



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 27 August 2025**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	Lib	Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem <sup>6</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina <sup>3</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard <sup>7</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> DLP until 25 March 2024

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;  
Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;  
LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;  
Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 27 August 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

**The PRESIDENT:** I acknowledge in the gallery a former member of the Assembly, Judith Graley.

***Papers*****Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 – under section 43 of the Act –

Advancing the Victorian Treaty Process – Report, 2024–25.

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

Auditor-General – Financial Management of Local Councils, August 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

***Petitions*****Responses**

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning's response to petition titled 'Renaming of Berwick Springs Lake'.

***Business of the house*****Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

***Members statements*****Health system**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:44): The Allan Labor government is delivering only the best for Melbourne's western suburbs. Recently I had the chance to get a sneak peek at the new Footscray Hospital site with the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and it is spectacular. Set to open its doors in early 2026, the \$1.5 billion project will host a range of services, including maternity and mental health. When fully operational the hospital will have more than 500 beds and provide emergency care, including with a new mental health and alcohol and other drugs hub. This massive health investment continues across the western suburbs, where we are getting on with building the new Melton hospital. It was fantastic to join the Premier, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Health Infrastructure and the member for Melton to turn the sod on this project, worth \$900 million. On track for completion in 2029, this will be an important addition to the hospital network in the west and will work with existing health services, including the new Footscray Hospital, to reduce demand pressure across this growing region. These projects are vital to support the rapidly growing communities in Melbourne's west. Only the Allan Labor government will continue to invest in our western suburbs and deliver the world-class health services that westies deserve.

**West Gate Tunnel**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (09:46): Recently my son and I were able to experience a marvel of Labor's so-called Big Build – a futuristic, state-of-the-art experience, something so unfathomable that we had to be prepared, with our taxes diverted away from building it to being spent on building a virtual experience of it instead. The marvel I speak of is a tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel – that election-winning infrastructure promise meant to solve all the problems of the west. Of course in the virtual version there are no potholes, no traffic jams and no trucks, and there is no

mention that the project is three years late and \$3.5 billion over budget and that the clearance is too low for most of the B-doubles it was meant to divert. There is no mention of the toxic soil, the ghost shifts or the families whose compensation for the vibrations cracking their walls from floor to ceiling was a pizza voucher. There is no mention of the giant Orwellian mirror boots that are going to spew unfiltered diesel fumes all over thousands of homes. We know that all the resources and the money are being spent over in the east on the Suburban Rail Loop, but I suppose in the west we should just count ourselves lucky to have gotten a key ring and a shoddy little virtual game.

### **Drug harm reduction**

**David ETTERS**HANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:47): Last week we saw the release of two reports relating to drug consumption in Australia: the Coroners Court's *Victorian Overdose Deaths, 2015–2024*, and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's latest report on the national wastewater drug-monitoring program. The coroner's report reveals a depressingly familiar and persistent statistic. Deaths from overdoses continued to rise, from 547 in 2023 to 584 in 2024 – the highest death rate in a decade and more than double the road toll. Illicit drugs, notably heroin, methamphetamine, MDMA, cocaine and GHB, contributed to over 65 per cent of those overdose deaths. Significantly, cannabis does not feature in that list, and that is because no-one died from a cannabis overdose, and no-one ever has. Yet we know from the wastewater drug-monitoring that cannabis continues to be the most consumed illicit drug. There is a correlation between these two datasets. The profits from the sale of illicit cannabis are used by serious organised crime groups to fund the distribution, manufacture and importation of those very drugs that contribute to our unacceptably high overdose rate. Cannabis is, as a New South Wales police superintendent recently noted, the jet fuel of organised crime. We could deprive criminals of easy money, free up police to combat serious organised crime and redirect money to support our alcohol and other drug services by regulating cannabis. Victoria's forthcoming AOD plan must include the regulation of cannabis if we are serious about reducing our overdose deaths.

### **Kensington Primary School**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): Kensington Primary has been a part of Victoria's story since 1881. Today it stands as a proud, multicultural school community where students from every walk of life come together to learn, grow and thrive. I was proud to represent the Minister for Education at the official opening of Kensington Primary School's new facilities. I was joined by Cr Davydd Griffiths of the City of Melbourne as we toured the school and celebrated these really important upgrades. We were warmly welcomed by principal Bridget McLaughlin and her leadership team and the wonderful student leaders, who showed great pride in their school and spoke with such confidence about the opportunities ahead. That is why the Allan Labor government has invested more than \$7 million to deliver modern classrooms, a new reception and administration area, new bathrooms, a community gathering space and a passenger lift to ensure accessibility for all students. It is all about giving these students access to fresh, dynamic spaces that will support their learning and creativity. I thank the Kensington Primary School community for their warm welcome and congratulate them on this important milestone. The Allan Labor government is proud to stand with you and keep delivering for families right across the inner north.

### **River Nile School**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:50): River Nile School is not your average school. It is an independent senior secondary school that provides specialised and educational experiences for young women from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds who have had disrupted mainstream school experiences. I was so thrilled to be invited to River Nile and meet the incredible staff and leadership team and some really extraordinary young women who, despite all the obstacles in front of them, still turn up to school at River Nile because for them education is freedom. It is freedom to shape their future, to break the cycles of poverty, disadvantage and trauma. For these young women, education is a way to challenge injustices and to resist abuse, oppression and discrimination.

Sitting down and talking with them, we discussed housing, immigration and also the recognition of the rich skills that refugee and migrant women contribute to Victoria. These young women did not just share their aspirations, they also spoke so deeply, with poise and empathy, for their families and communities. For me, it was a really meaningful reminder that education is a defiant reminder that it is not just about turning up, it is about rising in spite of everything that these young women have had to overcome.

### Community safety

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:52): Today I rise to add my voice to that of the Prime Minister and the Premier and many others standing with our Jewish community following the revelations yesterday from ASIO that Iran gave the order for the sickening antisemitic arson attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea in December last year. It was a cowardly and divisive act, an attack that struck at the core of a peaceful Jewish community in the beating heart of Melbourne. I welcome the Australian government's immediate action to expel Iran's ambassador, sever diplomatic ties and proscribe the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organisation.

When I visited the Adass synagogue on the morning of the fire and spoke with the congregation, the disbelief on their faces was palpable. A few days later we visited with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and toured the charred ruins.

**Georgie Crozier**: It took a while. It took too long.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: I am sorry, Ms Crozier, that is a really offensive interjection.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT**: Rather than have a debate across the chamber, we will reset the clock.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: I rise to add my voice to that of the Prime Minister and the Premier and many of our leaders in standing with the Jewish community following yesterday's revelations from ASIO that Iran gave the order for the sickening antisemitic arson attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea in December last year. It was a cowardly and divisive attack that struck at the core of a peaceful Jewish community in the beating heart of Melbourne. I welcome the Australian government's immediate action to expel Iran's ambassador, sever diplomatic ties and proscribe the Revolutionary Guard of Iran as a terrorist organisation.

When I visited the Adass Synagogue on the morning of the fire, I saw the disbelief on the faces of a peaceful community. In the subsequent days, when I visited with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, we toured the burnt ruins of that place of prayer. The twisted metal, the charred prayer books and the acrid stench of hate will stay with me forever. But on my latest visit a couple of months ago we saw a resilient community praying again, peacefully praying in new premises. I want to congratulate the synagogue and the community for their resilience in the face of hate. We have got to all stand together as Australians and Victorians in condemning actions that bring hate to our city.

### Southern Women's Action Network

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:55): It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the members of SWAN who are in Parliament today. Welcome to you all. Since 1996 SWAN have been a group of progressive women on the Mornington Peninsula – the Southern Women's Action Network. They have increased women's active involvement in community decision-making and have taken action to address social justice and equity concerns. It was an audacious move, as the local area was conservative blue. These women who wanted to see change sought out like-minded women and got on with the job of creating change in their part of the world. It is worth acknowledging that the first speaker at a SWAN bimonthly meeting was the Honourable Joan Kirner. The room was full. From that day onwards the women of SWAN have continued to meet and take action. For over 30 years SWAN has hosted over 160 meetings, featuring women speakers from all walks of life and

experiences and from various backgrounds and beliefs. I have been fortunate enough to join a number of SWAN meetings, particularly with a focus on housing on the peninsula. I have experienced firsthand and I have heard from SWAN members about the incredible friendships that have been formed through the group amongst like-minded women. SWAN campaigns have included action to support human rights, gender equity, family violence victims, First Nations people, the environment and recently housing justice. From what I have seen, the women of SWAN never give up. Congratulations to the hundreds of amazing SWAN women, whose quest for social justice in their community has been successful and transforming.

### **Fire Rescue Victoria**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): Last week I had the opportunity to participate in Fire Rescue Victoria's Fire Ops 101 program. I know I am not the first member in this place to have taken part. The reviews were so good, I was very excited to take part in their academy in Craigieburn. Fire Ops 101 immerses participants in time-critical, highly technical and skilled work – just a small sample of what it is to be an FRV firefighter. The program is designed for all sorts of stakeholders, including politicians – there were some actors there, some business leaders and some other public figures – to learn what it is like, to have a small sample of what it is like to be a firefighter and to better understand the resources and the training that they need to keep our communities safe. It provides us with a small glimpse of those daily responsibilities. It was a truly eye-opening experience, just the length and breadth of the type of work that our FRV heroes go in and do every single day. When others are running away from danger, they are the ones running in to fix the situation and to calm things down. I would like to particularly thank all of those at FRV and the United Firefighters Union who made this possible, including Kat, the coordinator, and give a big shout-out to Ed and my support team on the day and the wonderful FRV firefighters, including Lachlan, better known as Butters, Sam and indeed Andrew, who is one of my local firefighters as well.

### ***Bills***

#### **Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025 (the Bill).

In my opinion, the Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Council, 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 provides for the registration and authorisation of public protests, confers legal protection for participants in authorised protests, establishes a regime for prohibition and exclusion orders, prohibits the wearing of face coverings at protests (other than for religious purposes), and makes consequential amendments to the Summary Offences Act 1966.

In summary, the Bill:

- a. Introduces a registration and authorisation scheme for public protests, enabling the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Supreme Court to approve, refuse, or impose conditions on protests;
- b. Allows for prohibition orders to prevent organisers from conducting protests likely to cause serious disruption, endanger public safety, or require unreasonable police resources;
- c. Establishes exclusion orders restricting individuals from entering specified public places for protest purposes where they have repeatedly been subject to “move on” directions;
- d. Prohibits wearing face coverings at protests except for religious reasons, with police powers to direct removal of such coverings; and

- e. Amends the Summary Offences Act 1966 to remove certain provisions relating to “move on” powers.

#### Human Rights Issues

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

- Freedom of expression (s 15);
- Peaceful assembly and freedom of association (s 16);
- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (s 14);
- Right to privacy and reputation (s 13);
- Freedom of movement (s 12);
- Right to liberty and security of person (s 21);
- Property rights (s 20).

#### Freedom of Expression (s 15)

The right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, including through protest. The Bill regulates the manner in which protests may occur, including requirements for registration, possible court authorisation, and conditions on protests.

These provisions do not limit the ability to protest or what to protest. The registration system is optional, but it provides the appropriate protection and ability for police to manage traffic and public infrastructure in a safe way. The limits are aimed at legitimate objectives ensuring public safety, protecting the rights of others to use public spaces, and preventing serious disruption and are proportionate, with review mechanisms and judicial oversight.

The prohibition on face coverings at protests is narrowly targeted, applies only within the protest context, and contains an exemption for religious coverings, preserving freedom of religion.

#### Peaceful Assembly and Freedom of Association (s 16)

The right to peaceful assembly is directly engaged. The Bill imposes conditions in some circumstances for individuals that seek to intimidate others, prohibits participation through prohibition or exclusion orders.

These limits pursue the legitimate purpose of balancing the right to protest with community safety, order, and access to public spaces. They are proportionate, as the Bill includes procedural safeguards: the ability to seek court review of decisions, the requirement for notice and consultation before prohibition orders, and time limits on exclusion orders.

#### Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion and Belief (s 14)

By allowing face coverings for religious purposes, the Bill preserves the right to religious belief through attire. This ensures the provision is compatible with the Charter’s protections for religion and belief.

#### Right to Privacy and Reputation (s 13)

Registration requirements for protests involve the collection of organisers’ personal details, and exclusion orders may involve publication or sharing of identifying information. Such interferences with privacy are lawful, serve a clear public safety purpose, and are no more extensive than necessary to achieve that purpose.

#### Freedom of Movement (s 12)

Exclusion orders limit a person’s freedom of movement in specified public places for protest purposes. These limits are time-bound, subject to judicial oversight, and targeted at repeat disruptive conduct, ensuring proportionality.

#### Right to Liberty and Security (s 21)

The Bill creates offences for breaching exclusion orders or wearing prohibited face coverings, carrying penalties including imprisonment. This engages the right to liberty. Any deprivation of liberty will occur in accordance with law, following established judicial processes, and is proportionate to the legitimate aims of maintaining public order and safety.

#### Property Rights (s 20)

The Bill does not directly interfere with property rights, but conditions or prohibitions on protests could affect the use of public or private property for protest activities. Any such effect is lawful, proportionate, and in pursuit of the Bill’s objectives.

**Conclusion**

In my opinion, the Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025 does not unreasonably limit any Charter rights. Where rights are limited, the limitations are reasonable, necessary, and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Accordingly, I consider the Bill to be compatible with the Charter.

David Davis MP

*Second reading*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

President, this bill is about drawing a clear line between the right to protest peacefully and the right of every Victorian to live free from intimidation, disruption, and violence.

Victoria has always been a place where people could stand up for their beliefs.

Peaceful protest is a cornerstone of our democracy.

But in recent years, that right has been abused.

It has been hijacked by those who want not just to be heard, but to cause chaos.

We have seen streets blocked, ambulances delayed, and thousands of police hours ripped out of our communities.

We have seen flares thrown, fires lit, property damaged, and police officers attacked.

Victoria has become the protest capital of Australia and Labor needs to stop being social commentators, get off the sidelines and back this bill.

Since October 2023, there have been more than 500 protests in Melbourne.

Making these protests safe has consumed over 22,000 full police shifts, shifts that should have been out fighting crime, patrolling our suburbs, protecting families.

And what has Labor done?

The Allan Labor Government promised almost 240 days ago to ban masks at protests.

They promised to act.

They have delivered nothing but spin and empty statements.

Today, the Liberals and Nationals are doing what Labor will not, taking action.

Taking action to restore public order to our state to let Victorians get on with their lives.

For over a decade, Labor has been soft on crime, soft on lawlessness, and soft on the activists who hold our city to ransom.

They have nothing but empty promises for Victorians; the Premier promised she would ban face coverings nearly 240 days ago and what have we seen?

Nothing – nothing but empty statements and spin, while our communities are left vulnerable.

In 2015, they tore up the strong move-on laws that we put in place.

They made it harder for police to act quickly when protests turned violent.

They sent a message to extremists ‘Victoria is open for disruption.’

And the result?

We've had chaos on our streets, violence at demonstrations, and police resources drained away from real crime.

We've seen violent extremist elements hiding behind masks using anonymity to throw punches, destroy property, and hide before police can identify them.

We've seen protests that have nothing to do with free speech and everything to do with forcing an opinion through intimidation.

President, this bill sends a positive message, in Victoria: free speech is protected, but violence and lawlessness will not be tolerated.

Our five-point plan: Safe, firm, but fair.

This bill delivers the Liberals' and Nationals' five-point plan to: introduce a protest registration system to ensure protests are safe and orderly; ban face coverings at protests without lawful excuse, ending the reign of anonymity for those who commit violence; re-establish move-on laws, restoring the police powers Labor ripped away; introduce exclusion orders for repeat offenders, removing serial troublemakers from our streets; safeguard free speech for lawful protesters, protecting those who do the right thing.

Under this bill, protest organisers must register their event with Victoria Police.

They must provide details of the purpose, time, location, route, and expected numbers.

Why?

So police can assess the risks.

So they can suggest changes to minimise disruption.

So they can ensure there are enough officers on hand to keep the peace.

If a protest is registered and conducted lawfully, participants will be protected from being charged with obstruction of a public place.

Other jurisdictions do this and it works, so why don't we?

We've seen it work in New South Wales and we have seen it work across Australia, so why don't we have the system?

We've seen too many protests where people hide behind masks, balaclavas, or other coverings.

Not for health reasons, not for faith reasons but to avoid being identified when they commit crimes.

This bill makes it clear you cannot wear a face covering at a protest unless you have a lawful excuse.

Religious coverings will be respected.

But if you're hiding your face to hide your crimes, you will be ordered to remove it.

Our message is simple: if you are here to protest peacefully, you have nothing to hide.

This bill restores the strong move-on powers Labor scrapped in 2015.

Police will once again be able to direct someone to leave if they're causing a reasonable apprehension of violence; they've committed an offence in a public place in the last 12 hours; they're blocking lawful access to or from premises.

These powers prevent trouble before it starts.

They let police defuse dangerous situations before violence erupts.

Labor weakened these powers and Victorians have paid the price.

Some protesters make it their mission to cause chaos, day after day, week after week.

They ignore directions, return to the same spots, and disrupt again and again.

This bill gives courts the power to issue exclusion orders and ban repeat offenders from public places for up to 12 months.

It's about protecting the public from serial offenders, not once, but for good.

When you attend a protest for the purpose of causing disruption, you will be banned.

Despite what Labor and these professional protesters might say, this bill strengthens free speech not weakens it.

It gives a clear, lawful pathway to protest.

Register your event, follow the rules, and you will be protected.

Police know what's coming.

The public knows what to expect.

Nobody's safety is compromised.

Free speech flourishes when protests are safe, orderly, and respected.

It dies when they descend into chaos and violence.

I know what Labor will say.

They'll say this is 'anti-protest'.

They'll say it's too strong or heavy-handed.

But Victorians know better.

They know the right to protest doesn't mean the right to shut down a city, threaten police and put our communities at risk.

They know public safety matters.

They know this is about balance, and that is exactly what this bill is about, it is about balance.

And they know Labor has had every opportunity to fix this and have remained social commentators instead of getting off their hands and fixing this problem.

This bill offers Victorians a choice.

A future where protests are safe, lawful, and respectful.

Or a future where chaos and intimidation continue to rule our streets.

Labor has chosen chaos.

We choose order.

We choose a Victoria where families can enjoy the city without fear, where police can focus on fighting crime, and where the right to protest is preserved, but not abused.

This is a strong, fair, and necessary reform.

It is a plan for safer communities and a more respectful democracy.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:06): I move:

That this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

*Production of documents*

**Working with children checks**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:07): I am very pleased to move this motion in Mr Davis's name. I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Premier, the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP, stated on:
  - (a) 31 July 2025, that '... in April of this year I directed the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services to undertake a review of the working with children check settings';
  - (b) 12 August 2025, that '... through the work that was commissioned in April to review the system, there have been strengthened arrangements with the worker-screening unit';
  - (c) 14 August 2025, that '... we have also, as a result of work taken back in April – work that has been undertaken by the Attorney and the Minister for Government Services – strengthened the worker-screening unit with regard to the working with children check'; and
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 14 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, the review done by the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services that was commissioned in April 2025 and any documents used by the Attorney-General and Minister for Government Services for the review that influenced this change to the worker-screening unit and working with children checks.

We had an urgent bill in this house yesterday debating this very issue around working with children checks. We have seen what has happened in this state with the appalling acknowledgement and understanding of the crimes allegedly committed by Joshua Brown, the impact they have had on thousands of children and the thousands of families that have been impacted and the absolute anxiety and concern of every one of those family members, their friends and others, and of those people working in the system, I might add, who are doing the right thing and who have also been very alarmed and concerned by the heinous, vile, criminal acts that have allegedly occurred.

As I said, the urgent bill came in yesterday, and Minister Erdogan was at the table. I questioned Mr Erdogan on a number of issues, including this very point – would the review be made available for the committee – and he was really quite inadequate in the response to that. This is why this documents motion is important. We need to understand why the review that was commissioned in April came about, what sparked that review, and I said this in the house last night when we were debating that bill. In questioning the minister throughout the process in the committee stage, the minister admitted that there are loopholes in the bill – there are still loopholes. I asked the minister: 'Minister, does this bill today close the loopholes and implement the Ombudsman's recommendations in full?' I am referring to the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations made in September 2022, three years ago. The government failed to act on them then. They did absolutely nothing, despite the Shadow Attorney-General pointing out that we would immediately fix that issue. He made a statement at the time. So we have been on the record about this serious issue that the government has failed to address. I think we need the transparency and understanding of exactly why the government failed and what this review was about, and this is what this document seeks to do, because in the questioning, when I asked the minister that, he responded: 'Ms Crozier, to answer your question, today's bill will not close that loophole.'

There were other areas where Minister Erdogan confirmed that the bill that was urgently introduced and debated in both houses yesterday does not close loopholes and does not address very serious issues around working with children checks and around people that are getting through the system. I made the response about Ron Marks and how under the current laws he would still be able to have a working

with children check. This is what we are very concerned about, and this is why this documents motion is incredibly important, because clearly something sparked that review in April 2025. I argue that in the interests of transparency and in the interests of every one of those parents who have had a child affected who needed to be tested for STIs because of the vile, dreadful acts of these alleged perpetrators and others that have been charged and convicted, Victorians deserve to understand why the government failed to act and what sparked that review.

Children deserve to be safe, and they have not been safe because of the government's failures. I would hope that all members would understand the seriousness of this issue. That is why that bill came in yesterday, and that is why the Liberals and Nationals supported the bill. That is why we tried to amend the bill – to strengthen the bill and to close those loopholes which the minister has admitted are still there. I would urge all members to support this motion. The review is there, and the government needs to release it to the Parliament in the interests of transparency, as a matter of urgency.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): I rise to speak on notice of motion 1051, which has been put forward by Mr Davis and Ms Crozier today, and affirm that, as per standard practice, the government will not be opposing today's short-form documents motion. I do appreciate the opportunity to discuss this very important issue. Indeed, as has already been referred to by Ms Crozier, we did have an important bill through this place yesterday, a bill which – as was stated clearly by the minister in fact and by many of those members on this side, including me – is not the final outcome to this problem and a bill that is indeed the first critical step in addressing the most time-sensitive elements and the most critical things that require attending to. Indeed, as the minister and others referred to and as the minister referred to in the committee stage yesterday, there will be further legislation that will be coming through.

Noting that the Weatherill–White review was submitted to government just two Fridays ago and was published in full by the government along with its response last Wednesday, the government has clearly already taken very swift action to address the report's findings and recommendations. Notably when it comes to recommendation 6, which covers the working with children checks, the Weatherill–White report has put forward a proposed timeframe in which it seeks for these recommendations to be implemented, putting aside, momentarily, recommendation 6.5, which touches on the national collaboration that is needed. Whilst the state government has accepted in full every single one of the recommendations from the rapid review, there are a number of those recommendations that either fall under the purview of the Commonwealth or are work that is to be done across all states and territories and the Commonwealth, and the Victorian government has committed itself to enthusiastically working through that process with other jurisdictions.

With regard specifically to 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, those recommendations which fall squarely within the responsibility of the Victorian government, the rapid review proposed a timeframe of the design and drafting of legislation to be in the immediate phase, which is within three months, and the new legislation and the changes to be implemented within 12 months, which is 12 months from 15 August this year. As members will already be aware, this government has actually committed to a faster timeframe than that in the response to the rapid review, with each of those recommendations being responded to. Indeed as has been touched on, there was the immediate and urgent bill which covered some of those critical areas yesterday. But all of the remaining parts of the legislation, which will acquit recommendations 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, will be put forward in a bill which will be put to Parliament in October of this year. Not only is that exceeding the 12-month timeframe that has been put forward by the review, but if it passes through the Parliament quickly, and we certainly hope that it does, it is actually meeting that within that two- to three-month timeframe.

What I think is very important to focus on here is that we have this review. It has put forward very sensible, very good recommendations. It has been processed by government. It is being acknowledged. It was said at the outset that all recommendations would be supported, and that has certainly borne true. With the legislation that I was very happy to see pass this chamber yesterday, we already have a stronger system today, or in a few days time, than we did yesterday, once it receives that royal assent.

With the legislation that the government has committed to provide to the Parliament in October, we will then see even stronger reforms in this space, acquitting all of the other things that have been raised by Ms Crozier and by others to address the working with children check system. That is what this government is continuing to focus on, as I believe it rightly should do. Whilst we will not be opposing the motion put forward by Ms Crozier today, I again make the note that this is an important space of work. As Minister Erdogan said in committee stage yesterday, this is an important thing to get right, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Davis's name. It is a documents motion, and again the government only has 5 minutes on the clock to respond to something like this. I have listened to Mr Galea's contribution.

**David Davis:** You have already had five. You are going to have 10 now.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes. But look, the position of the government is as our standard position on these things. The government does not oppose documents motions. Nevertheless I was just having a read of the motion and also listening to Mr Galea.

Despite what the characterisations of those opposite might be on this issue in terms of the government's actions on child safety and the working with children check, there is a clear pathway of actions that the government has taken in response to a whole range of things. We had a bill through this chamber yesterday, but we also have had various ministers take action in various spaces, and that includes the Minister for Children but also the Attorney-General. But I guess the concerning thing about the debate in this space is that those opposite want to continually talk down the safety of the sector where we know that the vast majority of people who work in the sector are very hardworking and dedicated early childhood educators. There are people who really care deeply about the children who are in the early childhood childcare settings, and they are dedicated and hardworking professionals.

What I am noticing about the people who work in the sector right now is how really disappointed and devastated they feel about what has happened in the sector, but also then about how that reflects on them. They have been working hard, turning up to work every day caring for our most vulnerable children. So despite the characterisations from those opposite, yes, they have been betrayed as well. It is disappointing that those opposite want to continue to talk down those workers in the sector. Parents do need to have confidence in the sector, and so the actions of this government are clear when it comes to making improvements. Every parent does deserve to know and to trust that when they drop off their child at child care they are safe and protected.

There were some contributions in regard to the bill yesterday which I agreed with. Many, many years ago when I was a young organiser I used to organise in the childcare area.

**David Davis:** It was a few years ago, wasn't it?

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, that is right. But that was when the sector was not-for-profit. There were no for-profit centres – I am going back some 20-plus years ago. There were no for-profit sectors. There was an incredibly strong regulator who used to turn up and do spot checks, and they were well funded. So of course whenever a private market enters the situation we always have calls for less regulation because it is hard to make a profit et cetera, et cetera.

The bottom line is that there have been changes in the sector over many years, and you can look at the federal government's involvement in this space as well in terms of the childcare rebate going back to the Morrison years. I am a student of history, so I have seen the changes and I do not necessarily agree with all of the changes that have come, but here we are. And so now we get calls from those opposite that the government has failed, and it is just a little bit opportunistic as of course it always is. Nevertheless, the government moved in April to review our working with children check scheme and update the worker screening regulations. We are supporting that motion. There has been a power of

work done in a very quick turnaround – for example, the rapid review that has happened. We have also commissioned that urgent review in early childhood education and care, including the working with children check in Victoria, which is led by Jay Weatherill AO and Pamela White PSM. The rapid review was delivered to government on 15 August, and as has been stated earlier, the government is accepting all 22 of the recommendations around that and will boost funding with a \$42 million boost to the sector to ensure that child safety and early childhood education and care settings are safe.

Despite what those opposite might say and their wont to talk down the sector and the workers who work hard and turn up every day to keep our kids safe in that sector, the government is acting on this. Every Victorian was horrified by what happened, and I know as a parent I was deeply distressed by what happened. Anybody who has children was sickened by this. I will leave my comments there.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Suburban Rail Loop

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:23): I am pleased to move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the Suburban Rail Loop costings were done ahead of the *Suburban Rail Loop: Business and Investment Case*, which was released publicly in August 2021;
- (2) further notes that construction costs have increased significantly in the more than four years since the costing work was undertaken;
- (3) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) copies of all additional or updated costings undertaken and presented either to the department and/or the government to the date of the house agreeing to this resolution; and
  - (b) updates or refreshed costings or newly initiated costings works, including estimates of overall cost for the Cheltenham to Box Hill component or other components of the Suburban Rail Loop.

We know this is a project out of control. There have been enormous cost increases across the construction sector in Victoria, and almost every government project has careered firmly out of control and in some cases well beyond time too. The investment case was released, and the Premier at the time called it very pointedly an investment case. It was not a business case of the type where you are considering options or changes is what Premier Andrews said at the time. He said this was an investment case where you have made the decision and you are just looking at the upside of it. I am paraphrasing him, but that is essentially what he said.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** It is very close to what he said. The point is that a proper business case would look at all of the various options, and this one did not.

Having said that, we are proceeding in the sense that the government has made a set of statements, the government is pushing forward, and you would be naive to believe that costings have not changed in the last four and a bit years. You would believe that if you were believing in the tooth fairy or Noddy. We know that the government has done some work. There have been discussions in this chamber. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition here asked Minister Shing some questions around some of these points, and we have certainly requested details on other occasions that touch some of these materials, but this is a very clear request for the updated costings, the updated estimates of the project, to be provided to the chamber and thereby the community.

This is listed as the largest program in the state's history – arguably in the nation's history. It is an enormous cost to the state budget. It is a project where opportunity cost is a major point to be examined. It is also a project where significant work needs to be done to keep a project on track and on budget, and it would be very important for the community – and for the budgetary position of the community – to see that the government is updating and refreshing its costings and estimates. It would be

irresponsible if the government were not doing that, so I would expect the government is doing that. We know that there have been some reviews. The minister has referred to those in this chamber, and in fact I would have thought some of those might be about ready to be released now. But this documents order is a straightforward documents order. Obviously the investment case released in 2021 is a dated case now, and there must be government work that has looked at different and updated costings as the government has proceeded with certain aspects.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:27): One of the great privileges I think we have as members of this chamber at this particular moment in time is that we get to hear a lot from Mr Davis. He is a frequent contributor, as befits his position as the Leader of the Opposition in this chamber. One of the things he talks a lot about is business cases and investment cases with respect to the Suburban Rail Loop project. I have been sitting here listening to him making the same points again, questioning the same issues, looking, searching, for meaning or content or something in documents that, as the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop has so eloquently articulated on previous occasions, have been presented to the public. I am not suggesting that she would have any copies of them with her in the chamber right at the moment, but I am sure that she does.

One of the things that has been on my mind throughout all of this back and forth about business cases and investment cases is why it might be that Mr Davis is so obsessed by them. One of the reasons – and I am sure there are many, and he has articulated some of them – I think why Mr Davis is so interested in getting his hands on documents that talk about investment, particularly investment in transport infrastructure, is that he has probably never seen any, because we know that the record of the Liberal Party during the four glorious years that they were in power in this state between 2010 and 2014 was a record of doing nothing.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Worse than that. It was a record of doing nothing. It was a record of taking the state nowhere fast. So I can only surmise that Mr Davis and the Liberal Party's continued attempts to request further and further documents, seeking details about the significant investment that this Labor government is making in rail infrastructure in this state, are driven by the fact they have never seen any before.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: As the minister so eloquently interjects, it is really a distraction, because they do not know what their policy on these infrastructure projects is. It changes daily. It changes weekly. It might change with their leader. Who knows? What we do know is that the Liberal Party, particularly the last example we have of a Liberal government –

**David Davis**: On a point of order, Acting President, it is actually quite a narrow motion about documents. I did keep it pretty much to the point in fact, and even earlier speakers have done so. I just think that now running into an attack on the opposition is far beyond the pale.

**Harriet Shing**: Further to the point of order, Acting President, in his opening comments this morning Mr Davis referred to the former Premier and to the business and investment case and the process which had precipitated it, and on that basis Mr Batchelor is entirely within his rights to be responding to that. Notwithstanding Mr Davis's editorial, this has now traversed beyond the area of the narrowcast documents motion, at his own making.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: Noting that the first speaker has leeway, I do not find that there is a point of order.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Just to clarify for Mr Davis, I was not about to attack the state Liberal Party. I was about to attack the former federal Liberal government and their track record of ripping investment out of Victorian infrastructure projects, because one of the things that Mr Davis might learn if he were to read the business and investment case that the minister has talked about – and probably

has copies of – is that included in there and included in the broader documents which exist about the Suburban Rail Loop is investment from the Commonwealth government in the Suburban Rail Loop –

**Harriet Shing:** Well, this government – not Dutton.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Correct – but that is only because it is a Labor government. If we had a Liberal government in Canberra right now, there would be no funding for Victorian rail infrastructure projects, because we know that the Liberals wanted to cut it prior to the last federal election, which follows their history of cutting funding from Victorian infrastructure projects, like what Tony Abbott did to the federal funding for the Metro Tunnel, cut back in 2013 and 2014. Mr Davis, I have no doubt, will continue to seek documents about investment in infrastructure in Victoria, particularly investment in rail infrastructure in Victoria, because as I said at the opening of my contribution, perhaps he has never actually read one, because the Liberals never produced one when they were in government.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:33): I also rise to make a contribution on this documents motion moved by Mr Davis, seeking again, as is his wont on a Wednesday, to raise at least two documents motions for the government to respond to, again keeping many, many public servants busy and distracted from the very important work that they would otherwise ordinarily have to do. Yet again they are tied up going through voluminous papers and documents just so that Mr Davis can try and have a bit of a stab in the dark about what he thinks may be there – you know, fishing expeditions writ large. Again here we are, first thing on a Wednesday. Nevertheless, as I stated in the debate on the previous documents motion, the government's position on these documents motions is that we do not oppose them, but nevertheless we are going to talk about documents and the Suburban Rail Loop today. So here we are again. There is a bit of a theme.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is right, there is a bit of a theme. And yes, all the greatest hits can come out in this debate. But I wanted to focus my comments on the constantly evolving positions of those opposite when it comes to the Suburban Rail Loop, because what we know is that our community in –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, the member has just indicated she intends to focus on the evolving position of those opposite. Actually, the motion is about the provision of documents, not about that.

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, Acting President, yet again Mr Davis is hoist on his own petard, because when he gets up to make comments about a document's motion he cannot help himself; he goes into the substance and the detail of particular matters and therefore opens the door for further and broader discussion in response to those comments.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I do not believe there is a point of order on either side.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Thank you, Acting President – a very sage ruling. I know the strategic non point of order is to run down my clock. As I said, last week – this was noteworthy, and I know the minister was also on this interview – Matthew Guy, the member for Bulleen, actually said:

If a project is commencing then a project goes ahead, it's as simple as that ...

making it their eighth policy position on the Suburban Rail Loop since 2022 – eighth policy position. There are more positions here than the Kama Sutra. Honestly, it is constantly changing and evolving positions. But I am glad now that the opposition are actually on board, because what they have realised is that people in my region and in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region have voted on this project, and they want this project.

In terms of documents – again, I do not actually agree with the characterisation that Mr Davis has made in his motion anyway in saying, 'Oh, updates or refreshed costings or newly initiated costings work et cetera et cetera.' There is an assumption there that there is some kind of refreshed thing, and

of course Mr Davis would want us all to believe and the community to believe that there is a blowout, there is hidden this or there is blah, blah, blah.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Exactly right. As the minister interjects, what we have seen repeatedly is the project is on time and it is on budget. It goes to my earlier comments: this is a fishing expedition, tying up public servants, having them waste precious, finite government resources going through documents which will assist us, actually, because it will show yet again that this project is on time and on budget and is very much supported by the Victorian community. It is about time they got on board; it has taken them a number of years, though. As I said, there are multiple flip-flop changes in position, which is kind of embarrassing. Again, it is documents sought for what purpose? I am yet to see Mr Davis or anyone actually use any document they have gained through any process in this chamber anyway.

**Ryan Batchelor:** They are certainly not using it to come up with a policy position.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Certainly not.

**Harriet Shing:** No, they support SRL now.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, but nevertheless I am yet to see them actually use any documents that they gain through any processes in a debate or in any useful way in this chamber. I just think it is a waste of this chamber's time. It is a waste for the public servants who have to do this, because someone has to read all of these documents; someone has to make an assessment under the relevant standing order about whether they are in or out and whether any exemptions apply, so it is not a simple exercise.

As I said, we will not be opposing this motion, but I am glad to see that the opposition has now changed its position again, for the eighth time, and has come around to supporting the Suburban Rail Loop, because it is important and we know that. It is good to see those opposite supporting it, and they would also be very supportive of the fact that the Suburban Rail Loop is on time and on budget, because I know those opposite built nothing. They are the worst opposition in history ever and would not know what a costing or anything would look like, because they are too busy tearing each other apart internally. I will leave my comments there.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Anasina Gray-Barberio:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:39): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025 introduced by Ms Gray-Barberio. It is a bill that seeks to make amendments to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, principally to insert provisions into that act relating to housing and to bring all the antecedent components of the application of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to the administration of laws in the state of Victoria.

The bill is not particularly long, nor does it need to be. What is most striking though is that this is a bill that will not build a single home. It is not going to do anything to make housing more affordable. This bill will not help first home buyers with a deposit for their first home. It will not do anything to support the application of things like the Help to Buy schemes that are giving young Victorians and young Australians more support to get into the housing market. It will not do anything to improve the way our consumer laws work with respect to the operation of the property market. It will not improve

the standards of rental properties in this state – it will not make them safer; it will not make them more livable – and it will do nothing to help renters make their tenancies more secure. This bill will do nothing to build more homes for more Victorians. But we know that, because that is not the point of the bill. This bill, despite its title, is not about housing and it is not really about rights. It is about clicks. It is about likes. It is about a social media strategy that is built on manufacturing outrage and is bereft of action. It is just another example of the way that the Greens party has approached the central question of how we solve the housing crisis.

This Labor government has made it clear time and time again that we think you solve the housing crisis by building more homes. This bill does nothing to build more homes in Victoria. We also know that the Greens party, in proposing this bill today, are not really interested in building more homes. Yes, they have put this bill to the Parliament with a political strategy in mind, but their actions as representatives and as legislators in this place and others are about blocking housing, not building it. I have no doubt that in the course of today's debate those are some matters that we will get into.

I do want to say at the outset that I think our position on this bill can be best summed up by this: this Labor government is not going to be taking advice from the Greens on how to fix the housing crisis, because their approach will not do a single thing. This bill will not do a single thing to build more homes for more Victorians. Labor is getting on with the job of building more homes for more Victorians, and that is exactly what our agenda is focused on, not the sorts of issues that seem to occupy the attention of the Greens.

On the many issues that I want to traverse in the course of the debate today, I want to start by just looking at some of the more technical issues, queries and questions that were raised about the provisions of this piece of legislation and whether it would do the job that it intends to do and whether in fact it is something that would add to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities in Victoria. The report of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee in relation to this bill, in *Alert Digest* No. 9 of 2025, details quite an interesting discussion about the implications of inserting the provisions in this bill into Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and asks some questions about the framework that our Charter of Rights and Responsibilities was established under. Particularly – and I will quote the committee in its *Alert Digest* here – it says:

The Committee notes that clause 3 inserts a new section 12A into Part 2 of the Charter. The Committee notes that section 7(1) of the Charter provides that Part 2 'sets out the human rights that Parliament specifically seeks to protect and promote'.

However, the Committee notes that section 3 of the Charter defines 'human rights' to mean 'the civil and political rights set out in Part 2'. The Committee notes the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill for the Charter –

not this bill but the bill for the charter –

The purpose of this Charter is to establish a framework for the protection and promotion of human rights in Victoria. The human rights protected by the Charter are civil and political rights. They primarily derive from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 and are set out in Part 2, which follows a number of general provisions set out in Part 1. Part 3 of the Charter outlines the scheme by which human rights are protected by Parliament, courts and tribunals and public authorities.

Essentially it goes on to have a discussion about the distinction between those rights protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and those rights that are protected under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. For many that may seem a distinction in search of a difference, but particularly in the context of the Victorian charter of human rights, it was a matter that the scrutiny of regulations committee felt it needed to seek further information about from the proponent of the bill. I think it is a bit disappointing that the response provided by the member to SARC was a bit hand-wavy. It just kind of said it does not matter what the charter of human rights is trying to do with respect to human rights and just waved away their concerns. I just raise this issue because it was a matter that was raised by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, and I felt in the context of the debate it was important to highlight.

I made a contribution at the start about the fact that what we have here is not really an attempt by the Greens to be supportive of the policy goal of building more homes in Victoria, because we know that they are not. We know that the Greens in Victoria have repeatedly – and the Greens nationally in the Commonwealth Parliament, particularly in the last few years – taken a determined strategy of policy to block the housing that the community desperately needs, particularly new social housing but not just that. It is difficult to believe that the Greens care about the issues that they purport to when they might purport to be interested in housing as a human right and want to bring legislation into the Parliament, generate outrage on social media and set tests for Labor members as to what they are going to do when this bill comes before the Parliament, when their own actions not once, not twice but repeatedly have been to block more housing being built. If I had to choose between participating in performance or building more homes, I would always unashamedly be on the side of building more homes, not being part of a performance test that the Greens set out.

I found it particularly amusing because – this is an orchestrated campaign – of what the Greens did in the lead-up to today in introducing this bill. Legitimately, members of the Labor Party care a lot about housing. I certainly have spoken in this place a lot about housing. I think I have said time and time again that the way we fix the housing crisis is to build more homes. I am going to keep talking about housing for as long as I have got the privilege to sit within these walls on these benches. In the lead-up to today's debate the Greens went and scurried and found other Labor members in this place and in the other place who also care a lot about housing, and they put together what I would call a montage. I think the kids these days would probably call it a supercut. It is a collection of the contributions that Labor members have made on the question of whether we think housing is a basic human right. They did that for clicks and likes. I think it is childish and cheap as a strategy and that it diminishes the importance of the issue that we are debating. The reason that I think they did not take it seriously is because in one of the posts they put up they said:

... Labor MPs have said ... that housing is a human right. But is it all talk? Our bill will put them to the test.

This was the test. The slight problem they had with the montage was that in the post they put up, that collage of what Labor MPs this term have said did actually include someone who is not a member of this Parliament, who in fact retired at the last election. So I am a little hesitant to take seriously their purported attempts to take seriously an important issue, when they cannot even get their social media campaign right by making sure that the Labor MPs they are setting up for their test actually include people that are all members of this Parliament in this term. Despite what they have said in their posts, we cannot take them seriously. They keep making mistakes. The former member for Yan Yean featuring prominently on their social media posts I am sure supports housing, but she will not be subject to the false test they are trying to generate now.

The real test that we as members of Parliament need to consider is not whether or not we think housing is a human right. I do and many do. It is not whether we think that this bill will move the dial one inch on providing more homes for more Victorians. It will not. The real test that members of Parliament have as to whether they have got bona fides on the housing crisis, to solve the housing crisis, is what they do when it matters. When something is on the line, how do you vote? That is the test that people should be put to, that is the test that all members need to be accountable for and it is a test that members of the Greens fail time and time again. There are lots of examples I could go through, and I am sure others in this debate will do so as well, where we have seen the Greens opposed to the construction of more housing in Victoria.

I want to frame this part of my contribution with the words of Ms Gray-Barberio in her second-reading speech on this bill. It says:

... governments have a responsibility to intervene in ambitious and concrete ways ...

basically to ensure everyone has a place to call home to fix the housing crisis. There are a lot of things I do not agree with Ms Gray-Barberio about, but I agree about that – that governments do have a

responsibility to intervene in ambitious and concrete ways to fix the housing crisis. And that is what Labor is doing.

The Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund – \$6.3 billion – are delivering 13,000 new homes, with over 11,000 homes already completed or underway. In the 2024–25 financial year we built over 2400 pieces of social housing in this state. But it is not just on the social housing side, which is where this government in particular is making leaps and bounds; more broadly across the entire residential construction sector Victoria is leading the nation in approvals for new homes in this state. It is leading the nation in the construction and completion of new homes in this state – more than in New South Wales, which is the largest state in absolute terms. The biggest contributor to housing activity in this nation is Victoria. We are leading the way – and not by a little bit, by a lot. That just does not happen without government taking action to make sure homes can be built. The social housing does not get built without government investment and government action on things like planning.

We know that the Greens as a political party have a track record of opposing the construction of social housing in this state, particularly by Labor governments. When we think about the test that we need to set for members of this chamber – members of Parliament, representatives of the community – to decide whether they are serious about housing, the real test is whether, when it matters, they stand up against housing or for it. We know some of the new social housing that has been completed in my part of Melbourne in the last couple of years, which I have visited, is amazing. It is fantastic. In Ashburton there is the Markham estate. I have visited there with the former Minister for Housing and the local member Matt Fregon. The redevelopment of the Markham estate, the construction of the new social homes on the Markham estate, was opposed by the Greens and the Liberal Party, who teamed up in the last Parliament to knock off the planning approval that we gave.

In this Parliament we have seen the Greens opposing more social housing being built. Again, it is in my part of the world, the Southern Metropolitan Region, at the Barak Beacon estate, where I think 89 homes are being redeveloped into more than 400 new homes on that site – a 43 per cent increase in the amount of social housing on the Barak Beacon site in Port Melbourne. Members of the Greens brought a petition in this place calling on the government to stop the project. They joined protests against the project. Why? That cannot have been because they thought that the people who were going to move into those new homes have a right to housing. They did it for clicks and likes. They did it because when it comes to the things that matter and when it comes to the tests that matter, the Greens are always on the side of no more housing.

We see it right now with the government's plans to redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing towers in this state. Time and time again when they are given the opportunity to have more housing being built on well-located, well-serviced parcels of public land, with the sites that have been announced so far remaining in public hands, they have opposed it. They are opposed to that redevelopment. They are opposed to the new homes that are going to be built. They are opposed to those homes being more energy efficient. They are opposed to those homes being more accessible. They are opposed to the residents in those homes living, for example, in high-rise accommodation in buildings that have lifts that are serviceable by stretchers so that if they are sick and need to be taken out by an ambulance, they have got facilities that enable them to do that. They are opposed to all of that. But Labor is not. Labor wants to give those in our community, particularly the most vulnerable in our community, access to high-quality housing, and access to housing that meets their needs.

I want to talk a little bit about what the actions of the Greens, particularly their colleagues in Canberra, have done to slow down new social housing being built in Melbourne. We had the experience in the last federal Parliament where the former member for Griffith, and the former member for Melbourne as his leader, orchestrated a political strategy that was set out to deny the federal Labor government the ability to pass key legislation designed to help people get more housing, particularly designed to allow the creation of the Housing Australia Future Fund. The Housing Australia Future Fund is a \$10 billion endowment into social housing for a generation. It is not about a one-year sugar hit to capital programs. It is about a generational investment, an endowment for the future to enable a

consistent pipeline of social housing to be built. The Greens opposed it and opposed it and opposed it, and what that did was delay and delay and delay more social housing being built.

Eventually, the contradictions in the Greens' obstruction of more housing being built got the better of them in the last federal Parliament. They came to their senses and they passed the bill, kicking and screaming. They did not want to do it. They passed the bill kicking and screaming. We know, as students of current political history, what happened to the architects of the Greens political strategy to oppose the construction of more social housing in Australia, in Victoria. I think it is a very salient lesson, and I hope that on one level our colleagues here in Victoria learn it. On another level, I am not confident that they will. But the implications of that delay were that projects that are now underway to build more social housing in the Southern Metropolitan Region, that would deliver action to provide homes for those who need it, were held up.

There is a site in Carnegie being funded by the Housing Australia Future Fund, where 99 dwellings are being built. Seventy-five per cent of the properties in the project will be allocated to the priority access list on the Victorian housing register, with 30 per cent allocated to homelessness with support, 30 per cent to housing special needs and 15 per cent to emergency management. Ninety-nine new dwellings in Carnegie are under construction now, funded by the Housing Australia Future Fund, that the Greens obfuscated and obstructed. If they had their way, those homes would not be built. We have got another one in Hampton East, with 77 homes being built just back from South Road and the Nepean Highway, delivering 77 homes over eight storeys. Again, 75 per cent of the properties in the project allocated to the eligible persons on the priority access list of the Victorian housing register. It is close to schools, it is close to trains, it is close to jobs, it is close to community support facilities – supported by the Housing Australia Future Fund, that was delayed, obstructed by the Greens. I was down there last week, driving by, and saw just how quickly those dwellings are coming up out of the ground. It is sad that that facility is due to be completed in mid-2026. There is a real chance that if the Greens had not obstructed the Housing Australia Future Fund, projects like this that are due to open next year could have been opened this year. We could have had residents moving into these types of developments had the Greens obstruction of social housing being built in this country not occurred during the last federal Parliament.

If we are trying to make tests for people about whether they are fair dinkum about giving more Victorians access to housing, about whether they are fair dinkum about caring about housing in this state, the test is not going to be, despite the Greens' social media campaigns, whether Labor MPs who support giving more people more housing support the fundamental rights of people who live in that housing. The test is not whether we pass or do not pass a piece of stunt legislation that does nothing to deliver a single home in this state, that does nothing to help people buy a new home in this state, that does nothing to support renters in this state through more security or better rentals. This bill does none of that. The test is not whether we support something that does nothing; the test is whether we support something that takes action. That is the test that members of Parliament should be thinking about all the time. And that is why the Greens and the opposition are going to face more tests as to whether they support the development of more homes on government land here in Melbourne or whether they are going to continue to sign petitions and have protests that oppose the redevelopment of sites like Barak Beacon, about which they have brought petitions into this place saying, 'Don't build more social housing on that site.' That is their action that they are accountable for.

And they will face another test when it comes to whether they support the redevelopment of the two towers at Elgin Street that have no-one living in them because of a catastrophic failure of the sewer stacks. They have to make a choice as to whether they support the continuing redevelopment of the walk-up estates that is dramatically increasing the amount of social housing. We heard evidence at one of our public hearings recently that the average increase in social housing on the redevelopment sites that we are seeing at the moment is close to 50 per cent. That is the choice, that is the test that exists for the Greens. If you are serious about fixing the housing crisis, if you seriously think that housing is a human right, you have got to support moves to build more housing. And if you do not support more

housing being built in Victoria, if you do not support more social housing being built in Victoria, then all of your claims are hollow, and we should not believe a word that you say, because the only way that residents on the priority waiting list are going to find homes is if we build them for them. That is what Labor is going to do, and this bill will do nothing to help it.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:09): I rise to speak on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025, a private member's bill put forward by the Greens. It aims to establish a legally recognised right to adequate housing in Victoria and introduces new section 12A, which defines the scope and characteristics of adequate housing and affirms housing as a fundamental human right. Its purpose is to enshrine housing as a human right in Victorian law, to ensure housing policy and service delivery are guided by dignity, equality and inclusion, and to provide a legal foundation for individuals and communities to advocate for housing justice and challenge systemic barriers.

Mr Batchelor had some incredible talking points then, but it is such a shame that they were not anchored in reality. I am going to start off my contribution by placing on record some facts about housing in Victoria. When the coalition left government in 2014 there were 9990 families on the Victorian housing register waitlist – 9990. Fast-forward 11 years and there are now 66,117 families on the waitlist – that is families, not individuals. If we are quite conservative and just double that number, assuming that a family is two people – which is very conservative; it will be much more than that – that is one and a half MCGs full of Victorians on the waitlist. That is actually a huge, huge number. After more than a decade of Labor being in power, they have not reduced the amount on the waitlist – not even close. They have almost multiplied it by seven – unbelievable – from just shy of 10,000 to over 66,000 families.

Let us take a look at Labor's Big Housing Build and its effectiveness. This project, and we heard Mr Batchelor talk about it before, has cost \$6.3 billion – not million, billion dollars. You would hope that with that much of a burden to the taxpayer it would be quite a successful project. Well, as of June 2017 the total number of community dwellings was 13,479. As of June last year it was 15,964, so an increase of 2485. That is roughly 355 per year – nowhere near the 80,000 promised by Labor. I actually agree with Mr Batchelor in the sense that in order to really tackle the housing crisis we need to build more homes. But I think we need to be absolutely clear-eyed about this. You cannot just look at Labor's talking points, you actually have to look at the statistics and measure them against what they are saying, and they just simply do not add up. That aside, let us say 2485 is okay. But it does not meet the demand, and with a price tag of \$6.3 billion, it is a lot. However, let us drill down a little bit further, because there are some nasty surprises in here. As of June 2017 the total number of public housing bedrooms was 161,153. Fast-forward 11 years and the total number is now 156,602. I do not know if you grasped that – that is almost 5000 less bedrooms. Under a decade of Labor, while they are talking about building more, we actually have almost 5000 less bedrooms. After a decade and over \$6.3 billion charged to the taxpayer, we are ending up with less – not just a few, but thousands less. This is an unmitigated disaster.

I have started off with the facts there. The coalition will not be supporting this bill, for a few reasons. Let us not let the facts get in the way of a good story, or whatever they say. This bill, I believe, sets a dangerous precedent of endless charter expansions. It opens the floodgates to costly litigation and accelerates our drift towards a state of welfare dependence without economic freedom. Worse still, it will continue to burden the taxpayer while solving nothing.

This bill has a lot of ironies when you consider the Greens voting rights. They have the same double standards around various policies, and I am going to break some of those down. They claim to believe in sustainability and the right to food, yet they voted for the emergency services tax, which has destroyed farmers' livelihoods and really crushed their ability to produce local sustainable food. I also think this bill represents a profound misdiagnosis of the housing crisis. The Greens have voted for very different policies that have created a crisis, and now I think this bill is pointing to the symptoms –

mental health issues, family violence, addictions – as a justification for more government control, which is something that we on this side of the house fundamentally do not agree with.

We know of and celebrate the importance of home ownership to our democracy, and that is something that cannot be overstated. We on this side of the chamber are for home ownership, especially by society's most vulnerable, but we believe that this is the wrong way of reaching this goal. When a Victorian owns a piece of land, no matter how small, they gain more than just shelter. They gain independence, a sense of responsibility and a stake in the future of this state. Home ownership fosters free and critical thinking, strengthens self-reliance and reinforces the values that are at the heart of a liberal democracy and are truly progressive. In contrast, I believe this bill threatens to make this state more a state of renters, specifically renters dependent on the state. I think that is what this bill is really about, and it is something that I just would not trust. In a liberal democracy the human right is to equality of opportunity, not equality of outcomes. This bill fundamentally undermines that principle by shifting responsibility for housing outcomes from the individual onto the state – worse still, a state that has proved it cannot be trusted to do what it says.

When we enshrine housing as a right in our charter, we are not solving the housing crisis, we are creating legal uncertainty while avoiding the hard economic reforms that would actually deliver more homes. But the implications go far deeper than just housing alone. More fundamentally, this approach will keep expanding Victoria's ever-expanding welfare system; it will just keep it growing and growing. How will we afford this when the government has worked so hard to destroy our finances and has left the economy in a state of complete disrepair? There is so much debt in this state that our children will be paying it off and our children's children will be paying it off – and it is Victoria's most vulnerable that will pay the biggest price. When people cannot build wealth, when they cannot invest and when they cannot create their own security through ownership, they become dependent on government provision – and that is not compassion, it keeps people enslaved. If people have the ability to create wealth, to break through and to make their own decisions, we end up in a much better situation.

Since 2014 Labor has introduced 61 new or increased taxes. The bulk of those are targeting the property sector. The 2024–25 state budget confirms that nearly half of Victoria's tax revenue – so \$21.5 billion – now comes from property taxes. This is not just unsustainable, it is destructive, and it adds enormously to the price of a home. I have spoken many times in this place about real estate agents saying that for every four rental properties that come on the market, once they sell only one returns to the market. That is because it is harder to have a rental property in Victoria than in any other state in Australia because of the tax burden. The Urban Development Institute of Australia has warned that these taxes are choking housing supply and affordability. Development has slowed, rental supply has stalled and Melbourne's rental vacancy is at a historical low. It is causing a housing investment flight. Less investment means less housing and more demand, which means more expensive housing. You cannot tax your way to housing affordability. It is just not how it works, yet the Greens claim that housing policies benefit the wealthy. That is simply false. These are not abstract statistics. They represent families unable to find homes, young people locked out of the market and everyday mum-and-dad investors being squeezed out of their investment, which for many was their retirement nest egg. This is contrary to the Greens' claims that housing policies enrich the wealthy. No, these sorts of economic environments affect absolutely every single one, and it is those who have housing insecurity that are affected most.

Victoria is now one of Australia's poorest performing states. Household disposable income is 10 per cent below the national average. Labour productivity is the lowest in the country. Our debt is absolutely out of control. It is the highest in the nation. Net debt is actually projected to hit \$194 billion by 2029, yet instead of fixing the housing crisis this government has wasted billions of dollars on infrastructure blowouts. Even a fraction of the waste could have built incredible amounts of social housing to help combat the issue we are talking about right here today.

I am going to skip forward, because I always write too much. This bill is not a solution, it is a symbolic gesture and one that distracts from the real economic reforms that we need. We must protect the right to equal opportunity and protect the environment that makes this flourish, not make promises with outcomes that we cannot deliver and not have talking points like we see from the Labor Party with statistics that are completely at odds with what they say. Housing is best supported by economic growth, investment and freedom to innovate, not by expanding the charter in ways that create legal uncertainty and burden public authorities. I believe this bill would be a step in the wrong direction, and we should be focusing on practical solutions. I am going to leave my contribution there. Like I said, the coalition will not be supporting this bill.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:23): I rise today to speak in strong support of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025. This bill seeks to enshrine the right to adequate housing in Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities – a step that is both overdue and I would say necessary. For decades governments at both state and federal levels have treated housing primarily as an asset and investment strategy – tax concessions for wealthy property investors, stamp duty discounts for luxury penthouses, negative gearing and capital gains tax – at the same time as we have seen severe reductions, for example, in welfare payments. This approach of private gain over public good has led to the crises that we see today: escalating homelessness, housing insecurity, soaring rents, impossible house prices and governments over-relying continually on the private market to provide housing.

The reality in this state is stark: more than 120,000 Victorians waiting for public housing, decades of underinvestment and neglect and a program of privatisation that has ravaged our public housing system. This state has the lowest proportion of public and community housing in the country, with demand expected to grow in the coming years. The Labor government's callous plan, the plan to demolish our public housing towers, threatens to make this worse, displacing thousands of people and undermining long-established communities. I will be clear: housing is not an investment strategy, it is a fundamental human right central to human dignity, health, education, employment and community participation. Without a stable home, people cannot thrive and families cannot feel secure. This bill sets a course correction. It is about changing our approach to housing. Just as governments endeavour to ensure public health or education, they must act to guarantee access to secure, adequate and affordable housing.

A rights-based approach recognises that housing is not a privilege to be earned but a necessity for all people in this state, and international law affirms this principle. The right to adequate housing is recognised as a fundamental human right in several international human rights agreements, ratified by almost all national governments around the world. The right to housing is recognised in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Australia in 1975 under Whitlam without reservations. However, this country has not embedded the right to housing into domestic law at the state or the federal level, even though we have accepted international obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right when we ratified it back in 1975. This is something that our country has been criticised for. Back in 2007 the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing criticised the Australian government for failing to uphold or implement this right. As Justice Connect has stated:

This means that many people in Australia don't have access to affordable, secure housing and are often evicted into homelessness because our laws don't protect them.

The right to adequate housing has also been enshrined in national laws across the globe, as I have mentioned. More than 50 countries, including South Africa and France, have enshrined the right to housing in their constitutions, and countries such as Canada and Scotland have enshrined the right to housing via legislation. In the ACT the Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025, which was a Greens bill seeking to enshrine the right to housing in the ACT's charter, was recently the subject of an inquiry. The inquiry report, which came out just last month, recommended that the ACT Legislative Assembly pass that bill. As one of only three states and territories to have introduced a legislated

human rights charter, Victoria plays a significant role in leading the country on human rights compliance. This is an opportunity for us to show national leadership. As the UN special rapporteur on housing noted in a 2014 report, state governments are crucial to realising the right to housing, as:

Forced evictions and discriminatory exclusion from housing often result from decisions or policies adopted at the local or subnational levels.

Enshrining the right to adequate housing in our charter would mean that Parliament would have to take the right into account when making laws. Public authorities like Homes Victoria, for example, would have to act compatibly with the right and take it into account in decision-making, and our courts would have to interpret and apply laws compatible with the right. Yes, we have existing charter rights that have the potential to protect aspects of some people's housing realities. For example, we have got the right to not have one's home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and we have got the right to property, but they do not protect people who do not have a home in the first place. Including a right to housing in the charter would provide this much-needed protection.

This state's homelessness crisis has long been a cause for serious concern. The 2016 census recorded 24,817 people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. The 2021 census recorded 30,660 people, and we know that it is highly likely that these statistics are a serious undercount. The inquiry into homelessness in 2021 heard that about two-thirds of people who experience homelessness do not even seek assistance from homelessness service providers. Evidence like this directly contradicts claims that Melbourne, our city, is among the most livable cities in the world. Homelessness or insecure housing does not simply leave people without a place to call home. It is directly linked with many outcomes we guard against in our current charter. Homelessness or insecure housing leaves people without privacy. It is associated with poor mental and physical health. It makes it near impossible to take part in public life, to hold down a job or to stay in school. It can result in the removal of children from their families, and it makes it that much harder to avoid exploitative and unsafe situations such as family violence, which is a leading driver, we know, of homelessness in this state.

Enshrining the right to adequate housing would help to fully realise these other vital human rights that our charter protects. The term 'adequate housing' encompasses so much more than simply a roof over someone's head. It is a term that recognises that housing stability underpins human dignity. This bill outlines that adequate housing means housing that is accessible to all, genuinely affordable, structurally sound, safe, culturally appropriate, free from discrimination, located close to employment, services and community infrastructure and able to provide secure tenure and protection from unfair eviction. Including the right to housing in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 was a key recommendation in the Legal and Social Issues Committee's 2021 final report following its inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. The government's response was that this recommendation was under review. Two years later, in 2023, a key recommendation following the final report from the inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in this state was that the Victorian government investigate enshrining the right to housing in the Victorian charter of human rights, including considering advice from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner. The government responded that this recommendation was also under review.

Some parts of the community that have called for the enshrining of a right to housing in Victoria's charter include the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Victorian Ombudsman, Tenants Victoria, Victorian Council of Social Service, Per Capita, the Human Rights Law Centre, the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, a former Supreme Court justice the Honourable Kevin Bell, Dr Bill Swannie, the Centre for Urban Research, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, the Council to Homeless Persons, the Housing for the Aged Action Group, the Victorian Public Tenants Association and Catholic Social Services Victoria, to name a few.

Enshrining the right to adequate housing in our state's charter is overdue. It is essential. Housing is not optional. It is as fundamental as food, water, health care and education. When we fail to ensure access

to housing, we fail to protect human dignity. This should not remotely be a partisan issue, because this is a social imperative. This bill echoes calls from countless experts. Passing this bill would fulfil recommendations from multiple parliamentary inquiries that I have mentioned. It would bring our state into alignment with our country's obligations under international human rights law, and it would be an important move towards a more just and more equitable housing system. I absolutely commend this bill to the house.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:33): I also rise to make a contribution on this bill, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025. It is, again, the wont of the Greens to move a bill like this and talk about housing as if the government has done nothing about it and has never done anything about it. But if you look back through history – and I am a student of history, and many on the government benches are students of history – there is a long and proud legacy of Labor governments providing housing for vulnerable people. It is disappointing but not surprising, the rhetoric that comes from the Greens when we talk about this bill. The whole debate is mischaracterised. It is really par for the course in terms of them wanting to spread misinformation, casting doubt on the government's actions. Of course they will say things like, 'Why don't you work with the Greens?' But they do not want to work with us. What they want to do is attack us and continually point out things that are not true.

What I want to do is talk a little bit about what is happening. I could go into the history of why we have a problem with housing. I am going to be very careful not to use any of the Greens' rhetoric, because what I have also seen in the last week is the Greens want to hunt through snippets of Hansard recordings and put them on social media and attack people on the government benches who have used particular terms. That is really disappointing, because I think all of us in this chamber – well, some of us, maybe more on these government benches than others – want to help people with housing. We want to provide them with secure, stable housing. It is not in anyone's interest to have people not have access to housing. But again the social media grabs, the pot shots – I do not know, the Greens kind of think that is going to entice people to vote for them. I do not know what it is. It just comes off as nothing other than juvenile and desperate. But we will let them do them. But nevertheless, if you look at the history of housing it is really a good thing now that we have a willing partner in Canberra in the Albanese federal Labor government who is now going to be working with Victoria on ensuring that not only do we get our fair share of infrastructure funding but we are going to get support for the housing build that we are embarking on. If you look at the history, the Commonwealth government actually had a stake in providing public housing, and they still do. But if you look at what happened under conservative governments, conservative federal governments sold off housing at a rate of knots and did not replace it. So that is the way in which they have had a vacuum in this policy space that has contributed to the shortage of housing.

Also the type of housing that people want access to now has changed. Post war there were a lot of people who were seeking family homes – three-bedroom homes and the like – but what we see now is that the types of homes that are most in demand are single-bedroom dwellings, and a lot of the stock that is still on the public record has aged out, like the public housing towers. So our government is taking strong action to work in that space to make sure we provide homes that are modern and fit for purpose and meet the needs of people who need access to housing.

I might remark on the housing needs in my area, because I think a lot of the focus on housing in this debate, certainly from the Greens, is all on the activity that happens inside the goat's cheese curtain. But I can tell you, President, that in my region – and I know we share the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region – one of the fastest growing cohorts of homeless people is women over 55. Not only is it about family violence – there are high rates of family violence that exist in my region – but also women are retiring in poverty for a variety of reasons, whether it is because they have taken time out of the workforce to care, have not had access to economic equality or have not been able to generate the savings that perhaps their male counterparts have. Now they are post 55, their marriages might be

breaking up or whatever and they do not have the same asset bank that others might. Then they find themselves needing to rely on public housing, and there is no shame in that at all.

I do not have housing towers in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. I asked a question on the public record of one of the witnesses in a hearing for the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into housing, which was: what are older women telling some of these community organisations or entities that have popped up around the Greens campaign about housing? I am telling you right now that very few women over 55 are talking to them, because there is a direct focus on a certain demographic which fits nicely with the Greens. But women over 55 want safe and secure housing. They might have needs in regard to disability, housing safety, security or tenure. They may still need to be working but may not be working in secure jobs and the like. So when we talk about housing we have got to make sure we have got the right wraparound supports for people as well and not just a one-size-fits-all approach.

It would be very easy if you were to take the Greens line of rhetoric about 'We've just got to do this and get on with it.' Well, it is easy just to say that, but we need to make sure we are providing the right housing that people need and that it is accessible in terms of disability access and it supports whatever stage of life those people are at. They need to have the right wraparound supports to ensure that that housing placement does not fail, because whilst some people are placed into public housing or social housing, if the wraparound supports are not there the placement fails. It is more complex than the Greens would actually have you believe.

I am just going to talk about the facts, because I think it is important to talk about the facts in terms of what this government is actually doing and has been doing.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is right. Mr Batchelor's interjection is exactly right – the Greens will not do it. All they want to do is criticise and throw cheap shots at us and do silly things on social media, which actually does nothing in terms of putting a shovel in the ground or putting bricks on mortar to physically build houses. It does absolutely nothing other than waste time. Under the Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund, more than 11,100 homes are complete or underway and over 6300 households have moved in or are about to move into their brand new homes. I want to say that again; it is important. Under the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund – so it is not just housing in the city inside the goat's cheese curtain but housing in and all around Melbourne and Victoria – 11,100 homes are complete or underway and 6300 households have moved in or are about to move into their brand new homes, because people deserve modern, fit-for-purpose homes. They deserve to have energy-efficient homes, so if you need to heat or cool your home, you are not spending exorbitant amounts of money actually doing that. We know that some of the housing stock that was built in the past did not particularly have those sorts of things in mind, so we have modern housing that is more energy efficient. People are entitled to that; they are entitled to live in modern and fit-for-purpose homes.

There were 56,405 residential building approvals in Victoria in the last 12 months to June, which is 18,500 more than Queensland and 7800 more than New South Wales, so the facts speak for themselves when you look at how many building approvals have been in the system. Victoria, under the Allan Labor government, is forecast to reach 98 per cent of its share of the housing accord target of 1.2 million dwellings. As you can see, not only are we leading the nation in terms of building, we are the only state or territory that even comes close to reaching our share of the target. Our government is indeed doing the heavy lifting when it comes to putting more housing into the system.

Again, we do not just build homes. As I said earlier, we can put bricks and mortar on the ground, we can put shovels in the ground, but we also need to make sure we work hard to get people into them. So 34 per cent of the nation's expenditure on homelessness services actually happens right here in Victoria. That is not because homelessness looks significantly different here when compared to other

states but because we are doing the heavy lifting when it comes to making sure we get people into housing and working on making sure that that placement sticks. It is about our commitment to prevention and early intervention. Our government provides Victorians with the support they need before they fall into homelessness.

Homelessness can be persistent or it can be intermittent. There are a variety of circumstances where things might pop up and for whatever reason, one way or another, you find yourself without secure housing. As I said, it could be a lifelong situation – people may have mental health conditions or people may just not feel comfortable or secure in the housing placement that they have. There will be people who fall in and out of that, but that is why it is important to make sure we have wraparound supports for people who are experiencing homelessness. We have here in Victoria our nation-leading Housing First program, which as I said, not only provides people with a home but also provides them with the wraparound supports that they need to address the sometimes very complex and interconnected issues which might have led them to experience homelessness in the first place. That is an important distinction to make as well.

The other thing I want to talk about in terms of facts is the disappointing track record that the Greens have on this. I want to go through some of the facts on the record and talk about some of the blocking actions of the Greens and how they say on the one hand that they care about housing and want to support it, but they have blocked housing at every turn and every opportunity. Let me talk a little bit about that. In 2017 Greens councillors in the City of Darebin led the vote against the development of new social housing dwellings at the vacant Huttonham estate site. The Greens led a protest against that development. In 2020 a development at Harvest Square in Merri-bek, which has since delivered 119 social homes in that municipality, which has a rate of homelessness higher than the state average, was opposed by four Greens councillors. It is on the record – opposed by four Greens councillors. In Melbourne's north, Darebin council's Greens were so opposed to providing homes to vulnerable Victorians that planning approval for the Oakover Road development was taken out of their hands. In the case of the Oakover Road development, the Allan Labor government again needed to intervene to ensure that homes were built. What we built were 99 energy-efficient, safe and secure social homes as well as 197 market homes. Again, we had to intervene because there was such opposition to this from the Greens. At the Markham estate in Ashburton new housing went through the entire planning process only for the Greens to team up with the Liberals in that example and revoke it in the Parliament. In 2020 the member for Richmond in the other place, as the mayor of the City of Yarra, voted against building 60 social and 40 affordable homes – but the government is bad, the government is wrong and we do nothing on housing. We continually take strong and principled action to make sure we build homes. You can see the history: the Greens continually block housing.

I am sure my speech will be chopped up and put all over social media and taken out of context. I know the President will then have to deal with me writing to him and making a request for it to be taken down, because I will. I am sick to death of the garbage that comes out of the Greens on this issue. If only there were real transparency. Whether it is opposing individual projects like the one that would turn an empty sand and gravel factory in Brisbane into 381 residential apartments because there would be too many car parks, as Stephen Bates, the former member for Brisbane, did or, more seriously, whether it is slowing down the deployment of the Housing Australia Future Fund for months, it is quite outrageous. I am not sure what the end game is for the Greens here other than to just try and slow things down and say the government is taking no action when really the reality of it is that their actions through their constant blocking and through their opposition, both locally and at a state level, mean that the government has to work incredibly hard to keep the momentum going and to make sure that we build the homes that people need. That is exactly what we are doing. Let us be very clear: the Housing Australia Future Fund is already delivering over 5300 homes for Victoria alone, with billions of dollars of investment flowing into our state, and that is what the Greens blocked for months.

What I hope I have done in my contribution today is highlight some facts, which is important because in this debate there is so much misinformation that is put out there by the Greens, but also highlight the very poor track record of the Greens in blocking any attempts on housing.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:48): I will not be lectured by the Greens on human rights. The Greens supported and enabled, without any evidence, one of the biggest human rights abuses in Victorian history. Let us go through it. I used to be a big fan of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, but I saw what happened when the rubber hit the road during the pandemic – the charter failed. It did not protect the rights of Victorians. When rights are limited by the government, that limitation is meant to be proportionate. At least the government has the excuse that they might have had executive privilege. They might have had access to these charter assessments. The Greens did not. I constantly, over the entire term of the last Parliament, asked for these charter assessments. We never got anything at all demonstrating proportionality except when the pandemic legislation came out and they came up with these summaries, which frankly were rubbish.

Let us go through it. Section 10 of the charter, ‘Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’, subsection (c) says:

subjected to medical or scientific experimentation or treatment without that person’s full, free and informed consent.

The Greens enabled ostracising Victorians who did not take medicine that was dictated by the state. We had teenagers that could not go into stores to buy uniforms. They had to get changed outside the store because of the vaccine passports. The Greens supported that. That was a human rights abuse in my view. ‘Freedom of movement’ – do I even need to talk about this? We had the ring of steel, the border closures. People were locked in their homes. The Greens supported that. They never saw the proportionality. They supported it anyway.

‘Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief’, in particular subsection (2):

A person must not be coerced or restrained in a way that limits that person’s freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.

The churches, synagogues and mosques were closed, and those that attempted to go in and practise their religious observances were arrested.

‘Freedom of expression’, in particular subsection (2):

Every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, whether within or outside Victoria and whether –

orally; or

in writing; or

in print ...

There were ladies arrested on the street for carrying signs, standing by themselves. The Greens supported and enabled this human rights abuse.

‘Taking part in public life’ – I can speak personally about this one. It states:

Every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination –

...

to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

The Greens voted to expel members of Parliament who did not take medicine dictated by the state or chose to not hand over their paperwork. I was in that category. Four members of Parliament were expelled, with the support of the Greens.

Section 21, 'Right to liberty and security of person', states:

- (2) A person must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.

Again, I can speak to personal experience on this. On Cup Day in 2020 the police arbitrarily detained around about 400 people because they were standing outside. Apparently they were breaching restrictions. The Greens had no evidence of proportionality but supported it anyway. Therefore I would say under section 21(2) it was also a breach.

'Humane treatment when deprived of liberty' – we have talked a lot about the housing towers, haven't we? The housing tower lockdown was one of the saddest and most awful episodes of the pandemic. The Greens were supporting the government's emergency restrictions. That was investigated by the Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman came to the conclusion – she agreed with me – that what happened in the housing towers was a breach of human rights. One of her recommendations was to ensure, when people are deprived of liberty – if we, God forbid, ever have another housing tower lockdown – that people have access to fresh air and exercise. It is a very, very simple thing. The Libertarian Party put forward an amendment when the emergency powers were amended. We put through an amendment to guarantee fresh air and exercise for people that were deprived of liberty. The Greens opposed it. They opposed fresh air and exercise for people locked down in housing towers. Maybe people should tell the people in the housing towers that the Greens were not really their friends during the pandemic.

With regard to incorporating these rights into the charter, there was a review by the Scrutiny and Regulations Committee in 2011. It directly says – about what the Greens are doing here – that there were good reasons not to do it. It states:

... SARC considers that there are powerful reasons not to expand the Charter in its current form with ESC rights found in the *ICESCR* ...

There is a bigger problem here around what is a right in the first place. The charter is actually pretty good in that most of the rights are what are termed negative rights. This is what Libertarians believe in. A negative right is something that you are born with. It is inalienable – freedom of speech, religion, these sorts of things. Governments can choose to protect these rights or choose to infringe those rights. What the Greens are doing is trying to introduce things that they think are human rights – things that sound nice, like housing. Of course it sounds nice. Everyone wants housing, why can't it be a human right? But it imposes obligations on the state. This is the problem here. One of the good things is when the charter was originally designed they did not do this. That is why we should not support this bill. I do not trust the Greens philosophical view of rights. They view rights as everything that they like is a human right and everything that they do not like should be banned. We should oppose this bill.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:55): I also rise to speak on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025. I have listened to a lot of the debate, and I have some conflicting thoughts, having read the bill myself. Whilst I understand that it has come from the Greens and the Greens are very inconsistent in what they represent and what they stand for, the one thing that stands out to me in this is the right for housing for people. I understand that it does put obligations on the government, but that is where I want to take this discussion. I want to go to the fact that this government is actually failing.

It is mind-boggling to me that since I mentioned in the housing inquiry the Menzies government's provision of public housing, people have actually interfered with AI by having a number of think tanks go in there to change how AI comes out with different results than it did a couple of weeks ago. So I want to go back to what Menzies actually stood for when Menzies started the Liberal Party, when the Liberal Party took over after the Second World War, and why Menzies had a heart for people to have homes. Ultimately, yes, he wanted to improve the opportunity for all Australians to be able to have that Australian dream and own their own home, but at the same time he recognised the dignity of human life and that people deserved to be able to be in housing. He went on to make sure that our soldiers who returned home without anything would be able to have the right to have somewhere to

live. He went on to make sure that those who were struggling because of what had happened with a depression and a world war and those who were single mothers would have somewhere to live. Public housing was not frowned upon by a Liberal government even though it was not the preferred option. The preferred option was to allow as many people as possible to be able to have the Australian dream and to own their own home. That is something that Liberals still feel very, very strongly about.

It is really interesting that the Labor government are attempting to disguise some of their ideas that they are trying to come up with – to allow people, for instance, to purchase a home with a less than 10 per cent deposit – as if they were something that they had started to come up with, these different schemes. But the reality is it came up through a Liberal Menzies government. The Liberal Menzies government wanted to make sure that every Australian could actually afford to buy a home, so there was an increase in the purchase of homes, but there was also the provision of public housing, affordable housing. I have to say that under this government there is no affordable housing, as they knock down these towers and have people sleeping on bits of cardboard boxes on the pavement all over Victoria. It is an absolute disgrace that there are girls and young men having to go and prostitute themselves to get housing and a roof over their head in the state of Victoria because this government is failing Victorians every single day.

Look, I have read the bill. I do not know how many people actually go out of their way to read these bills that they talk about, but it is really interesting to me that not many people seem to read the bills that they talk about. Number one, it simply says:

Every person has the right to adequate housing.

Honestly, in Victoria what breaks my heart is to see that so many Victorians – it is not even that they do not have the right – do not have the ability or the accessibility to be able to have housing. It is a significant omission of this government. It has failed Victorians. It has failed to provide adequate housing. It has failed to provide the opportunity.

If I was to look at things in my area, let us have a look at Frankston. The median house rent is now over \$550 a week. This is a figure that has risen by 10 per cent in the past year alone.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Waste and recycling management**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1021) My question today is to the Minister for Environment in the other place. There is a property owner on Black Gully Road, Diamond Creek, who is allegedly operating an illegal rubbish dump on their land. It has been reported for many years that significant amounts of waste are being delivered by the truckload to this property, which is in a rural conservation zone. We are talking about 60 trucks a day, cash in hand – whoever wants to dump an estimated 400,000 cubic metres of fuel, commercial waste, demolition materials, soil, vegetation, potentially asbestos and more. To date the landowner has reportedly refused to address concerns raised by council and has been incredibly aggressive and threatening to council staff and others who have sought to address the issue. Not long ago there was a large fire at the property, which was allegedly lit by the landowner to burn off some of this commercial waste. I understand the EPA has been involved in this case over the years, but the waste dumping continues. I mean, what are our environment laws for if people continue to get away with this. Minister, will you fix it?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:01): Obviously I will refer this matter to the Minister for Environment for a response. I am sure that he has heard about this and I am sure that you have probably written to him already on this matter, but he will respond to you within the standing orders.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): Thank you, Minister, for referring that question on. If you look this property up on Google Maps, you can literally see what appears to be a

large bin fire burning on the site. Aerial images since then show the landfill growing and spreading over the property over this time. Again, this is a rural conservation zone. Minister, will you work with Nillumbik council and any other relevant authorities to see that this illegal dump is closed down to protect this important rural conservation area?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:02): This is a matter that is being dealt with by a number of authorities, and I am sure that the minister will respond to your supplementary as per the standing orders.

#### **Working with children checks**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (1022) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, yesterday during the committee stage of the debate on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 Minister Erdogan admitted that the bill will not close loopholes in the working with children check. So why has the government failed to fix these problems that were identified by the Ombudsman three years ago?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:02): I thank Ms Crozier, but again I would remind her that the working with children check and the worker screening bill to which she refers are a matter for the Attorney-General, as she has previously been informed, and indeed that is why the minister here representing the Attorney-General was answering those questions for you yesterday.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): Minister, when did the former Attorney-General first speak to you about the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:03): Again I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I have ongoing conversations with all of my colleagues, and they will well attest to my passion for representing children in this place and indeed in government. As I pointed out to the house yesterday in relation to the two matters in the Ombudsman's report that went to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, they were indeed actioned by my department, as I have informed the media and this chamber a number of times over a number of weeks –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: No, there were two recommendations within that report that related to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The matters to which you refer, Ms Crozier, are a matter for the Attorney-General, and I suggest you direct your questions that way.

**Georgie Crozier**: On a point of order, President, this is a very specific question. It is about when the former Attorney-General first spoke to the minister about the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations, which are around child safety.

**The PRESIDENT**: I was hesitant about putting the supplementary question, because when a minister gets a question and says, 'That's a responsibility for another minister,' I do not know where the supplementary can go. This is why I hate paraphrasing ministers' responses, or for that matter members' questions, in real time. I had a concern. I did put it to the minister. This is me paraphrasing and probably getting in murky water, but I felt like the answer was when the report was delivered – the report we are talking about. I will ask the minister to continue.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: As I have informed the house, and indeed – your point, President – if we wanted to talk about when the report was provided to the Parliament, I was indeed the Minister for Planning and was located in the other place. But as I have indicated to this house, the working with children check is the responsibility of the portfolio of the Attorney-General, so I would suggest that if those opposite have questions for the Attorney-General they direct them to the appropriate place. But

what I will say is that I am absolutely an advocate for vulnerable children, and indeed all children, every single day.

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, the constant interjections from Ms Crozier are unruly, and I would ask that you ask her to come to order.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will uphold the point of order.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): I move:

That the minister's response be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Ministers statements: community safety**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:07): Victorians and indeed Australia's Jewish community have been shocked by revelations that a number of antisemitic attacks, including the horrific firebombing of Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea, were orchestrated by agents of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. These targeted antisemitic attacks have been made to sow division, fuel hatred and harm our proud Jewish community. I commend our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong for their swift response and leadership. To our Jewish community and the Adass Israel community in Ripponlea: we stand with you. Your daily lives continue to be affected by this abhorrent attack and the dramatic increase in antisemitism that you have been subjected to. I say this: you have the right to practise your religion, be proud of who you are and not have to look over your shoulder in fear. The past two years have seen an unprecedented breakdown in our community's harmony. This is a stark reminder that there are actors who seek to stoke division and harm what is so precious in our multicultural and diverse society. We must always stand against hate, against division, against antisemitism and against violence.

### **Early childhood education and care**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:09): (1023) My question is for the Minister for Children. Minister, the rapid child safety review highlighted that Victoria's regulator has just 195 staff compared to 448 in New South Wales – less than half the capacity. Recommendation 13 calls for the regulator to be 'appropriately funded to deliver its functions'. Your government accepted the need for an immediate and substantial increase in authorised officers and enforcement staff, but the Labor government's response to the rapid review did not specify the amount of new state funding for the regulator. Without major investment, more unannounced visits and stronger enforcement powers will not be deliverable. Minister, what is the amount your government has specifically allocated to fund this workforce expansion?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:10): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question and for an opportunity to talk about the things that we are doing in response to the rapid review that was handed down by Mr Weatherill and Ms White just last week. The Premier, the Attorney-General and I indeed responded in relation to that, specifically in relation to regulations and the establishment of regulators. As I had said in this place and in the media over recent weeks, the setting up of an independent regulator is something that I had actually already asked advice on from the department. When I received the recommendations that we should establish an independent early childhood regulator as well as a beefed-up Social Services Regulator, I was most pleased to see that in the report, because I do think that we do need to do more, as we said at the outset, in relation to how we provide for the regulation of this very fast evolving sector.

If we look at the early education and care sector in Victoria, it has more than doubled, by about 60, 70 per cent in the last 10 years, and of that, 94 per cent of long day care services are for profit. If we

look at the way in which this system has evolved, it is one with which regulation has not kept pace, so it is very pleasing to receive these recommendations. The establishment of an early education and care regulator that specifically brings the workforce in early education, the regulation and the application of the national law all into an independent regulator is important. Equally important is bringing together those other elements within the Social Services Regulator that also work with children, whether it will ultimately be the working with children check, whether it will be the reportable conduct scheme or the child safe standards. In particular, I am excited that it will also be brought together with the disability workforce and the out-of-home care workforce, because we know that we want children to be safe wherever they are, whether they are learning, playing, being cared for or in our early education systems.

The Premier and I last week announced an initial contribution, or initial funding if you like, of \$42 million for setting up these new functions and for the immediate steps that we need to take to bring those recommendations into effect. But we also made it very, very clear that this is an initial investment. As we do that legislative work to establish the independent education regulator, to bring about the rest of the registration work and work that in with the Commonwealth, and to beef up the Social Services Regulator over the coming weeks as we formulate that and develop a legislative proposal to bring to the Parliament, we will be very cognisant of the fact that will require additional investment. That \$42 million is an initial investment, and we certainly look forward to making sure, as per the recommendations suggested, that they be adequately funded.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:13): I actually failed to hear what dollar figure is going to be allocated for the resourcing of the independent regulator specifically around authorised officers and enforcement staff to be able to ensure delivery but also safety of children. If I can ask you again: from that \$42 million that your government has initially planned to invest in these measures, what amount is going to be allocated to the independent child safe regulator?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:14): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her supplementary question. As I indicated, this is an initial investment of \$42 million to do the work, including the legislative development and the policy work to bring these proposals to the Parliament in order to be able to then have a regulator with which we can allocate the appropriate levels of funding. We have made it very clear that that \$42 million is an initial investment. We will do the policy development and the legislative work and will bring the proposals to the Parliament. They may indeed change by the nature of this democratic place. We will then allocate the resources that are necessary to deliver on an independent regulator, which will be nation leading and will include those 12-monthly compliance visits, plus the additional things that we agreed to as part of our conversations at the education ministers meeting last Friday that go to things like ensuring three-year average assessments and a range of other matters. We will also ensure that there is appropriate funding for the Social Services Regulator to bring all of that regulation together.

### Community safety

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): (1024) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, I had an alarming discussion with a constituent who called me regarding a health-related matter but concerningly spoke of her daughter's recent experience. The woman's daughter is a student at RMIT. She was having coffee with a friend last week and was confronted by another young woman who quite literally shoved a pro-Palestinian pamphlet in her face. When she said, 'No, thank you,' the woman then went up to her, ran her finger across her throat and said, 'You will die.' Minister, as you can imagine, this was a horrifying experience. I ask: what is the government doing to stamp out such vile and violent actions from individuals linked to groups that are intolerant of Victorians just going about their business?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:16): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. At the outset, can I say that that kind of behaviour is not acceptable. Whilst I accept that people have got sometimes very strong views

but very different views about a whole range of issues in our state, including some of the issues around what has been occurring in the Middle East and in other parts of the world most recently, people have a responsibility to express those views in a respectful way and one that does not intimidate or harass individuals in the community. That is the first thing I would say in response, Ms Crozier, to the treatment that your constituent received – that it is unacceptable.

There are a range of measures that the government has been taking to combat this kind of hateful behaviour, including of course bringing into the Parliament and passing laws to strengthen our anti-vilification and social cohesion legislation. On this side of the house we voted for it. Secondly, I have asked for a comprehensive review of the multicultural settings in Victoria. I am not sure of the cultural background of your particular constituent; it may or may not be a relevant factor here. But it is important that we find ways to strengthen our multicultural settings and provide communities with the tools and the capacity to be able to build bridges rather than continue with this kind of disharmony in the community.

I would also, of course, urge Ms Crozier to, as I am sure you already have, encourage your constituents, if they feel it is an incident of particular seriousness, to come forward and report that kind of behaviour to the most appropriate agency and authorities. If it is something that the member would like to provide me with more details around, I would be very happy to see what relevant information I could provide via my department.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): Thank you, Minister, for that response, because it was alarming and all concerned were very upset about it. You spoke about the responsibility to express views in a respectful way, and I think we all agree with that. But in recent weeks there has been an increase in intolerance of groups and in protests that are disrupting our city. Businesses are fed up, and last Saturday a constituent was blocked from being able to get to the MCG. The appalling un-Australian rhetoric calling for the abolition of Australia and the targeting of police should not be tolerated by anyone. These ongoing pro-Palestinian protests are a threat to social cohesion, which you have mentioned, so I ask: what discussions have you had with the new police commissioner about multicultural social cohesion?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:19): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary. The Premier has been very clear about these issues. She has indicated that we will be bringing forward legislation this year to stamp out unacceptable protest behaviour. They are not matters in my specific portfolio. They are matters that the Attorney and the police minister are leading. But at the instigation of the Premier, there has also been an anti-hate taskforce established, which the chief commissioner attends regularly. And of course there are lots of regular opportunities for me as Minister for Multicultural Affairs to talk to not only my ministerial colleagues but also, you know, relevant leaders across our agencies, including VicPol. It is very important that our multicultural community feels supported by everyone.

#### **Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:20): The Suburban Rail Loop is Australia's largest infrastructure and housing project, and it will only be delivered under a Labor government. Last week it was a delight to join the members for Box Hill and Ashwood, along with the fantastic newly elected federal member for Menzies Gabriel Ng, at the SRL East Burwood site. Teams on site are there around the clock excavating 19-metre-deep voids at the tunnel-boring machine launch site in preparation for the start of tunnelling next year.

But the Burwood site is not the only massive hole that has been making headlines. The coalition has been digging every day a little deeper, tying themselves in knots as they use this critical project as a proxy in the latest round of internal warfare within the Liberal Party. While Victorians back the SRL, the coalition just really hate each other, and now they know they must get themselves out of this hole they have dug for themselves with the daily lottery that determines their position on this project. That

is why leadership aspirant Matthew Guy tried desperately last week to reverse course on their opposition to a project that Victorians have voted for in four consecutive elections. He said:

If a project is commencing then a project goes ahead, it's as simple as that.

It then took his leader three days to summon the courage to contradict his potential challenger, adding to their clear-as-mud position by saying the Liberals will pause the project. This officially marks the eighth different policy position the Liberals have had on the Suburban Rail Loop since 2022. Pause, cancel or proceed – it really depends on who you ask, and if it is a day ending in 'Y', chances are you will get all three out of those opposite.

One thing they will not do, though, is say they will front up to the 3000 Suburban Rail Loop workers to tell them exactly what their confused positions mean for their jobs and their families. They will not front up to young Victorians who know this project will help them to buy their own home closer to where they grew up, and they certainly will not front up to the thousands of Victorians who backed this project in at four separate elections. The Allan Labor government has only ever had one position on the Suburban Rail Loop: build 70,000 homes, take pressure off outer suburbs and slash travel times. We are getting on with it.

### Housing

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:22): (1025) My question today is for the minister for housing. I have been recently made aware of a large regional property owned by the Department of Health and human services on Wisely Road, Zeerust, just 15 minutes from Shepparton. This property has been vacant for at least five years, is boarded up but is being maintained. Can the minister shed some light on why this property has been left vacant for so long?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:23): Thank you, Ms Tyrrell, for that question and for inquiring about this particular property. The property that you have referred to in Zeerust was purchased in 2008 for the purpose of residential care, and in 2023 it was deemed no longer fit for purpose. The property was required to be rezoned prior to it being sold. I am advised that we need to get some further information on rezoning and what that process looks like. I am sorry I cannot give you any further detail, but just to be really clear, maintaining the condition of a property which may be vacant – including prior to sale and prior to any divestment – through repairs, maintenance or structural change is par for the course in respect of any property that might be held, including for those purposes such as the one that you have referred to. Why don't I see if I can get you some further information, including on the rezoning process. That can usually take between 12 and 18 months in general terms, but I will see what I can find you.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:24): I thank the minister for her very factual answer. I have had reports of a great number of public housing properties that are currently sitting vacant in my electorate of Northern Victoria. Can the minister tell me exactly how many public housing properties are vacant in my electorate?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:24): Thank you, Ms Tyrrell, for that question. It might have perhaps been more useful to flip it around in terms of this being the principal question. Vacancies in our properties across the state are being managed really carefully and with purpose. We do have a lower vacancy rate in public housing around regional Victoria than the general housing stock, including through private rentals, and the total number of vacant properties has actually fallen by 19 per cent, or 721 properties, over a two-year period from 30 June 2023 to 30 June 2025. At the end of each tenancy properties are assessed for their condition. We do want to make sure that they are safe, livable and suitable homes, and there may well be extensive work that needs to be undertaken. In light of the fact that I do not have detail for your specific electorate and all of the seats

that it represents across regional Victoria, why don't I get some further detail to you on exactly what those statistics look like.

**Economic policy**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:26): (1026) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the *Australian Financial Review* today said of Victoria in its editorial:

The higher taxation and bigger spending policies under Labor over the past decade have coincided with the lowest productivity growth of any state and the second-lowest per-capita economic growth –  
of any state –

in the nation.

I therefore ask: does the Treasurer accept that after over a decade in government Labor is responsible for the most business-unfriendly environment of any Australian jurisdiction and that these failures are responsible for Victoria's shocking economic performance?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:26): I thank Mr Davis for his question and the opportunity to give an editorial on the business environment and positive economic growth of Victoria.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: I will take up the interjection of my colleague. The continual talking down by those opposite of the communities they represent and use of cherrypicked data which does not actually represent the reality is really confronting. It is actually quite concerning that you want to govern this state when you cannot even be positive about what is, frankly, very positive.

Mr Davis, you started by claiming there are some tax issues in relation to the Victorian position. What I would point to is budget paper 2, page 47, which talks about interstate comparison of state government revenue and demonstrates how on a per capita basis Victoria brings in less revenue in relation to other states – that is the first point. In relation to the business environment, we have added more than 113,000 businesses since June 2020. That is an increase of 18 per cent, and that is the most of any other state. I do not know how many times I have to continue to say this, because you continue to ignore and try and refute the statistics – more than any other state. Quarterly business investment figures are showing that for the full year to March 2025 investment grew by 1.6 per cent – significantly faster than the national growth, which was 1.2 per cent. In relation to small businesses, over 6000 small businesses do not pay any payroll tax after the payroll tax changes that we recently made.

We have the *Economic Growth Statement*, which I do not have a copy of on me, but I will drop one off to anyone who is interested. In relation to ensuring that we continue to not actually take for granted how well our state is going, we want to strengthen, we want to do better and we will continue to support businesses through the *Economic Growth Statement*. We will look for opportunities for tax reform. We have cut tax 66 times in the last decade, but we do not like to talk about that. In relation to business creation, as I said, a record number of businesses have been created here. Consumer sentiment in Victoria is strong – 99.8 per cent compared to 93.1 nationally.

I have got a number of stats that I can continue to point to. We are the best in the nation when it comes to economic growth, but I am not satisfied with that. I will continue to attract new business, work with existing businesses and take Victoria from strength to strength with those that want to work with me rather than those that want to work against the interests of Victorians.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): I do think the Treasurer is delusional. Leaving that aside, I ask her a further question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: Mr Davis, I think that is a bit unparliamentary, so maybe you should withdraw.

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw ‘delusional’.

**A member:** Without reservation.

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you. We might reset the clock and then Mr Davis can ask his question without too much help. When the Treasurer has her 1 minute to respond, we will be all be quiet then too. It will be fantastic.

**David DAVIS:** My question is to the Treasurer again. I note, moving around the state, there are very few who would agree with her assessments, but I again reference the editorial in the *Australian Financial Review* and ask the Treasurer why Labor has shown so little interest in:

... building broad-based constituencies that support rational pro-growth, pro-investment and pro-productivity policies to make everyone better off.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Do you want to ask it again?

**David DAVIS:** I will read it again. Referencing the editorial in the *Australian Financial Review* again, I ask the Treasurer why Labor has shown so little interest in, and I will quote from the editorial:

... building broad-based constituencies that support rational pro-growth, pro-investment and pro-productivity policies to make everyone better off.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:31): Without reiterating the stats that I just went through, what I will talk to in response to that, Mr Davis, is that you will have seen from my latest diary disclosure, and my next diary disclosure, that it is full of people that are wanting to talk to me about investment in Victoria, about what they are doing to promote economic growth, how they are employing more people and how the state can partner with them. I would welcome a collective partnership in relation to these efforts, but if you do not want to take up that opportunity, there is no shortage of people who want to take up that opportunity with me.

#### **Ministers statements: early childhood education and care**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:32): I rise to update the house on the successful education ministers meeting held last Friday in Sydney and the positive outcomes reached. This includes our government’s successful advocacy for improvements to child safety that were recommended by the rapid review undertaken by Jay Weatherill and Pam White. Fifteen rapid review recommendations made by Mr Weatherill and Ms White require national action. This is because early childhood education and care services are regulated under a national framework, national law and national regulations. This is important because we do not want predators crossing borders. I am pleased to advise the house that 10 of the recommendations that require national action have already been agreed, or agreed in part, to be implemented following Friday’s meeting. Importantly, this includes agreement to amend the national law to make the safety, rights and best interests of children the paramount consideration in all decision-making. This will apply to all staff in services, from educators and managers all the way up to board members, because the safety, rights and best interests of children must underpin all decision-making in the early childhood education and care system, from the boardroom to the playroom.

In addition, education ministers agreed to establish a national early childhood worker register, increase penalties for offences, commence a national trial of CCTV in early childhood education and care settings, implement improvements to the information available to parents about service quality and compliance and require national mandatory child safety training for all people involved in the provision of early childhood education and care. This work is in addition to the immediate steps that the Allan Labor government is already taking to improve child safety in Victoria, including our initial

investment of \$42 million to establish a new nation-leading regulator that will more than double the frequency of compliance checks and beef up the Social Services Regulator, giving it new powers and removing silos. As I said yesterday, we look forward to those opposite being true to their word that they will provide constructive support to any measures that improve our early education and care system in response to the rapid child safety review, because child safety should be above politics.

### Disability services

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:34): (1027) My question is to the Minister for Disability. The 2023 NDIS review recommended the establishment of foundational disability supports for every Australian with a disability. These would be a new tier of disability supports classified as general supports, including capacity-building support, information, guidance and peer support, and targeted supports offering lower intensity disability supports for those not on the NDIS, like children with developmental and neurological differences. It was envisaged that these would sit between mainstream services, like health, education and community services, and the specialised services offered by NDIS. Agreement between the Commonwealth and the Victorian government was to be finalised by June 2025, but it was not. People with disability are anxiously waiting to find out if their services will be reduced and if the foundational supports will cover the services they need. Can the minister update the house on the negotiations around foundational disability supports and when these will be implemented now that the July deadline has passed?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:35): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and for the opportunity to address this matter in the house. I too am most anxious for the information that Mr Ettershank is seeking, and I was most surprised to hear Minister Butler's address at the press club last week. I had no advance notice of what was to be in that address, and indeed I did not hear from the Commonwealth until I think at least a day or so later. It is most concerning, in my view. It has always been my concern that the changes to the national disability insurance scheme would ultimately result in children being removed from the scheme, and that remains my concern. I remain particularly concerned that children with neurodivergence might be removed from the scheme at the expense of others on the scheme.

There is absolutely agreement across the Commonwealth between jurisdictions that there needs to be work done, and indeed it was what led to the NDIS review in the first place to ensure that the scheme is a sustainable scheme. I have long been an advocate of a national disability insurance scheme. Indeed I think it has the capacity to be, for most of us here, the Medicare of our generation, but it does need to be sustainable.

All of the states agreed to work with the Commonwealth as co-governors of the scheme. I would say we put \$3 billion this year into the NDIS itself, so we are co-governors, we are co-funders, hence it was disappointing not to have a discussion with Minister Butler before that address and to still have relatively limited information about what Thriving Kids actually is. It appears from his address at the press club that it speaks to things such as maternal and child health, it speaks to early education and it speaks to other family services. These are all areas in which I would say Victoria leads the nation. One example he gave was a three-year-old health check. We already have, as part of our 10 key ages and stages visits, a three-year-old health check.

What I do not want to see is Victoria being punished for being, again, ahead of the game as compared to other states right around the nation in terms of the services that we provide for children and young people. So I am seeking to assure myself of that and seeking information. I would welcome any opportunity, as I know my colleagues around the country would welcome any opportunity, to further engage with the Commonwealth to better understand what they mean by Thriving Kids and make sure that Victorian children and young people, particularly those in that zero-to-nine cohort, get the services that they and their families need to support them on their journey, and particularly for those who may have a permanent disability that looks somewhat different to somebody else's permanent disability

but who nonetheless need those supports so that they can equally participate in their education and in their care and can live fulfilling and happy lives.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:38): I thank the minister for her response. I guess I was seeking something a bit broader than Minister Butler's comments specifically about kids, but since you have raised it, that fits well with my supplementary. Parents of children with mild to moderate developmental delays or autism and their support groups were blindsided last Friday by the federal government's decision to divert these children away from the NDIS. This announcement, as you suggested, was made with zero consultation and no advance warning to either those directly affected or obviously, as you have said publicly, the Victorian government. The lack of consultation has left families rightly concerned that a one-size-fits-all model may be adopted, with children losing access to specialised supports at critical stages in their development. So I ask: as co-funders, as you said, of these supports under the new NDIS model, will the minister commit to co-design with parents of children with mild to moderate developmental delays or autism to preserve affordability and access to vital specialised services? We are seeking that undertaking, Minister.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:39): Again, I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. As I said, these remarks that were made last week that we still have a lack of clarity around did absolutely heighten concerns. I know in particular there are a number of organisations that represent children with neurodivergence – Yellow Ladybugs, who I know particularly well, were one – that rightly at the absolute outset, as well as many individuals, publicly shared those concerns, and I appreciate them doing that. The Association for Children with Disability was another. We absolutely want to be involved in the design of what these services look like, and we want families who are using these services to be involved in that as well. That is the assurance that we are indeed seeking from the Commonwealth. They have said they want this to be a nationally consistent scheme. We are seeking to understand what that means and what that means exactly for consultation and design work, because we have not been privy to those conversations. I cannot answer that further. From a Victorian government perspective, we absolutely want to make sure that families and particularly those with children impacted are involved.

#### **Retail workplace safety**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1028) My question is again to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I note the recent comments of the chief executive of Coles Leah Weckert that threatening behaviour towards the supermarket giant's retail staff is increasing, especially in Victoria, despite the company investing in extra technology to reduce theft since 2023, when a crime surge began. Her further comments were:

Despite all the investments that we've made in the loss technology, despite the investment that we've made in safety ... we are continuing to see increases in threatening situations in store ... And it is definitely the case that in Victoria, retail crime is escalating more than what we are seeing in other states.

I therefore ask: is it a fact, Treasurer, that the business and investment climate, especially for retail, is being cruelled in Victoria by a retail crime wave that is driving firms and investment away from Victoria?

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I am just concerned that is asking an opinion, but I will let the Treasurer respond as she sees fit.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:42): Mr Davis, there is a range of issues you raised and a range of ministers you could have directed them to, including the Attorney-General, the Minister for Industrial Relations and the Treasurer. You did end with claims about business investment being decreased, I think was your language. The latest data – and again, the data, not just me making this up – shows that Victorian business investment increased by 3.7 per cent over the year to December, and nationally

business investment went backwards 0.1 per cent. So the contrast between where we are headed compared to other states is really positive, and the fact that you continue to say it is not is on you.

In relation to support for retail workers, that is something that we have committed to doing in relation to retail worker harm. That is legislation that is being developed in consultation with the big operators as well as small business. We know that retail theft is a concern for businesses and the community more broadly. It is a conversation that we are also having with police – and this is work that started before I transitioned to this role. There is also the industrial relations ability to work with businesses about things like security, safety and things like that. There is a holistic approach to this issue across government from a number of portfolios.

But linking a concerning behaviour that we are aware of and we are trying to deal with from a number of perspectives with stats that do not line up is probably not the way – my gratuitous advice to you – I would frame the question. I am happy to answer it in different segments. Business investment is up. Retail crime is a concern. Linking them is not something that I think you have got any evidence to be able to do.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): I thank the Treasurer for her response, and I want to ask her further on this topic: the *AFR* released retail crime figures by state, showing in the first six months of this year threatening events in Victoria were up 41 per cent and violent offences were up 33 per cent – far and away from any other comparable jurisdiction. I ask: how is it possible for the retail sector, a critical sector for the Victorian economy, to thrive when retailers and their staff are being threatened and pummelled? Why would any retail investor invest in Victoria in those circumstances?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:45): Again, Mr Davis, the issues you raise are issues of importance. We share concerns about retail theft, and I went through some of the initiatives, programs and opportunities that we are working with willing partners on to address some of these issues – not necessarily through my Treasury portfolio. In relation to business investment, I can continue to tell you that is strong, and we are outstripping the nation.

#### Ministers statements: State Revenue Office

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:45): Today I would like to use my ministers statement to inform the house of the important work of the State Revenue Office. I recently visited the more than 350 wonderful SRO staff who are located in Ballarat. Many SRO employees have several years or decades of service – the average length of service is actually nine years – and their employee satisfaction levels are off the charts, as I discovered when I attended their service awards. Their work is much more than just collecting revenue on behalf of the state. They support and speak to excited first home buyers who are receiving stamp duty concessions and grants, they process off-the-plan concessions, they administer exemptions to victims of family violence and they host seminars to provide public education and expert advice to people who need help navigating the tax system. Last year they assessed over \$31 billion of revenue and they answered over 330,000 phone calls and 70,000 emails, with a customer satisfaction level of over 80 per cent.

It is a wonderfully dedicated workforce, and I fully support the work and rulings made by their commissioner. I would like to put the claims that the government's work-from-home policy will make you liable for land tax to bed. Let me say it very clearly: these claims are categorically false. I would like to assure the house, as I did yesterday, that working from home a few days a week will not make a taxpayer liable for land tax. You need to be conducting substantial business activity. This is confirmed in a ruling on the principal place of residence exemption that was made in 2013 –

**David Davis:** That is the one I referred to.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** The policy was brought in by the Liberal government, so I understand that you should know exactly how it works, and I gave you credit for that yesterday. If you are working from home and you are not paying land tax now, you will not be paying land tax under the government's protections to work from home.

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT (12:47):** I thank Minister Tierney, who under the standing orders will get two responses for Mr Puglielli.

*Constituency questions*

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1772)** My constituency question is to the Minister for Health in the other place. Last week the Allan Labor government officially opened the Craigieburn Community Hospital as part of the more than \$800 million support for the community hospitals program. This facility run by the brilliant folks at Northern Health is already delivering vital dialysis and public dental services. This hospital means families in Melbourne's north can access high-quality care closer to home. It is easing pressures on our major hospitals so they can focus on emergency and complex cases. My question to the minister is: what new services will be coming to the Craigieburn Community Hospital, and how will it improve access to local health care, particularly in our growing communities?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:49): (1773)** My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. The *Bendigo Advertiser* has reported that, according to a leading rail expert, Bendigo's train services are unlikely to improve for at least a decade and will inevitably get slower after Melbourne's Metro Tunnel opens later this year. Rail Futures Institute president and former V/Line chief operating officer John Hearsch said the tunnel would increase services along the Sunbury line, which would have a domino effect on Bendigo trains because they share the same tracks. The paper also reported that Bendigo already has one of the worst rates of service cancellations in Victoria. According to Mr Hearsch, the only thing that would free up the Bendigo trains would be dedicated V/Line tracks. I ask the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to respond to these concerns and clarify what impacts the Metro Tunnel will have on V/Line train services in Northern Victoria, including the Bendigo and Seymour lines, once it opens.

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Adem SOMYUREK (Northern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1774)** My constituency question is to the Minister for Health concerning the lack of after-hours urgent care services at the newly opened Craigieburn Community Hospital. When the facility was first announced the community was promised access to urgent after-hours care, yet today I am receiving numerous complaints from families that they are still left without the option in the evenings and on weekends. I therefore ask the minister: what steps will the government take to deliver the after-hours urgent care that was promised to Craigieburn families when this hospital was first announced?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1775)** My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. As our city grows, how is the Labor government providing more opportunities for young people to engage in sport in the Southern Metropolitan Region? Last week I had the pleasure of joining my colleague Nick Staikos, the member for Bentleigh in the other place, to officially switch on the lights at the Dane Road Reserve in Moorabbin, home to the Racing Rugby Club, an excellent junior rugby team. These new LED lights will mean they can hold more training sessions during extended hours through the winter months, thanks to a contribution from the Labor government in conjunction with the City of Kingston. The switching on of these lights is an investment in these young

people's futures. As they were switched on at the Dane Road Reserve, you could see the new classrooms that are just being built at the Moorabbin Primary School and the brand new competition-grade gymnasium at that primary school, which is just about to be opened for community use. With these new lights, the future is bright for community sport in Moorabbin.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (1776) My constituency question is for the Premier. A constituent in Hastings is deeply anxious about her child's safety, because they must attend child care so she can work to buy food. Langwarrin is one of the highest areas for mortgage insecurity, and this is one of the reasons why. Her question is: why has the Premier allowed Jaclyn Symes to continue to be on her leadership team, since she was the Attorney-General when the Ombudsman handed down their report into child safety? The report made multiple recommendations, yet not a single one was enacted. My constituent believes this failure has contributed to the tragic cases that we have been debating over the last few weeks.

**The PRESIDENT:** We might review that, because it is 'My constituent asked' and a global issue. I am not saying it is going to be knocked out, but we will just have a look at it.

**Renee HEATH:** Do you want me to reword it?

**The PRESIDENT:** No. It might be okay, but I am just thinking about how 'My constituent asked' a big global question when it is supposed to be around your constituency.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1777) My question today is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and I start by absolutely welcoming the announcement that Melbourne's eastern suburbs will be getting a Chinese community centre. My region is home to a diverse and vibrant Chinese diaspora community, and I am proud to work with this community and support their work. I have been contacted by local residents who are from the region. I have been speaking with local community leaders, and they have raised some concerns with elements of the expression-of-interest process for this community centre. Specifically, they have informed me that they are concerned the timeframe for the process is too short given the significance of the project. They are also concerned that the requirement that groups must own land to be eligible will prevent a number of large and longstanding organisations from applying. They have actually suggested that a Chinese community consultative body, capturing the diversity and breadth of these communities in my region, could provide useful advice and guidance not only on this project but on others. Minister, will you establish a Chinese community consultative body?

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (1778) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Recently I had the privilege of joining the minister on a visit to Heany Park Primary School in Rowville to celebrate the 12-member green team who won the Student Action Team of the Year award in the 2025 ResourceSmart Schools Awards. These wonderful students run a weekly gardening club and deliver regular sustainability updates, leading to more students adopting eco-friendly habits like using reusable containers. I would like to give my congratulations to the whole school team but especially to Hayley, Sam, Raha, Nadini, Patrick, Almas, Erol, Oliver, Eden, Alta, Serenity and Isla. Minister, how does the ResourceSmart Schools program help students in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region gain hands-on experience in sustainability?

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:55): (1779) My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment. My constituents have raised with me concerns about the employment rates in Melbourne's west. Our latest youth employment figure in Melbourne's west shows unemployment rose from 11.5 to 14 per cent. In contrast, youth unemployment across the state

rose from 9.9 to 10.5 per cent. Alarming, our youth unemployment rate in the west is about 4 per cent higher than the rest of Victoria. So my question for the minister is: can you update my constituents in the west on the latest figure and what actions you have taken to rectify the significant increase in youth employment? Because in my electorate young Victorians are struggling to find work and there are clear widening gaps between those in the west and the rest of Victoria.

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1780) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Constituents have contacted me concerned about the fate of our state's special and genetically distinct dingo subspecies the alpine dingo, of which there are only 2940 mature animals remaining, and the Mallee dingo, or wilkerr, of which there are only 16 mature individuals left. These beautiful, uniquely adapted creatures are important to our ecosystems as apex predators, they help control feral animal populations and they are of huge cultural importance as part of First Peoples' living cultural heritage. But under Jacinta Allan's government Victoria's dingoes could be the next mammalian extinction in Australia. Minister, in 2024 the government promised more than \$2.5 million funding to trial control methods that would inform a transition from lethal to nonlethal dingo population control methods. My constituent wants to know what has been delivered with this funding and where the trials are.

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:57): (1781) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Under Labor pride in our city has diminished, and it is reflected in the shocking state of our roads. I would invite the minister to join me on a road trip through the south-east. She can enjoy the rubbish and the long grass alongside her state roads, graffiti sprayed over signage and of course potholes so large you would think we were living on the moon. A constituent wrote to me about the so-called repair job at the intersection of Seaford Road and Nepean Highway. While flooding was initially responsible for the damage, VicRoads used their usual hopeless bucket-and-spade technique to repair the intersection, which resulted in potholes showing again. Minister, can you please explain what your government will do to ensure that this and all our road damage is repaired for the long term and not just a few months?

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1782) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, my constituents who live in and around Moreland Road have been very concerned about the recent surges in cyclist injuries and deaths. Just this Sunday evening past, it was reported by the *Brunswick Voice* that a cyclist on Moreland Road in Coburg was involved in a hit-and-run collision in very tragic circumstances. Moreland Road is a busy major road for road users to get to and from the CityLink freeway and has a speed limit of 60 kilometres. Minister, my constituents are asking what safety measures you will implement to ensure safety of cyclists and harmony for all road users to prevent any more preventable deaths and injuries.

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:59): (1783) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the government install temporary traffic lights at the Willaroy Boulevard–Donnybrook Road intersection to allow residents exiting Donnybrae estate to safely join Donnybrook Road? Donnybrook Road is a single-lane road that is notoriously busy and permanently congested, and residents of the Donnybrae estate who want to turn right from Willaroy Boulevard to head towards the Hume Freeway find it very difficult to do so safely, especially during heavy morning traffic. Residents of the Donnybrae estate have started a petition calling for the Victorian government to install temporary traffic lights at the exit of the estate onto Donnybrook Road. I strongly support this call from the residents and urge the minister for roads to immediately implement this safe and

practical temporary solution, because the Labor government has no plan to properly fix Donnybrook Road any time soon.

### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1784) My question is for the Minister for Environment. I have raised the issue of illegal dumping occurring in the South-East Metro here before, and it appears that the issue is only getting worse. Many constituents have contacted my office to report illegally dumped rubbish on the roadside, and one area that comes up frequently is Glasscocks Road between the Dandenong Valley and Western Port highways. This stretch of mostly unsealed road receives new deposits of rusty appliances, soiled mattresses, spent oil drums and burnt-out car shells daily. The area has been fitted with security cameras to deter this illegal activity, but that is proving ineffective. All that Dandenong council can do about this issue is send out a flatbed to clean up new deposits as fast as they appear at great expense to the ratepayers. Therefore my question to the minister is: what is the minister doing to prevent illegal dumping in South-East Metro?

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:01): (1785) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and it relates to a survey of farmers that has been conducted in my Eastern Victoria Region. The question I ask the minister is: will you advocate to the Treasurer to scrap the tax? The results are in: after an extensive survey 95 per cent are concerned or very concerned about the emergency services levy, 95 per cent are concerned or very concerned about new taxes, 96 per cent are concerned about road and freight and 88 per cent are very concerned about the energy costs that they have to implement. One East Gippsland farmer says:

I can't afford any new taxes or higher power costs.

Another one in East Gippsland said:

I can't afford any new taxes ...

The other one in West Gippsland that I will refer to is:

The new levy is unfair and unaffordable. Most farmland is mortgaged, and the value of land does not have any bearing on our ability to earn an income.

Minister, will you scrap the tax?

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

### ***Bills***

#### **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): I will continue my speech. I want to read out some information about Sir Robert Menzies and the vision that he had and what he said about housing. In his landmark Forgotten People speech in May 1942 Robert Menzies spoke about the importance of 'homes material, homes human, homes spiritual.' The big thing that he spoke about, though, was that:

The home is the foundation of sanity and sobriety; it is the indispensable condition of continuity; its health determines the health of society as a whole.

This government has clearly failed on the topic of housing. One only has to walk the streets of Melbourne during the daytime and at night to see the number of people that are sleeping out there on pavements, in shop doorways and under bridges, with cardboard boxes for homes. I can understand why the Greens have brought in a very short bill that talks about every person having the right to

adequate housing and then to go on to talk about what that housing should be – it should be affordable, structurally sound, meet standards, provide personal safety, have sufficient space for the person, be close to public services and employment opportunities and be secure. It is a very basic and simple bill that has been put before the house, but the problem is that it is ideologically driven by the Greens.

The Greens have failed, as has been mentioned by others in this place, on issues of human rights, and there has been a definite inconsistency in what they stand up for. It is really disturbing, as I mentioned before, that two weeks ago I could go in and easily find information about the contribution of the Menzies government to housing for all Australians and Victorians, that I could read about it and learn about it. But now, because there are a number of fictitious or slightly slurred perspectives being provided with AI that have redetermined how AI writes about this, it is very difficult to find the right information and to seek the truth. This is how a failing government would behave. It wants to control its people with a narrative that honestly it cannot hide.

You cannot hide it when you come to the south-east. I dare you to go down to the Frankston foreshores. I dare you to go down to the soup kitchens. I dare you to go down to where people are having to find food and shelter. This has got nothing to do with affordable housing, appropriate housing, for any Australian. It is an absolute disgrace that in this state we have the lowest amount of public housing available, and yet I bet our housing numbers are at record highs in this state. You cannot argue with it. You cannot lie about it. You can try to manipulate AI if you want to, but the reality is we walk down our streets, we see our empty shops and we see people finding nowhere to stay. When they go to places like Wayss in Dandenong, they are told there is no room in the inn. This is simply unacceptable in a country like Australia – the so-called lucky country that has become so incredibly unlucky because it has had more than 10 years of a Labor government that simply does not care, is so ideologically driven and yet at the same time is prepared to sell off some of our public housing to the private sector that is not going to be affordable housing. What that means, though, is that now more people cannot actually afford to buy a house. So if they only learned from Menzies and were actually able to sit down with us – and some of them obviously are, because they are trying to copy some of his ideas – they would learn from the Liberals how to actually make home ownership affordable. There needs to be dignity for every Australian so that they have a house with a roof over their head to live in and we are not trying to make it pie in the sky.

I have been to the social housing, the public housing that is being closed down and condemned, and I am telling you that I would live there. A bit of paint and a bit of new carpet, and maybe work out some air conditioning for some of them, but I am telling you they are acceptable dwelling places and they are far better than sleeping on the streets. They are far better than sleeping between two pieces of cardboard or in a sleeping bag that some charity has managed to give you, while you sleep on the pavement. And you do not have to go far from Parliament House to see these people at the end of every sitting week.

I want to speak on the crisis of affordable housing. It is devastating families across Melbourne's South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. This government boasts of a Big Housing Build across Melbourne's south-east and across the whole of Victoria. But the people in my community – the people in the City of Casey, in the City of Greater Dandenong, the City of Frankston, the City of Cardinia and the City of Monash – are all subject to this big lie. For too long the government has treated housing as a commodity, not a fundamental right. The south-east is a perfect storm of policy failure and market forces. They are not just numbers on a page when we say that it is \$550 a week to rent a median house in Frankston. These are not just figures when people cannot even afford to rent without having to work in groups and put families together, and still they may not be able to get into the private rental market. This government's response has been woefully inadequate. Their much-vaunted Big Housing Build is little more than a drop in the ocean. The Victorian public housing waitlist now numbers over 65,000 households statewide. This is a significant proportion of people, and a number of them are in the south-east. People are waiting for years and years, not months, for a safe and secure place to live. The government's own data from March 2022 shows that over 5000 households in southern

Melbourne – and this includes the area of Dandenong where my office is – were on the public housing waiting list. This waitlist has only grown since then.

A failure of political will means that the government's strategy is fundamentally flawed. Instead of a proactive, long-term plan we have a reactive, short-sighted approach driven by headlines and press releases. They have handed control of our communities to developers, offering tax breaks and fast-tracking private projects, while the need for public and social housing is ignored. One cannot ignore the fact that a number of these housing projects are somehow integrated into the CFMEU, who we know have a track record of being involved in criminal activity. What other activity is going on in housing projects under this government?

We have seen reports by the Auditor-General revealing that the government's ambitious targets for new homes are also falling behind schedule. What a surprise when they have got people that spend their whole time looking for ways to delay projects so they can have cost blowouts and put more money in their own pockets. The policies presented, such as the Homes Victoria Affordable program, are small-scale pilot programs that offer a token amount of affordable housing at a rate just 10 per cent below the market value. For a family in the south-east which is struggling to pay \$550 a week, a 10 per cent discount is not a solution, it is a cruel joke.

The housing crisis has a profound human cost. It is the young professionals who have to choose between paying rent and starting a family. It is the single parent who has to move their children out of their school district because they have been priced out of their neighbourhood. It is the elderly couple living in constant fear of a rent increase that will make them homeless. It is the frontline nurse or teacher who cannot afford to live in the very community that they serve. We are witnessing the slow and painful unravelling of our social fabric under this Labor government.

The time for half-measures and empty promises is absolutely over. We need a government that will commit to a genuine, large-scale investment in public and social housing, not just the private sector with its bailouts. We need to implement strong renter protections, including rent caps, to give stability to those who are most vulnerable. We must reform our planning laws to ensure that a mandatory percentage of every new development is dedicated to truly affordable housing, not just lip service but allowing people to get into the market.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

I rise to speak on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (Right to Housing) Bill 2025 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria.

I would like to start by thanking my crossbench colleagues for bringing such an important issue forward for debate.

This bill amends what is, arguably, Victoria's most important piece of legislation – our Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

The charter recognises that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

As a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, I am acutely aware of the extra checks and balances proposed legislation faces thanks to the charter.

The charter enumerates some inherent rights, including:

- recognition and equality before the law;
- protection from torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;
- peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and
- freedom of expression.

But these are not the only rights that we are obliged to uphold when passing new laws in Victoria.

Australia is a signatory to multiple international treaties concerning human rights, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 11 of the covenant maintains that people have a right to housing and a continuous improvement of their living conditions.

Acknowledging this, it is uncontentious to say that there is an established right to housing in Victoria that we are failing to uphold.

It is also uncontentious to say we are in the middle of a housing crisis.

We've all heard from constituents in desperate housing stress, reaching out to our offices because they don't know where else they can go.

Former Victorian Chief Justice Kevin Bell says it is no longer a housing crisis, but a 'disaster'.

He goes on to say: 'now it is obviously not just a blip in an otherwise well-functioning system. It is chronic. It has become the system.'

According to the Salvation Army social justice stocktake 2025, 'In Victoria, 68.5 per cent of people identified housing affordability and homelessness as an issue in the community and 35 per cent identified it as an issue for themselves.'

Thirty-five per cent of the Victorian population are stressed about being able to afford a roof over their heads. That's almost 2.5 million people.

It gets worse. The best guess we have at how many Victorians are currently experiencing homelessness is from the 2021 census – four years ago.

30,635, that is one in 212 people experiencing homelessness when the data was collected four years ago.

As if that were not bad enough, there are over 65,000 people on the social housing waiting list. These include people fleeing domestic violence and unsafe homes with nowhere to go and people sleeping in their car because they can't afford rent.

If the ever-increasing housing and rental prices are any indicator, I would feel confident assuming this crisis has only become worse.

I don't know what you all think but I believe in a better, more just Victoria than this.

Something in the system is failing and we must do better.

This bill is a step in the right direction.

It would be a recognition of a right we are obliged to uphold and a declaration of our commitment to it.

While this bill will not structurally address our broken housing system, it would set a fundamental benchmark in our legislation which the government of the day must respect.

I want to briefly touch on some of the specifics of the bill before us.

Clause 3 of this bill inserts a new section 12A into the charter that states that every Victorian has the right to adequate housing.

This bill is not abstract in describing what adequate housing means.

It provides a clear framework that housing must be accessible, affordable, structurally sound, safe, secure in tenure and culturally sensitive among other things.

In short, this bill characterises housing as more than just a roof.

It characterises it as a foundation for belonging, stability, safety and opportunity.

It should be a basic dignity to allow people a place to call home, a shelter from Victoria's winters and a safe place to rest, live and play.

If I could be so bold as to assume that none of us in this chamber are currently experiencing housing stress or homelessness.

Aren't we the lucky ones?

Having experienced unstable housing as a teenager, I am endlessly grateful for the home I own with my partner Renee and our little fur babies.

For me, and many others, home is a grounding place, a place where I can belong, be safe, and loved and calm. Home is the foundation from which my life is lived.

But many Victorians are not as privileged as us to have somewhere to call home.

When you have a former Chief Justice of the Victorian Supreme Court stating that the government is not upholding an obligation under international law, something must be seriously wrong with the system.

In Kevin Bell's words, this government is 'bound to give effect to the right to a decent home'. But it does not.

Many government MPs are even on record in this place reaffirming housing as a human right.

So, what is the problem?

Is it that this government doesn't support private members bills?

Or is it that this is a progressive bill designed to address our housing crisis?

Whichever it is, this government appears to be more comfortable politicising human rights than enshrining them in our law.

While passing this bill will not solve our housing crisis, it will create a legal obligation to act and bring Victoria in line with international human rights obligations.

We owe Victorians a right to housing that is immortalised in our law.

Accordingly, we will support this bill and encourage our colleagues to do the same.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:13): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until later this day.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

### *Committees*

#### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Reference*

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:13): I move:

That this house requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by August 2026, on the development and expansion of waste-to-energy (WTE) infrastructure in Victoria, including:

- (1) the suitability of existing WTE infrastructure plans and policies, including:
  - (a) the proximity of WTE projects to residential communities and transport infrastructure;
  - (b) annual caps on waste that can be used in thermal WTE processing;
- (2) economic, social, and environmental consequences of WTE, including from:
  - (a) the terms of commercial arrangements between proposed WTE operators and governments;
  - (b) separating recycling and organic material from WTE streams;
  - (c) nature and management of emissions, toxic waste and ash byproducts;
  - (d) the cost-benefit of WTE generation to consumers and businesses;
- (3) alternative waste management approaches and emerging technologies that better align with circular economy principles, having regard to the recommendations of the Environment and Planning Committee's 2020 inquiry into recycling and waste management and the role of WTE in the Victorian government's circular economy plan;
- (4) the adequacy of community consultation and social licensing; and
- (5) any other related matters.

I rise to make a contribution to this motion, 1002, in my name. This motion requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report on the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria.

For the uninitiated, waste to energy involves turning waste into energy resources and can include a wide range of technologies, including incineration. For those of us young enough to remember, this might conjure up images of backyard incinerators where households used to burn their waste. Make no mistake, these waste-to-energy facilities are not your grandparents' backyard – or in my case my parents' backyard – but they will be burning through millions of tonnes of Victoria's waste. I would like to think we have come a long way since the time of the backyard incinerators. We have learned about that little thing called climate change and how to reduce, reuse and recycle, and yet puzzlingly the government's waste management agenda of the future looks a lot like the waste management of the past.

In Victoria we have more waste-to-energy projects in the works than all other Australian jurisdictions combined, and the annual cap on the amount of waste that can be burnt has increased by 150 per cent in three years to 2.5 million tonnes. Just last week seven new licences were granted for new waste-to-energy projects. While at the same time it was good to see, in the same announcement, that plans for the Lara facility were rejected, it should not take the opposition of the Deputy Prime Minister for community concerns to be heard. Residents, council and the Geelong Chamber of Commerce all raised concerns about the level of odour and air pollution this plant could produce, with some homes mere hundreds of metres away. Similar concerns are held by all communities where these facilities are proposed. Once these projects reach full capacity, the vast majority of waste in Victoria could be taken from landfill to be burnt. This represents one of the most significant shifts in waste management policy in Victoria's history. It is deeply concerning that this major shift in waste management policy is happening at the same time as this government is gutting hundreds of jobs from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. In today's changing climate, we must ask ourselves if this is part of the future we want for Victoria, a future where we are creating even more ways of polluting the people and planet.

When it comes to waste to energy, we need to examine the suitability of existing plans and policies, the adequacy of community consultation and opportunities for greater alignment with Victoria's circular economy plans. A parliamentary inquiry will allow us to listen to the experts and fully understand the consequences of waste-to-energy transition. Communities, particularly those who may end up living next to these facilities, deserve to understand what the consequences will be. We need to look at the proximity of these facilities to residential areas and transport infrastructure. Communities should not be made to live next to these facilities and deal with hundreds of trucks full of waste barrelling down their local roads at all hours of the day. Infrastructure plans and policies also must be examined to ensure they can cope with the rapid growth of waste to energy.

The cap on the amount of waste that can be burnt in Victoria has gone up and up and up again. It may be 2.5 million tonnes now, but what could it be next year, and can the infrastructure keep up? Our motion requires an investigation into the economic, social and environmental consequences of the waste-to-energy transition. Commercial arrangements between proposed waste-to-energy project operators and various levels of government are also something that should be questioned. We should not be allowing decades-long contracts for these incinerators that require a certain amount of waste to be generated each year. All this does is incentivise waste generation and the importation of waste from other jurisdictions. We have seen that happen overseas; I am not making this stuff up.

While we are pleased to see that the government's waste-to-energy plans emphasise the importance of separating out organic and recycling materials, we are concerned about whether, in practice, this is actually happening. To understand our concerns, you only need to look as far as the *Recycling Resources from Waste* April report from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. This report highlights several ways in which the Victorian government is failing to manage waste heading to landfill. In the last decade recycling in Victoria has been in a state of crisis following China's closure to low-grade Australian recyclables. From 2019 to 2020 this meant that, according to Sustainability Victoria, 63.7 per cent of Victoria's recycling went into landfill. While Victoria's recycling capacity has increased since then, these extensions are slowing. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office found that there were gaps in mandatory reporting by some operators, and we do not know how much organic matter is actually being sent to landfill. They also found that the amount of waste going to landfill has not changed since the government announced their circular economy strategy in 2019. That strategy is 10 years long and we are halfway through, and to see that there has been no change in the amount of waste going to landfill is astounding. With a track record like this, how are we meant to trust that recycling and organic waste will not just be sent to be burnt at these waste-to-energy incinerations?

We also have concerns about the nature and management of emissions, toxic waste and ash by-products. In the UK nearly half of the rubbish produced is incinerated. An examination by the BBC found that burning rubbish was their dirtiest form of power, producing the same amount of greenhouse

gases for each unit of energy as coal power. It is no surprise that many places in the UK are restricting the construction of more waste-to-energy facilities. On top of this, most waste-to-energy facilities produce residues and by-products, including toxic ash, which can contain heavy metals and toxins. It is a falsehood to say that waste to energy is part of the circular economy when this process creates toxic waste. In my region Hampton Park residents have fought strongly against a waste transfer station that was planned to package up rubbish from nine councils and ship it off to a waste-to-energy plant in Maryvale. The proposed operator Veolia had been the subject of numerous complaints and litigation over their management of their landfill site. It is no wonder that these communities have little trust that the operators of waste-to-energy facilities will not fall victim to mismanagement and fail to responsibly deal with toxic by-products. Surely we can do better.

With that in mind, our motion requires an investigation into alternative waste management approaches and emerging technologies that better align with circular economy principles. It is important to remember that not all waste to energy is created equally. In central Victoria there is a farm that started investing in waste-to-energy technology about 30 years ago using anaerobic digestion. This is pretty interesting, because trillions of tiny anaerobic bacteria break down manure waste, which creates gas that can then be used to power machinery, and the waste generated can be used as fertiliser. Some of these technologies are truly innovative, and more are developing every day, but others, like incineration, leave a lot to be desired.

When this government are faced with the option of burning their waste or investing in innovative alternatives, they have a history of going with the easy option. In 2020 the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee conducted an inquiry into recycling and waste management. Included in a small part of this was waste to energy, which was heralded as the solution for Victoria's waste woes. The reality is that there are solutions for dealing with waste, but they just take a bit more effort and ambition than incinerating it and setting it on fire. Reducing the amount of waste generated and better separating different waste streams is a really good place to start. A lot has changed since the 2020 inquiry, and the government appear to be at a critical juncture where they are turning Victoria into the waste-to-energy state. Now is the time for us to look at alternative waste management approaches and emerging technologies that better align with circular economy principles.

Community consultation and the ability to build and retain a social licence are some of the other major issues faced by waste to energy. While many of these projects are in the early stages and have not been subject to formal community consultation processes yet, after seeing how the community of Hampton Park were treated during community consultation for their waste transfer station, I hold grave concerns. Consultation is only meaningful insofar as it has a direct influence on government decision-making. It cannot simply be a tick-box exercise. It must extend to all members of the community. We do not want to see our CALD communities and our working-class and vulnerable communities exploited by this government, and that is why our motion requires an investigation into the adequacy of community consultation. These waste-to-energy projects are not being proposed in Brighton or in Toorak. They are being proposed in suburbs that are used to being walked over and which have a long history of being the state's dumping grounds.

In New South Wales, out of an abundance of caution for the risk to human health and the environment, incinerators are banned in metropolitan Sydney. In the ACT they were banned entirely after immense community backlash and significant concern over toxic pollution. This forces us to ask: why is waste to energy not good enough for them, but it is good enough for Victoria? If the government wants to know why these proposals so often suffer from a lack of social licence, a mirror could help in this situation, because many of the MPs from Labor's own ranks have stood up publicly against their government's plans for waste to energy. But all too often this opposition is only heard when the proposed facility is in their own backyard.

Despite introducing waste-to-energy legislation into Parliament back in 2022, Minister for Climate Action Lily D'Ambrosio has opposed a project near her northern Melbourne electorate and signed a petition by her Labor colleague Bronwyn Halfpenny to oppose a proposal in Wollert. With all this in

mind, it is no surprise that the public are failing to buy into the idea that waste to energy is something they should embrace in their neighbourhood. Again we are forced to ask: why is waste to energy not good enough for them, but it is good enough for us?

At the end of the day the most important thing is stopping waste before it starts. The reality is we are continuing to produce mountains of waste, and until something changes it needs to be managed responsibly. An inquiry focused on the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria will take the advice of experts and engage with the community to understand all the options. It is our hope that this inquiry will enable better outcomes for people and the planet and force the government to consider if this huge shift away from waste management policy is in the interests of all Victorians. To that end my colleague David Ettershank will be moving an amendment to this motion. We encourage all parties across the chamber to support this motion.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:27): I am pleased to rise to have a discussion on motion 1002 in Ms Payne's name. I have been listening with interest, and this is a topic of great interest and concern to many people but also an opportunity for many regions in our state. I have been around long enough to have actually been on the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into recycling and waste management back in 2020, noting that it was a very fulsome and thorough inquiry that canvassed a broad range of those issues about how Victoria meets the challenges of this waste, once manufactured, once created – and waste is an interesting term – and how this waste can be managed, recycled, reused, repurposed and potentially form other useful objects. I call it energy from waste – energy coming from the end product, the bottom end of the waste cycle – and it is where no other waste can be recycled. It is often called the red-bin waste: that which has ceased to have anything of use able to be removed from it.

I listened with interest to the Legalise Cannabis Party's contribution, and I would like to endorse Ms Payne's comments around my concerns about the cuts from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, as she raised. My concerns in relation to that of course are that this government has a tendency to cut services, to cut boots on the ground, out in the field – workers out in the region and workers out in the suburbs – rather than suits in the metropolitan CBD of Melbourne. That is my concern. Ms Payne also spoke about how we need, in her proposed inquiry, to have an inquiry about community consultation. Well, this very upper house inquiry committee, called the Environment and Planning Committee, is doing just that now. It has come from Ms Tyrrell, and it is a multiparty inquiry, a report card – we are listening to people; we are listening to organisations, industry, all of the breadth of anyone who wants to reply – on how the government performs in terms of communication. It is a very important inquiry, and the report card is not looking good after one round of hearings. I have yet to read all the submissions, but I am sure they will prove that there is a level of clarity that the government needs to listen to on that. There is a community consultation inquiry proceeding right now.

In this previous inquiry we looked at some of the streams of waste: municipal waste; food organics and garden organics and the very important area about recycling our organic material; commercial and industry waste; construction waste; hazardous waste; agricultural waste – it looked at that; and e-waste as well. One of the key things that came out of this inquiry was there was a section on energy from waste. We looked at the circular economy, and we saw that there were examples in Europe. Where there is an advanced circular economy, energy-from-waste facilities were maximised or were used to great effect. I give you an example quoting figure 6.2. In Sweden 53 per cent of municipal waste that cannot be further recycled goes into energy-from-waste facilities and 47 per cent into landfill. I think the star is somewhere around that 53 per cent in Norway and Sweden et cetera.

What we have seen with this government so far – and it is now rightly, as Ms Payne said, five years into the government's own Recycling Victoria strategy, the policy that has 80 per cent of landfill being diverted by 2030 – is it is failing this dismally. We have seen the Auditor-General come out and say that five years into this 10-year strategy we have got roughly 50-odd landfill sites across this state and they are going to be chockers, they are going to be full. The report found that waste diversion rates

have stagnated at around 69 per cent, well below the interim target of 72 per cent by 2025. The government is not getting its head around its commitment. It is not achieving that diversion – and it is important to divert from landfill; there is no doubt about it. You have got methane emissions that are a concern, you have got grandfathering issues and you have just got the sheer volume of the waste that councils have to deal with, locals have to deal with, residents et cetera, and the landfill levy goes on.

I appreciate the comments about location, location, location in terms of energy-from-waste facilities. The really important things are where and how and having the best technology. It is important that places and families and residents at Hampton Park are not put under duress and that there is good communication and there is a good outcome for those communities. I will just finish this little section on the inquiry. There were recommendations, and recommendations 37, 38, 39 and 40 the government accepted. The government supported the recommendations that there needs to be a strong regulatory framework around the environment and public health outcomes from energy-from-waste technologies adopted in Victoria, including in relation to monitoring and reporting of air emissions where further clarity is needed et cetera. That is one. It also spoke about the long-term need to take into consideration capacities in local government. It also talked about our multiparty recommendation – and the Greens were a member on that committee – for best-use practice in technologies that minimise any impact on the environment and public health.

They are just a couple of examples of how this has been well canvassed. It is an important topic to canvas, there is no doubt about it. But one area in my electorate of Eastern Victoria is the Latrobe Valley, a place very dear to my heart, where there have been incredible and ongoing challenges in terms of energy transition. The government is shutting down jobs and not building them up. I think Morwell at the moment has got somewhere around 12 per cent unemployment after the government promised such a lot at the last election.

Let us look at Opal. Opal sits out at Maryvale mill, and it has been an employer and a producer of white paper and recycled paper and packaging for over 80 years. They have had on their list, on their most rigorous plan, feasibility studies, business case approvals and requests to the EPA. They are now at the pointy end of delivering this thermal energy red bin waste, non-recyclable waste, and they are going to produce the concept – and it is quite well developed – of a 225-megawatt facility. And what do they use at the moment? They use gas. They use very expensive gas and electricity for production in their manufacturing. This is going to reduce their dependency on gas and provide that constant supply. It is also going to take the equivalent of 270,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases off emissions. We are going to reduce that from this facility, and it is going to have a diversion rate of 99 per cent. One per cent is going to be that aggregate at the bottom. They are going to remove the minerals and the metals, and that bottom residue is going to be incorporated into road base and used to strengthen that. This is also important because it is going to create jobs in an environment where we have not had jobs after having jobs closed down in the Latrobe Valley.

I understand the importance of making sure that these are in the right places and that there is great and rigorous oversight, but the Nationals and the Liberals will not be supporting this inquiry.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:37): I am pleased to make a contribution on this motion 1002 on waste to energy, and I thank my colleagues in the chamber from Legalise Cannabis Victoria for bringing it forward. Victoria is in the middle of one of the most important transitions of our time. We are making a shift from the take-make-waste model of consumption to a modern, thriving circular economy. This shift is about reducing what we send to landfill by reusing materials wherever possible and by building new industries that create jobs while protecting our environment. As part of this transition the Allan Labor government has been very clear: waste to energy has a role to play but only within strict limits. We must make sure of strong protections for community health and the environment. That is why our Recycling Victoria policy and waste-to-energy framework sets out these principles. Waste-to-energy facilities must reduce waste to landfill. They must meet best-practice environmental protection standards while supporting community amenity and support waste avoidance and recycling, not undermine it.

I think we have come a very, very long way from the backyard incinerator. We all – well, perhaps we do not all remember; perhaps millennials do not remember. Even when I was younger, there were not very many backyard incinerators, but perhaps the elderly gentleman nearby had one. And yes, of course he would always be putting something plastic or wet in it, and then there would be smoke everywhere, all over people's washing, and it would generally disrupt the amenity of the neighbourhood but also, as we now know, disrupt the health status of many people who were asthmatics and had health issues. I think we have come a long way from the backyard incinerator when it comes to this sort of technology.

We know that avoiding the need to recycle is the most important, most effective action. It is like in the water industry: if we reduce the amount of water we need in the first place, that is the biggest environmental protection we can have and the cheapest for all of us. In relation to waste to energy, therefore, these facilities are required to operate under some of the most stringent environmental and health regulations in the world. The Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 requires every facility processing waste to hold a licence, with clear limits set by government. These licences are not a green light to build, as we saw a few weeks ago. They are the first step in a long and rigorous process that includes detailed community consultation, scientific health assessments and independent approvals. Last year the government completed a regulatory impact statement to review Victoria's overall cap on waste to energy. This is an important safeguard, because the government's first priority remains: avoid waste, reuse where we can and recycle more. Waste to energy is the last step in that chain, a way to extract some value from material that cannot currently be recycled.

This is not about waste management; it is about jobs, economic growth and community benefit. Each waste-to-energy facility represents hundreds of millions of dollars of private sector investment, supporting local construction jobs and long-term operations. Earlier this year Recycling Victoria issued seven cap licences under the new framework. Together these projects could divert 2.35 million tonnes of non-recyclable waste from landfill each year. Each will need to meet every planning and environmental approval before construction. These include the project's contribution to Victoria's waste infrastructure, commercial viability, economic benefits, environmental standards, the ability to deliver reliable energy and of course community support. I recently heard a radio talkback conversation – I think it was on ABC; I will not technically reference it – and it was interesting because a lot of people called in. It ranged from people who kind of thought that waste to energy was a bit like the backyard incinerator with the smoke coming over the fence. There were people ringing in, and one guy rang in who said he worked in a waste-to-energy facility and said how clean it was and how amazing it is. So I think we have had the full gamut of perceptions about what they actually mean. I have a bit of curiosity, and I think there may be some benefit in exploring those issues further for our community.

Victoria's circular economy transformation is ongoing. Since 2020 our Recycling Victoria policy has been driving systemic change, and we are already seeing results. Victoria now has standardised four-stream household waste bins. For some odd reason Warrnambool, where I live, was one of the first to get their four bins. We have the orange bin and the purple bin, which we have dubbed the bin of shame because it is the glass bin and it is very loud. Everybody knows when the purple bin is emptied, and the louder it is the more assumptions the neighbours make about what is in there – I can tell you it is usually not pickle jars. Nearly 2 billion containers have been returned since launching the four-bin process, and that is underway as we go. Over 5.5 million tonnes of recycled materials have been used in Victoria's Big Build, showing that recycled content can support world-class infrastructure projects. Our circular economy transition is estimated to boost Victoria's economy by up to \$6.7 billion.

I just want to talk about a project in my own electorate near Hamilton, where plastic farm waste is being received by a local business, who are called Sustainable Plastic Solutions. They have created a world-leading closed-loop circular economy. This is where baling twine, silage wrap and grain tarp are used that would have otherwise gone into the tip, so to speak. Other businesses put in orders for plastic pellets. Literally, in one end of the machine goes the baler twine and out the other end comes

the specifically ordered plastic pellets for a business that has requested them to make something – that might be plastic chairs or whatever. It is absolutely fantastic because it gets rid of that landfill.

These initiatives are all part of a very broad sweep of activities that form part of our response to climate change – to mitigate climate change and adapt to climate change. They include not just our waste strategies but also energy transformation by getting rid of coal-fired fossil fuels and reducing the amount of plastics in our community. In July 2024 the company, Sustainable Plastic Solutions, were awarded a federal government grant of \$4,421,704 to install recycling technology and infrastructure to recover and process an additional 8000 tonnes per annum of agricultural plastics. These initiatives not only reduce landfill but also create local jobs and investment, ensuring regional communities share directly in the opportunities of a circular economy. The Allan Labor government is well and truly committed to building a system that is sustainable, resilient and fair, ensuring Victoria remains at the forefront front of waste and recycling reform.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:47): I am glad to see this motion come before the house, and I thank Legalise Cannabis for bringing it. For years the Greens, including me, have stood alongside communities who are appalled at the dangerous, polluting waste incinerators this government wants to build in their backyards. As is too often the case, it is regional communities and outer suburban communities that are expected to put up with this mess. Labor wants us to believe that burning our rubbish is a good way to deal with it. The contribution we have just heard illustrated just how captured they are by this industry. The absurd comparison with old-fashioned backyard incinerators shows that a real level of misinformation has permeated many members of this government. The industry is out there with a whole lot of complete greenwashing, absurd material. If you speak to experts in science and in public health, they will paint a completely different picture about what even modern waste incinerators will do.

Incredibly, Labor even claims that waste incineration is a sensible part of a circular economy. Maybe that argument would have held water decades ago in Europe – although I question that – but they were ramping up their incineration facilities at that time. Now it is 2025 and European countries are closing down incinerators en masse. They are scrambling to get out of them because of the shocking health and environmental problems they have created, and yet here in Victoria we have just decided to start getting into the business. Labor is trying to sell incinerators as the perfect new solution to our problems. Burning rubbish is a highly emissions-intensive process, and that is even before you account for the never-ending procession of trucks required to transport the waste from homes to transfer stations to incinerators. The burning of waste materials, such as plastic and PVC, means that these are a type of fossil fuel plant. Do not buy the greenwashed claims; they are fossil fuel plants that fill the air with CO<sub>2</sub> as well as toxic pollutants like mercury, lead and dioxins, many of which have no safe exposure limits. It is as if this government were encouraging new coal-fired power stations to be built in Sunbury or Wollert, except that waste incinerators produce even more carbon emissions than coal. What is more, numerous studies have shown a range of human health impacts related to exposure to the pollutants that are created by waste incineration. Despite the lofty technological claims of the corporations that stand to get super rich off the back of these greenwashed fossil fuel plants in disguise, you cannot make waste incineration safe. Toxics Free Australia notes from years of evidence in Europe that some of the most damaging pollutants are formed after gases leave the plant's filters as they cool down and interact with the outside air, and incineration leaves behind mountains of toxic ash that create serious health risks for workers and surrounding communities.

If all this was not bad enough, this government's commitment to waste incineration makes a mockery of their rhetoric around moving to a circular economy. Building huge rubbish-burning plants completely undermines the economic incentives to reduce waste and develop more sustainable alternative recycling markets. This is another reason why countries like Denmark are closing down their incinerators in favour of improving waste separation and recovery systems, especially for food and organics. The economics of these massive incinerators means that councils get locked into decades-long contracts to feed the hungry machines, with minimum amounts of waste to make the

plants commercially viable, and Labor keeps increasing those minimum amounts. The statewide cap started at 1 million tonnes of waste per annum. Then it increased very quickly to 2 million and then again most recently to 2.5 million tonnes. There are whispers it will go up even more.

These caps do not even account for the category of exempt waste, which includes hazardous waste and certain types of biomass that can be burnt without counting against an incinerator's cap licence. Every minimum cap increase represents more carbon emissions from burning and transporting waste, more threats to human and environmental health, less incentive to channel our resources into genuine circular economy initiatives and more financial risk for councils, which can be punished if they do not generate the waste they are contractually obliged to provide.

It is no surprise, then, that communities like Lara in my electorate have been staunchly opposed to the incinerators planned for their backyards. I celebrated alongside my very relieved, although still very wary, community as we learned that the Lara incinerator was not granted a licence under the cap last week. It is wonderful to see that community pressure paid off in Lara, including through getting a few Labor MPs and ministers to speak out against the proposal in their electorate, but Labor needs to realise that every proposed incinerator is in someone's backyard.

The Greens and I are keen for this inquiry to go ahead, but it is important for it to be done right. For an issue so rife with greenwashing and spin, it will be crucial for the committee to not only hear from industry and vested interests – which will no doubt be the case, because I am sure the government will be sure to get their industry mates to make those submissions and turn up at the inquiry hearings – but from communities and independent experts. It is also important to make sure that we understand and clarify the term 'waste to energy'. This is a vague term that also encompasses a range of safer, more effective non-combustion technologies like anaerobic digestion, which Ms Payne talked about, and landfill gas extraction. What the Greens and I are most worried about are waste incinerators, and it will be important for this inquiry to clearly define its terms so that the dangers of incinerators are not permitted to hide behind the rhetorical trick of referring to these different technologies together under the benign blanket term 'waste to energy'.

There is no denying that Victoria has a waste problem. In 2018 Australians were forced to reckon with the fact that for decades, while we had been thinking we were doing the right thing by diligently filling up our yellow-lidded recycling bins, we had just been exporting our waste problem to other countries. Finally they decided to say no more as they did not want our rubbish piling up on their shores. When they did that, it was a chance for us to figure out our waste problem. It should have been an opportunity to invest in genuine waste reduction and circular economy initiatives. Seven years on, Victoria has barely budged. We have done a couple of good things: container deposit scheme – great; there is some good stuff happening in food organics. But there is so far to go. Too much waste is still being produced, our landfills are running out of space and far too little waste is being recycled, but burning it is not the answer. Pull something, anything, out of your rubbish bin tonight, and I guarantee there is something better that we can do with it than burn it. Australia's National Toxics Network engaged an independent consultant to investigate Australia's residual waste management options and found that in areas with high landfill gas capture – and in 2022 Victoria had the highest in the nation – incineration was the single worst outcome in terms of cost to air quality, health and climate. I repeat: incineration was the single worst outcome.

If the work of this inquiry is genuine, and I really hope it will be, it will be an important way to investigate alternative waste management processes, like better collection, separation and processing, not to mention reducing our waste in the first place, which is the absolute key. Incineration is not the answer, and it is time that Victoria admitted it.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): I too rise today to speak on motion 1002: that this house require the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report by August 2026 on the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria. First and foremost I want to say that I have been fighting very, very hard

with my local community. In fact it is a joy to see some of the residents that have come out from the south-east today, because this is an issue that is literally very close to home for them. It is so close to their homes in fact that in some cases some people have had to endure a rubbish dump that is 54 metres from their homes, and the proposed waste transfer facility is so close to their homes that it is a genuine health risk.

I do not think the concept of turning waste into energy is something that anybody could deny is bad. The idea of us being able to take our waste and our rubbish and somehow do something positive with it, that can actually help our society and our community to be more responsible, is something that I think we would all benefit from and that I think we would all support in principle. The issue here of course with these waste transfer facilities, in particular in my area, is their location and the lack of community consultation. The issue for the people of the south-east is that you cannot have nine councils' waste going past our kindergartens, our childcare centres, our schools, our community centres, our aged care facilities and right past the residents to allow everybody to be exposed not only to the toxins but also to the possibility of combustion in A-double trucks that could go soaring down these roads. I am so proud of my community – just everyday people who are just trying to hold down their jobs and pay for their rent and their mortgages and look after their families – that they have come out en masse and said, 'We say no. Not in our backyard.'

It really interesting, and it is also quite hypocritical, that this government can say, 'We are so in favour of waste-to-energy facilities.' It is very hypocritical that the Minister for Energy and Resources publicly opposed a waste-to-energy facility in Wollert, which is neighbouring her electorate, despite masterminding the plans, and meanwhile the Deputy Prime Minister also opposed one in Lara, which he represents in federal Parliament. So these facilities were no good for their local people, and they are no good for my constituents either. The issue I know is that there are a number of MPs, and I am not one of them, that have gone overseas and visited these waste transfer facilities or places that have been able to convert rubbish into energy. I have not seen them, I have not visited them, but I have heard about this. I am sure that there is a lot of positive stuff that can be taken away from actually going through and looking at this as a whole. But this is big business, this is billion-dollar business, and there is no price that you can pay for people's health.

Whilst I will say that the Liberal–Nationals are not supporting this particular motion, we are not against the concept of turning waste into energy, because we think the idea and the concept of that is good, so we are not against waste transfer facilities per se. The location is incredibly key, and the reason for that is to do with health. Look, it would be great if we could wave a magic wand and find a really healthy way to get rid of our rubbish and also make good use of it, and that is, I think, quite key. But to have an inquiry just before we head into an election period, when we have a responsibility as an opposition to provide an alternative government to the one that people currently have, is just bad timing.

I want to talk about some of the issues that people have in terms of contamination. I know that there are a few actually around the Paris area, and as has been noted, some of these places are having trouble now trying to shut them down. Toxins are affecting millions and millions of people in residential areas, and it just simply cannot happen here in Hampton Park. I will continue to stand with the people, because let me tell you what some of these toxins can actually do. Toxins from waste transfer facilities, which are concentrated and processed, can negatively impact human health through air and water contamination. In the area of Hampton Park we have a number of underground springs. Potential health effects include respiratory issues, irritation of the eyes and skin, headaches and nausea. Chronic exposures are linked to more severe outcomes like various cancers and reproductive and developmental problems. And when I say reproductive and developmental problems, we know that severe toxins can cause severe birth defects.

I am the mother of four kids, and I cannot imagine what it would be like to be exposed to toxins that actually can cause severe birth defects. It would be simply irresponsible of any government to do that to any family, to any parent. It is simply unacceptable in the modern era. It is not progress, it is the opposite to progress. It is actually taking us back, and we are regressing when we make decisions that

are not wise. Chronic exposures can also cause hormonal disruptions, immune system weakening, liver damage and neurological issues. What is more is that the waste can actually be disease carrying and cause other issues as well.

The area of waste, we know, is complex. Nobody wants to live near a place that is covered with rubbish and have those toxins affecting them in various ways. Nobody wants to be near a facility that could actually be causing harm to their health and to their family's health. I do think that it is important to recognise the importance of location for these facilities, and I think that across Victoria we have a problem because quite often they have been selecting locations, until an MP jumps up and says, 'Not in my backyard,' which I will say again is literally the case for the people of Hampton Park – you can literally see across their backyard where this facility is; it really is behind their fence – and it is seen as inappropriate, unfair and unacceptable.

On issues like this it is important to remember that it is important to keep fighting. I applaud all the people that have come out of their homes today to actually fight for this issue and to speak up on this issue and to recognise that this is an important issue. But at the same time we need to look at this in a way that is responsible, and inquiries that are going to be taking us right up to just before we actually have to be dismissed from the chamber and can no longer be here to actually campaign are not fair on anybody. It is all right for the Greens and the Legalise Cannabis Party; they team up with the Labor government the whole time and vote with them. But if we are going to offer the Victorian people a genuine opposition and a genuine opportunity for another government, it is simply bad timing. It is not fair. And we are not against the concept of turning rubbish into energy.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (15:04): Can I thank Mrs Hermans for the most compelling argument for why we should have an inquiry. I was a little discombobulated with the ending there, but I feel almost as though I am redundant as a result. Anyway, putting that aside, I rise to speak in support of motion 1002, moved by my colleague Ms Payne. At this point in time I would like to move amendments 1 to 8 standing in my name, and I ask that they be circulated, please. I move:

1. In paragraph (1)(a), omit 'proximity of WTE projects to' and replace it with 'impact of WTE projects on'.
2. After paragraph (1)(b), insert the following new paragraph:  
'(c) the regulatory framework to establish and manage WTE facilities;'
3. In paragraph (2), omit 'economic, social, and environmental consequences' and replace it with 'the impact'.
4. Omit paragraph (2)(a).
5. In paragraph (2)(c), omit 'toxic'.
6. In paragraph (3), omit 'better' and replace it with 'also'.
7. In paragraph (3), after 'circular economy plan' insert ', including Victoria's landfill management, capacity and strategy'.
8. In paragraph (4), omit 'and social licensing'.

My preference is that the amendments be put as a single question when we get to that.

Just to speak briefly to the amendments, these are a product of discussion with a range of stakeholders. The major changes are the addition after paragraph (1)(b) to include in the terms of reference the regulatory framework to establish and manage waste-to-energy facilities, and the rest are largely grammatical in nature. I commend those to the house.

This debate could not be more timely given the news that Recycling Victoria has just approved seven more licences for waste-to-energy facilities in Victoria. This means that soon Victoria will potentially have 11 waste-to-energy incinerators, and that is not only more than in any one state, it is more than all of the states in Australia combined, by a comfortable margin. The unseemly haste to install these incinerators is perplexing to me given the government's commitment to transitioning to renewable energy, because while these facilities do produce energy, they also produce exactly the same amount

of greenhouse gas emissions per energy unit as coal-fired power. Yet waste-to-energy is being sold to Victorians by the corporations that have got their money backing it as some form of benign technology.

If you read the propaganda coming from those companies awarded the licences to support these giant incinerators, you would think that it is a boon for the environment. It says ‘Decreasing waste generation’ and ‘Increasing investment in recycling and resource recovery’ and that they are necessary steps in our transition to a circular economy and that they are lowering costs and improving efficiencies while reducing environmental impacts. Quite simply, it is all just gaslighting and spin. These incinerators are locking the state into eternal waste generation, with caps now of 2.3 million tonnes of waste being incinerated annually. We will all have to produce a lot more waste to feed these beasts, and we will need to import more waste from other states.

Let us look at the maths, for example, in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region. HiQ has won the contract to service the Hume catchment, and that catchment has an annual cap of 740,000 tonnes of garbage headed for their so-called Eco-Hub incinerator. The problem is that if we take all of the landfill in Hume, it totals a mere 14,000 tonnes a year. So where are the additional 726,000 tonnes coming from? These things are perpetual operations; they run 24/7. They cannot just be turned on and off on low-rubbish days.

And how is burning rubbish increasing our investment in recycling and resource recovery? One great way of increasing our investment in recycling and resource recovery is to increase our investment in recycling and resource recovery, which we are not doing. This was highlighted by the Victorian Auditor-General’s report *Recycling Resources from Waste*. The report concluded that the government was only on track to deliver on one of its circular economy goals, and that is enabling household access to an organics waste service by 2030 – good on them for that. The other economy goals have stalled, including diversion from landfill.

It is a pity that the government appears to be putting its eggs into the waste-to-energy basket. The 2020 Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee inquiry into waste management and recycling in Victoria heard from organisations working to create a circular economy. They just needed a bit of help in scaling up their operations. Why didn’t the government fund some of those instead of saying, ‘It’s all too hard. Let’s just burn it’?

How is this technology a necessary step in transitioning the state into a circular economy if we are not investing in a circular economy? Do we believe that waste-to-energy companies will somehow create a circular economy and then just quietly recede into obsolescence? If waste-to-energy is an interim measure until Victoria miraculously reaches a circular economy nirvana, we will find when that moment apparently comes that those companies have long-term contracts locked in for their continued operation. That has been the experience in countries abroad, and there is no reason why we would not be facing the same thing now. What damage to the environment, to our health and to the livability of our state will be wrought before these incinerators are decommissioned? We have heard a lot about the safety of these cutting-edge, world-leading waste-to-energy facilities. Why, there is an incinerator right in the middle of London – they must be safe! If they are so safe, let us build them in Brighton. Or let us build them in Malvern, shall we?

In the local context, apart from the greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants generated by these incinerators, we need to consider the huge carbon footprint produced in just getting the waste to the facilities. Again, let us go back to my electorate, where there will be, to feed the beast at the Sunbury Eco-Hub, an extra 700 trucks a week clogging up local roads and releasing a staggering amount of noxious vehicle emissions in their own right. And those will be 24/7. That is how these incinerators work. In a further bit of planning mismanagement, no-one seems to have noticed that HiQ, the Sunbury operator, will be immediately adjoining proposed housing and a future town centre, according to the Hume council integrated growth area plans. But this is perhaps not so surprising. There appears to be a blind faith in the market to address our waste problem without much oversight. For example, there

are no minimum environmental standards set for tenderers. This laissez-faire approach is deeply troubling. Communities do not want them in their suburbs, and who can blame them?

Certainly, affected government members are alive to the safety and environmental concerns. Community opposition to the Wollert incinerator proposal has been openly supported by its local members. Likewise, state and federal members have been very vocal in opposing the Lara incinerator. Then there is this, and I invite members to guess the author of this quote:

... so many people think they can use Western Sydney as a dumping ground, whether it was the proposal a few years ago to dump radioactive waste at Kemps Creek in my electorate or now these two disgusting proposals for incinerators at Eastern Creek. They claim they are clean energy. They are not clean energy. It is burning garbage. It is literally a dumpster fire ...

If you guessed that was Chris Bowen, now the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, you get a gold star and a Mars bar – come and see Ms Payne after the debate. It was great to see him so proudly defending the western suburbs, and if you change ‘western Sydney’ to ‘western Melbourne’, ‘Eastern Creek’ to ‘Sunbury’ and ‘nuclear waste’ to ‘PFAS’, the similarities are striking. So why are our western suburbs colleagues not doing the same? Perhaps they have not been paying attention, otherwise they might have noticed what a bad actor HiQ really is. Only last year the EPA laid a series of charges on them, including improper disposal of asbestos waste, failure to implement a rehabilitation plan, failure to establish a risk-based monitoring program et cetera – I will not go on; there are a lot of them. They received a small fine and a rap over the knuckles, and in the spirit of forgive and forget they got a licence to operate a waste-to-energy facility in Sunbury, processing almost three-quarters of a million tonnes of waste a year. Some crazy idealists might think that flagrant breaches of our environmental regulations might put a kibosh on a licence to burn that garbage, but no. Welcome to the brave new world of privatised garbage.

There may well be a role for incineration in dealing with waste, but it is not the silver bullet we are being sold, and that is why we need an inquiry. We need to reassess the largely unqualified embrace of this technology. These facilities are expensive, carbon intensive and lock us into continual production of waste. I urge members to support our motion, as amended.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:14): I also rise today to speak on motion 1002, which has been put forward to us by my colleague in the south-east Ms Payne. I acknowledge the deep community interest that has come to this topic as well. It is one that I spoke about previously in this place when, just under three months ago – in fact one day short of three months ago – we debated a petition regarding the Hampton Park waste transfer proposal by Veolia. I will take the opportunity briefly to reaffirm my remarks made at that point that it is my clear view that the EPA, in ruling against that particular proposal, made the right decision, and it was the right body to make that decision. That matter is still before VCAT, and we are all hoping for the very best outcome. But what is certainly clear is that, irrespective, the EPA has sent a very strong message about the health risks of this particular proposal. It is one that I, as a local member, and members from across the south-east are deeply, deeply concerned about.

When it comes to the broader issue of waste to energy, this is something of a wicked problem. It is not quite so simple as saying that we can just burn everything, but it is also not so simple as saying that we can not do anything at all, because for too much waste, the alternative is landfill. Landfill contributes more CO<sub>2</sub> than waste to energy. It is deeply environmentally destructive and there are many other concerns. The thing that troubles me as well is that according to reports as late as this last week we are seeing that Victoria’s landfill systems are approaching capacity at a rate far quicker than had been forecast. It is certainly true that something needs to be done. There are obviously many important aspects of the circular economy, such as various recycling initiatives. The container deposit scheme is one recent example. But it is very much the case that we cannot solve all of those things without looking at other solutions, and waste to energy has been identified as one of those solutions.

That being said, there are genuine questions that have been raised in the community that particularly relate to these operations, whether it be a transfer site or whether it be an actual waste-to-energy incinerator being placed within certain distances of people's homes. That is, to my mind, a very valid concern and one that we should be looking at. It is why I am pleased to be standing today in support of this motion, because this is something that we should be looking at. We should be having a conversation about how we do this. It should not be a simple one-sided conversation. I do think it should be a broader conversation about how we manage these problems. That is why I welcome the amendments put forward by Mr Ettershank, and I affirm that the government will be supporting those amendments, because in my view those amendments allow us to take that bigger picture look.

His amendment 7 adds, in paragraph (3), a specific reference for the inquiry to look into matters including Victoria's landfill management capacity and strategy. This needs to be an important part of the conversation. I will be very glad to see that amendment move forward so that may take place in this inquiry as well, should it pass this Council today.

I have been listening to the debate in between other things as much as I can today, and one thing that struck me about the Hampton Park issue is the very real need for the community to be heard. In many areas that did not happen properly. Again, I will limit my remarks about that particular applicant somewhat, given that the case is still before VCAT, but I do hold grave concerns about the way in which some community members in particular were treated by the applicant in that case. We have a clear indication from the EPA of its view on this particular issue. Whilst there may well be a role for waste to energy to play, it is clear – we have the community saying and we have the EPA saying it – that Hampton Park is not the most appropriate location for a waste transfer site. That is why I think that this conversation is so important, because we need to be bringing the community in more. We need to be having this genuine conversation about how we do fix this wicked problem and how we do substantially and meaningfully address our waste challenges without adversely impacting communities. We can talk about different models. For example, I know Ms Payne has referenced – I am not sure about today but possibly in some of her public statements – different situations in some other states around the distances that houses need to be from these sites. I think that is a very sensible thing for us to be looking at, and that is why I am very excited to be able to speak in favour of this motion today.

We all in this place are on very many committees, and I am a participating member on this committee, as I believe you might be as well, Acting President Broad. As a participating member, I may not get to be one of the committee members taking that deep look in; I may well be depending on other circumstances. But I know for those members who are on that committee, it will be a very illuminating inquiry indeed. But most importantly, it will give the community more of a say. It will address many of the things that Mrs Hermans in her contribution raised around various health risks. It is an opportunity for that to be discussed, and I have to say I am quite disappointed to hear that members opposite in the Liberal Party have indicated that they will not be supporting this motion, because I do think it is something that we should be talking about. I do think that if you are serious about speaking up on this issue, if you are serious about taking a proper look at Hampton Park of course but waste to energy as a whole, you would support this inquiry.

There have been ongoing conversations across the chamber, as there are with every motion in this place, and I do want to acknowledge Mr Ettershank and Ms Payne for their interest in working on amendments which can drive support. I do not know if those conversations were put forward by those opposite, but it seems that from their contributions, perhaps not. It is timely. It is appropriate, and it certainly strikes me that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee is the right committee to take a look at this issue. It is time that we keep those voices and that we elevate those voices so that they can be heard. I say to all members: irrespective of the party you are in, if you are serious about this issue, you should support this motion.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:22): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this motion brought to the chamber by Ms Payne, motion 1002. This is to establish an inquiry for the

Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into and report on the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria. The waste-to-energy story is an interesting one. There is clearly a significant role for waste to energy in our processes. There is also a very significant context for waste-to-energy processes to be considered. Thirdly, there is the question of siting and processes and how this is proceeded with.

I want to say up-front that the Liberals and Nationals have no intrinsic opposition to waste to energy per se. However, we also recognise that there is a context in which this operates, and I could talk at some length – I could probably put the chamber to sleep with some of the discussion if I so chose – about a recent trip to Europe. As a guest of the Danish government, I was able to look at renewable energy projects across Denmark. I also attended the world biogas conference in Birmingham and further looked at a number of locations elsewhere in Europe – particular plants associated with farms, larger ones, a whole series of different facilities. What is clear to me is that there is a very significant context here, and we need to carefully work through our waste stream. I was fortunate enough to be on the old inquiry on this, and we had some significant concerns about the government's direction at the time. We produced a minority report. We pointed out that the government had not worked through some of the cost implications properly, and one of the things we said is there had to be an appropriate regulatory impact statement, which there never was.

The government is moving headlong down one particular direction, and much of it has not been thought through and costed properly. Mrs McArthur has talked at length about this from time to time, about the costs that are going to be incurred by councils and thereby communities over the period ahead. We are actually at a position where I think the government's own behaviour and own processes have not really thrown up the best outcomes in a lot of these areas. There is a shortage of information, and I understand why the –

**Lee Tarlamis:** So it's the government's fault you are voting against the motion? Is that what you are saying?

**David DAVIS:** No, I am talking about the context of the whole system here, and I think that is important to understand. I could talk, as I said, for quite a while about some of these renewable gas issues. I might say something about that since I have been given the opportunity to do so. One of the things that I would say about renewable gas in this state is that the state government has been very slow to move on it. The state government has not understood that you can actually build a proper circular economy outcome with renewable gas. There is a tension with waste to energy, depending on how that is applied. There is no doubt a secure stream for waste to energy in part of the waste stream. The question is how large that is, where it is, how the streams are separated and how we get best value out of some of these particular streams.

I was persuaded by some of the things I saw in Denmark and other parts of Europe as I looked at a number of these facilities, and there are literally hundreds of them across Europe. I went, for example, to a renewable gas facility owned by Prodeval, a French company active in Italy, active in Spain and active in France and elsewhere in Europe and also overseas. They have a very good model where they can put together small, medium and large facilities quickly and effectively, taking the renewable stock – it could be agricultural waste, it could be food waste, it could be waste from wastewater facilities, it could be a whole stream of different wastes mixed and matched together – and put it into the anaerobic digestion. I heard Dr Mansfield talk about anaerobic digestion and some of the opportunities that we face ahead in the future with that, where we can actually use anaerobic digestion to deliver significant renewable gas options. That is just one set of points I am making there in terms of the broader and newer context.

The relevant cooperative research centre actually put out a paper in May this year, and I urge people to read it. It looks at the renewable energy and renewable gas context. It draws out some of the places I saw in Europe – in Denmark, in Britain, in Italy and so forth – and lays out some of what they would regard as best practice with renewable energy of that type. I guess what I am saying here is there is a

broad context. There is a government set of processes which I think have failed Victorians in many of our city areas, where plants have been positioned with non-transparent processes and real concerns. Some of my colleagues have raised these in this chamber today and elsewhere. The EPA is a body that we all understand has not really been up to the mark and up to scratch – I will leave it at that. I am not a massive fan of the EPA and its capacity to make the best decisions. I do not think it is a body that has done us well as a regulatory group. We have a number of challenges and contexts.

I note also the amendments that have been circulated, which as I understand it have been requested by the government. They replace a number of clauses, remove a number of clauses, make some substantive changes, in my mind, to the motion and provide I think some useful points that we note on this particular issue.

We are in a context where we do not oppose waste to energy per se. We are worried about the application of the process to some particular locations in metropolitan Melbourne. My colleagues have talked about those. I do not need to go back over those.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** You would like me to, would you? I could talk about Sunbury and the huge volume that is proposed for Sunbury. I could talk about Hampton Park and the lack of process down there by the EPA and the agreement where the EPA might have got to a right position in the end, but it might not have got there by a good mechanism. I could go on in great detail, item by item, if people would want me to do that.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Jeff Bourman:** On a point of order, Acting President, could Mr McIntosh interject from his own place, please?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I uphold the point of order. Mr McIntosh will return to his seat.

**David DAVIS:** We have some concerns about the time capacity of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. I in no way diminish the importance of the topic that is being brought forward. I understand Ms Payne has brought it forward for a very sensible set of reasons, to try and get what I would call a more holistic or more comprehensive look at this field so that we can look at it in a constructive way. I understand the logic of what has been proposed and I understand the amendments that are being proposed. The Liberals and the Nationals obviously have a significant recognition in particular of the renewable gas options.

Let me just say a bit more about renewable gas. Victoria has to date missed the boat on renewable gas. We have missed the boat. I will just pick an example – I could pick a dozen of these, but one will do: Melbourne Water and the major treatment plant down at Carrum, the Eastern Treatment Plant. A massive volume of effluent from the east of Melbourne, as people know, collects down there.

**Tom McIntosh:** On a point of order, Acting President, I know Mr Davis's effluent contribution is very important to him, but I do not think it is relevant to the motion.

**David DAVIS:** On the point of order, Acting President, it is deeply relevant to the motion.

**Tom McIntosh:** It is not. We are here to discuss waste to energy.

**David DAVIS:** We are talking about how to utilise waste streams. At the moment the biomethane at the Eastern Treatment Plant is largely flared. It is just flared. What a shocking greenhouse outcome, to flare that.

**Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:32):** It is always a delight to get up and speak in support of more works to develop and expand waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria. Here is the thing: I support this motion because I view it as a really valuable opportunity. It will give us an

opportunity to examine the progress Victoria has made, consider community views and ensure that our future policy settings align with the broader goals of our circular economy and climate action strategies. I have got to say that waste to energy is complex and it is sometimes a contentious subject, but putting it under the careful scrutiny of a parliamentary committee I believe will give us the opportunity to provide assurances to communities, to industry and to households that Victorians are taking a thoughtful, balanced and evidence-based approach.

Victoria does not come to this debate from a standing start. We have already had a robust framework for waste to energy established through Recycling Victoria policy and the waste-to-energy framework and our framework. It is clear waste-to-energy facilities will only be supported where they reduce waste to landfill, meet best practice environmental and human health standards, support community amenity and complement rather than undermine avoidance and recycling. Facilities really must comply with some strict environment and human health regulations, and these rules require international best practice and pollution controls. Absolutely nothing less will be accepted in Victoria. This inquiry will not weaken or replace that framework; rather, it will give Parliament a chance to assess how well it is working, whether our policies remain fit for purpose and what lessons we can draw from early projects. The Victorian government has put in place a clear multilayer system of regulation. The EPA, planning authorities and Recycling Victoria all really play an important role in ensuring facilities meet best practice standards.

You may be familiar with the fact that the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 requires all thermal waste-to-energy facilities to be licensed, with licences specifying a permitted amount of waste within a statewide cap. Facilities must secure multiple approvals – planning approvals, EPA development and operating licences and cap licences from Recycling Victoria – before they can even begin construction. This rigorous process ensures that communities are consulted, environmental impacts are carefully considered and only projects that deliver real value proceed.

The committee inquiry will provide an additional layer of transparency. It will enable the Parliament to look at these regulatory systems as a whole, hear from experts and engage directly with communities. It is not about opening the floodgates for incineration. It really is, I would say, about a balance. That is why we have placed this statewide cap on waste-to-energy facilities. After careful modelling and a regulatory impact statement, the cap was set at 2.5 million tonnes per annum. I would just say that this inquiry will give us a chance to test this cap in a parliamentary setting, hear what stakeholders think with respect to what is the right level and examine how it has been implemented.

The issues of community trust cannot be overstated. Waste-to-energy facilities will not succeed without a social licence to operate. This inquiry, if it is to go ahead following the vote on the motion today, can deepen community confidence even further and allow people to see that all sides of politics are taking this concern seriously, that we are listening and that every detail of this policy is being scrutinised. I am not a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. I do understand that there are other speakers that may want to make short contributions as members of that committee, so if that is okay, I might leave my remarks there and get back to my coughing.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:37): I am very pleased to stand and support this motion. Being a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, I will be delighted to be able to look into this issue in more detail. We have had a number of topics in our committee that have touched on themes in the energy space. Indeed we will be looking at electric vehicles next, so we can follow that by looking at how waste is managed, look at the interaction with local communities to ensure local communities are engaged and there is consultation with communities on these projects and just look at the waste cycle and how we are recycling recyclable product and our organic waste.

I have the good fortune in Eastern Victoria to have the Dutson Downs facilities of Gippsland Water, which is an incredible facility where they are recycling organic material to be reused as compost. There is a hell of a lot of work being done on a closed loop on so much product. I think this inquiry will give us a really good opportunity to look at the many components on not only the waste side but the energy

side and the actions that we take to mitigate and reduce climate change. I will leave my remarks there as we have run out of time, but I look forward to the inquiry.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:38): Firstly, I want to thank all of the community groups that have either appeared here today or who have been active in this space. I have learned a lot throughout this process because it has been my community who have come to me with their concerns. They have raised these concerns with me and highlighted why it is so important that we in this place get it right. I mean, we do have to consider what kind of world we want to leave for future generations, and that has to be front of mind in any decisions we make in this place, because decisions we make in this place are long lasting and have impacts. That is especially the case when it comes to impacts that could be impacting our communities around their health and their wellbeing. That is what our communities have raised with us. They are concerned, they are worried, about what waste to energy and the broader infrastructure that facilitates it mean for our communities more broadly. I want to thank everybody for making contributions today. There were so many varied and wide contributions in this space. It is important to note that I think we are all overwhelmingly on the same page when we are talking about avoiding waste and wanting to move towards an economy where we reuse, we recycle and we avoid creating the waste initially. However, what we are currently seeing in how we are operating is that is not actually happening, and this is why we are calling for the inquiry.

The facilities that are being proposed are being proposed for residential areas in working-class communities. Why is this continuing to happen? We need to have a look at that. Are the current requirements around where these operators can apply to plan and have a permit fit for purpose? Some of my colleagues also talked about something which is dear to my heart, the Hampton Park waste transfer station, and the EPA decision there should be upheld. I do appreciate that many of my colleagues in this place have raised that issue and looked at the fact that those that are following the guidelines are operating appropriately, but when it comes to operators that continue to challenge the EPA's decisions, continue to litigate any sort of issues that surround the current facilities they have got, there is no doubt that there is going to be ongoing community concern and a lack of trust in these operators as to how they are going to operate these sorts of facilities.

When we have 11 applications in Victoria, we also need to question that. An inquiry process allows that community consultation, which is something that most people raised in their contributions – the importance of community consultation – but it also allows the experts to come in and educate us. I appreciate that we had an inquiry similar to this only a few years ago, but what was born out of that was the circular economy policy, and we are not meeting those targets. We are five years through a circular economy policy, and we are producing and creating more waste and using more plastic than ever before.

I do feel that we can get to a place where we could see the circular economy become more robust, and waste to energy may have a part to play in that. But we also need to make sure that the regulators have the teeth to hold these multinational corporations to account on their emissions targets and on their requirements of how they operate in communities and that they do the right thing by our communities, because the way we are seeing them behave currently is they are litigating every challenge they receive.

Again, I want to thank all of the community for being active in this space. We have learned a lot throughout this process. I look forward to the inquiry going forward, and I hope that everyone will support the motion going forward.

**Amendments agreed to.**

**Council divided on amended motion:**

*Ayes (18):* Ryan Batchelor, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (10)*: Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Joe McCracken

**Amended motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

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

#### *Royal assent*

**The PRESIDENT (15:50)**: I have a message from the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 27 August:

The Lieutenant-Governor informs the Legislative Council that he has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Act of the present Session presented to him by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

**33/2025** Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Act 2025

### *Motions*

#### **Crime**

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:51)**: I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the recent serious and violent home invasions across metropolitan Melbourne, including home invasions in Kew;
  - (b) the aggravated retail burglaries in retail outlets, including supermarkets, across Melbourne;
  - (c) comments of Mr Anthony Heraghty, CEO of the Super Retail Group;
  - (d) concern regarding community safety in country Victoria;
  - (e) the lack of police resources available in our suburbs; and
- (2) expresses legitimate concern at the failure of the Allan Labor government to control this serious situation putting many Victorians at risk.

This is an important motion because we have a crime wave across our city. We have real threats to individuals and to businesses. In my own suburb in the City of Boroondara, in Kew, there has been a spate of robberies, aggravated burglaries and violent crime committed, and people are genuinely fearful. People are fearful of home invasions. They are fearful of the threats that are there. These are not made-up threats. They are not people being hysterical. These actually relate directly to what is happening and what people see and what they know is happening to their friends. The case in Kew East recently – and I am going to just quote briefly from the *Age* here, which states:

A Kew East father has been stabbed 11 times, including in the face, while he defended his wife and two toddlers who were trapped in a separate room during a home invasion.

Police said the 39-year-old man had tried to fight off five armed home invaders who smashed a large window to break into his family home in Oxford Street at 4am on Sunday.

I am just using this as one case study to explain what is happening in our suburbs and the reason that people are so concerned. Everyday Victorians, everyday Melburnians, people in the country too, older people, younger people, men, women, children – everyone is fearful of what is happening. The article states:

The husband and his wife, 34, confronted the intruders, with the woman herded at knifepoint into a room with their two children, aged two and three, while her husband faced them.

The man's parents, aged 69 and 70, who were also staying in the home, ran to his aid but were confronted by the group and received minor injuries. The grandfather suffered cuts to his hands, and the grandmother was pushed around, police said.

The invaders, allegedly armed with a machete, garden shears, and a knife, attacked the father, who was later taken to hospital with serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

I think I have said enough. This is a too-typical story in our suburbs.

But it is not just the violent home invasions; it is much more than that. It is the serious threats that we are facing in our retail outlets as well. The CEO of Super Retail Group has been very clear about this and about a number of the supermarkets, and I think it is worthwhile putting very clearly what is happening here. The Super Retail Group has Supercheap Auto, BCF and Rebel Sport, and their chief executive described how Melbourne's out-of-control crime, targeting his Rebel outlets, has severely drained his company's profits and also called out Victoria amongst all of the states around Australia as the worst offender. He slammed Victoria as the nation's crime and theft capital, calling on police to crack down on the 'industrial-scale theft'. He said:

We think roughly Victoria equates to 40 per cent of the increase in this activity. So that's disproportionate ...

He said:

This is industrial-scale theft. This is not children taking an item and putting it in their school bag, this is gangs of people coming into our stores, taking thousands of dollars, in some cases tens of thousands of dollars in stock ...

This CEO said:

It's organised theft, so it is someone coming in and taking thousands of dollars in one move and usually assaulting the team members on the way out. (They are) threatening our team members with weapons, driving 200 Series Land Cruisers through shopping centres, it is out of control.

This is a senior CEO. He has got retail outlets all around Australia. He is singling out Victoria as a particular problem.

The Coles CEO – and we heard a question today to the Treasurer, who did not seem to want to deal with the fact that retail is being impacted by these matters – Ms Weckert said her team were witnessing an increase in crime and threatening behaviour in stores. Organised crime gangs are robbing meat from Coles supermarkets to sell to restaurants for a quick profit, especially in Victoria, where the crime rate spirals out of control and provides lucrative opportunities for targeted theft. She said:

Despite record levels of investment in technology, security guards and safety training, our team continue to experience unacceptable levels of theft, abuse and threatening behaviours – particularly in Victoria, where we see the highest proportion of organised retail crime by individuals who pay no attention to the law ...

She said:

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

A Woolworths spokesperson – lest it be thought it is one major supermarket – said they are seeing increased levels of theft. The Master Grocers – which includes IGA and FoodWorks – chief operating officer, Mikaela McKenzie, said:

Offenders act with little fear of consequence, and they seem to know that once they become aggressive or vocal, staff are instructed not to intervene.

The Master Grocers Australia CEO David Inall, who represents IGA and FoodWorks, said that Victoria had become a 'consequence-free environment' and that:

Enough is enough, our members have had a gutful of the ever-increasing incidence of theft, violence and anti-social behaviour ...

The Australian Retail Association chief industry affairs officer Fleur Brown said Victoria was now a 'hotspot' for retail crime. She said:

It is very distressing for retail stores to have anything happen like the ram raid, but to have it happen repeatedly is a really traumatic event for those store teams ...

We are deeply concerned about the intensity of these numbers and the increase that we are seeing in retail crime ...

We would like to see a response in Victoria with strengthened legislation. We do need to take this problem seriously.

This government has been in power now for almost 11 years, and in those 11 years the situation has deteriorated. The crime situation has deteriorated; the home invasions are up; the severity of the crime, the intensity of the crime and the bloody-minded nature of the interventions by some of these groups has got much, much worse. The attack on retailers and the situation in retailing has become much worse and has now become a very serious matter.

What is going on here is the question. There is a huge increase in crime, as picked up in the government's own statistics. I am going to stick with many of these from my own electorate, but it is true elsewhere. I might pick some country locations just to show the situations as well, as it is not just the metropolitan area. If you look at Boroondara, the total crime rate from year to year 2023 to 2024 was up 12 per cent; the Monash rate was up 10 per cent; Whitehorse was up 10 per cent; Greater Bendigo was up 15 per cent; Loddon was up 12 per cent; Hume, 20 per cent; Melton, 19 per cent; and Moonee Valley was up 23 per cent. These are very, very significant increases. If you look at aggravated robberies, the numbers have gone up very significantly. In the case of Boroondara it was a 17 per cent increase. In Glen Eira it was an 11 per cent increase and it was 6 per cent in Bentleigh. In Monash there was a 75 per cent increase in the number of aggravated burglaries, up from 60 to 105 over the course of 12 months.

These are very big increases and concerning. Greater Bendigo is 82 per cent up for aggravated burglaries. Melton is 34 per cent up. Even Campaspe has had very significant increases. In Shepparton the numbers have gone up 67 per cent. As I said, in Monash aggravated burglaries are up very significantly, from 60 to 105 – a 75 per cent increase. These are significant and frightening. Some of the theft figures are up significantly. In Kingston, a 33 per cent increase; Boroondara, a 30 per cent increase; Monash, 19 per cent up; a 17 per cent increase in Whitehorse. These are figures that should make people very concerned. These are going terribly in the wrong direction, and Victorians do not feel safe. And they do not feel safe for a reason. They do not feel safe because they are at greater risk now than they were previously, because the crime rate has gone up, the severity of crime has gone up and the deep, threatening nature of it has got much worse as well.

It is also interesting to see what has happened with policing in the same time. I am fortunate to have that rare thing, a time series on police rosters in my own area. When you look at those police rosters, there are significant deteriorations. The total staff working over a fortnight in November, if you look back at 2020, and the most recent ones I have got are 2023 – I am waiting on some new data, I might add – at Camberwell the number of staff has fallen from 287 to 168. That is a 41 per cent fall in the total number of staff working over a fortnight. The same is true in Malvern, with falls there, and in Prahran there are falls.

I should say that in Prahran this week my colleague Rachel Westaway in the Prahran electorate held a forum on Monday night which was incredibly well attended. David Southwick, Tim McCurdy and others were there representing the leadership of the party. But Rachel had done the work to get a large number of people there who had had significant experiences in recent times in that area. Crime is up in that area, but the policing effort is down when we look at the most recent figures that I have available in Prahran. There has been a fall of about 14.25 per cent in staff working on weekdays. On weekends there was a 29.75 per cent fall in the number of staff, and the number working night shift has fallen from 125 to 95, down 24 per cent. These are again significant falls. This is indicative of what the figure work that we have shows is happening across local police stations in metropolitan Melbourne.

The effective numbers on the roster for any particular week or fortnight period are falling. When we request a fortnight, we are getting 14 days, so we are getting the weekends and the weekday presence. The names are obviously redacted, but we can see the rank of the different officers, and it is clear that a number of officers have been stripped out and sent to taskforces in the city. Other ones are not there for a range of other reasons, but the number that are available on any particular occasion, whether it is

weekend or weekdays, has fallen over the last three to four years in many of these metropolitan stations. That is not good.

The availability to undertake local policing is a concern. It is often that local policing that can provide the preventative work. They are out there, they are visible, they are known to the community. They know the hotspots in a particular community. They know where to go to look and see what is happening. But if you do not have the local police presence available in a timely way, then there is a real concern that a preventative and active police presence and policing cannot take place. This is a very moderate motion because it picks up what is actually happening. There have been these recent home invasions across metropolitan Melbourne. It is not just in my suburb of Kew, it is not just where my office is in South Yarra – it is not just those. It is in Brighton and it is in other areas right across the metropolitan area. We have heard some of the cases in Cranbourne recently.

The retail burglaries are up in supermarkets. I have put those quotes onto the record from a number of the CEOs and senior people in some of the retail outlets that we have got. Rebel Sport, a major store and a major chain, are pointing the finger directly at Victoria and the Victorian government's failure to act, and they are saying that this is costing Victoria and it is making it more difficult to keep their business effectively running. Then there are those issues with supermarkets. The comments from the Coles CEO are very clear. They leave no room for doubt that there is a serious problem that has developed in Victoria, and it has developed under this Labor government and under Jacinta Allan, who has failed to tackle these points, and she should have tackled these points. It is clear that this has been going on for some time. There is an operation that is working now that is a formalised thing. It is much more than casual crime. These are organised crime operations that are actually putting at risk the safety of our community, and they are putting at risk the viability of many of our retail businesses as well. I know that many of the shops down Chapel Street are afraid to challenge a threatening individual or group that comes into those retail outlets. This, I am sure, is true elsewhere too. Country Victoria is not immune to this.

The lack of police resources is I think closely connected to what is going on. It is not the whole story. It is partly about unclear penalty signals. It is partly about the bail issue, which we discussed last night. There were amendments that we sought to move that the government and others chose not to support. We know that the government culpably weakened the bail laws, and there has been a surge in violent crime since that point. This is in one sense not surprising. If you have got situations where you have got individuals who feel that they are not going to be brought to account for crimes and for violent steps, they may well continue to do that when those signals are not there. We have got to get a better set of things in place. That does not in any way diminish the need for careful preventative policing. I know that is something that many police I have talked to in my area say should be a significant part of the response. That is harder to do if you have got the police stripped out of the local police stations and doing other tasks elsewhere. We have obviously had a lot of demonstrations, but even prior to the demonstrations this issue was a developing issue and a problem. There is no doubt that having less available local police will make it much more difficult to run the preventative steps at a local level that are needed.

The final section of my motion picks up the legitimate concern at the failure of the Allan Labor government to control this serious situation, putting many Victorians at risk. We say it has gone too far; it has got beyond a joke. The violence is serious. The threats and the home invasions are serious. The threats to retail businesses and importantly to retail workers are too much, and people should not have to face those threats. Businesses should not have to face those threats. Something has got to be done, and this motion is a direct call for some sort of action. It is highlighting this issue for the purposes of saying that we have got to act and we have got to move forward.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:09): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Davis's name in regard to crime and community safety. Despite the characterisation of it by Mr Davis and the casting of this motion, what it does not speak to is the large amount of work that the Allan Labor government is doing in regard to crime. We have to look at what

the causes of crime are but then also look at what the consequences are for people who commit serious crimes. Of course what is really front and centre, or the most important point in the government's approach to crime, is making sure that community safety is really at the centre of our approaches to crime. Community safety is a top priority, and all Victorians have the right to feel safe and be safe in their communities. Nothing that anyone says in this debate should be construed as giving a green light to anyone who commits crime. These are serious problems, and people do have the right to feel safe.

But we also are interested in what drives crime, and sometimes there are many serious drivers of crime. Some of them are preventable, but sometimes there are generational impacts that can cause crime. These are also matters that the Allan Labor government is working incredibly hard on – things like family violence. If you look at some of the drivers of crime – family violence, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and what is going on inside the family home – all these things can contribute to the reasons for crime, but also the cost of living is particularly high, and we had at least 10 years of wage suppression in this country by former coalition governments.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Through you, Acting President, I will take up Mr Davis's interjection about how we have been in government for 10 years. The Allan Labor government, the Victorian state government, does not set wage policy in this country. We are not responsible for it. The Commonwealth government is. We had 10 years of wage suppression, and what we have seen is household budgets being absolutely stretched to the max. Whether it is people struggling to pay rent or whether it is people struggling to put food on the table and those sorts of pressures that families or single people are experiencing – whoever they are – they are all feeling the pressure, and there are a range of things that then occur as a consequence. But trying to look at the causes of crime through a very singular lens is kind of irresponsible, because there are lots of drivers for these sorts of things.

I am going to go through some of the extensive work that our government are doing in regard to managing crime and also looking at the causes of crime, but with community safety being at the heart of our responses. In terms of Victoria Police we have got a record investment of over \$4.5 billion – I will say that again, \$4.5 billion – to ensure our police are equipped with the resources and tougher powers they need to keep our community safe. That is a big investment in our police force and our services, and we thank our hardworking police officers for the work that they do in keeping communities safe each and every day. They turn up sometimes in some of the most difficult circumstances. We have just heard recently about a tragedy in and around Bright, where people who chose to serve in our police force have given their lives in service, and that is a tragedy. So I will not talk down Victoria Police. I will not talk down the very important work they do. I thank them, and I know that members on the government benches also thank the police each and every day for the very important work they do in keeping our community safe. That is an important thing to get on the record.

We also have more than 3600 new police officers on the beat to keep Victorians safe. Again, there is record investment in our police force, but also we are madly recruiting police officers because we know we need police on the beat. We know that having a police presence in some communities is incredibly important. We have also invested \$1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations across our state, and our government continues to invest in critical police infrastructure. That is an ongoing process. We know that where police infrastructure needs to be invested in and upgraded we will rise to that request and make sure our police have the best and most appropriate facilities they need to be able to do their job – their job is an important one, and that is keeping Victorians safe – unlike those opposite, who cut \$100 million from the Victorian police budget and failed to fund a single additional officer. I will say that again, because we need to look at the contrast, don't we, Ms Watt? We need to look at the contrast where our government has invested over a billion dollars versus those opposite who cut \$100 million and did not fund a single additional police officer. We know what happens when those opposite get control: they cut, they cut and they cut. As I said, our Victorian police officers are out every day, at all hours, in all weather. It is a very challenging job. But they do it so well, and that is why we back them. We know Victoria Police are making record numbers

of arrests – over 75,000 arrests in the last 12 months. Despite what Mr Davis said about crime – he has done a great job in going through and pulling out every single stat that he could look at and cherrypicking various ones – if you look at the long-term average of crime in Victoria, it is stable. There are hotspots, yes, but that is where our police officers are taking action. We continue to support our police officers in doing that very important work.

What people need to know, for any of those people who might be playing along at home this afternoon, is that Victoria by and large is a safe place to live. If you listen to the contribution of Mr Davis, you would think that we have all gone to hell in a handbasket here in Victoria, which is demonstrably untrue. It is demonstrably untrue because if you look at the publicly reported crime statistics – they are available to everyone to see, if you would like to go and look them up yourself, again for those who are playing along at home – if you look at the long-term average and the long-term statistics over time, crime is relatively stable in Victoria.

I have got 2 and a bit minutes on the clock, so I just want to again go through some of the important investments that our government has made. The machete amnesty to address knife crime – a \$13 million investment by the government. We have secured the bins for people to be able to surrender those, and that will be coming into effect from 1 September, just a few days away. We have invested in that. Again, that was the advice our police force gave us, that that was what they needed to be able to manage this situation. In terms of bail, some of the signature work we have been doing in this chamber has been around introducing bail laws that are more robust than the previous ones, and these changes have seen remand numbers up by 4 per cent across the system. Again, our bail laws are working despite what Mr Davis would have you believe. We have been clear though that there is more work to do. We never said we are finished. There is more work to do. As part of our second tranche of reforms, which passed the Parliament yesterday, there will be more stringent bail tests, one of the most stringent in the nation, targeting serious offending like aggravated carjacking, armed robbery or home invasion and the like. You can see that we act. We listen to what our police tell us they need to be able to do their job, and we act.

Another area that we are acting on is cracking down on illicit tobacco. We have beefed up Victoria's police search powers to make it easier for them to raid properties quicker and search and seize illicit products from retailers suspected of having links to organised crime. That is important. The Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024 gives Victoria Police new powers to target individuals involved in serious and organised crime to deter and disrupt organised crime groups, including outlaw motorcycle gangs. This builds on the powers in the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Act 2024, which deprives crime bosses of the use and enjoyment of their unexplained wealth, because when somebody all of a sudden has a lot of wealth at their disposal, you might think, 'Well, how did you get that?' There might be a reason for that. It allows the police to look into that and act accordingly.

There are many areas of note. I think Ms Watt might be speaking on this too. I know she will have a lot to say on these sorts of matters as well, but just one of note in the 15 seconds I have left: post-and-boast laws. We are making a new offence for those who publish content bragging about their offences in terms of affray, burglary and robbery, so that can be dealt with as a new offence. Despite what Mr Davis over there says, the government is taking strong action on crime, and we oppose this motion.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:19): I rise to speak in support of Mr Davis's motion 1055 on the increase in crime. I specifically want to address point (1)(d) around concerns in country Victoria. I am going to use this time to highlight some of the experiences of my constituents across the Eastern Victoria Region. Last week I spoke to multiple shop owners in Hastings, and every single one of them cited crime as their key concern. One shop owner said that the first thing she does every single morning is log onto her computer to look at her CCTV and check if her shop has been vandalised. She says it is literally the first thing she thinks of when she wakes up. She was not the only one. As I went business to business, it was a common theme. Another shop owner spoke about – in main street in Hastings – how there has been a rise in vigilante-type behaviour because people have just lost faith in the justice system. I think that it is extremely worrying when people begin to think

that they have to take the law into their own hands. What had happened in this particular situation is there had been a crime committed and there were no police around at the time. The next day, when these shop owners came into work there were posters on every single shop with a picture of the offender. This is very concerning, and it just shows that communities feel as if they are being abandoned, they are not safe, and they are taking matters into their own hands. The community there raised a couple of concerns, and these are the ones that they said would really make a difference in their community: they want more police presence, they want tougher penalties for people that commit crimes and they want CCTV, and these are practical solutions that I absolutely support.

Last week, as you would have seen in the media, an IGA store was held up in Officer by youth with machetes. Officer is a beautiful community. It has got a laid-back feel, but things are changing there. Every week our office receives multiple calls and multiple emails about the fear that community members feel. There is huge frustration and outrage over bail conditions. It was extremely frustrating that, after that machete attack, straight away they heard that one of those offenders had been bailed. The community feels that the rights of the offender are often prioritised above the rights of the victim, and I tend to agree. In Victoria there are often people that are arrested, charged and then bailed within 90 minutes.

I have spoken in this place about the prevalence of gangs, particularly around Pakenham, crashing parties, and about windows being kicked in along Lakeside and along Main Street in Pakenham. These things have become commonplace, but we cannot normalise this behaviour. Just because something is common does not mean it is normal, and this sort of behaviour is far from normal.

There have been significant changes that have occurred in Victoria when it comes to law and order. Over the past year, bail has come to this chamber five times, so I do not know how Ms Terpstra can say that bail in Victoria is working when it has been here five times in the past year. If something is working well, you do not have to have a kneejerk reaction to correct it five times. I think that they still have not got it right. There also has been the change to the age of criminal responsibility, something that the Greens are pushing to change even further. They have raised the age from 10 to 12, deeming that children under 12 are incapable of committing a crime. There is no doubt whatsoever that this will improve crime statistics, because an 11-year-old can carry out a crime, but if it is not deemed a crime, it goes into a different category. It does not mean that the communities are safer, it does not mean that houses are not being broken into, it does not mean that less cars are being stolen. What it means is these people are being categorised differently. So rather than a crime, it might be called an incident.

There has been \$50 million cut from the police budget, \$50 million cut from frontline services, equalling a reduction in manned hours in police stations, fewer patrols and less of a community presence. Under the Allan Labor government more than 1100 Victoria Police positions remain vacant; 43 police stations have either been closed or had their hours reduced since 23 November, and this is due to inadequate staffing resources. We have banned machetes. The Liberal–National parties called for that five times. Five times we called for that and brought legislation, but it was of course rejected by the government and rejected by the government until it was politically a good opportunity for them, and then they backflipped monumentally.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** That is right, Mr Davis. They were dragged kicking and screaming, and they finally made the change, because machete crimes have become rife in our state. We are in the middle of the three-month amnesty period, where those who have got machetes can give up their weapons, but there has been a lot of concern around how that process is being managed. The Labor government have cut \$50 million from VicPol, but then they spent \$13 million on 40 machete bins across police stations, but we still do not know what sort of change that is going to make.

Here are some crime stats for Victoria. An offence is committed in Victoria every 50 seconds – so by the time that I finish this speech there will have been up to 20 offences committed in Victoria; there is

a serious assault that occurs every 29.7 minutes; there is a family violence serious assault happening every 58 minutes; there is an aggravated robbery every 20 hours; and there is a motor vehicle theft every 16 minutes. Youth crime has risen 18 per cent year on year, and that is with the change to the age of criminal responsibility. When crime becomes a culture, which it seems to be becoming in Victoria, it takes a multifaceted approach to actually fix it and to root out the issue, because what we see is just the tip of the iceberg.

The research is clear. There is a clear school-to-prison pipeline. Children who do not learn to read properly and who struggle to learn to read cannot flip that and then read to learn. They often end up failing in school and not being at the level that they are meant to be. These kids, according to the research, often find themselves caught in a life of crime. They are far more likely to be; it is a huge risk factor. We need to realise that when we fail to educate children properly, we are actually failing that next generation. The reason I bring this up is I believe we have got to be working at both ends. We need to absolutely get out of the flurry that we have been in and look at bail properly. I hope it does not come back a sixth time. We do not even sit that often, so every few times we sit we are bringing in new bail laws. That is just the reality in this place. I believe we have got to get out of that flurry and look at bail properly, once and for all, and stop chasing our tails. We have to figure out a way that we can curb crime from that end, but we also need to look at the risk factors and how our policies affect that in the beginning.

I do not have time to touch on stalking laws, which are in desperate need of reform; I do not have time to talk about emergency management days and how over a thousand days of discounts were given to violent and high-risk offenders across Victorian prisons; and I do not have time to talk about how protests are absorbing huge amounts of police resources, so I will just leave it here and say we have an absolutely long way to go. We have a lot of work to do, and I commend this motion to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:29): I also rise to speak on motion 1055, which has been put forward by Mr Davis today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on what is an important part of government policy and an important community concern, and that is keeping Victorians safe. At the outset it would be remiss of me not to reflect and take a moment to acknowledge that yesterday was a very dark day in our state. It was a very dark day, and it always is on any day that police officers doing their job to keep us safe are lost in the line of duty. I want to briefly acknowledge their sacrifice, the sacrifice they should not have had to make, in the interests of keeping us all safe. Many in this chamber, in fact probably all, are wearing the blue ribbons today. It is a potent and very sad reminder of what our police face.

Our police do very important work, and I always appreciate the chance to have conversations with them in and around my region about their work, about their priorities, about what is working and what needs more attention. It is one of the reasons in fact, as I discussed yesterday, that I was so pleased to attend a Casey policing forum last week organised by Victoria Police with representatives there from federal, state and local government. It was a very interesting conversation, but most importantly it had input from residents and business owners as well. I noticed Mrs Hermans was interjecting yesterday. She was complaining about not having received an invite. I am not sure what she felt she needed – a handwritten invitation? It was a publicly advertised event, and as a local MP I certainly was happy to take the opportunity. I did not need to be specifically invited.

But I really wanted to take that opportunity to go and hear firsthand from our police and hear firsthand from the community as well. It was a very valuable crime forum and not one of those ridiculous sorts of sham forums that the Leader of the Opposition and some of his Liberal colleagues have been running around and hosting. It was an actual forum with police – the unvarnished truth, the good, the bad, the ugly, what is going well, what is not going well and what more needs to be done. It was very useful. In fact I think I took about half a notebook of notes out of it. I am still working through them and looking at things that we can be doing in that local area in particular to better support our police.

As I touched on yesterday, they covered some very large topics, big topics, starting with family violence. We know that that is still a major driver of crime in the south-east, as it is across the state and well beyond this state's borders as well. We know the influence that has on then connecting to further offending, with victims of that type of offending then becoming offenders in other ways down the track. It is still a very significant issue. Indeed there are pockets of my electorate that have some of the highest instances of family violence in the state. It is something that I know my colleagues, including in particular the member for Cranbourne, have been very invested in and very focused on. This has included, amongst other things, securing the new Orange Door in Cranbourne to provide that support for people when they need it most. As the police rightly said at the crime forum, it is not just a societal issue, it is a crime issue, and it is a community safety issue that we should all be taking very seriously.

A number of other topics were also raised, including youth offending and various government reforms, such as the first tranche of the bail reforms which were passed this year. It certainly seems these reforms are already starting to make a difference. I know many police officers were very much looking forward to this place passing the bail laws, which we did at around about midnight last night. It was a very good thing for us to be able to do that. They are laws that will make the community safer and will make a difference in terms of both deterrence and keeping people off the street at that highest level of offending.

Without going too much into my contribution from yesterday's bill, I will make the point that we know that, especially with young offenders, the most effective way to make the community safer is by providing those better pathways for them, providing those detours off the path to crime as early as possible. We know that for the majority of them it works, whether it is the programs that I talked about yesterday that are run by Victoria Police, whether it is the youth crime prevention program, whether it is any of those measures run by official authorities or whether it is run by community groups on the ground. Nas Recovery Centre is an outstanding one in the Cranbourne area as well that does incredible work in building that community strength, in building that community power, so people who are at risk of falling into a life of crime do not do so and are able to build their lives better. These are the positive stories that are worth mentioning as well. But as we do so we also acknowledge that there is that smaller contingent of offenders who will not take up the very many opportunities that are given to them. And for those offenders it is appropriate that we have bail laws in place which appropriately reflect the community's expectations. The community has a right to feel safe. They have a right to feel safe at their home. They have a right to feel safe going out to the shops. They have a right to feel safe at work as well. It is an important thing, and that bail reform that we passed through yesterday is going to help to achieve that. It is a very significant piece of legislation and it does complement the other. As Dr Heath said, or was maybe complaining about, the very many bits of legislation that we have put through in the past year in particular focused on community safety.

I will come back to some further legislation that will be coming as well, but I do want to pick up on, firstly, something that Dr Heath made mention of in her contribution: this apparent \$50 million cut which was affecting police resourcing. I do not know if this was intentional or she is just unfamiliar with the facts, but it may interest Dr Heath to know that the \$50 million she referred to was a temporary, time-limited measure as part of an enterprise bargaining agreement called the patients in bargaining allowance. It was always due to come to an end. It came in and it came to an end at the time it was scheduled to do so. It had nothing to do with police resourcing. So to infer that the government is proactively making these cuts to police resourcing is actually blatantly false and could actually not be any further from the truth.

We are continuing to invest in that resourcing for the police. But we do know that, as with other jurisdictions around Australia and around the Western world, police forces are struggling to recruit. I do take this opportunity as well to echo the sentiments at the Casey crime forum that the police finished on and say that it can be a very rewarding career, and I very much encourage anyone who wishes to put their hand up to help make Victoria a safer place to consider a career in the police force, with the

very many different opportunities. They do from time to time of course run recruitment campaigns, and I became aware that apparently the Queensland police force was also helping us down here when they accidentally ran a recruitment campaign on Melbourne trams. So it was very good to see, and thank you to QPol for helping to boost police numbers in Victoria.

Another thing that I was quite surprised to hear last night in the chamber was Ms Lovell doing an adjournment on a local policing matter and raising a police station issue in, I believe, Epping on this very matter and on this issue of resourcing, saying that we are struggling to fill these police roles and making some wild assertions, firstly, predicting the station may be closing altogether or may be reducing its hours, and then saying that that would mean that people would have police not able to respond to them as quickly. I think it just goes to the very point that for a party that claim to be all about law and order, they apparently have no idea how the police actually operate. It is not like the old days of the 1950s where police officers were sitting around in the station waiting for something to do. They are out on the road every day. They are in their units, they are going around doing patrols, whether they are within 500 metres of a station or 50 kilometres of it. They are out there, and that is the operational model which they use, and for members such as Ms Lovell to apparently not be aware of that is quite surprising.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I am curious as to why, as you come in here to proclaim yourselves the party of law and order, you would be so unaware of how the police in this state actually operate. It is an important issue. And as I say, it is really important for anyone who does have that interest and the skill set to seriously consider a career in Victoria Police. We know there are challenges and certainly we know that there are dangers, but it is for many a very rewarding career. I would like to particularly thank the officers that came out to the Casey forum last week. It was a really interesting session, and I would like to thank the residents as well. I do have much more to say, but my time is up, so I will leave my remarks there.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:39): I rise to speak to motion 1055:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the recent serious and violent home invasions across metropolitan Melbourne, including home invasions in Kew;
  - (b) the aggravated retail burglaries in retail outlets, including supermarkets, across Melbourne;
  - (c) comments of Mr Anthony Heraghty, CEO of the Super Retail Group;
  - (d) concern regarding community safety in country Victoria;
  - (e) the lack of police resources available in our suburbs; and
- (2) expresses legitimate concern at the failure of the Allan Labor government to control this serious situation putting many Victorians at risk.

I think that last line is particularly pertinent, because there are many people who do not feel safe. They do not feel safe in their homes, they do not feel safe in their communities, they do not feel safe at work and they do not feel safe in their streets. That is the reality of how we are living in Victoria. That is the reality of what has happened to this state under the Allan Labor government: a decline in community safety and in the perception of the government looking after us. I say that because they have failed. They will talk a big game, but they have failed, because every day, every night we see in our news stories home invasions, carjackings, firebombings. These are crimes that were never as prevalent as they are now, and I am shocked at the extent of the crimes and the prevalence of the crimes. That is why this motion goes to some of the very deep and serious issues that need to be debated in this place.

The violent home invasions across metropolitan Melbourne, including home invasions in Kew – and it does not matter if it is Tarneit, Toorak, Kew, Cardinia, wherever it is, Brighton, Broadmeadows – are across this city and are hugely concerning. But I think the Kew home invasion that this really is

referring to is that terrible situation where just a couple of days ago, and I am reading from a report here from the ABC from Monday 18 August:

A man and two teenagers have been charged with breaking into a family home in Melbourne's east and repeatedly stabbing a father multiple times after forcing his wife into a bedroom with her children.

That is what I am talking about. The severity of these crimes – they are horrific. Many of you have heard me speak before of that terrifying moment when you are in your home and an aggravated burglary is occurring because I have experienced that – I experienced that last year.

On Saturday I was at a lunch supporting women in football, actually, speaking at that. I spoke to someone who was a great supporter of this club. That very night he had six young people in his property roaming around, on camera and so brazen; they did not care a hoot. He told me that last Sunday he was so terrified and his wife was absolutely petrified. The police were brilliant. They came very quickly – like they did for me as well, I have got to say. They were fantastic; I cannot fault them. While I am on the police I want to extend my thoughts – like all in this chamber, I am sure – to them with the very difficult time that our police force is experiencing at the moment and recognise the extraordinary work that they do day in, day out. When you need them, like I needed them and like this friend needed them in the early hours of Sunday morning – the frustration of the police when they are talking about trying to deal with this and magistrates just let these people out.

A few years ago when we raised the issue about youth gangs it was Labor who said, 'Youth gangs are non-existent. They're just groups of affiliated young people.' Look where we are now. These are youth gangs that are rampaging through shopping centres, terrifying shoppers, terrifying the people that work in those retail outlets. If you look at the numbers, the crime statistics, that have just escalated so incredibly high across the state, there is no denying that we have a crime crisis in this state and people do not feel safe – they do not feel safe. The first priority of any government is for their community to feel safe. This government has failed on that fundamental element of government. The community does not feel safe because of what is occurring, as I said, in our streets, in our homes, in our communities. This motion goes in large part to that which is reflected by comments made from those who are also concerned, those who are looking after their people. I am referring to part (c) of the motion:

comments of Mr Anthony Heraghty, CEO of the Super Retail Group ...

They are talking about the disproportionate increase in Victoria around these crimes that are occurring in their stores. I think they refer to the Rebel stores where clothes are constantly being targeted and where these youth gangs come in with knives and machetes. While I am on machetes, we have got the machete bins that are out there. They are covered with barbecue covers – you know, \$13 million for a few machete bins at \$370,000-odd each. These figures are extraordinary, and that is just so symbolic of this government. They have got no clue how to manage taxpayers money. They are just appalling in their disregard for how taxpayers money should be spent. It should be spent wisely.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, Mr Batchelor, you interject; it is your government that has failed every single Victorian. \$13 million on a few bins – I am talking about the cost of the bins.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, we know that the Liberals are not very good at maths, but Ms Crozier is ignoring the fact that the majority of that funding is going to community resourcing, police resourcing and community education. To say that is the unit cost per bin is grossly inaccurate.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Mr Galea, that is not a point of order. The point of order is overruled.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Labor are very testy about this because they know that their communities are suffering. Mr Batchelor's area is my area. You should stand up for your constituents a bit more in

Brighton, Toorak, Malvern, Kew, Caulfield and Albert Park. Everywhere it is out of control. Oakleigh, Bentleigh – firebombings, carjackings and home invasions are rife.

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** Mr McIntosh! Labor are very testy. They come in. They do not even speak from their places. These people have lost control of crime in this state and our community safety. This is no laughing matter; this is really serious. This is a really serious issue. This is a responsibility of government, and these backbenchers are laughing about this very serious issue. There are people that cannot live in their homes who feel terrified. There are women who do not feel safe in their homes.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am quite obviously not laughing about that. Ms Crozier, the bizarre comment where you were equating Mr McIntosh interjecting from outside of his seat with our attitude to crime was outrageous.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** That is not a point of order, but it is a good time to remind everybody that it would be good for Ms Crozier to be heard unassisted and that interjections are unruly.

**Georgie CROZIER:** As I said, this government has failed every single Victorian. The community deserve to feel safe, whether they are in metropolitan Melbourne or whether they are in regional Victoria. Right across this state there is a crime crisis. It is spiralling further out of control. We are known as the crime capital of this country. We are known as the protest capital of this country. They are not enviable labels that anyone should be proud of, they are appalling. It is a disgrace how far we have sunk because of this government's failure, and these unenviable labels that we have are just appalling, to say the least. I stand by those people who are speaking out about the concerns about where we sit in this country with these disgraceful circumstances that we find ourselves in. I would say that this motion, where it expresses legitimate concern –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Ms Crozier, your time has expired.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:49): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion today about crime and community safety. I think it is worth reflecting that it is disappointing that Ms Crozier in her contribution seemed to have not listened to the quite significant debate that we had in this chamber yesterday debating some very serious legislation to improve community safety through our second tranche of the bail bills. I made a contribution at length yesterday and I made a contribution in the last sitting week about community safety and the important ways in which the Allan Labor government is both listening to the concerns of the community about crime in our communities, particularly about high-harm crime, serious crime, in people's homes – things like aggravated burglaries, home invasions and carjacking – and acting. It is not just about listening to the victims, as important as that is; it is about doing something with it, not just making spurious allegations across the chamber about matters and not taking these issues seriously. This government, the Labor government, takes these issues seriously. To suggest, as Ms Crozier did in her contribution just now, that government members are not out talking to the community and listening to our constituents is, frankly, offensive. I understand that she legitimately feels very strongly about these issues for some very personal reasons, and we understand and respect that. But I think it is taking a complete step too far to suggest that members on this side of the chamber are not listening to our communities and are not talking to our communities on a regular and consistent basis about the legitimate concerns that they have, because we are.

I made the remarks about what I have been doing in the region that Ms Crozier and I jointly represent – over I would have said recent months, but it has been longer than that – in talking with residents who have been the victims of serious high-harm crime. I spend time regularly talking with the excellent people at the Bayside Neighbourhood Watch, who are an excellent conduit for feedback from members of the community to me, as a representative of the governing party in the Southern Metropolitan Region. We take that feedback and we use that feedback. The response that we have had

from the community and the concerns of the community, that the government has listened to, I would have said were acted upon as recently as last night, but it was the early hours of this morning, when this chamber passed the second tranche of our bail reforms. It was not even yesterday that we did that; it was earlier today.

If the opposition wants to downplay the work that the government is doing, that is on them. But we are taking this issue seriously. We are making sure that our police have the resources that they need to tackle the crime in our community. We have invested significantly in supporting our police force, providing them with the resources that they need. We have been providing them with the powers that they are needing, and we have been making sure that in the laws that surround things like bail, in the issues that bail decision makers need to take into consideration in making determinations about whether alleged offenders should get bail before their court dates, community safety is an overarching priority – a principle for bail decision makers. We have ensured that with high-harm crimes there are tougher tests to get bail and that in the serious cases there are presumptions in different ways.

We had some peculiar contributions from Ms Crozier, who seems to be critical of the government's actions in banning machetes. She seems to be critical of the measures that the government is taking, with the installation of receptacles at police stations to allow individuals to safely take their machetes off the streets, through the bin and amnesty program that it is running. I do not know why the Liberal Party is so critical of action to get machetes off our streets. They might think it is a joke; we think it is pretty serious. The Minister for Consumer Affairs is exercising special powers, and the Minister for Police is working with Victoria Police to make sure that we have got the facilities that we need so that Victorians can safely surrender their machetes from 1 September, the date that was in the legislation that this chamber passed to ban these dangerous items several months ago.

The investment that we are making – contrary to the position that Ms Crozier has put in her contribution – is not just for those disposal bins themselves. It is also, as the ban and the amnesty kick in, going to include a public awareness campaign, funding to support retailer education, the manufacturing and installation of the safe disposal bins for the machetes, mechanisms in place so that we can securely collect the machetes out of those bins and dispose of them properly, and the cataloguing and safe destruction of the items that are handed in. If Ms Crozier and the Liberal Party do not support that, then they cannot be taken seriously on issues of community safety. They cannot be taken seriously when they come to the chamber and make those sorts of outlandish claims, because the safety of the community is something that this government takes incredibly seriously.

In the early hours of this morning we were passing the second tranche of our tough new bail laws. In March we did the first round, and they are working. The number of inmates who are on remand awaiting their date in court is up since those changes were made, particularly for high-harm crime and associated areas. The second tranche of the reforms, which passed the Parliament in the early hours of this morning, will deliver the toughest bail test in the nation, targeting serious offending like aggravated carjacking, armed robbery or home invasion, and the laws will make sure that the bail decision makers put community safety first. We have made significant investments to support the actions of Victoria Police – a \$4.5 billion record investment into Victoria Police to ensure that they are equipped with the resources and the powers that they need. We have added resources so there can be more than 3600 new police officers on the street to keep Victorians safe. In addition to that, we have invested almost a billion dollars to deliver new and upgraded police stations across the state and to support the investment in critical police infrastructure.

We are engaging with members of the community to make sure that crimes that are of significant harm are being targeted. We know that both the on-the-ground frontline policing activity but also the intelligence work that is going in to try and disrupt the criminal networks are underway and yielding results. We support and thank members of Victoria Police, I should say particularly those who are continuing to be on the front line in what has been a very, very difficult 24 hours for Victoria Police. We do take community safety very seriously and we will continue to do so.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:59): I rise to endorse the motion moved by my colleague Mr David Davis, motion 1055. It is a very serious issue and serious topic that we are debating today in relation to violent home invasions in metropolitan Melbourne, and I certainly know that is not limited to metropolitan Melbourne. It highlights an example in Kew and aggravated retail burglaries in retail outlets, including supermarkets, and also the increased comments in relation to retail crime. A concern that we have on this side is in relation to community safety in country Victoria and a lack of police resources in our suburbs. We want to see an improvement in this situation. Before I do that I want to just put on record my sincere condolences to our Victorian police members and the families of those dear and beloved service personnel who lost their lives yesterday morning. The devastation that this is causing is not only in the region of Porepunkah but reverberating right across the state. We acknowledge the pain of people who lose loved ones in such an extreme and violent circumstance. We wish with all our heart that there can be healing in the knowledge that Victoria stands side by side with our members in blue.

I would like to start to correct the record. It certainly sounds like there has been a little bit of communications tennis in this house today, because we have heard various statements refuted and then I may well refute them back. Speaking to knife crime, indeed in my region I am seeing it more. Australian retailers have recorded a 66 per cent year-on-year increase in retail crime compared to last year. Unfortunately, Victoria is tracking in all the wrong metrics. This data is collected by Auror. It is a global institute, a global agency. It is used not only across Australia and New Zealand but in North America and the United Kingdom, so it is to be believed. The category that Victoria is doing so poorly in is, compared to last year, Victoria is leading the states in terms of threatening events – and this is in the Australian retailers. Victoria is up 52 per cent. That translates to a lot of fear, a lot of concern, a lot of aggravation and a lot of people feeling less and less safe. Serious events in Victoria are up 38 per cent, and these include the use of knives, blades – in the retail environment – hammers, scissors and box cutters. Used in a violent fashion, they can create all sorts of lasting trauma not only in the victims, the retailers, but the centre in which that is occurring and the community in which that is occurring. I put on record again my concern for those people.

If we look at that, we have seen in my own region, in my own electorate, alleged stabbings this year in Morwell and Warragul. We have seen our small business owners frustrated and concerned by this. I did a walk only a month or so ago down the main street of Morwell with my colleague Martin Cameron, and we spoke with shop owners and business owners very concerned about this knife crime and antisocial behaviour. There are layers upon layers of this, but it is happening in our regions.

Part of this motion goes to community concern in regional Victoria. Let us look at some of those crime stats for June – so the most recent. There will be more coming out. We now have a criminal offence occurring every 50.3 seconds in this state. We see youth crime, motor vehicles being stolen – I can give you examples that are happening in towns close to my home as well – aggravated burglary and the like. On the percentages in the rise of crime, Bass Coast is up 13 per cent, Baw Baw 19 per cent, East Gippsland 9 per cent, Latrobe 12 per cent, South Gippsland 11 per cent, Wellington 18 per cent and Cardinia 32 per cent – in that fantastic area in my electorate. If I have time, I will continue this litany of crime increases happening right across the electorate. Just finishing off on that, Bass Coast has a 61 per cent increase in supermarket crime and a 53 per cent increase in other retail settings. Cardinia, an 84 per cent increase in petrol crime. I am sure my colleague Dr Heath and I have both been speaking with those fantastic people in the town of Lang Lang in relation to the fact that their fantastic little police station, right in the heart of town, is open only a few hours a week. This lack of oversight, this lack of presence in these smaller towns is a concern. Those officers are being asked to backfill in our metropolitan stations where there is a dearth. We know that there are around 1100 vacancies and around 700 officers on long-term sick leave in our police force. These again are concerning. The reality of this is that people do not feel safe in their homes, they do not feel as safe as they did 10 years ago, and it is quite frightening.

In relation to machetes and in terms of refuting the comments from the other side, the Liberals and Nationals in early May this year introduced a private members bill to outlaw machetes on our streets. We introduced that and, hey presto, the Allan government knocked it back and said, 'No, there's nothing happening here. It's a bit of a problem.' A few months later it introduced its own bill, but we still have a delay in that machetes will not be banned until September. If Labor had been on the front foot, they could have been banned much, much earlier. I will just make some comments about machetes because we see the costings. I heard from the speaker before me about the whole rationale and that \$13 million for 40 steel bins equates to over \$300,000 a bin. I take a very sensible person, the member for Narracan –

*Members interjecting.*

**Melina BATH:** It has hit a nerve, I might say; it has hit a great, big nerve. My colleague Mr Wayne Farnham, the member for Narracan, has gone out and sourced what it would take, in a professional capacity, to produce a properly fabricated steel bin that could be used – all of the rest; he did that work – and it was around that \$10,000 mark. So we see –

**John Berger:** He would be the last bloke I'd get a quote from for 10 grand.

**Melina BATH:** I will take up that interjection. It is quite unparliamentary to start bagging people out when they are not in the house, so I suggest that you do not do it.

The Allan government refuses to take responsibility for that crisis it has created. We have seen the government water down our 2013 bail reform. We saw them water it down in 2016. They then watered it down again in 2023, and now they are looking at, as I said yesterday, the twostep dance on this. People's lives, property, homes and wellbeing are at stake here. I think this is a reasonable motion; it does not go too extreme. It is just calling out the truth and calling on the government to take the situation seriously and reduce that risk to our Victorian population so that they can feel safe sleeping in their beds at night.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:09): Throughout these contributions we have heard what you would expect from the Liberals: negativity and naysaying and I think some misquoting as well. But community safety is the Allan Labor government's top priority. All Victorians have a right to be safe and feel safe in their communities. We are backing Victoria Police with our record investment of over \$4.5 billion to ensure our police are equipped with the resources and tougher powers they need to keep our community safe. We have more than 3600 new police officers on the beat to keep Victorians safe, and we have invested almost \$1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations across our state. Our government continues to invest in critical police infrastructure. There have been no cuts to Victoria's police budget. The government works with Victoria Police, not against them. We deliver the tools and resources they need to keep all Victorians safe, unlike those opposite, who cut \$100 million from the VicPol budget and failed to fund a single additional officer. We know they did not do much in their last four years, but not only did they not act, they took the state backwards. We are backing Victoria Police to keep Victorians safe. It is Victoria's police who are out every day at all hours in all weather patrolling our community and keeping Victorians safe.

We know Victoria Police are making record numbers of arrests – over 75,000 in the last 12 months alone – and our government is committed to supporting Victoria Police in their efforts by ensuring they have the resources and the laws they need. Particularly today, as many of us have indeed, I want to acknowledge Victoria's police and their families. It is an incredible commitment they make to us day in, day out, but in recent days with lives lost we have seen the commitment they make to our state and the work they do so that all of us can have a quality, safe life in our state. We give our condolences for those that have lost their lives.

Regarding the machete amnesty and knife crime, we are calling on Victorians to do the right thing and hand in their machetes during the amnesty. The amnesty is just one part of our plan to end knife crime in Victoria. From 1 September machetes will be banned in Victoria. Anyone caught with a machete

without a valid exemption or approval after that will face up to two years in jail or a fine of over \$47,000. Every week VicPol are using their strengthened stop-and-search powers to seize knives off criminals. Our retail ban has choked the supply of machetes across the state, with over 98 per cent of retailers doing the right thing. We are also partnering with major retailers who want to get rid of their excess stock.

Regarding bail, the Allan Labor government is listening to the community and taking action to deliver the toughest bail laws in the country to prevent reoffending and keep our community safe. In March we passed the first round of our new bail laws, ensuring community safety was the overarching consideration in all bail decisions, and these changes are working. Remand numbers are up by 4 per cent across the system. But we have been clear there is more work to do, and that is why we introduced a second tranche of legislation to deliver on our commitment to Victorians. As part of the second tranche of reforms, which passed Parliament early this morning, we will deliver the toughest bail test in the nation, targeting serious offending like aggravated carjacking, armed robbery or home invasion and ensuring that our bail laws meet community expectations and put their safety first. Only the Allan Labor government can be trusted to keep Victoria safe. Our government has taken strong action to crack down on illegal behaviour and has given Victoria Police the power that it has asked for.

When it comes to getting knives off Victorian streets, the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025 allows police to search for and seize weapons without a warrant, with less notice and for longer periods of time. We have changed the law to allow the Chief Commissioner of Police to declare a location a designated search area for up to six months instead of 12 hours. This allows police to act on intelligence about potential violence and weapons for much longer.

The Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024 gives Victoria Police new powers to target individuals in serious and organised crime and deter and disrupt organised crime groups, including outlaw motorcycle gangs. We have powers for improving oversight of the private security industry under the Private Security and County Court Amendment Act 2024. We have given the Chief Commissioner of Police the power to issue a code of conduct for private security employers and workers. We are making sure that the industry is safe for workers, because we know the vital role private security plays in the places where we meet, learn and play.

With regard to post and boast, criminals who share their disturbing crimes on social media will face extra jail time under our new laws. The new offence targets those who publish content bragging about their involvement in serious crimes such as affray, burglary, robbery, car theft, carjacking, home invasions and violent disorder. This includes anyone encouraging or facilitating these crimes. There is no room to hide behind the ringleader. These laws respond to the dangerous trend among young people chasing clout on TikTok and Snapchat about their heinous crimes, which encourages copycat offending, retraumatises victims and deeply disturbs the community. The Allan Labor government has taken the next step to drive down youth crime and keep Victorians safe, handing courts an extra tool to ensure those who are granted bail get back on the right path or face tough consequences. Through the \$34.4 million electronic monitoring trial the Children's Court and the Supreme Court now have the power to impose electronic monitoring and intensive supervised bail for young people in the metropolitan area as a part of their bail conditions. The trial builds on the government's tough new bail laws, which put the community, as I have discussed, at the centre of all bail decisions and make remand for younger people no longer an option of last resort. As I am running out of time, I will leave my remarks there.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:16): This motion is a very thoughtful and modest motion. It points to what is a developing and serious problem – a problem that has beset so many Melbourne suburbs now, so many parts of the country and so many of our retail and other outlets. Supermarkets are being hit. This is a serious, serious problem. At its roots this is certainly, partially at least, due to the lack of police resources, but it is broader than that. Nonetheless we ask for the

expression of legitimate concern at the failure of the Allan Labor government to control this serious situation, putting many Victorians at risk.

Nobody can deny that the crime rate has gone up. Nobody can deny that the seriousness of the crimes has got worse, the home invasions have got more serious and the retail issues have got worse and worse. This is a very serious situation we find ourselves in, and we need to take it seriously. It is time the Allan Labor government did.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (13):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (17):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney

**Motion negatived.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:24): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**Respect Victoria**

*Report 2023–24*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:24): I rise to make a statement this evening on the Respect Victoria annual report 2023–24. As of 2025 Respect Victoria has been running as an authority for seven years. It was established under the Victorian government's Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018, and it is an organisation dedicated to eradicating family violence and violence against women in the Victorian community. The annual report for 2023–24 by Respect Victoria has emphasised the importance of raising public attention to family violence and violence against women, to identify risk factors and main causes and thus improve education to prevent family violence and violence against women from ever happening in the first place.

Education cannot be limited to specific parts of society. It applies to all parts of society, from early schooling right through to the workplace. It is with education that social change can indeed occur as we continue to work towards ending family violence and violence against women. In May 2024 a four-year initiative to prevent violence against women in Ballarat was announced. This initiative is intended to saturate the community of Ballarat with knowledge about preventing violence against women and about community action against violence. This is not limited to the home but applies to every location, including workplaces, schools and other public and community institutions and is otherwise known as the saturation model.

Respect Victoria found that addressing gendered drivers of men's violence against women would likely be able to help in reducing and preventing family violence and gender-based violence and is the key to investigating family violence, but violence against men is also considered. Other factors which may contribute to its perpetration include but are not limited to things like alcohol and drug use, mental health issues, trauma and an overall acceptance of the norms of violence within society. Respect

Victoria has also been able to identify gaps in knowledge, for example, including but not limited to the different sources of structural oppression within society and their interaction with gender in driving different forms of violence.

Respect Victoria went on further to work with the Men's Project to undertake the Man Box study, which surveyed 3500 Australian men aged from 18 to 45 in order to investigate the perceptions of and the agreement with the Man Box rules in our society and the harmful stereotypes in attitudes on what it means to be a man in Australia. The study found that agreement with the harmful stereotypes of masculinity coincided with a greater likelihood of not only holding violence-supportive attitudes or norms against women but not reporting perpetrating intimate partner violence. The study also investigated the pressures felt by some men to conform to stereotypes of masculinity and how to engage other men in gender-transformative approaches to the prevention of violence. Respect Victoria has continued to provide advice to the Victorian and federal governments to better inform and influence prevention policy, legislation, regulation and investment.

Respect Victoria also advocates for bipartisan engagement with Victorian and federal members of Parliament to better support their understanding of and advocacy for the prevention of family violence and gendered violence. The Allan Labor government continues to strongly support the work of Respect Victoria. It is imperative that the Victorian government continues to work with Respect Victoria, collaborating over resources and actively engaging with advice so that family violence and gendered violence can be prevented across Victoria.

In Respect Victoria tabling this report, it is commendable the work that they continue to do with communities and it is commendable the work that they are doing on the saturation model in Ballarat. I urge colleagues across this chamber to approach future recommendations by Respect Victoria with support and continue their utmost commitment to ending family violence and violence against women. I commend this report to the house.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2025–26*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:29): I rise to speak on the state budget for 2025–26. The state budget of course raises the money that runs the Department of Transport and Planning, and I want to talk about a planning issue. I want to talk about the recently approved amendment to the Macedon Ranges planning scheme for a very large housing development on Amess Road in Riddells Creek. This was announced via a press release on Tuesday 26 August. This now-endorsed plan will develop 130 acres of land in Riddells Creek to create around 1360 new homes, with some lots as small as 100 square metres. In a small country hamlet where people have chosen to go to live for the lifestyle, the government is just going to double the size of the town. There will be 3800 new residents in this development. On one side of the road on Amess Road now there are currently lifestyle blocks that are acreage blocks where people might have a horse or something. On the other side of the road there are going to be 1360 new lots, some as small as 100 square metres. That is a 10-square-metre home. That is not in place with the lifestyle and the amenity of Riddells Creek, and the locals are furious about it. As I said, this development will just about double the town's population. It will add 3800 new people to a town that is only 4500 people now. This will destroy the country character and the amenity of the Riddells Creek community. The local residents are against this plan, the local council rejected it, but the Minister for Planning has approved it.

A development of this size on the edge of Riddells Creek of course will create a car-dependent suburb, because the government is not putting in place any additional public transport, additional services or car parking in the town centre or at the railway station. None of that is coming before this development comes. They are going to put the development there and then do something. The changes to the plan under the Development Victoria approval include a traffic plan – but that has not been done yet – and include a community centre. But this development is well out of town. What the government need to do if they are going to do things like this is put in place public transport and put in place the services

that will service these additional residents. The local people are really concerned about what this will mean for them with the extra cars being parked in their shopping centre, the parking at their railway station and the additional pressure that it will place on their rail services to Melbourne. There is concern about the additional pressure on local infrastructure, including sporting and recreational infrastructure, as well as services and what it will mean for the character of their town.

The government is just pushing ahead because they have failed on housing. We know that they have fallen behind on all of their housing targets, and they are now just riding roughshod over the people of Riddells Creek without taking into account their concerns and without taking into account the Shire of Macedon Ranges' concerns. The government are so desperate to get housing out there that they are approving unsuitable developments in regional towns without supporting those towns with the infrastructure and the services that are going to be necessary to service so many new homes. We have seen this happen again with the new development announced at Kalkallo without any additional services or roads there. We see what happens in Donnybrook with the traffic congestion there because the Labor government have not invested in the infrastructure necessary to support the developments.

### **RMIT University**

#### *Report 2024*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:34): I rise to speak on the RMIT University annual report. RMIT continue to shape our state, our communities and our future with their leadership in education, innovation and sustainability. As the member for Northern Metro I am proud to represent a region that is home to the RMIT city and Brunswick campuses. Both campuses are vibrant places of learning, research and deep social impact.

Very recently I had the good fortune of visiting RMIT with the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and some truly inspiring students who know a lot more about technology than me. You see, these students that we met are part of a new work-integrated learning partnership between RMIT and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, bringing the future to life using cutting-edge augmented and virtual reality technologies. They are helping to design the station precincts of SRL East, shaping the communities of tomorrow while learning on the job today. They are doing it through a partnership that connects education, infrastructure and real-world outcomes. That is what modern education looks like: it is hands-on, it is industry linked and it is future focused. It is a powerful example of what RMIT does best: connecting students with opportunity, innovation, community and purpose.

Throughout the annual report, RMIT sets out a story that makes it clear that the university is committed to climate leadership, sustainability and public value. They are leading the way when it comes to action on climate change. In 2024 RMIT ranked first in Australia and eighth in the world in the QS sustainability rankings. RMIT also ranked in the top five in the Times Higher Education impact rankings. These are not just numbers, they are a recognition of how seriously RMIT takes its role in building a cleaner, fairer and more sustainable Victoria. That leadership is clear in projects like the coffee concrete footpath trial. It is actually very, very exciting. It is a world-first initiative, turning waste into a community solution. It is evident in the work of the sustainable technologies and systems research platform, where researchers are building real-world innovations in clean energy, low-carbon construction and circular economy design.

Right here in my electorate we are seeing the impact of this work through the City North Social Innovation Precinct, which starts across the road from Trades Hall and goes right down Swanston Street. This social innovation precinct's vision is to bring together community, technology and industry to engage with major social challenges of our time, building workforce skills, inclusion and climate-focused innovation through cross-community collaboration, such as is necessary here in such an iconic part of Melbourne. Climate action is not just about technology, it is about people too and it is about equity. It is about ensuring that the benefits of this transition are shared by everyone. That is why I want to talk for a moment about RMIT's earn-and-learn model, an education pathway that allows working people to study and skill up while they are doing paid employment. Whether it is

engineering, planning or health, let me just say this model is helping build Victoria's clean economy workforce while keeping equity and access at its heart. Something dear to me is the RMIT's growing commitment to First Nations justice. This year the university contributed to the Yoorrook Justice Commission inquiry into tertiary education, confronting the past, listening to truth through testimonies and committing to changing their organisation and doing better for both Indigenous students and staff.

All over the world, I have got to let you know, RMIT's international profile is being leveraged for global climate impact. With campuses in Vietnam and a research hub in Europe, the university is building bridges across borders to share climate solutions, foster international cooperation and support Victoria's adaptation projects. This annual report offers clear evidence of an institution that is stepping up its responsibilities in a climate-challenged world. I commend the RMIT leadership team, the academics, staff, students and the broader community for their work. I look forward to seeing what is next for RMIT. I commend the RMIT 2024 annual report to the chamber.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

#### *Budget papers 2025–26*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to make a statement on the 2025–26 budget, which was tabled on 20 May, noting the funding that is in this year's budget to operationalise the Metro Tunnel. The Metro Tunnel, which is going to open later this year, is one of the most visionary projects we have in Melbourne, and I am very much looking forward to it. I am looking forward to getting on a Metro Tunnel train and getting across our city faster and easier than ever before. The biggest upgrade to our transport infrastructure since the City Loop stations began operating in 1981, the Metro Tunnel is going to change the way Melburnians live, work and move across our city.

It did not just happen by accident that we will have the Metro Tunnel. It took a vision and it took determination from this Labor government more than a decade ago to realise that the City Loop was reaching capacity, that there was a limit on how many trains could run around those tracks and that something needed to be done. Here we are, closing in on the point where the Metro Tunnel is opening its doors to Victorians. There are going to be five new stations: Anzac, Town Hall, State Library, Parkville and Arden, located next to hospitals, universities and top tourist attractions, growing like our city to meet our future needs and growing to support our growing tourism industry. I just wanted to mention that we had some figures recently showing that hotel occupancy has been at an all-time high for a series of consecutive months in Melbourne thanks to the world-leading events program in this city backed by the Labor government. The Metro Tunnel is going to help propel that events industry forward. It is going to help carry us to work, to learn and to get health care. It is going to connect our north-western suburbs to our south-eastern suburbs, and I cannot wait for it to open.

Alongside the funding to operationalise the Metro Tunnel that was contained in the May budget in these budget papers that we are taking note of this evening was also some additional funding to bring more passengers onto the Sandringham line, boosting capacity for between-peak trains, which will run every 10 minutes instead of every 15 minutes – big news for the Sandringham line.

Obviously for those on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, they will now be now serviced by the Metro Tunnel, getting from Clayton or Oakleigh or Carnegie through Caulfield and Malvern before going through the tunnel. Those living around Caulfield will have the benefit of both city loop and Metro Tunnel trains, with Caulfield station becoming a critical juncture and interchange point for passengers wanting to transfer between these two lines. It is a modern network. For those of us who have had the opportunity to visit some of these brand new stations, they are a marvel. They have excellent new features – things like, for the first time, passenger safety doors, making sure that the platforms and the train lines have a protective barrier, with automated doors opening in line with where the trains connect; and all new high-capacity trains, which offer 20 per cent more capacity than the older trains.

The Metro Tunnel is going to transform the way that Melburnians get across our great city. It is going to connect parts of the city in ways that we have never seen before. Anzac Day will be different when the Anzac station opens. People will be able to get to and from the dawn service like they have never done before. For those fans going and visiting the grand prix at Albert Park, that station will be just a short walk away. Students studying at the University of Melbourne will for the first time have a train. People needing treatment at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre or at the Royal Melbourne Hospital will have a train line at their doorstep. This is going to be revolutionary for transport around Melbourne, and I cannot wait to see it open.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2025–26*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:43): I rise to speak on this year's budget papers, specifically budget paper 3 and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's LGBTIQ+ equality policy and programs. Over the past 12 months, we have seen a marked increase in the number of gay bashings. This is a topic which many would quite understandably think is a relic of history from the 1980s and 90s, but we have seen in Victoria, interstate and indeed across the world a marked increase in the number of gay or otherwise or bisexual men coming forward to report being assaulted. Most commonly this starts online on a dating app, where someone will be lured to a public place. In many cases the conversation will go on to Snapchat, and some victims, not realising that location services can be automatically turned on in Snapchat, then find their homes being raided, attacked, burgled. People have been assaulted viciously, threatened, harassed and intimidated. Though we do not know the precise cause, we can be fairly confident in saying that this has been driven by online activity, by nefarious influencers spreading toxic messages and inciting these attacks. It is a very disturbing trend that we have seen.

In the eight months to May this year, 35 individuals were arrested in the state of Victoria for these crimes. They have typically been males between the ages of 20 and just 13. Victoria leads the nation for the number of arrests, but we know that that does not paint the true picture. The identification of this trend was first discovered by Victoria Police, and it is through their early intervention, including in particular by Jeremy Oliver, the LGBTIQ+ liaison, who I want to give enormous amount of credit to, that these incidents have been able to be responded to in such an effective way. But despite these arrests and despite the attacks that we know about, we can also be, very sadly, confident that there are many, many more that we do not. Many of these attacks have taken place in outer suburban communities – communities very much like the one that I am very proud to represent. We know as well that many of these attacks have targeted men from communities where they are still not able to be comfortable with who they are, where they are still in the closet and where their fear of reporting the crime is so much greater because of it that so many simply do not.

I recently had the privilege of attending a forum in Abbotsford that was held by Thorne Harbour Health to discuss the issue. People were invited from across the community to come and share their experiences and to listen. It was moderated by Caleb Hawk, and we had a great input from Thorne Harbour Health, including Simon Ruth and Janet Jukes. We had Jeremy himself on the panel as well as our terrific LGBTIQ+ commissioner Joe Ball and influencer Odus. I was very pleased to be there representing the Minister for Equality Vicki Ward. I also note the attendance and keen interest in this issue of my colleague in this place Mr Puglielli. For some of the attendees at this forum it was the very first time they had spoken about the violence that had been inflicted upon them. It was a very deeply moving and emotional discussion. But I was reminded throughout that for every person that was there, there were many, many more – many in suburbs such as the ones I represent – who still do not feel safe to be who they are.

Last week the terrific organisation Switchboard announced a very significant program, opening a new hotline to support people and provide the best confidential advice – directions to legal support and mental health and other health supports – and that support for people that need it, whether they want

to disclose it or not. It is a very commendable service, and I am very grateful to them for doing it. I also note the keen interest of both Minister Ward and the Premier in this service. Indeed the Premier was at the launch, which sent a very strong message indeed. The Premier has also announced that the Anti-Hate Taskforce will hear from members of the queer community about these attacks. In Victoria equality is not negotiable – not now, not ever.

*Petitions*

**Daniel Andrews**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:48): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Today I am rising on a tabled parliamentary petition bearing over 12,000 signatures, and almost 20,000 signatures from other platforms, from Victorians calling on this government to cancel plans for a statue of the former Premier.

It may be a case of former Premier derangement syndrome. Symptoms can include an inability to recall basic facts and say women's names, and a total lack of socially appropriate shame. There is no cure of course, but we can slow the spread by not insulting the people of this state with statues of living politicians while serious questions about their legacy remain unanswered. Unlike the radical activists who tear down statues, I am not actually calling for history to be erased; I am just calling for a little bit of respect.

In liberal democracies statues are earned. They are not demanded. They are not vanity projects. They are supposed to be public expressions of gratitude for service, usually long after their deaths, when their legacies have been judged in the full light of time, like Curtin or Menzies. It is actually a hallmark of authoritarian regimes to be putting up statues while the leaders are still alive. Often it is done as a tool of political dominance, of intimidation, like with Lenin or Mao or Hussein. I think that we should be erring on the side of the tradition that honours leaders who did not lead their people into mass starvation and violence – but hey, that is just me. But even if we put tradition aside, thanks to that man and this Labor government we cannot even afford it anyway. This state is drowning in record debt: \$20 million a day in interest. Families cannot even afford to pay their bills or for their basic groceries. Services are collapsing around them. Yesterday, and all day today actually, we heard about parents who are being told to go and get their little children tested for STIs when we know they cannot even afford the sick leave. To spend money that you told us all that you could not spare to fix child safeguards on a bronze statue of some former Premier is not just offensive, it is obscene.

The man's political legacy is also a disaster. It is all about abuse of power. Over and over, his legacy was condemned by our own watchdogs. Freedom and rights were crushed. We saw the police used as a personal army with weapons of war and no name tags. We saw access to health care totally denied. We saw Nuremberg trial principles like bodily autonomy totally ignored. The freedom to move, to protest, to take your children to the playground – no, not without that man's permission. It was absolutely a public expression of coercive control. It was cruel. It is no wonder, actually, that there is also a 40,000-strong petition to have his Order of Australia stripped from him.

But there is another reason why I and many others believe that this statue should not go ahead. It has become known as the bike-boy scandal, but it raises grave questions much bigger than this statue about governance, corruption and the coercion of our public sector. It revolves around Ryan Meuleman, the young boy who almost died after being hit by the car of the then future Premier and his wife, Dan and Catherine Andrews. Mr and Mrs Andrews have repeatedly said that the crash was Ryan's fault, that it was investigated thoroughly and that justice was done. However, Ryan and his family dispute this. They have shown me some evidence that they are now in possession of, including various phone records and emails from the day of the crash. I really do believe that once this evidence is made public in the coming weeks, criminal charges will become an inevitability.

I am going to briefly outline that evidence now under the protection of parliamentary privilege, so that we can pause. The 2013 crash in which Daniel Andrews and his wife Catherine drove their government-provided Ford Territory into 15-year-old Ryan Meuleman nearly killed him, and he was airlifted to hospital and lost 90 per cent of his spleen. D24 recordings from the day of the crash show that the two young police officers attending the scene, Shayna Sage and Daniel Ward, were under the authority of Karl David. No breath tests were carried out on Daniel or Catherine. Daniel Andrews was permitted to drive his smashed-up, unroadworthy car away from the site shortly after the crash. No photographs exist of the scene. The major crash investigation unit was never called, despite a child fighting for his life and having to be airlifted to hospital. To this day, not a single statement has been taken from any witnesses from the scene. Andrews has repeatedly said that Ryan crashed his bike into the side of their car; he described it as a perfect T-bone. But the original crash repair report for the Andrewses' car has been sourced, and it shows that there was no damage to the side of the Andrewses' car. The damage was to the front. It was a head-on collision. Records show that just 30 minutes after the crash – (*Time expired*)

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:53): Yesterday two serving Victoria Police officers lost their lives in the course of duty. Today someone whose title is the Leader of the Opposition's representative has made outrageous accusations against Victoria Police officers. This is beneath contemptible.

**Moira Deeming**: On a point of order, President, they are not outrageous accusations. I would ask the member to withdraw. There is no accusation.

**The PRESIDENT**: There is no point of order.

**Michael GALEA**: I am also, frankly, thrown by a reference to the Nuremberg trials. It is frankly offensive to many, many people in the community, many people who deal with – whether it is firsthand or second-hand – experiences or bearing witness to the Holocaust. I am appalled by the opposition leader's representative – a title he has given to Mrs Deeming – saying this in the Victorian Parliament to make a political point about a statue.

**Moira Deeming**: On a point of order, President, I was not making a political point, I was referring to the dissenting ruling by the judge.

**The PRESIDENT**: There is no point of order. Mr Galea can respond to your contribution.

**Michael GALEA**: I had notes about this. Clearly you are not serious. None of you are serious – the fact that you have taken this petition into the Parliament today as one of the things that you want to address. This government has taken bail reform to the Parliament this week, this government has taken working with children check reform to the Parliament this week, and this is what you take in. I mean, it is a joke. Saying some of those things, Mrs Deeming, that you said – they are not a joke. I am gravely offended by that, to be honest – gravely and genuinely offended. But this is at its heart not about that. This is a bizarre motion. Feel free to have your say. Personally, I do not give a damn if we build a statue of former premiers or not. I do not know why Jeff Kennett bought it in the first place. I do not know why we apparently had one Premier who did serve more than 3000 days who never got a statue – one of the earliest premiers of the state. I do not know why you are seeking to implement these bizarre tests on it. Either we do it or we do not. Frankly, I do not give a damn. I am sure most Victorians do not. They want us to be here to legislate –

**Ann-Marie Hermans**: On a point of order, President, I do believe that the member is using unparliamentary language.

**The PRESIDENT**: No, he is not.

**Michael GALEA**: They are a joke. They are an absolute joke. The Leader of the Opposition's appointed representative putting these ridiculous things into this chamber today is a very sad indictment on the entire Liberal Party, and I am sure many of their members are rightly hanging their

heads in shame right now – in fact I am not quite sure of it; I know it. By all means let us spend the time in this place discussing whether we should build a statue to the former Premier or not. I think in your remarks, Mrs Deeming, you referred to authoritarianism. It sounded like you were talking about your own former Premier Jeff Kennett – I could not be clear. I would say it is a joke. It is an offensive joke to be quoting Nuremberg trials, to be bringing up allegations against police officers. It is a joke.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): The erosion of democratic principles in this state under the leadership of the former Premier Mr Daniel Andrews cannot go without comparisons to Joseph Stalin. Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union from the 1920s to 1953, and it has been described as a totalitarian dictatorship. It was built on fear, on violence and on absolute control. His key tactics included total state control. The state controlled every aspect of life. There was no free press, no political opposition and no individual rights.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** On a point of order, Mr President, I cannot hear myself.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can the house come to order. I have indicated to members that sometimes, if you are going to do a provocative speech, there might be a reaction from some people. I ask Mrs Hermans to continue without any assistance.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** Dissent was a crime. For years we have heard his supporters praise his decisive and strong leadership. They call him a man who gets things done. But let us be clear: getting things done is not a substitute for due process, transparency and accountability. A government that centralises all power in a single office is not strong, it is autocratic. A leader who dismisses any dissenting view as unhelpful or selfish is not decisive, he is authoritarian. This is not a new criticism. We have seen a pattern of behaviour that has systematically undermined the foundations of the Westminster system. Cabinet was bypassed, with crucial decisions made by a small, hand-picked inner circle. We have seen it in the hugely expanding size and influence of the Premier's private office, which became a de facto shadow government, operating with minimal scrutiny.

The most glaring example of this was the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I can say that the number of signatures on this petition is testament to the fact that there are a number of people in this state who were severely hurt and injured by this government, in particular during the COVID-19 lockdowns, not to mention that some of them were members of Parliament who have spoken in this chamber today and were originally from the government's side.

Under the guise of an unprecedented crisis, this government sought and was granted unprecedented power. Powers designed for a short-term emergency were extended and extended again in a clear overreach. We saw a government, led by Daniel Andrews, that was more interested in controlling every aspect of Victorian lives than trusting its own people to make valid decisions. The public health legislation, which we were told was necessary to get through this, became a permanent blueprint for the suspension of our freedoms. Daniel Andrews – a politician, not a medical professional – took his power to declare a pandemic for an indefinite time. This was not about saving lives, it was about seizing power.

We have heard from legal experts, including the Victorian Bar Association, who condemned this legislation as a threat to the rule of law. We have seen the Inspector-General for Emergency Management Victoria and the Ombudsman raise serious concerns about the lack of oversight and accountability. This is not about policy disagreement, this is about the fundamental health of our democracy.

When a Premier refuses to appear before a parliamentary committee, when a government buries reports and avoids answering questions and when the public is told to get on the beers rather than to seek answers, something is deeply wrong.

The former Premier's defenders will say that he was a victim of a biased media and a political witch-hunt, but the truth is the most devastating criticisms of his government came not from journalists but from the institutions that are supposed to hold power to account: the Parliament, the Ombudsman and the anti-corruption bodies. A functioning democracy is built on checks and balances. It is built on the principle that no-one, not even a popular Premier, is above scrutiny.

The legacy of the former Premier is not just his infrastructure projects or his social reforms, it is the precedent he set for centralising power, avoiding accountability – 'I don't recall,' if you recall – and governing by fear. I urge this Parliament to remember that our duty is not to serve the government of the day but to serve the people of Victoria and the democratic principles that protect them. We must commit ourselves to restoring the integrity of the institution and ensuring that this state never – (*Time expired*)

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:03): I have been in this place for about three years now, and I can distinctly remember a few times when I have felt deeply disturbed by what I have heard in this place. I will not mention what those times were, but I remember them vividly. This is probably up there with them. On today of all days, with what has happened to Victoria in the last 24 hours, I think it is a very good reminder for all of us to be very, very mindful about the language we use. If you are talking about Stalin, millions of people –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH**: Thank you. I will not say died – murdered. I think we need to be very, very thoughtful about the language we use, because what do we want to be like? Do we want to head down the path that some other nations are heading down, where their democracies are being destroyed? I did not have my great-uncle track Kokoda to see our democracy disrespected. I had two great-uncles on warships in the Pacific getting sunk, seeing their mates die, coming back here to work on the wharves and drinking themselves to sleep every night because of the trauma they went through at war, when they fought for this nation so that people could respectfully discuss democracy and go to the fabric of policies. The reason why you are standing over there and you are talking about Stalin is because you are unable to identify the values that you have to inform plans that create policies. It is absolutely disgusting. I will bring politics into this. There is a reason why the Liberals got wiped out at the federal election, because the dog whistling –

**Ann-Marie Hermans**: On a point of order, President, this is a debate about a Daniel Andrews statue that received thousands of signatures from Victorians in a very short space of time.

**The PRESIDENT**: There is no point of order, because you hit the nail on the head: this is a debate, and a speaker is responding to a previous speaker in the debate.

**Tom McINTOSH**: I also want to comment on something I have been fairly passionate about in the last few weeks, the Labor state conference. We have had it for 20, 30 years up at Moonee Valley racetrack. The carpet is not that flash, but it is open, it is televised, it is democratic. In recent years we have enabled working-age people to bring their kids into a creche. Last year that place got run through. We had people on the floor – observers, media, delegates – and people ran through and were trying to smash through a wall and on the other side were kids in a creche. Do you know what happened this year? The place was locked down; people could only access through one point. That has really stuck with me. I came in here for question time the other week, and I was a bit shirty with a few people –

**Ann-Marie Hermans**: On a point of order, President, this is a debate about a statue of Daniel Andrews. I do ask that the member return to the topic.

**The PRESIDENT**: I think it has been a quite broad-ranging debate from both sides of the chamber, so I will ask Mr McIntosh to continue.

**Tom McINTOSH**: What I am trying to say is this year parents with kids did not come, did not attend. I know that. I have heard from them. Because when they were on that floor and their kids were

on the other side of what they did not know was going on with wall smashing and crashing, that was terrifying.

I was recently out and there was some pretty poor language used towards me, and I called it out. Some pretty, pretty ordinary language, the same sort of language that was used about Dan Andrews, and I called it out in a room of 20 or 30 people, and it was taken back. I am not going to say what was said, but the person who said it apologised to me later. The point is, it does not matter whether people are on the left or on the right, if we are going to debate things, we have got to do it respectfully if we value our democracy, because where are we going to be in 20 or 30 years? It is really easy to go for the cheap wins and try and fire people up. The last 24 hours, of all time, to use Stalin – seriously. Like really, really seriously, let us have a bit of respect for our democracy.

There is a lot of grey in politics. We can agree to disagree; that is fine. I value the fact that most of us can walk out of here and still engage with each other in a respectful way. That is something we should cherish. We should be very, very mindful of the language we use. It is okay to come in here and rip apart the policies we bring. We should absolutely do that. But when it comes to inciting hatred, when it comes to bordering on inciting violence, that is where we risk our democracy.

**Moira Deeming:** On a point of order, President, I ask that Mr McIntosh withdraw. Is he accusing us of inciting hatred and violence? Is he seriously doing that?

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr McIntosh did not single anyone out.

**Tom McINTOSH:** What I am saying is there a responsibility collectively for us all to be mindful of the language we use when we come and debate an issue. We can come and debate a statue. That is fine. We can debate whether or not we build a statue – absolutely. Let us do that. But let us not use language that is absolutely ridiculous. I think to compare a democratic leader in Victoria, a democratic leader in Australia, to Stalin is disgusting.

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:10):** I want to make some statements about this matter today. A large petition has been brought to the chamber and people have expressed their views that they do not want a statue of Daniel Andrews, the former Premier, and I can understand that. I do not devote much of my time to thinking about whether Daniel Andrews deserves a statue or not. That is a secondary matter, but it does cause me to revisit his legacy and his achievements and what he has done or not done for Victoria.

I think it is important that we look at our economy and the massive debt that he left. More than \$200 billion is where the number will be for the general government sector, and it is much more if you count the outer sector in. The massive tax increase is a legacy of Daniel Andrews – the debt and the tax and the sluggish economic growth with declining living standards. The hallmark of this period of government since 2014 has been the declining living standards per household and per Victorian. Our economic performance was not good under Daniel Andrews, and that is a central legacy of his. We should not step away from measuring him on the things that matter to Victorians. What matters to Victorians is the cost of living, what matters to Victorians is the living standard and what matters to Victorians is the ability to get into a home, and on all those basic metrics the performance of this state drifted under Daniel Andrews. He has left the state in a terrible position.

Look at the mismanagement of COVID. I do want to put on record the undemocratic way the chamber was run, the undemocratic way that the Parliament was run and the draconian approach that was adopted with COVID, which was much more stringent than in any other state in Australia. That is the truth. The consequences of that have been serious, and the truthfulness of the decisions that were made do not bear scrutiny. We have seen that. I followed some of those freedom-of-information requests from the time to seek the explanation for the orders that had been made under the health powers, and Daniel Andrews and his government fought and fought and fought the release of those orders. I am a former health minister. I believe in the use of those powers where it is appropriate, but I also believe in the transparency that is involved in that. Great power begets great responsibility. Great power begets

the need to be honest, open and truthful, and they were not. He was not. He fought and fought to prevent the information coming out. What we know is that some of the central things, like the curfew, were not based on health advice. It was made up by Daniel Andrews.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** The FOI that was released by the Court of Appeal made it clear. They fought all the way, and the Court of Appeal released that document. The document made it clear it was not based on health advice. It was concocted by government in the Premier's office. I say these were bad decisions and the wrong decisions.

But I also want to talk about red shirts. You talk about the standards here and the corruption –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** No, it was pure corruption actually; it was pure corruption.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Yes, it was. It was bad, and what was done was quite wrong. I say when you go back and you look at the legacy of Daniel Andrews, if you look at his time from when he was in opposition through the period until he resigned and handed over to Jacinta Allan, you see massive cost blowouts on projects, you see the tax go up massively, you see the debt go up massively and you see the living standards of Victorians falling. Living standards per head and per household in Victoria are not better. It was a terrible performance over the last period of government, and that was Daniel Andrews's responsibility. Daniel Andrews has to accept responsibility for that. When I review his legacy, he did win elections, but he did other things too. He left the state in a weaker and worse position than before. That is his legacy. If you ask the question: does he deserve a statue? On those hard assessments about the state's debt, about tax and about the living standards of Victorians, my answer is no, he does not. Do I devote a lot of time to thinking about whether he should get a statue? No. But is it an opportunity to look at his legacy? Yes, and I say he should not get it.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:15): Let us talk about legacy, because I want to talk about former Premier Jeff Kennett and his legacy. That is where I want to start, because indeed it was former Premier Jeff Kennett who implemented the commemorative statue policy. This is in fact his idea. May I remind the chamber that the standard set by former Premier Jeff Kennett is that you serve 3000 days – not 3000 days plus having the approval of every politician that ever served in the chamber after you leave, not 3000 days plus approval ratings or 3000 days plus whatever it is that serves your purpose over there. I will tell you right now, Jeff Kennett set the standard. The standard has been set. There are already four former premiers in this state that are all recognised for meeting the standard set by the former Premier. I would just say he has met the standard and be done with it.

I do not agree with the legacy of every one of those former premiers. I have not moved petitions about what they have done and what they are all about. But what I will say is that for 3000 days he served honourably the people of Victoria – that is what he did. For 3000 days, that is worthy of recognition. I could go to his legacy and all the things that I really admired about Daniel Andrews. I am going to need more than 2 minutes, let me assure you of that. I am not going to relitigate COVID and what happened – the lives saved, the hospitals, the workers – because I am not going to talk about that. I served on hospital boards before coming to this place and was there seeing the very impact of lives saved by the decisions made by that Premier each and every day. Then I followed that by coming into this place.

I will tell you that this policy has been applied equally. Whether or not we like that former Premier, this policy has been applied equally, and I am saying that it should continue to be. I have no concerns that we should absolutely call out the hypocrisy in its purest forms from those opposite, because this debate is about fairness and honesty. You created the rule, and now you do not like it. That is not good enough. You are all about celebrating your own good selves with public money. Well, now you are

going to celebrate a Labor Premier. Maybe it is that you dislike him and his legacy, but I will tell you what, a whole bunch of people loved him. They loved what he did and the lives that were saved and the raft of incredible, incredible achievements for our state.

I was one of the 1,339,496 Victorians that after the pandemic voted 1 for Victorian Labor. I will tell you that that number is much stronger than the 13,000 signatures to this petition, and we should remember that each and every day. This Premier deserves the respect of being recognised for time immemorial as somebody who saved lives each and every day of those 3000 days that he served in our state. I honour him and his remarkable legacy to the people of Victoria. He will be remembered with much respect and admiration from those on this side for many years to come.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (18:18): As I was saying, it was a head-on collision. The car struck Ryan. Phone and email records show that just 30 minutes after the crash Daniel Andrews phoned his then staffer Chris Reilly asking him to urgently arrange a new windscreen, that the state government insurance VicFleet refused to do so without a proper claim form and that Reilly then rang to arrange it with O'Brien glass directly. This all would have happened while Ryan was lying on the road fighting for his life.

Isn't it interesting to see you all close ranks on the basis of tribal loyalty for someone that we all know – you know – did things you did not agree with. I chose my words very carefully. I referenced proper historical facts. I referenced an actual judge in this state who did reference the Nuremberg trials, condemning that man's governance. Listen to your language. What about your language? Listen to the contempt you just poured out on the people of Victoria for a legal, democratic petition scheduled permanently in the timetable that you guys obey. It is ridiculous, the way that you just poured contempt on Victorians. Honestly, that is just disgusting, what you just did. You have contempt for working-class people that you rule over.

**Michael Galea**: On a point of order, President, pointing out that it is perhaps inappropriate to compare a democratically elected Premier to Stalin is not the same as what you are saying, Mrs Deeming. Furthermore –

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

**Moira DEEMING**: As a collective, you called these concerns a joke and bizarre. It is just absolutely –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Moira DEEMING**: Well, excuse me, he just admitted to calling me a joke. Can he withdraw that? Am I allowed to take a point of order in my own speech? I do not know.

**Michael Galea**: I will clarify that the 'you' was the collective Liberal Party, but I am happy to withdraw.

**Moira DEEMING**: Thank you. The statue proposal is out of step with tradition, financial reality, morality and common sense. You should get over yourselves; that is what you should do. Serve your constituents.

**Michael Galea**: On a point of order, President, let us just melt the statues down, because clearly Rupert Hamer is rolling in his grave.

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

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (8):* Gaele Broad, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (13)*: Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:27): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1043, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Committees*

#### **Parliamentary Ethics Committee**

##### *Membership*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (18:27): I move:

That Gaelle Broad, Tom McIntosh and Richard Welch be members of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (18:28): This ethics committee has been set up to review the standards of behaviour and code of conduct for MPs. It was established in response to Operation Watts, which revealed industrial-scale branch stacking and rorting of public funds by Labor MPs – it is just worth understanding that context. Finally, after years of independent experts and the Greens calling for a parliamentary standards commissioner and ethics committee, the government was forced to introduce it. Now Labor and the Liberals have decided, deliberately, to only put Labor and coalition MPs on this committee, despite there being a huge crossbench in the Victorian Parliament. This is a highly unusual move, and it will be the only joint committee in this Parliament with no representatives from the crossbench. This is despite repeated meetings where we raised this issue with the government asking them to consider putting crossbenchers on this committee.

It would be reasonable to ask why they failed to do so. If nothing else, it gives the impression of a protection racket. This is Labor and the Liberals deciding that they and they alone will get to decide the code of conduct and standards of behaviour for MPs in this place, which is pretty galling when the impetus for this ethics committee being established was the rorting and scandals uncovered through IBAC investigations within those major parties. A bit of history: in 2019 the Greens moved amendments to establish an independent parliamentary standards commissioner, but they were opposed by Labor and the Liberals, meaning we had to wait six years and have a series of scandals before we actually got an independent commissioner. The Greens introduced a comprehensive parliamentary integrity bill in 2022, which not only included an integrity commissioner but also proposed laws for parliamentarians' interactions with lobbyists and required cooling-off periods for MPs moving into private consultancy roles after their political careers. But these laws were of course opposed by the major parties, and who knows how many years it will be and how many lobbying scandals will have to occur before we see reluctant action on the revolving door between ministers and big corporations.

I know that it is inconvenient, but crossbenchers exist, and crossbenchers and the people they represent should have a say in the codes of conduct and standards of behaviour that MPs should live up to. Crossbenchers also face really different circumstances than those in the major parties, including the nature of our workload and our staffing, and of course crossbenchers are not immune to ethical and conduct challenges. But none of this will be factored into these decisions, because Labor has deliberately decided that crossbenchers should have no voice on this important committee.

Why don't Labor and the Liberals want crossbenchers on this ethics committee? Well, we will never know, because crossbenchers will not get to have these conversations. As a fellow crossbencher suggested when we were discussing this matter, this is all, ironically, pretty unethical. The Greens will not be supporting this motion today.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (8):* Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

**Motion agreed to.**

*Adjournment*

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:37):  
I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Croydon train station**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:37): (1879) My adjournment matter this evening is to the minister for transport. For many years now the Victorian government has remained committed to the removal of level crossings across the state. This is to improve the safety for motorists, pedestrians and passengers on public transport, as well as to alleviate the traffic congestion not only in the present but for years to come. Croydon train station has been one of the many across the state to benefit from these changes. Delivered by the Allan Labor government in August 2024, Croydon station has had not only a congested level crossing at Coolstore Road removed but the Coolstore Road roundabout removed and a new transport hub also constructed. With the completion of works at Croydon station, the Lilydale line became the very first train line in Melbourne to be completely free of level crossings. The action I seek is for the minister to provide insight into what future steps may be taken to maintain this new infrastructure at Croydon in coming years, not only in Croydon but across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**Government accountability**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:38): (1880) My question for the Premier is to ask why ministerial responsibility has been delegated to anonymous spokespersons under this government. When the *Herald Sun* reported on land tax defaults in November last year, with thousands of Victorians refusing to pay their spiralling land tax bills, the response was provided by a government spokesperson. Another news story that focused on the bungled rollout of the container deposit scheme quoted a spokesperson for the state government. In January this year, when the *Age* reported on the \$12 billion Treasurer's advances, it was a government spokesperson that was quoted. Another news report focused on independent schools being caught up in payroll tax, and it was a state government spokesperson that responded. In April this year, when the *Bendigo Advertiser* reported that flood victims were homeless and felt abandoned, a Victorian government spokesperson was quoted for the response. In July, when questions were raised because the state government slashed the number of dangerously poor roads across Victoria without any proof, it was a government spokesperson that responded. In another news article that focused on the lack of federal funding for the Suburban Rail Loop, it was a government spokesperson that provided the response. It seems to me that the Labor state government ministers are very good at outsourcing their responsibilities. To avoid being the bearer of bad news, they hide behind an anonymous spokesperson – a spokesperson with no authority and no accountability.

I commend the Liberal and National shadow cabinet ministers, who do the work, know the brief and respond to media inquiries, who take responsibility. On our side we put our name to public comments, unlike Labor, who rely on anonymous spokespersons to provide media commentary. The action I seek is for this government to step up and for ministers to take responsibility for the decisions made and stop hiding behind anonymous spokespersons. I also hope the media take note and start holding this government and its ministers to account for their actions and stop permitting them to hide behind anonymous spokespersons.

### **Bushfire preparedness**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:40): (1881) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Environment. The action I seek is for the minister to allow Victorians to help with fuel reduction activities in state forests and to implement recommendation 7 of the climate resilience report tabled on 12 August 2025. To anyone who has ever set foot in our forests, it is hard to deny that they are overgrown and in disarray. You can barely walk a step into the forest without seeing a fallen tree or branch littering the ground. This is causing huge concern for residents in nearby communities. They are watching the ever-growing threat of bushfire accumulating on forest floors. They want not only to help reduce the threat of fire but to help new growth that is currently suffocated under the deadfall. By helping with fire reduction activities, constituents can also reduce their costs for heating and cooking. To my constituents, this is a win-win situation.

Deadfall removal is an efficient and cost-effective way to achieve fuel reduction targets. Allowing constituents to perform fuel reduction activities will lessen the workload on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Considering the government reportedly plans to reduce the number of DEECA staff by 350 in the coming months, allowing Victorians to conduct fuel reduction activities will be seen as a rational decision by the government. The action I seek is for the minister to allow Victorians to help with fuel reduction activities in state forests and to implement recommendation 7 of the climate resilience report tabled on 12 August 2025.

### **Koorie Heritage Trust**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:42): (1882) My adjournment matter for tonight is directed to the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples in the other place. Progress is not always linear. It moves at its own pace, even one stitch at a time. Last week I had the privilege of representing the minister at the Koorie Heritage Trust's 40th anniversary celebrations, which coincided with the official opening of Aunty Connie Hart's exhibition *One Stitch at a Time*. The exhibition is a remarkable reflection of the strength, creativity and resilience of First Peoples' cultural practices. Each stitch tells a story and connects us to something far larger than ourselves – to culture, to community and to the continuation of knowledge across generations. It is a reminder that traditions, when nurtured and celebrated, are never lost.

The Koorie Heritage Trust has been central to this work for four decades. Since its founding it has provided a place in the heart of Melbourne where everyone can engage with and learn from the world's oldest living culture. It stands not just as a gallery but as a gathering place where our culture is shared, taught and carried forward. For many, me included, the trust is deeply personal. I still remember vividly visiting as a child and being absolutely immersed. To see the trust flourish in its 40th year, including 10 years located proudly at Federation Square, is something truly special and a testament to the dedication of its supporters. That success is not possible without people. I want to acknowledge the leadership of CEO Tom Mosby, co-chairs Indi Clarke and Aunty Janice Muir, Daniel Ross and the whole Koorie Heritage Trust team. Their enthusiasm for this exhibition was on full display and entirely infectious. The action I seek is for the minister to provide information about how the Allan Labor government has supported the Koorie Heritage Trust in its important work.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:44): (1883) My adjournment is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The action I seek is that the minister publicly acknowledge and appropriately address the health impacts of the SRL works in Heatherton. Infrastructure projects should never be put before people's health, but under the Allan Labor government everyday people are being steamrolled by the Suburban Rail Loop authority. It is disturbing enough to hear about these issues in the media, but it is another thing to hear about them from residents and yet another to experience them personally.

Just a few days ago I received an emotional voicemail message from a resident in Heatherton affected by the SRL works at the Heatherton stabling yard. I would like to tell this resident that I could move the train yard, but the best the opposition can do right now is to rally with community, expose their concerns in Parliament and call on the government to act. Residents are complaining about nausea, vertigo, headaches, vomiting and grinding of their teeth from stress. These symptoms are linked to low-frequency noise and vibrations from generators or machinery, which disrupt the inner ear's balance mechanisms. A constituent who visited their doctor was told that their symptoms were environmentally created. Another constituent became bedbound, with their dog suffering and whimpering in pain. It got so bad that they were forced to leave their home to live with their parents or to couch-surf with friends. Those who remain are forced to leave home by 7 am to avoid the vibrations. But for one of my constituents who works night shift, this is not sustainable. As for tradies, the offer of a shared workplace is also not useful.

What are some of the other tokenistic initiatives that the government has provided? Tea bags and biscuits. If that is not enough, another constituent was offered a massage or a restaurant service. The government also has offered double glazing, but there is a catch: only windows directly facing the site are eligible for upgrades. How does this help when vibrations can be heard well beyond the site? According to Ms Shing, these gestures are a part of 'a whole suite of support'. Well, I have a message for the minister from my residents: your package is not working. They think it is pathetic. One resident spoke to the Suburban Rail Loop Authority via their 1800 number and was told that plans for an acoustic chamber would be completed in late 2026 and that the worst of it would be experienced over several months, if not longer. Minister, can you advise what action you will take to address concerns raised by residents regarding the use of machinery on the Heatherton SRL site that is appearing to make people ill?

### **Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:47): (1884) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the urgent implementation of the optional protocol to the convention against torture known as OPCAT. By ratifying OPCAT, Australia has agreed to put in place mechanisms to prevent torture and inhumane treatment in places of detention. To fulfil this commitment alongside the Commonwealth government, state and territory governments have been tasked with designating their own independent national preventative mechanism, known as an NPM. The NPM will conduct proactive inspections of all places of detention and closed environments. Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales are the only jurisdictions in Australia that have failed to designate their NPM. In 2023 the failures led to the subcommittee on the prevention of torture terminating its visit to Australia. Rwanda is the only other country ever to have such visits terminated. The Yoorrook Justice Commission, numerous inquiries and Ombudsman reports all show that Victoria's prison system is failing. Greater oversight and scrutiny are needed to protect vulnerable communities, including young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Time is of the essence. OPCAT must be urgently implemented in Victoria.

This week Labor and the Liberals worked together to pass the second tranche of Victoria's tough bail laws. After the first tranche was passed earlier this year, we saw hundreds more people forced into the

criminal justice system. Following the changes proposed in the second tranche, we expect the number of incarcerated Victorians to soar even further. At the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre we have already seen what happens when staffing is unable to meet the increasing demand – never-ending lockdowns, severely restricted movement and difficulties accessing essential legal and medical appointments. This has had a profound effect on the social and emotional wellbeing of the women at the centre and their ability to be properly discharged. If the Allan Labor government want full prisons, then they must implement OPCAT in full.

For years a wide range of stakeholders have been calling for Victoria to establish an NPM. In response, the Allan Labor government has consistently blamed a lack of Commonwealth funding. This excuse continues despite a federal Labor government being in power since 2022. So I ask: will the Attorney-General implement OPCAT as a measure of urgency?

### **Gippsland rail line**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:49): (1885) The action I seek is from the Minister for Public and Active Transport. We recently were out on the Gippsland line, and there are incredible upgrades, whether they are stations, signalling, new services or of course the cheaper regional fares that Victorians have been enjoying right across regional Victoria. So the action I seek is: can the minister please update the house on the benefits to be experienced in Gippsland thanks to the upgrades on the Gippsland line?

### **Palliative care**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:50): (1886) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it concerns a rather distressing situation which has been reported recently. Prior to the reporting of it I was contacted by 86-year-old Doris, who had a distressing situation involving her son Terry. A few weeks ago Terry was in Sunshine Hospital dying from cancer and unable to speak or move following a stroke. Despite his terminal illness and inability to move, he was assessed and awarded a NDIS package valued at \$518,000, which was intended to support his care in a community share house. This arrangement was clearly inappropriate given his condition. Terry died just seven days later on 1 August without having access to the support he actually needed – specialist palliative care. Sadly, this is not an isolated case. Palliative care specialists have raised concerns about the increasing instances of bed block across Victoria, where terminally ill patients under 65 are stuck in hospital beds awaiting NDIS assessments. These delays are preventing timely access to palliative care and forcing hospitals to keep patients in high-care beds that are not designed for long-term stays. The situation is expected to worsen after 1 November, when new Commonwealth regulations restrict access to aged care facilities for people under 65, placing even greater pressure on the NDIS to provide timely and appropriate support. This heartbreaking story of Terry and Doris illustrates a problem that demands urgent action. Victorians deserve better coordination between the state health system and the NDIS, and they deserve compassion and dignity in their final days.

The action I seek is for the minister to explain what discussions she has had with her federal colleagues the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme regarding this disgraceful allocation of expensive NDIS packages to palliative care patients in Victoria. As I said, this story of Doris and her son Terry highlights the problems in the system. Doris was really brave in speaking out about the situation. She wanted to highlight just where it was going so wrong. She wanted her son Terry to die with dignity. She knew he was dying, but he was given this ridiculous palliative care package that he could never, ever use as it was assessed and allocated. That is why I am asking the minister to provide that information, so that hopefully we can see some advancements in sorting out these issues that are issues between the federal and state governments.

### Community safety

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:53): (1887) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is that this government commit to implementing all the recommendations of the 2022 inquiry into extremism in Victoria. The dangers of far-right extremism are clear, particularly this week, but they have been growing for years. Fortunately, we already know what an evidence-based approach to far-right extremism looks like, because our own Parliament has already done the work. In 2022 the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee investigated the rise of far-right extremist movements in Victoria in an inquiry initiated by the Greens. That inquiry recommended a range of measures, such as to genuinely fund intervention programs and support workers; prioritise community-led prevention; improve digital literacy; support youth workers; expand anti-racism education, particularly for young men prone to radicalisation; review whether firearms laws should explicitly capture members of violent extremist groups under the fit and proper person test; and ensure ongoing transparent evaluation of counter-extremism programs. Yet three years later this government has yet to implement all of the recommendations. The inquiry had 12 broad recommendations with a number of specific actions under each.

The government's response to the inquiry's recommendations supported five but only supported in principle the remaining seven recommendations. Some of that work has been completed, such as the anti-vilification laws that passed Parliament this year, but some of the work remains either partially completed or shamefully neglected.

It would be helpful for the government to provide reports on the status and timelines for fully implementing these recommendations. Premier, follow the path that the Parliament has already mapped out to tackle radicalisation upstream and invest in community-based prevention.

### Planning policy

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:55): (1888) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning. The Allan Labor government is implementing a new single-home code to streamline approvals for small lots, cut red tape and deliver more homes faster while maintaining design standards. The action I seek is that the minister provide an update on how the government will ensure councils and communities are supported to make the most of this faster, simpler process.

### Energy policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:55): (1889) We face a very significant moment in the state, where gas and energy prices have been surging upwards and upwards and upwards. Electricity costs have gone up massively, with all the costs going up for domestic consumers from 1 August. People will have got the letters in the mail. The concern I have – and this is a matter for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources – is that the costs are being loaded up and up and up. The government is seeking, through a bill coming to this chamber tomorrow, to add even more costs. We have seen the work that has been done by Bruce Mountain from the Victoria Energy Policy Centre – very important work costing matters out from the AEMO figures and showing very conclusively that the costs are not as AEMO has laid them out. We know, for example, with VNI West there is a massive cost increase, going from \$3.2 billion to \$7.6 billion and with a likely range of up to 50 per cent more than that figure, which would take it to \$11.4 billion just on one project, but the Mountain figures make it very clear that the cost could easily be in the order of \$28 billion.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, I will tell you who will pay for it: every cent of that will be sheeted home to Victorians. Every cent of it will be paid for by small businesses and households. So what I am asking the minister to do is to publish on a website, visible to every member of the community, who will pay for all of these matters.

The key point here is that massive, massive increases are already occurring for households in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. But with the forthcoming costs, if you amortise those costs across every household and every business in the state, with businesses paying in some cases on his estimates up to 300 per cent more and households paying up to 50 per cent more and perhaps even greater than that, what I think is required is for the minister to come clean and tell us the figure. What does her department calculate will be the cost of all of these projects in the bills of Victorians? How much will it be per year? Will it be \$500 extra? Will it be \$1000 extra? Will it be \$2000 extra? Will it be \$5000 extra? Victorians are going to pay through the nose, and the minister for energy needs to come clean.

### **WorkCover**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:58): (1890) My adjournment today is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action I seek is that the disastrous WorkCover ‘modernisations’ that came into effect last year be repealed. Michael, who has asked me to share this story, his story, served as a health and safety representative committed to creating a safer workplace. His psychological injury arose from bullying and harassment by managers after he raised critical occupational health and safety concerns. But the trauma that broke him was not only from the workplace; it came from the workers compensation system itself. In November 2024 Michael was initially assessed at 30 per cent whole-person impairment, acknowledging the deep impact of his injury. Yet just two months later, in January 2025, this rating was inexplicably downgraded to 15 per cent without any explanation or consultation. This brutal cut was not just a number; it dismissed his suffering and stripped away his rights. Although legislation guarantees injured workers the right to timely payments, it took six months for the agent to correct mistakes in Michael’s weekly payments. During this time Michael was forced to survive on reduced payments while mentally fighting the agent and proving that he was at high risk of self-harm.

Since June 2025, following the downgraded whole person impairment rating requested by the agent and WorkSafe, Michael has endured two months with no weekly payments at all, leaving him isolated, vulnerable and desperate. Michael’s repeated requests for access to critical documents and transparency were met with stonewalling and silence. The gaslighting and dismissal shattered his trust and sense of reality, pushing him into despair, self-harm and hospitalisation. The psychological scars left by his workplace injury are deep, but it is the cruelty and neglect of the workers compensation system that nearly destroyed him. To make matters worse, the new WPI system, introduced last year intended to fairly assess ongoing entitlements, is being misused by agents and WorkSafe, lacking proper governance or oversight.

Injured workers like Michael face premature and unfair decisions that strip them of dignity and support. Michael’s story is a devastating example of how the workers compensation system inflicts far more harm than the original injury. It reveals a system that retraumatizes vulnerable workers, denies basic support and drives some to the brink of despair, all while failing those it was meant to protect. Minister, let us fix the system.

### **Living Libraries infrastructure program**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:01): (1891) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Local Government, Minister Staikos in the other place –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: A fine minister indeed, Mr McIntosh. The action that I am seeking is an update on the support being provided to local libraries by the Allan Labor government. We have many studious and shrewd members in this place, I am sure you will agree, and I would like to take this opportunity, in the spirit of bipartisanship, to recognise and congratulate Ms Bath, Ms Crozier and Ms Lovell for shrewdly not supporting some of the outrageous comments by the Liberal backbench in a recent motion – it is very much appreciated.

Libraries serve a very important role in our communities, and we know that through the Living Libraries infrastructure program. The grant applications for that are actually now open. They will close on 19 September. I very much encourage all of the fantastic local libraries in the south-east to engage with this program again, indeed as many have in the past, because we know that previously Dandenong Library received a little bit over \$300,000 towards a project to deliver parents, multifaith and quiet study spaces, providing more welcoming and accessible facilities to meet the community's needs. We have also seen Bunjil Place Library in Casey receive \$14,000 towards their study zone project. Many worthwhile projects have already been supported by this scheme, big and small, and I want to make sure that libraries in my region are engaging with this process again. I would appreciate the minister's update.

### Short-stay accommodation

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:03): (1892) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer. The action I seek is for the Treasurer to repeal the short-stay levy, which is harming Victorian tourism businesses. The Allan Labor government's holiday tax on short-stay providers is a greedy tax that is harming Victorian tourism businesses and totally failing to achieve its objectives, and it should be repealed. Recently released data from the ABS shows that international visitors are choosing other states over Victoria, and it is easy to see why, as the Labor government's holiday tax has made taking a holiday in Victoria more expensive than ever. Victoria saw a drop of over 2000 visitors in June 2025 compared to June last year, even while all other states recorded an increase in the number of tourists. Visitor arrivals to Victoria are still 10.6 per cent lower than they were pre COVID in June 2019, and Labor's holiday tax is slowing the recovery of Victoria's tourism sector.

Accommodation providers across my electorate have complained about the negative impact of Labor's holiday tax. One chief executive of a large property management company said that the data showed bookings in Victoria have dropped while bookings in other states are growing. The purpose of the short-stay levy was to push accommodation providers to stop offering their property for short stays and instead offer their property for the long-term rental market. But it has been reported that Homes Victoria rental bond data shows that the number of long-term rentals is actually dropping. The president of the Macedon Ranges Accommodation Association has said that this levy targets many small operators who are not even able to offer their property as a long-term rental because it does not meet certain requirements – for example, it is a small one-bedroom cottage without a permanent kitchen. Other small operators are struggling with the onerous reporting burdens and lack of information and clarity around how the rules apply. One accommodation manager has said that Labor's holiday tax is just bad policy and that when you compare the outcomes to the objectives it is just fail, fail, fail. If the purpose of the tax is to push providers out of short-stay and into long-term rentals, the policy is failing. If the purpose is to raise money to build social housing, the policy is also failing.

We know that Labor are way behind on their social housing targets. The only outcome of Labor's holiday tax is tourism operators being squeezed for cash to fund project blowouts and tourists being scared away from Victoria. A Battin Liberal government will scrap the holiday tax, restore confidence in the tourism sector and bring visitors back to Victoria, where they can enjoy all that our wonderful state has to offer.

### Wallan quarry

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (19:06): (1893) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with members of the local Wallan and Beveridge community in regard to the planned quarry in their neighbourhood she recently approved. The Wallan and Beveridge community are fiercely opposed to the process which has taken place in regard to this quarry – a process that has ignored them and dismissed their concerns, lacks transparency and threatens to devastate their lives. This quarry has

been approved in the heart of a designated growth corridor and sets a dangerous precedent by putting heavy industry before families and the community.

Last week I met with the community and listened to what they had to say. It was very clear that they are overwhelmingly and deeply saddened and frustrated by the minister's decision to approve this quarry and the lack of meaningful consultation with them. They fear for their children's safety, with up to 250 additional heavy trucks passing dangerously close to school zones and childcare centres on already congested roads. Residents speak of being financially ruined or unable to move out, with homes now effectively unsellable. They also rightly fear the irreversible damage to significant Wurundjeri and Taungurung cultural heritage sites, the loss of native habitats and the contamination of groundwater. Most damningly, they describe this process as a sham consultation. They were presented with a precinct structure plan that never mentioned a quarry, only to be informed later that a decision had effectively already been made. Ecological studies were kept secret and First Nations consultation was shallow and tokenistic, and resident petitions with 1200-plus signatures and an overwhelming 96 per cent of council submissions opposing the project have all been ignored.

In talking to residents, I learned that in the three years this process has gone on none of the four planning ministers in that time have gone down to the community to meet with them. Minister, this community deserves transparency and accountability. The more they are met with silence, the more this decision looks like the result of a flawed, opaque process that puts the profits of developers before the needs of everyday people. Minister, will you show your face to the people of Wallan and Beveridge, who will be affected by this life-altering, community-shaking decision? If you cannot, then this project rightfully deserves to be put back in the ground.

#### **Police resources**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:09): (1894) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police in the other place, and it relates to the issue of policing and public safety in Prahran. Many residents of Prahran, Windsor and South Yarra are worried about issues of public safety and antisocial behaviour in the area generally, but particularly around Chapel Street. Some are home owners that have lived in the area for decades, others are renters and many of them are new to the area. Prahran is a wonderful place. It is a highly walkable area with great access to public transport, but many worry that public safety issues could undermine this amenity. What a lot of residents agree on is that maintaining a strong police presence in this area is critical to keeping people safe and allowing Chapel Street to thrive. We know that past governments have tried cutting police staff, and that does not work. We also know that only a Labor government, who put their money where their mouth is, are serious about keeping Victorians safe, because we know that action, not slogans, is how we support our police and protect our communities. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me and my office with details of how the community in Prahran has benefited from the Allan Labor government's investments in the police force and how this is helping us keep people safe.

#### **Parentline**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:10): (1895) My matter this evening is for the Treasurer, and it relates specifically to Parentline. What I ask the Treasurer to do is to provide the \$1.6 million it requires to keep Parentline open. We all know by now – or at least I hope we know by now – that on 31 October Parentline is to be shut. That is a great travesty. In fact today I took the effort of making sure that I looked at the government's website – that is, the department's website. It was illuminating, to say the least, because it speaks quite rightly of the great service Parentline provides. It has, for example, some reasons to ring Parentline. Some reasons include child behaviour and development, parent/carer-child relationships, education and bullying. It also has a number of quotes from people – that is, parents – who have used this service. This is a telephone service from 8 am to

midnight, seven days a week, including public holidays and weekends. The two quotes here on the government website are:

I often lack confidence in what I am doing so being able to talk with someone was really great for me. I did not feel put down or judged.

A further quote:

I felt a connection with the counsellor. They tailored (the call) to my situation.

According to this website, the government's own website, the common parent concerns that are addressed by the website and the expert counsellors – these are not people who are not experts, they are absolutely experts; they range from social workers to teachers to psychologists – are issues like, for example:

'My 8 and 10 year old continuously fight.'

'I am worried that my child is bullied at school.'

'My stepchildren ignore me.'

'My 12 year old daughter is on the internet a lot and I am not sure what she is doing.'

'I suspect that my 14 year old is seeing an 18 year old.'

'Child care had told me that my 2 year old is biting other children.'

'My 15 year old has hit me.'

'I read my daughter's Facebook – she said she does not want to live anymore.'

This website of the government's does give everyone an indication, a flavour of the value of Parentline. I will end with one further quote:

I was most impressed that Parentline took my issues seriously. Sometimes I feel as if I am banging my head against a brick wall but I felt I got somewhere after the call

There are 17,800 telephone calls received by Parentline every single year. The service they provide to parents to assist with their children aged five to 18 is critical. We cannot afford to let Parentline close on 31 October, and that is why tonight I am appealing to the Treasurer to find the \$1.6 million in the budget so she can give that to her colleagues and those around the cabinet table, so we can continue to have Parentline, because there is no substitute for Parentline.

### **Tackling Leukaemia**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (19:13): (1896) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and in speaking to the Minister for Health I would like to create an awareness of and highlight a wonderful grassroots charity organisation called Tackling Leukaemia Incorporated. The action I seek from the minister is to meet with this Victoria-based not-for-profit grassroots charity, who are doing amazing work. I would like her to meet with them and to work out a way how she can partner, whether it be in logistics or resource support, with them to continue to expand their life-saving work. Tackling Leukaemia Victoria only came into existence in 2021, but their patron is the Honourable David Hurley, the former Governor-General of Australia. The charity's mission is to increase the number of registered stem cell donors across Australia, but in our case specifically Victoria, particularly among those First Nations, Māori and Pasifika communities. These groups are tragically over-represented in leukaemia diagnoses but under-represented on the national donor registry. Without a suitable donor match, the chances of survival are greatly reduced. The flip side is that with a donor, life expectancy and treatment success is elevated. Every half an hour someone in Australia is diagnosed with blood cancer and more than 5600 lose their lives.

Early intervention is key. Tackling Leukaemia has developed a very simple but effective grassroots recruitment strategy. They partner with sports clubs to recruit fit young people – that rules me out – and invite them to swab their mouths to see if they can go on that donor registry. Last month they swabbed at events with the Old Geelong Football Club and the Old Carey Grammarians Football Club

and added 100 new donors to the register, and I think that is fantastic. They partner with Stem Cell Donors Australia. It is all about getting connection, meeting those young people and asking them for a very simple operation. In the last year they have increased by 10 per cent, but they have a vision to really promote and put more and more people on that register so that people will have a great chance of survival. I ask the minister to meet with them, find out about the work they do and work out a way to support this wonderful charity.

#### **Responses**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (19:16): There were 18 matters in the adjournment debate this evening, and they will be referred to the relevant ministers.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:16 pm.**