



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 18 June 2025**

**By authority of the Victorian Government Printer**



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

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

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

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

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

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

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

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

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

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

Emma Kealy

#### **Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

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

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,

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

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**Wednesday 18 June 2025**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Matt Fregon) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Bills*

**National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005, the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:34): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:34): This bill presents the second stage of legislation to establish VicGrid as a transmission network plan in Victoria and implement the Victorian transmission investment framework.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:35): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Local Jobs First Act 2003 to provide for additional obligations, penalties and enforcement powers related to Local Jobs First and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (09:35): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:35): This bill amends the Local Jobs First Act 2003 to maximise opportunities for local jobs and businesses by strengthening the Local Jobs First commissioner's compliance and enforcement powers, introducing new consequences for noncompliance with Local Jobs First and clarifying the obligations of suppliers and agencies under the Local Jobs First scheme.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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### Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (09:36): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, the Building Act 1993, the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 and the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 and for other purposes.

#### **Motion agreed to.**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (09:36): I request a brief explanation of the bill, please.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (09:36): The Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025 responds to the review of the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 and is a key element of the government's building reform program. The bill carries a range of amendments identified during the review of the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 to provide a regulatory framework that strengthens consumer protections for consumers as well as supporting growth and innovation in the building industry by strengthening requirements and protections for domestic building contracts and major domestic building contracts; authorising deposit limits, progress payment stages and progress payment limits to be prescribed in regulations with any payments for work completed, subject to a general proportionality requirement for all major domestic building contracts and any exemptions; allowing the use of cost escalation clauses in Victoria for MDBCs with a contract price of \$1 million or higher, with a 5 per cent ceiling on price increases and additional consumer protections; amending the definition of 'domestic building work' to allow building owners and builders to enter into preliminary agreements for plans and specifications and bills of quantity; providing the transfer of compliance monitoring and enforcement functions from the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria to the Victorian Building Authority; and making other minor amendments to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012, the Building Act 1993 and the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025.

#### **Read first time.**

#### **Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

#### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (09:38): Notices of motion 11, 62 and 90 will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

#### *Petitions*

#### **Mount Doran battery energy storage system**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) presented a petition bearing 155 signatures:

##### **Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly our objection to the proposed development of the Mt Doran Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Planning Application PA2403103

The proposed project by developer Iberdrola presents severe bushfire risks, direct non-compliance with state planning regulations, environmental degradation, and substantial threats to public safety and community well-being.

Iberdrola has failed to adequately engage the community about the proposed BESS installation at Mount Doran, providing only one meeting and a letter to a handful of homes, leaving little time to object. Despite

## DOCUMENTS

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starting the process in November 2023, Iberdrola only informed a few nearby households in mid March 2025. Employees at the meeting couldn't address residents' concerns, and left them with less than 1 month to review 300+ pages of documents before the April 10th, 2025 decision. Our objections include: Failure to comply with Bushfire Planning Policy; Violation of environmental protection obligations; Non-compliance with Farming Zone planning controls

Public safety and emergency service failures; Inconsistency with public interest and community amenity.

### Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly strongly urges the Government to reject this application. The project must be relocated to a site with lower fire risks and minimal environmental impact. It is critical that responsible, sustainable alternatives are considered to protect the community, wildlife, and broader environmental interests. The proposed development raises significant legal, environmental, and safety concerns that violate established planning regulations. This project does not comply with the Moorabool Planning Scheme and contradicts key Victorian planning objectives, posing a clear risk to the local community and environment. The proposed site's high fire risk, along with potential adverse impacts on public safety and the surrounding ecosystem, makes it an inappropriate location for such a development.

### *Documents*

### Documents

#### **Incorporated list as follows:**

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

Auditor-General:

Annual Plan 2025–26

Contractors and Consultants: Management – Ordered to be published

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 39 and 57.

### *Bills*

#### **Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

##### *Council's agreement*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (09:39): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

### *Motions*

#### **Motions by leave**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the escalating global tensions and the threat to global peace and calls on the Victorian government to immediately stop the supply of weapons parts to Israel and the US.

**Leave refused.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Technology support**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:40): Today I want to draw attention to the challenges our ageing population is facing as technology becomes more prevalent in our society. With more and more of our daily lives heading online, from banking to insurance, bookings for outings, medical appointments, paying bills and receiving packages – the list goes on and on – many of our ageing population are being left behind. Many face confusion over how to complete these tasks safely. They fear the increasing scams circulating, targeting those who are not as tech-savvy, and some simply do not have the access to computers, smartphones or tablets to even complete these tasks. Whilst some have family and friends or neighbours to help or teach them, some are completely on their own.

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Our wonderful neighbourhood and community houses are a wealth of resources, offering support with technology, access to computers and even classes to learn how to complete these everyday tasks. However, due to ever increasing demand, they are stretched to support everyone. I urge the minister to invest in supporting our ageing population regarding technology to not only be able to access the services they require but do so in confidence and without fear.

On another matter, Deputy Speaker, I do have an apple for you today if I do not get kicked out during question time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Props.

**John Pernu**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (09:41): I want to take a moment to acknowledge and pay tribute to someone who has given so much to our community, John Pernu, who sadly passed away on 27 May. John was the heart and driving force behind the *Boronia and The Basin Community News* for many years. He joined the committee around five years ago, drawn by his passion for local community initiatives. Not long after he stepped up as president during a time of major transition following the retirement of many of the paper's founders. John did not just steady the ship, he transformed it. He modernised the way the paper was produced, introduced a strong digital presence, secured grant funding and created new ways for the community to engage with the paper. Much of this he taught himself, pouring countless hours into improving systems and supporting others. But it was never just about the work. John had a unique gift for connecting people. Always warm, respectful and thoughtful, he built strong relationships, launched the paper's annual volunteer thankyou event and was always the first to lift others up. Even after stepping back due to ill health, John remained a guiding voice. To JP and to his wife Katrina: we thank you deeply. John leaves behind an impactful legacy, and he will be sorely missed by many.

### Vehicle registration fees

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (09:43): When is a motorcycle a car? When the Allan Labor government has worked out it can charge you more to register it. In Victoria, if you think you own a three-wheel motorbike, you do not. It is a car, and as such you will pay \$780 to register it. If your motor trike was really a motorbike, the most it would cost you in regional Victoria is \$468. But as Minister Horne has responded to my inquiry, even the Department of Transport and Planning acknowledges the inconsistency of having to register a motor trike as a motor vehicle but requiring the rider to hold a motorcycle licence to operate it. Amending the regulations they said would be too costly and complex. What a load of rubbish. Every other state in Australia registers a trike as a motorbike. The department bemoans just how complex it would be to change to five-digit numberplates – please.

Three-wheel motor trikes give a sense of safety and control to many and a genuine sense of independence to the disabled, who have turned to trikes in droves. As one of my constituents quite rightly asked about her three-wheel motorbike, when did Harley-Davidson ever make a car? What car has handlebars and footrests and requires a motorbike licence and helmet to be driven? And where on her bike does she fit the car doors and the seat belt? This is not just an anomaly, it is a bureaucratic idiocy which could be fixed immediately and painlessly. As my constituent also points out, this is plain stupidity and price gouging – her words, not mine, but I am not going to argue.

### Monbulk electorate schools

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:44): I rise to celebrate some wonderful achievements across the Monbulk district. At The Patch Primary School I was thrilled to help open their beautiful new learning spaces, designed to reflect their nature-based philosophy – this school has its own wetlands – and built with the future in mind. Congratulations to principal Jim Burnside, the whole school community and the architects and builders who made this happen. What a wonderful asset this is, to be enjoyed for decades to come.

Soon it will be St John the Baptist Primary in Ferntree Gully celebrating their new building, made possible through state government funding. I had the chance to visit their new learning spaces in the final stages of their construction, as the painting was taking place, and I cannot wait to see the finished product.

I also had the delightful opportunity to visit Monbulk Primary School's breakfast club last week, where I enjoyed porridge made with love by the students themselves. Seeing the conversations over breakfast and the smiles on faces before starting their lessons was proof that the benefits of this program go beyond filling bellies. It nourishes minds and souls as well. Long may it last.

**energy infrastructure**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:45): It was cause for celebration on the weekend when I joined Senator Lisa Darmanin and Yarra Ranges councillors to officially open the Monbulk microgrid. This project is paving the way for a more resilient, sustainable energy future and shows what can be achieved when three levels of government come together to address the challenges posed by climate change.

**Belgrave Lantern Festival**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:45): Finally, this Saturday the Belgrave Lantern Festival returns to light up the longest and darkest day of the year on the winter solstice. It is a not-to-be-missed event on the hills calendar, so come one, come all and bring your lanterns along.

**Breen Printing**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:46): Congratulations to local Healesville small business Breen Printing for being named the regional printer of the year for 2025 at the National Print Awards held in Sydney. Breen is a strong name in the Healesville community. They go above and beyond to assist and ensure the job gets done while producing quality work. They are family owned and operated, and it comes as no surprise to me that they have won this award. It is a well-deserved recognition. Well done to Kirsty, Luke and the whole Breen team.

**Sebastian Atkins-Davis**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:46): It is not often you hear about an acclaimed 14-year-old winemaker. Sebastian Atkins-Davis from Steels Gate Wines in Dixons Creek has gained praise for his unique and well-received 'smerlot' and Atkins-Davis cabernet shiraz. Seb is following in the footsteps of his fathers, Steels Gate Wines owners and winemakers Matthew Davis and Brad Atkins, and he is leading the way in his winemaking process, even though he is not old enough to drink it. Great job, Seb. I look forward to watching what else you achieve and drinking more great wines from Steels Gate.

**Lions Club of Eildon**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:47): It was a big milestone for the Eildon Lions club and club president Kevin, celebrating 50 years and ringing in the occasion with a club dinner. Over the 50 years 183 members have joined the club, which is a big achievement for a small town. The club has had an important role in the community, with key projects including the Big River camp, the Eildon Lions leisure park and the Eildon Dams Museum. Founding member Syd Savage has been a member for the entire 50 years, and his wife Chris has been on the journey for that time but has only been able to be a member for 26 years.

**Footscray High School**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (09:47): Twenty-nine years ago Footscray High School was shut down – no prizes for guessing by whom – but since its reopening under a Labor government in 2020 the school has gone from strength to strength. This year marks a milestone: the first graduating class to have completed their entire secondary schooling at the new Footscray High. Across the Pilgrim, Barkly and

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

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Kinnear campuses, this school community has benefited from generational investment under the Allan Labor government, turning vision into reality for public education in the inner west.

I recently attended a dinner hosted at the Kinnear campus by the VET cookery students, and it was phenomenal. Supported by local institution Bar Thyme, the produce came from the Footscray High farm. The four-course menu was prepared and served by the students themselves. We dined under student-made decorations and were serenaded by the school's music students.

The other week I was at Footscray High's music showcase and heard a brilliant cover of Tool's *Forty Six & 2* by student band the Pilgrims. You can check them out on my Instagram. It was good enough that the federal arts minister Tony Burke gave it a like. Later this week I will be attending the 100-year anniversary of the Bally campus. It has seen many iterations: Footscray college of domestic arts, where my grandmother went, Footscray girls school, Gilmore girls college and now Footscray High.

### Drought

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (09:49): The drought taskforce set up by the Premier clearly puts the responsibility of a positive, active drought response on the shoulders of our Premier. The Premier has been to my electorate once – without meeting with local councillors, without meeting with local community leaders – to talk about the drought. The government again convened a meeting in Shepparton last week, and again very little was delivered to the desperate farmers of south-west Victoria. I call on the Premier to absolutely stake a plan to the public to make it clear what the support is and what the mechanism is that is going to make sure that the agricultural industries across south-west Victoria will be here next year. There needs to be a plan of financial support and assistance, not only just now for media but for the future of communities and families right across south-west Victoria. They are meeting again this week. I call on the Premier to make sure there is a clear plan.

### Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (09:50): Additionally, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, which has been given the power from Torquay through to Warrnambool to manage one of the best coastlines in Australia – in fact the best coastline in Australia – continues to upset and antagonise communities. The Lorne community at the beautiful Point Grey and the Kennett River community at the Kennett River picnic ground are desperate to be heard by this government through its agency the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority. I call on the government to immediately review and seek better community input.

### James 'Jimmy' Mentor

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (09:50): It is with great sadness that I rise today to acknowledge the passing of James Mentor. Jimmy was a dear friend to many in our labour movement. I first met Jimmy when we were both in Young Labor and students at Monash University. I would like to say we became close because we were fighting Tories, but we were actually fighting our comrades in Young Labor Left. Student politics can be brutal, but you always had a friend in Jimmy. He had a unique ability to connect with people from across the political divide and earn their respect. Jimmy was the best kind of friend, the friend who was always there for you, the friend with whom you could pick up where you left off.

Jimmy gave so much of his time and his heart to our labour movement. Come election time, he would be one of the first to volunteer. At this most recent federal election he was helping in his beloved eastern suburbs, and they came up red. Passionate about education policy, he championed this in many roles, from the Monash student union to the National Union of Students and to roles with both the Victorian and federal Labor governments.

Jimmy will be sorely missed by many, but he will live on in the memories we have of him. Jimmy, I will remember you every time I watch the Magpies at the G and every time I hand out a Labor how-to-vote card, and I will remember you every time I hear a university student sing 'Student unity forever'. I will remember you every time I take a group of Young Labor through Parliament on a tour

and when I see the hopes and dreams written on their faces. To all of Jimmy's friends, families and colleagues, I extend my deepest condolences. Vale, Jimmy Mentor.

**Ovens Valley solar projects**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (09:52): I rise to put on record my bitter disappointment about the battery energy storage system project that was given the green light at Dederang last week. After a couple of years of angst, research and public meetings, this hardworking community have been let down by the Allan Labor government. Renewables have a place in our energy mix, but they should never be used to belt a community into submission. The lack of consultation is an insult to this community and shows that it always was and always will be a box-ticking exercise – consulted the community, tick.

Further to this, Bobinawarraah – or Meadow Creek, as the proponents like to call it – is a solar factory proposition 20 kilometres from Wangaratta. Again we have a community that has objected to the location on prime agricultural land, with genuine concerns for the future sustainability of farming in this region should this project get the green light too. Submissions have closed for those objecting to this solar factory, and I note the Goulburn–Murray Water report says the proposal is not in accordance with the guidance of the EPA guideline for onsite wastewater management. The proposal poses a high risk of offsite impacts and poses a high risk to the water quality of the Ovens River at Wangaratta, especially in their special water supply catchment. Only time will tell if the Victorian government is prepared to risk the water supply that supplies the Wangaratta community of some 30,000 people or if, like the Dederang community and the Colbinabbin renewable projects, it simply gets rubberstamped and the project continues with the renewables-at-any-cost agenda. If submissions are closed for the public, then they should be closed for everyone. The GMW report does not and will not pass the pub test to install a solar factory in Bobinawarraah. It is over to you, Minister.

**Sara Murdock**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:53): I would like to extend my community's heartfelt congratulations to local pharmacist Sara Murdock, who was recently named the Victorian Pharmacist of the Year for 2025. From very humble, war-torn beginnings to starting a new life in Australia and finding meaning in her healthcare work as a young mum, Sara's journey has been nothing short of remarkable. Serving and keeping our community healthy from Pharmacy 777 at 108 Kent Road in Pascoe Vale, Sara has transformed the pharmacy into a vibrant, patient-first health hub. Since engaging with the Victorian Labor government's pharmacy program, Sara and her team have delivered well over 1000 vaccinations whilst forging strong partnerships with local GPs, aged care facilities, neighbourhood centres, schools, charitable organisations and the wider local community, including through last year's successful Pascoe Vale North Cole Reserve community health expo. Commendations to Sara. The award is a true testament to her dedication, work and selflessness in providing diligent, conscientious and compassionate care to many on a daily basis. I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Health, who is at the table, on a visit there very soon in due course.

**East Coburg Cricket Club**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:54): On 2 May the East Coburg Cricket Club celebrated its 2024–25 premiership night and highlighted the efforts of longtime club true believer Joseph Trimboli, with an astonishing 38-year ongoing involvement in the club. Joe has more recently become East Coburg's first cricketer to play in a premiership with his two young sons Aidan and Nathan. As one of the club's longest serving captains, coaches, players and life members, Joe has six premierships under his belt and has been bestowed the title of club legend. Coming from a migrant background, with Joe's father Frank born in Varapodio in Calabria, Italy, Joe's family journey and contribution to sport in our community exemplify the very best of what the East Coburg club is all about.

**Bowel cancer**

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (09:55): Today is Red Apple Day, Bowel Cancer Australia's annual giving day. This morning MPs across the political spectrum gathered for a photo in the Assembly to show our united support. Thanks to all members who joined us and those wearing the red apple ribbon today. Your support means a great deal. Red Apple Day falls within Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, held each June to raise awareness of Australia's second-deadliest cancer. Bowel cancer takes the lives of 101 Australians every week, over 5200 a year, despite being one of the most treatable cancers if detected early. While often thought of as an older person's disease, bowel cancer is now the deadliest cancer for Australians aged 25 to 54, which makes early screening and awareness more important than ever.

As many here know, my chief of staff and former member of this Parliament Donna Hope OAM was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2014 while serving and now is an ambassador for Bowel Cancer Australia. To support this cause I recently completed a 27-kilometre trek along the whole Mornington electorate coastline, raising nearly \$3000 so far – and yes, I am still recovering. I will also be completing my bowel cancer screening test today and encourage each and every one of you to do the same. To those who can, you can also still donate to Bowel Cancer Australia on my page at [redappleday.au](http://redappleday.au) or at [bit.ly/chriswalk](http://bit.ly/chriswalk). Together we can save lives.

**King's Birthday honours**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:56): Today I want to take a moment to recognise and celebrate two outstanding members of our community who have been honoured in the King's Birthday honours list for their incredible service. In particular I want to acknowledge police inspector Lisa Prentice-Evans on receiving the Australian Police Medal. She is our local area commander, whose leadership and dedication were especially evident during the Exford school bus crash tragedy, a time that tested and showcased her exceptional professionalism, compassion and care for our community.

I also want to congratulate Wayne Barnes from the Bacchus Marsh SES, who has been awarded the Emergency Services Medal. Wayne's decades of service as a VICSES volunteer, combined with his experience as an intensive care paramedic with Ambulance Victoria, have made him an invaluable asset. His distinguished work in rescue operations with a tireless focus on patient wellbeing has taken him not only across Victoria but throughout Australia and around the world.

Emergency services workers and volunteers do the job not for the accolades or the recognition. We are incredibly fortunate to have people like Inspector Evans and Wayne Barnes serving our community, and I thank them.

**Gordon Bowman**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:57): Last Thursday I attended a memorial service in Leongatha for a longstanding friend, Gordon Bowman. Gordon passed away two weeks ago from a brain tumour. He was a paramedic for 50 years, serving the Leongatha community for the last 25 years and many other parts of the state for the other 25 years. Gordon was also the president of Ambulance Employees Australia for over 20 years. He supported his colleagues not only as a team manager but also in many battles for better wages, conditions and safety in the job. I want to thank him for his service and also extend my condolences to his wife Pat and four children and 12 grandchildren. Vale, Gordon Bowman.

**Uniting Prahran**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (09:58): Two weeks ago I visited Uniting Prahran on Chapel Street, a key service hub focused on helping people with mental health issues and homelessness on and around Chapel Street, and witnessed extraordinary compassion in action – volunteers working tirelessly to support some of our most vulnerable in the community and people struggling with significant mental health issues who desperately need our help. But what I also witnessed was a system failing these people every single day. Uniting are operating often at 70 per cent understaffing, and this

means that their services are constrained and their mental health professionals cannot safely conduct outreach work. They cannot go outside to help the very people wandering Chapel Street who need support the most. Just last week their van was stolen, stripping away even more of their limited capacity to reach those in crisis. This is the reality of frontline mental health services under this government – dedicated organisations like Uniting doing exemplary work with woefully inadequate resources, while people with serious mental health issues and conditions fall through the cracks. The consequences are absolutely devastating, and when we fail to provide proper mental health outreach we see increased crime and antisocial behaviour. We see vulnerable people deteriorating on our streets instead of getting the coordinated care that they deserve. These organisations need more than our admiration, they need proper funding for frontline staff and better linkages between services.

**Yoorrook Justice Commission**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (09:59): I want to acknowledge and thank Yoorrook commissioner Travis Lovett for initiating the Walk for Truth. Thousands of people have joined the walk from Portland to Parliament. The walk will end here today with a ceremony in Queen's Hall. It is a celebration of strength and resilience of First Peoples, the oldest living culture in the world. I am proud that in Victoria we are the first in the country to have the Yoorrook truth-telling process. Yoorrook is giving us a great gift of knowledge and asks us to walk with them to share this. We are all part of this history. It is a significant time for all Victorians. We will remember this as a time of real progress – of learning the truth of the impacts of colonisation told by First Peoples. The Yoorrook truth-telling will stand as a record for the past wrongs – the massacres, the stolen generation, the stolen lands and language and so much more. It is a very uncomfortable truth but necessary for us all to move forward. First Peoples culture holds living wisdom that will benefit all of us. First Peoples have thousands of years of deep knowledge of the lands, waters and skies. They have told stories that have been passed down through generations, and they have a deep cultural understanding of this land where we all live. Truth-telling and treaty is how we close the gap. Victoria's latest Closing the Gap data shows we have mixed results. Our progress on some targets has gotten worse, and why is that? Because for over 200 years governments and our systems have been making decisions for First Peoples.

**Geelong public transport**

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (10:01): Mid last year the Allan Labor government was able to open the regional rail revival program for the Geelong region. This has seen much-needed investment in duplicating the rail line between the Marshall and Waurn Ponds train stations. It has seen a redevelopment of the Waurn Ponds train station, the Marshall train station and the Geelong train station, and importantly, it has improved the opportunity for people to catch a bus to these train stations and then obviously get onto the train and go off to Melbourne. This investment that was delivered by the Allan Labor government has made the Geelong commuter experience much, much better. I had the pleasure just last week of talking to a constituent in the queue at the supermarket, who was commenting that he is able to use the pedestrian and cycling trails to get to these train stations, which was a key part of the project. The last mile – or the first mile – is a very, very important investment that can be made when we invest in our public transport systems.

**Springvale post office**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (10:02): I rise today to voice my strong objection to Australia Post's decision to close the Springvale post shop. The Springvale post shop first opened in 1864 and has been a significant part of the community, relocating multiple times before settling next to what is now known as post office lane. A post office holds an important place in the community. For businesses it provides vital functions such as parcel tracking and banking services. For individuals the post office provides a vital link to government services, identity verification and sending parcels to loved ones overseas. For the elderly, those with a disability or even those without a car, moving the post office will render these services highly inaccessible. For charities like the Springvale Benevolent Society, who have used the PO box in Springvale for over 60 years and serve our most vulnerable in the

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community, it will be devastating and time-consuming, having to travel further to collect their mail. With the nearest post shops being over 2 kilometres away, the lack of consideration for our beautiful community and the need to have an accessible post office location is appalling. This is why I have been busy alongside the federal member for Hotham making clear our strong objections to the removal of the Springvale post shop, and we will not stop advocating for our communities. Last Friday I, alongside several community leaders and residents, came together at the front of the post shop and protested the closure. Shame on Australia Post.

### Community safety

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:04): At 3 am on Sunday 1 June a group of white supremacists posed outside Northland shopping centre with a horrifically racist banner. I understand that Northland security could not see the wording of that banner from their control room, but they called the police, and police commenced an investigation immediately on the Sunday morning as soon as the details became clear. The mainstream media have chosen largely not to cover this incident, and as members here might know, they have also chosen not to cover a similar incident this week and indeed an incident that happened here on the steps of Parliament with an antisemitic banner last year. I understand from talking to journalists that they are trying to draw a genuine line between reporting the news and not giving publicity to what are very obviously stunts designed to draw attention to the far-right cause. But on the other hand, the first goal of our government's anti-racism strategy is to ensure that racism is always recognised, challenged and rejected, so we have spoken to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs about possible further discussions around that tension between calling out racism and not wanting to platform it and how we best ensure that Victorians from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel safe and supported in their workplaces, homes and communities.

### International Day of Deafblindness

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:05): On a separate matter, I just want to note that 27 June will be International Day of Deafblindness, and I want to recognise the work of CHARGE Syndrome Australasia in advocating for those who face that tough condition.

### Point Cook electorate

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:05): Once again I rise to discuss the geographically challenged Liberal Party and their lack of knowledge of Melbourne's west. Previously the member for Caulfield at the table posted on social media that he was in Point Cook, but he was actually in Laverton. Previously the Liberal Party endorsed short-changing the Sunshine station upgrade so it would miss out on airport rail, and the same Liberal Party did not even bother to have a candidate for Gellibrand just a couple of weeks before the election was called. And now member from the other place Trung Luu unfortunately has got confused with the electorate of Point Cook, believing that Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes are part of it – just a little bit away. I thank him for putting that flyer into people's mailboxes so they know all about how the Liberals ignore and do not even know Melbourne's west. I look forward to sending Mr Luu a description of the electorate, including the suburbs and a map.

### James 'Jimmy' Mentor

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:06): I associate myself with the words of Ella George, the member for Lara, as well regarding Jimmy Mentor, who I worked with at the Monash Student Association. It was a great and challenging time in all of our lives, but Jimmy Mentor was always a person you could have a beer with and talk about Labor politics. He was a genuinely good person and is gone far too soon. Vale, Jimmy Mentor.

### Josephine Montalti

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:07): It is with great sadness that I acknowledge and grieve the passing of a fantastic local teacher in the Laverton electorate in Ms Josephine Montalti. Josephine

taught at Laverton P-12 College for 33 years and in that time has inspired and touched the minds and hearts of hundreds of students. Whether it was driving students to exams, organising school formals, buying textbooks and stationery for kids who could not afford them or even providing food for students who went without breakfast or lunch, it is clear that Josephine was driven by a passion for ensuring that all students got the best education they could. Outside of the school Josephine had been recognised for her outstanding service, including by Hobsons Bay City Council and the Altona City Rotary Club.

For many students, they are lucky to find one, maybe two, teachers who really make a difference in their time at school. They might help you turn that grade around in a subject that you struggle with. They might help you personally through a really difficult time or look out for you in the schoolyard when things are not really going right. Hearing from so many former students and Laverton residents, it is clear to me that Josephine was this teacher for so many students at Laverton P-12 College over the years, and her presence will be deeply, deeply missed. My thoughts go out to Josephine's family, including her children Ayesha and Peter, and to the Laverton community for losing such an incredible local hero and an inspiration to all our fantastic teachers. Vale, Josephine Montalti.

### **Esmond Julian Curnow**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (10:08): I too rise today with sadness to note the passing of Esmond Curnow. Esmond was a Victorian MP serving as a Labor member of the Legislative Assembly for the seat of Kara Kara in north-western Victoria from 1970 until the seat was abolished in 1976. At the time he was the youngest MP to sit in this place. Unfortunately for Esmond, he was in opposition the whole time that he was there, but after leaving politics he became a publican in Bendigo, was secretary of the Bendigo Trades Hall Council and then joined the mighty storemen and packers union, where he was an official, then later the National Union of Workers, becoming its assistant secretary, my immediate predecessor. It was there that I came to know him and to work alongside him. At the NUW he fought on the picket lines alongside many striking workers fighting for better pay and conditions. It was unfortunate that in the last 10 years of his life he also had to fight Parkinson's, which is a terrible disease and just sucked the life out of him. Ezzy was a stalwart of the Labor Party. He believed in its solidarity and its entrenched motto as a party of the people, their needs and its wants. He was a great man. Love to his partner Beth. Vale, Esmond Curnow.

### *Statements on parliamentary committee reports*

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

##### *Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance*

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (10:10): I rise today to speak on the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into workplace surveillance. It is a matter of critical importance to every working Victorian, the escalating issue of workplace surveillance and the urgent need for legislative reform, as highlighted by this recent inquiry. This comprehensive report, tabled just last month, is a stark reminder that our current laws have simply not kept pace with the dramatic advancements in surveillance technology. What was once confined to CCTV cameras and call recordings has now morphed into an ever-present digital eye scrutinising every keystroke and every movement. The committee's findings are deeply concerning. We heard that technologies like key logging, remote screenshotting, wearable trackers, biometric data collection and even sophisticated AI analysis of communications are now commonplace. This is not just about monitoring productivity, it is about a fundamental shift in the power dynamic between employers and employees.

In my capacity as the member for Mulgrave, this issue first came to the forefront for me when I began reading about the treatment of warehouse workers in Dandenong South. They were being subjected to a new coaching and productivity framework, which they labelled 'the framework', which set unrealistic performance expectations, resulting in injuries and unsafe work environments. The workers, with the support of the might of the United Workers Union, walked off the job and picketed over the unfair framework, and I was proud to join them.

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The more I read the many submissions to this inquiry and the case studies that the report emphasised, it truly opened my eyes to how prevalent workplace surveillance is in Victoria. Workplace surveillance comes in many forms and has hit many of us – or our friends and families – in this place. So let me share just a few examples of how this is playing out in our state. We have seen instances where union members in the finance sector were flagged for disciplinary action not for poor performance but for seemingly innocent phrases captured by AI monitoring, such as simply commenting on the weather. This demonstrates how algorithms can lead to unfair and distressing outcomes. The inquiry also heard from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation about a case where a nurse faced disciplinary proceedings based on partial footage from a security guard's body-worn camera. Crucially, this footage was not subject to the health service's own privacy policies, therefore bypassing protections and severely impacting the nurse's professional standing.

The report also highlighted the alarming trend of function creep, where data collected for one legitimate purpose – say, vehicle safety tracking – is covertly repurposed for performance management or even disciplinary action without the employee's awareness. This is a profound breach of trust and privacy. This type of pervasive monitoring, often lacking transparency, has severe repercussions. It intensifies work, increases stress, diminishes job satisfaction and can significantly harm workers' mental and physical wellbeing. It discourages open communication and can even stifle collective action, further entrenching the existing power imbalance.

The committee's 18 recommendations offer a clear pathway forward. We need new technology-neutral laws that ensure surveillance is reasonable, necessary and proportionate. Transparency, mandatory consultation with workers and clear rules on data collection, storage and use are not merely suggestions; they are essential safeguards for the dignity and privacy of every Victorian employee.

Meanwhile, the minority report by those opposite on the committee suggests deferring to Commonwealth legislation or simply issuing guidelines, in the hope employers will abide by them, citing the administrative burden on businesses. Well, what about the burden on employees? The evidence presented to this committee, including the very real examples I have outlined, demonstrates a clear and present harm to employees. Waiting for national reforms or relying solely on voluntary guidelines is simply not enough to protect Victorian workers from current and emerging surveillance abuses, particularly with fast-developing technologies. The dignity and privacy of our workforce cannot wait. I commend the committee's chair, the member for Bellarine; the member for Glen Waverley, my neighbour; the member for Pascoe Vale; and the member for Tarneit for their report and recommendations to address this concerning issue.

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

#### *Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls*

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:15):** I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's vaping and tobacco controls inquiry. I thank the member for Point Cook for the shout-out earlier, and I notice that the member for Laverton is in the chamber here as well. Quite often we come to this place and we talk about what wonderful work our committees do, and by and large the committees do great work. This is no reflection on necessarily the committees – it is on the chaotic government that we have – but we have a government that is giving this committee work to do when they have already got the answers. What they are doing is wasting the time of the member for Laverton and wasting the time of the member of Point Cook by giving them an inquiry to do stuff when they should be doing work in their electorates, because ultimately they have put these recommendations in play for registering tobacco shops, but they were looking at ensuring vaping legislation as well. We have got vaping laws. We have got now, finally – even though we are the last state in the nation to have them – registrations when it comes to the licensing of tobacco shops. So this committee was tasked with doing work when the government already had the answers and were already introducing the legislation. What a complete waste of time. This shows a chaotic government that is just giving

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members of Parliament – the backbenchers, the member for Point Cook and the chair, the member for Laverton – something to do.

I was at Sunshine just the other day, when I was talking to the police forum at Sunshine in the west. The member for St Albans was there with me. We were there together, and we were hearing just how stretched Victoria Police are. It is because, we know, the members of the government are not doing their job. They are not doing their job to keep people safe. So instead of wasting your time in a committee I would suggest you go out there and do some time in your electorate, because ultimately that is what constituents are telling me in the west.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Member for Point Cook, that is what your constituents were telling me when I was at the train station. Let me say – and you might say it is across the road – there are many people from Point Cook that actually use that train station, so you cannot just limit your boundary to within and what is in your electorate, member for Point Cook. You cannot limit your boundary; it is just like a school. You have got to look after everybody in your electorate, member for Point Cook, and they are telling me they do not feel safe because you are wasting your time. So if you want to get re-elected next year, member for Point Cook – and all the people – you have got to look after the people in the west. You have got to look after people in the west, because the west is being neglected. I know, member for Point Cook, you had a go at hardworking member Trung Luu in the upper house, who, I can tell you, is at a lot more forums than you are, member for Point Cook. He is out there working very, very hard in areas that you are not, so I would suggest that instead of having a go –

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, why is Trung Luu not the delegate for Western Metro, unlike Moira Deeming? If he is such a hardworking member, why has he been downgraded?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** There is no point of order. But before the member for Caulfield continues, I ask him to not make reflections on the Chair and to direct his comments through the Chair.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I will not be making reflections on you, Acting Chair, but I will on those opposite because they are not doing their job, clearly. The member for Point Cook is very touchy, because he has to take a point of order because he knows he is not doing his work – he is not doing his job. Trung Luu, a hardworking member in the upper house, is doing the job for him. I can tell you that the people in the west are feeling neglected, particularly when it comes to crime and the crime crisis. I would suggest, with this particular committee report on vaping and tobacco controls, that the answers were already made before the committee started. Let us not waste time. Let us actually do the job. We are the last to the party when it comes to registration of these tobacco shops. We are seeing firebombings of tobacco shops. We are seeing outlaw motorcycle gangs using these tobacco shops to profit from. It is appalling. Victorians' lives are being put at risk. While you might laugh, member for Point Cook, and while the backbench may laugh, this is very, very serious, and the government needs to stand up and do something.

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is outrageous to misrepresent that I was laughing at the tragedies that have occurred around firebombings and the life that has been lost across the road from the community that I represent, so I ask him to withdraw.

**David SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am very happy for the footage to be shown of the smile on his face while I was talking. I would like to be able to see the footage of that, member for Point Cook.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** There is no point of order, member for Caulfield. The member for Point Cook has asked the member for Caulfield to withdraw.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I withdraw.

**Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance*

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:21): That is a hard act to follow. It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise and make a contribution on the report on the inquiry into workplace surveillance, an inquiry conducted by the Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee. It was one that was chaired by the magnificent member for Bellarine. I also should acknowledge the member for Glen Waverley and the member for Pascoe Vale, next to me, who made a pretty significant contribution to that inquiry.

We know that the way that work is done in this state, in this country and in fact in the Western Hemisphere has significantly changed over time, and the way that employers have surveilled their employees has changed with that. What we know now from this inquiry and the evidence that we heard is that Victorian legislation, unfortunately, has not kept up with that. The overwhelming amount of evidence that we heard is that Victoria's laws in respect to governing the way that employers surveil their employees are no longer fit for purpose. There is no standalone legislation in Victoria that covers this. There is no onus on an employer to consult about the way that they are going to surveil their employees, and they do not even have to notify them. I mean, an employer in Victoria can bring in a new form of workplace surveillance that may be incredibly intrusive, and there is no onus on that employer to even let their workers know that that is what they are doing. That is the overwhelming evidence that we heard. We have a situation where two comparable jurisdictions to Victoria, the ACT and New South Wales, both have standalone legislation in respect to workplace surveillance. The ACT's legislation requires genuine consultation when an employer wants to begin to undertake new workplace surveillance. We heard that the ACT legislation is not foolproof and is not perfect, but at least it requires genuine consultation in respect to this matter.

We heard several, honestly, alarming examples from witnesses in respect to how workplace surveillance had been used in a pretty horrendous way. The member for Mulgrave just spoke about an example in a healthcare setting where a registered nurse was wearing a body cam for her own safety, and that footage was used in a disciplinary procedure to dismiss her. We heard of instances from the Finance Sector Union where managers were using emails and surveillance to stop union organising activity. They were blocking union emails. We have seen public articles about how Woolworths in their warehouses have been using surveillance to count how many pieces of stock employers are picking, and if they do not meet a certain standard they face disciplinary action. None of this contributes to productivity in our economy. The overwhelming amount of evidence that we heard is that it leads to burnout. There is function creep, and it leads to lower productivity, it leads to mental issues and it leads to WorkCover claims. It is frankly a drag on the Victorian economy.

The hearings were conducted, I think, incredibly well by the chair, the member for Bellarine. Frankly, throughout the hearings I thought everybody that was on the committee was in pretty serious agreement about what the clear path on this was to be, so it was to my surprise that I saw a minority report to this by the member for South-West Coast, which frankly just says: do nothing. It cites a federal inquiry that is happening at the moment, which does not actually have the capacity to fix anything that we have been speaking about. One of the recommendations – the most important recommendation – for standalone Victorian legislation requiring employees to consult is absolutely fantastic.

**Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:26): I am happy to rise to speak on a committee report. You would think it would be on one of the committees that I am on, but after two weeks of being on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee with the member for Point Cook and the member for Laverton I decided to look into some other committees and see what some other committees are doing, seeing we

have done such a wonderful job over the last couple of weeks. Obviously other committees are not quite doing that load of work, but I was interested to read the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee because I spend a lot of time driving around particularly the western part of this state, given that you do not get much further away in this state than Mildura. So that is a lot of road to cover. I do tend to drive when I come down here for sitting weeks or for PAEC, because by the time I am halfway here, which is about 3½ hours, I am still in my electorate. And some of the roads around the Mallee in particular and Sunraysia – I mentioned yesterday that we have a Mallee links golf course along some of these highways, just like the Nullarbor Plain golf course. You could use the potholes as greens, I guess.

This inquiry in fact delved into how road safety behaviours have evolved during and after COVID-19, and I do not think it is any secret that among road users, or maybe society in general, there is a quite a level of angst, short tempers and quite aggressive reactionary behaviours, particularly on the roads. This report looks at how those behaviours post pandemic affect those that are most at risk on our roads, and they are pedestrians, children under seven, cyclists, motorcyclists, older individuals and users of mobility devices – and we see a lot of mobility devices around these days. Given the lack of infrastructure in rural towns in particular because of the lack of footpaths, a lot of the time mobility devices are being driven on the roads, particularly around towns, because they simply have no choice. Even in housing developments slightly out of town there are mobility devices on roads that have no shoulders et cetera.

In regional areas like ours these challenges are amplified and they are multifaceted with, like I said, the vast distances and the limited public transport options, and we will see that illustrated and that lack of infrastructure around roads for vulnerable road users amplified again when the alcohol and other drugs rehabilitation facility is built and operational in Merbein, given that there is no public transport and there are no footpaths around the facility. Given that it is a health facility, there is a vulnerable population there anyway, so there is a huge danger there. And talking about children under seven, there is a childcare centre about to be built in Red Cliffs across the road from the early childhood centre, but it is also across the road from a workers accommodation facility, which has all sorts of dangers within itself.

This inquiry made several pertinent recommendations, like developing a road user hierarchy that prioritises the safety of vulnerable road users, ensuring those who cause the most harm bear the greatest responsibility. Enhancing infrastructure – that is, pedestrian crossings and traffic lights – is an important one, and the installation will make a huge difference for particularly Mildura and the south of the city. I did thank Minister Horne last week for the announcement of the Sixteenth Street–Deakin Avenue traffic lights, which will make a huge difference to the speed of heavy vehicles and for Mildura South Primary School. That is fantastic. It is good to see that enhancing infrastructure is one of the recommendations.

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance*

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (10:31): I rise to support the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into workplace surveillance, which was tabled in May 2025. The act of surveillance, which refers to the close observation or the act of watching a person or a place, of course is not something new, and the act of surveillance has been traced way back through the history of humanity both for the purpose of public good but also the public not so good. Over the years there have been many examples of how surveillance can be utilised, as I said, for good and bad but also be considered an infringement of one's liberty, rights and wellbeing over time without the appropriate checks and balances. For example, the Victorian penal system, including at Pentridge prison, once created centrally controlled prison blocks that were known as panopticons, a large circular prison block, each cell divided like a pizza slice. A central guard tower could keep constant watch on each individual inmate in each cell, where prisoners were isolated in their cells for 23 hours a day, and

they were allowed 1 hour exercise, during which they were required to cover their faces with masks so as to prevent interaction with other prisoners. The royal commission into Pentridge in 1870 was later told the panopticons were responsible for generating more mental illness than any other division in Pentridge, and over subsequent years the panopticons were eventually dismantled and demolished in an example of how state laws keep pace with community expectations.

While we no longer have panopticons to keep watch here in Victoria, surveillance approaches and tactics have very much continued to evolve in the absence of appropriate checks and balances – namely, when it comes to Victorian employers monitoring Victorian employees without their awareness, consent or support. That is why on 14 May 2024 the committee was tasked with undertaking an inquiry to help us understand the extent to which surveillance data is being collected, shared, stored, disclosed, sold, disposed of and otherwise utilised in Victorian workplaces. The inquiry found very clearly that in many ways modern day panopticons are very much still in operation throughout Victorian workplaces without the knowledge, consent or awareness of a vast number of Victorian workers. Employers are now monitoring Victorian workers at unprecedented levels, and employees are none the wiser. We heard a mountain of evidence from a range of employee, academic and community organisations which clearly demonstrated we need to modernise our Victorian workplace surveillance, monitoring and privacy legislation to keep pace with employer workplace monitoring technology, and I would particularly like to acknowledge all of the union and community organisations that gave really good submissions and evidence.

Based on this extensive feedback, the inquiry found workplace surveillance has accelerated in recent years in Victoria and indeed worldwide as a result of the technological advancements and shift to remote working, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic and working from home phenomenon. In a short space of time surveillance has advanced beyond camera footage and the recording of telephone calls to incorporate key logging, wearable trackers, biometrics, neurotechnology and artificial intelligence, AI. Employers monitoring employees via optical listening, computer or tracking devices is growing in popularity in workplaces around the world and in Victoria, and surveillance technology has become more sophisticated, affordable and easy to use over the past two decades. Yet Victoria's workplace surveillance laws have not changed since the Surveillance Devices Act 1999, the amended act of 2006 and the subsequent Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Since then privacy and surveillance laws have also not kept pace in other jurisdictions, but we look towards New South Wales and the ACT as models for reform.

It became clear throughout the inquiry that many Victorian workers are unaware of the extent of surveillance in their workplace and how their employers are handling and storing data collected through workplace surveillance. Whether in white-collar roles or blue-collar roles, we heard numerous examples of how workplace surveillance is impacting workers' mental health, wellbeing and productivity, and it is through this unregulated encroachment in the working from home space that concern was particularly raised. That is why the committee put forward 29 comprehensive findings and recommendations to begin reforming in this space, recommendation 1 being that the Victorian government introduce new principles-based workplace surveillance legislation that is technology-neutral, defines a workplace as wherever work occurs and places a positive obligation on employers to prove through a risk assessment that any surveillance they conduct is reasonable, necessary and proportionate to achieve stated legitimate objectives.

I will not go through all the recommendations, but I will note, however, that notwithstanding this overwhelming evidence we received, the Liberal Party decided to put in a dissenting report, which is quite concerning. Also, the silence from big business and the big technology companies not wanting to participate spoke volumes and frankly showed their unwillingness to participate and reform this space, because, frankly, it has been the Wild West in this space for a long time, and that must come to an end. The Liberal Party put forward a submission essentially saying that we must remain in the current context with 1999 legislation, when *Mambo No. 5* was the number one song and we had

Nokia 5110s and Nokia 3210s. They are living in the past. We have now since of course had significant technology evolution, and we must keep pace.

### Integrity and Oversight Committee

#### *Inquiry into the Operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (10:36): I rise to address this chamber about the committee report on the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) prepared by the Integrity and Oversight Committee and what it means to the people of Prahran and the people of Victoria. At the outset I would like to thank the committee members for their work in investigating the issues that this act underpins. The Freedom of Information Act is often referred to as the sunshine legislation, and it provides integrity to all levels of our government and government departments and agencies with the intention of allowing my constituents in Prahran and all Victorians the opportunity to have faith in the decisions that are made on their behalf and confidence in the information that is stored on them. As a former assistant commissioner for freedom of information in Victoria I was responsible for matters being appealed – that is, decisions that applicants were not happy with. This goes to the very core of what the committee report was all about. A review was well overdue, and reforms were desperately needed.

As the recently elected member for Prahran I have had numerous constituents exasperated by the delays experienced in obtaining information from government departments and agencies. These decisions can relate to planning developments, and they can relate to police and hospital records, recruitment into departments and agencies and general decisions across the board. It serves to give confidence to the general public. The report refers to ‘pull FOI’, meaning applicants must pull for the information they want from an agency, and this in itself requires patience and resilience. It should not be that hard; that was never the intention of the act. Further still, if an applicant is not happy with the result that they have received, then they have a right to review from a toothless tiger, in essence, and the same delays and resistance is experienced by the review body and applicant yet again.

The report recommends terminology changes to reflect the frustrations experienced by all and speaks to ‘push FOI’ – that is, push of information to the applicant – and it is a worthy concept, but there has to be will in regard to this. FOI officers must be there, supported and trained, and department and agency staff must be supported and trained as to what this actually means. It also means that they must turn their mind to being vigilant in all forms of communication, not to hide potentially problematic material but to actually ensure professionalism at all times in their communication, because it is my hope that the recommendations in this report are adopted.

I would like to take the chamber through a few examples of how important FOI is to our constituents. In my former role I had a young person who, through their psychologist, after years of sexual abuse as an infant and as a teenager, was told that FOI-ing information on their abuser may enable them to find comfort in obtaining police reports on their abuse. The abuser was found guilty and ended their life prior to sentencing, and little could be released regarding the information because the person that was the abuser was also protected in regard to their private information. The frustration for the person who was the applicant was doubled. There is little more I can tell you about the matter other than to say that the abuse was horrendous and I wish I could have absolutely done more.

Another case was of an applicant admitted to a psych ward who wanted their medical reports. The family member who reported them and had them admitted rightly had their identity hidden, a necessity to safeguard and give confidence to those who try to do their best but do not want the possible repercussions to follow should the applicant be able to identify them and take retribution.

I saw numerous local government requests regarding planning developments where photos of neighbours’ properties were exempt from disclosure as it was their private property, and this in most circumstances just seemed ludicrous. I saw other applications for review that had accused applicants requesting material on police surveillance. Releasing this information would undermine the integrity of an operation.

Often the material before our FOI staff was voluminous, hence the delays in releasing it. Some people wait over a year for the material. This hardly provides confidence in the release system. The FOI act is out of date, and the material people can request simply is not covered to the degree it should be. CCTV footage, for one, was often problematic as it displayed other people that should be deleted from the footage. This recommendation allows for this, but how one redacts exempt information still remains time consuming and problematic. With social media so prevalent, often material not able to be released under the act was already in the general public sphere. Applicants would become irate when they learned of this, with their faith in the system further diminished.

*Bills*

**Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:41): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025:

**Opening paragraphs**

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 Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025 (the Bill).

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

**Overview**

The Bill seeks to protect and promote community safety, by introducing a new performance crime offence into the *Crimes Act 1958* to prohibit a person from publishing material that draws attention to their involvement in the following specified serious offences:

- theft of a motor vehicle
- burglary or aggravated burglary
- carjacking or aggravated carjacking
- home invasion or aggravated home invasion
- robbery or armed robbery, and
- affray or violent disorder.

**Human Rights Issues**

**Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

The Charter rights that are relevant to the Bill are the:

- Right to privacy (section 13)
- Freedom of expression (section 15)
- Protection of children and families (section 17)
- Rights of children in the criminal process (section 23), and
- Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25).

Under the Charter, rights can be subject to limits that are reasonable and justifiable in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. I do not consider that the Bill unreasonably or unjustifiably limits rights under the Charter. The limitations are reasonable and just in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

**Right to privacy and reputation**

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their ‘privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.’

Justice Bell has characterised the right to privacy as including protection of a person’s capacity for communication (by whatever means) with others (*Director of Housing v Sudi (Residential Tenancies)* [2010] VCAT 328 [29]).

While the Bill interferes with communication by people charged with certain serious offences about their offending conduct, this limitation is not unlawful (as it is provided for by law), or arbitrary. Interference with privacy will be arbitrary if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable (*Minogue v Thompson* [2021] VSCA 358 [55]). The Bill is limited in scope to certain communication by certain people that draws attention to the specified offences. Given the harm the Bill is seeking to prevent, this limitation is lawful and does not arbitrarily or unreasonably limit the right to privacy.

The Bill promotes the right to privacy by criminalising the conduct of people who share material about themselves unlawfully entering and interfering with victims' homes and other property or otherwise interfering with their person. Publication of this material can potentially identify and retraumatise victims, compounding the harm caused by the unlawful conduct.

**Right to freedom of expression**

Section 15 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold an opinion without interference and seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds through a variety of mediums.

The right is not absolute and may be limited where it is reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality (section 15(3) of the Charter). This includes measures for 'peace and good order, public safety and prevention of disorder and crime' (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50 [151]).

The Bill limits this right by restricting a person's ability to publish material advertising specified offending conduct. Criminal acts of threats and violence are not protected forms of expression (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50 [86]–[91]). While some of the specified offences that would be captured by the Bill may involve criminal acts of threats and violence, others such as theft of motor vehicle or burglary where no victim is present do not.

However, given the limited scope of the Bill, applying only to certain offences, the restriction is lawful as it is reasonably necessary for the protection of public order by preventing crime.

Publishing material to draw attention to involvement in certain high impact offending presents a risk to public order by encouraging others to participate in similar offending, trivialising the harm caused to victims and normalising criminal behaviour. Public order is protected by creating an offence to prohibit publication of this material.

The limitation is consistent with the Bill's purpose to protect community safety by creating a new performance crime offence to address an emerging trend of people publishing material to draw attention to their involvement in offences such as theft, home invasion, robbery, burglary, affray and carjacking.

The Bill is limited in scope to apply only to publication by a person who was involved in committing a specified offence. This recognises that certain prevalent offences present a greater risk to public order and there may be legitimate reasons to share material about offending by others, including for journalistic broadcast, academic purposes or community awareness.

The Bill imposes a narrow limit on the right to freedom of expression. However, I consider these limitations are reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter, as informed by the factors set out in section 15(3).

**Protection of children and families and children in the criminal process**

Section 17 of the Charter protects the rights of families and children. Section 17(2) recognises the vulnerability of children because of their age, conferring additional rights on them. It is concerned with protecting the 'best interests of the child' (*Certain Children by their Litigation Guardian Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for Families and Children* [2016] VSC 796 [145]).

Sections 23 and 25(3) of the Charter protect the rights of children in the criminal process. An accused child must be brought to trial as quickly as possible (section 23(2) of the Charter). Section 25(3) of the Charter provides that a child charged with a criminal offence has the right to a procedure that takes account of their age and the desirability of promoting the child's rehabilitation.

The new offence does not impact on or alter any protections or special procedures for children in the criminal process. The Bill is consistent with the right of a child to be brought to trial as quickly as possible, as the offence is a summary offence and must be charged within the applicable time limits. The Bill is compatible with the rights accorded to children in criminal proceedings by the Charter.

**The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP**  
**Attorney-General**

*Second reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

One of the challenges confronting our community today is the rise of ‘posting and boasting’ about criminal offending – where people commit serious crimes and then share content advertising or drawing attention to their conduct on the internet, primarily via social media.

The performative nature of these offences introduces a new layer of harm: it glorifies criminal behaviour, encourages others to emulate it, exacerbates community concerns and fear, and erodes public confidence in the justice system. It may also publicly identify and retraumatise victims.

This Bill will introduce a new offence of performance crime into the *Crimes Act 1958* that recognises the additional criminality associated with publishing material that advertises serious criminal offending. While existing laws cover the underlying conduct (such as the motor vehicle theft or burglary), they do not specifically criminalise the act of turning crime into content. Such behaviour can be considered during sentencing of an offender, however the new offence will provide additional accountability, denounce the publication of this content and acknowledge the further trauma it can cause for victims of these crimes.

Introducing a targeted offence sends a clear message: publishing material that advertises or draws attention to offending will result in serious consequences. Communities have a right to feel safe, and to know that the justice system is equipped to respond to new forms of anti-social behaviour. The performance crime offence demonstrates that we are listening and acting accordingly.

**The performance crime offence**

The new offence criminalises the publication of material that draws attention to someone’s own involvement in the following serious offences:

- theft of motor vehicle
- carjacking and aggravated carjacking
- burglary and aggravated burglary
- home invasion and aggravated home invasion
- robbery and armed robbery
- affray and violent disorder; and
- inciting or attempting to commit one of the above offences, or being complicit in such offending (e.g. encouraging or directing a robbery).

The performance crime offence will carry a 2-year maximum penalty. This is in addition to the penalty for the underlying serious offence. For example, if a person is found guilty of a home invasion and also the new performance crime offence, they may be sentenced to a maximum term of 25 years imprisonment in relation to the home invasion and up to 2 years imprisonment for the performance crime offence.

The new offence targets serious confrontational theft and violent group offences of concern to the community, which are increasing in overall frequency or becoming more prevalent among young offenders, who are most likely to ‘post and boast’ about their conduct.

A person can be found guilty of a performance crime offence if they have been found guilty of the relevant serious offence. However, the Bill makes clear that a person may be charged with the performance crime offence before a finding of guilt for the relevant offence. It is expected that the relevant offence and the performance crime offence will generally be charged at the same time, and will progress together in the same court proceeding. The prosecution of both the underlying offence and the separate performance crime offence is more likely to result in higher sentences as a penalty must be applied to both offences.

The offence will capture a broad range of conduct. The definitions of ‘material’ and ‘publish’ in this Bill are defined broadly to reflect the many ways offenders share material that draws attention to their involvement in serious criminal offences. ‘Material’ is defined to mean any film, audio, photograph, printed matter, image, computer game or text or any electronic material or any other thing of any kind which depicts or describes anything done in the course of committing the relevant offence, property obtained or damage or harm caused. ‘Publish’ is defined as including exhibiting, communicating, sending, supplying, transmitting the material or

making it available to other people. These definitions are consistent with existing definitions of these terms in the *Crimes Act*.

Criminal behaviour that falls outside the scope of the new offence will continue to be dealt with by existing criminal offences where appropriate, such as grossly offensive public conduct and Commonwealth offences of using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence.

**Conclusion**

The new performance crime offence sends a clear message that the community denounces ‘posting and boasting’ about criminal conduct, and that those who do so will face serious consequences.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:42): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 2 July.**

*Business of the house*

**Standing and sessional orders**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:44): I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow only members who did not speak on the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 to speak on the motion to take note of the 2025–26 budget papers.

It is a pleasure to speak on this motion. There are a bunch of investments across Victoria that I am really proud of in the 2025–26 budget and in my portfolio at least. I might give a couple of contributions there before I get to my electorate. We have made the biggest ever, despite what the Greens political party may say on their TikTok feed, investment of any government into the protection of biodiversity – in excess of \$600 million over the life of our government. That includes a whole range of investments on public and private land.

BushBank is one of the most iconic long-term projects, with the aspiration to repair 20,000 hectares of predominantly private land through partnering with the private sector. That is important because less than 40 per cent – I think it is somewhere around 38 per cent or thereabouts – of all land in Victoria is held in public hands, so course if you want to protect biodiversity and you want a better future for nature and the environment, you have to have a relationship with and have a deliberate action to focus on recuperating and restoring private land as well as public land. BushBank helps us do that in a significant way. It is a long-term investment by our government, in excess of \$70 million.

In addition to that, Trust for Nature do an incredible job in supporting effectively the same endeavour to protect private land voluntarily, sometimes with an incentive, so that private owners decide to protect a portion or the entirety of landholdings they have in future for environmental purposes. There is a covenant that they agree to take out on that property to make sure it is protected in perpetuity. They are all things that are supported by this budget in my portfolio, as well as many other initiatives.

One that I think is key for the energy and the global reputation of Victoria, which some on the other side of politics like to talk down, and which has also got significant investment in this budget and in the long term by our government, is the major events part of my job and my portfolio. We consistently see Victoria in international news in terms of the big events that we land, and we do that for multiple reasons. Yes, we put funding behind it, but funding is only –

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** Lenny Kravitz in Mildura, absolutely. Thank you to my colleague for reminding me. It is not just a Melbourne play, it is a Victoria-wide play – exactly right. We had Kings

of Leon in 2022 in Mildura. We have got Lenny Kravitz coming on 28 November, a Thursday night. It is important it is a Thursday night because Thursday night means it is likely people who attend –

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS**: will stay on, on the Friday and Saturday. Thank you, member for Narre Warren North. But what is important as a reminder of what is possible here is that with the Kings of Leon in 2022, 42 per cent of people who attended came from outside the region. As we say, they have to stay somewhere, they have to eat somewhere and they have to spend in the local economy. That is a fundamental part of why we do major events. It actually underpins thousands and thousands of jobs. Mildura, by the way, produces 90 per cent of Australia's table grapes. The member for Mildura is not in the chamber at the moment, but she would endorse that.

**A member**: And how much gets into wine?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS**: That I do not know. But she would endorse that, I think. It is an incredible wine grape producing part of Victoria. Fruit is a powerhouse in terms of being the food bowl of Victoria and in fact the food bowl of Australia. My point about that is: people will come for Lenny Kravitz but they will stay for all the other offerings of that beautiful, beautiful city in this state of ours.

**A member** interjected.

**Steve DIMOPOULOS**: The grand slam tennis? My colleagues are incorrigible. I could talk about the tennis and the fact that it is the best of the four grand slams on every metric possible – literally on yield, in terms of what it produces in economic value for Victoria and Australia in fact; in terms of attendance, 1.2 million, well in excess of New York, Paris and London; in terms of the average age of attendance, at least a decade or more lower than the average age of attendance at other grand slams.

I might yield the floor to others who might want to say a few things about the budget and how impactful this is, not only for the cost-of-living frame, as we talk about in our government, which is fundamental to everything we do, but in terms of my portfolio across environment and major events. I will leave it at that.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (10:50): I will pick up where the minister left off, on how this budget is so impactful on Victorians. The budget itself, in black and white, said how much it is impacting on the cost of living for Victorians, and it is precisely why we oppose this motion today. The motion reads:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow only members who did not speak on the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 to speak on the motion to take note of the 2025–26 budget papers.

The reason that we on this side of the chamber oppose this is because we have a lot more to say about the devastating impacts of this Labor government's budget. This Labor government's budget is a devastating budget for Victorian people – debt skyrocketing to \$194 billion, taxes increasing. We want to explore more about how the new Treasurer came in and said that there would be no new taxes and no new charges, and yet the devil is always in the detail. It is in the budget. We have uncovered a number of increased taxes and charges. The emergency services tax is but one of them, and that is a massive one – a \$3 billion impact on Victorian people in a cost-of-living crisis.

If this Labor government wanted to spruik their budget and talk about how fantastic it is, why wouldn't they want to encourage more people to have more opportunities to speak on it? The reason that they are introducing this motion is because they want to gag people on their own side from talking about the bad parts of this bill. They want to gag non-government members and opposition members from being able to talk about this budget and all of the problems and issues with the Labor government's 2025–26 budget, which, as I said, is devastating. They are trying to put a situation where they limit even the Labor members of Parliament speaking about the budget, because, quite frankly, there is probably not a lot to speak of. They know they do not want them speaking about the cuts to services

and the Silver review, which has \$3 billion of cuts to jobs and services. Public sector jobs are going under in this Labor government budget, and they do not want their Labor government members to be able to speak to that. They also want to stifle any opportunity for opposition members to have more of a say and to scrutinise this budget more through the parliamentary processes.

This is a house for the people here in the Parliament, here in the Legislative Assembly, and the people want to know the truth about this Labor budget. Labor budgets are all about spending – spend, spend, spend, tax, tax, tax – and it is a situation which we want to uncover and let Victorian people know about. The budget papers refer to the government's fiscal strategy, which the former Treasurer Tim Pallas set up. He set up this fiscal strategy in response to criticism from the credit rating agencies, because we know the credit rating has been downgraded not once but twice under this Andrews and Allan Labor government, and the former Treasurer Tim Pallas had to come up with a fiscal strategy just to satisfy those credit rating agencies. We know that the new Treasurer had to fly off to New York to talk to the credit rating agencies again only a week or so ago to plead the case to not have Victoria's credit rating downgraded again because of the dire situation presented in this budget of debt soaring to \$194 billion – record debt that this Labor government will leave as a legacy for our children and grandchildren to have to pay back. But this fiscal strategy, as I said, the step of –

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** I will take up the interjection from the minister, who talks about the Suburban Rail Loop, a project that is not fully funded under this Labor government and is precisely the project that the credit ratings agencies pointed out as an issue and as a reason why the credit rating might be downgraded further – because it is not funded. We even know that on this project they have a very limited partner in Canberra, because Canberra does not even want to spend any more money on the Suburban Rail Loop. Whilst you spend money on the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister, you are unable to spend money on essential and vital services. This budget includes cuts to core services and cuts to things like 000. Just check your budget papers. This government is cutting funding to 000 and then taxing hardworking Victorians in order to fund these services. That just goes to show the financial mismanagement and incompetence of this Labor government.

The first step of the so-called fiscal strategy was to reduce unemployment. Well, under this budget, in the budget papers it says in black and white that the unemployment rate is forecast to increase to 4.75 per cent, and that is an increase of half a per cent above the national average. This means that Victorians are going to be out of work this time next year. Under this Labor government's budget and their forecast, more Victorians will be out of work this time next year. Dare I say, it will be more public sector employees that will be out of work, because this government intends to save billions of dollars by cutting their jobs.

The second step was to return the budget to an operating cash surplus. Well, back in March the Department of Treasury and Finance was predicting a \$1.8 billion cash deficit. Now this figure has miraculously turned around to a \$620 million cash surplus in this budget. It just goes to show you cannot trust what is in the Labor government's budget. Of course the Labor government's budget and this \$620 million cash surplus relied on the revenue that this government expects to take in from the \$3 billion emergency services tax. And we know of the community uproar, from farmers, from emergency services volunteers and from the protests on the steps of Parliament about this emergency services tax. Only a week after the budget was actually brought into this chamber by the Treasurer, they did a bit of a backflip – but only a little bit of a backflip – to give a reprieve to farmers for just one year. Already that \$620 million cash surplus is completely obliterated by that.

Again, you cannot trust what is in the government's budget papers. Such a massive turnaround of course does deserve closer interrogation, because it is not because this government all of a sudden, in trying to come to this \$620 million cash surplus, adopted any fiscally responsible measures and put in place any structural reforms in this budget. Of course this budget does not include any reasonable or responsible structural reforms. The turnaround, as I said, is a result of the deception of this budget. Not

only did the government receive a massive GST windfall, many property owners received their land tax bills earlier this year. So instead of being required to pay their land tax bill in August like every other year, they were forced to pay it the week before the budget. People are usually meant to pay their land tax bill once per annum, but this Labor government did a dodgy and required people to pay their annual land tax bill twice in one year, and that was just to prop up this Labor government's dismal budget. You would think it could not get any worse, but this government stooped to a new low, and this is a clear example of how this Labor government penalises hardworking families and hardworking Victorians and cheats Victorians to doctor the numbers in their budget.

The budget papers at least do not seek to hide this con job at all, because they state the change in position, again in black and white in the budget papers. They do not seek to hide this con job because they state the change in – and I quote from the budget papers – ‘the timing of various receipts such as land tax’. This government are so bad with their financial management that they increase the land tax. They then require and force Victorians to pay their annual land tax bills twice in one year, and they actually go and write it in the budget that the reason for the situation is ‘the timing of various receipts such as land tax’. So they know they are doing the dodgy on Victorian people, and it is Victorian people who suffer. This government is seriously a one-trick pony. Making Victorians pay their land tax bill twice in one financial year just is really an absolute disgrace.

How can the government say it is helping with the cost of living when it is forcing Victorians to do this? It is not helping the cost-of-living crisis, it is actually exacerbating Victorians' cost-of-living crisis. Not only are they introducing this whopping hefty new emergency services tax, which will hurt every home owner, every renter, every farmer – and then in turn it will translate into the higher cost of groceries on the supermarket shelves – it is going to hurt every business, every hairdresser, fitness gym, cafe and restaurant. It is going to hurt our manufacturers, and that is the emergency services tax levy that is going to be expanded and increased. And of course there are the massive increases to land tax. This is in a cost-of-living crisis, and this Labor government is, sadly, impacting people's cost of living at the worst possible time.

The third step in the government's fiscal strategy was to return to operating surpluses, and again, this is another fail from the Allan Labor government. This government have not recorded an operating surplus since 2019, and they repeatedly demonstrate they are incapable of making financially responsible and hard decisions, and they are also incapable of introducing any real structural reforms to the budget to curb spending and to eradicate waste. We know from reports in the media in the last week or so that the new Treasurer has gone over to America to plead with credit rating agencies and say that she is going to be cutting spending, but there are only really meagre spending cuts indicated in this budget. We cannot trust this \$3 billion savings figure in this budget paper, because if you look at last year's budget paper and the promised savings measures in the 2023–24 budget paper, this government actually only delivered less than 4 per cent of that savings target. If you go to the 2023–24 budget papers and the promises that this government made about saving money then under former Treasurer Pallas, that translated into less than 4 per cent. What the output was, what the delivery was, was less than 4 per cent of that savings target, so how can any Victorian believe that this government will save the \$3 billion promised in this year's budget? They have no credibility when it comes to savings, and in fact all they are doing is recklessly spending more on the Suburban Rail Loop, which is actually unfunded. It is totally reckless, and it is sending our budget into a massive debt situation which is only going to hurt Victorians into the future.

The fourth step of this so-called fiscal strategy was to stabilise debt. Well, the government said it was going to do this by introducing a COVID debt levy. You might recall when the former Treasurer introduced the fiscal strategy that the pillar that he was relying on to stabilise debt was the COVID debt levy. The former Treasurer said it was necessary because some people did better out of the pandemic than others. I certainly have not known any Victorian to date, certainly not in the electorate of Evelyn, that did better out of the pandemic and therefore could find extra money. Our businesses, our cafes, our restaurants and our manufacturers were forced to close in COVID, and now they are

required to pay again with the COVID debt levy. And this COVID debt levy – I mean, COVID finished years ago. We had the worst results from COVID. We had the worst lockdowns, the worst number of transmissions, the worst number of deaths and the highest number of businesses going under and suffering in COVID, and now the government's strategy to stabilise debt is to tax Victorians more with a COVID debt levy to pay down. They are forcing every property owner and every employer to pay this COVID debt levy on top of payroll, on top of land tax. Even though, as I said, COVID finished a couple of years ago now, in terms of the pandemic, Victorians are still forced to pay this, in this budget, until 2033. This Labor government is going to retain this COVID debt levy until 2033, in this budget, despite the pandemic having been called off a number of years ago.

Instead of stabilising, debt is increasing. This government cannot be trusted. They are saying that they are going to have their fourth step of the fiscal strategy, to stabilise debt, when their budget papers have debt increasing to a whopping \$194 billion. Of course we know that the legislation that was debated in the chamber yesterday, the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, was providing this Labor government a get-out-of-jail-free card to not have to do a budget report or financial reporting in 2026, the election year. This Labor government is actually changing the law so that they do not have to do a budget update or financial reporting in an election year. It says it in black and white in that legislation. They do not want to have to own up to the Victorian people. They do not want to have to share the truth, because this 2024–25 budget has debt soaring to \$194 billion. It is going to be vastly worse, and this Labor government knows that it will be so much worse in the election year. They do not want to be required to report on that.

It is quite something for the Premier to have said not long ago, defiantly claiming when they put out the budget and they were seeking to spruik this pretty dismal budget, on radio that they were stabilising debt. She actually said they were stabilising debt when the budget papers said that debt was increasing. It is phenomenal, their financial incompetence and again misleading Victorians, which is absolutely why they can no longer be trusted. Debt is completely out of control, and it is crystal clear that this Labor government has absolutely no plan to tackle it. There was a fifth step in the fiscal strategy added on last year by the government to reduce debt as a proportion of gross state product, GSP. Currently, debt as a proportion of GSP is 22 per cent. It is kind of strange that the government has introduced a new fiscal strategy step to reduce the ratio or proportion of debt to GSP at the same time it is actually going up. We have got it at 22 per cent at the moment, and instead of it reducing, this 2024–25 budget forecasts the proportion of GSP to debt to increase to a staggering 25.1 per cent in the 2025–26 year. That means that net debt now makes up a quarter of our entire gross state product.

If that was not shocking enough, the budget forecasts it will remain at 24.9 per cent in 2028–29, so this government is forecasting debt as a proportion of GSP by 2028–29 will still be a quarter of Victoria's economy. Back in 2019, Labor promised to stabilise net debt at 12 per cent of GSP. Instead, Labor has broken that promise and more than doubled debt as a proportion of GSP. I will say that again: only a few years ago, in 2019, this Labor government promised to stabilise debt at 12 per cent of GSP, and Labor has now broken that promise. They break many, many promises and have broken that promise, and debt is soaring to \$194 billion. That equates to around \$71,000 for every Victorian household. And what comes with that debt – an interest bill that must be repaid. Interest to service Labor's debt will increase by \$10.6 billion. That equates to \$28.9 million a day or \$1.2 million an hour. Just think what we could all spend in our own electorates across the state with \$29 million a day: we could have extra police, we could have extra nurses, we could upgrade hospitals, we could upgrade emergency departments, we could get new equipment for our SES or CFA, we could upgrade schools, we could fix dangerous road intersections, we could fix potholes and we could make our communities safe. But instead all we are doing is paying \$1.2 million an hour on an interest bill because this government cannot manage money. Labor's fiscal strategy is not worth the paper it is written on.

There is a major concern, as I mentioned earlier in this contribution, around the credit rating for Victoria and the real risk that it will be downgraded once again. After delivering a budget that forecasts net debt will increase by \$38.5 billion over four years and with a Suburban Rail Loop that is not fully

funded, the Treasurer had to go to the US. We actually would like to see some public reporting of what went on there and some actual transparency about what was discussed in that meeting with those credit rating agencies, because I think the credit rating agencies can actually see through it. They can see that the \$3.25 billion of so-called savings initiatives in this budget are actually not real. Again, we will wait to see the Silver review, which is going to be handed down on 30 June, in only a couple of weeks time, and actually see what comes of that review and also if the Treasurer fulfils her promise to the Victorian people that she will make the recommendations of the Silver review public and come out and publish what the government's response will be to that review.

We oppose this motion to gag or to stifle the opportunity for more members of this Parliament to represent their communities and to talk about this devastating budget that is going to be sending Victoria into skyrocketing debt, record debt, taxing Victorians more, cutting services and cutting jobs. We think that more people ought to have an opportunity to represent their communities, to talk about how bad this budget is and to talk about how few things in their own electorates are being looked after: the basics, like the schools that are not being upgraded in people's local electorates, the schools in my electorate that are not getting upgraded, and the roads, like the Warburton Highway in Seville East, the Maroondah Highway in Coldstream and Hull and Mooroolbark roads in Mooroolbark. These are known dangerous roads. This government know they are dangerous roads, and yet they are doing nothing to fix them. And that is only in the Evelyn electorate.

I am sure that so many more members of this chamber would like the opportunity to highlight what this budget lacks in terms of providing for Victorians in their own electorates and call for more support for people across their electorates, whether it is more police or more nurses – I mean, look at the Maroondah Hospital. This government promised to upgrade the Maroondah Hospital in the 2018 election and in the 2022 election, but still not a single cent has been allocated to capital funding to upgrade the Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood, which is the closest public hospital for the residents in my community. Now there is talk of a lot of the services being shut down altogether and moved to Box Hill. What does that do for people in the Yarra Valley? They have to go further, into Box Hill.

What we would like is to have more opportunity, but all this government wants to do is stifle debate. They want to stifle debate on this budget. They moved a piece of legislation yesterday to stop them being required to do a budget update or financial reporting in an election year. They want to pull the wool over Victorians' eyes. Well, Victorians deserve the truth, and we oppose this motion.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (50):* Julianne Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

**Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (11:21): I rise to make a contribution on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill contains four separate elements. There is a component that deals with the Serious Offenders Act 2018, there is a component that deals with the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, there is another component that deals with the Corrections Act 1986 and there is a miscellaneous piece that deals largely with some changes around the parole board. I am going to start my contribution today by focusing on the corrections component. This is all really important, particularly when we talk about serious offenders and sex offenders, and I will get to that shortly. But I do want to give the government every bit of opportunity in my 29-minute or thereabouts contribution today to really consider supporting the amendments that we are about to propose on this bill, because I think this is a line-in-the-sand moment for the government – a chance for the government to actually say they are going to back workers, particularly prison workers, and they are going to ensure that when a prisoner assaults a worker there are consequences, and those consequences mean that that prisoner will be handcuffed on movement, for three months. That is what the union is calling for, and that is what we are going to be calling for today. Under standing orders I advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

**Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**David SOUTHWICK:** Let us talk about this. Every worker, no matter where they work, should be able to be safe, and we know in our prisons that is not the case. We are seeing prison staff not coming to work and we are seeing staff leave the prison system altogether, and we know that this government has now resorted to \$8000 sign-on bonuses to try and recruit prison staff to come and work in the system. When we end up with a prison system in Victoria where you actually have to lock down the prisons because you have a staff shortage, we then have a failure in our system, no question. Our system has failed, and every single prisoner is actually feeling that consequence.

The idea of prisons is to reform prisoners. We want them to come out better than they actually were. That is really, really important; I want to say that up-front. However, we are dealing with very serious individuals – individuals that take it on their own to say, ‘I’m going to seriously assault a staff member.’ I am going to give you some evidence to show this today, but we know many of these people are there for a number of years, not just for six or 12 months. These are serious offenders, often lifers – 20 or 30 years in prison, multiple serious offences, killers. These people, according to the government’s proposed changes in this bill today, would face additional penalties to their sentence. If they punch and assault and hospitalise a staff member, they might get six months added on to their sentence. How will it do anything to keep that staff member safe if a person who is already doing life gets another six months? It will not do a single thing.

What we know is the CPSU have been advocating for these changes and many of the prison staff that I talk to who call me nearly every day say they do not feel safe, and ultimately they want these changes. That is what the CPSU has been calling for. The CPSU have clearly said that they want these changes, and so we are asking today for the government to take up these changes. It is very simple and very straightforward. I want to refer to a letter that I have got from the CPSU. The CPSU says:

CPSU has been calling for greater consequences for prisoners who assault prison staff. To that end we welcome the intent of the Bill.

CPSU understands the Bill covers “custodial workers” rather than “officers” defined in *Corrections Act* ...

This is the second part of the bill that we also want to amend today. We are not just talking about prison staff in terms of prison guards; we are talking about anyone that works in the prison system. That is why I am talking about this up-front today to all of the government especially. I want you to understand that if you do not support our recommendations, you are ultimately turning your back on not just the prison guards but anyone that works in the prison. Whether you work in education, whether you are a health worker or whether you are a cleaner, you should be protected equally. Our amendment is suggesting that, for everybody, if you are assaulted, there are consequences. That is why we want the change to include all prison staff, and that is what the CPSU are calling for.

The second part is that the CPSU has been calling for more consistency in the application of the policy about the loss of privileges for a prisoner who assaults a staff member. We are of the view that an assault on a staff member should result in the application of a stronger handcuff regime. This means that where a prisoner is found to have assaulted a staff member, they should have all movements subject to handcuffs for a minimum three-month period. At present there is no consistency between the prisons, so some prisons choose to do this and others do not. There need to be consequences and there needs to be safety when it comes to those working in the prisons. I think this is very reasonable. I will be very interested to listen to the contributions of those opposite if they actually talk against this, because they will be talking against the very union and against the very people that they are trying to protect. This is a very sensible set of amendments. It is something that we should be working together on, and it should send a very, very, very loud message that if you assault somebody that works in a prison, there are consequences.

It is also a basic safety mechanism, because when people are moving around the prison, that is when they are likely to assault a staff member. Having them handcuffed means they are less likely to assault somebody. We only have to look at the types of situations that we have had. Overall, the official Corrections Victoria data shows that 442 attacks have been recorded in the last 12 months, including 10 sexual assaults on staff and six that were so serious that the guards were hospitalised. Absolutely, something needs to be done here. As an example, on 16 March two prison officers were:

... bashed by an enraged bikie at a maximum security Melbourne prison.

... the pair were left unconscious when the outlaw motorcycle gang member launched his attack at the Metropolitan Remand Centre at Ravenhall on Saturday.

Both officers were knocked to the ground and stomped on during the onslaught, described by a source as horrific.

Knocked to the ground, unconscious, hospitalised – this is what we are dealing with. When you have got a bikie that is going in and actually assaulting a staff member, they need to be handcuffed upon movement – no ifs, no buts. You know what, the consequences that we need to have in terms of our justice system should apply not only to those in the community but also to those behind bars. We do not have consequences, and that is why we have got a crime crisis. To deal with it, the government needs to actually step up and do something here. But that is not all. There are many, many examples. On 19 March, only a few days later, in a related incident, a Comanchero, in a wave of violence across two jails, was enraged over a decision to deport his brother. The *Herald Sun* said the:

... anger was sparked by his brother being denied time with him before being banished back to New Zealand.

It culminated in the savage bashing of two officers by the bikie inside the Metropolitan Remand Centre ...

So we have got two situations. This one was in Port Phillip, when the outlaw motorcycle gang member had been in Port Phillip with other members last month, which is believed to have been the start of these concerns. These are just two examples, but there are plenty, plenty more. This continues on. Let me get to 'Officer attacked at Barwon Prison':

Police are investigating another assault on a staff member at Barwon Prison.

The victim – believed to be a supervisor at the maximum security jail – was allegedly attacked and spat on during a violent incident on September 9 ...

Then there is another one, 'Killer admits to vicious prison officer bashing':

A convicted killer who is serving decades in prison for murdering a woman at Hoppers Crossing, has admitted to brutally bashing two guards at Barwon prison.

Sigaragh Baea, 29, appeared in the County Court of Victoria on Monday over an unproved attack on the male and female officers in February of last year.

The female guard was knocked out and suffered serious injuries including a broken leg, while her colleague received cuts and bruises.

Another example – they are being knocked out. These are coward punches happening in prison, behind bars – knocked out. I appreciate the government is trying to do something in terms of adding further sentences on to these individuals. The changes that are proposed are important in terms of getting additional sentences, not to be served concurrently but consecutively, as the team for the minister said, and I thank the minister's office for the briefing that they provided to me on this. They are certainly very well versed in terms of what changes are proposed, and they are to try and change things to add additional sentences on to these people. But as I said earlier, this is not just about somebody that committed a crime and got a few years who that six months might make a difference to. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, killers, do not worry about another six months to their sentence. They do not care. This will not deter them at all. The only way to deter a killer that is in prison for 10-plus years is loss of privilege: stick them in handcuffs, restrict their movement, keep staff safe – simple. That is what we are proposing in terms of our amendments.

I will go on to some other parts of this bill, because there are some other important parts of this bill that I think need to be covered. The first part is the Serious Offenders Act. This deals with serious offenders, many of whom are on the sex offenders register – that is the second part of the bill – and it ensures better protection post release. These offenders are still very much a danger to society, and we need to ensure that the community, victims and families of victims are protected. To do that we need to ensure where they live, who they live with and the surroundings are all certainly managed to ensure that these people do not commit more crimes. That is what this part of the bill covers: things like wearing ankle monitoring bracelets, which is something that the government is looking at proposing and rolling out. That is important in terms of the change, and that needs to be covered as well. Who are they living with? Are they living with another sex offender? That should not be the case. Are they living with somebody on whom they have done violence before? That should not be the case.

There is a need to look at that register in terms of the information and restricting and limiting risk, because that is what this is all about, risk mitigation. Anything that does that is something that we do support. We think that is really, really important, so we are supporting that. We say to the government that we will work with them on whatever those cases are. The kinds of things included in the Serious Offenders Act include better support for victims participating in post-sentence decision-making submissions, clarifying the directions that the authority can give to supervision and electronic monitoring and expanding the membership of the authority. Again, at the briefing we were told that because there is so much work happening in this space there need to be more staff to be able to manage the Post Sentence Authority, so the membership of the authority is being increased from 10 to 13, with an Aboriginal person being included in that. So we appreciate the need to expand the membership of the authority.

Better information sharing for people that are working with a person on an order to be better eyes on the people that are being supervised: again, this is really important, because we know those people that are released on an order or that are released on a register will have potentially other agencies that will work with them – health agencies, police and other agencies as well. We need to ensure that that information is properly shared, so I like the intent in terms of what the government is trying to do here. I hope that actually we have got the technology and the means to do it and, the last bit about it, that we have the resourcing, because we know that has been a real problem with the government; a lot of the policy changes have not necessarily been the problem, the resourcing has been the problem, and I will come to that very shortly.

I will touch on it now. We did see a situation where the coroner released a recommendation that was particularly around Noeline Dalzell, who unfortunately was murdered by her partner. The system failed in that particular instance. Victoria Police rejected the coroner's recommendation to notify women when violent partners are released from jail, citing a lack of resources, and this again is a failure of the system. So the recommendation is to ensure that information is shared, that you have got different agencies that are notified. But in this particular case you have got the tragic case of 49-year-old Noeline Dalzell, who was brutally murdered in front of her three children by an abusive ex-partner, James Fairhall, in 2020. The judge later stated that police should have warned Ms Dalzell of Fairhall's release and that it could have saved her life. So here is a scenario of a lack of resourcing and policies obviously needing to change, but also you have got to have the resources to go with it.

It is a blight on society when we know just how many family violence issues we have in this state, it really is, and also we have got to remember we have a situation where one woman is killed every 11 days. Police responded to over 104,000 family violence incidents in the year 2024, rising by 54 per cent since 2014, meaning that police are responding to a family violence incident every 5 minutes. We will have the police crime stats coming out tomorrow, and I am sure that record will unfortunately continue. We need to ensure victims are put first, and that is really, really important.

So the information sharing is important – better eyes on people. But I would say and plead to the government: do not cut budgets. Do not cut corrections budgets or police budgets in the middle of a crime crisis. Taking almost \$50 million out of the police budget is not a good look when we are experiencing a crime crisis in Victoria.

Clarifying the actions that police can take to bring them in line with other police investigations processes, being able to release unconditionally is another change, an important change. What it means is police can do their job. If they want to investigate somebody on suspicion, they can do that. They can bring them in for questioning. They can charge and ultimately release unconditionally if the information is not there. It brings it in line with other work that Victoria Police does. It is a very important change.

Another part which is really important is dealing with the Sex Offenders Registration Act. This is determined by the court, the need to make a supervision act for the register of five years. Most people that are on the sex offenders register are on there for life. We were told in our briefing that 22 people or thereabouts are not covered. That figure could increase. So what the government is doing here is ensuring that those people that are released that do not have an ability to be on that register for life have an ability to be on that register for five years. I think that is really important. But I do want to just raise that back in 2021, when I was the shadow minister for this space, the Shadow Minister for Police and Shadow Minister for Crime Prevention, there was talk about operation of a Victorian sex offenders register. A recent County Court proposal had sought to increase judges' discretion to keep convicted sex offenders off the register, meaning sex offenders could be employed in schools, religious organisations and transport services, leaving police – and victims, more importantly – blind as to people's whereabouts. We raised this back in 2021, and it has been an issue since then. We certainly campaigned on it in 2018, including about more transparency and more people on the serious sex offenders list. It is very important.

All of these changes are important, and that is why I do want to just point out that quite often, particularly when it comes to law and order – we have got our Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs in here, who will tell you that – when it comes to tobacco licensing, again the government is playing catch-up; post and boast, catch up; bail laws, catch up; and machete laws, catch up. This is another one. But, you know what, if the government is copying our ideas, then great. Ultimately all we want is for victims to be safe, for Victorians to be safe and to ensure that there are consequences for those that break the law.

We have spoken about corrections and the assaults. I will touch on that in my wrap-up. The last part is the miscellaneous changes. There are two components to the miscellaneous changes dealing with

parole. The first part is largely centred around the ‘no body, no parole’ element. We can all recognise that this has been an important change. It basically says you will not be put out on parole until you cooperate to ultimately determine where a body is. We know certainly one of the key cases is that of Samantha Murphy. I will not go into the details for obvious reasons, but that is an important example. We need to ensure that if you have an offender, somebody who is not willing to cooperate with Victoria Police, well, they just do not get parole; it is quite simple. What this particular change does is just clean up a technicality. It manages that system so that if people do not give that information once they are convicted, over a number of years they do not have to go through the whole process, if that information is not forthcoming, and clog up the parole board. It kind of smooths things out and makes it a lot easier in terms of that process. Again, we have no issue with that particular element.

The second part, dealing with the miscellaneous changes, provides the parole board with discretion to revoke automatic parole and cancellation for minor offences. This deals with a situation where somebody who might be in for a shorter timeframe is seeking early parole and by the time they actually go through the process of the parole hearing and the granting, the time exceeds the time that they are being locked up for. That is just silly, and what this is saying is that we want to be able to expedite that process so that we give fairness. And again, we have no issue with that. Overall we believe that we do not have issues at all with what the government is proposing here. What we are trying to do is make this bill better. That is why we are here; we are trying to improve the bill, and we are trying to do it particularly for the safety of all Victorians and the safety of workers, no matter who they are and no matter where they work. That is what we are doing here.

I do note for the government particularly that there was an almost 95 per cent no-confidence motion in the corrections commissioner only recently, and that was done on the basis of safety. That was done because staff do not feel safe in prisons, and ultimately they voted for a no-confidence motion in the corrections commissioner. I know that would be pretty hard to handle being the corrections commissioner, and this is not necessarily any attack on them, but I do note we have had a no-confidence motion on a police commissioner, a no-confidence motion on a corrections commissioner and only today a no-confidence motion on the fire rescue commissioner as well. That is three no-confidence motions in under 12 months – in about six months. The common thread in all of this is the Allan Labor government, and ultimately the buck does stop with the minister. They are the ones that have the lever. They are the ones that can have the policy change. They are the ones that have the resources and ability to be able to throw some more money, expertise and resources at this. Ultimately, when it comes to a vote of no confidence, it should not be just the commissioner, it should be the minister, who is responsible. I would say that and I would highlight that.

Here is – pardon the pun – a get-out-of-jail-free card for the government, and the get-out-of-jail-free card for the government is to back our changes. That will show many of the staff working in the prisons, who contact me almost every day and who do not feel supported, that the government is finally listening. That is what we are calling for. It is very, very simple: back the changes, ensure there are consequences for those that assault staff members and send a message that this government will finally keep workers safe and ensure there are consequences for people that do the wrong thing. Whether you are behind bars or you are on the streets, there should be consequences when you break the law and when you assault people. That is what we are asking for – nothing more, nothing less – and we ask the government to support our amendments.

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (11:46): I am very pleased to rise today to speak in support of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which proposes a number of improvements to our justice system. Together these improvements will ensure processes within our justice system can function as intended and that safety is prioritised in our prisons and, importantly, in our communities. I would like to recognise and thank the Minister for Corrections in the other place, his ministerial office and the Department of Justice and Community Safety for developing this proposed legislation. As chair of the Women’s Correctional Services Advisory Committee, I work closely with the minister, and I want to thank him for his strong support of WCSAC and the work that we do as a committee. I

would also like to acknowledge the work of Ross Porter and thank him for the support and advice that he provides. We have two women's correctional facilities in Victoria, the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Deer Park and Tarrengower in Maldon. Through my role I have had the opportunity to visit these prisons on a number of occasions, meeting with staff and women in custody. I want to thank the corrections staff for the work they do, their professionalism and their dedication.

Just this week WCSAC visited the Werribee justice centre to learn more about supervised court orders, community correction orders and drug treatment orders. A special thank you to Patti, who shared her lived experience with the committee as a woman who has served time in custody and is now doing great advocacy work on the outside, as well as senior parole officers, court practice workers and advanced practitioners, who provided insights into the work that they do, why these orders are important, how they are implemented and, most importantly, how they are keeping our community safe. It was a really worthwhile visit, and I do just want to thank the great members of WCSAC for the work that they do as important stakeholders in providing advice to the minister about women in the corrections system and in custody across Victoria.

In terms of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill, which is before us today, there has been significant consultation, and I would like to recognise all the stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this bill, including Corrections Victoria, the Office of Public Prosecutions, Victoria Police, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. They are really important stakeholders, because when we are talking about corrections we really do need a whole-of-government approach.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety also briefed the Community and Public Sector Union on staff assault reform. I know from my firsthand experience of visiting prisons that prisons by their very nature are dynamic environments and corrections staff do an incredible job every day. We have heard the safety concerns, and we are ensuring that corrections staff have the option to use handcuffs and other strategies and tools to keep themselves safe.

Whether they work in corrections in Victoria or whether they work in any business, every worker in Victoria deserves a safe workplace and occupational health and safety rights. We know that this government is a champion of workers and a champion of occupational health and safety, and that is why it has supported workplace manslaughter laws and why it works every day with unions and respects unions. To be lectured about unions, as a former national official of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, is a little bit rich. We will continue to implement measures that support and protect our hardworking staff and our union members, and once again I thank them for the work they do.

The Victorian government is dedicated to making our community safer and making our justice system stronger, and in the most recent budget, this government committed \$2 billion towards the criminal justice system, courts and emergency services. \$727 million it has invested in improving capacity at prisons and youth justice centres, providing beds and more staff. But I would also like to highlight some of the funding in this year's state budget that is targeting recidivism and integration. Examples of these include employment hubs at prisons as well as assessment and transition coordinators and Aboriginal wellbeing officers, who assist with the transition into and out of custody.

With regard to what is before us, the Serious Offenders Act 2018 was introduced in 2018 and addresses the management of offenders who still pose an unacceptable and serious risk upon the completion of their prison sentence. A five-year review was required under this legislation and was completed by the department in 2023, offering 13 recommendations. Several of these recommendations require legislative changes, which is what the bill before us provides. It also improves the function of our justice system through a number of related provisions. Altogether this bill proposes amendments primarily to the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Corrections Act 1986, with additional consequential amendments made to three further acts.

I would like to really highlight some of the changes proposed to the Corrections Act. Firstly, this bill will better protect the thousands of corrections workers in our prisons by ensuring real consequences for any prisoners who cause injury to them. This bill does so by broadening the stated definition of ‘prison offence’ to include special offences against custodial workers on duty, which includes governors, prison officers, escort officers and others fulfilling the same functions. Prison offences come with jail time that is cumulative, not concurrent, and therefore all prisoners convicted of injuring a corrections worker will face real additional time added to their sentence – a real consequence for their behaviour and their actions.

Another amendment to the Corrections Act will make sure that ‘no body, no parole’ provisions can function as truly intended. ‘No body, no parole’ requires a person in prison for murder or manslaughter to cooperate with police in locating a victim’s remains in order to be considered for parole. We know this provides deep and emotional significance for victims’ families and loved ones and ongoing trauma. Families are often left in a painful limbo. The proposed amendments clarify this provision, relating specifically to situations where there is no body, and that is to say, only in situations when a victim’s remains are still missing. ‘No body, no parole’ is intended to address a narrow, agonising set of circumstances. This amendment better conveys that intent.

The final substantive change to the Corrections Act allows for a more responsive approach to the automatic cancellation of parole. This currently occurs if a person on parole is sentenced to a separate term of imprisonment, no matter how short. The proposed amendment makes it clear that the Adult Parole Board of Victoria, if they see fit, may revoke these automatic parole cancellations. Used judiciously, these revocations will help to avoid additional, unnecessary, lengthy and expensive parole reapplications. It also allows the board the discretion to reverse potentially unjust parole cancellations – for example, when a very short sentence is imposed for a nonviolent offence. Reinstating parole, where appropriate, also allows for monitoring and support during the transition back into community. Together these improvements will work to ensure that the Corrections Act can function as intended, keeping our prisons and our communities safe.

This bill will also make amendments to the Serious Offenders Act to implement several recommendations from its recent review. In particular I would like to highlight the amendments designed specifically to better support the experience of victims. This bill clarifies that relevant persons on the victims register should be appropriately notified regarding an offender’s involvement in the post-sentence scheme. They may also make submissions regarding the offender’s management, but significantly these amendments will allow the Post Sentence Authority to use more discretion when deciding what matters require notifications so that victims can be kept sufficiently informed while not being inundated with unnecessary and potentially traumatic notifications.

Further improvements that are proposed in this bill include clarifying the role of the authority in the courts with regard to directions about living arrangements as well as electronic monitoring orders. They include specifying that police may remand in custody, release on bail or release unconditionally persons arrested for contravening supervision orders so that police can respond appropriately to specific situations, and they include allowing the court that places the suppression order to be the court that deals with any potential breaches.

There are a number of other improvements that we are making to the Post Sentence Authority too: increasing it from 10 to 13 and including at least one member identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is an important bill. I commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (11:56): I rise today to speak on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It was interesting listening to the member for Caulfield at the start talk about this legislation that is going through and also the member for Wendouree getting into the core of what we are trying to achieve here. I think everyone that stands in this chamber today realises that we do need to make safe working conditions for all Victorians. All of us, whether we are working on the Big Build here in Melbourne, we are on a worksite, like we used to be in regional Victoria, Acting Speaker

Farnham, or we are here in Parliament, need to make sure that we have got regulations and procedures in place that protect everybody that goes to work. The amendment that the member for Caulfield circulated, giving more powers to these workers to make sure that they are safe, seems to me to be a good amendment right across the board. If we are changing stuff to make our corrections officers and people inside our prison system safer, who are probably working with the very worst of people in society, we need to make sure that they have got every lever available to them. We heard about how there have been incidents with correction officers being bashed and assaulted. We need to make sure that we give them the power so that that does not happen. With this bill and with these changes that I am going to talk about shortly, we are achieving most of that, but why not toughen it right up to make sure that we have given every single person inside our prisons the opportunity to stay safe?

The bill seeks to amend the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Corrections Act 1986 and is for other purposes. The Serious Offenders Act 2018 relates to the legislative framework that is designed to provide enhanced protection to the community by requiring offenders who have served custodial sentences for certain serious and violent sex offences to be subject to ongoing detention. As I said, these are changes that we need to make to keep everybody safe. They are changes that we need to make to make sure that the officers that are doing their job inside our prison system have all their rights and protections around them as well. The Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 establishes a legal framework to monitor individuals convicted of certain sexual offences, aiming to enhance community safety and prevention of recidivism. We need to have these types of conditions in place. We need to be able to stand up in this chamber together and stop offenders who do this, and make sure that when they do get out, we have procedures around to keep the community safe.

The Corrections Act 1986 is the principal legislation governing the operation of correctional facilities in Victoria, including our prison system and the management of offenders. It outlines the establishment and administration of prisons, as well as the rights and responsibilities of both prisoners and prison staff. I know that the member for Caulfield was very much trying to outline that there is some great stuff we want to get through as quickly as we can here in this chamber to protect our prison staff. There is a concern that because we do not have these protections in place at the moment and we are not going as hard as we can to make sure we are protecting our prison officers, we have had a downturn in people wanting to go to work in our correctional facilities. We need to make sure that we can staff them properly and that we can staff them safely. At the end of the day, if you go to work, no matter where you are in Victoria, no matter what work site you are on – whether you are making coffees in a coffee shop or looking after our most hardened criminals in the criminal justice system – it should be as safe an environment as you can actually have. We need to make sure we are doing that.

In the past year alone, there have been 442 assaults on our prison staff, including 10 sexual assaults and six incidents requiring hospitalisation. It is a hard and harsh working environment that they encounter inside our correctional facilities, and I do not think most of us actually realise – except for the ones here who have worked in those facilities – just how hard and how tough it is. We need to make sure we are ticking every single box that we can as we stand here in the chamber and talk about change, to make sure that we have tough, tough laws. As I said, workers really do need our help to make sure they have a safe working environment.

I have continually had people come through the front door of my office, and I am sure every single member in here has experienced the same thing – constituents coming in for a chat, worried about safety on the streets in their local communities. We have people, especially on social media, posting all the time about undesirables at every time of night, walking up driveways, looking into their property and stealing cars. We do have a society at the moment where people do not want to play by the rules. Most do, but we have those people who do not want to play by the rules. They are committing crimes in our community, being caught by the police, put through the courts and ending up in jail. They just do not want to play by the rules. This is why we are here to toughen up the rules, so there is no grey area that people can work out and work around.

I know at the moment there is a court case going on in Morwell. We had a police procedure probably about seven or eight weeks ago on the streets of Morwell where we were continually having unruly behaviour from certain individuals, the criminal element. We were having people go into shops and just take what they wanted. There was a police operation before the court case happened where police actually had the powers to stop and search individuals on the street, and within an hour or so you could actually see the difference that that made. Being able to give police those powers just proves that what we do in here makes a difference at the coalface, on the streets.

I had elderly people coming in and saying they felt unsafe on the streets, and then, to their credit, they came back in after this particular operation went down and they visibly noticed the difference. While this court case has been running there has been a presence on the street – that visual presence that is a deterrent. If you can see someone in a uniform, whether it be an authorised officer or one of our wonderful Victoria Police people wandering around, it does make a difference: (1) it makes people, if they are going to be causing havoc down the street, stop and think and (2) if you are on the streets just going about your daily activities, it does make you feel a lot safer.

As we said, we are not opposing these amendments that are coming through to this legislation. We would like to see things toughen up just a fraction more, because I think I can speak for every person that stands in this chamber: if you walk out your front door at home and you go to work, no matter where you are working or what you are doing, you have the right for the government and this Parliament to protect you so you walk back through the door at night.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:06): Just to set the frame, this bill is one of a number of reforms that our Allan Labor government has brought before this Parliament to crack down on serious offending, including our recent tough new bail laws, a ban on the sale of machetes and this week's announcement of new post-and-boast laws. Zoning in further on the corrections system and the frame for this particular legislation before us, I note that this year's budget has invested \$727 million in new funding for the corrections and youth justice systems to ramp up capacity. This will mean that our custodial facilities will continue to be safe and focus on supporting people to turn their lives around. That new funding package will increase the number of staff working right across our corrections and youth justice systems, with 700 new staff to be recruited. The new Western Plains Correctional Centre is opening within weeks, adding an extra capacity of over 1000 maximum-security beds into the corrections system. These are all part of a coordinated effort to make the community safer.

Zoning in on some of the specific Corrections Act 1986 amendments, we know that there are over 3000 people working as corrections workers in our public prisons right across the state, and it goes without saying that they are very much at the front line. Whilst their work is largely unseen to community, we know that they are working hard every single day and night to keep Victorians safe from crime, and we certainly thank them for that. It goes without saying also that it can be really dangerous work. I have visited both remand and prisons, and the sense that I got from that – apart from the incredible professionalism and humanity with which the corrections officers approached their work – is that they literally are having to make decisions all day long. It is not a static space. It is one where they have to be monitoring every minute of every day, and I do not in any way wish to pretend that I understand the stress or the pressures that they are under; I am simply reflecting that it was very evident to me that this is a high-pressure space and a very difficult working environment which they handle professionally. We know that unfortunately sometimes they are subject to violence and aggression from people in custody, and we know that this is completely unacceptable, whether it be within a prison or in any workplace in the state. This is why the bill is making important changes to make sure that there are real penalties for people in custody who assault a corrections worker.

Before I proceed on the changes specific to the strengthening of penalties, I do want to note that staff do risk assessments every day, and these are key operational decisions that are inherent to their role. As a government we want to ensure they have flexibility with the use of the tools they have the option to use, such as handcuffs and other tools, as opposed to imposing an arbitrary and non-evidence-based solution or option. We respect the professionalism of their role, and that is why the amendments are

as such in this particular bill. We most certainly have heard their safety concerns. They have asked for tougher penalties, and that is what we are seeking to deliver with this bill. I say ‘seeking’ because obviously the bill has to be passed before those tougher measures can be implemented. I just want to clarify what might otherwise be misinterpreted with regard to the discretion of the corrections officers and the respect we pay to them for the difficult operational decisions that they have to make.

The bill will define the assault of a corrections worker as a prison offence under the Corrections Act 1986. This will mean that once Victoria Police charge a prisoner with assault and they are found guilty of that offence by a court, the court must impose an additional sentence to be served on top of the sentence that the prisoner is already serving. Too often courts are directing the sentence to be served at the same time as the prisoner’s existing sentence and it has no impact on the prisoner’s release date. This means there is no real, practical consequence for the committing of the assault, so the bill will change that and ensure there are real punishments for assaulting a corrections officer at work. This change will also act as a disincentive for people in custody to be violent towards staff, and certainly the intention is to reduce the number of these assaults that occur in the future. That is absolutely the goal of this legislation.

There are other aspects to this bill, including the Serious Offenders Act 2018 amendments. We know that the post-sentence scheme has been in place. It was established in 2018. A statutory review of the scheme was completed in 2023 covering the first five years of the scheme’s operation. Whilst the review found that the overall scheme was working well, it made recommendations for improvements. The bill will implement the legislative aspects of those recommendations. It will make it easier for victims who are registered on the victims register to engage with the Post Sentence Authority, meaning victims of crime can be kept better informed of developments in the offender’s supervision, as well as enable the Post Sentence Authority to consider the views of registered victims in its decisions. It will also clarify the directions powers of the Post Sentence Authority as well as the powers of Victoria Police to allow for swifter action to implement conditions or respond to possible breaches. Finally, it will enable better information sharing between a range of organisations and the Post Sentence Authority. When we are looking from a holistic perspective at how we make the community safer and at keeping the Victorian community safe from crime, well, what is inherent in that? Of course there are many layers, and one of them is – I have said this in a back-to-front way – the post-sentence scheme. It is just one example of many layers of implementation of changes to help make the community safer.

The sex offenders register is another important tool in protecting the community from risks posed by known offenders in the community. So there is some crossover between this act and the Serious Offenders Act, both of which are aimed at ensuring we have an appropriate level of supervision of sex offenders. So the bill will make a small change to improve the interaction of the two schemes by requiring people who are subject to a supervision order to have reporting obligations under the sex offenders register for five years after their supervision order ends. Whilst this is only impacting a small number of people, it does ensure that we continue to appropriately monitor those people in the community who may be at risk of further sexual offending. The prioritisation of victims but also broader community interest is at the core of these very important changes, and they are certainly most welcome.

With regard to – and I know it has already been mentioned – miscellaneous amendments specifically pertaining to parole, the bill clarifies the application of the ‘no body, no parole’ provision for use only in homicide cases where the location of the deceased remains unknown at the time the perpetrator is being considered for parole. I think we can see inherently there are very pragmatic elements to this change, and I certainly noted there was no opposition from the opposition on this particular aspect of the bill either, which is welcome, because it is very much a pragmatic change. We can certainly see that if somebody is not forthcoming with the location of someone who is deceased, there have to be consequences for that. But at the same time, we do not want to protract the work of the Adult Parole Board of Victoria unnecessarily. So this makes a really pragmatic adjustment, which is certainly most

welcome. I just want to close out by again thanking corrections officers for the incredible work that they do every day to keep playing a very important role in community safety in Victoria. Thank you.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:16): The Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 that we have before us touches on a number of really important elements for all of us, keeping the community safe but also keeping custodial officers safe. I am going to commence with the changes around the Serious Offenders Act 2018, and 2018 was not so long ago. In 2023 there was a statutory review of the act, and I think it was a very positive move that this was undertaken. It found that the act was mostly okay, but it made 13 recommendations to enhance the post-sentence scheme.

When I was looking at this bill and thinking about the Serious Offenders Act and who fits in it and who does not, I was taken to the act itself and had a look at schedule 1, which has a whole list of serious sex offences, and schedule 2, which has serious violent offences. These were around servitude, commercialisation, sexual assault and rape, dealing with adults and with children. It is particularly confronting even just reading a list in those schedules about what fits in it. Essentially they were offences against the Crimes Act 1958, the Sentencing Act 1991 or the sex work act.

What we have with serious offenders is that they complete their prison term and they are deemed still to be a risk to the community. This is where it is so important that the community be protected, so some of these changes around operational issues are really around how these operational issues enhance that post-sentencing scheme. One thing is that we need victims to be better informed. One of a couple of the areas that I will touch on that are notable here is clarifying the Post Sentence Authority directions. This means that there are directions about who a person on a supervision order can live with. This really is around playing a critical role in managing the individual's risk regarding co-residents. There is antisocial behaviour; there are all sorts of things that fit in here, because you have drug use as well. There could also be somebody who is involved with a supervision order with a history of family violence. We had in 2020 Noeline Dalzell, who was fatally stabbed in Seaford in front of her kids. The offender, her former partner, was living with them. He came out of jail, had nowhere to go and within a very short period of time was living back in her home and tragically killed her in front of her children. It is just extraordinary that this could happen. The Law Institute of Victoria I note do oppose some of these changes based on human rights and privacy and things like that, but I am very firm that we need to keep community members safe in this space because we know the stats are not trending in the right direction.

The Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 has some crossover, because a lot of these people will also be known serious offenders. This also deals with a post-sentence scheme, which is linked to what I have just talked about. Currently, offenders provide personal details, details of their work and details of their travel so that we can keep an eye on the offenders and know where they are moving and how they are moving. And there is a change to the post-sentencing reporting obligation of five years.

I mentioned that the stats here are heading in the wrong direction, and I just want to mention some stats for the chamber, because I am not sure that everybody is aware. According to the Crime Statistics Agency, from December 2024 there were 5571 counts of rape recorded as offences, up from 2015, when there were 3924. That is a 1500 difference. For the better part of the last few years it has been around 4500, and I am a bit concerned now that it is up to 5500 rape cases. Crimes against children, which we would also find particularly horrendous: in 2015 there were 1540, and as of December 2024 there were 4439. That is a staggering increase. So the statistics are heading in the wrong direction, and if the government think that they are getting tough on crimes against children and crimes against women, they need to have a good look at the crime statistics, because what has been happening is not working and it is just simply not good enough.

I am going to turn now to the amendments to the Corrections Act 1986, and there is an issue here. The issue is that there have been attacks on prison officers. These are much further than just spitting and abuse, which happen almost day in, day out. Whilst the amendments may be minor, I think that they are important. We are talking about severe attacks on prison officers, and if we have a look at the stats,

in the past year alone there have been 442 assaults on staff, including 10 sexual assaults and six incidents requiring hospitalisation. This is pretty severe. These endanger not only the lives of the custodial officers but also law and order within the prison itself. So we have got this problem. It should not happen but it does happen, and it happens in the men's and women's prisons as well as in the youth prisons. The second-reading speech said the custodial officers have a right to feel safe at work. I would go one further. They have a right to be safe at work, not just to feel touchy-feely, cosy – safe. They need to be kept safe all the time, and we can see that the problem has not been dealt with effectively from a number of points: from the officers, from the prisoners and certainly from the government, with the recruitment and retention of staff, because if you have got continual attacks, it is not good enough.

What this bill proposes is additional prison time so most perpetrators in prison will be required to serve additional time rather than concurrently, which can sometimes happen at the moment, if they cause injury to custodial officers. That is not far enough. 'Custodial officers' is not far enough. They could cause injury to any number of people working in those prisons, and that certainly should be considered. I want the chamber and the minister particularly to reflect on these assaults on prison officers and what they actually mean, because on one hand the person, the offender, is going to be penalised with making sure they do additional time, but we have still got the issue of what has happened to the prison officers, the custodial officers. People in this chamber note the dangers and the high-pressure situation, but I have a couple of quotes from the book *Code Blue: Prison Officer in Danger*, written by Bruce Perham, who is a social worker who has done a lot of work in prisons. This is from a young prison officer:

You know the prisoners hate us and would kill us if they could. They wouldn't be killing us as a person, they would be killing us as a uniform.

These guys go on to say that they feel very disillusioned because they do not feel supported. This same prison officer went on:

Many a time a prisoner would verbally push me in the hope that I would lash out, knowing I would pay a high price for doing so. They can do whatever they like with no consequences.

Hopefully now there may be some consequences, because the prison officers feel at the minute that there are no consequences. They are left to deal with it. They are left to fill out forms, live with that trauma, get on with their day and keep moving. Here is another quote:

It was a horrendous assault on a prison officer and it upset a lot of us. The prisoners who witnessed it received counselling. But all we got was a debrief about what we did. Often these debriefs can end in, 'if you hadn't done that, the event with the prisoner would not have happened'. Half the time we come out of these debriefs as the cause of the problem. Our ... reactions are never taken into account.

That was from a female officer. That quote absolutely highlights how prison systems struggle to manage the psychological impact of their staff being assaulted and lapse very quickly into defence management of the situation. This is just not good enough. Yes, it is good that those offenders are getting additional sentencing – time added on – but we need to be emotionally supporting the prison officers, the custodial officers, not hanging them out to dry and not making it look to them as though they are the cause of the issue. They need to be supported holistically, not just in the tearoom, where they can all have a quick chat after it and go, 'Gee, it was pretty horrible what happened. Let's go home. We'll have a couple of drinks at the end of the day. Hope it doesn't turn into full-blown alcoholism or something bad happens at home.' They need to have proper debriefing sessions continually so that they are looked after and kept safe. This is part of the reason why retention and attraction are so difficult in this area. It is not just that the offenders do not get punished; the prison officers themselves do not get supported enough.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (12:26): I too rise to speak on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Before my contribution, I do want to say a very big thank you and give a very big shout-out to corrections staff. It is not an easy job, and I do not think it takes anyone to have worked there to know that it is not an easy job to do. Thinking about corrections staff, it is interesting because I know that one of the best friends of my sister-in-law up in Sydney is actually a staff member at one

of the women's prisons in Sydney. She is a particularly tough lady but very fair. She has a beautiful nature. I know that she absolutely loves her job.

Turning back to the bill, the bill does aim to build upon our government's efforts to ensure our communities are, importantly, safe and that our prisons are safe, with a focus on greater protections for custodial officers and improved management of serious offenders once their sentences are finished. It should be clear that our government is absolutely committed to ensuring not only that our corrections system is operating effectively but also that the folks who work in our prisons, keeping our community and inmates safe, are also safe at work. We on this side of the house know that everyone deserves to be safe at work and return safely home to the people that they love each and every single day.

I note that last month's state budget invested an additional \$727 million into boosting the capacity of Victoria's prison system. As the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I heard about that \$727 million in detail during the budget estimates hearings over the past couple of weeks. That \$727 million includes hiring additional staff and bringing more prison beds on line. We know that we need this extra capacity. We need it because we can already see that our new bail laws are starting to have an effect. Last month there were 465 more people on remand in Victorian prisons compared to April last year, which is an increase of 22 per cent. Also, there were 39 more young people on remand in youth justice compared to April last year, which is an increase of 71 per cent. That is a remarkable jump. Whilst these numbers are not inherently fabulous – nearly 500 people, too many – what they do is they tell us that these changes are working and that more offenders are not being bailed. That is thanks to a successful recruitment drive. I love hearing the Minister for Police and the Minister for Corrections talk about recruitment drives for police here in Victoria and the different methods and things that they are doing to recruit more police officers and also to recruit more prison officers. We have been able to bring on an additional 640 prison officers and more than 170 youth justice officers in just the past year.

It should be clear that we do not want to go back to a corrections system and a remand system where folks languish on remand for months for a simple case of shoplifting. That is not what we on this side of the chamber want to see. Our system should not be about repeating the mistakes that led to the tragic death of Veronica Nelson. But we must be very clear that our corrections system exists for a reason, and that is to protect our community from violent offenders. It is about protection, it is about deterrence and, most importantly – and I think our community gets this – it is about rehabilitation. If you ever go ahead and speak to a victim of crime, yes, they want that perpetrator of the crime to be punished, but actually most of all they wish that it had not happened in the first place. That is why rehabilitation and prevention and diversion away from criminal activity are just so very important, and that is why there are substantial increases in investment into those particular services and organisations that are doing that very important work.

I note just last week my community in Brimbank held a community police forum, which my great friend and colleague the amazing member for St Albans, who is here at the table today, attended. I heard that it was a great conversation, with a lot of questions raised, and the police were able to provide a lot of information and reassurance for the local community. We also had, surprisingly – I think it was the first time they had turned up – the local Liberals in attendance as well as the member for Caulfield, who from what I have heard might have been a bit embarrassed when a particular local Liberal volunteer started promoting the adult crime, adult time policy that the Crisafulli LNP government in Queensland have adopted. I certainly hope, after the member for Caulfield appeared so embarrassed by that, that those opposite do not adopt this as their policy going into the next election. Our local police –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** No, get this, you will like this bit. You will like this, because it sparked some interest from those opposite in talking about how potentially that could be their policy. The local police in Brimbank completely shot down that idea. Do you know what else? They said it would not work.

There is more reform to come for our corrections system than just bail reform. This portfolio is also about the ongoing management of offenders when they enter the prison system and, more importantly, when they eventually leave the prison system. That is what this bill is all about. One of the biggest changes in this bill is an increase in penalties for inmates who assault custodial officers – and so there should be. Currently there is a presumption in the Sentencing Act 1991 that requires sentences for prison offences to be served cumulatively. What that means is that offenders will spend more time for crimes committed in custody. However, we are not always seeing this, and it is clear that the legislation requires greater clarity on this point so that we do not have offenders not serving that additional time.

This is not just about punishing criminal behaviour. Folks who work in our prisons deserve to be safe at work, just like any other worker, and these incidents are often, sadly and tragically, quite significant. They cause ongoing health impacts and trauma and often require specialised support and treatment. Like I said at the outset of my contribution today, this is not an easy job; it is a tough job, and I do not think you have to work in it to know it is a tough job. For those that work in it, they live and breathe it and they know it is tough, but I would also say they know it is rewarding work. If we want to hire more staff to work in our prisons, which we need to do, they need to know that if their safety is put at risk – and it is a risk to work with violent offenders – there are punishments and there are deterrents in place so that their safety is not compromised. This is really important, and this is what this bill does so well. The bill is going to remove the ambiguity and it is going to clarify that offences that cause injury to custodial officers are prison offences, which in turn ensures that those sentences are cumulative. The message we are sending to inmates is absolutely crystal clear: if you commit a crime, you will – make no mistake – serve more time.

Of course the bill does more than just this. It is also going to implement recommendations made by a statutory review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018. This legislation is the major framework for the post-sentence management of serious offenders, and we are talking here about not just your normal offender. These are violent, serious offenders and they are sex offenders who continue to pose an unacceptable risk of reoffending, but their sentences have expired. As part of the act there is also a statutory requirement to review the post-sentencing scheme to ensure that it remains effective. The previous review was completed in 2023 and it made 13 recommendations, and this bill before us today delivers on those that require legislative action. This includes changes like clarifying what actions police can take should they arrest a person who is suspected of having broken a condition of their supervision order, as well as things like information sharing and ensuring that the Post Sentence Authority importantly has Indigenous representation to address the needs of our First Nations Victorians who may fall within the scheme.

The bill makes a number of small but really important changes to ensure that our corrections system is operating efficiently and effectively. We have committed to expanding our prison capacity and hiring more prison staff. These changes in this bill today should give them the confidence they need that if they want to work in our prisons we will prioritise their safety at work. That is why I wholeheartedly commend this really fantastic bill to the house today.

**Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:36):** I too rise to speak on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I might just start with a couple of comments that the member for Laverton made around the Crisafulli government. The Crisafulli government are seeing some very promising trends when it comes to the reduction of crime in Queensland since they came to government, and maybe it is time the Allan Labor government actually focused on the needs of Victorians, the priorities of Victorians, when it comes to community safety. There is a crime crisis in the state of Victoria under the Premier's watch; in fact there has been a 19 per cent increase in crime since the Premier took over. Victoria has now reached the highest level of criminal incidents on record under the Allan Labor government. So instead of focusing on what other governments are doing around the country – governments that are actually taking a crime crisis seriously, putting community safety first and seeing green shoots when it comes to crime reduction in the state of Queensland – maybe the Allan Labor government could

actually focus on community safety rather than trying to tear down other governments in this country which are doing the hard work and actually ensuring that community safety comes first.

The bill today establishes more severe penalties for prisoners who attack prison workers. We have heard today some very concerning statistics around the fact that in the past year alone there have been 442 assaults on staff, including 10 sexual assaults and six incidents requiring hospitalisation. These incidents not only endanger the lives of staff but also disrupt the security of the entire prison. The bill before us today seeks to amend the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Corrections Act 1986, with the aim of ensuring that safety risks from serious offenders are appropriately managed, appropriately denouncing and deterring assaults on custodial workers and making minor amendments to parole and other provisions that are not operating as originally intended. I think the key point here is this is a bill that makes some moves towards protecting prison officers and ensuring that their safety is put first, but it really does only make minor amendments and does not go as far as those officers and those workers in our prisons would like to see.

The Serious Offenders Act is the legislative framework providing enhanced protection to the community by requiring offenders who have served custodial sentences for certain serious or violent sex offences to be subject to ongoing detention, while the Sex Offenders Registration Act establishes a legal framework to monitor individuals convicted of certain sexual offences, aiming to enhance community safety and prevent recidivism. The Corrections Act is the principal legislation governing the operation of correctional facilities in Victoria, including prisons and the management of offences.

There are many parts of this bill that the opposition believes are worthy of support, but of course, as with every piece of legislation that comes before this Parliament, there are many elements of concern, some of which I will come back to shortly. Most importantly, people have the right to feel safe in their workplace, and that is especially the case for those very hardworking Victorians who take on the tough job of working in the corrections space. These men and women, as we have heard from the data and as we have heard from the seriousness of the offences against these men and women, are suffering in our corrections system under the Allan Labor government's watch. As I said, over the past year alone there have been 442 assaults on staff in our correctional system, including 10 sexual assaults and six incidents actually requiring hospitalisations. It is simply not good enough. That some of the measures in this bill will help to deter and prevent these types of incidents is worthy of support, but it does not go far enough.

In particular, there is great importance on strengthening the sentencing outcomes for individuals who cause injury to a custodial officer, ensuring that this act will be considered a prison offence and will attract the presumption of a cumulative sentence. It is very important, as a cumulative sentence will act as a deterrent to prisoners. Strengthening the operation of certain elements of the post-sentence scheme for serious sex offenders is also a sensible measure to ensure safety risks posed by these convicted offenders can be appropriately managed. However, it is concerning that the scope of this bill does not cover all staff working in a correctional facility, which seems a pretty significant oversight by the government, given the staffing requirements in these facilities. We have heard a lot today about the importance of retention and of attracting new staff into correctional facilities, but when the bill does not go far enough to protect the wide amount of roles within correctional facilities, you have to ask: is the Allan Labor government actually serious about protecting workers regardless of their role in the corrections system?

We know that the staff within our corrections system are very, very disappointed in the Allan Labor government. We saw that in a vote last month. There was a resounding 94 per cent no-confidence vote against the Corrections Victoria commissioner Larissa Strong. And these changes come as we know we are going to have a greater need for corrections workers. We know that we are going to see an influx. We dragged the government to the table when it came to somewhat strengthening Victoria's bail laws – still not as strong as what they were when they changed them over a year ago – and we know that we are going to see an influx in prisoners. We know that the government has a plan to shut down Port Phillip Prison, and we know that there are not enough workers to manage this in the system.

Yet we have the government today putting forward a half-hearted bill that does not actually deal with that fact and does not expand the definition of ‘worker’ within our corrections system. That is why I commend the work of the member for Caulfield in bringing forward an amendment that would expand that definition to ‘a custodial worker on duty or another person employed or engaged to work in a prison while working in the prison’.

I note that the union has been very, very clear in its support of this amendment, saying that it was told that the bill was okay but there needs to be more immediate consequences for assaulting an officer and that it does not go far enough in the definition of what a worker is in our corrections system. So we have a situation where the union is asking for the government to do more to protect the workers in this space – the very workers that they claim they are trying to keep in the system – and to attract new workers into the system.

As always, this is just another example of the Allan Labor government bringing forward a bill that relates to our criminal justice system but does not actually make the reform needed to not only keep our community safe but keep those hardworking corrections officers – those hardworking people who work within our corrections system – safe. We have seen time and time again that this is a government that is not serious about prioritising the need for community safety in this state. This government has overseen a crime crisis growing and growing, as I said earlier, to a record number of criminal incidents in Victoria. We have seen aggravated burglary and home invasion climb by over 160 per cent under the Allan Labor government. We have seen, under the Premier’s watch, crime increase by 19 per cent. Yet while all those statistics are readily available – and we hear day in, day out from those in our community telling us that they do not feel safe – what does the Allan Labor government do? They weaken Victoria’s bail laws. They have in place machete laws that do not actually ban the holding of a machete, despite the fact we have crime after crime in this state with people wielding machetes. People do not feel safe in their homes, and this is a government that is refusing to deal with the crisis.

Unlike the Allan Labor government, we will actually reform Victoria’s weakened bail laws, and I commend the member for Malvern for his immense amount of work. We will reinstate the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail. We will require offenders to show a compelling reason to be granted bail again. We will remove the current exemption for youth offenders who breach bail again, and we will put in place tougher bail tests for robbery and burglary. That is the difference between the Allan Labor government and their weak bail laws, and a new, fresh government – a coalition government – that will actually prioritise community safety in this state.

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (12:46): I rise to give my contribution on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which seeks to make changes to the Serious Offenders Act 2018 and the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and addresses provisions of the Corrections Act 1986 that are not operating as originally intended. I think this is a good bill, unlike the member for Kew, who thinks that it does not address the issues that we currently are facing, or that present custodial officers are facing. It absolutely does. This bill is about their safety, their health, their wellbeing and also their mental health and wellbeing. Therefore it stretches out to their families, because if a prison officer is coming home from work stressed and anxious, et cetera, it is not good for their relationships at home. Going to work stressed, anxious, concerned, worried or frightened is not what we want people to be doing when they are doing such an amazing and important job. I believe this bill does exactly what the community would expect from a responsible government. It strengthens the way we manage serious offenders once they have served their time, it ensures our laws are doing what they were always meant to do and it sends a clear message that violence against custodial officers is never acceptable.

Through these reforms the bill delivers on several key recommendations from the review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018, reinforcing our post-sentence scheme to make sure it is working properly and protecting the public. These laws are about managing the ongoing risk posed by a small number of serious offenders, people who have committed some of the most serious crimes, and ensuring we continue to keep a close eye on them after they have left the prison system. I think handcuffing anyone

for three months is not really focusing on the rehabilitation and the humanity that we should be focusing on with people in prison.

When it comes to public safety, we cannot afford to take chances. This legislation makes sure our monitoring systems are strong, our laws are clear and the community remains protected. One of the most important parts of this bill is the tougher response to assaults on custodial prison officers. These are people doing incredibly hard and often unseen work, managing some of the most complex and dangerous individuals in our prison system. I do not know how they do it, and I am very, very glad and grateful for their commitment and the work that they do each and every day and each and every night. Unfortunately, the data shows that too many times assaults on these workers have not resulted in further time being added to the offender's sentence. That is not good enough. It sends the wrong message and does not reflect the seriousness of the work our prison officers do every single day. This bill changes that. It strengthens sentencing outcomes for people in prison who cause injury to custodial staff, making it clear that violence in our prison system is unacceptable and there will be consequences.

The bill also updates reporting requirements under the Sex Offenders Registration Act, making sure serious sex offenders in the post-sentence scheme continue to be subject to the appropriate levels of oversight. On top of all that, it makes a series of smaller but important technical amendments to ensure the Corrections Act is working as it should be – things like clarifying parole provisions and fixing unintended issues with the original legislation.

What gives me confidence in this bill is the extensive consultation that has taken place to get it right. The Department of Justice and Community Safety has worked closely with stakeholders right across the justice system, from Corrections Victoria and Victoria Police to the Adult Parole Board of Victoria, courts, health services and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus. That broad support reflects the real need for these reforms and the thoughtful work that has gone into them. I thank those that have done this crucial work to ensure that all the relevant bodies understand what is being changed.

Just delving a little bit deeper into some of the changes that I mentioned earlier, the Sex Offenders Registration Act is a really important tool to help keep the community safe. It means people who have committed sexual offences have to report certain details to Victoria Police, like where they live, where they work, if they wish to travel and where they are going to travel. This helps police keep track of them and step in early if needed, reducing the risk of further harm to the community. This bill also strengthens those rules, especially for people who are also under a post-sentence order under the Serious Offenders Act. These are people who have already served their time but who a court has decided still pose a risk to the community. Under the changes people on a post-sentence order for a serious sex offence will need to report their details for the entire time under the order and then continue to report their details for a further period of five years. That is a big improvement. It closes a gap that could appear once a post-sentence order finishes and ensures Victoria Police can keep monitoring high-risk individuals for longer. It also gives more peace of mind to the community knowing that the people who pose the highest risks are still being monitored and watched and the community is being kept safe. These changes are all about keeping people safe and making sure the system keeps working even after someone finishes their prison time and supervision. It is a smart move that shows we are serious about protecting the community from further harm.

When it comes to protecting our hardworking prison officers and custodial staff, this bill sets out to do just that, as I mentioned earlier. Between the start of 2024 and March 2025 there were around 330 assaults on prison staff across Victoria. While the majority of these incidents, about 62 per cent, did not result in physical injury, they still involved troubling behaviour like shoving, throwing food or water or spitting – behaviour that is still unacceptable and causes stress and emotional harm to our workers. Unfortunately, there were also five cases where prison officers were hurt badly enough to have to go to hospital and required treatment. These attacks have serious consequences beyond the immediate harm. Prison officers often face ongoing physical and mental health challenges after such incidents. The costs involved with medical treatment and rehabilitation can also be significant. On top

of this, repeated assaults make it harder for staff to feel safe and secure whilst doing such an important job.

Feeling safe at work is a basic right for everyone. That is why we are putting this bill forward to toughen up the penalties for people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers. The goal is clear: to protect the hardworking officers who keep our correctional facilities running safely and to deter violent behaviour within prisons. Currently the legal system around sentencing for these offences is a little bit unclear. The Sentencing Act 1991 says that sentences for prison offences, which are offences committed by someone already in prison, should generally be added on top of their existing sentence. However, there has been some uncertainty about whether offences causing injury to prison officers fall into this category, and because of this ambiguity courts have sometimes handed down concurrent sentences, which means the new offence is served at the same time as the original.

This bill fixes that loophole by making it clear that offences causing injury to prison staff are indeed prison offences and as a result these offences should lead to extra time being added to their original prison term, unless of course there are exceptional circumstances. This change will make sure that prisoners who assault custodial officers and cause injury face tougher and more appropriate consequences. And that is really the key word there: ‘consequences’. Knowing that they will serve extra time really should be a deterrent to causing any harm. One would like that they did not cause any injury at all to custodial officers, but knowing that there are severe, hard, real consequences should deter people from making the wrong decisions. These reforms send a strong and important message: assaulting prison officers is completely unacceptable and will be met with serious punishment. Protecting the safety and wellbeing of our corrections workforce is essential, and this bill is a step forward in ensuring that those who harm prison staff are held fully accountable for their actions and appropriately dealt with. By making the legal framework clearer and more consistent, this legislation also gives custodial staff more confidence that if something happens to them the justice system will take it seriously.

In the very short time that I have left, I just want to quickly outline that there is \$727 million in new funding for the corrections and youth justice system to ramp up capacity. Some of that funding will go to getting 700 new staff. We have also got extra capacity of 1000 maximum security beds in the corrections system. Quite frankly, the Allan Labor government is doing what is needed to keep the community safe. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (12:56): As members before me have said, the intent of this bill is noble and it is one that stakeholders support. But it does fall short, which is why the member for Caulfield has done a huge amount of work in preparing the amendments that he has presented, which I will get to perhaps in the 3 minutes that I have – maybe I will, maybe I will not. The Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 does not go far enough, and we have seen this as a bit of a habit and a pattern of behaviour with the Allan Labor government. It is much like the bail laws that are supposedly the toughest in Australia but still fall chronically short of where we were.

We have also heard members talk about the scale of violence in Victorian prisons. That additional investment that the member for Hastings was talking about, I would suggest, is going to go towards fixing a lot of infrastructure and mould issues in the likes of Barwon Prison. Staff are definitely going to be needed. If Port Phillip Prison is going to be closed, Western Plains is going to be populated. But who is going to want to work in an environment where 442 assaults on staff occurred last year, including 10 sexual assaults and six that led to hospitalisations? It does not sound like a safe workplace to me. At the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre alone there were 69 assaults, and that occurred amid severe staff shortages. There was a no-confidence vote as well, and that was just because of unsafe conditions. These are things we are seeing more and more often. It is actually quite alarming. I did see the news today about the firefighters and their no-confidence vote, but that is another matter.

Why the member for Caulfield has moved these amendments is because he argues the bill must go further to protect all workers within the prison system, not just prison guards, which is ultimately what

the bill is doing. They could be health professionals, cleaners, teachers or administration staff. There are a plethora of additional staff that work throughout prisons, and they also face those risks, the same as the prison guards do. The amendment to clause 30 will expand the coverage to cover all of that off. Obviously there are the new handcuff clauses as well for practical in-prison safety.

Just quickly in the very short time that I have left, this is something that we feel in Mildura. Going through the crime stats – and no doubt it is not going to be a pretty picture tomorrow when the latest round of crime statistics is released – in Mildura we have the third-lowest safety ranking among Victorian –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** Order! In accordance with standing orders, I interrupt debate. The house will resume at the ringing of the bells.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

*Members*

**Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs**

*Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today and tomorrow the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing will answer questions for the portfolio of economic growth and jobs and I will answer questions for the portfolio of finance.

***Questions without notice and ministers statements***

**Health system**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Minister for Health. A whistleblower from Northern Hospital has stated that ambulance offload times were doctored up by an hour in order to falsely meet government targets. What specific steps has the minister taken to satisfy herself that this falsification of ambulance transfer data is not widespread across the Victorian hospital system?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:03): I am very happy to answer the question from the Leader of the Opposition. As you would expect, I expect that all of our hospitals and our healthcare workers, who we all hold in the highest of regard, attend to their work with diligence and with integrity at all times. That is why the Department of Health is commissioning an external audit of data reporting to ensure the robustness of that data at all times.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Minister, falsified hospital performance data can have life-and-death consequences as well as serious implications for public trust and public safety.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I need to be able to hear the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Let us get past the first question before we lose people.

**Brad BATTIN:** Will the minister now commit –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Laverton is warned.

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**Brad BATTIN:** Will the minister now commit to a fully independent and transparent investigation that will be released to the community to determine the true extent of the data manipulation?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:05): The Leader of the Opposition was clearly not listening to my earlier answer, where I indicated that we would undertake an external audit.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Just listen for a moment, thanks. As I said, we will undertake an external audit, and we will release that information once it is completed.

### Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): Right now across Victoria there are three big tunnelling projects that are under construction – right now here in Victoria. These are tunnels that are part of projects that are going to shape our state for generations to come. They are projects that will slash travel times. They will get trucks off local roads, and importantly too they will get families home safer and sooner. These are tunnelling projects that some said would never get off the drawing board. Well, they are not just off the drawing board, they are in the ground. They are happening right now and supporting thousands and thousands of workers in a job.

A bit of trivia for you: which member of this house once said the Metro Tunnel was a hoax, all smoke and mirrors? This same person also went on to say that the West Gate Tunnel project was a dud and even went so far as to try and block its construction here in the Parliament. He also went on to say about the North East Link – something that supports his own electorate – that he would scrap the entire project if he was elected. Well, this member for Bulleen, who has opposed all three projects, who is knocking three times on the door –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The house will come to order. The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**BrIDGET VALLENCE:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, ministers statements are an opportunity for government to countenance their policy positions, not to attack the opposition or members of the opposition. I would ask you to ask her to desist doing so.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** We got to the point of order. Thank you to Speaker Brooks for his wisdom. The Premier to continue on her ministers statement.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** They do say the postman always knocks twice. The member for Bulleen is knocking three times. I say this: while it is whack-a-mole for those opposite, we are focused on what matters for Victorians, getting on and delivering these projects, supporting workers, supporting jobs and supporting Victorian families.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the Leader of the Opposition, I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the Japanese Consul-General Mr Tokuro Furuya. Welcome, sir.

### Health system

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Health. The Cranbourne community hospital, which the government promised in 2018, was finally finished months ago. However, the only employees in the building are security. When will the Cranbourne facility actually treat a patient?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:09): I very much welcome this question from the Leader of the Opposition

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as it gives me an opportunity to outline the fantastic visit that the member for Cranbourne and I made only recently to the Cranbourne community hospital to see the finalisation of works at the Cranbourne community hospital. If the opposition had anyone on PAEC that could ask a question, they would know that –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the minister is debating the question. It was very narrow: when will the Cranbourne facility actually treat a patient? I would ask you to ask her to come back to the narrow question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister, from what I could hear over the din, was responding to the question about health, and she will continue on the answer for the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** As I was saying, having visited the Cranbourne community hospital recently with the member, I was very excited when our budget delivered the funding to enable us to open and expand nine new hospitals here in Victoria, to commission the Cranbourne community hospital, to commission the Phillip Island hospital –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order on relevance, Deputy Speaker, when will the Cranbourne facility treat a patient?

**Ben Carroll:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the minister is being very relevant. The opposition leader asked her a Dorothy Dixer on the opening of the Cranbourne hospital, and she is giving all the detail as to how she opened it with the member for Cranbourne.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I encourage members on both sides to not use points of order for further debate. The minister was being relevant to hospitals.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** In direct response to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, if he had read the budget papers, he would know that commissioning funding is available for the Cranbourne community hospital in the 2025–26 budget.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): Minister, the Craigieburn community hospital, also promised by Labor in 2018, has been completed but has a wire fence around it and simply no access. When will the Craigieburn facility actually treat a patient?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Bulleen is warned.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:12): Once again, if the Leader of the Opposition had listened to what I was saying, he would have heard me say that the budget delivered commissioning money for a number of community hospitals. Indeed, as it so happens, I was with the member for Yuroke on Monday and the member for Greenvale, and we were able to once again tour that community hospital, which will very soon be delivering community mental health services and community paediatric services and will continue to bring on line services in order to meet the needs of the Cranbourne community.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the minister has failed to address the Craigieburn –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The point of order is?

**Bridget Vallence:** On relevance, Deputy Speaker. This is a very narrow question not about when she is touring the facility but about when it will treat a patient.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister is being relevant to the question asked.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** As I was saying, it was great to be able to visit Craigieburn the other day –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** and to talk to patients – thank you – receiving dialysis there as a result of our government's investment. Real patients receiving real treatment.

**Ministers statements: housing**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:14): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is pushing forward with bold reforms to build more homes for Victorians. On this side of the house we understand the scale of the housing challenge and we know what needs to be done – not blocking homes, not defending the status quo. We are taking decisive action to reform our planning system to build more homes because Victorians, especially younger Victorians, are counting on us.

We are unlocking more capacity for homes in the right places, near jobs, transport and services. We are making it easier to build duplexes, townhouses, low-rise apartments and mixed-use developments in established suburbs. We are cutting red tape and speeding up approvals. Our 10-year greenfields plan lays out Victoria's longest ever pipeline of new land for new homes with backyards fit for growing families. The development facilitation program will continue to fast-track quality projects that bring investment, create jobs and deliver the homes we need. We are reviewing and rewriting the Planning and Environment Act 1987, building a modern, fit-for-purpose system that puts people, not process, at its heart. We are working with councils and communities, creating clear, consistent planning rules that prioritise affordability, livability and sustainability.

The Allan Labor government knows that more homes means more opportunity and more homes means a better future. While we plan for more homes, those opposite are planning another Matthew Guy reboot, and while we respect heritage protections, it looks like those opposite have heritage-listed the member for Bulleen, preserving him for another tilt at the leadership.

**State Emergency Service**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:16): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the SES base budget for 2025–26?

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:16): It is with –

*Members interjecting.*

**Vicki WARD:** Do not knock for the third time. It is an absolute –

*Members interjecting.*

**Vicki WARD:** We cannot joke too many times about this. It is a great pleasure to talk about the SES, an organisation that those of us on this side absolutely support. In fact what we have done with this budget is give investment into the SES that we have not seen before. We recognise exactly how hard our more than 5000 SES volunteers work across this state to protect our communities. They are there, and it is such a diverse range of things that our SES respond to. I know that in this budget the member for Footscray is extremely happy to see that there is \$14.5 million –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order on the question of relevance, Deputy Speaker, this question could not be more straightforward. I ask you to bring the minister back to answering it.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister may have strayed and will come back. The minister was being relevant on the SES before that.

**Vicki WARD:** The question is around the money that we are investing in the SES. It is around the money that is being budgeted for our SES. This is why we talk to the \$14.5 million that we are investing for a new unit at Footscray. We talk about the \$30 million that we are investing, which was announced last year, in replacement fleet for the SES. What we are seeing from those opposite is an attempt to try and create a narrative, which they have continued to do for some time, that this is a

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government that does not invest in our emergency services, and nothing could be further from the truth. This is a government that will continue to invest in our emergency services. As I said yesterday, nearly \$2 billion –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again on relevance, this is a very, very simple question, one that the previous minister was able to answer last year. Why can't the people of Victoria get the answer today?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** A point of order is not an excuse for further debate, as you know. The minister was being relevant to the question. The minister to continue without assistance from the Leader of the Nationals.

**Vicki WARD:** Is that the third point of order? I have lost track – the second or third point of order. What I am doing is helping the opposition understand and unpack the budget and the investment that we have put into our SES. It also includes more than \$23 million that we have invested to provide 57 new heavy rescue trucks and seven medium rescue trucks. What those opposite fail to understand – and we see this time and time again – is that when it comes to emergency services, budgets are set and then continue to get revised throughout the 12 months of the financial year in response to the emergencies that our emergency services experience.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:20): During a cost-of-living crisis, Victorians are being slugged an extra \$3 billion in tax under the guise of supporting emergency services, yet the minister will not tell Victorians the budget for these same agencies. Will the minister now admit the government's own figures published in the *Government Gazette* show those services are facing funding cuts while Victorians are hit with more tax?

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:21): I think the Leader of the Nationals has come to the heart of the issue, which is that they want to create a fear campaign around a gazetted figure which talks to the prospective budget of what an emergency service can provide. What he is also not acknowledging is that within that legislation it provides that all of the amounts raised go to the support of our emergency services. What we know is that there is ongoing funding that gets delivered to our emergency services.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.**

**Vicki WARD:** Third time unlucky for the member for Bulleen. When we are talking about a government that has invested more than \$2 billion in our emergency services, double what those invested in their last budget, we know this is a government that takes our emergency services seriously.

### Ministers statements: creative industries

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:22): Everyone knows that Victoria is the creative state, the cultural capital of the country, whether it is the biggest ever ticketed art exhibition in *Kusama*, which just finished at the NGV; the next big thing, the *French Impressionism* exhibition, which is underway; *LEGO Star Wars*, which we have got on at the museum; the big winter arts festival *Rising*, which just completed its run; our iconic live music scene; extraordinary dance productions; or in regional Victoria, things like *Frida Kahlo* at the Bendigo gallery. And our screen sector keeps kicking goals, backed by \$50 million in this year's budget, and this is a smart investment because the screen sector returns an investment of \$10 for every dollar invested.

The Allan Labor government's investment in the world's largest permanent volume screens at Docklands Studios has certainly seen plenty of action. A few months ago I visited the studios to see the filming of the movie *War Machine* with Alan Ritchson. *War Machine* is not a movie about the

internals of the Victorian Liberal Party. I talked recently to Sarah Snook about the filming of her series *All Her Fault*. That is not about Moira. Most recently I visited to see a movie being filmed that is supporting around 100 Victorian businesses and 300 jobs and generating \$24 million in the Victorian economy. It is called *Play Dead*. I will not give away the plot, but the lesson here for the Leader of the Opposition is: beware those who have been written off as threats. In politics, as in the screen sector – the member for Bulleen has left the chamber, but he should heed this – sequels are very risky and trilogies rarely ever work out.

### Health system

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Health. Krystle, a young woman who presented to Northern Hospital emergency department with acute abdominal pain, spent hours in the overcrowded waiting room doubled over in pain before seeing a doctor for the first time 4 hours later. An internal ultrasound was finally ordered, but the delay meant there was no sonographer or technician available until the next day. She was eventually diagnosed with a burst ovarian cyst. Minister, why is Victoria's busiest emergency department unable to deliver timely and urgent care such as an ultrasound to women in extreme pain?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:25): I thank the member for Warrandyte for her question. As is my practice in this place, when it comes to individual patients and the care that they are receiving, I am very happy to follow up the actual circumstances regarding Krystle's care if the member is happy to share her details with me, and I will ensure that she gets a response.

Of course how our emergency departments work is that patients are triaged on arrival. Here in Victoria we still maintain a position where all category 1 patients on arrival at emergency are seen immediately, and the triage decision is made not by politicians but by clinicians. People are then seen according to their need as it is determined. I am aware of course that our emergency departments have been under sustained pressure, and we know why. We have talked about it in this place many, many times: the consequences of the COVID pandemic that are being experienced here in Victoria and in every jurisdiction around the world. I note the opposition again laughing every time I talk about the COVID pandemic, and when they do that it is a slap in the face to our healthcare workers who worked through the pandemic.

**BrIDGET VALLENCE**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, this is about a woman in pain with a burst ovarian cyst. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to the narrow question.

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

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: Because of this incredible pressure that is being experienced in emergency departments here in Victoria as well as emergency departments all around the nation, our government has invested in a whole range of initiatives to support our frontline healthcare workers.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: I am going to take up an interjection over here, because I hear that apparently it has not worked. That person was obviously not listening when I explained that those presenting with category 1 are seen immediately. What is more, we are seeing that time to treatment continues to improve. Currently the median time is 14 minutes, which is 6 minutes faster than it was prior to the pandemic. None of this is to take away from the experience of Krystle, but as I have said to the member, if she provides me with details, I will follow up for her.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:28): Given the government continues to fail to meet its own targets for the treatment of emergency patients within the clinically recommended time, how can Victorians have any confidence the health system will not continue to decline under your watch?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:29): The member is wrong in her assumptions when she says failing to meet targets, because as I have just explained, category 1s are all seen immediately, and that is a figure that we are very, very proud of. Those are the people that require emergency care. A number of the initiatives that we have implemented, including our urgent care clinics and the virtual emergency department, have ensured that category 4 and category 5 patients have alternative pathways, and this in turn is working to reduce the demand on our emergency departments. I am very proud of the investments that we have made, and I reiterate that our government is investing \$31 billion into our hospitals this year alone. Unlike those on the other side, who cut, close and privatise, our government has a proud history of building and opening hospitals in this state.

**Ministers statements: Victorian Virtual Emergency Department**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:30): I am very pleased to rise to update the house on how our government is expanding the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, which I was just talking about. Can I say for the benefit of those opposite, and in particular Mrs Hermans in the other place, I can confirm not only that we deliver virtual emergency care in the state of Victoria but that the virtual ED is the busiest emergency department in the state. While that is news to some, it is not new. In fact the virtual emergency department has been supported by our government since 2020 and has seen half a million people in that time – people like Emily, a mum of three who I had the privilege of meeting. She uses the VVED when her little ones are struck down with childhood illnesses like asthma and gastro, and she can receive the care that she needs from the comfort of her own home.

Of course we want more Victorians to be able to receive this care. That is why we have invested in the virtual emergency department in order to triple the number of patients who will be able to receive that care. This will in turn, member for Warrandyte, drive down the number of people that need to come to our physical emergency departments. Eighty-three per cent of patients who have been seen by the VVED have told us that they would otherwise have gone to a physical emergency department, while around 79 per cent of those who are referred by a paramedic end up receiving the care that they need, once again, in their own home.

Victorians remember Matthew Guy – he is not here, unfortunately, the member – for his fake ambulances and dangerous 000 policy.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind members to use correct titles.

**Health system**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Health. Yesterday you boasted in response to the tragic death of a man waiting for an ambulance that:

We have a plan that we are implementing, which is paying dividends ...

However, code 1 response times have worsened since last quarter in 23 local government areas. Only 65.6 per cent of statewide code 1 responses are arriving within 15 minutes, well below the target of 85 per cent. Ambulance data is being falsified while Victorians die waiting for ambulances. On top of this, there are now 60,000 Victorians stuck on the surgical waitlist, with the average wait time a staggering 188 days. Victorians have recorded the lowest number of community mental health service hours in the last year, and all the while Cranbourne and Craigieburn community hospitals sit empty. Are these the dividends the minister is boasting about?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Wendouree! Order! Members on my right! I could not hear the end of the member's question. Could you please finish the question again. Presumably there was a question at the end, and I would like to hear it.

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**Roma BRITNELL:** And all the while Cranbourne and Craigieburn community hospitals sit empty. Are these the dividends the minister is boasting about?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:34): As I was listening to that question I was reflecting once again on the fake ambulance that Matthew Guy delivered, the fake patients that the member for Polwarth knows quite a lot about –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, it is a question of relevance, Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister has been going 17 seconds. I am sure the minister is getting to the question. I remind ministers and members to use correct titles.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I might start at the end of that question, which contained a number of things that are simply not true. The member did ask me again about the community hospitals at Cranbourne and indeed at Craigieburn, which gives me an opportunity once again to talk about the patients that we had the pleasure of visiting, receiving dialysis at the Craigieburn community hospital. For the benefit of the opposition member, again at Cranbourne I had the opportunity of visiting with the member for Cranbourne to see that facility almost complete. The commissioning money has been delivered in this year's budget. You can only open hospitals if you build them, and that is something that those on the other side have zero experience in – zero experience in actually delivering a hospital to the people of Victoria – whereas we have a \$15 billion pipeline of health service delivery here in the state of Victoria.

Once again I note that every time those on the other side of the chamber get up in this place and talk down our healthcare workers, they disrespect our healthcare workers. It is our healthcare workers who are at the forefront of leading reform in this state, be it the delivery of the planned surgery blueprint and the huge reforms that we have seen there, which will enable us to –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is usually the healthcare workers that are exposing the failings in the system.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** What is the point of order?

**Bridget Vallence:** On relevance, I would ask you to ask the minister to be relevant to the question.

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Wendouree is warned. The minister to continue. She has been relevant to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I took the opportunity to confirm that part of that rambling statement was indeed about planned surgery, and this gives me an opportunity to tell you that when it comes to the delivery of category 1 planned surgeries in this state – that is of course urgent surgery –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Can I let the member on the other side know that Victoria is the only jurisdiction in the nation that delivers all of its category 1 surgeries within the clinically recommended time. Not only that, but because of the investments our government has made, we have seen significant decreases in the time to treat category 2 and category 3 surgeries. I also know – and one would think the member on the other side, given her own background, would know this – it is a clinician that makes the decision about when a patient is ready to undergo surgery. Surgery is always a significant procedure, so the clinician will work with the patient to ensure that they are optimised for surgery.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:38): Minister, ambulance ramping continues to be a serious problem, with Box Hill Hospital having wait times on stretchers for almost 3 hours and Maroondah Hospital over 5 hours. When will the plan that is allegedly being implemented result in clinically recommended wait times for all metropolitan hospitals being met?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:39): Once again, that was a bit hard to understand. That was a question that was all over the place and showed zero understanding of how our health system actually works. I think the member may have been talking about transfer times – that is, from an ambulance to our emergency department – but who knows.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I am talking about hospital transfer times. That is when a patient goes from an ambulance to an emergency department, and the implementation of the standards for timely ambulance and emergency care has seen in some health services a 10 per cent improvement in that transfer time.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again on relevance, the minister is not actually answering the question. It is about ambulance ramping and stretcher times. She is not being relevant to the question whatsoever.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant to the question and its supplementary. The minister has concluded her answer.

#### Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:40): I rise to update the house on how the SEC is back and delivering for Victorians. As we know, the SEC has had three chapters in its life: it was sold off, it was shut down and now it is back serving Victorians again, because the third time is the charm, absolutely. Good things do come in threes, which is why the SEC is guided by and delivering on its three pillars: accelerating the energy transition, helping households go electric to save money on their bills and building a renewable energy workforce. Construction is underway on two huge projects – that is, three minus one equals two. The Melbourne renewable energy hub, one of the largest batteries in the world, is made up of over three big battery components with over 1100 people having worked on the site so far, and up in Horsham the new SEC renewable energy park is coming along at pace.

In less than three weeks the SEC will be powering Victoria once again, for the first time since it was sold off three decades ago. It will power classrooms, hospitals, police stations and fire stations across the state and some iconic sites like the Melbourne Zoo, the NGV, the Melbourne Museum and more. And of course we are delivering the SEC's one-stop shop, providing (1) free, (2) trusted and (3) simple advice to help families save money on their energy bills.

Jeff Kennett sold off the SEC with his then assistant the member for Bulleen, the original cuts guy, sending power bills skyrocketing and slashing jobs. Some things really do come in threes: privatisation, higher energy bills and the member for Bulleen.

#### *Constituency questions*

#### Lowan electorate

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:43): (1170) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health, and I ask on behalf of my constituents: when will the mental health locals, promised back in 2021 and again in 2022, be open and available to support my local people in Horsham, Hamilton and Ararat? It was promised as part of the royal commission's recommendations that there would be 60 mental health locals built across the state so that people could access front-door mental health supports close to home. However, while a list of 20 sites was announced, we have not seen any progress towards making that a reality. For people in Hamilton, Horsham and Ararat, this is problematic because over the bushfires over this past summer we were told by the government, 'If you need mental health support, go to your nearest mental health local,' which is either Geelong or Bendigo. I therefore ask the minister: when

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will the mental health locals promised for Horsham, Hamilton and Ararat be opened and available to support my community?

### Laverton electorate

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:44): (1171) My question is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission. Just a few weeks ago the Premier announced that from 1 July our government will be powered by the SEC. This means that all Victorian government operations – our schools, our hospitals, our train stations, our museums and right down to our trains and traffic lights – will be powered by cheap and reliable renewable energy. In fact it is the first time the SEC will have powered anything since the Liberal Party privatised it in the 1990s. They said it could not be done, that we would not successfully bring back the SEC, but we did, and what is more, we enshrined it in Victoria's constitution so that it could never, ever be sold off again. From next year ordinary households and businesses will be able to access the SEC as a one-stop shop for all their electricity needs, including energy upgrades and solar. My question for the minister is: how will these changes benefit folks in my electorate of Laverton, be it at our schools or our stations or for households and businesses come next year?

### Brighton electorate

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:45): (1172) My question is for the Minister for Education. I ask: when will he review the poorly designed school zone boundaries that are unfairly impacting upon Brighton Beach Primary School? Brighton Beach Primary School is a historic school in Brighton. The school was first opened as Brighton Orphanage School in April 1878, before transitioning to a primary school in 1915. The ethos of its historical roots has been carried with the school ever since. One of the children at the school's centenary reunion said the school had a special character imparted by the presence of orphans:

Friendships were formed, but the camaraderie of the children at Windermere distinguished them.

Previously, the school zone boundaries ran between Dendy Street and South Road to Nepean Highway. The new boundary dramatically reduces the zone size but, more concerningly, takes out parts of the community with homes with young families. The zone changes have significantly impacted upon the school, and despite repeated attempts, the minister has refused to do the right thing. Please fix this, Minister, for Brighton Beach Primary School.

### Broadmeadows electorate

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (14:46): (1173) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I ask: what can be done to address the ongoing issue of cigarette butt litter at Glenroy Station. I was recently contacted by Alice Walker from the Clean Up Glenroy group, a dedicated team of locals who volunteer their time to pick up litter, protect our environment and encourage pride in our community. Led by the wonderful Flower Jogiya-Mitchell, I have had the pleasure of joining them a few times, and I am so grateful for their commitment to keeping Glenroy clean. On Sunday 18 March 10 volunteers from the group spent more than 2 hours cleaning up Glenroy station and the surrounding area. Despite their hard work, they were unable to remove all the cigarette butts due to the sheer volume. They have written to me requesting the installation of cigarette bins. Although smoking is banned at train stations, cigarette litter remains a problem at Glenroy station, and a practical solution is needed. I also take this opportunity to give a shout-out to 15-year-old Jed Vacirca, who volunteers every week to pick up litter and tend to the gardens at the Itiki sporting club. It is truly inspiring to see a young person so dedicated to looking after our community environment.

### Rowville electorate

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:47): (1174) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the current cost-of-living crisis impacting many, why did you and your government impose such an unfair and

inequitable new emergency services property tax, which on the average Rowville electorate residential home will cost over 45 per cent, or over \$100, more per annum for local household budgets compared to the existing fire services levy. My office has recently been contacted by many, many angry and concerned Rowville electorate constituents who say that they cannot afford yet another tax. For example, on an average, median-priced residential property in Rowville or Lysterfield of \$1.2 million, the new tax will add an additional cost burden of \$107, up from around \$236 under the previous fire services property levy to around \$344 under the new emergency services tax. People in Rowville just cannot afford Labor.

#### Pascoe Vale electorate

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:48): (1175) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. How is the Victorian Labor government supporting local community sporting clubs across the Pascoe Vale electorate, including the Coburg Tennis Club? Originally established in 1890 next to Pentridge Prison, the Coburg Tennis Club has been serving from the current Bush Reserve location since 1954 and is one of the oldest sporting clubs in Victoria. For 135 years the club has continued to guide the development of generations of tennis players onto the local, amateur and professional circuits, including international hall of famer Ashley Cooper and grand slam finalist and Davis Cup champion Mark Philippoussis. With the club's mission to make tennis accessible and support grassroots health, wellbeing and active recreation outcomes for all, Coburg tennis club is now proudly home to 140-plus players, including many women and girls. But it is the dedicated volunteers who are the heart and soul of the club. Tass Vassiliadis is a lifetime club player and volunteer. Having risen through the AIS, he has since coached at the club for 20 years. Michael Leeder is the club treasurer, Jamie McIlroy is the long-time secretary, Ray Reymers is a former president and Rebecca Johnson is the current president. Through these contributions, Coburg Tennis Club was recognised as the most outstanding tennis club and centre in the 2022 Victorian tennis awards. They would welcome the minister's advice on future funding steps.

#### Ringwood electorate

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:49): (1176) My constituency question is for the Premier. What is the government doing to address the chronic underfunding of homelessness services in the Ringwood electorate? Local homelessness providers have raised serious concerns about growing demand and declining capacity. Funding used to support crisis accommodation is insufficient, with services often unable to provide even a few nights in a motel for people in crisis. Frontline workers report that families with children, once prioritised for emergency support, are now missing out due to an appalling lack of available resources. With over 65,000 applications currently waiting for social housing and rental affordability worsening, people are presenting to services in increasingly acute need. Those that do find emergency accommodation are staying for longer because of the lack of affordable rentals and social housing options, placing added strain on already overstretched systems. Staffing shortages are compounding the crisis. The broader service system is fragmented and under-resourced, with significant gaps in mental health, drug and alcohol and youth-specific housing support.

#### Yan Yean electorate

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (14:50): (1177) My question is for the Minister for Environment. My community deserves to live in clean streets with clean parks, but unfortunately a small number of Victorians are doing the wrong thing and dumping their waste, impacting us all. The department has been helpful with picking up loads on Plenty Road recently, and my local councils are doing everything they can to stop this. But they cannot do it alone, so I ask the minister: how is the government supporting the EPA to tackle the rising issue of illegal dumping in my electorate of Yan Yean?

#### Morwell electorate

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (14:51): (1178) My question is for the Minister for Victims, and my question is: what is the minister doing to repair the new victims of crime financial assistance

scheme, which is currently failing providers? I have been contacted by several practitioners who provide critical psychological support and grief counselling for victims of crime. They have reported they have not been reimbursed for services provided through the FAS, despite lodging all required documents, with one reporting they had not received a payment from the government since November 2024. That is seven months without payment. Still these dedicated professionals are committed to providing crucial services to vulnerable victims of crime, but they have bills and mortgages to pay and cannot go on much longer without being paid. These people have contacted the minister's office but have been ignored. Again, Minister, what are you doing to repair the flawed victims of crime financial assistance scheme to ensure providers are being paid for the services that they provide?

### **Bass electorate**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (14:52): (1179) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and relates to the proposed Lang Lang strategic extractive resource area. What is the latest update being made on finalising the SERA, including how community feedback is being taken into consideration, particularly in relation to the area on the Western Port side of the highway? Cardinia and Bass Coast councils, Lang Lang caravan park, local organisations including the Western Port Biosphere foundation and Save Western Port Woodlands group, residents and locals in the area have concerns, which I share, about the western portion of the proposed SERA in the Jam Jerrup area by the coast. Cardinia's green wedge management plan has this area as a designated coastal precinct for its environmental values, cultural heritage and proximity to Ramsar wetlands. This sat with feedback from the community about truck movements, noise, dust and road safety, and I look forward to updating my community on the SERA progress.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

#### **Unparliamentary language**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (14:53): On 28 May 2025 the member for Evelyn raised a point of order regarding disparaging language used by another member. The Speaker undertook to review the footage. Having reviewed the footage, it is not clear that any disparaging language was used, and I rule the point of order out of order. However, I remind all members that in accordance with the standing orders members must not use offensive or unbecoming words in relation to another member. I would also encourage us all at all times to consider that we were elected here by 50,000-odd people and when we use language to each other we are also speaking to them.

### **Bills**

#### **Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (14:54): I am very pleased to rise today to speak in support of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I first would like to thank the Minister for Corrections for introducing this very important bill. The need for this bill is clear. It is the duty of those in Parliament to protect the people who serve our community, to stand by victims and to ensure that individuals who pose a serious risk to public safety are managed appropriately. With these key objectives in mind, this legislation in front of us introduces significant reforms that will provide tangible improvements to our corrections system and the safety of all Victorians.

We are all aware that custodial officers play an essential role in maintaining order within our prisons, ensuring rehabilitation efforts can take place in a structured and secure environment. However, far too often these officers face violence and assaults, with significant consequences for their physical and mental wellbeing. The gut-wrenching thing is that the people who committed these violent acts receive only a concurrent sentence instead of a cumulative one, meaning they would not serve an extra day in prison. This undermines the seriousness of these offences and fails to deter such violent acts. After all,

if you can assault a custodial officer without facing extra time in prison, what is stopping you from doing it again? This bill introduces targeted reforms to rectify this injustice. Through this bill we are putting beyond doubt that these attacks will be classified as prison offences and will attract cumulative sentences. This means that offenders who commit violent acts against custodial officers will serve additional prison time as a direct consequence of their actions. This is not just a matter of punishment, it is a matter of justice.

I know that across my electorate of Mulgrave and indeed across the state of Victoria hundreds and thousands of people work day in, day out to keep their community safe. They deserve a workplace where their safety is prioritised and where deterrence measures are strong enough to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. This reform ensures that our corrections system protects those who uphold it, fostering a safer environment for staff and detainees alike. I also point out that this bill does not stipulate or mandate automatic increases in sentencing. Our judicial system will still have full discretion in determining appropriate sentences based on the circumstances of each case. What we are addressing here is a legal ambiguity that has for far too long allowed offenders to serve concurrent sentences instead of cumulative ones, effectively nullifying any additional consequences for their actions.

I also note that the member for Caulfield has put in some amendments to this bill regarding handcuffing. Handcuffing is an important safety measure and is currently used every day in prisons right across our state, and our hardworking corrections officers have the option already to use handcuffs when they need to, when moving prisoners or otherwise. That is a regular occurrence, and there is no arbitrary three-month limit on that. Staff can use those tools when they need to for as long as it is appropriate.

I move on to a second key feature that I want to highlight today, which is the improvement of the sex offender registration scheme under this bill. Currently, these individuals are already required to provide critical information to authorities, including personal details, employment arrangements and travel plans, helping law enforcement monitor their movements and assess any risks. Under the current system reporting obligations may cease when a post-sentence order expires. The Allan Labor government recognises that the transition out of intensive supervision presents potential risks to the community. This bill here today ensures that individuals under post-sentence orders for serious sex offences will be required to report to police not only for the duration of their supervision but for a minimum of five years after their order expires. Local families in Mulgrave and across the state, especially those with children, can be assured that even when the post-sentence order has expired authorities can still track the whereabouts of these offenders. This will enable the appropriate authority to make an early intervention should any warning signs of reoffending emerge. Local residents in Mulgrave and across our state can be assured that their safety and the safety of their loved ones are always at the heart of everything that this government does. I also want to stress that this change is not about unnecessary punishment; rather, it is about responsible and appropriate risk management. By learning from past experiences we ensure that no community has to endure the uncertainty and anxiety that comes from inadequate oversight.

Equally significant are the amendments to the Serious Offenders Act 2018, which will enhance the post-sentence supervision and management of individuals who continue to pose a serious risk of reoffending. The post-sentence scheme plays an important role in ensuring community safety by allowing courts to impose ongoing supervision or detention on serious offenders beyond their prison sentences. Following a statutory review in 2023, a series of recommendations were made to improve this system. This bill here today ensures that those recommendations are implemented effectively. Our community can be assured knowing that if an offender under post-sentence supervision breaks their conditions, authorities will be able to act immediately and decisively, ensuring that offenders who disregard their conditions are swiftly held accountable.

Finally, this bill will make necessary amendments to existing legislation to clarify provisions that were not operating as originally intended. These refinements ensure that important laws continue to function

effectively. One of these amendments pertains to the ‘no body, no parole’ provision. This provision was introduced to incentivise individuals in prison to cooperate with authorities in locating the remains of their victims, bringing closure to grieving families. We know all too well the impact that this can have on families who have lost a loved one. For many multicultural communities, particularly the Chinese, Cambodian and Vietnamese communities, including the thousands of families in my electorate of Mulgrave, mourning is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions that emphasise the importance of properly laying a loved one to rest. The absence of a body disrupts these traditions, leaving families in emotional limbo, unable to complete vital rituals that mark the journey of their loved one’s soul. Our government recognises that for the families and loved ones of a victim, the return of their body will allow them to grieve, will allow them to find closure and will allow them to honour their memory with dignity. The clarification provided in this bill ensures that the law applies only in cases where a victim’s body or remains have not been found, maintaining the integrity of this important policy.

Victorians expect their government to take decisive action when it comes to community safety. They expect us to promote frontline workers and protect them, to stand by victims and to ensure that individuals who pose serious risks are managed responsibly. This is what the Allan Labor government is committed to doing, and this is what this bill will deliver. It builds on the work that we have done and reinforces our commitment to a justice system that prioritises safety and fairness. I commend this bill to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:03): I am pleased to rise today to talk on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. First and foremost, I would like to thank our shadow minister, the member for Caulfield, for the work that he has put in on this for our side of the house. The bill seeks to amend the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Corrections Act 1986. The aim of the bill is to deliver several priority reforms to ensure that safety risks from serious offenders are appropriately managed, to appropriately denounce and deter assaults on custodial workers and to make minor amendments to parole and other provisions that are not operating as originally intended.

We on this side do not oppose this bill. We understand the government has had to bring in this bill. But the member for Caulfield did move a reasoned amendment, and that reasoned amendment is in line with the expectation of the CPSU, who have been waiting a long time for reform in this space. It is important, I think, that the government listen to the member for Caulfield here. He has not done this out of any malice towards the government. He has actually put this reasoned amendment forward to reflect the expectation of the CPSU and what they want for their members. That is why he has put this forward. If you allow me, I am going to read a letter from the CPSU. The CPSU stated:

CPSU understands the Bill covers “custodial workers” rather than “officers” defined in *Corrections Act 1986*. Occupations not included that may be exposed to occupational violence inside a prison but not captured by the definition of “custodial worker” should, in our view also be included, as these people work closely with prisoners or within prisoner areas.

I think that is a very important point. This is the members asking for this amendment that the member for Caulfield has put forward. I think when we are talking about the safety of workers we should always bear in mind what section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 in this state says. If you will allow me, I will just read this out. Section 21 of the OH&S act:

... requires all employers to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. This duty is to be met so far as is reasonably practicable. It is an offence not to comply with this section and penalties apply.

I think if the government listen to the member for Caulfield and his reasoned amendments and if the government actually reference the OH&S act, particularly section 21, they would support the amendment by the member for Caulfield. There are lots of people that work in prisons, and we do not put nice people in jail. First and foremost, we have murderers and pretty aggressive people – rapists et cetera, et cetera. So I think if the government look at this and look at the amendment by the member

for Caulfield, this will strengthen their bill – but not only that. More importantly, it will protect the workers within the system. I think the government should really take that on board.

The handcuffing of prisoners that are violent – we have some statistics from the past year alone. When we look at what has happened in our prison system, there have been 442 assaults on staff, including 10 sexual assaults and six incidents requiring hospitalisation. That is a lot of incidents within the prison system. At every point in time I think we should do our utmost to protect the staff within the prison corrections system. It does not matter whether they are a guard, whether they are a cleaner or whether they are in the kitchen. Whatever act they are doing within that prison system, we should really do our utmost by section 21 of the OH&S act to make sure they are safe, and if that means that these people come under that umbrella, then that is what we need to do. So I would encourage the government to take on board what the member for Caulfield has done. As I said, he has not done it out of malice. I think it is probably a good amendment to the bill.

Just touching on where the member for Mulgrave left off in her contribution, I think one of the changes I fully support is the ‘no body, no parole’ change. I think that is very important. As the member for Mulgrave did rightly point out, within Victoria we are a very large multicultural community, and there are communities here where it is hard to get closure if there is no body recovered. I think that is very important to note. I think if there is a prisoner that has obviously committed murder – there is no body but they have committed murder; they have been found guilty of that murder – parole should never be given if they will not give the location. At the moment we all know the family in Ballarat that is going through their thing up there with the missing lady. I think for everyone, no matter what culture or where they are from – Catholic, Christian, Muslim, whatever – the recovery of the body is so important, because it does give people closure. It does allow them to bury their loved one and say their final goodbyes, so that part of the bill I think is very, very important, especially for our multicultural communities. They are why – as the member for Mulgrave pointed out, and rightly so – that part of the bill is important.

The really strong part, or the point I want to get to, is what the member for Caulfield put forward. I think it is a fairly reasonable request that the government listen to that and get that pushed through. Other than that, there is not a lot more I really have to say on this bill, other than to reiterate that the government should really consider what the member for Caulfield put forward and the fact that I support strongly the ‘no body, no parole’ section of the bill. It does clean up the parole board a bit. You do not have people going in there that do not deserve to be there. I think if they are in there and they are not prepared to let a family know where their loved one is, then they should not get parole until they fess up.

It is opportunities like this where I think the government actually needs to step up and have this bipartisan support. Unfortunately, I have seen in this chamber a few times now since I have been here – and I have not been here that long – where we have actually put something forward on our side and the government has rejected it. Then, unfortunately, we have had to come back to the chamber – and I suppose I will reference the Denyer bill, for example. That would be a very good example in this chamber of where we put forward a bill especially for the families in regard to Denyer. We put forward a bill and the government knocked it back, and then a few months later the bill came back. It was virtually exactly the same bill, and those families had to go through all that grief, all that heartache, all over again. I will just reference the member for Frankston, who I know pushed very hard for that bill to come back into the house. All credit to him and actually our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, who put it forward. I know the member for Mornington worked very hard on that as well.

I think this is another one of those times where the government can look at this and, rather than being obstructive, let us work together on it. Let us put this in place to make it a better bill. As I said, the member for Caulfield is not doing this out of malice. Maybe if the government had listened to us on machetes, a bill that we put forward four times, which now the government has finally done, then we would not be wasting time in Parliament. We could actually be moving on to other bills that the government wants to push through. These are the times where we actually need to come together. We

represent our communities all over the state, and I think our communities would appreciate that every now and again opposition and government come together and actually say, 'You know what, that's a good idea, let's support that.' So I am encouraging the government to support the member for Caulfield's amendment and not have another repeat of the Denyer situation.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (15:13): I rise today to contribute to the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I want to thank the minister responsible for this very important bill. I am pleased, after following the member for Narracan, that those opposite are not opposing this bill, but I do not accept the amendments that have been put forward by the member for Caulfield. The reason I do not accept the amendments put forward is because while handcuffing is an important safety measure, it is currently in place and currently used by custodial officers right across our prisons and right across the state. Of course they have the option to use handcuffs when they need to. I noticed the member for Narracan referred to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, which is a good act and an important act for the safety of all employees within all workplaces. I dare say that those custodial officers have got a very good health and safety committee working on the safety issues within their workplaces, and I dare say that is why they are able to use handcuffs to make sure that they have a safer workplace. That is the reason why I do not necessarily think that the amendments should be upheld. I think the custodial officers could work through that issue with their employer through their health and safety reps and through their health and safety committees.

The Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 represents a significant step forward in our ongoing commitment to strengthening community safety, improving the integrity of our corrections system and of course enhancing those protections available to all those that work every day to keep our state safe. The Allan Labor government has long held a firm commitment to ensuring that our corrections system not only holds offenders to account but also supports a safer, more rehabilitative and humane environment for those in custody and for those who serve within it. It is really important that all those involved in the correctional system are safe, and this bill responds to several priority areas requiring reform across the corrections system. It is also about strengthening the sentencing outcomes, clarifying the operation of existing legislative provisions and ensuring that the tools available to our authorities remain fit for purpose. This bill introduces several amendments across four principal areas, and I will read those areas out: strengthening protections for custodial officers who face violence in the workplace, implementing the recommendations from the 2023 statutory review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018, enhancing reporting obligations under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and making targeted improvements to the Corrections Act 1986 to address operational gaps and ensure legislation functions as Parliament originally intended.

Every day custodial officers perform an essential and often dangerous role in maintaining the safety and security of our prison system. We all know that they are dealing with some very hardened criminals that are incarcerated, and it would be very difficult to deal with some of those people. It is of the utmost importance that custodial officers are well protected within their workplace. The work is very complex. Clearly, they are under enormous pressures. It is a high-pressure environment, and it is obviously very confronting sometimes with some very challenging behaviours. I do know some prison officers, some custodial officers, and I know that it is really difficult work. It is not only difficult work within the workplace, but they have also got to be very protective when they are outside of their workplace, because some of these people that have been incarcerated eventually get out of jail and cross paths with custodial officers, so that can also be very dangerous for them.

Any assault on custodial officers is a very serious offence. It can result in lasting physical harm and psychological trauma, and it deeply impacts the morale within that workforce. Again, it is like any other service industry, whether it be custodial officers, police, ambulance or fire: they are big families, and they certainly support each other and look after each other. It is really hard when one is injured in the workplace. It has an effect right across the workforce. Too many of the offenders who assault custodial officers are not required to serve any additional time in prison, and this bill will address that. It was due to some lack of clarity in the current application of the sentencing requirements under the

Sentencing Act 1991. It includes a presumption that sentences imposed for offences committed by prisoners while in custody should be served on a cumulative basis. The reforms contained in this bill will close that loophole for good. The bill amends the Corrections Act 1986. It explicitly defines certain offences involving injury to custodial officers as prison offences, and this designation ensures that the presumption of sentence accumulation under the Sentencing Act will apply beyond doubt and requires the courts to impose additional prison time where appropriate. I think all of us here would agree with that.

The opposition have stated that they are not going to oppose this bill. I am pleased that we are all very supportive of that – that if you harm a custodial officer in the course of their duties within the prison system, then you should get an additional penalty. Hopefully it will be used as a disincentive against any violence against any custodial officer within the system. This recognises the fundamental right to feel safe within the workplace and in particular within our corrections system, so as I say, I think everyone is very supportive of that. Of course a safe custodial workforce is essential to the safe, secure and rehabilitative operation of our prison system, and that is exactly what we hope to achieve out of that. It is not going to be achieved with every person that has been incarcerated. There are some that probably never will be rehabilitated, but you can only try. We have just got to make sure that part of that process is not about continuing to extend violence against custodial officers within the system.

I am pleased to say that next week I and a number of members are going out to visit the new Cherry Creek correctional facility. I believe there is a tour on sometime next week, so I am going out there to have a look at that. I will be very interested to see it and hopefully talk to some of the staff that will be employed in that facility. It will be interesting to talk to them about their experiences and what they expect.

The Serious Offenders Act 2018 provides the legislative framework for Victoria's post-sentence supervision and detention regime, a scheme that enables the courts to impose ongoing detention or strict supervision on individuals who continue to pose an unacceptable risk of serious sexual or violent reoffending following the completion of their custodial sentence. In 2023 the government completed a statutory review of the Serious Offenders Act to assess its operation and effectiveness. The review found that the act is largely operating as intended but made 13 important recommendations to strengthen the scheme and ensure its ongoing effectiveness in safeguarding the community.

I just want to skip over to the member for Narracan and the member for Mulgrave, who raised the issue that the bill also clarifies some technical issues, but the one that is really important is the application of the 'no body, no parole' provision. It is an important provision which is designed to encourage cooperation from offenders by incentivising them to disclose the location of their victims or their remains. As both members referred to, it is important for families – in particular multicultural families, but I would go further than that and say it is important for all families – to know where their loved one is or that they have been found or where their remains have been found, and it is important to have closure. It must be so difficult for families and family members and friends, when someone has been seriously offended against and murdered, to not know where they are. This is a really important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (15:23): I am just going to give a very, very short speech on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I think others have detailed what is in the bill. It is primarily implementing the recommendations of the review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018. There are some things in here around clarifications around the 'no body, no parole' policy and altering reporting periods for sex offenders, and there are things around the Adult Parole Board of Victoria et cetera and a few other matters. They are important matters, and the Greens are discussing those matters with stakeholders. We will not be opposing the bill in the house, and we will continue those conversations with stakeholders to ensure we get detailed feedback on some of the details of the bill. I note there are a few amendments that have come before us as well, which no doubt will be moved in the other place.

As this bill deals with corrections and post-release matters, I want to use my short speech just to highlight an issue that has come to light recently which is very much related, which is that Victoria Police have rejected a recommendation by the State Coroner to notify domestic violence victim-survivors at least 48 hours before their abuser is released from prison. I was really distressed to read that police have not implemented this recommendation and will not be notifying victim-survivors when their abuser is released from prison because they do not feel like they have the resources to do it.

We have one of the most well resourced police departments anywhere. Victoria Police have received huge, huge amounts of money over the last 10 years since this Labor government has been in power – much, much more than when this Labor government first came to power. They are one of the most well funded police forces in the country, and I find it strange that Victoria Police cannot find the resources to notify victim-survivors when their abusers are being released from prison, given the risk to safety that may arise, particularly as this was a recommendation from the coroner. We know that far, far too many women are being murdered across Australia, including here in Victoria, by partners and ex-partners in family violence situations. It is an epidemic. It is something that we have had a royal commission into, and yet it continues despite some of those recommendations from the royal commission being implemented. It is something that we all should be doubling our efforts on to figure out how to deal with, because it is just a horrific and extraordinary situation we have when a woman is killed every week in a domestic violence situation by a man.

The Greens believe that the recommendations from the coroner to notify victim-survivors when their perpetrators are being released should be actioned, and we are looking at some amendments to this corrections bill that would put those recommendations into effect so that they actually do happen and the police cannot shirk their responsibilities, if that is what they are doing, and so that people affected by family violence can feel safe when someone who has harmed them returns to the community. I will not be circulating them in this place because, as we know, we will not get to the third reading and we will not actually have a chance to move them, but we will certainly be having more to say on it when this bill comes before the other place.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (15:26): I too rise to speak in support of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so I would like to begin by acknowledging the Minister for Corrections, his office, his department, Corrections Victoria and all the stakeholders who have come together to help develop and progress the passage of this bill. As part of this I would like to particularly thank and commend all of our Corrections Victoria office workers across the state who work every single day to keep our justice, custodial and prison staff safe and, in turn, who work to keep our communities safe. It is because of this that we must continue doing all we can as legislators and policymakers to help keep our Corrections Victoria staff safe too. I would like to acknowledge all of our corrections staff across the state, including particularly those who live and work in my electorate. There are quite a few in Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, including my wife Anna, who was a longtime Corrections Victoria and prisons officer and who is celebrating her birthday today as well.

This bill will continue to support all of our corrections staff across the state. Corrections Victoria's vision is for safer prisons, safer people and safer communities. Their mission is to create a safer, smarter system with a skilled and supported workforce that enables people in their care to make better decisions. Corrections Victoria is home to and responsible for over 3000 staff and operates Victoria's adult prison and post-sentence system. It runs 15 correctional facilities across Victoria. Thirteen of them are for male prisoners and two are for female prisoners. Six prisons are maximum security, five are medium-security prisons and four are minimum-security prisons. These prisons, for the record, include Barwon; Melbourne Assessment Prison, the MAP; the Metropolitan Remand Centre, MRC; Port Phillip Prison; Western Plains; Fulham medium security; Hopkins medium security; Loddon Middleton medium security; Ravenhall maximum security; Beechworth minimum security; Judy Lazarus Transition Centre; Langi Kal Kal minimum security; Dame Phyllis Frost, the women's prison;

and also Tarrengower. As of June 2025 there were over 6500 adult prisoners in Victoria, 95 per cent of whom were male and 5 per cent female; 40 per cent are on remand and 60 per cent are sentenced.

Corrections Victoria do essential work to help keep our communities safe by remanding and housing some of our state's most dangerous, notorious and repeat violent offenders. But they do also undertake a lot of critical work by aiming to reduce the risk of reoffending through case management informed by sound risk assessments, delivery of offence-specific and offence-related programs, and transition into support programs post release. Corrections Victoria in that regard also help oversee our post-sentencing and release schemes.

The Victorian Labor government have been working to strengthen our justice system to keep Victorians safe from crime. We have already passed those new, tougher bail laws, meaning that serious and repeat offenders are taken off the streets. This year's budget invested \$727 million in new funding for the corrections and youth justice systems to ramp up capacity. This will mean that our custodial facilities will continue to be safe and focused on supporting people to turn their lives around. That new funding package will increase the number of staff working right across our corrections and youth justice system with over 700 new staff to be recruited, and the new Western Plains Correctional Centre is due to open very soon, adding extra capacity of over a thousand maximum security beds to the corrections system. These are all part of a coordinated effort to help build a fairer and more resilient and robust corrections and community safety system.

The Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 makes a number of targeted and important changes to keep our community safe, including for our hardworking corrections officers. The bill will make a number of important amendments to corrections-related legislation, including the Serious Offenders Act 2018, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Corrections Act 1986. These changes are about keeping the Victorian community safe from the risk of harm caused by serious offenders both in the community and within our correctional facilities. This bill is part of a number of reforms that this Victorian Labor government has brought before this Parliament to crack down on those serious offenders, including, as I said, the recent bail laws, a ban on the sale of machetes and this week's announcement of the new post-and-boast laws. The bill will deliver on recommendations from the review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018, otherwise known as the Harper review, and ensure community safety risks posed by serious offenders are appropriately managed, denounce assaults on custodial officers and address other provisions of the Corrections Act 1986 that are not operating as originally intended.

As I said, there are over 3000 people working as corrections workers in our public prisons right across this state. They are the front line of our prisons and in many ways our criminal justice system as well. While their work is largely unseen by most people in the community, they are working hard every single day and night to keep Victorians safe from crime, and we should thank them for that. But their work can also be dangerous. Every day they are working with the most dangerous people in the community, as I mentioned – people that the courts have decided we all need to be protected from. Unfortunately, sometimes corrections workers are subject to violence and aggression from people in custody, and that is unacceptable. Violence and aggression have no place in any workplace, particularly our prisons. They should be treated no differently. That is why this bill will make important changes to make sure that there are real penalties for people in custody who assault a corrections worker.

The bill will define assaulting a corrections worker as a prison offence under the Corrections Act. This will mean that once Victoria Police charge a prisoner with assault and they are found guilty of that offence by a court, the court must impose an additional sentence to be served on top of the sentence the prisoner is already serving. Too often courts are directing that the sentence be served at the same time – concurrently – as the prisoner's existing sentence, and it has no impact on the prisoner's release date. This means that there is no real practical consequence for committing an assault on a corrections officer. This bill will change that and ensure that there are real punishments for assaulting corrections

officers at work. This change will also act as a disincentive for people in custody to be violent towards staff, hopefully reducing the number of these assaults that occur in the future.

The bill also makes a number of changes to the Serious Offenders Act. This act has been in place since 2018 and establishes the post-sentence scheme. This scheme provides for the supervision and risk management of serial sexual offenders and serious violent offenders after they have completed their prison sentence. The act allows these offenders to be subject to a supervision order, with a range of conditions designed to prevent them from committing further harm to the community, overseen by the Post Sentence Authority. This is designed to cover the most serious offenders who are not in jail. At any one time there are up to 150 people subject to such supervision orders. This scheme arose out of the Harper review conducted back in 2015 and is targeted to the most serious offenders who have completed their court-imposed custodial sentences. A statutory review of the scheme was completed in 2023, subsequently informing the need for further changes and reforms.

The sex offenders register is another important tool protecting the community to keep it safe from the risk posed by known sex offenders. There are some crossovers between this act and the Serious Offenders Act, both of which are aimed at ensuring we have an appropriate level of supervision of sex offenders. This bill will make a small change to improve the interaction between the two schemes by requiring people who are subject to a supervision order to have reporting obligations under the sex offenders register for five years after their supervision order ends.

The bill also makes some minor changes to the operation of the parole system, which is supported by the independent Adult Parole Board of Victoria. The bill clarifies the application of the ‘no body, no parole’ provisions for use only in homicide cases where the location of the deceased remains unknown at the time the perpetrator is being considered for parole. This is the original intent of the provisions and will save significant administrative and reporting burdens placed on Victoria Police to provide evidence of cooperation by the perpetrator even in cases where it is not relevant.

Of course these reforms are built on the feedback and views of many across the sector, particularly the corrections staff and proud members of the Community and Public Sector Union. As per the media release of 1 May 2025:

Prison workers will not accept unsafe workplaces, collapsing morale, and poor leadership.

These changes reflect:

... the lived experience of staff, and the strong desire for meaningful change at the top of the department.

I should add we can formally communicate that these changes will help make the system safer for corrections officers. In that respect I turn to the amendments moved by the shadow minister. Frankly, to cut to the chase, when it comes to handcuffing, there already are powers and provisions in place in the existing act for corrections officers and prison staff to use handcuffs to keep themselves safe in situations they deem appropriate.

It goes without saying that I am also supporting this bill in the context of someone whose community was home to Pentridge prison, one of the oldest prisons and institutions in this state’s history, having been established in December 1850 and closed in 1997. It was notorious for many reasons, including for the infamous H division. But it is also, tragically, a place where many corrections staff over the years suffered and were abused. Arguably the most infamous such instance of prison staff treatment in the state potentially occurred on 19 December 1965, when Ronald Ryan and Peter Walker, both serving sentences for armed robbery, broke out of B division the corner of Sydney Road and today’s Pentridge Boulevard, opposite St Paul’s church. After 2 pm, when many prison officers were distracted by a Christmas party, they climbed the 5-metre prison wall to disarm and overpower a guard at the watchtower and forced him to open the gate. As Ryan and Walker sprinted down Sydney Road and Champ Street and tried to commandeer a passing car, an unarmed officer, George Hodson, tried to stop them and was shot dead through the heart. Ryan and Walker were captured in Sydney 17 days later after killing Arthur Henderson and robbing a bank. After a 12-day trial, after being captured in

March 1966, Ryan was found guilty of prison officer George Hodson's murder, a sentence that carried the death penalty but which was usually commuted at the time to a life sentence. However, it was then Premier Sir Henry Bolte who refused to commute the sentence, despite the prolonged and strenuous efforts of many eminent people and community campaigners gathered outside Pentridge to oppose the death penalty.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:36): It gives me pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a contribution in favour of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation but also one that is incredibly important here in Victoria. There have been contributions prior to my own contribution that have gone into why exactly this amending bill before us this afternoon is so important. It will update and strengthen the legal framework surrounding the management of serious sex offenders and the corrections and parole systems.

The Allan Labor government has said time and time and time again that the principle of community safety comes first. We have demonstrated our willingness to pass legislation and to come to the table to do everything that we can to keep the community safe, and this piece of legislation is just another illustration of that. This year we passed the toughest bail laws anywhere in the country. We did so after lengthy consultation with communities like mine in Tarneit and also with Victoria Police, which is an incredibly important stakeholder when you are creating laws that aim to keep the community safe. We have just recently banned the sale of machetes here in Victoria. I know the Minister for Consumer Affairs, his office and his department have been working with private retailers to make sure that that ban sticks and that it is as hard as it possibly can be to purchase a machete here in Victoria. We have also said in response to our new bail laws that we will deliver and release an extra thousand beds throughout Victoria's corrections system to make sure that if there are those that do the wrong thing, they stay exactly where they should be.

This bill, on top of all of that, marks another significant and also necessary step in strengthening the safety and wellbeing of our community. What it also does is help support victims, who are going through a horrendous time and having to play a horrendous part, by making sure that the people that do the wrong things, in particular sex offenders, are brought to justice, so that during that horrendous experience – more than likely the most horrendous experience they will go through in their life – the victims know that they will be supported even more than they are currently.

With this bill we are introducing tougher and more targeted laws to ensure that the most dangerous and high-risk offenders are kept exactly where they belong, and that is behind bars. That is clearly what our changes to bail earlier this year aimed to do – the toughest bail laws anywhere in the nation. They were aimed at keeping those serious offenders and repeat offenders exactly where they should be, and where they should be is in a corrections facility. This piece of legislation builds on that landmark reform that we made just earlier this year and in fact actually goes further. It introduces powerful new tools that close loopholes, improve oversight and reinforce the supervision of serious offenders, particularly those convicted of violent and sexual crimes – the types of offenders that belong in a correctional facility and away from innocent, hardworking Victorians.

Sexual offences will not be met with leniency or silence. The bill ensures that sex crimes are dealt with more seriously, not only in the interests of the broader community and their safety but, I think most importantly, out of respect for the victims who have already suffered far, far too much. Victim-survivors should never have to question whether their government is standing behind them. We are. We hear you, we see you and we are acting to make sure that your voices carry real weight in our justice system.

Importantly, this bill also empowers victims to participate more actively in the correctional process if they wish. This is done through stronger rules around victim submissions, and the legislation makes it easier for victims to share their story and be part of decisions affecting offender management. Your voice is not just welcome, it is absolutely essential. This is about making sure that the system works with you and for you, not just around you. By modernising and aligning reporting and parole laws and

improving how we manage high-risk individuals, we are sending a clear message: Victoria will not tolerate threats to public safety. We are delivering a justice system that protects our people, supports victims and also upholds accountability. It is not just law reform; this is a promise kept to every Victorian who deserves to feel safe in their home, on their streets and in their community.

I said at the beginning of this contribution that the principle of community safety always comes first with the Allan Labor government. Over the last couple of weeks in my community of Tarneit and indeed in Hoppers Crossing I have spoken to many stakeholder groups, I have spoken to victims and I have spoken to Victoria Police. This is a piece of legislation and an instrument to help keep people in my community and indeed right across Victoria safe. This, with our machete ban and with our new bail laws, is delivering on the promise that we have made to Victorians to put their safety first and foremost in everything that we do in this place. The Serious Offenders Act 2018 allows these offenders to be subject to a supervision order with a range of conditions designed to prevent them from committing further harm to the community, overseen by the Post Sentence Authority, which is designed to cover the most serious offenders that are not in jail. At any one time there are about 150 people subject to supervision orders. A review of this scheme was completed in 2023 which covered the first five years of the scheme's operation. The review found that the scheme overall works well, but it made some recommendations for improvements. This bill implements the legislative aspects of those recommendations. We brought in legislation in 2018 which fundamentally has been successful, but the review found that there are some changes that can be made. This piece of legislation is acquitting those recommendations.

I will repeat once again: the principle of keeping our community safe comes first and foremost with this government. Through our actions in passing incredibly important legislation, and particularly this year, in response to community sentiment, we can sit here and know that we are doing absolutely everything that we possibly can to keep Victorians safe. I commend the bill to the house.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (15:46): I rise to join the member for Tarneit in support of this amendment bill, the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This is another important bill that will deliver recommendations from the review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018 (SOA), ensuring community safety risks posed by serious offenders are appropriately managed; denounce assaults on custodial officers; and address other provisions of the Corrections Act 1986 that are not operating as originally intended. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward, as we know that there has been a great deal happening here in this place regarding our justice system and keeping our community safe. We have seen some really significant legislation and changes, particularly around bail and youth justice. This demonstrates that community safety is an important priority for this government, and we can see that again here in this bill.

I was happy to be involved in the debate on our tough bail bill, a bill to put community safety above all in bail decisions and remove the principles of remand as the last resort, creating the toughest bail law ever for serious offenders, including a new bail test which is extremely hard to pass, targeting repeat offenders for the worst crimes. It was a really important measure, and we are seeing the results in remand rates. That is really important because there was and is a really clear expectation from the community on this. It is one of the most common concerns in my community and still is a major concern for many, along with the importance of quality public health care, major infrastructure projects and local development, and ensuring amenity for local residents.

We will keep working, particularly around community safety, and we will continue to work around the government's new tough bail laws to keep Victorians safe by putting community safety above all and creating the toughest bail laws ever for serious offenders, targeting repeat offenders of the worst crimes. Thank you to all of my constituents for raising community safety with me at community events, while doorknocking or at my mobile office. The feedback is important to me and to the government. Those were positive changes which sent a clear message that community safety must be placed above all, and we will keep working to make sure that that is the case – that we have the legislation to keep our community safe and to keep our justice system operating efficiently and

effectively. We continue this work here through the changes in the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

The first of the amendments here will make changes to the Serious Offenders Act 2018 to implement six recommendations from the review of the SOA to strengthen the operations of Victoria's post-sentence scheme, address operational issues and reinforce the scheme's ability to protect our community. The Serious Offenders Act was introduced in 2018 to help manage people who continue to pose an unacceptable risk of committing serious violent or sexual offences after they have completed their prison sentence. It is an important piece of legislation, and it is important that it is operating effectively.

I remember the introduction of that bill and meeting with my predecessor, the former member for Clarinda Hong Lim, to discuss community safety and some of the rhetoric that was being thrown around leading up to the 2018 election, particularly from the former opposition leader Peter Dutton, who at the time was claiming that people were afraid to go out for dinner in Melbourne, particularly in Dandenong. At one point I was the mayor and a councillor for that city in the south-east, and that was really disappointing – appalling to be honest – so it was great to speak with my predecessor at the time about how proud we were to be part of the south-eastern community and our connection to the City of Dandenong, one of the most multicultural communities in the country. He made some really important points during debate on the Serious Offenders Bill 2018 and in Parliament more broadly that helped to challenge that disappointing and really appalling behaviour at the time. Speaking of our thriving, vibrant and diverse community in the south-east, we are truly a multicultural success story. My thanks to Hong, my predecessor, and to all community leaders and faith leaders for challenging that rhetoric and behaviour and showing what a proud, inclusive and diverse community we are.

Back to the bill: as I mentioned, this bill will make changes to the Serious Offenders Act 2018 to implement six recommendations from the SOA review to strengthen the operations of Victoria's post-sentence scheme, address operational issues and reinforce the scheme's ability to protect our community. The Department of Justice and Community Safety completed a statutory review of the act in 2023, and the review found that the act is operating efficiently but made recommendations to further enhance the ability to protect our community. As such, the bill will deliver the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of that review, and the bill will implement six of the 13 recommendations, with a further five to be implemented operationally and to require no further action. The change will have a number of effects. First of all, it will improve how victims are to be engaged to avoid unnecessary trauma, clarify the directions that the Post Sentence Authority can give to people on supervision orders to reduce the risk of reoffending and create more flexibility around membership of the Post Sentence Authority to respond to its increased workload.

I am going to run short of time. With the remaining time I will just quickly touch on other elements of the bill. There are further amendments to the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 to strengthen the protections for community safety by ensuring serious sex offenders on the post-sentence scheme have to report to police under the scheme for an appropriate period. These are important amendments. And there are amendments to the Corrections Act 1986 to strengthen sentencing outcomes for people in prison who cause injury to officers. In 2024–25 there were approximately 330 staff assaults. Sixty-two per cent did not result in injury and were incidents such as throwing food or water and spitting at staff. But five prisoner-on-staff assaults resulted in staff being admitted to hospital. This is unacceptable. Assaults on prison officers can have significant impacts, including ongoing physical and mental health challenges, financial impacts relating to medical treatment and rehabilitation and a decreased feeling of staff safety at work.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and be safe at work, which is why I am happy to support tougher sentences for people in prison who injure a prison officer. There are other miscellaneous amendments to ensure that parole and other provisions of the Corrections Act are operating as intended. Once again, these are important changes to ensure community safety risks posed by serious offenders are appropriately managed and to better ensure safety for our officers. I commend the minister for bringing

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this bill forward and for the change that is taking place in our justice system to ensure that community safety is of foremost importance. I commend the bill to the house.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (15:56): I have this very funny affiliation with corrections staff because for some reason on my phone the job offer comes up for me all the time. I am not sure what it is in my – what you call it?

**Natalie Hutchins** interjected.

**Belinda WILSON**: Algorithm. Thank you, Minister; that is the word I was looking for. My algorithm is suggesting that I could be a great corrections officer. First of all, I would like to say what an incredible job our corrections staff do. I will say I have always had a bit of a fascination about being a corrections officer, so maybe that is a job for me later in my life. Who knows? But they do do an incredible job, and I was intrigued to hear that the member for Pascoe Vale's wife had been a corrections officer in her past life. That was just astonishing, and I cannot wait to now ask her an extreme amount of questions.

This Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is necessary to tidy up a number of different parts of the corrections legislation, and they are targeted and important changes to keep Victorians safe, including of course our hardworking corrections officers, who do an absolutely incredible job. The Allan Labor government is strengthening our justice system and is all about keeping Victorians safe from crime. I had the absolute pleasure of taking our Minister for Police last week to the Narre Warren station, where our incredible police force are doing exceptional work, and it was really interesting to have a conversation with them about our youth justice system and the young offenders in the Casey electorate, of which are there are a few. It was really great to talk about what programs are available for those kids – which some of them are – the Pivot program being one that I champion because I know what incredible results that program gets for our youth, and I know it is one that our police in my area, particularly in Endeavour Hills and Narre Warren, really champion. So that really is one that I support, and that is what we want – we do not want our youth in jail or in detention; we want them to be safe and to have meaning and purpose in their life. There are a number of different aspects that we can do to make that happen.

This bill clarifies the ability of the independent Adult Parole Board of Victoria to revoke an automatic cancellation of parole in certain circumstances. This is about making the parole system fairer and more efficient and not leaving people in custody unnecessarily where a fresh parole application is prepared and can be considered. It also supports the effective operations of the adult parole board, which has a different but important job to promote community safety.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Matters of public importance*

### **Government performance**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Brighton proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for a decade of debt, deficits, infrastructure blowouts and mismanagement that has driven Victoria into a deepening cost-of-living crisis due to:

- (1) delivering reckless and irresponsible budgets that leave families worse off, underfund essential services, and push our state further into debt;
- (2) running cash deficits and driving net debt to \$194 billion by 2028–29, with Victorians then paying \$28.9 million in interest every single day;
- (3) wasting more than \$1.2 million every hour on interest payments, money that should be going to important services like nurses, teachers and police;
- (4) imposing or increasing more than 60 taxes since Labor came to office;
- (5) overseeing a record high unemployment rate for 14 consecutive months; and

(6) allowing electricity prices in Melbourne to rise by 16.2 per cent in just one quarter, seven times the overall CPI increase.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:02): I rise to speak on the matter of public importance that I have proposed, which is at its core about the government's budget and economic mismanagement over the last decade and the impact that is having on our state, on our economy and, at the end of the day, on every household in this state. I will start by saying the Treasurer has just returned from New York, where she, at the taxpayers luxury, begged the credit rating agencies to not downgrade our state's credit rating. And it matters, because our credit rating obviously impacts the costs we pay on this great big ticking debt bomb the government has created but also it reflects what the global community thinks of our state's economy. It is worth noting that we are the worst graded in this country. Is there any surprise, after a decade of mismanagement? Though the Treasurer would have you believe it was an important trip that was 'positive', as the Treasurer said, what did the credit rating agencies say about the trip? They said:

We view Victoria's commitment to controlling operating costs, delivering promised savings, and slowing growth in debt as important for maintaining the –

current –

... credit rating ...

Hang on, hang on. And:

However, these goals have proven to be difficult to achieve in recent years.

What does the credit rating agencies' assessment actually mean? 'We don't believe them. We think they have no hope of managing their budget or certainly controlling debt.'

I can start with quite an interesting little find. Most people would not remember when this new Treasurer took the reins and gave her first public interview and talked about her job.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**James NEWBURY**: No, we are going to get to that, member for Polwarth. She talked about one of the important goals she saw in the job back in March. The Treasurer said:

Am I comfortable with our debt levels? No, that's why I'm taking active steps to reduce it ...

That was in March. You would listen to that promise, and you would think that in May we will get a budget where debt is reduced. It is a promise: 'I'm taking active steps to reduce it.' Well, what happened with the budget? We have seen a debt level that is now making Tim Pallas blush. He is blushing. We are about to get to a record \$200 billion in debt. If the Treasurer is actively reducing debt and getting it to \$200 billion, I do not want her to stop trying. Imagine the level of debt if she stops trying to reduce it and gets it to \$200 billion. Imagine what it is going to be if she stops trying – \$200 billion while trying to reduce the debt. It is so bad. You can just imagine the ratings agencies scratching their heads in these meetings and thinking, 'Are these people serious?'

But the Treasurer probably took some important people with her from the department to provide advice. Well, it is funny that she should talk about that, and she did. She talked about how she took the 'bonds people' with her to her meeting. That is a direct quote. The Department of Treasury sent a funny little text message to the opposition today that said, 'We don't have any bonds people.' The Treasurer is boasting about taking the bonds people with her on the trip, and Treasury is briefing behind her back, because she does not know what she is talking about. I think it is important to pick up on that, because when you are managing the economy you have got to be able to understand what you are doing. Unlike the first thing the Treasurer said when she took the job – she said the job was going to be fun – if you wreck the economy when you take the job, you should hardly use words like 'fun' to describe what you are doing.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** That is right. ‘It’s only been six months,’ says the member for Mordialloc. I do not know how she can bugger it up any worse. I do not know how much worse she can do in the four months that she has been in there. This is a Treasurer who promised to reduce debt while increasing it. You can just imagine what would happen if she promised to increase it. It is getting up to \$200 billion – extraordinary. But the job is fun, she says. It is fun. Unbelievable. We know, and I am not having a go, that when the briefs come in now they are a little bit simpler – no economic terms. I understand that the Treasurer made sure, as the Treasurer personally said, that the economic terms had to be taken out. Fair enough; I have no issue there.

I think probably the lowlight for the new Treasurer, and there have been a couple, was the most recent appearance at the economic meeting where she said to a big group of stakeholders, hundreds of stakeholders, ‘What’s your favourite tax?’ I mean, talk about throwing a dead cat on the table. What is your favourite tax? I am sure every single person in that room could think of numerous taxes they hate, because we are the most overtaxed state. As I often say, I do not like tax, but if people were being taxed and they were getting the best services in the country as a result, if they were getting incredible services, if the streets were paved with gold, if they called an ambulance and they did not die waiting for it, they would say to themselves that maybe some of this big-taxing government’s tax is being spent wisely on government services. But we have got the worst services. How is it we have the biggest taxes and the worst services? Only this Labor government could do it.

When the Treasurer gets up and says to a room of smart people who the government wants to continue to invest in this state, ‘What’s your favourite tax?’ is there any wonder why within moments the room was seething, wanting to send the message out to the broader community that this Treasurer just does not get it? I picked that particular lowlight over the previous gaffe of the Treasurer where she was asked about the great big new dog of a tax, the emergency services tax, a \$3 billion tax, and said, ‘Well, Victorians can afford to pay more.’ So we have now got a Treasurer who is not only joking around about the job being fun and joking around and asking people which of the overtaxing burden is their favourite tax but now believes that Victorians can afford to pay more. Well, they cannot, which is why the opposition has already announced that we are going to cut five taxes.

You can see that the Labor members have never even dreamed of getting rid of a tax. What does scrapping a tax look like? I can see the confused looks across the other side. They have never, ever seen a tax scrapped. They have never, ever seen a tax taken off the statute books. All they know is how to increase tax. That is all they know how to do. We know that is true.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** To help the members on the other side understand, we on this side are going to reduce the tax burden. We are going to take less money away from Victorians, because at the end of the day, this is the thing Labor never, ever, ever remember when they are in government: the money that comes in through tax is not their money; it was first earned by a Victorian, and they worked for that money. They worked and they sweated, and then that was taxed and that was brought into the government coffers. It should be very carefully used, and that is unfortunately what this government has forgotten.

So we will get rid of five taxes. We have already committed to that. Five taxes already off the burden on Victorians’ backs – that is the type of structural change this state needs. It will also help get this state moving again, because we know this state has big problems economically. Despite what the Treasurer, whose job is fun, or the Premier try and convince people to believe, this state has serious problems, and because of that it is hurting Victorians and there is a cost burden on Victorians. I have just spoken about tax, but it is in other things too. We have spoken a lot about the energy changes in this state. As a result of the mismanagement by the ideological minister, the cost of energy is clearly one of the most crippling costs on every Victorian household – total mismanagement from this ideological minister, who simply wants to ban gas purely because she does not like it. How could you

get to a point as a government where you ban a core resource purely because you ideologically do not like it?

The Treasurer, I do not think, has ever come up with the idea of reducing a tax, and before the budget she promised no new taxes on the same day as introducing a \$3 billion tax through this Parliament. But there is another one in the budget of course: the expanded congestion levy. What I understand is that the government took the congestion levy measure out of the associated budget bill purely so that they could do it a few weeks later and claim there was no new tax. Very shortly we will see a new tax bill in this Parliament which banks on a new congestion levy which is in the budget papers. That new tax, the congestion levy, is in the budget papers, so to claim there is no new tax is simply wrong, and people can now see it. Everyone knows the overburden of tax in this state. Everybody can see the economic mismanagement.

**Emma Kealy** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** Member for Lowan, I think the Premier is very well aware of how hopeless she is. But what we can see from the last 10 years of their budget management is the difference between what was budgeted and the outcome of spending blowing out by \$129 billion. No responsible government could budget and then blow out their spending by \$129 billion above, over 10 years, what they committed to spend, at an average of \$14 billion a year. If you say the budget is worth around \$100 million, how could you possibly blow it out by an average of almost 15 per cent a year by accident? It is not an accident; it is totally duplicitous.

This government has totally mismanaged the budget and, as a result, it is tanking the economy. Taxpayers, in and of themselves, are not sitting there gagging for another tax: 'Which is our favourite?' They are not sitting there saying, member for Mordialloc, 'Oh, I don't know which one is my favourite; I love paying these taxes.' They are saying, 'We're going to invest somewhere else.' That is what they are all saying. The proof is clearly there. They are moving their money because they know that economically this state is going down the wrong path – as do the credit rating agencies, which they have made clear. This Treasurer needs to come clean and start managing the budget in a responsible way, because taxpayers' money should be spent more wisely. This government should be condemned for their budget mismanagement, for the economic vandalism that they are causing to this state and for the damage they are causing to every Victorian household.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (16:17): I will repeat myself from last week: if I were you, I would not be sitting over there and critiquing the performance of some of the people on the government benches. I am up to make a contribution. I would not say it is a pleasure having to follow the ghastly performance of the member for Brighton, the Shadow Treasurer, and his year 7 explanation of tax receipts in Victoria. I mean, I would rebut some of it, I would speak to some of it, but it was all utter dross. The member for Brighton should hang his head in shame, as should his staffer, who I assume is a member of the Young Liberals, for putting that utter reheated Liberal trash on a piece of paper and bringing it into this place for people to debate. It was reheated Liberal Party absolute utter nonsense. That is all it was, and those on this side of the house will take pleasure in picking it apart, 15 minutes at a time.

I tell you what, I will at least give the member for Brighton a shred of credit for staying on message. At least he is in here talking about financial management, pretending to do his job and talking about the budget, whilst in the other place we have got Moira Deeming talking about who can and cannot use public toilets. They are a party room full of deadbeats that care more about playing politics than –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I understand that a matter of public importance usually has some colourful words within it and some accusations. However, I believe the member for Tarneit has strayed very far from the MPI that was put forward very eloquently by the member for Brighton.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the point of order, it is a very broad MPI. However, the member for Tarneit might have been straying a little. I ask the member to come back to the MPI.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Deputy Speaker, I appreciate that, and I will try and keep my language in the realms of parliamentary language as much as I can, but it can be hard from time to time after having to listen to the utter trash from the other side. Those opposite care more about politics and drumming up fear in the community than about anything to do with the Victorian economy. I use some colourful words to describe them, but in all honesty my 11-year-old son could join the Victorian Liberal party room and be leader of the opposition in about two weeks because he can use more than 2 per cent of his brain. They are an absolute dangerous show, and every single time they get up in this place and speak they illustrate that, time and time again.

In this matter of public importance raised by the member for Brighton and the Young Liberal member that works in his office, we have:

- (1) delivering reckless and irresponsible budgets that leave families worse off ...

Why don't we just go to the budget that has just been delivered and the cost-of-living measures that are within it to support Victorian families and to support working Victorians. Let us just go through a few of them. I know the constituents in my electorate of Tarneit absolutely love it. For the extension of the Get Active Kids vouchers program there was \$15 million, making sure that every single Victorian kid has the fantastic opportunity to play community sport, because it is not just great for them from a health perspective, it is great for them from a social perspective as well. Communities are built around community sporting clubs. I for one was lucky enough to be able to grow up using one or two myself. This makes sure that every single Victorian kid gets the same opportunities that I got as a child to stay healthy, to stay fit, but also to build social connections and relationships – absolutely fantastic.

The big one: I have been out doorknocking the last few weeks, as you do as a member of Parliament – on this side of the house anyway – and at every door that I knock on free public transport for children under the age of 18 comes up: 'When does it start? What does it apply to? Can my child use it?' Indeed they can. My community of Tarneit is a mobile community. People come in and out, they move around, they go into the city and they go down to Geelong, and they use public transport. A lot use public transport to get to school every day, just on a normal bus route because there is not a dedicated school bus. The school does not have a dedicated school bus. So that means that those children that do that every single day that are under the age of 18 now do that for free, saving almost \$800 per child per year. It is an absolutely fantastic initiative directed straight at Victorian families. Contrary to what the member for Brighton says in point (1) here, that goes straight to Victorian families to keep money in their pockets.

In the same vein there is free PT statewide for seniors on weekends. We all know people who have or perhaps ourselves have loved ones – grandparents, parents that live outside of our own community, that live a commute away, and this will make sure that those loved ones that are seniors over the age of 60 who need to commute to come and see you or maybe to come and see their grandkids or maybe to come and see their great grandkids will be able to do that for free from 1 January.

What else have we done? We have increased the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund payments to \$400. Like I said about the sport vouchers to be able to participate in community sport, this makes sure that every Victorian kid in every state school will not miss out on fantastic things like camps and excursions. For people that may be less fortunate, people that may be struggling, parents that may be struggling, those are the things – the luxuries – that unfortunately struggling families cannot afford. Because of this Allan Labor budget those families and those kids will no longer go without. Point (1) on this is just utter trash. The member for Brighton should genuinely be embarrassed for bringing it into this house. Those opposite – well, some of them that can stay on message – bang on about debt all the time. Only some of them do, because like I said, they are a party room full of people that pretty

much take their brain out before they speak. They talk about debt a lot. What they refuse to do is talk about economic growth. So why don't we do that?

Victoria's economy is projected to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2025–26. What that means is since 2018, which includes the pretty economically debilitating years of the COVID pandemic, Victoria's economy would have grown by 14 per cent, which is a pretty massive achievement, particularly when you compare it to other states in Australia. What ranking do you think that is of any state in Australia, member for Mordialloc?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Dylan WIGHT:** I would ask the Chair, but he cannot respond. That is the best economic growth of any jurisdiction anywhere in Australia. In fact it is 4 per cent higher than New South Wales. It is 5 per cent higher than WA, and it is higher than Queensland – both states that are resource rich, get good receipts from their commodities and have a fair bit of our GST as well. But the Victorian economy still outperforms each of those jurisdictions, and by a considerable margin. The member for Brighton actually knows this; I will give him that much credit. He knows this. When you talk about Victoria's economy, you cannot just talk about debt in isolation. We have, since coming to government, had one of the largest infrastructure programs that this state has ever seen, probably second only to Bolte, I think, who also had higher debt to gross state product than what this government did, because he believed in building things. Those opposite have never seen an infrastructure project that they have not wanted to rip up, and they will do it again.

The most concerning part about all of this, apart from of course that the member for Brighton thought this was a good idea, is that they want to sit there and say that they will be better economic managers. They want to stop five sources of resource coming in to the Victorian budget. They will sit there and they will say that they will keep the Victorian budget in a surplus, and I am sure they will say at some point that their surplus will be higher. What we have to ask ourselves, what the people of Victoria have to fundamentally ask themselves and what that lot need to be honest about is what they are going to cut. What spending are they going to cut? What cost-of-living measures are they going to cut?

The member for Brighton, if he had the gumption, would be honest about this going into the 2026 election. I cannot really say 'the member for Berwick', because we have got no idea what position he is going to be in in two, three, four weeks, let alone three, four, five months, let alone 18 months. I do not think we can confidently say that he will be the Leader of the Opposition. What I am confident in is that the member for Brighton will cut a deal for himself once again and probably still be in that position. What he should do is come clean coming into the election and tell the Victorian people –

**Nicole Werner:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you for the very succinct point of order – worthy of note.

**Dylan WIGHT:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is an MPI about the Victorian budget and financial management, and I am talking about them cutting things out of the budget.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the point of order, this MPI is very broad, as I said. I think the member may have been straying from the topic, but he can come back to it, because so far we have been pretty well on.

**Dylan WIGHT:** As I said, we will go to point (2) here, where they criticise the government for net debt, for running a cash deficit and for Victorians paying interest every single day. The only way for that lot over there to reduce any of that is to cut things out of the budget. So come clean. Have the gumption to come clean with the Victorian people and allow them to make a choice – a choice between them and an Allan Labor government that supports Victorian families and Victorian students with free public transport and with the \$400 school saving bonus; that supports seniors with free public transport on weekends; and that supports Victorian students, making sure they can go to camps and excursions and do not miss out on the very best parts of school. Even Zoos Victoria – kids go free. They will cut

that. They will cut breakfast clubs again. They cut Fresh Fruit Friday last time they were in government. Breakfast clubs will go, meaning that Victorian kids in vulnerable areas in particular will go to school hungry, and we know that educational outcomes are not as good when they do.

I have described those in that party room a few different ways during this contribution. What the Victorian people need to know is that they are a dangerous, dangerous show, and if they ever get their hands on government again, we know that they will slash and burn everything that is important to Victorian families.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (16:32): I rise today to speak on the member for Brighton's matter of public importance. Upon opening, I would like to take some of the rhetoric out of the debate that we have heard so far, because at the end of the day this is much more than political statements. It is much more than just the numbers which are in the budget papers. It is much more than just having a swipe at the government, at different ministers or at the Premier, because there has been a budget cut in black and white in the budget. This is about the families and the individual Victorians who will suffer as a result of a budget that just applies more taxes, gives back less and less to the Victorian people and takes away the hopes and dreams of Victorians who want to aspire to do more and be rewarded for their hard work and their effort. That is something that we used to be proud of as Victorians and Australians – that if you work harder, you are rewarded for that effort. You get to retain that money in your pocket or in your business, and you get to make decisions about what you want to do for your own growth, for your family's growth or for your business's growth, to stimulate the economy and create more jobs.

We are at a tipping point in Victoria where socialism is on full display after 21 of the past 25 years of a Labor government. What socialism means – and this is something I am hearing from very young people as well as older people in the Victorian community – is that the harder you work, the more taxes get taken out of your pocket and out of your business. This is money that is just going into the Labor government, and we do not get a choice about where that money is spent. We do not get it laid out before us before an election. What we hear during the budget is just spin and complete and utter rubbish about inputs and nothing about the outputs. It is never about the outcomes. It just shows time and time again that Victorians are paying the price for a Labor government that is addicted to taxes, is addicted to waste and does not hold itself to account because it is in total denial of the destruction it is applying to every single Victorian.

You talk about things that we would cut. We would cut taxes. We have already committed to cut five taxes. The Nationals and the Liberals will cut five taxes. We have committed to that. We will cut the waste. We will cut the corruption. Let us get back to governing for all Victorians and giving some of that choice back. There are a lot of people who are doing it very, very hard at the moment. There are people taking on multiple jobs. They are cutting back not just on the finer things in life on the food that they are buying because it is really expensive. Food prices have gone up 30 per cent under this term of Labor. It costs 30 per cent more to feed a family and to make sure that it is nutritious, and they are doing their best for their children. We see bills just going up and up and up. We have had a massive increase to power bills, a 22 per cent increase in power bills since 2021. Gas bills have increased by nearly 9 per cent. There has been a more than 30 per cent increase in people turning to Foodbank to help feed their families. We have got more than 1 million Victorian households in mortgage or rental stress, and yet this government want to talk about what they are delivering.

I thought it was absolutely revolting yesterday to hear the Minister for Health on a question which involved somebody who had died, who had bled out waiting for an ambulance, to include in her response that this is the dividend of what they are doing. Well, it is the dividend. We have got death and disaster and absolutely catastrophic failures right across this Labor government, who have completely lost their way. They are addicted to taxes. They are addicted to making sure that nobody has any transparency or understanding over where that money is going. They are not focused on outcomes to make sure Victorians are safe or to make sure that there are appropriate fire services over the summer. There has been a \$200 million cut to emergency services, and yet what are we being told

right across the state – we are going to have a \$3 billion tax, and that that is going to deliver more funding to emergency services to fix these problems that have plagued the state of Victoria since there has been a Labor government in place.

There is one solution and one thing that Victorians can do differently at the next election, and that is to vote 1 for the Nationals or Liberals in their seat in the lower house and in the upper house. That is the only way we can end this trail of destruction that Labor are leaving. I fear for my children's future, and I hear this from other families right across the state. They think we are beyond a tipping point. We are heading to a debt bill of \$200 billion – that is \$200,000 million. This means that our children will be paying. It is not even our children. Very soon, in the next couple of years –

*Members interjecting.*

**Emma KEALY:** It will be generations. But in the next couple of years we are going to be spending \$1.2 million each and every hour just on interest to the big banks. That is not delivering for any Victorian. It is just Victorians paying the price for a Labor government that is addicted to waste and that is not transparent.

They are only interested in getting into their ministerial vehicles, living it up at different events and making sure that they are living the high life. Labor have lost touch entirely with the families that they say that they represent the best, the people who are struggling. The Labor members here have got no connection to the people who are doing it tough. I talk to them every day when I am out in the community. There are people who are really struggling. I talk to people who are in tears. They cannot make ends meet. Young people are saving up to buy a house but then realise that it is going to cost an absolute fortune; in fact 42 per cent of any home they buy is going to be made up of government taxes, which means that they cannot afford a home. They cannot afford to put curtains in the home. They cannot afford to landscape it. It has killed the Australian dream. This is why we are listening, and it is something that Labor have forgotten to do. They are just relying on the spin doctors, focus groups and what looks good and thinking about how they can line their own nests and get a donation back in return, rather than putting Victorian people first, and that is an utter disgrace.

I think the worst example of that is how the government have completely stuffed up the emergency services volunteer tax and caused so much mental anguish and grief for Victorians right across the state. It is a doubling of that tax for every single household, whether you are a renter or a home owner. It is a doubling of that tax for every single business in the state, which will just push up the cost of living and the cost of buying goods and services in the community – and it triples for farmers. We know through the drought support that this will be waived for just one year. Now, I might not have finished that crystal ball course, but I am guessing they are going to extend that for another 12 months because I do not think they want the first rate notice to be a couple of months out from an election with a big highlight on there from councils saying, 'Labor's great big new tax is going to hit here.' They are not going to want to do it. So my little punt, my top tip for next year, is that that will be extended for another year.

While I am on drought support, I really do urge the government to get on with providing on-ground support for our farmers. The longer that you leave this, the higher grocery prices will get and the more farmers will leave the industry, and they are great farmers who are looking at selling up. We are losing so much breeding stock at the moment, and while we have got a taste of what could come in terms of farmer support, there is a lot more that could be put in place. We look at waiving water rates, fees and charges, and council rates. We can also look at further supports around cartage. I listened yesterday to Kevin from BlazeAid. Good on BlazeAid, who have come out and said that they are going to provide the freight subsidies. They are going to pay all the freight for fodder out of Queensland. And what Kevin said on *Victorian Country Hour* with Warwick Long yesterday was 'If the government won't do it, we will. BlazeAid will.' I congratulate and I thank BlazeAid, because every single time there is a fire, they are in my community. They have just pulled out of Willaura.

And if I can mention Willaura for just one moment, I would like to congratulate Pete Sporton, not just because he is an amazing Collingwood supporter and makes the best vanilla slice in the state, but I saw on his window he has banned Jacinta Allan from his store. I commend him for doing that because he knows that he is standing with his community, he is standing with businesses, he is standing with his local firefighters and he is standing with every single Victorian that is paying the price for a Labor government that has completely lost its way and must not be re-elected in 2026, in just 527 days.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:42): Well, that was weird, and I do not think a vanilla slice is going to erase that weirdness for some time. But I am going to go and talk on the matter. I do not know who the previous speaker was speaking to, but I am going to speak to all Victorians, which is what we do on this side of the house. We constantly speak on behalf of, represent, advocate, pass bills in this house, hand down budgets and manage the Victorian budget for all Victorians.

When I saw this matter I slightly laughed. I was not really surprised. It goes without saying that those opposite, even the member for Brighton, are not really original in demonstrating what they believe in, what they will fight for – or against, I might add – and what their vision is for Victoria. If anyone here in this place, including those opposite, could articulate their vision for Victoria going forward – they have got some time. The member for Lowan talked about how many days, and I am really glad that she is counting the days and weeks and minutes to the next election. They have some time; they can develop something. There were things talked about here in this place on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 earlier today that the Libs might be putting forward as policy for the state election following their counterparts in Queensland, but they always default to the usual rhetoric on debt and on deficits. We have seen that from the Liberal Party since forever. As the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and having spent the last two weeks doing budget estimates, it is all I have been listening to for the past two weeks. In fact I think this matter is actually pretty much a recycled one from last year. If we dig deep into *Hansard*, we might find that it is. It is certainly a recycling of the member for Brighton's budget reply speech. Remember that one? If you had to go on the way that those opposite talk about Victoria, you would be forgiven for thinking that this was the worst place to live in the country. Here on this side of the house we stand up for Victoria. We stand up for all Victorians. This is a great, great place to live.

In fact I was just looking at something on my phone, and my staff were talking to me about some kind of recent announcement about it being the most livable state or the most livable city to be in. That is something we should feel proud of, and I am so sick of listening to those opposite talk down this state like it is a terrible place to live, it is a terrible place to move to, it is a terrible place to raise their family. In fact I do not know why they do not get in their cars and hightail it out of this state and head into New South Wales. Let New South Wales deal with them. All you hear from them is that Victoria is broke and the sky is falling in. It is doom and gloom. It is catastrophic politics. They are in total crisis mode. That seems to be what they have in common with the Greens party, constantly being in a state of crisis – the world is in a state of constant crisis. The community do not need its leaders to be acting as though they are in a constant state of crisis. When you look at what is actually happening in this state, you see that nothing could be further from the truth. We are not in crisis. There are great things happening here. There are great people and great places to visit in Victoria. We have great local businesses. I wish that those opposite could get behind them and support them. They are constantly talking down businesses and the state of business here in this state. There are challenges, yes, to be sure; there are challenges in every state, in every city, in every country in the world. There are challenges, but let me say this: those challenges will never be solved by the bizarre and weird rhetoric of those opposite. You have already heard from two of those members opposite – weird, bizarre and visionless.

All they do is talk down Victoria, and quite frankly I get sick and tired of having to listen to it. You never see them celebrate the great things in this state, like our new schools. New schools are something to celebrate, or indeed our transformative infrastructure projects. Everyone here in this place knows my favourite project since I came into this place is the West Gate Tunnel, mostly because I have been

stuck in traffic for – number of years while that tunnel has been built. I tell my husband, ‘The West Gate tunnel is ours, honey.’ It belongs to the western suburbs. But, do you know what, those opposite, like the member for Brighton and the member for Prahran, will be able to use that tunnel. You will see the benefits of using one of the biggest tunnel-boring machines in the world to build a tunnel – two tunnels actually. I was down there recently and checked it out. I cannot wait to go back down again. It is going to unlock the traffic, the way in which westies and others – interlopers, I like to call them – will use that tunnel in and around accessing the western suburbs, accessing the city. It is actually going to revolutionise the way people in the western suburbs travel, including me and including my long-suffering husband.

You never hear about that from those opposite, and I tell you what: I know that they will be in their car or they will be on the platform at a turn-up-and-go service at Metro Tunnel. Maybe they will be at Parkville station, which is my favourite station, mostly because they have got a big sign saying ‘Sunshine’. It is the number one platform from memory, having been down at Parkville station recently. They will stand on that platform for something like 10 seconds. The train will turn up, just like they do in Paris. The glass will be there, the doors will open. They will be able to see which carriage is more congested than another, if they want to see. They will get onto that train, and those members opposite and their families and their children will go, ‘Oh my God, this is amazing.’ The problem is those opposite, the members that sit here in this place, will have to go, ‘Sh, don’t tell anyone.’ But I guarantee you it will blow their minds when they actually get to use it. And that will open later this year, as will West Gate Tunnel.

But I want to talk about government debt and I want to talk about government deficit, because it is true that our government has incurred debt. We borrowed to build. We built new hospitals, like the biggest infrastructure spend in the history of Victoria – \$1.5 billion for Footscray Hospital at the gateway of the western suburbs. We need more hospitals in Melbourne’s west. It is why we are building Melton hospital. It is why we are upgrading the emergency department at Werribee Mercy Hospital. We are building Point Cook hospital and we are building Footscray Hospital, which the Minister for Health Infrastructure sitting here at the table I think sneakily told me is the second biggest outside the CBD. It is an amazing, amazing, amazing achievement.

We borrowed to build the transport infrastructure and the upgrades that Victoria needs – projects like the Metro Tunnel, which will revolutionise our train network and unclog the city loop. It will be projects like the West Gate Tunnel, which will, I have to say, and I am now telling westies, save them up to 20 minutes in commute time, to get out of traffic and to get home earlier. This time of year it is a matter of waking up in the dark and getting home in the dark. It could mean getting home in the light and being able to go for a walk, go and watch their kids at soccer training or whatever it is that families like to do. No-one wants to spend their life driving in their car. West Gate Tunnel is about changing that – and yes, we had to borrow to do that.

These projects, as we have said in this place time and time again, are projects that those opposite not only had no vision to build but tried to block here in this place. They tried to stop them. The Premier talked today in question time about those opposite calling Metro Tunnel a hoax and using words like that to catastrophise and scare Victorians about these major visionary projects. Well, the future is now here. Those projects are about to open. They are projects that mean those opposite, in opposing them, would have left my community to rot in their cars for hours a day just trying to get to work, just trying to get home. Do you know what people in the western suburbs think? They cannot wait for the West Gate Tunnel to happen. They cannot wait for Sunshine superhub to happen, because we talk about it unlocking electrification, something that those opposite would have blocked and not done.

These are major infrastructure projects. Yes, they have incurred debt and deficit, but let me tell you, when they open and thousands and millions of Victorians use them, including those opposite and their families, with the benefits that they will have and feel and understand, it will be mind-blowing. I say to the member for Lowan – yes, she is counting down the days to the election: well, member for Lowan, so am I, and I can tell you folks in the western suburbs have benefited from these projects and

have benefited from this vision. That is why I think this matter is absolutely ridiculous, a cliché, showing the true colours of those opposite – that they do not stand for Victorians.

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (16:52): \$194 billion of debt under this state Labor government: this is not just a number. Let us look at a \$1 coin. If you stacked up \$1 coins, this amount of debt would go to the moon and back not just once but twice. It means if you were paying \$1 million of interest every single day, it would take 530 years to pay back this debt. This is a debt that is worth \$38,000 for every single adult Victorian, and even for an adult Victorian earning an average salary a \$38,000 debt is a big amount. This is a big amount, and it goes beyond that. It means \$29 million of taxpayer-funded interest payments every single day. That is \$1.2 million of taxpayer-funded – and I make the point it is not the government, it is taxpayer-funded – interest payments every single hour. Over this 10-minute speech of mine that will be \$200,000 of taxpayer-funded interest.

This economic mismanagement is having real-life consequences. It has already meant many cuts to services and infrastructure, and it means we cannot spend what we need to spend on infrastructure and services into the future. It has also meant that this Labor government has increased or introduced 61 new taxes. That is 61 new or increased taxes that impact every single Victorian, and that is driving out new investment – new investment in small businesses, new investment in housing, rentals and more. This government, at the same time as racking up this debt, continues to waste and waste Victorian taxpayer funding that goes towards major projects and more. They have blown out so many major projects it is not funny.

While Labor has looked at a short-term budgetary gain to try and meet their debt, it means long-term pain – long-term pain for Victorians and long-term pain for the economy. Instead we need an approach that cuts waste, that cuts taxes and that cuts red tape so we can actually grow our economy, so we can grow investment and so we can grow the revenue pie, which means that we can help to pay down this debt, we can have less interest payments for Victorians and we can spend more on essential infrastructure and services. I want to go further into what this debt means for the everyday Victorian. Let us look at roads. It means roads have fallen apart, and with roads falling apart and more potholes, we have more accidents as well, and more serious accidents. On crime, we see reception hours reduced for police stations across Victoria, including in my electorate of Mornington. We see a 1100-police shortage. This is all impacting Victoria Police's ability to then respond to crime and prevent crime. That includes in the member for Brighton's seat, in the member for Prahran's seat, in my seat in Mornington, in the seat of Warrandyte and in so many other seats, including the seats of those opposite who are part of the Labor government.

We have also seen cuts to education. This is something that the Labor Party parrots on about – that they supposedly look after the education space – but we have seen \$2.4 billion cut from public schools. That \$29 million of interest payments in just a few years time could mean a school redevelopment every single day. Places like Mount Eliza Secondary College in my electorate, which is now 50 years old, has not had an upgrade in 50 years. It is in desperate need of an infrastructure upgrade, and that could be done in one day's worth of these interest payments. We have to look as well at hardworking parents, including in my electorate and across Victoria, who are paying more for school fees – and at non-government schools as well – including in the Mornington Peninsula, where we are paying metropolitan payroll tax, much more than Geelong and elsewhere that are considered regional. That is despite the fact that we have 82 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula not having access to public transport – so much for 'metropolitan'.

Small businesses are also already closing due to increased taxes, and that will only continue, which is really not what this government needs. This government needs more small businesses and more investment so they can actually grow the economy and grow the revenue pie over the long term. We see the major impact on individual households as well. As mentioned before, we have a 22 per cent increase in power bills. We have grocery bills going up. Rents are going up, particularly as the increased land taxes are passed on, not to mention the fact that a number of landlords have been selling up, which means less rental stock in the market. Again, with less supply, that means higher rents for

those who are trying to get into the rental market to start with. Payroll tax, land tax, stamp duty and all these other costs are having a major impact on Victorians' ability to live, survive, invest and more.

Let us look at public housing as well and the homelessness crisis across Victoria. We have more than 60,000 people in Victoria on the public housing waiting list. The Mornington Peninsula is now the second highest in metropolitan Melbourne for homelessness and the fourth highest in the whole state. If we could spend this \$29 million of taxpayer-funded interest better, let us say we could actually build about 30 homes a day towards much-needed public housing that could over a year house many of the 60,000-plus people on the waitlist.

We also recently saw thousands of people on the front steps of Parliament House protesting against increased taxes with the Labor government's proposed new emergency services tax. Yes, after much pressure, they have delayed that for a year, but it needs to be scrapped altogether, and that is what the coalition have committed to. The tax will mean much-increased costs for farmers, including CFA volunteers, as well as landowners across Victoria, which are then passed on to renters and so many others.

In the health space we have less funds, given our debt crisis, to spend on hospitals and we have less funding to spend on ambulances, and the ambulance-ramping issue has been going up and up and up. We have not got enough investment in our emergency departments, which is having a real-life impact on people's health, particularly in an emergency. If they do not get an ambulance in time or do not get to the hospital in time, we see people with more serious injuries and we see people, sadly, pass away as well. This is also not helped by the GP tax, which when passed through to the patient sees increased fees for patients who are just trying to see their doctors. We also have more taxes for those who just want to have a holiday with their family, no matter where they want to travel to. This is another tax that we have committed to scrapping if we form government.

We have seen a situation in this budget where Labor are not only going into \$194 billion of debt, they have on the books things like the Suburban Rail Loop marked as 'still TBC'. They cannot even service the current debt. How are they going to service the debt if they add another \$200 billion top of that? Instead of looking at these white elephant projects, you have places like the Mornington Peninsula. As I mentioned, 82 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula has no access to public transport. There is no train at all to places like Mornington. There is no train at all to places like Mildura. Perhaps we should look into investing a very small subset of the amount going to the Suburban Rail Loop to actually deliver a passenger rail, to start with, in places like Mornington and Mildura instead of spending more and more taxpayer funding when we cannot afford to do so.

Going more into this situation that we are facing, we are falling behind every single other state on nearly every single metric. This is not just a matter of numbers, it is a matter of public importance. This place must condemn the Allan Labor government for driving Victoria into economic decline and debt dependency and deepening the cost-of-living crisis. We have a situation where we are also in a position now where the government is taxing more than ever – a projected \$42 billion in annual state tax by 2026 – and we are still running cash deficits year after year. Victoria's GDP is now 11.5 per cent below the national average, down from a position of strength in the early 2000s, and household disposable income is now the second-lowest in the country. So I support this MPI message brought by the opposition, and I thank the member for Brighton. This Labor government needs to – *(Time expired)*

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:02): I think it is very easy to throw around words like 'waste' and 'debt', but you need to do a little more homework than that, because what does that exactly mean? I think for the opposition, and I will say 'opposition' as opposed to 'you', it would be helpful to know exactly what they intend to cut, because they are sort of slashing and putting down everything and anything in Victoria. It is a wonder they still live here. It seems like it is such a hateful, horrible place to be. Well, that is not my experience of Victoria. I think it is a fantastic state. I think we have brilliant businesses, and it is a wonderful place to live. I am sorry the opposition hate living here so much, the

way they trash talk it and talk down our businesses and everything else. It is quite depressing, the way they reflect on our wonderful state of Victoria. Anyway, that is what they do. Rest assured, they cut Free Fruit Friday, and that was just the low end of the scale. That is exactly what they would do again if they were to be re-elected.

Thinking about my electorate, there are South Melbourne Park Primary School, South Melbourne Primary School and Port Melbourne secondary school. Fishermans Bend primary school is being built. Actually, South Melbourne Primary School might be an interesting point for the member for Brighton. So many people are moving into Southbank and around South Melbourne that they are going to have to expand South Melbourne Primary School. He thinks that nobody wants to live in the inner burbs and that everyone should move miles out. It is all about choice, so let me say people should be able to live where they want to live within Victoria. We are all about choice. But oddly enough, contrary to his contentions in the chamber, there are a lot of people, a lot of families, moving into the area where I live, which is putting more pressure on local schools. Luckily we have a historic investment in school infrastructure and will have built 100 new schools by 2026.

So when they talk about our approach to education and our lack of investment in education, I think they are very loose words and they are unfounded words, because our record speaks for itself. I think every member can reflect on, I am sure, new schools that are being built all around the state, because they absolutely have been and are being delivered. Would they have preferred we did not deliver? If you put the opposite of that, are they saying it was wasteful to build all these primary schools? And the secondary school in my seat – was that waste? Is that how they classify it? Is the Metro Tunnel waste? Is the West Gate Tunnel waste? I do not know. Loose words without much substance are not really credible when we are talking about such critical elements of the economy and the state of Victoria.

I want to go a little bit further on the issue of education, considering that those opposite were pretty much talking down any of the investments or otherwise that we have put into our education system. We are investing \$152.3 million in the 2025–26 budget to increase the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to \$400 per eligible family. They were saying that we have not been helping households with expenses. That looks like a helpful investment in Victorian families, providing these supports. Would they cut them? Do they think they are not valid? In the 2024–25 budget we delivered the school savings bonus, providing \$400 to all government school students. Again, I would say to those opposite: would you cut that? Would you have not delivered that? Do you define that as waste? I am just saying.

We have delivered more than 50 million free breakfasts at over 1000 government schools in the state, and we will have a school breakfast club program in every school across Victoria by July 2026. When we are talking about cost-of-living elements for families, delivering free breakfasts, I think, certainly would fall within that bracket. I know in my electorate and across the state there are certainly families who are taking advantage of this for all the right reasons. This contrasts, as I was saying, with those opposite, who cut Free Fruit Fridays. I am not confident they would continue the free breakfast program in schools. These are all the valid questions that need to be put when people talk about debt and waste.

We have expanded the Glasses for Kids program. If anyone should understand the importance of eyesight, it is me. I have had glasses since grade 3. I was lucky enough that my parents were able to get me to the optometrist, get me tested and get me some glasses. Back then, the glasses were pretty ordinary. The choices were not too good, let me say. But I will come back to the topic. I think this is just the most amazing investment in Victorian kids, because it also means that those who might otherwise not be able to follow in the classroom and do their homework or otherwise be able to read in a very deep and profound way do have already the supports and the investments in them. The expenditure is not going out into the wind, it is actually about investing in Victorians, and I think that line has definitely been blurred in this debate by those opposite.

We are investing over \$1.9 billion in our most recent budget to deliver state-of-the-art schools. I was talking about all these government schools, so there is the figure. Do they think that is waste and that

we should not build those new schools? They need to put their cards on the table; the Victorian people deserve to know. That is so that students can have the classrooms of the 21st century.

I should also explore further the issue of teachers' pay and support. Since 2019 our Allan Labor government has invested more than \$1.8 billion in school workforce initiatives. Would they cut these? I am just asking and just saying. We have seen the impact that these investments are already having. We have seen 12,000 more registered schoolteachers in Victoria in 2024 compared to 2020. In the past 12 months alone we have seen more than 1400 teachers join the Victorian teaching workforce. Our student-to-teacher ratio has also improved from 12.6 in 2023 to 12.4 in 2024, the lowest in the nation. This is no accident, and it is an indictment of the former Liberal–Nationals government, which made no effort and left our schools behind.

The 2025–26 Victorian budget invests \$158.7 million to expand, support and recognise the school workforce. For the limited time that I did teach I did locums, but I also taught immersion German and French and some other topics. I do not think I need to declare – it should be obvious – the pivotal role that a teacher plays in the lives of students. You remember teachers and the impact that they had and sometimes the most profound words that they conveyed or the kindness, the care, the mentoring. This is probably one of the greatest influences in any person's life, so we are investing in them. Would they cut that? I do not know. Do they think that is waste or do they think that is a valid investment? I say I am backing it in. I think that is a pretty valid investment. Our teachers are vital. I should say that many of these new and ongoing investments are targeted towards sustaining efforts to attract, recruit and retain teachers in schools that continue to face workforce challenges, so we are tackling those challenges head-on.

Just looking at the issue of tax cuts, I am actually not going to be able to get to them all. We have had, since 2015, 67 tax cuts since coming to government. There are so many. I am not going to have time to go through all of them, but I am going to start. Motor vehicle duty exemption for mobile plant and special purpose vehicles – that was a tax cut in 2015–16. The land tax exemption for primary production land in urban zone superannuation funds was in 2016–17. Increasing the payroll tax free threshold from \$550,000 to \$650,000 in instalments was in 2016–17. Tax cut 4, a payroll tax exemption to employers for displaced apprentices or trainees, was in 2016–17. The fifth tax exemption abolished insurance duty on agricultural products in 2017–18. The sixth cut brought forth two increases of the payroll tax threshold by 12 months – \$600,000 to \$625,000 and \$625,000 to \$650,000 – in 2017–18. The seventh cut increased the threshold for annual payroll tax returns from \$10,000 to \$40,000 in 2017–18. The eighth cut reduced payroll tax rate to 3.65 per cent for regional businesses in 2017–18. You would think they would be vitally interested. They are talking about tax and waste and all the other things. I am just listing off all the tax cuts that we have had. What was that again? Let me check that number: 67 since we have come into government. It is odd that they did not mention that.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (17:12): It has been quite the afternoon, and here we are. We are talking about this very important matter of public importance about the budget deception from the Allan Labor government. The truth of the state of the economy under the Allan Labor government is this: in the last decade under the Andrews then Allan Labor governments they have accumulated more government debt than there has been in the last 150 years. It is a true story. The Victorian Parliament was established nearly 170 years ago, and in the first 158 years, between 1856 and 2014, the Victorian government accumulated \$21.2 billion of net state debt. Fast-forward to 2014, and in a short 11 years under the current state Labor government net state debt has already exploded to \$155 billion this year and is forecast to hit \$194 billion over the next four years. The cold, hard facts are that the Victorian government will soon have nine times the debt that had been accrued in 158 years before that – nine times more in 11 years than in the past 158 years. Let us do the maths on that: \$21.2 billion in 158 years, compared to the 11 years that this Labor mob have been in government, which has now brought us to this skyrocketing debt of \$194 billion. Victorians are seeing this. This is nine times the level of debt. This is just reckless. This is irresponsible. This is vandalism. I have no words to describe it.

The real tragedy of it is this: Labor has no plan to stop it or to pay down the debt. The truth is that the only way out of this debt bomb is to elect a coalition government. After the coalition's tenure in government in 2014 net state debt was forecast to actually fall for once, to \$19.5 billion by 2018, down from what we had inherited at \$21.5 billion. It was in the 1990s that Labor famously drove the state into an economic crisis, thanks to the massive debt under Joan Kirner. It was the coalition government that had to step in. They had to restore the budget, and they had to pull Victoria back from bankruptcy and from financial collapse. History is repeating itself over again. You have got a form of Cain that left it to Kirner, a glass cliff from Andrews that has been gifted to Allan here with the greatest economic crisis of our generation thanks to this Labor mob.

Victorians are desperate for change. The coalition is offering them that change. A Liberal–Nationals government will publish honest, transparent budgets and introduce a public real-time dashboard so every Victorian can see how their money is being spent. We will cut unfair taxes, and we will stabilise the spiralling debt through growing the economy and responsibly managing the budget. We will reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars being spent on interest repayments to service Labor's debt through responsible management of Victoria's finances. Victoria desperately needs a fresh start, and only a coalition government will be able to do that.

PSA, ladies and gentlemen: the Victorian government is now targeting everyday people who run small businesses from home by charging them land tax. This just in, because it is pretty common in this day and age for people to have small businesses or side hustles or to work remotely and write off some of their home expenses on tax when they work from home. What these people might not realise is that if they are making money from home, the Victorian government is now going to make them pay land tax. How is that for aspiration? Victorians running everyday businesses from home are now being hit with surprise land tax bills. Thank you, Allan Labor government – not. This includes your startups, side hustles, freelancers, hairdressers, PTs and physios with home studios, Airbnb hosts, online businesses and allied health workers seeing clients from home offices. Why – because Labor lowered the land tax threshold last year to make more properties eligible and force more Victorians to pay up to reduce their enormous debt. According to the *Australian Financial Review*, the result of these changes is that more than 400,000 Victorians who run businesses from home are now getting land tax bills for the first time. If the business earns more than \$30,000 a year and uses part of the home, that business owner will receive a land tax bill. For a home valued at a median house price this could mean a new land tax bill worth thousands of dollars. In the middle of Labor's cost-of-living crisis more and more Victorians are turning to secondary jobs and side hustles just to make ends meet. Now this new land tax is kicking them while they are down and punishing Victorians who are just trying to get by.

The week after delivering her first budget Victoria's new Treasurer Jaclyn Symes flew off to New York to desperately beg Wall Street credit rating agencies to please not downgrade Victoria's credit rating any further. How is it that we have come to the point where our own state Treasurer has to go and beg to not bear the consequences of her own government's failings? Victoria already has the lowest credit rating in the country, the only state in Australia with a lesser rating than AAA. What does that mean? A lower credit rating, let alone having the worst credit rating in all of Australia, means Victorians get hit with higher interest rates on our state debt, not because of their choosing or their mistakes but because Labor has recklessly spent taxpayers money and is now considered by credit rating agencies untrustworthy with money.

Let me put it plainly. When Victorians – and they know it – go to the bank and try and get a mortgage on their home, they know that it is important to get the lowest interest rate possible, because it will change their monthly repayments and how much money every month is spent on interest. They know that it is money that they will not get back. They know that that money does not go towards paying down that loan. They know that it is money wasted, and because they are reasonable and responsible individuals, they know this, but it is not the same for Victoria. If we get downgraded again on our credit rating, the interest cost on all of our debt increases. It will cost Victorians an estimated \$300 million in extra interest. No sensible person would seek to increase their interest rate, because it

is going to cost them more to pay back that money on their debt, let alone even being able to pay down that debt, be it on your mortgage or on your credit card. They know that it is money wasted and money that cannot be taken back. Yet here is our state Treasurer taking Victorians' hard-earned money, squandering it in waste, budget blowouts and mismanagement, only to be told by credit rating agencies, aka the lender, 'Nah, mate, you've actually gone too far on this one. You're actually being irresponsible with the budget. You're going to now have to be downgraded, and we're going to have to increase your interest repayments.'

This government are so negligent with the state's budget and economy that, as discovered through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week, they did not even attempt to model or project what it would look like if Victoria's credit rating was to be downgraded, even though the Treasurer is throwing a Hail Mary and has flown to New York to plead and beg, 'Please, no, don't downgrade us.' What kind of economic plan is this? It is a 'fly by the seat of your pants, rue the consequences, who cares, it's not my money anyway' kind of irresponsible recklessness that is on full display for every Victorian to see.

So off the Treasurer goes, begging these agencies not to reduce Victoria's credit rating, and she comes back the very next week saying, 'Well, we're going to have to make tough choices. There are going to be cuts,' she said. 'We will have to decrease our spending.' But it is the same Treasurer who released the budget less than a month ago now, and all we saw were blowouts, debt, TBCs – TBC after TBC after TBC – and mismanagement. Well, Treasurer, can you make up your mind, please? Which is it? Is it reckless or is it responsible? Is it overspending or is it decreased spending? Because it is like a bad ex-boyfriend, and I am getting mixed messages. Why should we believe anything that Labor has to say when they say one thing and they do another? They have been blowing out the budget for over a decade, and every year it is going to be the same. Labor wastes taxpayers and Victorians' hard-earned money, and Victorians are the ones paying the price.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:22): I rise to oppose this matter of public importance, MPI, that has been brought by the member for Brighton, which seeks to condemn our Victorian Labor government for the real action that we have been taking on economic management, budget priorities, revenue and Big Build infrastructure projects; our focus on jobs, employment and investments; our support for nurses, teachers and police; and our work in bringing back the State Electricity Commission to transition our energy sector to cleaner, cheaper, renewable forms of energy. Because the reality is that just like a Liberal Party branch meeting – God, imagine what that is like – this motion is one that has been written by the member for Brighton, who should actually be renamed the Shadow Minister for Talking Down Victoria. It has been written in the Liberal Party's own echo chamber. It has been plagiarised from long-discredited news outlets like Sky after dark, which they are obsessed with. It is a motion that is totally devoid of any real solutions and only focused on the Liberals' never-ending list of grievances, which continue to accumulate after 10-plus years in opposition. It is totally tone deaf to the current real-world economic and cost-of-living challenges being experienced globally, nationally and across the state. As the Shadow Treasurer, he shows absolutely no vision, no plans, and no idea, through this motion, about what it takes to lead this state's economy.

Firstly, from the very outset, how can you trust the Liberal Party with a straight face? How can they stand in this place with a straight face and claim they are the party of economic and budget management? This is the party that right now cannot even get its own house in order. It is the party that is totally divided and at war with itself. It is the party that is in the process of suing itself. It is the party that cannot even decide if it can or should cover the costs or legal expenses of one of its own members. It is the party that is in the process of sending one of its own MPs, concerningly, bankrupt, potentially. If the Liberal Party cannot even manage its own internal affairs, how can it ever be trusted to manage the Victorian economy, the Victorian budget and the household cost-of-living supports millions of Victorians depend on to make ends meet and make life easier? The Shadow Treasurer of all people is the least credible on this front, because it was his own selfishness in wanting to secure the shadow treasury portfolio at the expense of the member for Sandringham that has now left the entire

Liberal Party and the Liberal movement in a precarious philosophical and financial position. As demonstrated by the Liberal leader and Shadow Treasurer and by how the member for Hawthorn has sadly and disgracefully been left to his own devices to fend for himself, Victorians know where they stand with this opposition leader and this Shadow Treasurer: they stand on their own.

The Liberals have no credibility whatsoever to lecture this Parliament and the Victorian people on how this state's economy and budget should be managed. 'Get your own house in order' is the message from here to the Liberal Party before they get up and start lecturing on financial and fiscal management. Also, once you do, get a vision. You cannot seek to govern by grievance and campaign on grievance and then seek the support of the people to give you that mandate. Look at what happened to Peter Dutton and the federal Liberals – no vision, no plan.

Secondly, and even more concerningly, for all the stats and supposed facts in this matter, the reality is that this matter does not even mention, not once – I was waiting to hear this in the shadow minister's contribution but I did not hear it, and I did not read it in the matter – cost of living, jobs, kinders, schools, TAFEs or hospitals, and the list goes on and on and on. Not once are those terms mentioned in this matter that has been put to this house, and the reason why he has not mentioned them is because we know the Liberal and National parties do not support these things. They never have and they never will. If they got the opportunity to get back into government, we know the vicious cuts that they would pursue in office – cuts to all of our cost-of-living supports and measures, cutting free kinder, cutting free dental in schools, cutting the free glasses in schools program and cutting free TAFE. We saw on the eve of the federal election Senator Sarah Henderson make it very clear where the federal Liberal Party stands when it comes to free TAFE – they want to get rid of it entirely – and that is what this state Liberal opposition would do as well. They would cut the \$100 energy saving bonus. We have not heard them speak in support of that bonus. They would sack frontline public service workers – nurses, teachers, police officers – like they did before in the 1990s with Jeff Kennett and they would privatise our hospitals, and the list just goes on and on and on.

The member for Brighton's contribution has demonstrated the Liberal Party are not committed to retaining or expanding any of these essential cost-of-living supports or measures at all. That is why, fundamentally, our approach to economic and budget management is different. On this side we deliver budgets that work for people, families and households, while the Liberals deliver budgets that cost and punish working families and households through their vicious and ruthless cuts. Again, just look at how the Liberals are treating one of their own and a former leader of the party, whom they voted for, for undertaking his duties in leading the party. Make no mistake: if the Liberals ever got back in, they would take an axe through the budget and they would leave Victorians to their own devices.

The Victorian Liberals are trying it on with the Victorian people. They are trying to sell a narrative that they have changed. Just like George Costanza in *Seinfeld* used to say, 'It's not a lie if you believe it,' and they are believing their own mistruths. I draw the house's attention to the *Seinfeld* episode where George Costanza pretends to have a holiday house in the Hamptons – in the Hamptons of all places – and he is boasting to his in-laws in downtown New York about this holiday home that he has got in the Hamptons. They end up calling his bluff. They take him up on his offer. They want to come and see this house in the Hamptons. As they are taking the big drive down to the Hamptons, he is talking about how he has got so many master bedrooms, he has got so many ensuites and he has even got horses at this massive, vast property in the Hamptons. He has got panoramic beach views. But the reality is they drive through the day and through the night and they get to the end eventually of this dirt road on a peninsula where it is pitch black and there is a full moon. There is nothing else to see. There is nowhere left to go. He gets out of the car and finally admits it was all a lie: he does not have a beach house. It never existed. He does not have the horses Smoochy and Poochie, or whatever they were called. And it is the same with the Victorian Liberal Party. They are trying to sell us a lie that they have changed, and they are trying to take the Victorian people on a ride, on a journey, like George Costanza did with his in-laws. But we see through it because we have been there before. We have been to the end of that dirt road with the Victorian Liberals before, and it is all about cuts, it is all about

closures and it is all about public sell-offs, and that is the truth. We see through their mistruths, that is for sure.

Again, look no further than what happened. The Liberals and Nationals were decimated at the last federal election. It is the same playbook at a federal and state level. They have not listened. They are not learning. The Victorian people and Australian people overwhelmingly rejected the Liberal–National agenda. They wanted at a federal level to sack public servants across Canberra and across the country. They wanted to force public servants back to the office and abolish working from home for everybody, and people did not buy it. They sought to cut \$2 billion in federal investment from the Suburban Rail Loop and also send the signal that all federal money for major infrastructure projects had a big question mark on it. How can you trust a federal Liberal government if it is going to take \$2 billion out of that project?

What about the money that they would have ripped out of the North East Link and all the other projects that they have never supported: the West Gate Tunnel, the Metro Tunnel and the level crossings. They wanted to cut \$2 billion out of the Melbourne Airport rail link and essentially make the project redundant. Two billion dollars out of the Sunshine station project would have made the airport rail link unviable. Like George Costanza's drive down the dirt road, you need to fix Sunshine station before you can build the airport rail link. I am not sure if these guys have ever been to Sunshine, St Albans or the Brimbank area, but the Sunshine station redevelopment is crucial to facilitating the Melbourne airport rail link – which the Liberals wanted to cut, and the western suburbs rejected that. They wanted to cut Medicare and urgent care clinics. Cutting HECS debt – where were they federally on cutting HECS debt? Again, they wanted to abolish free TAFE as well and to introduce a tax incentive for business long lunches – talk about priorities; tax refunds on people's mortgages, which would have driven up the cost of housing and done nothing to support supply; and of course, their infamous \$300 billion plan for nuclear reactors.

**Richard Riordan:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I just draw your attention to the fact that the member for Pascoe Vale, in his enthusiasm, has sort of mistaken the Parliament that he is actually in. He has spent the last 5 minutes or so – we let him have a little bit of leeway – talking about federal policy. We might draw his attention back to the matter of public importance, which is a state-based issue. And, if he would like, we are happy to provide some advice on the difference between state and federal.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** This is a very wideranging matter of public importance, although I would encourage the member for Pascoe Vale to come back to state-based matters.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Acting Speaker, I am always happy to take your guidance, of course. On the big infrastructure projects, which the federal Liberal Party were opposed to, we are not only investing to create jobs and new opportunities but we are bringing communities along. For example, we have got the Myki youth drawing competition that is out and about at the moment. There are amazing competition entries going in, but one that is not being accepted is this one here. We are not going to see this on the face of the new youth Myki, that is for sure, as long as I am in this place.

**Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (17:33):** Phew, I am not quite sure how to come back after some of those comments from the member for Pascoe Vale. I rise to support the member for Brighton's matter of public importance:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for a decade of debt, deficits, infrastructure blowouts and mismanagement that has driven Victoria into a deepening cost-of-living crisis ...

I grew up in Shepparton. I went to local schools. I ran a small business for many years. I raised a family and, like many, I had aspirations and dreams – the Aussie dream of owning a home and having a secure life. In the public housing estate that I grew up in there were many young, hardworking families that had the opportunity to purchase a house at an affordable price, aligned with their income, an opportunity that does not exist today. We have gone backwards. We have not got the opportunities for

the next generations that we should have when it comes to housing, when it comes to surviving week by week. The escalating cost of living has put the Aussie dream of owning a home out of reach for many. We know that right now people are struggling to pay their bills, put food on the table and just survive, as I said, day by day. I have never seen things as tough in my community as I see right now, and I have heard little contribution from the other side in regard to some comments from their constituents. I am sure they are hearing very similar comments to what I am hearing. We are in a cost-of-living crisis, and every single day people are struggling to make ends meet. There is no relief, and the financial distress is significantly impacting on people's lives. Energy bills, groceries, rents, insurances and fuel are all climbing. Yet Labor has offered no support for households.

The Allan Labor government has allowed Victoria to spiral into a cost-of-living crisis. Everything is costing more in Victoria, and we are the most taxed state in the country. Surely that is not something that those on the other side can just continue to ignore. Victoria is known to be the state of out-of-control debt. The recent, reckless and irresponsible budget has left families worse off, underfunded essential services and pushed our state into further debt. The state's net debt is forecast to hit \$194 billion by 2028–29. Interest payments are set to soar to Victorians paying \$28.9 million a day. It is hard to fathom that figure – every single day. This government is trying to tax its way out of the out-of-control debt, and every day Victorians are paying the price, and they have had enough. They have had enough of city-centric spending on pet projects with billions in cost blowouts whilst they are struggling to put food on the table or a roof over their head. Over \$40 billion in cost blowouts over the past decade is just astounding. These cost blowouts represent real consequences. This money could have been spent on hospitals, roads or schools or on reducing the cuts we have seen in many services.

This government have their priorities all wrong, and it is distressing and bewildering. This government have imposed more than 60 new or increased taxes on taxpayers since they came into office due to their incompetence and financial mismanagement. They blew \$600 million of taxpayers money following the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, another major financial muck-up and disgrace. There has been an outcry over the latest emergency services and volunteers tax. The protest on the steps of Parliament had thousands turn up to call out the Allan Labor government. This should be a clear message that Victorians have had enough of this tax-grabbing, out-of-control government. This government have gone too far in turning their backs on their people.

My office has been inundated, and what we are seeing are more and more people having to ask for help, many for the very first time. I see the impact on their mental health and on their families. Just a few weeks ago I was contacted by Kelly, who said:

My car broke down and I can't afford to fix it, rent and food take priority.

Jan said:

My electricity is due and I can't afford to pay it, I am embarrassed to admit but I need assistance.

Housing stress and homelessness is a significant issue in my electorate, and we have one of the highest rates of homelessness in this state. Can you imagine having nowhere to sleep tonight? People are sleeping rough out in the cold, in their cars, in tents or on a park bench. We have people like Azem, a community champion who provides for the homeless with food, tents and any support that he can from his small restaurant in the CBD. People like Azem and his volunteers are providing for our most vulnerable when this government does not. I work closely with Azem, and he has said it is not just those sleeping rough reaching out for help. We have a significant public housing waiting list in my electorate, with over 2300 people in need of a home. Many of those are waiting for emergency housing, yet this city-centric government have no plans to help my community when it comes to addressing our significant housing shortage.

The rental market in Victoria is also in crisis, and in the past year alone we have seen a reduction of over 20,000 properties from the market. This was largely due to the increased land tax, and for many it is no longer viable to own an investment rental property in Victoria. Land tax has had a significant

impact on investment properties, and we have heard of everyday people with a small investment rental property who thought the income that they were getting from that property would support them in retirement. The increased taxes and costs have made it no longer viable. These are everyday people who are not financially dependent on the government. Where there are rentals available, prices have escalated to levels that are unaffordable for many, and you get 50 people applying for properties. We are hearing from people who have had ongoing increases in their rent that it is unachievable on their income. Property investors are continuing to flee Victoria in the tens of thousands. This government are so out of touch, and the numbers of people homeless will continue to rise.

There has been a significant increase in people reaching out to local community groups and organisations for food relief. Shepparton Foodshare have had a significant increase in demand. We are also seeing local community groups and businesses acknowledging the increase in the need for people to have food support and running their own food drives. For example, Cardamone Real Estate collected 350 kilograms of rice to help Foodshare, and many schools and community groups also went on the rice drive to help feed our community. The Nappy Collective is another initiative helping families doing it tough during the cost-of-living crisis. One in 10 families struggle to afford nappies, and thousands of little ones are going without nappies. This is just another example of communities coming together to help those in need.

When we talk about the budget, we have had no investment in my hospital. We have been calling on funding for an integrated cancer centre. GV Health is the only regional public health service in Victoria that does not have an integrated cancer centre offering comprehensive cancer treatment facilities. Our road network is no longer fit for purpose, and we have been calling on funding to upgrade our network, including a desperately needed second river crossing. We have also been calling for a bus review. I notice that the minister has left the chamber, unfortunately. It has been more than 15 years since we have had a review. We have had a petition, and I have called on the transport minister to acknowledge this, because people need to be able to get to where they need to go. It is just wrong that people across my electorate do not have the bus services that they need. We have areas with no services and small towns with no or limited bus services. Not everyone has access to a vehicle, and during a cost-of-living crisis bus transport is an affordable option. It is a disgrace that my community did not get a bus review in the budget.

In my final minutes, I just have these messages, which have come straight off my desk. These are actually people that have called into my office. For example, Ian is talking about the short-stay levy. He has apartments in Numurkah.

This is a tax I can't afford – I will have to pass the cost on.

Ron:

Food and utilities are getting so expensive leaves very little to live on.

Michael:

I am left with very little after paying rent and I have a 11 year old child, I am struggling to keep up with my costs.

Kelly:

My car broke down ...

I have mentioned Kelly. Jenny, a victim of domestic violence, is currently in transitional housing:

I don't know what to do I can't afford private rental.

And from Justin Stafford:

I am writing to advise you that, as a landlord, I have decided to sell up my two investment properties.

As we have talked about, this was a person for whom this was his retirement income.

It is no longer viable, and I am not sure how we are going to survive in our retirement.

This government has a lot to answer for. I know we all have stories, and I am sure those on the other side are seeing the people that we are seeing that cannot survive the cost-of-living crisis that we are all experiencing. I just want to put a shout-out to my front office staff, Mel. She is an incredible support to my community. Yesterday she was delivered flowers because she helped people within my community. She connected them to the service providers that they needed. Do you know every single day, on average, through my office door we get 10 people. For eight of those people it is related to a cost-of-living crisis about them not being able to pay their bills, not being able to survive. We need to do more; this government need to do more. We need to have a change of government next year so that the people of Victoria are supported.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (17:42): Following the member for Shepparton, I feel like ending the matter of public importance with that calm gravitas that the member for Shepparton has – just bringing the tone up. But we go to me in Mordialloc, and I might just bring it down a little as we give a bit of an assessment of the member for Brighton. I want to just put a search party out for the member for Brighton. This was the member for Brighton's moment to come into this place and to show himself as the leadership contender we all know he thinks he is. And where is the member for Brighton? We have not been able to sight him for the last hour. He has walked off on his own MPI after a bit of a waffle fest. It was not as good as some performances. The narration around talking down the state – he does a really big job. I think he does try his best to reframe the narrative around how Victoria is going, because it is in their political interests. Some of the convenient truths around how Victoria is performing undermine that message around debt and deficit they put forward, and I want to take people through that. But to see just the lack of attendance – the member for Bulleen has gone home; at least the Leader of the Opposition has come in to see a bit of a history lesson and a bit of an assessment here. I appreciate that because it gives me a chance to go through some of this as well.

Who was it that said cost escalations on major infrastructure projects are just a thing of doing business on the eastern seaboard? Who was that hero of governance? Who was that? If we are doing trivia, the member for Polwarth is thinking, 'Who could this be? It has got to be Labor.' No, it was not. It was Dom Perrottet, the hero of the member for Sandringham, who has done a couple of fundraisers down the road in Sandringham. He has been out there, and he said you have just got to keep going; you have just got to barrel through. Remember that great treasurer turned premier – a great effort there. And who was it that said increasing debt was a product of saving lives and saving the economy? The member for Morwell is deep in notes at the moment, but the member for Prahran might have that answer. It is a bit closer to home for the member for Prahran. Are there any takers? It was Josh Frydenberg. And where was Josh Frydenberg taking debt once upon a time? The member for Mornington always comes in prepared, and he had an eloquent speech. Coming from federal lands, he had a crack, he had a fair dip, and I thought, 'He was in federal lands around that time. He was around at that moment. Would he have known that Josh Frydenberg, the former member for Kooyong and Treasurer at the time, was taking the nation's economy towards a trillion dollars of debt?' He said \$194 billion is cataclysmic – it is all over – and the debt to GDP in Victoria is at 25 per cent on the budget estimates and numbers. Well, the federal number is in the mid to high 30s.

When the member for Gippsland South's hero Barnaby Joyce was on his back wailing to the stars, the debt-to-GDP number was in the mid to high 30s. You look at that and you go, 'What is this hysteria about?' We know, because it is in their political interests and their interests in survival in branch member land, which seems to be the only thing they try to cultivate these days – to talk down Victoria. The member for Pascoe Vale opened it up beautifully, because it is not just us that think they are all obsessed with Sky News after dark; it is literally the reviewers of their performances. Their federal reviewers are saying, 'Well, we're just too much on the Paul Murray front. We've got Paul Murray on speed dial.' He is out of New South Wales. Goodness me, I do not know why they obsess about him.

They are so fixated on internal squabbles that they miss the fact that talking down Victorians, talking down their aspirations, does nothing.

The former Premier Daniel Andrews summed it up perfectly: ‘They are Liberals first, Victorians second.’ You cannot deny truth and you cannot deny fact – 3.7 per cent business growth in Victoria while the rest of the nation is down 1.1 per cent. There is just a bit of silence there – they are just fun facts for those opposite, a bit of a mic drop. Well, it is not too far for you to read, member for Polwarth. It is in budget paper 2, chapter 1, page 1. Just go through that.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** ‘Will we believe it?’ the member for Polwarth said. The member for Polwarth was a plant specialist. If ever there was someone who was fed questions – he could not go off alone. Even if the question was no longer relevant, the member for Polwarth would still ask it. That is a budget reference right there that shows it.

We go into the growth of the state economy since the pandemic. That is a fair threshold. Those opposite say, ‘Well, we were disproportionately harmed and impacted.’ We were; we copped a fair hit during the pandemic. But let us then see the inverse of Victoria’s performance. What was Australia’s average of growth by GSP from 2020–21 to 2023–24? I have got to give a shout-out to the member for Monbulk, who has done the hard yards in getting me these numbers. The average was 9.4 per cent. Where was Victoria? The heroes over there want to be New South Wales every other moment of every other day. They talk and they fangirl and fanboy over New South Wales something fierce, and then when you remind them that Dom Perrottet was a fan of debt and was a fan of cost escalations in completing the tunnelling projects they have delivered, it is an inconvenient truth for them over that side. But it was 12 per cent. Where was New South Wales? 8.1 per cent. It is an astonishing number.

You walk through some of their language around bankruptcy. Now, these business gurus over there are economic managers, just ask them. I am not going to say the reference to how good they think they are, but they think they are economic managers, even though they did not manage an infrastructure project. They took the nation’s economy up to a trillion dollars of debt, with what to show for it? No-one knows. It has taken Jim Chalmers and Anthony Albanese to then slide in and bring back so much support for our nation’s economy. Finally we are getting our fair share out of infrastructure. You did not hear any of that in the Shadow Treasurer’s speech. It was all about taxes that they were taking away, revenue sources they were taking away that were going to smash services. On the notion that Victoria is broke, as some of those opposite say, what is the asset pool of Victoria? \$412.9 billion. Now, you have run businesses, Deputy Speaker; you are quite eminent in that frame. That is much higher than total liabilities of \$177.5 billion at the time, giving Victorian a net worth of \$235.4 billion.

I was just standing there, and the economic managers over that side, the absolutely illustrious economic professors – there are a couple of fake professors over that side – had a crack. But you look at that and go, ‘How can you be taken seriously?’ When they dished up the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) performance that they delivered over two weeks, they barely got a grab on media. They were trying their best. Even one of their members wore his own jumper in to try to get name recognition. It was a bizarre performance by those opposite. They say that we are in debt and deficit and they say time and time again Victoria is broke, and then the basic measure of any assets and liabilities shows that that is absolutely laughable. It is actually embarrassing, putting that forward. When you see the nation’s only economy with a COVID debt repayment policy coming forward with net debt to GSP coming down over the forward estimates to 24.9 per cent, when they get so sooky la la about the surplus – ‘We’ll never have a surplus’ – how many surpluses did those opposite on a federal scene deliver? Remember the ‘Back in black’ cup? Remember those? They were running off the shelves. Remember the cigars? But the member for Gippsland South never bought one of those cups. Remember, at the end of 2022 he was questioning the coalition agreement. He rolled Walshy, and when Walshy had no bar of that he came to the front table.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Titles.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Murray Plains. Now he sits at the front, but remember, he was ready to walk away from the coalition agreement, such were their shambles and such was the ridiculousness of that. And the member for Gippsland South as the Leader of the Nationals does the work. I have seen PAEC for four years. He does the numbers. The member for Gippsland South would not come in with a notion of broke, would not come in with a notion around debt, because it does not stack up. It is not in the evidence. I mean, at least have a narrative that is formulated with some sort of sense and resemblance.

Then we saw the Shadow Treasurer's performance the other day. It was any estimate between \$4 billion and \$5 billion in cuts in revenue source and not one justification for what will change or what will be done. And we know why – because past performance in financial terms when you are doing your superannuation is not a future indication. But I tell you what, in Liberals and Nationals policy, if it is past performance, you know what they will do into the future. You know that there will be cuts to services. I just wonder how many nurses will be taken away. Will they go back to trying to privatise our nurses? Will they go back to trying to privatise ambulances? Will they gut the education regions back to four regions like they did from 2010 to 2014, when they absolutely destroyed the morale of teachers and education support staff in our region? Will they cut infrastructure projects into the future? We know that the member for Bulleen has a very different policy around the Suburban Rail Loop to the member for Berwick, the Leader of the Opposition. Is it a shelve? Is it a 'We'll put it off a bit while we assess the contracts'? They have had seven or eight different variances of thought. It just depends. They basically look for Shannon Deery to do an opinion piece, and this week it is 'Matthew Guy times three' and they all get a little bit excited. Then they run around and background against each other and have a crack. I will tell you what, they get excited. The one that is getting the most excited with his talent and output is the member for Brighton. But this is about cuts and closures; that is what they are all about on that side.

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (17:53): I rise today to address this chamber about the Victorian budget deception and the cost of living and what it represents for the people of Prahran: another chapter in Victoria's tragic decline from the place to be to a run-down state that has lost its way. Prahran was once at the heart of what made Melbourne the world's most livable city, and we have heard my colleagues across the floor talking about it being the most livable city. Well, my friends, that is not where we are at at this point in time. Chapel Street was a vibrant destination. Our cafes and boutiques drew visitors from across the globe, and young people and families made the seat of Prahran the place they put down roots and planned in with confidence for the future.

But that Victoria – confident, prosperous and growing – has been replaced by a shadow of its former self. We have lost our most livable city status. We have become economically uncompetitive. The Business Council of Australia review of taxes and regulations released in December found the Victorian Labor government had the nation's worst business settings and the most to do in improving its business fundamentals. That is right – Victoria is dead last in Australia. This pathetic result relates to the government's policies on payroll taxes, retail hours, planning systems and business red tape and licences. And yet again it is a case of tax, regulation and wasteful spending. My constituents in Prahran are feeling the burden of mismanagement every day as young families struggle to pay their rent or to buy their first home, and small business owners on Chapel Street watch foot traffic decline as customers struggle with cost of living, increased taxes and crime in the area.

The fundamental problem facing Prahran and all of Victoria is this government's addiction to taxation. Since Labor took office, they have introduced or increased 61 new taxes, fees or charges. Tax revenue has increased by 183 per cent since Labor was elected, while workers' incomes have only risen by 38.5 per cent. Victoria now leads the nation in tax collection, particularly the property taxes that are strangling investment in areas like ours. When a young couple looks at buying their first apartment in our electorate, they face a bewildering array of taxes and charges imposed by this government. There

is stamp duty, land tax and development levies. This government has turned home ownership into a luxury that fewer and fewer can actually afford.

The statistics tell the story of this government's failure. In inner Melbourne home ownership is at its lowest levels, with areas like ours experiencing the rental crisis more acutely. As the Reserve Bank has noted, home ownership is the lowest in city centres, the CBD and surrounding areas. That is exactly where my seat sits. Young Victorians aged 25 to 29 have seen ownership rates crash dramatically. Today young adults in this group have a home ownership rate of just 36 per cent compared to previous generations, who achieved much higher rates at the same age. These are not statistics to me. These are my constituents priced out of their communities by a government that sees every transaction as a revenue opportunity.

This budget continues Victoria's march towards fiscal catastrophe, and we are approaching \$200 billion in debt, a ticking time bomb, a ticking debt bomb, that will explode in the faces of future generations. Interest payments alone will reach \$1.2 million per hour. Think about that: every hour Victoria pays \$1.2 million just to service debt that delivers no new schools, no new hospitals and no infrastructure for Prahran. This government has presided over \$129 billion in budget blowouts over the last 10 years, and when international financial institutions lose confidence in our state's financial management it means higher borrowing costs and less money for essential services that Prahran and all of our electorates actually need.

Let me bring this home to the everyday reality of Prahran residents. Our iconic Chapel Street continues to struggle, not because of a lack of potential but because this government's policies are driving its costs up and because lack of essential service delivery, such as policing and mental health outreach services, is impacting the desirability of the area and people actually wanting to visit. From January 2026 parking levies will increase by 73 per cent, with category 1 spaces jumping from 1750 to 3030, and category 2 from 1240 to 2150. Disappointingly the majority of the seat of Prahran will be now captured in the expanded category 2 levy. How can we revitalise Chapel Street when this government is actively discouraging people from visiting? Meanwhile, St Kilda Primary School, which I often speak about in the house, still awaits its desperately needed multipurpose hall. It is shocking. While billions are wasted on cost blowouts and pet projects, basic educational infrastructure for our children is ignored. This hall is not a 'nice to have'; it is essential for physical education classes, community events and emergency services coordination.

The vacant residential land tax exemplifies this government's punitive approach. A \$15,000 impost on a \$750,000 home vacant for six months is not targeting wealthy speculators; it is hitting ordinary families dealing with renovations, relocations or family emergencies. This policy is a punishment, not a solution. Our local businesses face an incomprehensible web of taxes and charges. The emergency services tax hits their bottom line. If they employ GPs or allied health professionals, they are slugged with the health tax. And if they cater to tourists, essential for Chapel Street's recovery, they are hit with a holiday and tourism tax.

The coalition offers Prahran and Victoria a pathway back to prosperity through eliminating the taxes that are strangling growth and opportunity. We will scrap the emergency tax that burdens every business in Prahran. We will eliminate the schools tax on non-government and religious schools to reduce education costs for families, we will remove the health tax on GPs and allied health professionals to support our local medical precinct and we will abolish the holiday and tourism tax to make Chapel Street competitive again. Most importantly for young Prahran residents, we are going to scrap the stamp duty for first home buyers on properties up to \$1 million, opening home ownership to a new generation. We will also legislate a charter of budget honesty, establish real-time online expenditure tracking and introduce debt-capped legislation, because Prahran residents deserve to know where their money goes and have confidence in where it is being spent. Our single point of contact for business and investors will help Chapel Street traders navigate red tape instead of drowning in it, while the Victorian productivity commission will identify and eliminate the barriers to growth that have made Victoria completely uncompetitive. We will reverse Labor's gas ban, ensuring businesses have

access to affordable energy, and cut planning red tape that delays development and drives up costs for housing and commercial projects.

When we establish construction enforcement Victoria and reinstate the building industry code of practice, Prahran residents will see infrastructure delivered on time and on budget. We will hold a royal commission into the CFMEU misconduct. They will know their taxes are not being wasted on union corruption and intimidation anymore.

Prahran residents want to feel safe walking to Chapel Street at night, taking their children to local parks and building community connections. We will ensure adequate police resources and work with local communities to design CCTV networks that actually deter crime, rather than simply recording it after the fact. We will invest in drug treatment and mental health services to address root causes, breaking the cycle that sees the same individuals repeatedly cycling through our justice system.

I want my constituents to once again live in the most livable city in the world. I want Chapel Street bustling with cafes, boutiques and cultural venues. I want young families able to buy their first home in our vibrant community, the envy of the world. I want local businesses thriving, not struggling under the weight of 61 different taxes and charges. This is not nostalgia, it is achievable for the future if we have the courage to change the course.

The difference between our approach and Labor's is fundamental. They see every problem as an opportunity for a new tax, every challenge as justification for more spending and every failure as a reason for bigger government. We see opportunity in unleashing the private sector, prosperity in lower taxes and progress in getting government out of the way of hardworking families and businesses. The choice facing Prahran residents could not be clearer: continue down Labor's path of ever higher taxes, spiralling debt and economic decline, or choose a coalition government that will restore Victoria's competitiveness and Prahran's prosperity.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I acknowledge in the gallery Wendy Machin, who is a former Deputy Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament. Welcome.

*Bills*

**Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (18:03): As you can see, I am very enthusiastic to speak on this legislation. After the indulgence of those opposite for the last few hours, it is refreshing to return to the priorities that our community and particularly my community have put me in this place to speak to. Before I go into detail on the bill, I do just want to reflect that before we paused for the Liberals' matter of public importance I looked at the chamber and the state of the chamber, and I saw my good colleagues here on this side, on the government side, talking to this bill, and I noted that there were no other speakers from those opposite speaking to this really important piece of legislation that goes to the heart of community safety. This is despite the fact that the member for Caulfield has circulated an amendment on this important legislation. You would think that they would have the time for their communities to come in here and debate this really important bill.

There is a lot of bluster that comes from those opposite about community safety, and these amendments that have been circulated are something that you would expect the Liberal and National caucus, I suppose you would call them, or whatever they call themselves – assembly, rabble – would want to be in here to actually discuss. So I was pretty disappointed, and I am going to remind every person in my community whenever I see the bluster on Facebook from those opposite about community safety and crime that they are not in here, save for our learned friend at the bench at the

moment the member for Polwarth. Save for the member for Polwarth, the other Liberals and Nationals are not in here talking about community safety, and I think that is pretty abhorrent.

However, I do digress slightly, and I would like to return to the bill. Across the Wyndham LGA 329 people are corrections workers out of a statewide figure of around 3250. That means that out of all corrections officers, 10 per cent live in the city that I am privileged to represent along with my colleagues in Point Cook, Tarneit and Laverton. These men and women deserve to know that this government is looking out for them, and that is part of what this bill will work to do, alongside our efforts as a government to ensure community safety for all Victorians. Because after all, community safety is our priority. It does not look like it is for those opposite at the moment.

With a large portion of the state's corrections officers coming from my community, I hear a lot of the concerns and worries that corrections officers have. As a result, I welcome this bill and its amendments surrounding custodial officers. It is a great privilege to serve in a government which legislates and is working towards practical solutions which protect and support both our community and our corrections officers across Victoria. These officers have a right to feel safe at work, and this bill will mean tougher sentences for people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers. Assaults on custodial officers have a significant impact on their mental and physical health. I have met a few of them out in my community who have been involved in some of the serious rioting we have seen in previous years, and I have seen how it has left them. I really do stand here today because I want to show that their experience matters to this government and we want to make sure that their colleagues who are still in the system get that protection that they deserve.

This has been addressed through this bill. It will ensure that sentencing for violence committed against corrections officers will be classified as prison offences and will attract the presumption of sentence accumulation in the Sentencing Act 1991, particularly in regard to emergency service workers, which I will go to in just a moment. This is part of our efforts to ensure that those who enforce our laws, both on the streets and off the streets, are protected. It will strengthen sentencing outcomes for offenders and help address the concerns of those in my electorate who work as corrections officers. I would also like to thank the CPSU for their advocacy in protecting the rights of these corrections workers in my community and across Victoria.

However, I do want to briefly touch on the thought bubble – sorry, amendments – proposed by those opposite. We have heard the safety concerns of corrections staff and particularly corrections officers. In fact if the opposition had read the regulations already made for corrections – in particular from 2019, regulation 14 – they outline a range of circumstances where restraints should be used. These include:

- for the safety of the prisoner or any other person; or
- for the security or good order of the prison.

That would be made under an order of the governor in charge of that prison. These are regulations that already exist, and that discretion already exists with the staff in that prison. It is not for politicians here in Spring Street to be making those decisions on their behalf. There is a fine line between safety and extrajudicial consequences, so we will work closely with corrections staff to make sure the option is there for restraint but that it is done with regard to human rights and their safety in mind.

Some may ask why only provisions for corrections officers have been put in place by this bill. It is because they are the most likely to face the sort of harm this bill seeks to address. They manage behaviour inside the facilities and are the first and last line of defence for all corrections staff in those facilities. It also goes to provisions already made in the Sentencing Act to include corrections officers as emergency service workers, as they should be considered. It is not just those officers that are escorting people to and from their cells or to different activities around the prison; it is also those critical response units that exist in our prisons that respond to serious incidents. They are emergency

service workers, just like other emergency service workers in our community. This bill makes it clear that there is a deterrent to anyone inside targeting our corrections officers.

I do want to briefly reflect too on some of the changes that we are making in this legislation to serious offenders and the Serious Offenders Act 2018. Our post-sentence scheme, introduced in 2018, provides for the supervision of serious offenders and sexual offenders after their release from prison. At any one time there are around 150 people subject to these provisions. This arose out of the 2015 Harper review, and it is targeted at the most serious offenders who have completed their court-imposed custodial sentence. That review found that the overall scheme is working well but there is more that we can do.

As I have said before in this place, our laws regarding community safety are not just set-and-forget, and this is the appropriate way to respond to changes in the risk in the community from people who have committed the most heinous of crimes. The thing that we in this government do is that we are out in our community listening to those concerns, responding to the risk by working with our judicial system and the people who work in our emergency services and making sure that those arrangements fit their needs, not just dictating it from Spring Street or from Liberal Party headquarters.

I have met and worked with victims of serious crimes both in my work here and in my previous life as a teacher, and despite knowing that person has completed their sentence, there is still that feeling of concern knowing that person is out in the community. These changes make it easier for victims who are registered to engage with that Post Sentence Authority created by those 2018 changes. We will also clarify the direction powers of that authority as well as the powers of Victoria Police to allow for swifter action to implement conditions or respond to possible breaches. In meeting with our local officers out in Werribee I know it is often one of the biggest frustrations that sometimes they feel that they cannot act swiftly on these sorts of things. So having this here is responding to their needs and not just dictating it from Spring Street.

As a former teacher working in some of our most vulnerable communities I have been a strong advocate for reforms to improve community safety – not just yelling and bleating on Facebook but actually doing the work with our community and our judicial service. Unlike those opposite, who splatter social media with their fearmongering and run so-called petitions to harvest frightened people's data, this government is doing the work with our frontline workers and our judicial system to continue to adapt to a changing risk profile in our community. We do not need to yell about this work. We need to do it, and if there is more that we can do we will follow the proper processes to get it done.

This bill follows on from several reforms to address serious offending, including our new bail laws and the ban on machetes. I welcome the bringing forward of some of those controls and what we are going to see over the next few months in consultation with those people who will have to enforce them. I also welcome this week's introduction of new post-and-boast laws. Particularly working in schools, I have seen how some of this can have a real impact on our community. We need to look at this legislation as part of a pipeline of investment into our state's law and order, from sentencing to parole and everything in between.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (18:13): I think my voice is going to echo around the chamber – echo, echo, echo. Why? Because it is empty. Those opposite have given up and gone home for the day. Actually I did go past and smell some lovely catering coming from their area earlier, so I guess something better is on than keeping Victoria safe. There are no media here, so why would they bother coming? This is the place where we do the detailed hard work of refining legislation. This is actually what we get elected to do, in case they were not aware. How disappointing it is from the party that likes to talk tough – 'The deputy's in town. Here's the sheriff.' They act like they are tough on crime, but when we get to the part where we have to do our actual jobs, 'Nah, couldn't be bothered.' They could not be bothered: 'No-one's here. No-one's watching. There's no audience to be impressed by me, so why would I bother coming and doing my job?' People are out of sight, and here we are anyway doing our job.

Do you know who else does their job, without fanfare, without an audience, without being praised, without the media – without anything like that? Corrections officers do. They put themselves every day between us and people that it has been decided need to be kept away from society for the time being. They are the ones that keep them safe and keep us safe. That is why we are all here doing our job to keep them safe while they do their job. Is that too much to ask? I do not think so – but apparently it is. I should not dwell on it too long, but I think it is very symbolic. Corrections officers to them – maybe they are not at the top of the pile, are they? Those opposite like to be associated with the highest status people, you know, luncheons –

**A member** interjected.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** And lobsters, that is right. There are no lobsters for lunch at our facilities, but anyway, here we are. We will always stand shoulder to shoulder with workers who are just going about their lives looking to provide for their family, doing their job with dignity and keeping our community safe. That is us. What can I say? You know what, that is reflected in our budget as well, because in our budget we focus on making sure those frontline services are there for our community members. When they need to see someone at the hospital, they can. When they need a good local school, they have got it. When they are fleeing from violence, there is somebody to hold their hand and take them to safety. That is what this government is about.

People deserve to be safe at work, and to me, corrections officers absolutely deserve that. The government, and the opposition also when they were in government, ran ads promoting recruitment for corrections officers. They had some particularly for the Punjabi community, and that has been taken up well and truly. I have got many members of my community who are corrections officers, people who I would consider friends, and they took up the call. It was classic – can I say this, I do not know – like Gallipoli: they were there. During COVID, for people needing food at home, they were there. We put out recruitment for corrections officers, and they are there. They are there serving our community in so many different ways. The least we can do is work to keep them safe. That is why we are here. What this bill does is it makes sure that corrections officers have that safety at work.

Currently, if somebody, God forbid, attacks a corrections officer, the punishment they receive can be served concurrently with their current sentence, so there is not sufficient disincentive there to stop people or sufficient protections and prevention. That is why we are making sure that that time will be added on to the sentence. That is the way that we can keep a deterrent. I think that that is the least that we can do for people who have a dangerous role. They are the front line of our prison system, essentially, and we are always with the people who are on the front line.

There are over 3000 people working as corrections officers in our public prisons right across the state, and we are standing with them. You can see the evidence for that – the receipts, as young people say these days – in the budget papers: over \$720 million to support top facilities, top workplaces for our corrections officers. We are even going to employ another 750 corrections officers because we understand the level that is required in relation to the prison population. Just the same as we did with nurse-to-patient ratios, we are making sure that the right level of worker is there for the person that they are in charge of, because it is about keeping everybody safe in that situation and getting the best outcome. We want prisoners to come out and be rehabilitated as well.

These changes have come about because, as I said, we stand with frontline workers. We are connected with the members of our community, with the unions who represent them, and we hear and we take on board what they tell us. We are not too good to show up. We are not too good to listen. Those opposite maybe need some assistance in being willing to sit down with people that do not have the high status like themselves and to hear how life is and how they can make life better for those people, which is what we do.

This is part of the broader work that we are doing to improve safety in our community. The really practical things that come from listening to people include understanding the feelings of those people

who are victims of serious offenders, because of the fear that a victim can feel with an offender's impending release or where they are or what they are doing in the community. We have had some incredibly compassionate attorneys-general and other ministers in our government who regularly sit with victims of crime. Even the member for Frankston here, we know he is also very open to listening and meeting with victims of crime and hearing what their experience is.

This bill also seeks to improve the lives of victims by making sure that people who are subject to a supervision order have reporting obligations under the sex offenders register for five years after their supervision orders end, and I hope that will bring some peace of mind to victim-survivors in Victoria. We listen to what people ask for and we deliver, because we turn up to work. We turn up to work; it is not even 6:30, so yes, shame on those opposite.

But this is the thing: they do not listen and they do not understand. Here is an example: what they are pushing out in the media today is they have got an idea for how we should handcuff prisoners. How about you ask corrections officers or the people who run prisons? They will say, 'Oh, awkward. Actually we already do that. Bit awkward, we already can do that. We already do do that. Maybe you should have asked us first,' but they just want to talk on what looks good in the media. They do not want to listen to what is actually needed. They do not want to be here to do the work of enacting what is needed – a bit too hard – and they do not want to do anything but complain and fire up and mislead the public. That is a shame. I am here in total support of this bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (18:23): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on this very important bill and to follow on from the outstanding contribution made by the member for Yan Yean, who very well articulated the government's position when it comes to these matters but also pointed out the importance of making sure that we are listening to those that work in corrections and listening to those who work in the justice system. There is a re-emerging and a consistent pattern, Acting Speaker Mercurio – very similar to the consistent pattern of you seeming to be in the chair every time I make a contribution. I would like to apologise for you having to listen to me wax lyrical. I do not know, maybe you are just racking up an extraordinary amount of hours in the chair. It is a very impressive effort from you, but I digress.

What we have seen, and what I think the member for Yan Yean articulated very well, is the position of the government when it comes to listening to those who do extraordinary work within the justice system and within corrections. As many members have touched on, I have had the opportunity to speak to a number of corrections staff, particularly over the last 10 years of being a member, and listening to the way that they interact with the system but most importantly the way that they interact with individuals is something that I greatly value. I want to put on the record my thanks and appreciation to everyone who works in corrections but also to those members of staff that have taken the time to share those experiences with me.

What I think we need to recognise is the fundamental complexity that comes with both the justice and the corrections systems responding to the individual but also making sure that the system is robust and strong and making sure that we are supporting those amazing people that do a phenomenal job in corrections in our state. It is a very tough job, I am sure, but a job that is done with great passion and great care by so many. What the bill before us this evening does is improve and strengthen the system. I again want to thank all of those that are doing terrific work across the system with those complexities within corrections and justice.

Making sure that we are listening and responding is I believe in stark contrast to what we have seen from those opposite. I think the member for Yan Yean articulated really well the policy position of the government but also the sheer difference between this side of the house and what we see served up time and time again from those opposite. They are driven by ideology, divided by difference and constantly all over the place when it comes to supporting many of the most vulnerable within our community.

What I am really pleased to see of course, and I think the member for Yan Yean and others have mentioned these, are the significant investments that have been made. There is \$700 million-plus within the budget to ramp up capacity in our prisons and youth justice centres, bringing more prison beds on line to deal with the increasing numbers of alleged offenders that are being denied bail. It forms part of a broader package, which other members have spoken about and which has been highlighted over the past few months by the government and within the budget. It is making sure that we are responding to the needs of those who work within our system, who understand the changes and the complexities that are involved within managing individuals and of course the many different instances that we know and understand are very, very complex to manage.

What we do not want to see is for it to be far easier to come into this place or the place next door or to go out and speak to the media and make political points with these matters. What we want to make sure that we are doing is providing the resources and the legislative instruments to be able to deal with these matters and to be able to, first and foremost, keep our community safe and invest in people's lives and livelihoods. For those that do the wrong thing and continue to do the wrong thing when in a corrections setting, we want to make sure that the state, the individual and, most importantly, the persons who have been at the forefront of many of these quite vicious and callous attacks are supported. That is why I am really pleased to see the commitment to a range of reforms that address the priority issues affecting the corrections system.

The bill amends the Corrections Act 1986 to denounce and deter assaults on custodial officers by strengthening sentencing outcomes for people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers on duty, which I have just gone to, and there are changes whereby the bill amends the sex offender registration scheme in the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 to ensure serious sex offenders who are subject to post-sentence orders must report to police for an extended period where appropriate. The amendments to the Serious Offenders Act 2018 are to implement recommendations of the statutory review of the act and to strengthen the operation of Victoria's post-sentence scheme, and the minor amendments to the Corrections Act are to clarify the application of provisions whereby they are operating not as intended.

Whether it is the tougher bail laws that have been introduced, whether it is the ban on machetes, whether it is the changes in youth justice, whether it is this bill that is before us this evening or whether it is the significant investments that have been made in the budget, we remain committed to keeping Victorians safe and we remain committed to supporting those who do amazing work within our corrections and justice systems. I do take what has been said from the other side. I think that the member for Yan Yean and other members in this house have articulated –

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** Well, I am not too sure, member for Mordialloc. Maybe they have called an early day. I am not entirely sure what is happening over there. There is a fairly large event tomorrow night I think that we are gearing up for, but I am not sure. There may be a few distractions over on the other side that have been presented. I am reluctant to take up some of these fantastic interjections, but I dare say, given the circus and the shambles and the absolute mess that we have seen from those opposite, running out and making all sorts of statements, whether it be about complexities contained in this legislation or many, many others that go to supporting people within our state that need support and deserve support, managing really complex issues when you cannot manage yourself, I am just not sure how you put that to the people of this state. I am actually just not sure how you go out and say to people of Victoria, 'We're the show, we're the outfit, we're ready to roll.' I am just not sure how those opposite are going to navigate through their current waters, but that is not a matter for us. We on this side of the house are focused on delivery, we are focused on supporting communities and we are focused on making sure that we are providing for those men and women that do an amazing job in our corrections system each and every day.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** They do deserve our support, member for Point Cook, and they deserve our support today and every day through the budget, through the legislative process and in any other way that we can. They deserve a listening ear, and they also deserve a team that is prepared to listen and act and not be driven by ideology or not be driven by some sort of circus that is going on internally. What we see time and time again, and we have seen it for a long time and they have failed to learn, is that –

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** These interjections just keep getting better. The member for Frankston is doing his best to throw me in the final 30 seconds, and maybe he is doing a good job at that. We of course are focused on making sure that we are supporting every single Victorian, whether it is through this bill or whether it is through the range of programs and initiatives that have been announced in the budget or over the past three or four months and beyond. We remain committed to supporting everyone, and that is in stark contrast to what we see from the other side.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (18:33): I tell you what, Acting Speaker Mercurio, it is great to see you in the chair. We have had the member for Box Hill and now the member for Hastings just absolutely dominating in the Speaker's chair. It is great to rise to speak on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I wondered, 'Where are all the coalition members right now?' And I thought, 'At 6:37 pm, what normally happens around this time?' And I thought, 'It's the *Herald Sun*'s filing time.' Everyone is backgrounding on that side on who is who in the zoo, because I cannot imagine why, on a law and order corrections bill, we would have no presence in here other than the shadow minister, who carries a big load, and the member for Caulfield, who I will come to on his amendment, which I think is a bit clunky. But I thought, 'It's *Herald Sun* filing time.' They have all gone on to the phones or on the text messages now. The Hunger Games continue, and that is what we will see tomorrow night down at admin at Liberal HQ as we see another corrections frame come in that is just absolutely extraordinary.

You just wonder why, on such a significant bill, on a corrections bill, on a law and order discussion that those opposite have constantly talked about, constantly politicised and narrated, there is no presence here whatsoever. I cannot understand how they have just exhausted the speaking list. And I know the member for Caulfield's back is sore because he is carrying that team, like he does a lot in this space – he does a lot of the time, and maybe he is the next big contender – but we just do not see it, because this is a really important bill in a number of frames. I will go to corrections, but I will also talk in this contribution about the changes to the serious offenders provisions and also the discussion around changes to parole, which I think are the clarifications there. But on the corrections staff, we are a little while away from the opening of the new corrections facility, Western Plains Correctional Centre, after which another thousand maximum security beds will be in the corrections system. We have invested heavily in supporting our Victoria Police members – the biggest in the nation in community safety and outreach. We know that there needs to be a crime prevention frame, but there is huge accountability that needs to be had for those that are committing high harms across various categories. I see that in the prevention of family violence and just in recent reporting around the tens of thousands of people who use violence. This is, in the Victoria Police deputy commissioner and assistant commissioner's own words to us in briefings recently, 'half of police work'. That is the impact each and every day.

Our corrections facilities are significantly impacted by those using violence. How do we change that over time and the risk to people in our community? The 3000 corrections staff and workers who do an extraordinary job in our facilities are at some of the most high-risk and high-harm settings. They do an extraordinary job under difficult circumstances. People are processing a change in circumstances when they find that they are serving in our early corrections centres all the way through to when they are being prepared to be either released on parole or reintegrated into community. It is a really difficult and challenging environment. The work in this bill to strengthen and clarify the offences to make sure that those that harm our corrections staff are subjected to penalties above their base level sentence and not served concurrently is a recognition to those staff of how seriously we take their safety, health and

wellbeing. Every single person in Victoria has the right to go home and be safe when they are undertaking work, particularly on behalf of Victorians in a high-risk setting. They are valued and supported. This is an important amendment and change as well. We want to make sure that we, in all circumstances, do all we can to lower any sort of risk. We do not want to see anyone harmed at all. But we know that this is a setting sometimes with volatile people who have committed the most heinous acts. There is an element of risk, and we need to identify that as well.

The shadow minister has done some work. He has put the effort in. I will give this to him. I do not know where the shadow minister is. I did not get to hear his contribution and his lead-off statement, but I was wondering where he got the handcuff change from, because I wondered if it was speaking to staff. We need an array of different measures and mechanisms. It is important that there is flexibility in that as well. At least he did not come in with another reasoned amendment. He has been around long enough where he comes in with a thought, he articulates that and puts it forward. Most on that side and shadows, when they go, 'Do you want to do any amendments? Do you want to just go to Department of Premier and Cabinet and do a few amendments?' they go, 'No, no, no. A reasoned amendment is enough, legend. That's enough for me.' At least he has done the work and he has put it in. But I would reiterate that we need flexibility in how we deploy some of the preventative measures. Being too prescriptive and restrictive in that can have unintended things that might happen as well. So having an array of ways that we support safety and outcomes is recognised through that. It will be acknowledged by the minister in the other place as well. But I just wanted to put that on record as well.

Just in terms of some of the changes too, I want to make reference to the sex offenders register amendments here – a very important tool in protecting the community and keeping people safe. There is a high risk that those that have used sexual violence in our community pose when they have served their sentences and returned into the community. You cannot make that acknowledgement without acknowledging the impact on victim-survivors and those that have been impacted in their lives. I want to put that recognition. In the work that I do in men's behaviour change and the prevention of family violence space alongside the magnificent Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women, this is a horrific toll on our community. The visceral trauma that people experience who have been subjected to sexual violence and the huge changes that we need to make on the invalidation of victim-survivors through the court processes and the impact that has on their livelihoods, their health and wellbeing are substantial. We have so much more to do. We need to do all we can in education and in primary prevention. We know that attitudes towards women and girls, gendered attitudes and the lack of early intervention have a huge harm and toll and impact. Sexual violence is an absolute crisis and epidemic in community, and we need to do all we can to change those outcomes over time and respond to this horrific harm in our communities.

The sex offenders register in the act and amendments here is at the highest point of crisis. So it is about needing to divert people away from their horrific actions and outcomes and also then the crisis level of how we manage people who are a risk. This is an important frame to that as well. There are small changes in this bill that improve the interaction of the two schemes. There are two schemes around this bill – the Sexual Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the Serious Offenders Act 2018 – but everything that we need to do needs to be victim-survivor centred. So for those with lived experience, those that live with the trauma each and every day, how do we support them in their journey as Victorians as well in that compassionate and supportive way?

The other important thing in this bill – named as miscellaneous amendments around parole and the clarification of this really important policy position that this government brought forward – is the notion around 'no body, no parole'. Some of the most horrific crimes that have been committed in this state are by those offenders – or alleged offenders, if their legal process is underway – that have gone through the judiciary who have not then shared the details after committing the most heinous acts. Then there is the absolute ongoing visceral trauma that people experience around not being able to have closure in the circumstances of those that have been lost. I think this is a really important part, and the changes are here to clarify that. The work that has been done by the Adult Parole Board of

Victoria is an important element of the work we have done over a number of years in law reform. At its hardest edge of perpetrator accountability, for those that have gone through the judiciary, there are harsher penalties and accountability and then prevention in that space as well.

This bill has a lot of moving parts that are really significant for our community, from supporting corrections staff to changes around sexual offender registration and parole changes, and it is a really important policy area. If only it was not just the Labor Party driving this and the Labor government. The Greens political party went home at 2 pm. They just took off. I do not know where they are or where they have gone – I mean, how outrageous. We have got a really important narrative in corrections around how we divert people away from crime and how they find themselves in youth justice. Just remember this, for those opposite who do not even rock up and give this bill respect: around 80 per cent of people in youth justice have been subjected to family violence or abuse in their life. If we are to change outcomes and divert people away into the future, we need to respond to the high-harm impacts that they have been subjected to over their time. It is never to excuse accountability; it never does. Violence is a choice, but in every sort of element we need to recognise how people have come to be and lower those instances over time. It is an indictment on those opposite and the Greens political party that they are not in here for this bill speech.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (18:43): Following on from the member for Mordialloc, I have got to say that I walked in on the other side of the chamber, making sure I did not breach any protocols in Parliament, and looking across there I thought that there had been an evacuation because there is literally no-one sitting there. It is not a walkout; it is an evacuation. One minute I am in here and they are attacking the budget; the next minute they are attacking the car park button to get out of here. I am not sure about the Greens – is it Woke Wednesday? I am not sure, but certainly I would like to – no, I would not like to see more of them, sorry. It seems like we have a bit of a performance. We have some performative art, some theatrics, and then we have people not willing to actually debate bills, and that is really sad, because as the member for Mordialloc said, this Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is a critical reform that advances not only the cause of justice but the very safety and dignity of our community and community members, who are the constituents of those opposite and constituents of the Greens party as well. You know, it is not –

**David Southwick:** Deputy Speaker, I draw the member's attention to the state of the house. He is suggesting that there is no-one here from our side; there is no-one here from the government either.

#### **Quorum formed.**

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I can see it now. I can see the Opposition Whip trying to hide AirTags in opposition bags to keep an eye on them, track them down and keep them actually in Parliament.

This bill does as people have said on this side of the house, doesn't it? It will do it successfully. It answers one simple question, and that is: 'I need to feel safe. How does the government do that?' If we are to take our job seriously as legislators, we must also take seriously our obligation to protect people – to not just punish, not just process, but to protect – and this bill does that clearly, carefully and comprehensively.

Firstly, it protects those who protect us. We have heard quite a bit about some of our corrections workers, around 3000 people that do a monumentally hard job. We listen to them and listen to their representatives in the union movement, and I for one, and I know people on this side of the house, believe that they deserve a safe workplace. That is not saying there is no risk involved in their workplace. They are dealing with supremely difficult people at times, but we want their workplace to be as safe as possible so they can go home without being injured. Too many times we have heard of custodial officers injured in the line of duty. It is unacceptable that men and women are being assaulted while they are performing one of the hardest and, I would say, thankless jobs in our community. They do not carry the tools of power; they carry that burden of keeping order. Yet too often we see people in the news that have been injured on the job. This bill rectifies that. It makes it crystal clear that

offences causing injury to custodial staff are prison offences – not administrative oversights, not forgotten footnotes, but serious crimes that must attract cumulative sentences. This bill says unambiguously that if you harm those who keep our system running, there will be consequences. It is not just about deterrence; it is about dignity and is about sending a clear message that we stand with those who hold the keys, and we do so because they are so professional, so compassionate and have a lot of resilience, I believe.

Secondly, this bill strengthens our post-sentence scheme, ensuring serious offenders do not slip through the cracks. The Serious Offenders Act 2018 was indeed a significant step forward in managing high-risk individuals beyond the expiry of their sentence, but the truth is that no legislation ever emerges from the page perfect, and that is why we review, we listen, we refine and we improve legislation where necessary. I think we need to be clear that risk management in this space of these offenders is not a denial of rights, it is a protection of rights, and those rights that I find the most important: the rights of children to grow up safe, the rights of families to remain unharmed and the rights of our community to be safe.

Thirdly, this bill recalibrates the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, extending reporting obligations to cover that critical transition period after a supervision order ends. One of the most vulnerable times for recidivism is the period immediately after structured oversight is lifted. By extending reporting requirements for at least five years beyond a post-sentence order, we are closing a loophole that never should have existed, and we do so not indiscriminately but with a laser focus on individuals who the courts have already deemed to pose an ongoing risk.

This bill also makes our parole system smarter and more just. The ‘no body, no parole’ provision was introduced to ensure accountability, but when the remains of a victim have been found, continuing to deny parole without cause becomes punitive, not purposeful. This bill corrects that imbalance. It restores the original intent of the law, which was to incentivise truth-telling, not to perpetuate suffering once cooperation has already occurred. By allowing the Adult Parole Board of Victoria to reinstate parole that has been automatically cancelled in minor cases, the bill reaffirms our commitment to proportionality. Some may ask if this bill goes too far. I say no, it is exactly where it should be and where it must be. It does not throw away rights; it balances them. It does not trample liberty; it aligns it with safety. Yes, this bill may limit certain freedoms for a tightly defined group of high-risk individuals, but when the court has already determined that someone must pose an unacceptable risk to the community, the community must come first. It is not populist lawmaking; it is principled lawmaking informed by evidence, guided by compassion and grounded in reality.

In closing, let me say this: this bill is not about being tough on crime or soft on crime. It is about being smart on safety. It is about recognising that justice does not stop at the prison gates, nor does responsibility end with sentencing. It is about ensuring that those tasked with protecting us, our officers, our agencies and our communities, have the tools they need to do their jobs and do them safely. Finally, it is about vision – a vision of a correctional system that not just contains risk but manages that risk effectively, that does not just punish wrongs but prevents them, and that respects human dignity.

I really think there have been some great contributions from those on this side of the chamber. I do, however, take up the dialogue on this side of the chamber that it is interesting that we see a performance in a matter of public importance but, when we come to speaking about a bill, we have the seats across the aisle evacuated. It kind of beggars belief that people do not want to talk on a bill like this. Officers who are the subject of this bill are constituents of everyone in this house, and we need to look after them. You know, one minute they are here, one minute they are gone. The MPI is one thing, and I think we can all value the contributions on the MPI, but speaking on a bill, being an MP and having the opportunity to speak on a bill like this, which will become law, is an absolute privilege and a privilege that we should not clock out on – a privilege that should be seen as exactly what it is. Right now there are people working in prisons. They do not have the opportunity to clock off and go home. I commend this bill to the house.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (18:53): I rise in support of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This is a bill delivering targeted and meaningful reforms to keep Victorians safe, including the hardworking corrections officers who serve on the front line of our justice system every day. I actually had a friend quite a few years ago, back when I lived in Wagga, who was a corrections worker in Junee prison, and she was such a delightful person. She was funny and intelligent and good natured and so softly spoken, and it challenged my thoughts of what it must be like to be a corrections officer. I had thought you might have to be shouty and a bit brash and a bit loud, maybe a little bit like me and my family. But she was actually quite different, and as I said, she was really softly spoken, very considered.

She would often tell me some stories about how tough her job could be, and they are stories that would curl your hair. As I said, this was in New South Wales, but I am just drawing on her experience as a corrections officer because we had many cups of tea and many discussions about it. There were times when there would be someone who was so drug affected, because drugs had managed to be smuggled in, that it would take a prison officer for each limb to be able to hold that person down and restrain them when they were at their most violent, physical and drug affected – someone literally had to sit on them to hold them down in place. She said the threat to their physical safety was a very real and present danger. After a while she decided to stop that job, because she had lovely twins and the risk that she was facing going to work was just too much for her to bear.

When I think about this legislation here – once again stating that that was the experience in New South Wales, and that was going back 20 years – all I can say is that everyone has the right to be safe at their work. This is a principle that we have long held here, and back when the West Gate Bridge collapsed, OH&S laws were born out of that horrific tragedy. We have really led the way, not just here but around the world, with our occupational health and safety reforms, predicated on the principle that the way you arrive at work should be the way you leave. You should be able to go home in the same form that you arrived, without being assaulted, without being harmed and without being hurt, or worse, dying and losing your life at work. This bill is so critical because it addresses that fundamental right to be safe in the workplace.

I do note now, because my colleagues have been speaking on this quite eloquently before me, the dearth of those on the benches opposite. The numbers are starting to swell because we are getting ready for adjournment. I will not have a full 10 minutes on this, which is a shame, because there are several aspects of this bill I really do want to go into depth on. I see the numbers are finally swelling, but we know it is not to contribute to this bill, because they stopped their contributions quite a while ago now. It has been a constant stream of government speakers on this bill, which is astounding when one stops and considers all the postulating and the hot air that comes out of those opposite sometimes when it comes to law and order. We hear a lot of talk, but when it comes to actually speaking and contributing meaningfully on a bill that will make a substantial difference to those who are at the coalface of dealing with convicted criminals, they are not here, not to be seen. I do not know where they have been – I would not want to conjecture – but I just thought I would state for the record that it is pretty disappointing and maybe smacks of some disingenuousness from those opposite when they crow about law and order at other times. We will remember this, those of us here who have sat in the chamber and seen the lack of those opposite.

I want to speak about the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and the amendment. It is another critical tool in keeping our community safe. Being someone who is actually on the fringes and who has been involved in this aspect of our criminal justice system, I can say to you that what this bill does in strengthening the connection between the register and the post-sentence scheme by requiring individuals who are subject to a supervision order to remain on that register for five years after their order ends is really important. This is really, really critical. It is only going to affect a small number of people, but it ensures that those who may still pose a risk are appropriately monitored. As I said, it might be a small change in the legislation, but that impact on community safety cannot be underestimated. It cannot be underestimated – the feeling of safety it will give to those who have been

impacted by those sex offenders, knowing that they will be monitored and be for an extra five years subject to that supervision order. This is a really important piece of legislation.

As I said, I think it is really important that it focuses on the safety of corrections officers, who really do a very difficult task. They are dealing with people that the rest of society have decided they do not want walking about freely in society. Our corrections officers turn up every day to do their part to make sure that those people are in conditions where they are treated with dignity and respect, but also they as officers deserve for their safety to be protected by us. That is what this legislation does. This bill will deliver real change.

I am incredibly proud of the work. I do commend the minister for his work and the team behind it – all those who have worked on this – because we are here on this side of the chamber in government making sure that when we turn up here we are working for the safety of all Victorians, and we will continue to do that, ensuring that this place is always better than we left it.

#### **Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

##### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

##### **Solar energy**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:00): (1191) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, who is here at the table tonight, and the action I seek is for the minister to address the issue, which I understand is at a national level, whereby farmers or indeed any businesses who have a solar installation are unable to use the energy across different titles. This is an issue that has been brought to my attention by a couple of farmers in my electorate who have installed solar. For example, the one I spoke with last week has solar panels on the dairy. They use it during the day when milking, when they can, but would like to be able to use it across the rest of the farm. As most farmers have multiple titles these days, it is a restriction on being able to use that renewable energy. My colleague the member for Gippsland East raised this with the minister a couple of years ago, and I understand the issue is tied up with rules that are set nationally by the various states and the Commonwealth. This is an issue that is restricting the ability of farmers and, I suspect, other businesses and commercial operations, and certainly residential, because I understand the issue is that if you are sharing power across titles you are effectively creating a microgrid. What I would like to see the government do is actually address the issue and ensure that farmers and anyone else who would like to do so in a single farm enterprise can actually share the solar energy that they create across those titles for the benefit of their business but also for the benefit of the entire community and the environment. If we are paying and subsidising to establish renewable energy, it would make sense that it could be properly used and used as efficiently as possible. I would ask the minister to address this issue and ensure that we are utilising solar energy as much as we can.

##### **Phillip Island Community Hospital**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (19:02): (1192) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the next stage of works at the Phillip Island Community Hospital in my electorate of Bass. Last week we welcomed the Minister for Health to walk through the literally newly opened expanded urgent care centre and come together with the wonderful Bass Coast Health team, who were equally impressed with the new space and outdoor area. We know that with stage 2 our community will be able to undergo low-complexity day surgery thanks to the inclusion of two operating theatres to deliver a range of ‘oscopies’, and we will also have day chemo, dialysis, pathology, diagnostics, imaging and social and support services. We are looking forward to a big, proper community open day where we can have a smoking ceremony and welcome to country and thank and celebrate the consultative committee members, who have been

an integral part of this journey, as well as the remarkable leadership of former CEO Jan Child, interim CEO Simone Alexander, the entire Bass Coast Health team, our amazing community volunteers, the auxiliary, the Phillip Island Medical and Health Action Group and of course every generous community member whose donations and fundraising helped make this happen. This is just the beginning of our community hospital journey. The second stage of the project will also transform the former site of the urgent care centre into dental treatment areas, which will get underway in the coming weeks. We are just super keen to know the timing.

#### Care allowance

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (19:04): (1193) I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Children in the other place, the Honourable Lizzie Blandthorn. The action I seek is for the minister to explain to the constituents of Benambra why care allowance payments have been drastically reduced and whether this is part of a wider issue of budget cutbacks. In 2020 Bill and Le-Ann Mitchell assumed responsibility for the full-time care of their three-year-old grandson due to the tragic death of his mother and significant and difficult circumstances faced by the father, who is their son. The Department of Health and Human Services were involved and requested the Mitchells provide for the grandson under a kinship care arrangement. An application for permanent care is proceeding through the courts and is supported by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Initially they received a level 1 care allowance of \$427.05 per fortnight. Subsequently the care allowance was increased, and for the past two years the grandparents have received a level 4 care allowance of \$1181.48 per fortnight. In May 2025, without any official notification or documentation being received, their care allowance was reduced back to a level 1, at \$462.03 per fortnight. They advised me that the caseworker told them, 'Everybody's payments are going down. It's cost cutting by the government.' This is one of the bureaucrats; this is one of the workers within DFFH that is sharing that with clients.

The grandparents are aware of others in the same position who have also had their payments reduced. Bill and Le-Ann are both in their 70s and retired, with limited funds. They do not live a grandiose lifestyle and are certainly not mercenary in their approach, but they fear that they will struggle to support their grandson with the reduced funding. In a time of increasing cost of living and immense pressure being placed on the family unit on a daily basis, this is not the time for a caring and responsible government to reduce much-needed support to struggling families, and I call on the minister to explain what is going on.

#### Mount Dandenong Preschool

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (19:06): (1194) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the newly rebuilt Mount Dandenong Preschool, now co-located with Mount Dandenong Primary School, to see firsthand this wonderful early years facility. As the minister would be aware, the original Mount Dandenong Preschool was permanently damaged four years ago during the devastating storms which hit the Dandenong Ranges on 9 June 2021, when a tree fell through it. In the aftermath the preschool was temporarily relocated to Olinda Primary School while plans were developed for a permanent rebuild. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of our Victorian government, the Yarra Ranges council, the Victorian School Building Authority and the local community, the new preschool has now been completed on the grounds of Mount Dandenong Primary School. This co-location has created a vibrant integrated learning environment that includes a kindergarten room, a multipurpose community space, a health consulting room and an outdoor learning area. It is a shining example of how we can rebuild not just infrastructure but community confidence and connection in the wake of a natural disaster. I know the minister is passionate about early childhood education and community resilience, and I look forward to her response.

**Montrose Primary School road safety**

**BrIDGET VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:07): (1195) Montrose Primary School is a wonderful local school with bright and engaged students led by principal Kylie Fisher. I enjoy visiting the school, whether presenting students with their leadership badges or supporting the school with their facilities' needs. The students and teachers deserve the best possible learning environments. The students, the families and the teachers also deserve to have safe roads around the school. Since the completion of the Montrose intersection upgrade with changed signage and the way traffic moves past the school at Leith Road now, families have raised with me their serious concerns about road safety at Montrose Primary School, particularly on Leith Road between Trevallyn Close and Stradbroke Road. Parents are deeply disappointed that road safety improvements were not made outside Montrose Primary School as part of the Montrose intersection upgrades. Despite a year of construction disrupting the school, families now find new road safety hazards have emerged, putting their children at risk.

The matter I raise is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is to undertake a comprehensive review and upgrade of Montrose Primary School zone signage, including the adequacy and placement of electronic 40-kilometre-per-hour indicators, before a serious accident occurs. Currently the location of the electronic 40-kilometre-per-hour signs around half a kilometre away from the school gates is failing to adequately slow Leith Road traffic passing the school because there is no additional 40-kilometre-per-hour signage beyond the Montrose Preschool, leaving drivers without any visual reminder that a reduced speed limit remains in effect past Trevallyn Close and past the Montrose Primary School. Furthermore, road changes have created a new hazard. The road design merges three lanes into two at Trevallyn Close at the school. Parents tell me the effect of this change is that drivers accelerate in order to merge rather than maintain the required 40-kilometres-per-hour speed limit during school hours. This is a significant safety hazard for students who are pedestrians and also for parents and teachers driving to the school that need to turn left into Burley Street. Canterbury Road, Leith Road and Swansea Road serve as a major thoroughfare, so it is imperative that the minister reviews this and upgrades the signage as a matter of urgency to ensure the safety of the Montrose Primary School community.

Residents raised these concerns with the Department of Transport and Planning during the construction but were told unceremoniously that they would not take any further action despite the signage being inadequate. While parents note the intersection upgrades have improved congestion and traffic flow, families and teachers want these road safety hazards that have now emerged around the school fixed.

**Susan Horsley**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:10): (1196) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action I seek is that the minister acknowledge in writing the life and service of a dedicated teacher in my electorate, the late Susan Ruth Horsley. Sue was born in the Royal Children's Hospital on 31 December 1952 and grew up in the Pines in Frankston with her mum Heather, dad Harry, sister Wendy and her grandma. She missed the first six months of school due to whooping cough, took swimming lessons in Port Phillip Bay and went to Sunday school each week. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, she loved the Beatles, the Bee Gees and the Rolling Stones even before they were cool. She loved jazz bars and dancing in pubs and even got involved in the Hare Krishna movement at one stage.

Sue left school at 17 and worked in the departments of health and transport before heading back to night school to get her high school certificate at age 21. She signed up to study teaching in Bendigo, where she met the love of her life, George, at Bendigo Teachers' College. Sue and George had two sons, Christopher and William, and raised them on Old Tarnagulla Road in Newbridge. They were married for 47 years and were proud grandparents to Zoe, Lucy, Vivica and Poppy. Sue lived an incredible life, teaching primary school kids, travelling the world and volunteering in her community. She cared deeply about justice and fairness, and she was never shy about speaking up. She was

president of the social club at the Newbridge Football Netball Club, the secretary of the Newbridge Recreation Reserve and mentor to many at Tarnagulla Primary School.

I first met Sue back in 2022 after the devastating October floods. She was leading the clean-up of the Newbridge rec reserve and was a woman on a mission. Even through ovarian cancer treatments, she would make calls, send emails, complete paperwork and chair meetings about how to get the rec reserve back up and running. That was Sue: unstoppable, selfless, strong, courageous and full of heart. She made everyone feel like they mattered and saw the potential in every person. Her students were her legacy, and her love will live on in every person she taught and every friend whose life was made better for having her in it. She lit up rooms and lifted those around her from the inside out. She gave all of herself to her family, her friends, her town and her causes. She will be so deeply missed by me and so many others across the Ripon electorate. Vale, Sue Horsley.

### **Operation Inglenook**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (19:13): (1197) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health: for the state government to call on the federal government to end Operation Inglenook. Operation Inglenook has seen dozens of armed police in midnight raids on legal sex work venues. Sex workers have reported police forcing their way into rooms while a worker is mid-booking, cancelling visas and detaining people on the spot. Some workers do not speak or read English and have not been allowed to access interpreters or lawyers or even been given information about their legal rights. Ninety-three per cent of people deported through Operation Inglenook since 2022 have been young women, nearly all from Asian countries. Singling the sex industry out for visa compliance enforcement causes widespread harm and fuels stigma and discrimination against migrant sex workers in my electorate in Victoria and sex work more broadly. We do not see raids like this in other industries. You do not see armed squads raiding cafes and putting hospo workers in cuffs or forcing their way into aged care facilities in the middle of the night.

Decriminalisation in Victoria has been life-changing for people who work in the sex industry, but raids like this put everyone at risk. They push workers and workplaces back underground because they foster a feeling of criminality in workplaces that are actually lawful. This operation, which claims to protect migrant sex workers, actually just profiles and threatens sex workers. As a result, sex workers are living in fear and are not accessing basic services that support their health and wellbeing while they are working. Research shows that these raids do not work as an effective deterrent and disproportionately hurt the workers at these sites without resulting in substantial detection of unscrupulous migration agents or bosses.

The Scarlet Alliance asserts that exploitative bosses or fraudulent migration agents can be uncovered in other ways: by empowering and supporting sex workers to report crime, have access to legal migration pathways and be protected from deportation when they come forward. This government must also continue to support the organisations that support sex workers, like Southside Justice, like the Scarlet Alliance and like Vixen. Minister, please call on the federal government to end Operation Inglenook and instead empower and support sex workers to report crime and exploitation.

### **West Gate Tunnel**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (19:15): (1198) The action I seek is for the Minister for Environment to join me in a meeting with the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group. The West Gate Tunnel Project is set to open later this year. Road tunnels can help reduce air pollution by moving traffic off local roads, and I know residents are excited about the forthcoming truck bans. Victoria's air quality requirements are among the highest standards in the world, and the project's tunnel ventilation system has been designed according to stringent air quality standards. The design has been approved by the independent scientists at the EPA. In saying that, the most important thing to me as a member of Parliament, as a local resident and as a mum is that there is no undue anxiety or concern regarding the project's ventilation system. I respect the technical expertise of the scientists who have assessed this project and approved it, and I note that there are no systems in Australia that use filtration technology. However,

I strongly believe that everyone has the right to be heard and to present their ideas directly to decision-makers. I believe it is my job as Footscray's MP to facilitate that, and I would appreciate the minister taking the time to talk to residents and listen to their perspectives.

**Warrandyte electorate bus services**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (19:17): (1199) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for the government to improve public transport in the Warrandyte electorate by reviewing and expanding local bus services. The only public transport available in my electorate is bus services, yet across many suburbs those services are limited, unreliable and in some areas non-existent. For example, Park Orchards is in the centre of my electorate, and if someone wants to drive from Park Orchards to shop local in Warrandyte, it is a 7-minute drive. However, the same trip by bus takes 10 times longer than that – over 70 minutes. Alternatively, if they went to Wonga Park, it is an 11-minute drive but nearly an hour and a half on public transport. It should not be that suburbs so close to one another are completely disconnected. For local resident Kim Coulson, who lives near Tindals Road in Warrandyte, the closest bus stop is a dangerous 50-minute walk along a 70-kilometre-per-hour road with no footpath. The Department of Transport and Planning previously said that their review had not identified a need for more bus services, but I am concerned that this assessment may be based on data that does not reflect reality. Ms Coulson recently caught a city-bound bus, which she had to drive to, and observed that by the freeway stop the bus was over capacity with standing room only. Yet she estimates fewer than 20 per cent of passengers had tapped on. If demand is being measured by tap-on data alone, then we would be undercounting usage and falsely justifying a lack of bus services for an area that really needs it.

But this is not the only example of Warrandyte's lack of local public transport. In North Warrandyte schoolchildren are being left without enough public school buses simply because they attend an independent school. Parents have repeatedly raised concerns about the overcrowded school bus service to Luther College. Local mum Crystal Stephens said her daughters often cannot board at Warrandyte Bridge because the bus is full, leaving them stranded with no way of getting to school. Despite years of advocacy through Public Transport Victoria, local councils and the school, the issue remains unresolved. Yet when this issue was raised with the minister, the response said that because these students do not attend their zoned government school, the department has no intention of providing additional support. So the message to parents of kids at independent schools seems to be, 'Go to a government school or we're not interested in helping you.'

Nearly 4000 students attend non-government schools in my electorate. How is it fair that these students' needs are to be ignored when it comes to accessing public transport simply because of the school they attend? Families in Warrandyte and surrounding suburbs deserve safe, reliable and fair access to public transport, and I urge the minister to take action to improve services in our community.

**Pascoe Vale electorate roads**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (19:20): (1200) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the work the Victorian Labor government is doing to improve road safety across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and parts of Brunswick West, including along Cumberland Road in Pascoe Vale. Since being elected, we have continued to invest in improving road safety throughout my community. We have delivered the Upfield level crossing removals project, which has removed the level crossings at Moreland Road, Reynard Street, Munro Street and Bell Street, getting rid of those dangerous level crossings once and for all. Introducing the active transport world-class corridor through central Coburg is part of that project of course. We continue to work on extending the Upfield shared trail all the way to the M80 ring-road, with construction due to commence there later on this year.

Construction is currently underway along Gaffney Street all the way down the hill between Cumberland Road and Pascoe Vale Road to improve safety for Pascoe Vale Primary School families, namely, and people going to the Pascoe Vale station. We have provided funding to Merri-bek council

to fix up the Landells Road and Essex Street intersection as well. We have improved safety along the Derby Street corridor for active transport users. We have allocated \$1.25 million for Nicholson Street to install safer speed and road safety measures. The Bell Street bridge, for Coburg High families, has had speeds reduced to school speed limits during school hours. And of course we are currently undertaking a road safety review, a holistic review, of Melville Road, which will include the likelihood of a speed reduction to 50 kilometres as a standard speed limit and extended 40-kilometre school speed zones along that corridor. But of course there is much more to do, including along the Cumberland Road corridor, which connects people from Bell Street to Boundary Road, from south to north. It connects people as well to the Tullamarine Freeway in the south and also to the vital links of Gaffney Street and Sydney Road corridors further to the north. It traverses and connects locals with the Pascoe Vale RSL, Pascoe Vale Primary School, Pascoe Vale train station, Strathmore college, St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, the local shops at Gaffney Street and Kent Road, the Pascoe Vale Community Centre, the Sussex Neighbourhood House, the Pascoe Vale Outdoor Pool, the Pascoe Vale Senior Citizens Centre, Jack & Daisy cafe and the Carson Cafe. There are five local early childhood centres or kinders along that corridor as well, and also the Cole Reserve sporting precinct, Pascoe Vale Girls College and Westbreen college. It is a busy corridor indeed.

Previously it was former member for Pascoe Vale Christine Campbell who helped secure the funding to fix up the O'Hea Street intersection with a signalised crossing. But there is more to do. Since the COVID-19 pandemic locals have experienced increased traffic volumes and congestion. More vehicles are undertaking speeding and hazardous driving behaviour and more rat-running in local streets like Westgate Street, Eastgate Street, York Street, Wills Street, Milton Street, Myer Street, Hayward Street and Anderson Street. Locals will welcome a number of new initiatives being considered to make the corridor safer for all, including safer speeds, the potential reduction to 50 kilometres as a new standard speed limit, enhanced safer pedestrian crossings along the corridor and potential opportunities for new pedestrian crossings further north, particularly at the Pascoe Vale pool and Cole Reserve end of the corridor.

### Responses

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:23): I thank members for their contributions. We heard from the member for Gippsland South, and his action was for the Minister for Energy and Resources to address the issue of renewable energy use across properties with multiple titles. The member for Bass sought the Minister for Health to come and celebrate her new community hospital and recognise the contribution of local residents, including the community consultative committee. The member for Benambra had an action for the Minister for Children, seeking an explanation for the reduction in support for his community regarding the car allowance. The member for Monbulk directed an action to the Minister for Children to visit the Mount Dandenong Preschool and see firsthand the fantastic work at this preschool.

The member for Evelyn had an action for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the safety of Leith Road near Montrose Primary School, seeking a review of the safety of roads around this school. The member for Ripon sought the Minister for Education to write in acknowledgement of the exceptional service of the late and renowned educator Ms Sue Horsley. The member for Richmond had an action matter for the Minister for Health, seeking her advocacy for the ending of the Operation Inglenook by federal agencies. The member for Footscray asked the Minister for Environment to meet with her and the Maribyrnong action group and listen to their perspectives on a variety of issues, including road upgrades and the West Gate Tunnel. The member for Warrandyte sought the Minister for Public and Active Transport to look at how public transport can be improved in her community. The member for Pascoe Vale's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to provide an update on the government's work to improve road safety across his community. All of these matters will be referred on to the relevant ministers.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Wednesday 18 June 2025

Legislative Assembly

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**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Minister. Just for clarification, member for Bass, was your matter for the minister for –

**Jordan Crugnale:** health infrastructure.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:25 pm.**