line upgrade works were recently just completed, and I was thrilled to be down there announcing the completion of that very significant project and also announcing that later next month we will be able to deliver the benefits of that project in that 40-minute off-peak frequency from Traralgon to Melbourne. We are boosting the capacity of the Bendigo line,

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enabling more six-car VLocity sets to run on that corridor, which of course means moving more passengers, which is a good thing. I referenced Seymour before, and we will be adding additional am and pm peak services on that corridor as well.

We are not just focused, though, on trains, although it is a very significant part of our network. Last year we made the biggest single investment in buses in our state's history, about \$180 million in total, and this budget continues in that vein, with an investment of \$162 million over four years to expand our bus network, particularly in some of Melbourne's fastest growing areas. The time for bus is now, my team and I like saying. Buses have not always enjoyed the same popularity in Melbourne and Victoria as they have in other jurisdictions. There are reasons for that, partly because of a very developed tram network, but I think it is changing, and the role for buses, particularly as we think more closely about how we plan communities but also as we continue to build an integrated public transport system, becomes even more important, and our investment decisions I think are reflecting that.

The member for Brunswick before me talked quite a lot about active transport projects, and I am pleased that we have continued our investment in this budget on that – in particular cycling infrastructure between Melton and Weir Views but also shared user paths on the Melton Highway and the Sunbury line strategic cycling corridors. We have also been investing in measures that will make our public transport system more accessible, including tactiles. They seem quite small, and those of us who do not rely on them maybe do not even notice that they are there, but for those who do rely on them they are an incredibly important accessibility measure across our network.

Of course that active transport investment, though, cannot be seen on its own, because later this year we will be turning on the West Gate Tunnel project, and one of the subheadings of that project, if you like – it is not always the main heading, but it is certainly for me one of the proudest features of it – is that it creates about 14 kilometres of new and upgraded active transport infrastructure, including of course that beautiful bright green snake of a veloway for those keen cyclists among us, which I look forward to sharing with the Victorian public soon, but also some really important connections like the bridge over Footscray Road. These connections make active transport commuting far safer, particularly in those areas where we have got a lot of movement of heavy vehicles. This also builds on all of the active transport infrastructure that we have been able to deliver through all of our level crossing removals. That has been a key feature of pretty much every level crossing removal project that there is; it is a lens that we put on each of those projects to make sure that we are delivering maximum benefit out of them.

There are many things I could talk about, but just finally, with the couple of minutes I have got left, I want to talk about and return to one of the things I started with, which was free public transport. This is a measure that many in this chamber will appreciate the importance of. For households around our state, in a time that has been particularly stressful on household budgets, free public transport for kids under the age of 18 represents a saving of roughly \$755 per child but potentially more. That is the cost of a student pass, but if a child does not have such a student pass it can be anywhere up to about \$1,200. If you multiply that by several children, that is a significant impost on the family budget each and every year. But what we also want to do with this is make sure that we are embedding from a very young age public transport use. We want young people to know how to navigate our public transport system. We want them to feel comfortable with it. We want to build a culture of public transport use. So we are proudly opening the gates to young people, giving them the golden ticket and encouraging them to get out there and use our public transport system. We also know this takes a load off parents, not only financially, but life is a juggle – we all know that in here. Many of us have families of our own, and trying to navigate how you are going to get kids to various weekend sports or training after school or indeed to school or other extracurricular activities that they have can be really tough, so knowing that they have in their pocket that golden ticket, that youth Myki, that can help facilitate their movement to and from where they want to go independently is of great value, I know, to many families across our state and something I have been very pleased to be able to play a part in.

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Equally, free public transport for seniors anywhere in the state on weekends – why shouldn't we encourage people to get out there and enjoy our beautiful regions of Victoria? We saw that when we introduced the fare cap people voted with their feet; they got out there and they explored our regions, and people from the regions came in and explored the many great events that take place here in Melbourne, and people invested money in regional economies. That is a hugely important story to tell, and we have just added to that story with the introduction of free public transport on weekends for seniors. Of course we have also freed up the opportunity for them to take their grandkids with them, if they are under the age of 18, which I am sure will be welcome news for many parents across the state who might take that opportunity to get some time out too.

Also reflected in this budget are some of the joint investments that were made between the state and the Commonwealth, in particular the Werribee Main Road interchange and the Ballan Road intersection upgrade and, perhaps very importantly in the few seconds I have got remaining, the Sunshine superhub, a project that I could spend 15 minutes on alone – talking about the importance of that as both a stage 1 of airport rail, stage 1 of Melton electrification and of course unlocking more services for the west, both the western suburbs and the western region, given the Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong corridors come through there as well. That unlocks probably one of the biggest choke points in our network, as it is right now, untangling that 6 kilometres of track and paving the way for some very key projects for the time ahead. Labor futureproofs; the Liberals look through the rear-view mirror. That is what we have always done, and that is what they will always do.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:51): The budget that the Allan Labor government delivered in May was simply disappointing. It was confirmation of what every person in South-West Victoria already knows, and that is that this government does not understand us, it does not listen to us and, worst of all, it does not value us. Let us start with the elephant in the room. Victoria is now hurtling towards a \$200 billion debt, a number so colossal that the interest payments to pay that debt back will soon cost the state \$29 million every single day. That is \$29 million a day that could be spent on our crumbling roads, our hospitals, our regional infrastructure, our housing or supporting our farmers.

Before the 2022 election we were promised in South-West Coast by the Allan Labor government a PET scanner – a PET scanner that they said they would deliver. We are now three years on, and that very important piece of cancer diagnostic equipment is not to be seen anywhere in South-West Coast. People who need to be diagnosed with cancer urgently are having to travel long distances to places like Melbourne. Why have we not got that delivered? The government said in 2022 we would, but they are now saying, 'Oh, we're going to wait till the hospital is finished.' Well, that is probably 2027. That is totally unacceptable, especially when there is another provider in town ready to deliver that and can do so within 16 weeks. That is not another six years away; that is 16 weeks. It could have been done two years ago when they approached the government, but the government will not engage.

That is just one example of a promise that has not been delivered from 2022. Another promise that was made in 2022 is the Portland gymnastics centre. Portland Gymnastics were engaging with the local community and the basketball community, the volleyball community, the dance community and many other clubs, who were coming together to design a precinct that would benefit the whole community. Out of nowhere, without any conversation with the gymnastics community, \$1.2 million was announced to build the gymnastics shed to a better standard. The kids were nearly hitting the roof. They did need an improved gymnastics centre. But now what is transpiring is three years on and we have not got a gymnastics centre. The government have scuttled the plans for the precinct that they promised, which the community was looking to develop, and the gymnastics centre community are only going to get a lean-to – as they have put it in their words – because all the money has had to go into the bureaucratic process and has been swallowed up, and it has not delivered the centre that they were promised three years ago.

Broken promises are a signature of this government. They say one thing; they do another. We can see no better example of that than what we have seen in the last few weeks from the Minister for Roads

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and Road Safety, spruiking and boasting about fixing the roads and highlighting South-West Coast. Minister, you are not fooling anyone in South-West Coast, because we know – we drive on these roads every day. They are a dilapidated mess. They are simply dangerous. Now it is not a matter of maintenance; it is a matter of public safety. This funding that we should be getting in the regions is nowhere to be seen, but the government continue to say they are delivering, which is what the minister had the audacity to claim in the Parliament here the other day. We have got 25 per cent of the population living in regional Victoria, but we get about 11 to 13 per cent of the budget from the state delivered in infrastructure. This is a government that is so metrocentric, and it does not understand the regions.

We are seeing services in our hospitals just disappear in front of our eyes. We were promised increased health services. We actually were promised a hub, instead of losing services and being swallowed up by Barwon South West. The government have come out with more spin in my opinion, saying that we will not be swallowed up by Barwon South West; we will have a hub that is working for us. What does that look like in practice? Well, we have got a helipad that has closed down in Portland. You would think if you are 5 hours from the only hospital that can deliver things like cardiothoracic operations, like in Melbourne, you would need to have quick transport to there. Instead of actually making sure that is a priority, the government has done the exact opposite and shut the helipad down. It will not tell the community why, and it will not tell the community what the plan is. In fact it is just shamefully disrespectful about the information that the community needs, seeing as they worked hard to get that helipad put there in the first place.

We have got services disappearing in front of our eyes. You can no longer have a pacemaker put in in Warrnambool; you have to go to Geelong. In 1990 I remember looking after a man in Hamilton who was having a pacemaker. How far backward have we gone if we cannot have something like this? It is not a very complicated procedure, believe me. I was talking to a community member the other day whose child has hip dysplasia who has to travel to Geelong every fortnight for their child to be assessed. That is a pretty basic condition that is quite common in infants, but this is how bad it has got. We have got hospitals in Camperdown and in Portland that cannot have babies delivered because they are on bypass. I know the health system seems like a complicated system, so it is easy for the government to pull the wool over the community's eyes and say things are improving, but just mark my words: try and get your neuropsychology assessment done in Warrnambool; you cannot anymore in the public system. You often cannot have basic operations in Portland like an appendicectomy, which I would have thought was an expectation, like having a baby. This is a government that wants to tell us it is improving things, but what we are seeing is things deteriorating markedly.

What we see also are promises from the Labor government that they are going to deliver housing. They have been in government for 11 years, and about two years ago we saw an announcement of a plan to fix the housing crisis. That plan was to build 80,000 new homes a year with a \$5.3 billion investment. What are we seeing for that in South-West Coast? We have got more families without homes and more women and children sleeping in cars in freezing conditions after fleeing family violence. Despite the government's promise that they would not abandon women, what we are seeing is a more than 2½-year wait for housing for women who are fleeing family violence. That is an absolute disgrace. Their target of nine months cannot even be met, and they are certainly not meeting the 80,000 homes they have promised to build.

This is a government which is failing south-west Victoria. They are failing in every aspect. The people of south-west Victoria and all of regional Victoria deserve better. They deserve a government that understands them. They deserve a government that listens to them and a government that delivers for them. Sadly, we will not find that in the Labor government. But I can promise you, the people of South-West Coast, that we on this side of the house will continue to hold this government to account every single day until we have a government that puts all of Victoria first, not just metro Melbourne but the state of Victoria, from Warragul to Warrnambool and right through the regional areas as well as metro. The community of Victoria have had enough of a Labor government that continues to spin

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and does not deliver, that tells mistruths, that makes promises that are not even slightly delivered on, that says we will have a PET scanner, which we have not seen, that says we will have a gymnastics centre, which we have not seen, and that actually says we have got better roads because of the spend it has made. What we are seeing are far worse roads, increased damage to cars, lies from a government that says less cars are being damaged and mistruths that we are going to have more safe roads, which just cannot be further from the truth.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Community safety

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (16:01): The Speaker has accepted a statement from the member for Caulfield proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for its failure to address Victoria's crime crisis, leaving communities unsafe and lives at risk, that includes:

- (a) the recent spate of violent knife attacks and home invasions across Victoria;
- (b) the disturbing rise in aggravated burglaries targeting supermarkets and small businesses, causing significant damage, loss and leaving workers traumatised;
- (c) the chronic shortage of frontline police with 2000 members short, 41 police stations closed or operating at reduced hours, and police budgets cut; and
- (d) the lack of consequences for repeat violent offenders, with the government's refusal to adopt the Liberal– Nationals' 'break bail, face jail' policy.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:02): Before I make my contribution today, I just want to make a few comments about the tragic events in Porepunkah yesterday. Yesterday two police officers went to work and they did not come home, and that really does demonstrate to all of us just what a dangerous job the hardworking men and women of Victoria Police do every single day. To think that your loved ones are not coming back when you hug them on the way to work – it is an absolute tragedy, and our hearts and thoughts are with the families of those two officers but also the families of Victoria Police, who are all really hurting at the moment. When we have this happen to us in our own families, we stop and we grieve, but Victoria Police are doing their job now each and every day to keep us all safe. We thank them and all emergency service workers during this very, very difficult time for the work that they do in keeping Victorians safe.

There is nothing more important than law and order and community safety. If you are not safe in your homes, if you are not safe in your work and if you are not safe in your streets, quite frankly nothing else matters. What we have seen over a decade under the Allan Labor government is a complete failure to keep the community safe. They are a government that has literally had their heads buried in the sand, saying that there is nothing going on and everything is fine. We have heard members of Parliament even recently in the by-election in Werribee saying there is no problem with law and order in this state and everything is great. I tell you what, here is a government that quite frankly has no idea and has come to the table, dragged kicking and screaming, to finally do something. And even now, when they are doing something – too little, too late – it is still not enough. We have seen many times that we have had to put private members bills forward to get the government to actually do something, and the government just do not react.

Starting with knife crime, 665 days ago the current Leader of the Opposition, who was back then the shadow police minister, brought a private members bill before the Parliament calling for a ban of machetes – 665 days ago. And where are we? We have still got to wait for September to take the veiling off the machete bins – the \$13 million machete bins. We have got to unveil them and cut a ribbon to say they are now open for business. I tell you what, this is a government that has been sitting on their hands doing nothing. Firstly, they are spending \$13 million on 40 machete bins when they are cutting \$50 million out of the police budget – not recruiting 2000 police in a shortfall but cutting the

budgets so police have to watch every single thing that they do. They cannot even mow their lawns at the police stations because they have got no money for it.

Here is a government that just does not care, a government that is missing in action and is not spending the money needed to be able to keep the community safe, and the machete ban is another classic example. Even when we finally had machetes banned for retail stores, the government gave three days for the retailers to clear out the machetes. So what did the retailers do? They had a hot sale on them, a half-price sale – you could buy a machete for 5 bucks. Well, you can bet your bottom dollar when we work out the average of the machetes that come back into these \$13 million bins they will be worth a lot more than 5 bucks. The government would have been better off taking the \$13 million and actually having people hand them in with an offer of some kind of incentive to get the machetes back.

But that does not stop there, because everything this government has done has been a failure. Again, we were told only after we had seen the retail crime happen that something would be done. We have seen attack after attack after attack in retail stores. The IGA stores have now resorted to setting up a WhatsApp group to notify one another when there is a swarming attack of gangs into their stores. The IGA stores have said, You know what, we can't wait for police because we don't have enough of them. So what we'll do is we'll set up a WhatsApp group, and when somebody comes and hits our store we will notify the rest of the stores about what's been happening.' The IGA group have tried to meet with the government; they have tried to talk to the government. They have tried to say, 'Let's sit down and at least help us with this group to notify one another so that when police get a notification at least the rest of the stores will also be able to be notified.' You have staff traumatised in IGAs at the moment. They do not want to come to work because they do not feel safe. We have had staff with a machete at their throats – at their throats – and this government do not want to do anything. Today Jeff from IGA, one of the managing directors of IGA, who runs the WhatsApp group, reviewed the WhatsApp group over 12 months. In the 12 months, just from what has been posted in the IGA group, there have been 42 hold-ups while trading – 42 while trading – and 20 after-hours break-ins. Countless stores were forced to close because of early swarmings, and he said he closed the store twice in two weeks to try and keep the staff and customers safe. The numbers are staggering, and that does not include all the other retail outlets and petrol stations, and that is what is just on the WhatsApp group. That is just what is on the WhatsApp group, and that is just what has been happening in 12 months.

These retail stores are living in fear. They are living in fear, and what does the government say? The government says, 'Don't worry because we've got new laws coming. We have new laws coming.' Well, when are new laws coming, Premier Allan? When are they coming? On Saturday 18 May, 466 days ago, the government put out a press release that said the Allan Labor government will better protect customer-facing workers in retail stores by ensuring that we have worker protection and, get this, a worker protection consultation group – a consultation group. So we are going to have a review. We are going to sit around, sing *Kumbaya* and say, 'Don't worry, you will be safe.' It is another review. The government said the work will be done with the aim of introducing the bill by the end of 2025. Well, you know what, in 466 days have we seen anything? Have we heard anything? No. After we raised all the retail crime today, the Premier gets up in question time and says, 'Don't worry. The legislation's coming. Watch this space.' Well, you know what, that was machetes; this is what is happening in retail. But do not worry about that, because it just keeps going. The government say, 'We're getting on with it.' I think they have used a swift – was it swift, in terms of the childcare staff?

Danny O'Brien interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Rapid. There is nothing rapid about this. It is a tortoise response by the Allan Labor government. The Allan Labor government are running their reviews at tortoise pace. I tell you what, if we wait any longer we will all not be in this place.

Let me give you an example about 'Tough new laws to smoke out tobacco crime lords'. Do you know where a lot of these retail crimes are happening? Do you know why it is happening? Because these groups that are going into the stores and stealing the illegal tobacco, the young kids that are recruited,

get \$5 for a pack of cigarettes, and they get sold in the illegal tobacco shops – millions of dollars. We just saw something in terms of the underground activity with Kaz, who has been deported. He is now involved in the Iranian stuff and what we saw about the terrorist activities overnight. So there is a whole link to what is happening in the underworld and the outlawed gangs and all of this, and at the front line you have got these youth gangs being recruited by some of these individuals. So what does this government do to fix it?

What the government says is ‘Tough new laws to smoke out tobacco crime lords’. They are going to put ‘more boots on the ground’ to ‘crack down on illicit tobacco and organised crime – with massive consequences for breaking the law’. That was in November 2024, and these laws are meant to come into play in February, 446 days later. Do you think the IGA stores will be able to wait 446 days for these laws to come in? When they do come in, it will not be Victoria Police going out to the illegal tobacco stores that have bouncers out the front. No, it is going to be local councils and health inspectors. I tell you what, every single one that I have spoken to says they might be going in and checking that the IGA has a licence; they will not be checking the black market of these tobacco stores, because they have got bikies protecting them. How are we going to shut that down with 14 workers across the state to police this? This is because the government is not serious, but it continues. It continues with the rapid, rapid pace of this government. They are working so hard in law and order to keep the community safe. It is not funny. No wonder we have crime stats out of control – 17 per cent in terms of rising crime in Victoria, 18 per cent of youth crime. It is all happening under the Allan Labor government’s watch: the largest increase in youth crime since crime stats were first reported. Under this government, every 50 seconds a crime is committed and every 20 minutes a young person is knocking over and doing a violent attack on somebody in Victoria. What is the government doing about it?

On top of that we have had 97 protests in the city. We have had 500 protests across the state. Again, we saw the Albanese government mention the Iranian involvement, and the Premier got up very quickly to support the Albanese government in all the fantastic stuff that they are doing. Well, again, on Tuesday 17 December 2024: ‘Strong Action to Fight Hate and Help Victoria Heal’. A whole lot of really great stuff you are going to do here: ‘stamp out extreme and radical influences in public protests’, ‘protect the safety of religious worship for Victorians of any faith’ and ‘help multicultural organisations reject division and promote peace’. It goes on, including getting rid of face masks and also banning those people that are using terrorist organisations’ flags – all that kind of stuff. Well, that was 253 days ago. We are expecting to see something by the end of the year. But do not worry, because there is a review; there is another group that is looking into it. So when you take your kids to the city on the weekend and somebody comes and intimidates you, or you take your kids to the national gallery and you have got the extremist haters that turn up at the gallery and intimidate you, do not worry, because the government will be reviewing it. Do not worry, you will get something some time soon. What a joke of a government we have here. What an absolute joke.

This is a government that has promised that we are going to have a whole lot of police. We will hear from the government shortly about how many police we have got. Let me just pre-empt this debate, because not only are we 2000 short but we were promised in 2020 that the government would give us an additional 500 police. Well, how is that going for us? From 2020 to now we have 10 fewer police without the 500 they have promised. We should have 510 extra; we do not. So do not hear a word of it. This government says we have got more police; we have less police than we had when this government came into power. In a crime crisis there are less police.

On top of that, we have had police that have left. That is why we are 1100 police short and have 700 on WorkCover and 300 on extended sick leave, and with the EBA 300 will be leaving. And that is not all. Remember, on the trucks, on the vans of the police, there were scribbled signs that this government does not support Victoria Police. So do not let this government stand up and tell you how they support Victoria Police, because they have abandoned Victoria Police. Victoria Police are trying to do their job with one arm tied behind their backs. This government will not give them the powers; they will

not give them the support. They are absolutely abandoning Victoria Police and, importantly, abandoning Victorians, because that is what happens in terms of Victorians.

So we are short of police, and on top of that we have 41 stations that have reduced hours. Let us quickly go through these: Wyndham North, 8 hours; Avondale Heights, an 8-hour station reclassification; South Melbourne, 16 hours; Malvern, 8 hours; Bayside, 16 hours; Chelsea, 8 hours; Cheltenham, 8 hours; Mordialloc, 16 hours; Springvale, 16 hours; Carrum Downs, 8 hours; Hastings, 16 hours; Mornington, 16 hours, Sunday to Wednesday; Camberwell, 16 hours; no reception service in Clayton – it is do-it-yourself; Mount Waverley, also no reception, help yourself; Forest Hill, 16 hours; Lakes Entrance, 8 hours; Colac, 16 hours; Hamilton, 16 hours; Portland, 16 hours; Bacchus Marsh, 16 hours; Stawell, 16 hours; Southbank, 8 hours; Collingwood, 8 hours; Fitzroy, 8 hours; Williamstown, 8 hours; Keilor Downs, 8 hours; Sunbury, 16 hours; Flemington, 8 hours; Brunswick, 16 hours; Greensborough, 8 hours; Northcote, 8 hours; Reservoir, 8 hours; Eltham, 8 hours; Epping, 8 hours; Oakleigh, 16 hours; Boronia, 16 hours; Moe, 16 hours; Ararat, 16 hours; Castlemaine, 16 hours; Maryborough, 16 hours; and Kyneton, 16 hours. They are part-time, because this government is not funding Victoria Police, and as a result all Victorians feel unsafe.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:17): This is an opportunity to rise on the matter of public importance (MPI) and talk about community safety and the leadership of Victoria Police. Can I also put on the record on behalf of the government our deepest condolences for the loss of Victoria Police members Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart, who tragically lost their lives this week in the service of our state, in the service of their communities. Victoria Police have put up one of the more moving tributes on their history, their legacy and their contributions. Detective Thompson had a storied career – and reading of him being so close to retirement, this impact will be felt substantially – and decades of service, and then there was the recent service of Vadim de Waart, who was on temporary assignment in Wangaratta but had family all over the world and had so much more to live for and give and contribute. A moment like this is a time to reflect on just how fragile life is, and the senseless tragedy that we have seen will haunt Victorians for many, many years to come. We extend our sincere and deepest condolences to their families, communities and friends at this harrowing and devastating time.

It is a reminder, this MPI, of the sensitivities around community safety and the temptation of any opposition aspiring to be in government to be populist at any moment and at any time. When I read this MPI – it is very similar to one the member for Caulfield has moved before – it has in its hallmarks very politicised language around the context of community safety. We know that youth justice and challenges that we face are a national challenge for us across our nation right now. You cannot be a serious contender in trying to reduce the instances of violence in our community without also going after the causes and some of the issues that we face and confront here. I think the absence of that now from two significant MPIs from the opposition just demonstrates either their wilful lack of understanding or their wilful ignorance of some of the ways to address and lower harm in our community over time.

As Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush said – I think he eloquently articulated this recently – where young offenders are breaking the law, breaking the trust and have high-harm crimes, there must be consequences and there must be respect for our broader community, and those people need to be held to account in incarceration on remand. But the longer tail to this is to try to address some of the challenges around crime and how people find themselves to be in that moment. I see that in the prevention of family violence portfolio, in the men's behaviour change frame and the interaction through there. There can be no denial of the impact on others when people, whether they are young people or others, commit high-harm crimes. That cannot be denied, and that is why the Premier's leadership on some of the toughest bail laws in the nation, the penalties that match those and the reforms that have been undertaken, has been so significant.

In reading and preparing for this MPI, I went to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's *Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System* report. When I go to page 16, under

the Victorian section, it does stand in stark contrast that when people go through incarceration we see the challenges go even further, either while in that setting or when they are released back into the community. We know the recidivism rate is around the low-40s percentile. Minister Erdogan in the other place made the announcement around some of the interventions under the YCPP, the youth crime prevention program, which has engaged some 7500 people through intensive case management, with some \$40 million invested since 2016 into case management, coaching and mentoring and prosocial activities. It is significant reform. You cannot have the tough-on-crime narrative and then on the other side not go towards what sees people take a life of crime or has impacts there. We must have that kind of debate that needs to be had nationally, but there was an absence of that with the six-gear speech that we just heard, which we have heard before from the member for Caulfield – there was literally nothing different; it was the same speech he gave on an MPI not long ago. I was listening intently to some of the key points made, and it has the absence of where we find people.

I go now to young people in youth justice settings, and I say this in the context of having been in the mental health space as a parliamentary secretary and as Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change: 53 per cent of victims of abuse, trauma or neglect are kids in this setting; 41 per cent have a current child protection case; 49 per cent present with mental health issues; and 42 per cent have been witnesses to family violence. This is not to say that people in that setting or people who experience that will necessarily have any impact on the community, but it is to say that to lower the risk over time is to have that policy focus on how people come back into the community when they have served remand or have gone through an incarceration, because these people will be back in community at some point. I think Victorians get that discussion. They get the fact that you must have the consequences there and you must have the settings right, but it has been absent in multiple speeches over and over again since the member for Bulleen ran and the member for Hawthorn was Shadow Attorney-General, in the tough-on-crime narrative that we saw in 2017 and 2018. There has not been any narration around that whatsoever. The notion that we have not supported Victoria Police from the member for Caulfield stands in stark contrast to how we found our communities and our Victoria Police investment: some 3600 new police officers; \$1 billion in delivering new and upgraded police stations; and a significant increase in funding and support over that time.

It might be hard for those opposite to comprehend that in the context of their desire to lead the state and in seeing the Crisafulli government – and we know the member for Berwick did a trundle up the road to go and get the powwow chat. What you would never see is Premier Crisafulli chasing a crime scene. We never saw that from David Crisafulli – not once. That was probably one of the most egregious things we have seen, and it should have had more coverage. I even think the member for Berwick in that moment – in the shakiness of his press statement, as if he had run to the scene, with the shakiness in his voice – knew that he had overstepped, because when he mentioned the minister and the member for Dandenong it was one of the strangest, weirdest things, when someone had been deceased for only hours and was literally still bleeding out under a towel. It was extraordinary how that happened.

This is the nuance to this debate, because a lot of the language nationally is quite damaging and challenging to navigate. Even with the Crisafulli government – I do not even think David Crisafulli would have done that. I find it absolutely extraordinary that there has not been some inward self-reflection. Post that, it was a very delicate time at that time, wasn't it? We saw the Resolve poll numbers. We saw *The Herald Sun* backgrounding that a challenge to the member for Berwick is inevitable. We saw all that in *The Herald Sun*, so we know there was a lot of tension. We can only imagine what the text messages and the WhatsApp and Signal chats were doing. They were probably going thick and fast at that time. The member for Polwarth would have been flat chat just doing the numbers again.

But we see then the context. When you approach crime in such a politicised setting, you cannot come back from that. You cannot reverse some of the really dangerous behaviours that we have seen put forward before. I said this at the last MPI from the member for Caulfield, and I go to this point right

now: the member for Caulfield opens up the batting with a crime crisis in our state and communities feeling safe. Well, my role is in supporting the Attorney-General and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence with one of the biggest crime crises we face in our nation, and that is the murder of women where they should be safest – in their homes and by their intimate partners. The fact that a crime crisis MPI –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Polwarth intervenes, saying ‘Waiting for housing’. Literally that was the family safety package. It was to take those that use violence, people who use violence, out of those settings, and those opposite say it is not working. At least they are talking about it, because they have not even bothered to put this into an MPI, the crime crisis that we face, the breaches that are faced. Then if you go to any community safety setting – and I have gone to the one at Springvale for Greater Dandenong, and I have shared a moment with Mordialloc police with our Premier, talking about what they face – prevention of family violence and mental health can be up to 60 per cent of police work. When the member for Caulfield talks about some of the chronic shortages and impacts, you cannot for a moment disassociate the mental load and impact of Victoria Police members, many of whom experience mental health and wellbeing challenges in the work that they do, fronting up and seeing kids, women and children in absolute despair and distress at the national crisis and epidemic that we have in gendered violence.

If we are going to do a community safety MPI that narrates the Victorian crime crisis, I say to those opposite: there are a range of different settings that we need to work on, and why politicise and pull out one for a playbook that is from Queensland to try to underpin your political fortunes when those opposite, if they bothered to go to any community safety forum, the first slides that are opened up –

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: Those opposite can have a bit of a chuckle, because they said in their DNA –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The former Premier of Victoria described this crime crisis as a lawyers picnic. That was the setting for where we found ourselves in the prevention of family violence. That is how it was narrated, and now nationally I think the latest count is 44 women’s lives lost. That is the crime crisis that should also be part of it. It is not to say that there is an either/or, but when we think about the challenges that Victoria Police face, what stops divisional vans getting back on roads is spending hours around the breach setting of an intervention order or a mental health case with a police, ambulance and clinical early response unit wondering where people are going to get that mental health and wellbeing support. That is the lived experience that they tell us they are experiencing each and every day. And the reforms that come through the family safety package – when the member for Caulfield said we have done nothing, we have specialist forces in the prevention of family violence right now that would not exist had it not been for the actions taken by this Labor government in the face of a lawyers picnic and the chastisement of the royal commission. That is where we find ourselves now. So the notion that we have not done anything about crime does not stack up.

The specialist forces in Operation Trinity and Operation Alliance that go out each and every night are serving Victoria Police members in the south-east, through Operation Trinity, that staff up. Are those opposite saying that the efforts that they make that we fund and resource are nothing? Is that really their contention? Because I think when you speak to those members who staff up, who deal directly with youth offenders in that engagement, who narrated the other night at the Springvale community safety forum that the member for Mulgrave and the member for Clarinda and I were at the number of offenders that have gone down because of the assertive and progressive outreach done by Victoria Police members –

Brad Battin interjected.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

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Legislative Assembly

Wednesday 27 August 2025

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Berwick can have a bit of a narrate into the clouds. He is a bit sensitive at the moment because we called out his poor behaviour, and we will be upstanders here on decency. You will never see a Labor member of Parliament rock up –

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: Detective Thomas had not even done his press conference, and there was the member for Berwick. While we were not quite sure whether the blood was still coming out of the deceased, he was there at that moment. That is the grubbiness. That is absolutely outrageous. The most extraordinary thing is the desire for the member for Berwick to name the member for Dandenong in that. That was just the lowest road I have ever seen. Not since the narration about Fire Rescue Victoria firefighters in the Bunyip fire – I thought that was the low ebb – or the papier-mâché setting down at Nepean –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, I ask you to bring the speaker back to the MPI, please, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, come back to the MPI.

Tim RICHARDSON: We have seen a similar playbook that has played out since 2017–18. It was African gangs at that time, and we saw the narration around that. Then suddenly, on 30 November 2018, that whole narrative was no longer a feature. Are we going to, as a Parliament, front up to how we reduce the risk of crime over time and go to the heart of some of the challenges?

I go back to some of those numbers around family violence, exposure and abuse that people in youth justice are sitting with now. They will serve their sentence, and they will come back into community. And the work that Minister Erdogan is doing has not been narrated by those opposite at all. There has not been a discussion, defence or suggestion of whether that important work should be carried on, and that is where you unravel the real strategy here. It is the *Herald Sun* grab, rather than the nuance of the challenges that we face. That is what it is right now. When they narrate 60 per cent of their work in that space, we need to free up those resources. We have had significant royal commissions, and we need to bring the debate up, because that will lower crime and risk over time, not some of the populist rhetoric that we have seen in the same speech that the member for Caulfield made only about three months ago. That is the seriousness in this debate that we all need.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:32): I am pleased to rise and support the member for Caulfield on this matter of public importance, which is of critical importance to our state. But before I do I want to again express our condolences to the family and friends of the two police officers tragically murdered, allegedly, at Porepunkah yesterday, express our best wishes to the officer who was injured and more particularly extend our heartfelt thanks, warmth, condolences and support to every single member of Victoria Police, because they will have felt it today and last night, and they will be feeling it right across the state. There are few jobs where you go to work every day and such a tragic, horrific outcome as this can occur, and we know it does occur, sadly. We thank them for the work they do. We thank them for being that thin blue line between us and the criminals, the crooks, the danger, the emergencies, and for all of those things that they do. Whether they are on the beat, whether they are in the station, whether they are in prosecution or whether they are in offices around the state, we thank all our police officers for the work they do.

The event highlights the value of our police and why we need them. The government likes to pretend that when we raise issues of crime we are attacking the police. Nothing could be further from the truth, because we know, because we speak to the police all the time in our electorates, how hard they are doing it and how frustrated they are. That revolving door – they pick up criminals, they arrest them, they charge them, they book them and they are back out again days later on bail, or they get a weak sentence. They get so frustrated with it, to the extent there was a horrific incident in my electorate on the weekend where a group of youths came from outside the football ground at Sale and allegedly bashed an 18-year-old Sale player who had just played in the thirds, and police told his family they

were probably better not to press charges because, firstly, there would be repercussions for that and secondly, they were under-age, they would just get off. That is the sort of message that we are getting under this government, and the police are frustrated at that because that is the message that they are having to give. It is partly about the resources they have. I was astounded to hear in the debate on bail legislation a couple of weeks ago the member for Ripon make the comment on bail:

... it is actually our side of the chamber that is doing the most and has done the most in the past.

What they have done the most of is weakening those bail laws. Now they are trying to catch up because they have seen the crime explode across the state, and that is occurring everywhere in the state. Indeed the member for Ripon went on and said:

I have had feedback from police officers and others in Ripon that they have been more resourced in their police stations than ever before.

I do not know which police the member for Ripon might be talking to, because the ones I talk to are constantly saying how under-resourced they are. Do not even take it from me and our anecdotal evidence. Let us have a look at the crime stats. In the member for Ripon's electorate, the Pyrenees shire, the crime rate went up 35 per cent. The Ararat Rural City Council was up 25 per cent in the most recent annual figures. That just highlights the disconnect, and I know it can happen in government. When you are in government you think everything is going well, and I think that is what is happening with members opposite.

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: They do live in a bubble, member for Mildura. They are told that things are going well – ‘We’ve put all this money in’ – and get figures from the minister’s office about how much money is going in and how much is happening, and they start to believe it. That is a problem for our state, because this government has been dragged kicking and screaming even to make changes to the bail laws that it weakened in the first place, and it has still not gone far enough now with two tranches. The first tranche, apparently the toughest bail laws in Australia, were so tough that they had to come back for a second tranche and still have not gone as far as what the Liberals and Nationals have committed to do with our ‘break bail, face jail’ laws, and the police are frustrated with that, I know from my own electorate. If I go to the first point on this MPI:

(a) the recent spate of violent knife attacks and home invasions across Victoria –

David Southwick interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is across Victoria, member for Caulfield. It is not just in the urban areas. In places like Leongatha for the first time ever we are getting regular home invasions, and it is predominantly kids breaking into homes, finding keys, stealing cars and often driving them off. It is not even for crime, it is for the post and boast more often than not. That is happening repeatedly in places right around regional Victoria. I spoke to police a few months ago – and I raised this in question time last year – about a youth who had been arrested and bailed 50 times in South Gippsland, not in Melbourne, and it happens repeatedly. The second point in this MPI is:

(b) the disturbing rise in aggravated burglaries targeting supermarkets and small businesses ...

If you talk to your IGAs, your FoodWorks or those smaller supermarkets in the suburbs and in regional areas, they are feeling the pinch. I spoke to one a couple of months ago who said he is just so sick and tired of dealing with offensive people but actual criminals as well who are literally walking into his store, grabbing what they want and walking out. He says, ‘What do I do? I have to tell my staff not to challenge them. You’ve got to look after your staff. You’ve got to look after their safety.’ But the brazenness of this, which is occurring time and time again, is costing Victorians money, is costing businesses money and is costing the community safety feel. When people hear that, they say this is terrible. Likewise the Sale Business and Tourism Association had a community meeting a couple of weeks ago. Sadly, Parliament was sitting. I could not make it, but that was about the level of shoplifting

and assaults on the street in a place like Sale. It is a great frustration of our communities right around the place.

Point (c) is the chronic shortage of frontline police. As the member for Caulfield pointed out, we currently have 1100 vacancies. We have got 700 officers off on WorkCover, 300 on extended sick leave and another 300 expected to go under the new EBA. This is at a time when the government promised at the last election an additional 500 officers, and we have actually gone backwards. When the member for Ripon says they are better resourced than ever, I do not know how that can possibly be the case in terms of the numbers of police. I talk to my officers. They often say, 'On paper we've probably got about the right number.' But once you take out a few on WorkCover, a couple on maternity leave, two or three on secondment to somewhere else and the rest on leave – some on long service leave – suddenly they are down 10 or 15 across a local government area. They do not get replaced, so they simply do not have the resources that they require.

Finally, the one that I think really hits home for so many people I speak to – and I am doing listening posts and mobile office visits around my electorate and around regional Victoria – is the lack of consequences. That is the big, big thing that people are so frustrated about, that they see people repeatedly. We know it is a small cohort. Indeed the statistics show children aged 10 to 17 make up just 13 per cent of all offenders, but they were responsible for 63 per cent of robberies, 46 per cent of aggravated burglaries and 20 per cent of car thefts. That is a very small cohort repeatedly doing the same thing because there are no consequences, and that is the issue that this government failed to understand when it weakened the bail laws several years ago. I remember standing literally right here and speaking next to the member for Malvern, who said we supported some of what the government was doing, but it was going too far and it would suffer the consequences in terms of the crime rate. And it absolutely has. But the issue is that there are not enough consequences for those people doing the wrong thing.

I will take up what the member for Mordialloc said. We absolutely understand that we need to target both ends, and we need to divert people, particularly young people, away from a life of crime. It is not just 'lock them up and leave them'. We absolutely get that, and we will have policies to that effect to make sure that we actually can get people on the straight and narrow and that we can address those causes of crime. But at the moment this government's policies after 11 years have absolutely failed Victorians, and we are seeing crimes skyrocket. We are seeing Victorians feeling unsafe in their homes. We are seeing Victorians feeling unsafe on the streets and in their cars because of the number of home invasions, carjackings and assaults on the street. Government's job is to keep the people safe, and on that score this government is failing.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:42): Just before I get into the debate on the matter of public importance (MPI) I would like to acknowledge, as others have, Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart. I would like to acknowledge their contribution to Victoria, and in particular the communities that they served, and acknowledge their contribution to Victoria Police. No family expects to get that call on any given day that their loved one is not coming home because they have died at work, and this has obviously happened in particularly egregious circumstances. I would just like to send my condolences to their families, to their loved ones, to their friends and to the communities out there in the north-east. I also acknowledge the member for Ovens Valley, who is in the chamber at the moment, who will be dealing with a lot of this trauma today and in the coming days from those communities out in the north-east that he represents.

I am up to make a contribution on this MPI. I will not bother reading out the contents of the MPI, because we have seen it all before. We have seen an almost identical MPI, and we see these sorts of words and the contents of this MPI every single week that we walk into this place. I will echo the sentiments of the member for Mordialloc: this MPI offers nothing in the way of a solution – nothing. I understand that policy development is not their long suit, but to come in here today of all days with nothing more than an MPI that allows members of the opposition to stand up and sledge the government is not helping anyone. It does not help keep the community safe. It does not help the

trauma that some of those in the community are feeling. It does not help the loved ones of those victims of crime. It offers absolutely no solution. Those opposite on this issue are all politics and no policy. I have said it before on this issue: they are all politics and no policy. They do not want to work in a bipartisan nature with the government to help keep the community safe.

This government, the Allan Labor government, has been and is pulling every lever available to it to keep the community safe, including in the prevention of family violence, which we have worked diligently on since coming to government in 2014, because we know when it comes to those crime stats over the previous 10 years, particularly in a place like Wyndham, which I represent, one of the fastest growing crimes is domestic violence, family violence, and the work that we have done in that space to try and keep women in particular in those settings safe has been absolutely significant. We have seen now two tranches of bail reform to make sure that when judges are making decisions on bail community safety is at the forefront of every decision that they make. We have banned machetes in the previous month or so, and we have a system, an amnesty, where people that are in possession of those weapons can hand them in without facing retribution or without facing charges from Victoria Police. I would implore anybody in my community or any community that has a machete to please put them in one of those bins that they will find in various locations within their community.

Whilst we have been doing that, those opposite have been playing politics at every single turn. They talked about a machete ban for ages. Then, when we come up with one, they moved the goalposts. We could amend that piece of legislation 100 times, and 100 times they would say no. They have no interest in a solution to any of it, because it is going to be the cornerstone of their campaign in 2026. That is why they do not want a solution, let us be honest about it. So they will change the goalposts on legislation on bail, on machete bans or on anything else that we need to address to keep the community safe, because it is only about politics for them, and we see that every single week. I was crook last week, so I did miss it, and I cannot believe it has not got more attention. Last week we had a situation where the member for Berwick, the Leader of the Opposition, thought it was appropriate to rock up to an active crime scene that still had police tape around it and conduct a press conference while standing over a dead body. I have never seen –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Speaker, the member needs to be factual on such an important issue as a death as a result of the rising crime rate. It is not something to be taken lightly, and I caution you –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tarneit to come back to the MPI.

Dylan WIGHT: We are talking about an MPI that is all about crime, and I am talking about the Leader of the Opposition being at an active crime scene talking about an issue with crime. Can you imagine being –

The SPEAKER: I ask you not to use the term ‘you’. You are reflecting on the Chair.

Dylan WIGHT: Sorry, Speaker. Imagine being the friends or family or loved one of that person at that crime scene who was dead and watching on the news that peanut have a press conference while standing over him. I have been in and around politics for a while, and I have watched it for a while. I have never seen anything more ridiculous, more disgraceful. I have never seen political opportunism to that level. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick, should hang his head in shame and drum himself out of politics. His party room might do that for him, and with good reason. Like I said, I know that policy development is not his long suit. But try speaking about anything not to do with crime ever, and you just stumble and you bumble and you have got no idea what you are talking about. To rock up to that scene and then to suggest that Minister Williams should be some sort of one-woman vigilante going around stopping crime by day – give me a break. And then we come in here this morning after one of the most horrendous incidents yesterday that we have seen in some time, and instead of talking to the government, working with the government and having a normal adult conversation about how we can appropriately mourn the loss or give our condolences or speak about

such an issue, we have a motion by leave put up that we were never consulted on. Of course it does not get up, and then we have the member for Brighton 3 minutes later going onto Twitter – I was just scrolling through for some football news – and having a go at the government, saying that we do not want to speak about a motion about two police officers who have passed away tragically.

I have never seen political opportunism to this level, ever. It is desperate, it is shameful and it is gross. It is utterly gross – and the people of Victoria will make their judgement on that in 12 to 14 months time. Frankly, I know people in this place have – and I know people in the Liberal party room have – had an utter gutful of it. As a member of the government that has to come in here week after week after week and listen to the opposition use people's grieving and use people's trauma as political fodder, eventually enough is enough and you just get a little bit over it.

As I said at the beginning of this contribution, the Allan Labor government has and is using every lever available to it to keep Victorians safe. Whether that be the prevention of family violence, whether that be the first and second tranches of bail reforms to make sure that when judges are making those decisions community safety is at the forefront or whether it is taking deadly weapons like machetes off our streets, the Allan Labor government will continue to put community safety first whilst those opposite continue to use trauma and grief as a political football. Shame on them for doing so.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:52): Can I begin my remarks on this matter of public importance (MPI) by extending, on behalf of the people of my electorate of Hawthorn, the sorrow, condolences and deepest wishes for the victims, the two police officers who lost their lives, their families, their friends and their community, and also the third officer, who we hope is making a recovery, as well as those seven other officers, who are being supported by Victoria Police and the agencies of Victoria Police at this time, and all members of Victoria Police, their families and the entire community.

Turning to the MPI, things are so bad when it comes to the justice portfolio – so chaotic – that Victoria's justice fiasco has gone global. When we think of Victoria's major events program, we do not think that the crisis in crime, knife crime, gangs and the violence we see will actually go global. Why has it gone global? This week, for the first time since the Second World War, the Prime Minister expelled Ahmad Sadeghi and three other diplomats, being the Iranian diplomatic mission here in Australia, and evacuated Australian diplomatic officials in Iran. Why? Because, as Mike Burgess, the head of ASIO, pointed out in press remarks this week, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps engaged a very notorious criminal who is the subject of various organised crime investigations including five murders, a kingpin in the illicit tobacco wars which have seen so much violence and loss of life in Victoria, Kazem Hamad.

The connections between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and Mr Hamad demonstrate that there are people abroad who see Victoria's justice system as a soft touch. They engaged Mr Hamad, who does not live in Australia anymore, and his network to undertake and orchestrate the firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue.

A member interjected.

John PESUTTO: And Lewis' Continental Kitchen, true. But they did that in Victoria. That says a lot about the connection between the crime we see on our streets and perceptions of crime, not just in Victoria but, sadly, right across the world.

And we see other manifestations of the fiasco that has become Victoria's justice system – the number of communities wanting to install CCTV in addition to those who do not already have it and the number of communities who want to and feel like they have got to now take control of security of their own streets. In my own street, for the first time in 20 years, our WhatsApp group entertained a discussion recently about hiring our own security – in Burke Road, Camberwell. I noticed this morning on my morning run a shop had installed roller doors – in Burke Road, Camberwell. We see the crime statistics – those on the other side of the chamber will not be proud of the increases in crime incidents in their own electorates, which are in the 20 and 30 per cents right across western, northern and south-

eastern Melbourne. But we have all seen an increase in crime across our community. We have seen the CEOs of some of Australia's largest employers and retailers come out. Anthony Heraghty from Super Retail Group, Leah Weckert from Coles and other leaders have expressed concern about not only their ability to run their businesses, not only their ability to keep their staff safe, but in this report, this earnings season, the impact that crime is having not only on the health and safety of all involved but on the future viability of many of these businesses.

We see all sorts of manifestations of this on the street, and it is not just about the data. It is about the real trauma that those people feel who have experienced home invasions when particularly youths walk through their homes without a care for the security or a care for the floodlights that switch on when they walk up the driveways and down the hallways; they continue to stroll with a cavalier attitude – total impunity. We see gangs, which is one of the reasons I opened with this week's events around the Iranian mission here in Australia. Victoria is a particularly soft touch when it comes to gang activity, and we know that sophisticated criminal syndicates engage young people – take young people with potentially prosperous and fulfilling lives before them and drag them into a life of crime. That is why this activity occurs, because of this sophisticated syndicate behaviour. What it tells you about is this government in the face of all that, in all the time they have been in office, from the explosion in crime that occurred in the 2015 to 2017 period in particular through all the years to now. It is not us raising these issues – we are now, on behalf of the community. But these issues are arising because they are real, and people feel them and they suffer the trauma from them, whether it is a direct machete attack or an invasion of their privacy that never leaves them feeling secure ever again. And the government pretends that it is not to be held to account for that. Well, that is just rubbish.

Our approach is different to this government. This government manages justice on a day-to-day basis. They have to be dragged kicking and screaming to fix up bail. They refuse to acknowledge the problems in sentencing and parole oversight. They refuse to acknowledge the damage that comes from under-resourcing Victoria Police to the point where we are 2000 short and the government has broken its own promise on police recruitment. We have seen a 50 per cent increase in unsolved crimes. What does that do for confidence in Victoria Police? This government has closed three PTSD centres that are there to support the people on the front line. And it pretends that it is supporting Victoria Police. Well, it is not; it is certainly not.

Our approach, as I said, is very different. We believe not in day-to-day management of our justice system but in end-to-end management of our justice system, and as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out this morning, it requires at one end of that exercise strong sentencing, strong parole and strong bail. We have championed that through a number of years of debates in this house and private members bills that we have brought. We have championed that. We have been strong and unwavering supporters and champions of equipping Victoria Police with the resources they need – that is, more recruitment and managing Victoria's finances so they can recruit the police officers we need. There is an undeniable shortfall that is affecting the ability of Victoria Police to conduct the patrols and be that presence, which all the literature confirms is the best deterrent to crime. A police presence is, in all the literature, the best deterrent of crime.

We believe in that. We believe in equipping our courts with the resources and the financial disciplines that will see us reduce the delays to criminal cases and the costs of criminal cases so people are not on remand for as long as they might have to be. Justice delayed is justice denied. And, more importantly, we will manage the finances of this state in such a way that, unlike the government, we will not be cutting at the other end of the justice system those programs that are vital to youth engagement, diversion and ensuring that kids stay in school. And you know what, it was this government that cut community crime prevention by \$11 million, cut youth custodial support services by \$34 million and cut prisoner supervision and support by nearly \$40 million, only some of which the government has finally started to reverse in this year's budget. But in several budgets leading up to this year they have gutted these programs.

So at one end they have been weak on sentencing, parole and bail and at the other end, pretending to be about that other side of the justice system, which is equally vital to security in our state, they have gutted it. On the one hand it is a lack of vision and commitment to keeping people safe. The most immediate priority in the justice system is to ensure that people do not face harm. That is immediate. The longer term challenge and the longer term commitment require managing the state's finances so you can invest in the many thousands of services and service providers that are there to engage our youth, keep them at school and provide them with a stable and loving home, some of the most important things you need if you want to ensure that kids do not drift off into a life of crime. This government pretends to be about the latter; it is not. It is not about the former. It is not about the latter. We have a weak justice system in terms of bail, parole and sentencing, yet we have seen programs that are vital to keeping communities safe absolutely gutted because this government cannot manage money. And Victorians, again, are paying the price.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:02): Firstly, I would like to also share my condolences for the two very brave police officers who have sadly passed away. It just makes you feel sick inside to even think about that. I think all the members in the chamber have also reflected on their sad passing, but also thoughts are with the third officer who has been seriously injured as well. I note that this is unfortunately a live and continuing state in terms of the crime not being resolved to date, which is obviously of significant concern to everyone and particularly those who live in that area of Victoria. I can imagine for the police force themselves it would be a very cold reminder to them of the incredible risks that they take every day on our behalf to keep our community safe. I do not want to reflect on other people's sentiments, save for the fact that I think it would be very natural to assume severe and extreme grief at this point in time and also concern about the situation at hand. Whilst all efforts are obviously being implemented to resolve the current very tragic situation, I thought it was important, also just from genuine human feeling, to reflect on what has happened in our state.

I do feel some discomfort and conflict about having to have this particular debate at this point in time. But having said that, I will of course do my duty, and I am prepared to reflect on the various mechanisms that have been implemented to date and those that we anticipate in terms of the hard work to keep our community safe. There are a couple of things I did want to reflect on before proceeding. Actually, it was the member for Mordialloc who I think inspired my memory, so to speak, because I remember attending a community forum in my electorate late last year and the local police got up and said they were going to speak about family violence. They were about to speak on that, and then someone in the audience said, 'No, we don't have any of that here. That's not a problem.'

I remember thinking that therein lay a significant issue in terms of perception of crime, and I do not think there was any malice in the comment as much as I think it was very much underestimating the rates of family violence. To think that my seat of Albert Park does not have an issue with family violence would just be completely incorrect and would disrespect those victims of family violence. I am not proceeding on that trajectory in any way to resile from any other crimes, because any crime is a crime too many and any victim is a victim too many. But I am just saying that it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge that when we are speaking of crimes that are damaging to fellow Victorians, it is incumbent upon us to speak holistically in that regard and not to walk away from the uncomfortable conversations, such as those regarding violence in the home.

On a slightly more positive note, I will say – and I am going to speak cryptically, because I want to protect the identity of the particular student that I am talking about – I had the great privilege of attending a great school that is particularly targeted at helping those who might have some particular challenges at home. There was a young student that I met – say, about 15 or 16 – who had recently been released from remand, but thankfully the teachers and caseworker et cetera had wrapped around him and helped him to find a pathway that he loves. There was relief on his face to see that people cared about him and acknowledged that he had worth, that he had something to contribute and that he was needed. There was relief and joy that he had found a pathway, that he could complete his schooling and that he was no longer associating with others who were not bringing out his best.

I have to say – and I am going to reflect on the member for Mordialloc’s commentary – that when we are speaking in this space and not resiling from the seriousness of crime and the seriousness of advancing legislative reform in this space, which we have been doing and are continuing to do, that looking at it from a holistic perspective, we saw that a young person who might otherwise have a pretty negative and sad trajectory had it within himself, with the right supports, to turn his life around. And I saw his teacher crying, because she was so relieved to see their really good work coming to fruition. So when we are looking at this space, I do think there is merit in looking at the holistic element, including things such as access to free TAFE. Even when you are thinking about the Victorian pathways certificate and making sure that individuals are encouraged to stay in school and to find the things that they are truly able to shine in, so to speak – the things that people truly love to do – that trajectory can be so much more positive.

I did want to address some of the matters that have been raised in the chamber, particularly one to do with recruitment and police numbers. I should reiterate that our government has made a record \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police, including funding for more than 3600 additional police. I should say – and I think it is highly relevant within the context of the discussion we are having today – that we have delivered the single biggest uplift in police numbers in the state’s history, but we know that many industries across the country are facing workforce shortages and policing is not immune to these pressures. That is why our government has provided funding for Victoria Police to continue our major recruitment campaign, which is called Made for More, including an additional \$4 million invested in this year’s budget. So to suggest we are doing nothing, that we have not been investing in our police and that we are not supporting the recruitment of more police is completely untrue.

Let me refute these allegations that were made in the chamber a little while ago. Changes to the entry requirements for the academy are helping to attract more people to the force while still maintaining the high standards of integrity and professionalism that the community expects. Recruitment is a top priority for Victoria Police and for this government, and we will always back Victoria Police with the numbers that they need. I do recall even earlier today the Minister for Police reflecting on every two weeks literally more and more graduates being able to graduate of course and then being able to serve our wonderful Victorian community. We know that is actively happening, and it is not without a serious commitment to recruiting more police. No-one would resile from the fact that people love seeing police do the job that they do so well, and hence we are supporting that. So I hope that we do not continue to see a narrative, which is completely untrue, that we are not doing anything, that we are not recruiting and that we are not investing. It is completely untrue.

Another thing that I do want to say is we know that Victoria Police are making record numbers of arrests, over 75,000 in the last 12 months alone. I think it is important in the context of community safety that we do speak in facts when it comes to that as well. Another point I do just want to make, although I only have 28 seconds, is that in March we passed the first round of new bail laws, ensuring community safety is the overarching consideration in bail decisions. These changes are working. Remand numbers are up by 4 per cent across the system, but we have been clear there is more to do, and that is why we introduced a second tranche of legislation to deliver on our commitment to Victorians. On that note I shall close.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (17:12): Before I start on the matter of public importance, may I also put on the public record my deep condolences to the officers that were killed in Porepunkah – that is, officers Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart. It is just terribly sad, and we are enormously grateful for the work that Victoria Police does. The people of Prahran, I know, will want this message to be sent to the families and colleagues of those two hardworking and hard-serving officers, so thank you for allowing that.

I rise to address a matter of urgent public importance that affects the safety, security and economic wellbeing of residents and businesses in the seat of Prahran. The escalating crime crisis in our community demands immediate attention and decisive action from this government. The latest data from the Crime Statistics Agency paints a deeply disturbing picture. Crime in Prahran has surged by

18 per cent in the last 12 months, and this is not just a number. This represents real families living in fear, real businesses struggling to survive and real communities under siege.

Just on Monday I spoke with the owners of Jfahri boutique on Chapel Street, who told me that their staff now lock the front door daily to the shop. That is not just to secure merchandise at night; that is actually for their own protection during business hours due to persistent antisocial behaviour. This is the reality of doing business in Prahran today. Even more troubling, the total criminal incidents across Stonnington have reached their highest rate this decade, the worst figures since the Crime Statistics Agency actually began reporting in 2015. We are witnessing a systematic breakdown of law and order in one of Melbourne's most vibrant places.

The local crime statistics reveal the stark reality. All offences are up from the previous year, but particularly alarming is the dramatic jump in burglary and breaking-and-entering offences in both Prahran and South Yarra, and these are crimes that strike at the heart of people's sense of security. When people come into their homes, touch their personal belongings and take their most valuable or dear things to them – sentimental items – and people come into their own personal space where they should feel safe, it is just horrible. Also, the businesses – people work really hard to establish small businesses: it is just simply not fair.

Perhaps most disturbing is the unprecedented spike in arson attacks. These attacks have more than doubled in both Prahran and South Yarra, representing the highest number on record since, again, the Crime Statistics Agency began reporting. And these are not just random violations, these are calculated, dangerous attacks that put people's lives at risk and devastate local businesses. Let me detail the recent pattern of arson attacks that have terrorised Chapel Street. From June 2024 to July 2025 we have witnessed five separate arson attacks across four sites. Harry's Mart was targeted in June 2024. Lux nightclub suffered an attack on 21 November 2024. The Golden Lounge dessert bar and Better Choice smokes endured not one but two attempts, on 6 December 2024 and 16 January this year. Most recently, a skincare clinic was attacked on 11 July this year, and that was reported to have connections to organised crime. Three of these four Chapel Street incidents remain without arrest. One person, a 20-year-old Pakenham man, has been charged in relation to the Lux nightclub incident and arrested on 15 May 2025. This means that 75 per cent of serious arson attacks have remained unsolved, sending a very clear message to criminals that they can act with impunity in Prahran. The human cost of crime and this wave extends far beyond the immediate victims. Local businesses are haemorrhaging, with vacancy rates sitting at a staggering 9.2 per cent, and that is up from 7.4 per cent in the previous year. Business owners directly attribute this exodus to crime, telling us that criminal activities are just everywhere. Every single day they see it, they feel it.

The insurance crisis alone is crippling legitimate businesses. According to ABC reporting, from June 2024 insurance premiums have actually tripled – just imagine – for tobacco-related properties. Some businesses are seeing their annual insurance prices skyrocket from \$60,000 per annum to \$220,000 a year – just for insurance for their businesses. And that is not so much the tobacco shop; that is all the shops around it that are owned by a landholder on Chapel Street. It is absolutely extraordinary. This forces law-abiding business owners into an impossible position. They are paying extortionate insurance costs that may bankrupt them, or otherwise they operate with no coverage and just face that risk. Many are simply just giving up. They are closing their doors. They are leaving their community poorer for their absence. Large businesses that remain are being forced to hire private security, essentially paying twice for protection that should be provided adequately by resourced police services that are simply not there.

I even speak to local residents who, like we have heard from many other members in this chamber, are actually hiring private security in their own streets. When did we ever think that Victorians would ever have to do this – hire their own private security because the current Allan government cannot even fund Victoria Police and resources? Which brings me to the root cause of this escalating crisis – this government's systematic failure in defunding and under-resourcing Victoria Police. The Prahran police station is operating with a 20-person shortfall – 20 fewer police officers to respond to

emergencies, investigate crimes and provide the visible presence that deters criminal activity. This staffing crisis is no accident. This year's state budget delivered a devastating \$50 million cut to Victoria Police. How on earth can we expect our hardworking police officers to effectively enforce legislation and protect our communities when this government strips away the resources they need to do their jobs?

The human toll of this government's failures cannot be measured in statistics alone. Families are afraid to walk down Chapel Street after dark. Small business owners are just struggling to do business. They go to work every day wondering if they will arrive to find their life's work destroyed by arsonists. Residents are installing, as I said before, extra locks, security cameras and alarm systems, turning their own neighbourhoods into fortresses. Young people are being recruited into criminal networks that prey on our community's prosperity. The cycle of crime and violence is embedded into our streets, creating long-term social damage that is going to take years to actually repair. And where is the leadership from this government? Where is the decisive action that is needed to address this crisis? Instead of actually acknowledging the severity of the situation and providing adequate resources, we see denial, deflection and continued cuts to the very services our community desperately needs. The Allan Labor government refuses to appropriately strengthen bail laws despite clear warnings from police, rising youth and retail crime and escalating violence on our streets. The amendments they have begrudgingly made are just a little too late.

When our own police force tells this government that the system is failing and government ignores their expertise, we have a fundamental problem, don't we – a breakdown in public safety policy. Prahran and in particular Chapel Street have been the focus point for media on machete-related crime. Mainstream media has shown men running down Chapel Street with machete in hand, terrifying locals. I personally experienced this during my by-election campaign when I was going to Prahran station early to hand out and there was somebody running down the street with a machete. Then one of my volunteers said to me that when they went back to pick up their car after they were assisting me they too saw somebody with a machete in their hand running down a street just behind Chapel Street. When I am hearing personal stories and I am facing it myself, I know there is a clear issue.

The Liberal-Nationals have attempted four times to bring a ban on machetes. Victoria Police are confiscating on average 54 illegal knives per day. However, instead of real action on crime prevention, this government's response has been theatrics and waste. The government moved too slowly on the machete ban, and only after months of delays while crimes continued. Meanwhile they have squandered \$13 million on 40 machete bins that could have been spent on actual police resources. Under the Liberals and Nationals, if you break bail, you will face jail. We are going to prioritise the victims and not the criminals. This fundamental principle has been abandoned by the current government, and it has absolutely got to be restored. There is a clear choice: act decisively now or watch one of Melbourne's most iconic precincts continue a descent into lawlessness. The residents of Prahran deserve safety, they deserve security and they deserve a government that stands with them in their need.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (17:22): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance (MPI). As others have done, I would also like to extend my condolences to the families, the friends and all those that have lost someone in the fine police officers of Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart. I would also like to extend my thanks to the member for Ovens Valley. We all know in this place what it is to stand with your community in a terrible time, and I thank him for what he is doing in standing with his community. It has been an absolutely horrendous incident, and many of us have felt it very deeply.

I stand now to speak on this MPI, and it fills me with sadness that on a day like today those on the other side would play these political games and stir and create fear and anxiety in our communities. Community safety is the Allan Labor government's top priority. We know that all Victorians have the right to be safe and to feel safe in their communities. We do not shy away from the events that are happening across our communities, and we work every day to make sure that we can resource our

police and support our communities in instances of crime. I think what I find so distressing is that to those on the other side this is nothing more than a game of politics. It is a game that they have played long and hard, using the same rhetoric. As the member for Tarneit pointed out and indeed other members have pointed out, in this MPI there are no solutions, there are no discussions. It is just simply fearmongering. Even the Leader of the Nationals, for whom I have a great deal of respect, in his speech said, 'We will have policies,' in the future tense. There are clearly no plans in place other than to create fear and confusion in our communities.

We know that we approach an election year, and I feel like there is an echo in my life. Those on the other side spent all of 2018 shrieking about African gangs, and they now seek to instil the same fear in our communities. Their African gangs rhetoric demonised some of the most wonderful and indeed vulnerable people in our communities, and those communities will never forget what it was to be demonised just for political purposes. We see this again, in this MPI; they seek to instil fear. On a terrible day like today, can I remind everyone in this house that members of the other side stood on the steps of Parliament with nooses and sovereign citizens stood there and supported them. When you offer support to those sorts of communities, those sorts of groups, we get awful events like we had yesterday. They must always hang their heads in shame that they stood on the steps of this house next to those people, and they must own their part in the awful events. They continue to do this. They talk about gang activity.

Members interjecting.

Michaela SETTLE: You should be ashamed of yourself. Your lot stood out on those streets with nooses. I saw them.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is reflecting poorly on you, several times using that term. I ask you to bring the member back to the bill and for her to stop reflecting poorly on you and stop being so divisive and hateful.

Nicole Werner: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do actually take offence to that statement. Neal Thompson is a friend of my family's, and I do take offence to bringing that politicisation to this chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There are a couple of things. That was a separate point of order. I will deal with the first point of order. Yes, all members should refrain from using the word 'you'. That does refer to the Chair. On the second point of order, I was listening carefully to the member for Eureka's contribution. She did not name a particular member. She was talking about a group of people. That is a matter for debate which can be rebutted. There is no point of order on that.

Michaela SETTLE: As I say, they continue to play political games day in and day out with things that are real issues for our community. They bring nothing to the table but fear and scaremongering. Indeed their leader, the Leader of the Opposition, turning up at an active crime scene can be seen as nothing short of political opportunism. I think that many, many people in the community understood what was happening there: they saw that, while the crime was still being investigated, while the families had not been notified, the Leader of the Opposition saw fit to call a press conference. And I think that speaks to their attitude towards crime: they see it as a political thing to wield.

Again and again we heard about African gangs – even the member for Hawthorn in his contribution today kept repeating 'gang activity, gang activity'. They love the words, and the *Herald Sun* loves those words. Those on the other side can pick and choose what they like. The member for Hawthorn was talking about the Iranian embassy and somehow that was the fault of the Victorian government. He completely chose to ignore the fact that those things had gone on in New South Wales, but somehow this Victorian government were responsible for those awful, awful attacks. I find it extraordinary that they will use anything – anything – just to play politics with this government. They like to absolutely heighten the language, the member for Prahran telling us that there is a systematic breakdown of law and order on the streets of Prahran. Can we support our police? Can we support our

communities? Can we work together to deal with things that are real issues in our communities? Let us find some solutions. Let us not just use it as a political weapon, which is all that those on the other side seem capable of doing.

I would also like to just defend the wonderful member for Ripon. The Leader of the Nationals was calling the member for Ripon out about the statistics on police and in fact suggesting that we just read the minister's notes and do not understand ourselves. I am very proud to represent the town of Ballarat with the member for Ripon, a wonderful member, and I would just like to point out that as of June 2025 Ballarat police service area had 145.74 police FTE, and that is up from 138 police FTE in December 2024. For the Leader of the Nationals' information, that statistic came directly from Victoria Police, not the minister's notes. So indeed when the member for Ripon talked about police resourcing in our area, she was quite correct to say that there has been an increase.

We think it is so important that we also look at what is happening in our communities in terms of looking after people. I noticed in the *Herald Sun* today that the member for Caulfield gave a quote saying that they want to 'give young people real chances to turn their lives around before they become serious offenders'. The lack of policy is clear in this space. It is at such odds with their 'face jail' campaign. They have got to pick a side. They have got to understand who they are. They have got to work out what they are going to do. But instead all they are capable of doing – and, frankly, they have been in opposition for so long it is all they know how to do – is just playing oppositional politics. They do not come up with any policies. We are told that we will hear about some policies in the future, but for the moment we have to listen to their insufferable ranting about African gangs, about crime. They turn up at active police investigations, not to mention the car crash.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (17:32): I rise to talk on the matter of public importance (MPI). As other members have said, my heartfelt thoughts go out to the two police officers that did lose their lives yesterday, another police officer who is injured but recovering and all police officers involved in the active situation at the moment. To my own local police force down in the Latrobe Valley: I am sure every person in the Latrobe Valley sends their support to you and to every active member at Victoria Police.

I stand here today with the MPI, having listened to our side of the debate and the government's side of the debate. We can stand here, and I can talk about statistics. People can use statistics any way they would like to. I want to talk about a real stat in the Latrobe Valley. It is a story I would like to tell about a person named Harry Wright. Harry was a lovable old fellow. His wife had passed away, and Harry was in the midst of going away with his family. He was going to go on a cruise. They had organised this cruise to help Harry deal with the loss of his lovely and wonderful wife. Harry was a huge supporter in the community and was involved with the Morwell bowls club. If you walked into the bowls club, you knew who Harry was, because he would either come up and engage you in conversation or he would be out on the greens, rolling the ball down the end. Harry, as I said, was at home and packing his bag to go away on this holiday. A family member came around to check on Harry, as she did every single day. She walked into Harry's house and unfortunately found her beloved father dead on the floor.

To add weight to why we talk about crime all the time, the person responsible for killing Harry was still in the house, and the family member did what needed to be done to get the person out and engage police. Unfortunately, Harry could not be revived. I have people come to my office. As I said, we can paint any statistic that we want about knife use, about aggravated burglary, about people stealing cars. But the real, tangible one is that people at the moment in Victoria are losing their lives because crime is out of control. The government can say, 'No, it's not,' but crime is out of control. Do not forget Harry was 91. He had worked all his life, he had paid his taxes and he was let down by us here in the chamber. We did not have hard enough rules for our bail laws, because the person that was in the house was out on bail. It is disgraceful that we let Harry down. We let his family down. It goes on not only in the Latrobe Valley, in my patch; it goes on around the whole of Victoria. We see these statistics

of people losing their lives because we have criminals out on the street that continue to break the law and continue to be put through our court systems that just do not care.

I talk often of Dr Ash Gordon. Here is a fella whose parents, I have said often, live in Morwell, and their son was a doctor down here in Melbourne doing the right thing, looking after people. He was stabbed 11 times trying to get his own property back off someone that had broken into his house and stolen his property. All he was trying to do was get his property back. Guess what, this particular perpetrator was out on bail. There lies the issue. We can have these arguments from one side of the house to the other, but the fact is that people are losing their lives. People are having to deal with losing loved ones because some of our laws, even though we try and make them stronger and harder, are not good enough. They are not hard enough. The good people of Victoria need to know that if someone is going to commit a crime against them, there are going to be hard consequences. They are not just going to be rolled through and back out on the street to start it all again and ruin people's lives.

I have got elderly people in my community – I am sure this goes on for every single member that stands in this chamber and talks on crime – that barricade themselves in their bedrooms at night because they are petrified someone is going to kick their front door in and they are going to pay the ultimate price. They are not worried about items being stolen off their kitchen table or a car being taken out of the garage. They are worried that their life is going to be taken, and as far as I am concerned, that is wrong. We are not doing our job. We need to make sure that we can keep people that continually commit crime off the street if they commit crimes that take people's lives or they continually break into people's houses. The issue is that these criminals disrespect life in general. They will fight to make sure they get out of the house, and they do not care if they take the life of a person that lives inside the house.

Something that I attend to now on crime – and I hope it never becomes a problem, but I can see it will – is that people now have lost trust in us being able to keep these people off the street, and they are going to take actions into their own hands. I hope that does not happen, but they are going to defend themselves; people are going to defend themselves in their own homes. This is what they are talking about, and they will be talking about it in your communities if you go out and talk to them. People will start defending their own homes. You may say, 'No, that's wrong,' and 'That is not heard of.' I hope that does not happen, but that is where people are at the moment. So we need to make sure that we have laws in place and give our police officers the powers to protect us. They know the perpetrators walking down the street that are going to be on their way to commit a crime. They know who they are, but they cannot go up and stop them at the moment. And why not? Why shouldn't they be able to do it? Why haven't they got the powers to be able to do that – check their bags, see what is in the back of them?

We need to make sure that our police have the powers and that we are keeping the citizens of Victoria safe no matter where they live. At the end of the day, that is our job in here, to make those tough decisions. We may not like it, but we need to make tough decisions. People need to know that there are consequences for your actions. Whether you are a first-time offender who might be 10 years old or whether you are an offender that is going through the system that has been bailed 50 times, we need to make sure you know that actions are done. This is why on this side of the house we get up and talk about crime rates and statistics. The number one crime rate that hurts the most is Victorian citizens losing their lives because we are not tough enough on crime.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (17:42): I join every other speaker who has preceded me in extending my sincerest and my deepest condolences to the families, the friends and all who loved Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart. Our thoughts are also with the injured officer and each and every police officer across Victoria. On behalf of the district of Monbulk, I do extend those condolences. This is such a tough day for so many. It is a really heavy day here at Parliament. I think a lot of us have been feeling it – a profound grief and a deep sense of sadness with the events that have occurred. The two police officers yesterday were doing their jobs, and they are not returning to their families anymore. I have spoken in here before about my beautiful friend Jane. We have been friends since we

were five, and her dad Dennis, who was my second dad growing up – it was the family I was always with – was a sergeant in the force, and he was shot in the shoulder in the line of duty. That does not leave you. The injured officer who remains, all the officers who were there – who witnessed, who were part of it – will carry that trauma with them until the end of their days, and the ripple effects on all those around them cannot be quantified. So I do extend my thoughts to all of them. It is a very, very sad day.

Before I really go to the substance of the matters of public importance topic, though, I just want to make a comment on what I observed this morning here in the chamber, which left me profoundly disappointed and, frankly, disgusted. Those opposite came into this chamber this morning with one goal, and everything that played out was about making sure that they achieved that goal. It was to politicise tragedy, and it is ghoulish, and it seems to be a playbook at the moment. Their goal was to make sure that the Shadow Treasurer had everything he needed to put out a social media post. I quite like the Shadow Treasurer. That is why I think my disappointment is so deep: because that motion was done without notice, without consultation with government, and the convention is to consult beforehand. When a motion is brought into this chamber with sincerity, it is discussed beforehand so that all get the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to it. When it is thrown in without notice, it is a stunt. The member for Tarneit spoke about this before. Within minutes of leave for that motion being refused, which is also the convention by government when a motion is brought in without notice, it was on social media. Then members statements from those opposite spoke to it, which means it was rehearsed, it was planned and it was executed, and that is appalling. To politicise something like this is a disgrace. It is shameful. That is the lowest of us. That is when we are reduced to the lowest common denominator. That is when people outside of this chamber look at us and shake their heads. It besmirches all of us.

Seeing the politicisation of that was very upsetting. Seeing the politicisation of an active crime scene by the Leader of the Opposition was revolting. It was ghoulish and vampiric to feed off a tragedy for political kudos. I cannot believe what I saw. I have never seen anything like it; I sincerely hope I never see anything like it again. Maybe I have a pollyanna view of things, but I have always thought that we come in here with the best of intentions. It makes me sad that after today I have become a little bit more cynical, because what I have seen coming from those opposite is really distressing. I have got to say, it is rank political opportunism. I am sure there are some on the opposite benches who are ashamed, because I would be. That is all I will say about that.

This MPI could have been changed, by the way. Given everything that has happened, maybe another topic might have been a bit better at this time, but they ploughed ahead with it. Again, I think, wow, what a lack of understanding sometimes, maybe a lack of emotional intelligence and being able to read the emotions of Victorians. People are really hurting. Most of us know someone who is a serving police officer or who has served. I just think we should be better.

To claim that we have done nothing, as the member for Caulfield said at the beginning, that we have buried our heads in the sand, has to be one of the most disingenuous things I have heard in a long time. Look at the legislation we have been producing. We have been working towards ensuring our bail laws are the toughest. Just yesterday the second tranche was passed. They will now be the toughest bail laws in the nation. But those opposite talk about ‘break bail, face jail’ or go to jail, whatever – sloganeering. If policy is merely a slogan, no wonder they have nothing else to talk about. It is such a vacuous way to approach opposition. Heaven help us all if they ever, ever have the privilege to be in government. It is a lot harder than just coming up with a few words as a slogan. It takes tough decision-making. It takes grit. Things have to be thrashed out and worked on. It takes creative thinking. It takes determination. It takes hard decision-making. I sincerely think there is a lack of that capacity at the moment over there. I do not normally get this cross, to use a term, but I am really feeling it. I am really, really upset because I do think that they should and they can do better, and we are not seeing it. Instead we are seeing the Leader of the Opposition. When he was in here the member for Mordialloc, the member for Tarneit and the member for Eureka were calling out his behaviour, we called out the fact

that he attended an active crime scene with a person who lost their life, horrifically, still there, and the family not even notified. To give a press conference is beyond the pale.

We are doing quite a lot as a government to ensure that Victoria is a safer place to be. And I have got to say too that something that struck me was those opposite claiming that the machete disposal bins were costing \$325,000 each because the investment of the program is \$13 million. What a basic, crazy way to quantify investment. The bins are about \$2400 each, but all over the social media of a number of those opposite is this false claim that they are \$325,000 each. Once again, facts matter, words matter. Get it right. Do not go out there spraying that information. I have people saying to me, 'It's costing \$300,000-plus a bin.' No, it is not, but they have seen the rubbish being produced by those opposite, and they take that unfortunately as fact. It is not. So I am here to correct it on the record that that is not the cost of the program.

The entire project, that \$13 million, includes public awareness, retailer education, manufacturing and installation of the machete safe disposal bins. They had to be carefully engineered to ensure that they are safe, that once a machete goes in it does not come out unless it is an authorised person removing them. They had to be designed. We brought that on faster than any other jurisdiction around the planet. In the UK it took 18 months for them to do it; we ended up doing it in six. It also includes secure collection and cataloguing and safe destruction of items that are handed in. That program costs that. Each bin does not cost \$325,000. What a ridiculous statement they have made, again reducing things down to simplistic, incorrect details – fake news, to use a term I really would rather probably not use, because it has been coined by a fairly obnoxious individual. But to reduce things, to be so reductive in debate, actually diminishes them; it diminishes the role that they play, and it diminishes their participation in democracy. I do sincerely suggest that maybe there needs to be some reflection, certainly by the leader on his own actions and by those opposite as a collective.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:52): From the outset I too rise to offer my condolences and express my deep sadness about the tragic loss of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart. Neal Thompson was a friend of our family on my husband's side who hails from north-east Victoria. My father-in-law actually recently retired from being a senior sergeant and officer in charge at Wangaratta police station only three years ago. As the member exits as I offer a condolence motion on behalf of my family, who has lost a friend, I would just like to note the really deplorable actions on that side, which are actually quite offensive. My father-in-law, as I will state again, recently retired from being a senior sergeant and officer in charge at Wangaratta police station only three years ago after serving 38 years in the force. Neal Thompson was his friend, and to quote him, 'He had a tough exterior but was a lovely bloke. Our tractor on the family farm is the one we bought off him.' So we offer our sincere condolences from our family and from the Victorian Parliament to the Thompson family. Gone too soon, Neal will be missed.

Likewise, we offer our condolences to the de Waart family and to the community in Porepunkah. Yesterday was a heartbreak day for Victoria. Two valiant police officers lost their lives in the line of duty, and another was seriously injured while protecting our community. It is a sombre reminder to us that the brave men and women who wear the uniform are also someone's parent, partner, sibling or friend. They leave behind families who will now carry an unimaginable grief. To the families grieving today: every Victorian stands with you. Our thoughts are also with Victoria Police, where we know this loss will be felt deeply across the force. Your courage, sacrifice and service to our community do not go unnoticed. We thank you for your service.

Our family has a proud policing legacy, and for us this tragedy has hit home. As mentioned, my father-in-law only recently retired from being the officer in charge at the Wang police station. He is known to the member for Ovens Valley, whom I acknowledge as well in this place tonight, and I know that this tragedy has impacted him deeply. His father Vaughan Werner – or Grandad to us – also served 35 years in Victoria Police, including as deputy police commissioner in the late 1980s under the chief commissioner at that time Kel Glare. Our thoughts and prayers go out to every member at the Wangaratta police station and to Victoria Police. We stand with you today. On behalf of the Victorian

Parliament, the Liberals and the Nationals offer every family member, friend and community member our deepest condolences. We honour the fallen officers' dedication and bravery. Their memory will never be forgotten.

I now rise to speak to the matter of public importance, but I would still like to put on record that I am very disturbed by the member that mocked my contribution as a condolence statement whilst I was trying to offer that on behalf of my family today. I would like to put on record that that was inappropriate and very insensitive.

Now I will go to the matter of public importance. This is where youth crime has got to in Victoria under the Allan Labor government. As reported by the *Herald Sun* last week, it was revealed that criminal statistics of Melbourne's worst gang members are being publicised and ranked in profiles likened to a footy trading card. The new social media page is documenting how many stabbings each criminal commits and ranking them on the severity and outcome. It delves into the profile of each gang member, complete with their street name, picture and affiliated suburban gang. Major points are listed for serious and deadly attacks on rivals while minor points are given for incidents such as public fights and brawls. VicPol intelligence suggests there are 670 gang members aligned to 33 street gangs across Melbourne. Members from Operation Alliance arrested 491 youth gang members a combined 1697 times over the past year. Victoria Police have stated:

Of those being monitored, we know most of the harm has been caused by a core group of 220 repeat offenders, including 73 who police have arrested more than ten times in the past year ...

That speaks to where crime is at in our state. It speaks to how weak on crime the Allan Labor government has been. There is a 14-year-old youth offender in our state who has 400 offences to his name and who has been bailed in and out of jail 50 times over, again and again and again, only to commit a crime again and again 400 times over in this state. Some of these youth offenders get out in 90 minutes so that they can reoffend again. That is how weak our bail system is. There is now a crime committed every 50 seconds in the state of Victoria; an aggravated burglary takes place every single hour. That is right – an aggravated burglary, where a thug breaks into someone's home with a machete, a tomahawk, a knife or a gun and in some instances stabs or threatens someone in their own home, happens every single hour in our state. That is how the Allan Labor government has failed Victorians.

Youth offences are up 18 per cent in 12 months; they are up 42 per cent in 10 years. We have seen the sickening images. We have seen the footage and have heard the story of a man who had his hand severed by a machete – a man who thought he was going to lose his hand by a youth offender – and two of the alleged offenders of that criminal activity are out on bail. The youth offender that murdered Dr Ash Gordon was out on bail. When the Northland attack shut down an entire shopping centre, with youth offenders running around with machetes and tomahawks brawling in broad daylight, three of those offenders were out on bail under the Labor government and their weak approach to crime. Two teenage boys who went on a rampage across five IGAs with machete attacks – at these independent retailers where there are 15-year-olds working at the counters and where there are retirees just doing their day shift – are out on bail. This speaks to how weak the Allan Labor government is on crime in this state. This speaks to how the government has prioritised criminals over victims, and this speaks to how the Allan Labor government continues to fail Victorians.

Victorians are sick of seeing violent offenders being released on bail despite posing a danger to our community. Victorians are sick of the government putting criminals' rights ahead of victims' rights. Victorians are sick of the government protecting perpetrators over victims. Victorians are sick of living in fear as to whether there will be someone that comes to their house in the dead of night with a machete, with a tomahawk, because these youth offenders are roaming our streets out on bail again.

The Allan Labor government has failed Victorians, and that is why we have brought forward, as the coalition, our 'break bail, face jail' policy. That is why on this side of the house we have brought forward meaningful policy that will actually act on crime in this state. No more free passes for criminals – would you fancy that? Victorians are sick of seeing the same criminals being let out over

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and over again. They are sick of seeing violent thugs being emboldened by weak laws with no consequences. Let me say, on this side of the house we stand on the side of victims. On this side of the house, as the coalition, we stand with victims, we stand with our community and we stand with Victorians. That is why we have brought forward this policy of ‘break bail, face jail’. That is why we have come to this Parliament to stand up for the rights of Victorians, and that includes fighting for the police, who are frustrated at arresting the same people over and over again, only for them to be released immediately. On this side of the house we stand with the victims, we stand with our community and we stand with Victorians, and we stand with them every day.

Motions

Budget papers 2025–26

Debate resumed.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:02): The Allan Labor government has utterly failed Victorians. Crime is spiralling out of control across our state. In Warrnambool alone we have seen a staggering 126 per cent increase in retail theft and a 19.9 per cent rise in overall crime. Our police are exhausted, under-resourced and demoralised. There are 1100 vacancies on police rosters and 700 police on WorkCover. Some have even told me they feel abandoned. That is what they have told me: they feel abandoned by the Labor government, which continues to weaken laws, cut their budgets and ignore the growing crisis.

I just want to stop here and mention the deeply shocking news of the tragic shooting near Porepunkah, which has claimed the lives of two Victoria Police officers and left another injured. My heartfelt condolences for this terrible loss. It is a horrific incident and a stark reminder of the dangers police officers face in serving and protecting our community.

The escalating crime rate is not just a policy failure; it is a betrayal of those hardworking officers who keep our communities safe and the families who now live in fear in their own homes. People are afraid in their towns, in their workplaces and even in their own homes. They are locking their doors – we have never seen that in South-West Coast. We have now got terrifying incidents, like a machete attack in Warrnambool, and a growing disregard for police authority. One man, out on bail after making threats to kill, openly mocked the system. As a senior constable told the court last week in my electorate, the man said:

What are the coppers going to do, honest. They’re going to take me up to their cop shop, they’re going to interview me, they’re going to bail me out … I’ll walk out of there and do a burnout in front of the courthouse.

This arrogance is a direct result of a government that has lost control. Statewide, the picture is just as grim. In the 12-month period to March 2025, we saw staggering serious crime increases: one serious assault every hour and residential aggravated burglary up 30 per cent. That is why the Liberals and Nationals have introduced ‘break bail, face jail’. That is the policy that we have introduced – ‘break bail, face jail’. It is a direct response to Labor’s weakening of Victoria’s bail laws, which has led to a surge in repeat offending and community fear. Under our plan, offenders who breach bail or commit indictable offences whilst on bail will face tougher consequences, including mandatory jail. Bail is a privilege, not a right. Labor’s soft-on-crime approach has emboldened offenders and endangered communities.

We have a government who have abandoned rural Victoria and who have a health system in crisis, a housing crisis and an education crisis where, like our police, our teachers feel abandoned. We have got students who have been left by this government in a crisis situation without the mental health support they have been promised and who are feeling like they do not see a future. This is a Victoria that we are no longer proud of, a Victoria that is so burdened with debt that the government has no ability to actually find a way forward other than to tax Victorians and to tax our emergency service operators, our firefighters and our SES. And only recently surf lifesaving clubs also learned that not only will they not be part of the emergency services benefits that are supposedly coming the way of

emergency services, which is debatable in itself, but they are actually going to have to get out with the begging cap and councils are going to have to get more money out of ratepayers to be able to support our surf lifesavers, who protect our beaches like at Warrnambool and Portland and Port Fairy and Bridgewater Bay – beautiful beaches that we have that they protect, and when we have our visitors come they feel protected. It is a service that we should be supporting, not destroying.

We have such challenges now in Victoria with the debt we have got burdened upon us, the \$29 million per day that has to be found to meet the repayments that this government has burdened our Victorian community with. People in South-West Coast deserve better. They work hard, they do not expect handouts, they give back through the work they do and through the taxes they pay, and they expect roads that are driveable, ambulances to turn up on time, to be able to go to the hospital and be seen and to have an operation and not wait for years on a waiting list in pain. They expect what they pay taxes for and have been able to get in Victoria probably up until the last 10 years, when this state started to just spiral out of control under the Allan Labor government.

This budget was an opportunity to correct the course that Victoria has been on, to fix the mistakes of the last 10 years, to deliver the promises made to our community, the promises that our community have been waiting for – promises like safety in your own home, that an ambulance will turn up, that the roads will be safe, that what was promised pre-election was going to be delivered, such as the gymnastics centre and a helipad that should be functional. So many broken promises – a PET scanner that was promised three years ago that has not been delivered. Instead, what we got from this budget was more blowouts, more excuses, more debt and more disregard for regional Victoria. This government cannot manage projects, it cannot manage money and it certainly cannot manage our state in a way that gives all Victorians a go.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (18:09): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025

Royal assent

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer) (18:09): I have received a message from the Lieutenant-Governor. I inform the house that today the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (18:10): I rise today in support of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025, and I thank the Minister for Health and the Minister for Ageing in the other place for their work on this. This bill goes to the heart of one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a Labor government: protecting those who are most vulnerable in our society. Aged care is about how we treat the people who raised us, who built our communities and who shaped the Victoria we know today. It is about the care and dignity we provide to our mums and dads and our grandparents, and one day it will be about the care that we ourselves receive. Every Victorian family wants to know that when their loved one enters an

aged care facility they will receive not just shelter, not just food, but genuine, safe, respectful, professional care. Yet for too long we have seen too many examples of neglect, under-resourcing and gaps in accountability that leave residents exposed to unnecessary risks, and we saw this highlighted specifically during the COVID period when many in private sector aged care, sadly, were significantly affected by this neglect.

This bill is another important step, though, in closing those gaps and ensuring that medication, one of the most sensitive and high-risk aspects of aged care, is handled only by those with the training, skill and clinical judgement to do so safely. This legislation makes a number of vital changes to strengthen protections and support Victorians in aged care, ensuring that only highly qualified health professionals such as nurses are responsible for administering specialist medication. It represents both a safeguard for residents and peace of mind for their families. We know that Victorians are living longer and that many are entering the aged care system later in life with complex health conditions that cannot simply be managed when living at home. This often means that aged care residents have a strict medication regime, with 36 per cent of people living in Victorian aged care facilities being prescribed nine or more medications.

As somebody who is perhaps in the prime of their working life, I can say that would be a headache for me to manage, and I know during my process of receiving chemotherapy having numerous medications to take was also quite challenging to remember. It was not nine tablets a day, but it was still a daunting thing. Add that to chemo brain and it can be quite a forgetful process, let alone for an older person that is also trying to manage some of the cognitive declines that go with ageing. We often see that in our family members, and I know my paternal grandmother who had Alzheimer's struggled a fair bit. I remember seeing her in an aged care facility struggling to even remember who I was when I would visit. It can be quite challenging, and to try and remember to take your medication can be a very difficult thing. We know that 19 per cent receive antipsychotics, which can carry particular risks if not managed appropriately.

As the number of medicines people take increases and the complexity of care increases, the risk of medicine-related problems also increases. In 2020 the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia estimated that 20 per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from residential aged care are a result of inappropriate medicine use. That is a significant, additional and unnecessary strain on our healthcare resources. The 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety identified medication management and safety in residential aged care as an essential area for improvement. The royal commission's report highlighted incidents of inappropriate management of medications, including medicines not being administered correctly or residents being given tablets without oversight to ensure they swallow them. Currently, medication is mostly administered by registered nurses and, under indirect supervision of an RN, enrolled nurses and personal care workers.

While personal care workers play a vital role in residential aged care, particularly in relation to personal care, mobility and daily living, this is a more unregulated workforce without the qualifications and skills to understand therapeutic benefits of medication and recognise and respond to potential adverse reactions. It is not sustainable for us to take on the increased risk to our loved ones that this represents. This legislation seeks to correct this and amends the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. It will place an obligation on Victorian aged care providers to ensure that only registered and enrolled nurses administer, prescribe and dispense drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. This includes prescription-only medicine and controlled drugs. The changes to this act also include specific exemptions and update language and terminology in line with the new Commonwealth Aged Care Act 2024. These changes only apply to residents who do not administer their own medication and only while they are in an aged care facility and will not change existing settings to do with assisted dying and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners.

These changes are here today after a long period of consultation. The Department of Health has provided input since 2022, and more recently the department has been consulting with stakeholders to ensure the reforms are implemented correctly. In addition to consulting directly with our public sector

residential aged care services, the Department of Health consulted with nearly a third of the non-government sector, ensuring representation from private, charity, community, religious and culturally and linguistically diverse providers operating in regional and metropolitan locations. I would particularly like to acknowledge the support of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the union for nurses and other health practitioners. To quote Maddy Harradence, the current secretary of the ANMF, 'Medication administration is a core nursing responsibility,' and these changes support nurses to work to their full scope, delivering safe, high-quality, person-centred care and improving job satisfaction. When these reforms are implemented, aged care providers will only need minimal staffing changes. We know that most residential aged care homes have nurses administering medication already. On average and based on a 2024 survey, nurses administer medication 91.2 per cent of the time in public sector residential aged care services and 81.2 per cent of the time in non-government homes.

I would also like to use this time to speak about how these changes affect my electorate. My electorate includes a number of aged care facilities in both Monash council and the City of Greater Dandenong. A common trend across my entire community, particularly with older members, is how common it is for people to primarily speak languages other than English. We know that when one is ageing they revert to their primary language or their mother tongue. I was recently in a discussion with the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, and they raised with me how common it is for members of the Vietnamese community to revert to using Vietnamese when they get older, knowing and being proficient in English. We know that migrant communities that speak languages other than English are far more likely to suffer from these medical accidents and are often unable to communicate with exclusively English-speaking staff. That is why I am proud to stand here in support of this bill and this government's reforms, which support my community across the Mulgrave electorate and support the most vulnerable in our community.

In conclusion, this bill is about more than just technical amendments to an act; it is about trust – trust that when we entrust our loved ones to a residential aged care facility the system will not fail them, trust that those administering powerful medications know what they are doing and are accountable for doing it correctly and trust that this government will continue to act when we see risks emerging in our health and aged care systems. I am proud that these reforms have been built on consultation with health professionals, unions and the community. They reflect not only expert advice but also the lived experiences of families across Victoria who have witnessed the devastating consequences of poor medication management. By strengthening the law we are honouring those stories and making sure fewer families suffer in the future. I again thank the Minister for Health and the Minister for Ageing for their tireless work on bringing these reforms to us. I commend the bill to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (18:20): I rise this evening to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 and to indicate that we will not be opposing this very important legislation. This bill represents a crucial step forward in ensuring that our most vulnerable Victorians, our elderly residents in aged care, receive the respect, dignity and professional care they deserve when it comes to medication management. Every Victorian, regardless of their personal needs and circumstances, deserves to be looked after with dignity in their later years.

We cannot ignore the stark findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The commission heard devastating evidence about the inappropriate management of medication in our aged care facilities. As the commission reported, they heard about aged care staff members failing to administer medications correctly or administering medicines but failing to ensure that residents actually swallowed them. They documented failures to administer medicines at the correct time or in the correct dose and residents being administered incorrect medicines generally. These are not mere administrative oversights; these are failures that can have life-threatening consequences for our most vulnerable citizens. Our elderly Victorians built this state. They deserve nothing less than excellence in their aged care. When 20 per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from aged care facilities result

from inappropriate medicine use, we know we have a systemic problem that demands legislative attention.

I have been fortunate to recently visit three outstanding aged care facilities in my electorate as part of Aged Care Employee Day with Tom Symondson, CEO of Ageing Australia, and Danni Campbell-Manley. At Australian Unity's Alba suites, Mecwacare Malvern and Bolton Clarke's Europa on Alma I witnessed firsthand the dedication and professionalism of our aged care workforce. These are amazing modern facilities equipped with the latest technology and staffed by committed professionals. At Mecwacare I observed the innovative use of a robot called Abi. She was absolutely extraordinary. She was probably half my size, looked like a Lego figure and chatted to residents. As we have heard from my colleague across the chamber, residents often revert to their native language when they are in aged care, when they are getting older or if dementia sets in. It was absolutely beautiful to see a robot that was so sophisticated that it could speak in nearly a hundred languages and communicate with residents. We are seeing innovation in aged care facilities, and this is really important to ensure that our older residents just feel comfortable in their facilities. At Bolton Clarke they were celebrating their 140th year of service, and I saw the depth of experience and commitment that defines quality aged care. But what struck me most profoundly were the skills and dedication of the doctors, nurses and staff I met. These professionals understand ultimately that medication administration is not a routine task. It requires clinical judgement, the ability to recognise adverse reactions and the expertise to respond appropriately when complications actually arise.

The statistics paint a sobering picture of the complexities we are dealing with. Thirty-six per cent of Victorian aged care residents are prescribed nine or more medications daily, the highest rate of polypharmacy in the country. Nineteen per cent receive antipsychotics or medications that carry particular risks if not managed appropriately. When I considered the residents I met during my recent visits, many with complex chronic conditions and multiple health challenges, it became crystal clear that these are real people with complex needs. Whether they are managing diabetes or heart conditions or challenging behavioural symptoms of dementia, every resident deserves special care. We have to honour their dignity and meet their individual circumstances. Medication administration in these settings requires nothing less than professional clinical care. These are not simply tablets being dispersed, these are complex pharmaceutical interventions that can mean the difference between comfort and suffering, stability and crisis, or life and death. This bill recognises that reality by ensuring only registered nurses, enrolled nurses and other authorised health practitioners can actually administer drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. This includes antibiotics, opioids, analgesics like morphine and oxycodone, benzodiazepines, and other high-risk medications.

However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the elephant in the room: workforce capacity. The sector will need approximately 650 additional nurses to meet these new requirements. We know that there is a nurse shortage and we are already significantly challenged across Victoria, particularly in regional and rural areas. This is where government must step up and work collaboratively with the sector to ensure these shortages are addressed comprehensively. As Anne McCormack from Mecwacare put it during my visit there, we need partnerships and not just policies. The \$7.6 million allocated over four years for state-funded services is a start, but we need clear, more robust responses that provide the private and not-for-profit sectors some answers. We must do more. We must work hard, hand in hand with providers, peak bodies and training institutions, to create clear pathways into aged care nursing and to make these careers attractive and sustainable.

In my electorate of Prahran we are fortunate to have exceptional aged care facilities, including Jewish Care in Windsor and Royal Freemasons in Moubray Street, alongside the facilities I recently visited and outlined. These providers understand the importance of clinical excellence in medication management, and many are already operating to the standards this bill will mandate. But they also understand the workforce challenges ahead. During my conversations with facility managers and clinical directors, the message is consistent: they support these reforms because they know they improve resident safety, but they need government to be a genuine partner in addressing the workforce

pipeline. As one director told me, we are not just caring for bodies, we are caring for people's mothers and fathers, and they all deserve the very best. Many of us have been touched by this experience, having to consider aged care for our family members, for our parents, for people that we love. They are not just bodies, they are actually people, and we want the very best for them. That is absolutely what they deserve.

I am pleased that this bill includes measured implementation timelines. The July 2026 commencement date, coupled with a 90-day grace period, demonstrates the government's recognition that transformation of this magnitude requires careful planning and support. The bill also sensibly provides for exceptional circumstances, genuine emergencies or unexpected staff shortages where delayed medication could place residents at risk. This is not about creating loopholes for inadequate rostering, it is about acknowledging health care is unpredictable and patient safety must always come first. The five-year review process and regular sector engagement through voluntary surveys will ensure that we can monitor implementation and make adjustments where they are needed. This is not about a set-and-forget reform, it is the beginning of ongoing commitment to excellence in aged care medication management.

But let me be clear: legislation alone will not solve the challenges in aged care. This bill creates the framework for safer medication administration, but it also must be coupled with continued investment in workforce development, ongoing collaboration with the sector and unwavering commitment to treating our elderly citizens with the dignity that they deserve. When I think of the residents I met during my recent visits, people who have contributed decades to building our communities and who deserve nothing less than the highest quality of care in their twilight years, I know we have a moral obligation to get this right. Every person, regardless of their cognitive ability, their cultural background, their financial circumstances or their complex medical needs, deserves to receive their medication safely and with dignity.

We are not going to oppose this bill, because it represents a step towards ensuring that our most vulnerable Victorians receive the professional, skilled care they deserve and it aligns our state with the recommendations of the royal commission and brings aged care medication management in line with hospital standards. But support for this bill must be coupled with continued vigilance around workforce capacity, ongoing collaboration with the sector and sustained investment in making aged care nursing an attractive career choice for the next generation of healthcare professionals. Whilst I only have 10 seconds left, I do want to acknowledge that the aged care workforce has a lot of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds coming in from overseas to assist us. Thank you and a shout-out to all of them.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:30): I rise today in support of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. This is a bill that speaks to our values as a Parliament and as a community. It places the safety, dignity and rights of older Victorians at the centre of aged-care reform and responds to the urgent need for change in how medication is administered in residential aged care homes across our state. This legislation is not just a technical fix, it is a moral and practical response to years of concern, advocacy and evidence that medication practices in aged care need to be safer, more accountable and more respectful of the people receiving care.

For too long personal care workers, who do incredible work under challenging conditions, have been placed in the difficult position of administering high-risk medications without the clinical training or legal protection to do so safely. These workers are dedicated, compassionate and essential to aged care, but they are not nurses. They should not be expected to carry out tasks that require clinical judgement, especially when it comes to medications that can cause serious harm if misused. This bill corrects that. It ensures that only qualified health professionals such as registered nurses, enrolled nurses with approved training and authorised practitioners like GPs and pharmacists can administer high-risk medications, including drugs of dependence, opioids, benzodiazepines, antibiotics and clinical trial medications.

Importantly, this bill also protects the rights of residents who are capable of self-administering their medication. It does not take away their autonomy. Instead it reinforces the principle that aged care should be person centred, respectful and clinically safe. Residents will still be able to take their own medication when it is safe to do so. The bill also allows for exceptions in emergencies, where delaying medication could put somebody at risk. This is a balanced approach that prioritises safety without being rigid or unrealistic. The legislation is a direct response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which revealed heartbreakingly stories of medication mismanagement, residents receiving the wrong dose at the wrong time or not at all. In some cases medication was given out without proper oversight, without clinical judgement and without consent. The commission called for stronger safeguards, better training and clearer accountability. This bill delivers on those recommendations.

I want to acknowledge the tireless advocacy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the mighty ANMF, particularly the Victorian branch, which has campaigned for this change for years. They understand that medication administration is a core nursing responsibility – not just a task but a clinical process that involves assessment, decision-making and care planning. When I was an adviser to the Victorian Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, the Honourable Luke Donnellan, I met for the first time in person the formidable Lisa Fitzpatrick and Paul Gilbert, who have been the strongest advocates for these changes. The Labor government listens to and values nurses. Under our government they have received an incredible 28 per cent pay rise to recognise the important work they do. I also listen to and value nurses. I have to; I am surrounded by them. My mum was a nurse in aged care. My sister is a nurse. Three of my sisters-in-law are nurses, four of my good friends are nurses and right now my daughter is being looked after by the dedicated nurses at the Royal Children's Hospital. In fact I did not end up having a 40th birthday because I did not set a date with enough notice to work into rosters.

Recently I visited the Northern Hospital with our wonderful new federal member for Calwell Basem Abdo, who brought the Deputy Prime Minister to Broadmeadows to talk to the nursing students about the fabulous \$330-a-week placement support payment the federal government started in July. I heard from some of the nurse educators how hard it has been for many doing the 20 weeks of unpaid placements they are required to do, often far away from home and especially hard for those who have to pay rent or mortgages. These nurse educators told me a heartbreakingly story. In the past they had had to speak to one of their students about personal hygiene, never an easy conversation, but through this conversation they learned she had no option but to live out of her car to complete her placement. But the Labor government's placement support payment now helps all of our aspiring nurses, teachers and social workers to undertake placements with dignity and support, and I thank them for this very important initiative.

Supports like this reduce barriers. That helps grow the workforce, which in turn enables us to put in place requirements to keep older people who are living in residential aged care safe and can offer more dignity of care with improved staffing numbers. We saw evidence of this during the pandemic in public aged care, with improved staff ratios than the private sector, and I thank the ANMF for their advocacy on that outcome, also delivered by the state Labor government. Better ratios support all staff in aged care, and I also want to give a big shout-out to the personal care workers who work so hard to give people the dignity, care and respect they deserve. I am so pleased the federal government is also supporting wage rises to these dedicated caregivers, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for the important work they do every day.

While the Deputy Prime Minister was in Broadmeadows, I also took the chance to show him the magnificent Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute, where the caring people of the north can turn their values into skills for the jobs we need now and into the future – jobs in health, early education, justice, mental health, disability, aged care and nursing – jobs that are both in demand and deeply rewarding. I thank our Minister for Health for visiting recently and our Minister

for Skills and TAFE for her strong support of this \$60 million investment in Broadmeadows, investment that helps build the workforce we need now and provide for the growing need into the future.

The royal commission into aged care also recommended there be nurses in aged care at all times, and the federal government is mandating this from November this year, ensuring that the legislation we pass on drugs and medications in this place is also practical and enforceable. By having only qualified health professionals administering high-risk medications, we are not only improving safety, we are also supporting nurses to work to their full scope of practice. This leads to better job satisfaction, stronger continuity of care and earlier detection of health issues in residents. Unsafe medication practices have led to avoidable hospitalisations, increased pressure on emergency departments and distress for families. When medication is administered incorrectly, it can cause falls, overdoses, infections and deteriorations in health. The bill will help reduce those risks. It will ensure that medication rounds are not just about handing out pills but are opportunities for nurses to assess residents, detect early signs of illness and intervene before a crisis occurs.

The reform has not been rushed. It has been developed through extensive consultation with unions, peak bodies, aged care providers, multicultural organisations and health professionals. It reflects the voices of those who are on the front lines and those who live in aged care every day. It also aligns with Commonwealth legislation and modernises the language and terminology used in our laws to reflect current clinical standards. The changes will come into effect on 1 July 2026, giving providers time to adjust, train staff and ensure compliance. The government will provide support and guidance to help aged care homes transition smoothly. There will also be a five-year review to ensure the reforms are working as intended and that providers continue to have the resources they need.

I recently participated in the DPV Health MP round table along with Iwan Walters and Bronwyn and many of my colleagues from the north, where aged care was a key focus. We discussed expanding local services and investing in health hubs across the north, including in Broadmeadows, and improving access to GPs and mental health support. These priorities reflect the needs of our growing and diverse populations. As a lifetime resident of the Broadmeadows electorate, I have seen firsthand the dedication of our local health workers and the resilience of our families. This bill is for them. It is for every nurse who stayed late to monitor a patient, every carer who has raised a concern and every family member who fought for safer care. The bill is not just about medicine, it is about justice, dignity and respect. It is about recognising that older people have the right to safe, high-quality care and ensuring that aged care is not a place of risk but a place of dignity, comfort and community.

I fully support this bill. It will ensure older Victorians are safe, respected and well cared for. It gives nurses and aged care workers the support they need to do their jobs properly, and it gives families peace of mind. In Broadmeadows and across Victoria, people deserve aged care that is kind, professional and trustworthy, and this bill helps us get there. We are working with the federal government to make aged care better for everyone, because when we care for our elders with dignity and compassion, we build a stronger, fairer community, and that is exactly what Labor stands for. This bill also speaks to the broader vision we have for aged care in Victoria and building something better, creating a system where older people feel safe and valued, where families can trust that their loved ones are receiving the best possible care and where health professionals are empowered to do their jobs with confidence and pride.

In Broadmeadows we have seen the impact of strong community-based care. Facilities like Ottoman Village Aged Care are more than buildings; they are homes. They are places where relationships are built, where cultural needs are respected and where care is delivered with compassion. We must ensure that all aged care homes across Victoria can offer this level of service. I know I have said it before, but I cannot thank enough the workers at Plumpton Villa aged care for the dignity and care given to my father and our family in the short time he was there to spend his last days.

Speaking on this bill, we have the opportunity to recognise the critical role of carers, both paid and unpaid, in supporting our older people. Carers are the unsung heroes of our health system, providing

emotional support and helping manage meals and medication and advocating for their loved ones. The bill supports carers and reduces the burden and stress on families. And while I am giving a shout-out to carers, I really want to give a shout-out to my mum, who cared for my dad for 20 years after he became a paraplegic. Her dedication and commitment, even during the toughest of times, was second to none and an inspiration to many. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:40): I rise today to talk on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I am very lucky; both of my parents are still alive, both in their 80s, and fortunately for them, touch wood, they both still live at home. But in my previous role as a plumber I used to do a lot of work in aged care facilities. We just heard the previous member talking about the dignity and respect that we need to give our elderly residents in regional Victoria and also in metropolitan Melbourne. We need to make sure, if they are moving into these residential facilities, that we do have all the things in place to make sure that they live a happy and healthy life as best they can.

This bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to strengthen medication safety in aged care settings by ensuring clinical responsibility for administering specific medicines rests with qualified health professionals. I think we all agree with that. Nowadays, with the amount of medication and tablets that are needed, and as we are living longer, we need to make sure that they are administered right. We have a lot of elderly people and people in general that now have a lot of allergies, and we need to make sure that this medication, which is helping with prolonging their lives, is administered safely. This is why we are bringing this in. The bill updates the legislative framework governing medication administration in residential aged care facilities, and only registered and enrolled nurses or other health professionals, such as doctors and pharmacists, may administer prescribed drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. These are the ones we need to make sure, if they are being administered to anybody, we are doing the right thing with and getting the doses correct.

This aligns Victorian legislation with national aged care standards and Commonwealth reform. The bill supports clinical governance frameworks that ensure safe and accountable medication practices to bring aged care settings into line with the standards in hospitals and other health services. That is just making sure that we have the correct people administering these drugs. In aged care and hospitals we know that we could always do with more workers. The government is making sure here – which we are agreeing with – that when we are in healthcare situations in aged care facilities, we are confident that the person administering the drugs to our loved ones is competent, qualified and, at the end of the day, knows what they are doing. We do not want them mixing drugs, which is going to end up disastrously. So we are making sure that this happens. Personal care workers will no longer be able to administer drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications to aged care residents. As we just spoke about, having the correct and qualified nurses and medical professionals administering them takes away that opportunity. If we do have a place where we do not have those officers and nurses who are qualified to administer those medications, the personal care workers are no longer able to do it. This bill is just making sure of that.

Our aged care facilities right around regional Victoria and especially in the Latrobe Valley have definitely changed over the years. We have had a progression, fortunately now, for our ageing population, and as the years roll by, we all might be in that situation if we are lucky enough to live long enough to become a burden to our children, hopefully. If that happens and we need to go into these facilities, we need to make sure that the people that are looking after us are qualified. I touched on some of the facilities around the Latrobe Valley – for argument's sake I will use my mum and dad as an example. As I said, they are still in their own home, which they have been in for a while. My mother is firmly against me going into a home, but they can now shift into some –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Martin CAMERON: I know, I might beat them in there. There are some wonderful units that form part of these facilities now where they can move in and still live unassisted in the facility in these actual units. Hopefully they live out their life in these units or, as my mum and dad do, live out their life at their family home. You can progress into these facilities and go into a bit of care, which is monitored care in rooms, or if it turns out they need palliative care, they can actually move in where there is full-time, 24-hour representation by medical practitioners to look after them.

Currently the administration of controlled medicines is predominantly managed by registered nurses and then actually administered by enrolled nurses and careworkers. Careworkers are not trained or qualified in recognising and responding to issues that may arise, such as adverse reactions to medications, and that is what I was talking about before. A lot of us, as we journey through getting older, require a lot more tablets and medications to keep us upright. Whether it be issues with cholesterol and our heart or other issues that may show up later in life, we need to make sure that if we are adding a new drug or pill to our regime it is administered properly and all checks and balances are done. Aged care residents increasingly have more complex needs, as I mentioned. It is just a fact of life that this can happen. We all cannot be youthful like the member for Euroa and her little daughter down here. My journey is certainly further down the track than what they are.

Thirty-six per cent of Victorian aged care residents have been prescribed nine or more medications. I remember the member for Gippsland East Tim Bull talking about his mother that was in aged care up there and lived to a great old age. The member for Gippsland East was talking about the amount of medications; as each year rolled on, there was another medication introduced. We need to make sure that no matter what age people are at and the medications that they are requiring, they are now going to be administered by fully qualified professional nurses or practitioners that know the signs of when things go wrong. The reform responds to sector feedback and addresses significant concerns identified by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, such as appropriate and unsafe use of medications. As I said right at the very start about the workforce inside these facilities, we all know it needs to be strengthened and we need to have more and more people that are actually able and licensed to administer these drugs as we move forward, because more and more of us are ageing gracefully and living longer. We do not oppose this bill, and we commend it to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:50): I am pleased to follow on from the previous speaker and have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. To just follow on from the comments from the previous speaker, supporting those in aged care and making sure that those people who enter aged care within local communities are supported and are supported in a way that community, government, loved ones and everybody has a sense of certainty and safety in is something that we should of course all strive for.

The points that members have gone to in their contributions around this bill this evening go to some of those changes that we have seen across the aged care landscape both within our state and within other territories and jurisdictions across the country. That goes to some of the data. We know those in aged care are indeed living longer, as was mentioned by the previous speaker, and do have a range of complex medical and healthcare needs. Making the necessary provisions for the care of those individuals is something that this bill directly addresses, and that is something that I welcome. In listening to not all but some of the contributions from those opposite, I can see that that is also something that is supported, which is important.

What we know – and Acting Speaker Hamer, I am sure you know, as the hardworking local member that you are, and other members right across both sides of the Parliament know – in having the opportunity to visit aged care both as a local member but also to visit people like my nan, who was in aged care in Werribee for a significant period of time, is having the opportunity to speak with staff and to see how communities interact within the aged care system is something that I think is really important for society and for community. Because when you have the opportunity to visit and you have the opportunity to speak to staff and understand the complexities, the dynamic and the

environment that is in many of these places, you know and understand that there is lots of variance. There is variance to which people are at different stages within their life. There is variance to the way that medicines are administered – the care, personalities, size and location. All of these things change the dynamic settings of aged care.

There has been a significant amount of work that has been done both by the feds and by this government that goes to improvements within the sector. I think the hardworking local members that so many people are within this place know and understand that when families and communities raise these issues within aged care, we have got a profound obligation to make sure that we support processes, initiatives and legislation such as the one before us this evening to improve that system. What that means is that we are getting better outcomes for communities. We saw, particularly in the pandemic, some very challenging circumstances which arose due to a whole range of failings within the system. We have got to be honest and we have got to be up-front about the way that those matters played out.

But what is really important is the work that is done by so many within this space. I heard the fantastic member for Broadmeadows making some contributions around work that she did in a previous role. When I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Carers and Volunteers – and I have spoken about this before – working with people like Gerard Mansour and others who have done so much both within the advocacy space but also in the changing dynamic and the work that is being done through many of our advocacy bodies around elder abuse and a whole range of other matters, you get a sense of just how important these matters are to individuals.

These should be matters that we all want to tackle, because in the end it is about providing the very best quality of life. It should not matter where you come from, what your medical needs are or what your journey is as a senior within our community; we should all want to make sure that that period of time in your life is one of dignity, is one of care and is one that communities can be proud of. When you see it work well, it works really well, and when you see it work poorly, it works very poorly. That of course means that people get hurt, we lose lives and people get harmed, and that results in tragedy. The piece of legislation that is before the house this evening makes a range of changes, which others have mentioned, that go to the medical care of those that I have discussed in the 6 minutes that I have been making the contribution thus far. The bill seeks to ensure that there is that additional support that I mentioned before, to go to that improved practice and to implement the reforms that have been heard through extensive consultation and engagement with the sector.

The commencement date of 1 July 2026, with a 90-day policy position of no enforcement action to be pursued by the health regulator, is in direct response to feedback from the non-government sector. We understand that there might be, in instances of this bill, unforeseen circumstances that impact nursing availability – examples being a serious resident emergency and temporary staff shortages at the commencement of a shift or other factors impacting nursing availability and medicines at the time – but the bill provides the power to make regulations to prescribe circumstances where that obligation does not apply. There will be further consultation and work done on this. There needs to be a practical implication to the changes and the reforms that are contained within this bill, and there is. But in the end, providing that additional certainty and those additional opportunities for care is something that is very important to the government and is something that was contained in the work that was done time and time again by so many that I mentioned earlier.

What we wish to continue to strive towards is better care and better support for our aged residents, and providing for additional support and certainty within the sector is something that is very, very important to the government. Whether it is aged care, whether it is education, whether it is transport, the work that is done to provide better certainty and better systems – and I know that the member for Frankston works very hard on all of these matters time and time again –

Members interjecting.

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Josh BULL: Tirelessly indeed, member for Point Cook. We might be there soon. What we know, member for Frankston, is that the reforms that are contained within this bill go to –

A member interjected.

Josh BULL: Jeez, we have upgraded. We have got the Deputy Speaker in the house. Things must be getting a bit rowdy. Just keep an eye on the member for Frankston at this time. This is a piece of legislation that goes to providing for better aged care right across our community. It is a piece of work that has been extensively consulted on. It is great work by the advisers and the department, and I happily commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Benalla Health maternal and child health services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:00): (1280) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is a commitment to restore birthing at Benalla Health through a midwifery group practice model so babies can once again be born in Benalla under safe, continuous care. Benalla is home to about 14,000 people and is now one of the largest towns in regional Victoria without a functioning maternity service that delivers babies. Last year Benalla Health paused birthing and assured the community that services would resume once GP obstetricians were recruited, but since then we have been downgraded to a level 1 capability, and that level offers only antenatal and postnatal support and no birthing. It is not suitable for a town of Benalla's size or needs, and this is not an isolated concern. Across my electorate regional maternity is under immense pressure. Kilmore maternity is too often on bypass, and women are increasingly facing birth before arrival because they must travel such long distances. The surge in demand for Ronald McDonald House accommodation tells the story. Regional mothers are leaving their communities before due dates because they can no longer birth close to home.

My electorate spans 12,500 square kilometres, and for a region this size this government should be ashamed that support is so limited for women to labour safely at their local hospital. Continuity of care has been replaced with long car trips, patchwork services and rising anxiety. Check-ups in one town, imaging in another and labour hours away is not a safe or humane model. I recently met with the president of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria Dr Louise Manning, who has helped reopen regional maternity services, including in Castlemaine. Her message was clear: without ambition and leadership from government, temporary downgrades become permanent, and when we lose maternity, we trigger a domino effect. We lose the capacity to retain other skilled services like anaesthetists, which further weakens our local health care, and these decisions affect real families and real people. One Benalla mother, Kim, wrote to the minister and me about constant travel, time off work, childcare challenges and the fear of being far from home for essential appointments. She said it plainly:

Women in Benalla are entitled to safe, local integrated maternity care, but right now we are not getting it.

I thank the Benalla midwives who are doing everything they can to retain their skills by working in Melbourne, Shepparton and Wangaratta. Their commitment keeps the hope alive for a safe return of local birthing. Postnatal programs like breastfeeding support are valuable, but they do not replace local birthing. Families in Benalla deserve the same standard of care as families in Mansfield or Echuca. They deserve the safety and continuity of a midwifery group practice model that is proven to deliver better outcomes, stronger relationships and fewer interventions. Minister, commit to restoring birthing in Benalla through a midwifery group practice model and to stabilising regional maternity more broadly. Do not wait for another review and certainly do not wait for a crisis. Bring births back to Benalla and give regional women the safe, local care that we deserve.

Lara electorate community hubs

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:03): (1281) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action that I seek is that the minister visit with one of the incredible community hubs that are in the electorate of Lara. These community hubs are based in primary schools, and the hubs engage families, especially women and preschool-aged children from culturally diverse backgrounds, connecting them with one another and their schools, local services and broader communities. The Lara electorate is incredibly diverse, representing a vibrant mix of cultures. These community hubs play a crucial role in assisting newly arrived migrants and are an essential resource for our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. They help to link individuals in need with educational opportunities, social networks and vital services. Visiting a hub would be a fantastic opportunity for the minister to hear about the work that is being done to support our multicultural community locally in Geelong's north, and I look forward to hosting the minister.

Mornington electorate health services

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:04): (1282) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to update my community on any plans for much-needed healthcare investment on the Mornington Peninsula, including upgrading Rosebud Hospital and investing in specialist services like public ophthalmology. Across Victoria only 65 per cent of 000 calls meet the 15-minute response benchmark, well below the 85 per cent target; ambulances are ramping outside of hospitals; there has been a 13 per cent spike in hospital-related complaints; and more than 42,000 Victorians last year waited longer than clinically recommended for essential care. Locally there is an urgent need for health investment, particularly at places like Rosebud Hospital. Rosebud Hospital is the closest one for people in the southern part of my electorate. Locals are waiting too long for emergency care, too long for elective surgery and too long to see a specialist. It needs an urgent upgrade that Liberals, led by the member for Nepean, committed hundreds of millions to last election, while Labor to this day continue to ignore it. Meanwhile, more so than the big new sign that has been put up at Rosebud Hospital, the awesome staff there and patients just want a roof that does not need buckets and hallways that do not need towels to catch water when it rains. What is more, there is also a need for more specialist services, including public ophthalmology; there is none at the moment – none at Frankston Hospital, Rosebud Hospital or anywhere on the peninsula, so accessing public eye care is simply out of reach for many.

One such person is Dianne in my electorate, who has to travel all the way to Melbourne to access ophthalmology services, taking hours and often spending over \$200 on taxis each time, something that she can barely afford and which means she needs to give up other things. This is really unacceptable. Over 26 per cent of the peninsula is aged 65 and over. Eye conditions like cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration are common and treatable, particularly if they are caught early. They are the difference between independence and living with a disability, or sight and blindness. So why are we forcing the most vulnerable in our community to travel hours, pay hundreds of dollars or go without care? This is not just a health gap, it is a fairness gap. Imagine being 75, unable to drive with worsening vision and your only appointment is in Melbourne. So how do you get there? Rely on a family member, pay for a taxi, take two buses and a train or, like many people do, you cancel the appointment. And then you fall – you lose your confidence, you lose your independence, all because the care you need was too far away. So we need these urgent specialist services on the Mornington Peninsula. We need urgent investment in places like Rosebud Hospital. These things should not wait any longer, and I call on this Labor government to take action.

Country Fire Authority Kororoit electorate brigades

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:07): (1283) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Emergency Services, who I note is in the chamber with us. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with me so I can best understand how the government will continue to support CFA volunteers in the Kororoit community, not only through infrastructure investment like the Rockbank

CFA station upgrade but also through programs that address the wellbeing and retention of these extraordinary volunteers. I would like to acknowledge the incredible work of our CFA volunteers, particularly those who serve in the Kororoit community and who I have had the pleasure of visiting on a number of occasions. These men and women give their time selflessly, answering the call when our community needs them most. They are not only first responders at emergencies but also active community members who deliver fire safety education, attend local events and support one another through the challenges that come with this vital work.

During a recent visit to the Rockbank CFA, I met with captain Luke Hibbins-Leece, who is an incredible volunteer, an extraordinary man and an incredible community member, and I am so proud that the Allan Labor government is investing \$100,000 for the Rockbank CFA to upgrade their station. This investment will improve the space and facilities for volunteers, strengthening their ability to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies. I know the members of the Rockbank CFA and indeed all of our local brigades will make great use of this funding to better serve our community. However, it is important to acknowledge that being a CFA volunteer is not without its challenges. Many balance the demands of family, work and volunteering, often at a personal cost. They face intense and sometimes dangerous situations and the mental toll that emergency services work can take. Supporting them means not only providing the right equipment and infrastructure but also ensuring that they have access to training and wellbeing programs and of course ongoing recognition for their service. I thank each and every one of them.

Life Saving Victoria

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:09): (1284) My adjournment is to the Minister for Emergency Services, who I note is at the table, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to confirm that Life Saving Victoria will receive the same amount of funding this year as it did last year. What has occurred over recent weeks is Life Saving Victoria has written to a number of coastal councils, claiming that the state contribution has not been committed to and therefore has told councils that to maintain the same level of service they need to pick up the tab. So East Gippsland Shire Council have been told that they are facing an increase of \$56,000 to \$105,000. Wellington have been told they need to contribute \$66,000 instead of \$32,000. South Gippsland goes from \$33,000 to \$113,000, and Warrnambool from \$23,000 to \$77,000. And Mornington Peninsula, I note, have corresponded with the honourable member for Nepean, saying they will need to increase their payments from \$90,000 to a whopping \$351,000. This is going on while we have the new emergency services levy being applied to our electorates. It will take \$5 million out of East Gippsland Shire Council and around \$10 million out of Wellington Shire Council. Given that, the ratepayers in these coastal councils should not have to fill any void if it has been left by a lack of state contribution to Life Saving Victoria. The action I seek is to ask the minister to confirm that Life Saving Victoria will indeed be funded to the same level.

Get Active Kids voucher program

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:10): (1285) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Community Sport and concerns the Get Active Kids voucher program. The action I seek is that the minister provide an update on how the program as announced in the state budget 2025–26 will assist families in my electorate of Narre Warren South. It is hard to believe that we are coming up to round 9 of the Get Active Kids voucher program. It has been going for so many years and delivering to those who are doing it a little bit tough. I am happy that our government has locked in the vouchers for another two years and the program will be opened to kids up to the age of 18 who are named on a Commonwealth healthcare card or pensioner concession card and named on a Medicare card. I know how popular the program is in my community. It has helped many vulnerable families with the cost of living, including registration fees, memberships, sports equipment and uniforms. My community loves their sport, and the vouchers have reduced the barriers to participation for many families who struggle to meet the basic grassroots costs. Physical activity is important. Not only is it great for kids' mental and physical health, but it also helps children to build friendships, resilience, teamwork and skills and to just be further connected within the community. The Get Active Kids

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voucher program is another display of our government's commitment to helping children reach their full potential, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Parentline

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:12): (1286) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to reverse the decision to close Parentline in October. None of the alternative programs proposed by the government adequately serve the community in the same way that Parentline does. Parentline is not just a helpline, it is a lifeline for thousands and thousands of parents and carers right across our great state – a service that provides support in some of the most difficult and isolating moments a family can face. For just \$1.3 million a year, Parentline supports over 18,000 callers – a modest cost for a profound impact. The service is staffed by qualified trauma-informed professionals, and it reaches families from all walks of life, with particularly high engagement from rural and regional areas, First Nations families and neurodiverse communities. The words of parents themselves speak volumes. This is from a parent dealing with school refusal:

Every morning was a battle. My kid just wouldn't go to school, tears, panic, sometimes full-on meltdowns. I felt like a failure, like I was doing something wrong. I called Parentline just needing someone to talk to who wouldn't judge me. She was amazing. She helped me understand what might be going on underneath it all, and gave me real tips to try, not just 'make them go.' Honestly, just having someone say 'You're not alone, this is hard,' made such a difference. I'll be calling again for sure.

And this is from a parent of a child with additional needs:

Most days, I felt like no one understood what life's like with a kid who has extra needs. But Parentline did. They got it. They let me vent, cry, whatever I needed. I don't feel so alone after calling.

Finally, this is from a foster parent:

Fostering's tough. Some days I just wanted to quit. I rang Parentline not expecting much, but they actually got it. They gave me space to talk things out and helped me find ways to cope. That support meant the world.

Victorian parents and carers cannot afford to lose Parentline. The minister must keep it open. This is a critical service – a service used by thousands and thousands of families over the course of a year. \$1.3 million is frankly minuscule in the context of the total Victorian budget. It is a set of services that is not replicated by any of the other services across government. It is so important that this service be retained, and I call upon the Minister for Children in the other place to retain it.

Community safety

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:15): (1287) My adjournment is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is that the Attorney-General update me on our government's implementation of anti-vilification reforms, which we rightly strengthened earlier this year, with the new laws set to come online next month. As Victoria prepares for some really nasty far right wing protests this weekend, our response to hate speech and vilification in our community has never, ever been more important. When I spoke on these reforms I recounted some of the racist vilification that I was seeing on my social media pages directed towards folks in my local community. Of course it is not just me who has experienced this. I am sure we all remember when the Premier recently put up a video with someone – a Muslim woman, I think it was – who just received the keys to a brand new social home. Through no fault of their own, the video sparked a ferocious backlash of racism and Islamophobia. The woman was demonised and typecast by anonymous Twitter accounts as a recently arrived immigrant, which in all likelihood was not the case. I hoped that following the federal election this kind of commentary would die down. Concerningly, it has gotten worse, and we are seeing more racism, Islamophobia and vilification in our local communities than ever before.

These days if I make a post with a photo that includes folks in my very diverse community in Melbourne's west, with large Indian and Asian communities, dozens if not hundreds of comments are posted. They usually emerge asking me why there are not any white people in the photo or accusing

us of participating in some kind of ‘great replacement’— whatever that is – or nastier, more disgusting commentary on communities in our part of Melbourne that did not ask for this kind of hatred to be directed towards them. With innocuous posts I have made, like a graphic celebrating Pakistan Independence Day or a subsequent post of me with other members in this place celebrating India Independence Day, we have been bombarded with hundreds if not thousands of comments spewing the vilest, most racist nonsense. This racism is most potently directed towards our Indian community in Melbourne’s west. There is absolutely nothing like it in blatancy or vitriol. It is not masked by concerns about crime like we see with our African communities, nor are they easily stereotyped, with comments talking about lazy dole bludgers who come here for benefits. These are appalling, appalling, appalling comments. This is not the community response that I expect to see to these kinds of wonderful pictures celebrating the amazing people in Melbourne’s west, which is why my community and I would welcome an update from the Attorney on how these new reforms will work to stamp out hate speech and vilification of our multicultural communities here in Victoria.

Waste and recycling management

Tim READ (Brunswick) (19:18): (1288) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for Victoria to ban unnecessary single-use plastic items, including bread tags, soy sauce fish, coffee cups, produce bags and fruit and veg stickers, which are still far too common in our state. Plastics are mostly made from fossil fuels, and because they do not readily biodegrade they instead break down into smaller micro and nanoplastic fragments that find their way into every corner of our environment and even ourselves. As I stand here today, it is likely that I have a plastic spoon’s worth of nanoplastics floating around in my brain, as does everyone else in this room, according to a recent study from the University of New Mexico. While this may go some way to explaining the behaviour of some of us, I think we can all agree it would be better if the contents of our brains were just brains. Another study found microplastics in human placenta tissue, so we are now saddling children with this problem before they are even born. We know plastics leach nasty chemical additives into their surrounding environment, and these chemicals have been linked to health problems in humans because some of them mimic hormones. The environmental impacts of our addiction to plastic can easily be seen by anyone who has visited their local litter-clogged creek lately, where dedicated clean-up volunteers struggle to keep up with the constant river of rubbish. And we know animals up and down the food chain are ingesting microplastics, which block their digestive tracts and even starve some species to death.

In recent years South Australia has banned a number of single-use plastic items that are still available in Victoria, including heavyweight plastic bags, plastic coffee cups and lids, produce bags, plastic confetti and expanded polystyrene fruit and meat trays, among others, and the South Australian government is still going – soy sauce fish and juice box straws will be banned as of next Monday. Meanwhile, in Victoria our government banned a few single-use plastic items in early 2023, but things have been pretty quiet since then. I understand the states are working together on a national road map to reduce plastics, but this is taking years, and that process is no excuse for us to sit on our hands and wait while more plastics accumulate in our bodies. If South Australia can be a leader in eliminating unnecessary single-use plastic items from their state, so can we. It is time for this government to show the same leadership and stop these waterway-clogging, brain-infesting fossil fuel products from polluting our state. Minister, when it comes to eliminating single-use plastics, why can’t Victoria be more like South Australia?

Suburban Rail Loop

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:20): (1289) To wrap this up, my adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in meeting with the traders of the Kingsway precinct, Glen Waverley, to discuss the impacts of the Suburban Rail Loop East works and the support available throughout this period.

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I want to acknowledge the many businesses that continue to serve our community with resilience during these works. Craig Lane has been a driving force in Glen Waverley's dining scene, establishing venues such as the Steak Ministry, Paradise Road and the Elephant Corridor, each adding to the vibrancy of Kingsway. His newest venture, Gambino, created with Garen Maskal and Aret Arzadian, has quickly become a standout rooftop destination, pairing refined dining with sweeping views across Melbourne. Garen, along with cousins Aret and Sasoon Arzadian, are behind the much-loved Black Toro. Its bold flavours and modern take on Latin-inspired cuisine have made it both a local favourite and a drawcard well beyond Glen Waverley, reflecting the entrepreneurial migrant spirit that has shaped Kingsway. We also have Mitchell Zadow and the team at Sharrock Pitman Legal, who for many years have provided trusted legal services to both residents and small businesses. Their reputation was recently recognised when Mitchell was named Law Firm Leader 2025 by *Australasian Lawyer*. Kingsway is equally renowned for its outstanding Chinese restaurants, grocery stores and in recent years bubble tea shops. From established institutions to hidden gems in side streets, they are at the heart of what makes Glen Waverley a diverse and celebrated food destination. I want to make a special mention of Lisa and Tony at the House of Delight, whose warmth and hospitality have made their restaurant a much-loved gathering place in our community.

Meanwhile, SRL works are progressing rapidly. Crews are relocating underground services beneath Railway Parade North, Coleman Parade, Myrtle Street and Montclair Avenue to prepare for twin tunnels and a new underground station. This station will sit in the heart of the business district, providing turn-up-and-go services for over 7000 passengers a day and linking to Monash University in 3½ minutes. It will be a catalyst for new homes, double local jobs by 2050 and create 8000 direct jobs during construction.

I acknowledge that these works are disruptive. The project teams are working to maintain access to homes and businesses, manage traffic, reduce noise and dust and keep car parks open where possible. Importantly, the Suburban Rail Loop Authority has established a dedicated business support team to promote local traders, run events, provide marketing assistance, deliver signage and undertake financial baseline surveys to help reduce these impacts. I thank Kingsway traders and the Glen Waverley Traders Association for their resilience and ongoing commitment during this once-in-a-lifetime generation build, and I look forward to hosting the minister out in Glen Waverley. Hopefully we can sample some of these businesses' fine wares while she is there.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:23): The member for Kororoit had a matter for me, asking me to meet with her regarding the state government's support for the CFA and volunteers who are in her electorate, which I am absolutely very happy to do, and we will organise a time. Thank you very much.

I also thank the member for Gippsland East for his strong support for his community and for asking me to confirm Life Saving Victoria's funding and how it compares to previous years. I am happy to tell him that. I am sure he shares my view that Victoria's lifeguards and lifesavers go above and beyond to protect the community and save lives, and I thank them for their vital support and service to our communities. We all – and I know that includes the member for Gippsland South – want Victorians to be able to safely enjoy Victoria's spectacular waterways, of which he has quite a few. It is a very beautiful coastline that you have, as well as your riverways. We have doubled the funding for Life Saving Victoria since coming to government, and this has helped employ more lifeguards, build new clubs and deliver new boats, drones and equipment. It is thanks to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund that we have doubled the volunteer emergency services equipment grant, which Life Saving Victoria can also apply for, which they have in the past and I know they will continue to do.

The member for Euroa sought for the Minister for Health to restore birthing services to Benalla. The member for Lara's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, seeking a visit to a community hub in her electorate to see firsthand the support offered to multicultural communities.

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The member for Mornington asked the Minister for Health to increase health investment in his community. The member for Narre Warren South asked the Minister for Community Sport to provide information regarding how the government's Get Active Kids vouchers have benefited his community. The member for Ringwood had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Children, seeking a reversal of the decision to end funding for Parentline. The member for Laverton had a matter for the Attorney-General seeking information regarding the implementation of the government's recent anti-vilification laws. The member for Brunswick had a matter for the Minister for Environment, asking the government to ban single-use plastic items such as sushi soy sauce plastic fish containers to reduce microplastics in our environment and in our brains. The member for Glen Waverley had a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, to meet with local business members of the Kingsway precinct in his electorate. These will all be referred on to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:26 pm.