



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 18 November 2025**



**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
Benham, 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'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, 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
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>5,6</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>11</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Tuesday 18 November 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Members***Liberal Party leadership**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:05): I wish to advise the chamber that today there has been a change in the leadership of the Victorian Liberal Party. The member for Kew Jess Wilson has been elected Leader of the Opposition and the member for Nepean Sam Groth has been re-elected Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

*Bills***Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Wrongs Act 1958 in relation to vicarious liability for child abuse, to amend the Limitation of Actions Act 1958 in relation to setting aside certain settlements or judgements and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:05): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): The Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025 will address the impacts of the High Court of Australia's decision in *Bird v DP*.

**Read first time.**

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

**Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to make miscellaneous amendments to the Fines Reform Act 2014, the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019, the Infringements Act 2006, the Marine Safety Act 2010, the Open Courts Act 2013, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Coroners Act 2008, the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996, the Crimes Act 1958 in relation to certain offences, the County Court Act 1958 and the Sentencing Act 1991 in relation to the operation of the Drug Court division of the County Court, the Road Safety Act 1986 in relation to procedural matters in the Magistrates' Court, to make related amendments to certain other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:07): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:07): The Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 will introduce reforms to improve the operation of the courts, the justice system and the Office of the Public Advocate.

**Read first time.**

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

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

**The SPEAKER** (12:08): General business, notices of motion 7 and 8, 43 to 46 and 68 and orders of the day 9 and 10, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Petitions***Twelve Apostles precinct development**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) presented a petition bearing 874 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the ongoing environmental damage affecting the Twelve Apostles precinct, attributed to the current Stormwater Management Plan for the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre. The plan utilises an existing stormwater system originally designed for managing natural rainfall. Monitoring undertaken by both the petitioner and the local community has identified that surplus stormwater generated by the visitor centre regularly exceeds the capacity of the existing stormwater culvert at Gibson Steps. This overflow results in substantial volumes of water traversing the cliffs, leading to significant displacement of topsoil and native vegetation. The excess runoff subsequently flows over the cliffs onto Gibson Beach, further accelerating cliff destabilisation and erosion beyond rates associated with natural conditions. In addition to causing irreversible environmental harm to Gibson Steps and Beach, the persistent issue of stormwater runoff presents a risk of permanent closure for one of the most prominent tourist attractions and photographic landmarks along the Great Ocean Road. Such an outcome would not only diminish the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the area but would also deprive visitors and the local community of access to a key site of cultural and recreational significance.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly takes decisive action regarding the ongoing environmental damage at the Twelve Apostles precinct, specifically, the immediate revocation of the current Stormwater Management Plan for the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre and the development of a comprehensive alternative plan that will prevent further cliff top degradation, reduce cliff instability, and ensure the long-term accessibility of Gibson Steps.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

*Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports*

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports*, together with appendices, extracts from proceedings and transcripts of evidence.

**Ordered that report, appendices and extracts from proceedings be published.**

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 16*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 16* of 2025, on the following bills, together with their appendices:

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

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025

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

**Ordered to be published.**

*Documents*

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

*Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* – Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2025 under s 303

Fire Services Implementation Monitor – Report 2024–25

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

Bass Coast – C172

Boroondara – C418

Murrindindi – C73

South Gippsland – C131

South West Healthcare – Report 2024–25, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt and an explanation for the delay

Victorian Fisheries Authority – Report 2024–25, together with an explanation for the delay

Yarram and District Health Service – Report 2024–25, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt and an explanation for the delay.

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS** – The Clerk tabled:

Government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee’s Report on the Inquiry into workplace surveillance.

*Bills*

**Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

*Council’s agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

**Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025**

*Council’s amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 with amendments.

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

**Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025**

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

*Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:11): I have received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

## MOTIONS

4928

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday 18 November 2025

### *Motions*

#### **Motions by leave**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (12:12): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the new Leader of the Opposition for arguing against government support for child care despite overwhelming evidence –

**Leave refused.**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (12:12): I move –

**Leave refused.**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:12): I move, by leave:

That the new Leader of the Opposition –

**Leave refused.**

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, it is just fascinating that on the member for Kew's first day in the job it is three blokes who get up to move a motion by leave against her.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:13): I move, by leave:

That the new Leader of the Opposition rule out cutting the free breakfast program in schools in my electorate of Albert Park to fill the \$11.1 billion budget black hole she created.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:15): I am delighted today to rise on the government business program, and I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 20 November 2025:

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

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.

What an important program that our government is bringing to the house in this, the second last week of the sitting of this year's Parliament. What a busy year it has been. We were reflecting earlier on what a hardworking government we are here, led by our Premier, the member for Bendigo East, Jacinta Allan. This is a government that has averaged the delivery of a bill every single day that Parliament has sat. We have been addressing the issues that matter to the people of Victoria.

When I think about the impact of the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025, it speaks directly to the values of the Allan Labor government and the people that we stand up for every single day. I was reflecting on the fact that, like many in this place, my first job was at Coles; I was on the check-out at Wodonga Coles. I also had an opportunity at KFC, also in Wodonga. I might point out that in both of those roles I was a proud union member, despite only being around 16 at the time, because I grew up in a family that always valued the rights of working people and the importance of collectivism and coming together to improve the conditions of workers, and that is just what this bill does.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, could I ask you not to hit the desk.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Yes, you may, Speaker. My apologies. This bill that we will be debating today goes to the heart of what it is to be a member of the Labor Party and a proud member of this Allan Labor government. I was also reflecting on the fact that one of those in particular on the other side, the former Leader of the Opposition, only recently was on social media talking about all the jobs he had had in the real world. But apparently –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, come back to the motion before the house and the business program.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** It is related, because amongst the many, many, many jobs that the former Leader of the Opposition claims to have had, being a retail worker was one of those. However, I will keep –

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Speaker, you have just asked the Leader of the House to come back to the bill. She is defying your ruling, and I ask you to ask her to bring it back to the motion.

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the House advised me that it is relevant. I am waiting for her to show the relevance.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** The point is that this is a bill that is before this place, and it is a bill that would only ever be introduced by a Labor government, because we stick up for working people. That is why our great party came into existence, and it is what we seek to do every single day. That is exactly what this bill does.

Not only do we stick up for people in the retail, fast-food, hospo and transport sectors – working people – but we also stick up for and stand in absolute solidarity with the victims of family violence, and that is why our Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025 is so important. Family violence remains the number one law and order issue in this state, and we can never take our eyes off this fact. That is why our government remains absolutely committed to continuing to put in place the legislative framework that will ensure justice for victim-survivors.

The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, another important Labor bill, is about reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, and it acquits recommendation 25 of the *Yoorrook for Justice* report.

Finally, there is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025. We know that community safety is a key priority for our community. It is a key priority for our government. All Victorians have a right to be safe and to feel safe at all times in their communities. We know that too many young people are carrying knives and that this has life-changing consequences. That is why we are strengthening our laws again, to protect more young people from harm, and that is what this legislation will do. I commend the government business program.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:21):** The coalition will be opposing the government business program. What we have seen over weeks is a government mismanaging this chamber, mismanaging its legislative process and mismanaging the bills it brings to this chamber and, as a direct result, not ensuring that promises are lived up to by way of new laws and that the concerns of Victorians are being dealt with when they need to be through legislation. It is not being done. As I heard the Leader of the House moving the government business program, what I noted was the items that were not included in the government business program and the commitments made over recent weeks by the Premier that have not been introduced by way of legislation into this chamber – because I am sure, as we would all understand, that a press release does not change the law. When it comes to the government business program, the government business program must include important issues that the community wants solved. I mean, we are here as legislators to ensure that our laws are modern, they are up to date and they deal with the priorities and concerns of Victorians. That is what is missing from the government business program.

By way of the bills, there are four bills being considered this week. There are a number of bills that are being considered this week whereby the government has made commitments aligned to those bills, and we will obviously speak about that in more substance throughout the debate. Now is not the time to deal with the substance of those bills, other than to say those bills do not fully form the commitments the government have made when they made them. The bills do not acquit those promises. 'There are things missing' is probably a simpler way to say it, because as I said earlier, press releases do not change the law.

When you look at the government business program, you can see that for week after week the government has not fully understood how to manage a chamber. We were here for an extra sitting last week, and as I said last week, I would sit more, not less, at all times. Next year is obviously a very light sitting, but I would sit more, not less, as a creature of this chamber. But the reason we had extra sittings is because the government had mismanaged the legislative program of the year. You can see it with the government business program, and important bills are being introduced without a timeline to complete them. We have just seen a bill introduced now which cannot be passed by the Parliament this year. It is not possible for it to be passed by the Parliament this year, which says a lot about the mismanagement of the chamber. We would say, when it comes to the government business program, it is so important with a government business program to not simply pick it up on a Thursday before it is publicly announced and just chuck something in there but to think through how the year will look, how the legislative process will work throughout the year, and put forward a government business program that deals with the promises you make to the community but also their concerns.

When it comes to this government business program, of course we know that not only are the items contained therein not fully acquitting those promises and not dealing with the concerns that Victorians face but the proposed legislation does not actually cover off the substance of the issues or the promises that have been made. We have got another 'We promise to do more at some point' with some unknown timeline, some unknown date, by way of press release. I think Victorians are very well aware now that press releases do not change laws. We now have a government that is effectively governing by press release rather than managing a chamber and proposing legislation that acquits those commitments and deals with the concerns of Victorians, which is why we will oppose the government business program. We will continue to make the point around the mismanagement of the chamber, as we have for recent weeks.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnait) (12:26): 'Tis the season, at least for those opposite. It gives me great pleasure to rise and to make a contribution in favour of this government business program, and it is always a great pleasure to follow a contribution of the creature of this chamber, the member for Brighton, dutifully serving his third leader in 11 months.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Tarnait, I ask you to speak to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT**: It was but a short preamble on my way to a substantive contribution on this fantastic government business program. As I was about to say, whilst those opposite have been talking about themselves the government have been carefully curating this government business program which delivers for all Victorians, because that is our responsibility as a government: to keep in mind the needs of all Victorians and to deliver for them. Indeed, with close to 100 pieces of legislation in the past two years, it is an incredibly jam-packed legislative agenda to do, as I said, what matters for all Victorians and to make sure they can live the best possible lives. It is incredibly disappointing to come into this place this morning and to hear that the opposition are opposing this government business program. Shame on them, given its contents – incredibly important pieces of legislation that ordinary Victorian workers and families need to be able to live fruitful lives.

The Leader of the House, the member for Macedon, touched on, quite eloquently, our Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. She spoke of her

experience working in the hospitality sector, and I have similar experiences – a lot of people in this house do, whether that be working in hospitality through university, through high school or indeed into their adult life. Some of the things that I have seen in this industry whilst working or whilst being a consumer have been absolutely deplorable. Nobody deserves to go to work and be bullied, harassed or abused. Pieces of legislation like this are incredibly important. I have heard some of the commentary from some of those opposite in recent weeks, saying that this bill has not come to the –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, this is a procedural motion, Speaker.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Manager of Opposition Business on his feet was quite wideranging, and I cannot see what the member for Tarneit has said that the Manager of Opposition Business could possibly be offended by.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members that this is a narrow procedural debate.

**Dylan WIGHT:** I did not think that I was going to the contents of the bill at all. I thought that I was bang on the government business program. As I was saying, some of those opposite have been critical that this bill has not been included in the government business program sooner. Let us be really clear: if the Liberals were in government, this bill would not exist.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, not a sledge debate.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Tarneit, back to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Those on this side of the house put Victorian workers front and centre in everything that we do. This piece of legislation is just another example of that, whilst those opposite have never shown an ounce of care for Victorian workers in their entire working lives.

I cannot get through all of the legislation, but another incredibly important piece of legislation on this government business program is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is important to everybody but particularly important to my community out there in Wyndham, a place where almost 30 per cent of Victoria's domestic violence happens – in that LGA. Think about that: almost 30 per cent of Victoria's family violence happens in Wyndham, and that is only the family violence that is reported.

It is, like I said, a real shame that the opposition walked into this place this morning and decided to oppose this government business program, given the important pieces of legislation that are on it. It is a fantastic government business program, and I commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:31):** I rise to talk on the government business program this week, and I concur with the member for Brighton in saying that we are opposing the government business program this week. I would like to also say that I do care for workers here in Victoria, as over my journey my businesses and businesses like mine have employed many, many, many workers, so I would like it put forward that we actually do care for people that are working.

I know one of the bills coming through is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I would just like to pick up on the member for Tarneit. In the Latrobe Valley we are number 2 on the hit list for family violence, which is very disturbing and something that I do not want it to be in my time as a member here, so I do agree with this particular part of the government business program coming through.

One of the other things that we do see on this government business program revolves around crime and youth crime and how we try and strengthen against that, and this is where the government has failed. They have been dragged kicking and screaming to bring this lot of amendments in to debate in the house this week. These are crimes which the Premier herself and also the Attorney-General will stand on their feet here in the chamber and try and explain to us are new crimes that Victoria is witnessing at the moment. Well, it would not and could not be further from the truth that these are

actually new crimes. The crimes that are coming through are crimes that have been ramping up – I will give them that – from 10 years ago to five years ago –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, you have already ruled that this is a narrow procedural debate, and the member on his feet is being rather expansive in his commentary. I ask that you ask him to come back to the narrow procedural motion that is before us.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Morwell will come back to the government business program.

**Martin CAMERON:** I will. I am talking on the justice legislation amendment bill because we do need firmer laws around so we can get our crime under control. I am talking on behalf of the family of Kaiden Morgan-Johnston, who have experienced the worst of these crimes, on a bill that we are trying to bring in to protect other families. They have lost their son in a crime that has happened – not new crimes, but more and worse crimes as they go through. The family of Harry Wright have also lost their father. We need to make sure that we are debating and doing stuff in this chamber which is going to make a difference.

I can only stand and listen in this chamber to the Premier telling us constantly that she is listening to the people of Victoria and the victims of crime in this state, and it is wonderful that she can do that. But I call on the Premier, who has never sat down with the Gordon family, who have paid the ultimate sacrifice –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, while I am loath to interrupt the member on his feet, who is discussing a very serious issue, there are other appropriate forums in this house for him to raise the matters that he is raising. This is a narrow procedural debate, and I ask that you ask him to come back to the matter at hand.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morwell, I ask you to speak to the government business program.

**Martin CAMERON:** We need to make sure that if we are in this place we are putting everything on the table and that we are looking after all of Victoria, not just certain sections of our population in Victoria, and I think that is what goes to the opposition opposing the government business program. The Labor government have the opportunity to include everybody and listen to everybody so we can make decisions moving forward to protect our community. As the opposition manager said, we will be opposing the bill this week.

**Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:36):** Well, it is no surprise that I am standing here supporting this government business program. I have to say, I am in the best mood, and it is not just the yellow jacket. We have had a huge weekend in Melbourne's west, and if that was not proof enough that this government is getting on and delivering for Victorians, this government business program before the house today sure is another example of that.

I am not surprised that those opposite are not going to support the government business program, because I dare to say there will be few speakers on these four important bills, because no-one has read them. They have been too busy focused on themselves, slicing and dicing and backstabbing each other in their party room – but I digress. Like I said, I am in a pretty great mood because these four bills are really important. The community has told us that they need this legislative reform before the house, which is exactly why we are bringing these four bills here before the Assembly today.

We have got the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, and we have got the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. Because 'tis the season – just over the last couple of weekends I will admit I even put up my Christmas tree, and the Christmas lights are well and truly up and happening in the Connolly household – I want to give a big shout-out to our transport workers, who are going to work so hard through this Christmas season and in January across all public holidays to get folks here in Victoria where they need to go as they are feeling very merry and jolly, and I will be one of those people joining them.

This is such an important bill before the house. I must say, many moons ago I was a barista. I was making coffee before coffee was cool to drink. It was never surprising having people complain about coffee being not hot enough, not strong enough. A cappuccino, a latte, a flat white – piccolos and things like that did not exist then – there was a big difference between a customer complaining about their coffee and throwing it in your face, right? This bill is all about that kind of behaviour. We are cracking down on it, and we are saying: no way, not happening in this state; people deserve better.

We have also got the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As the member for Tarneit quite clearly conveyed in his contribution here, Wyndham has a 30 per cent rate of family violence – it is incredibly high. Let me tell you what else is really scary about that municipality – when I speak on this bill, I will speak about this – it is also one of the fastest growing municipalities, LGAs and suburbs in Victoria and in this country, and the rates of family violence are just so high. It is completely unacceptable, and we must do everything we can here in this place – whether we are in opposition or in government – to fight family violence, because we know how it ends for women in particular and for children, which I know the Premier is going to be talking about this week.

We also have the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025. And because, like I said, 'tis the season, I think it is really important to give a big shout-out to Victoria Police and the amazing police officers, who will be working tirelessly across the Christmas and new year season to keep our community safe. It is a thankless and tireless job, but their commitment and their dedication do not go unnoticed here in this place and indeed out in the community, and we cannot thank those men and women of Victoria enough for their support.

These four bills matter to the community. They are things that this side of the house has been deep in conversation, deep in discussions and deep in engagement on to bring forward legislation and bills like these just before the house. This is the kind of thing that Victorians expect from people in government. These are the kinds of things that people in Victoria expect from their politicians, whether they are in government or they are in opposition. At all times when we are here in this place we must remember who we are representing, and that is the people of Victoria. It is not ourselves. When parties are too focused on what is happening in their own party room and not focused on Victorians and delivering for them, that is when they know they have failed. This government is getting on with these four bills before the house, because we will always stand up for what Victorians need and what they deserve. I commend the program.

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (12:41): I rise to oppose the government business program. I must say, if ever there was a week where the government handed us a mixed bag, it is this one. In fact calling it a mixed bag might be generous. I do note there are a number of school students here today, who I welcome. In mentioning a mixed bag, it is much like a lucky dip at a school fete, except if you close your eyes and put your hand in, you get something like a mouse trap instead.

We have before us four major bills, each deserving proper scrutiny, each with significant flaws and each being rammed through yet again. First, the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. The word 'stability' is doing a lot of heavy lifting in the title, because the bill itself does the opposite, removing the 24-hour limit on reunification, reversing our successful 2014 permanency reforms and risking children being left in limbo for years. The government says this will create certainty, but removing time limits is the legislative equivalent of telling your teenager, 'Take as long as you want to clean your room.' We all know what happens next. Vulnerable children deserve better, and that requires consultation with carers and families, who are largely left out.

Then we have the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025 – a very long title. Protecting workers is vital, so we will not oppose this bill, but honestly, these penalties are so weak they might as well come with a complimentary apology letter from the offender. New South Wales has real penalties – four years, six years, 11 years. Here – six months for

an assault. The government says this is real and strong reform. It is not strong. It is something like tofu, which looks like meat but tastes like nothing. Apologies to all those tofu lovers on that side.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris CREWTHER:** And this side as well, with the member for Brighton of course. The Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025 we have before us as well. This is an omnibus bill that tries to do everything, from drug-testing reforms to firearms, protest laws, terrorism symbol bans to religious assembly protections and more. If the government added one more thing, we might get something like frequent flyer points for reading it. But here is the problem: the protest provisions are so narrow and riddled with exceptions that even the Police Association Victoria has called it the ‘pretty please’ bill. When frontline police say that your protest laws will not work, they will not work. Terrorism symbols are important protections, but again, there are loopholes big enough to drive a tram through. Religious assembly protections are necessary, but inconsistent language undermines them.

Finally, we have the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025. There are some important reforms here, including on stalking and family violence orders, but again, the government business program forces us to rush scrutiny of dense, technical, multi-act reforms that impact thousands of victims and families.

These bills instead deserve careful, thorough debate, not being rushed through Parliament. But that is the problem with this government: they do not run a proper business program, they run a production line. Bills go in one end, rubber-stamped votes come out the other, and the public hopes that this was not translated from Swedish or Chinese by Google Translate. This Parliament is at its best when we debate major reforms properly – that is what we should be doing – but this week’s bills all raise significant concerns. Really, amendments are needed on several of these, yet the government’s program does not allow adequate time. As usual, the government will just ram through this program, yet again without sufficient consideration of the concerns and consequences, intended or otherwise.

We will have the amendments through on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 from the Legislative Council very soon today, on which there will of course be a free debate and a free vote if and as needed. Personally I am glad that the amendments have gone through the upper house. They were pretty much the same as a number of amendments that happened in the lower house a few weeks ago, so I look forward to speaking further on them.

Lastly, on this government business program, the Victorian opposition does oppose this program. We urge the government to concentrate on what is needed. What do Victorians want? They want action on roads, on crime, on health care, on cost-of-living pressures and on the housing crisis. These are the things that Victorians are worried about.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (52):* Juliana 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, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John

Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

**Nagambie Primary School**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (12:51): It is a joy to welcome the students of Nagambie Primary School into Parliament today and into the gallery. They have arrived full of energy –

**The SPEAKER:** It is not appropriate for members to acknowledge the gallery, member for Euroa.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. Honesty and, as we all know, the truth often come from the mouths of our children. The students did not come just for a tour, they came with a mission to advocate for their community. Savannah and Bella told me that Nagambie needs more public toilets immediately. One block cannot hygienically serve the entire tourist town, and they describe the current block as dirtier than a garbage bin, with toilet paper thinner than the white sheets on their beds. But the message I heard the loudest was about our roads. Harry and Cooper warned that the potholes from Nagambie to Shepparton are breaking tyres and putting lives at risk. Darby told me drivers are swerving into oncoming lanes in the Goulburn Valley Highway just to avoid the craters. He asked me to imagine risking your life every day just to get to school. Lake Nagambie was another big theme. Sarah made a great case for a rope swing so local kids can have a simple, affordable way to enjoy summer. Zhyven and Archie called for more native fish, explaining that catching a cod right now is about as likely as surviving on the moon without a spacesuit. Aiden added that restoring the lake's health would bring joy back to the families and boost tourism at the same time. Sporting facilities were front and centre too. Harper told me they need proper soccer infrastructure because kids deserve a place that keeps them happy. These young people have presented their case with heart and real responsibility for their town.

**Pakenham community hospital**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (12:53): Earlier this month I visited the Pakenham community hospital with Minister Horne, and the progress our builders are making is impressive. With major construction works now complete, work on the external facade is underway, and the inside fit-out is taking place. Providing convenient access for patients, visitors and staff, it is within walking distance of the town centre, our new train station and our bus interchange. There will be more than 150 parking spaces and a patient drop-off zone. The Pakenham community hospital will be one of the most accessible health hubs in the region, and it is well on track to be completed next year.

**Year 12 students**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (12:54): As the proud parent of a year 12 graduate, I want to acknowledge our teachers and schools for their commitment to ensuring that every student achieves their best. I also want to recognise families and friends for their support throughout this important year; we all knew that it would be a tough one. But most of all, congratulations to our year 12 graduates. It is your time to shine. I know everyone says this, but it is true: your results do not define you. There are many paths to a chosen career, and sometimes you might find something different along the way, which can be exciting. To my dearest daughter Sienna, you worked so hard to achieve your best this year, and I know that you will succeed at whatever you do and whatever life brings you. Be proud, be safe and be fabulous. I love you.

**Stuart Greig**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (12:54): Today I rise to acknowledge and congratulate my friend Stuart Greig for his outstanding service for 23 years as chairman of Maroondah Community Enterprises Limited, better known as the Ringwood East and Croydon community Bendigo Bank.

Under Stuart's leadership the bank has grown from its humble beginnings in 1999 with an initial investment of \$550,000 from local shareholders to a thriving enterprise valued at nearly \$10 million today. This success reflects not only financial growth but a deep commitment to community. Stuart and his team have dedicated countless initiatives to the community, including funding electronic scoreboards for local football clubs, contributing \$100,000 to Aquanation to unlock \$25 million in regional development funding, providing defibrillators to community groups and supporting Rotary with a mobility car for wheelchair users. They introduced the Bendigo Bank community bus, purchased a barbecue trailer that has raised over \$100,000 for local causes, and supported major efforts such as Black Saturday recovery and Foodbank. There are countless smaller causes that Stuart and his team have provided to the wider community, which have made a significant difference to many people. Stuart personally oversaw renovations of four branches, saving over \$500,000, and championed community consultation for the development of meeting spaces at the Railway Avenue branch, a decision that earned the branch the hall of fame award as Australia's best community bank. They were the first to combine banking with a coffee shop and community hub. Stuart's dedication has left a legacy, and the recognition of an education scholarship in his name is a fitting tribute. I thank Stuart for his vision, leadership and unwavering commitment to our community and again congratulate him for 23 years of focus and dedication.

#### **Combined Churches Caring Melton**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (12:56): Recently Combined Churches Caring Melton celebrated their 30th anniversary. It was a fantastic event that gave the community an opportunity to reflect on three decades of compassion, care and profound community impact. The selfless volunteers that assist the Melton community through Combined Churches food bank service provide food to those who have hit some hard times and are less fortunate. Denise, over her 25-plus years, and Michelle have led their team with compassion and unwavering commitment to the Melton community. They ensure that no-one who comes through their doors goes without. In my seven years as the member for Melton I have always had an incredible working relationship with the entire Combined Churches team. Like many members in this place can attest, we do have people and their families that come through our electorate office doors who are in desperate need of essential items and help to put food on their table. No matter the time of day, we have always been able to call up Denise and Michelle, and they would ensure that a family was cared for. Combined Churches Melton does the heavy lifting, and they are the coalface of food bank services in Melton. They always go above and beyond for every person they meet, whether it be the friendly nature of all their volunteers or their genuine care for others. People who seek help from Combined Churches are treated with respect and dignity, no matter their circumstances. Having food security each and every day should not be a luxury, and the Combined Churches team make the days better for all of the people they serve. I cannot thank Combined Churches enough for all they have done and continue to do for Melton. I congratulate them on their incredible 30 years of service.

#### **Evelyn electorate small business**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:57): I am a strong advocate for small business and always promote supporting local businesses with my 'Shop local, support local jobs' message. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and as cost-of-living pressures bite with the increased taxes and regulatory burdens by this government, I know that things are not easy. It is why shopping local is more important than ever. I wish to make a shout-out to a few local women in small business and encourage everyone to check out their shops.

Congratulations, Jodie, owner of Jodie Westall Art & Gifts on York Road in Mount Evelyn, for celebrating 10 years in business. She is an amazing artist, from paintings to drawings and through to gorgeous jewellery. It was absolutely wonderful to join and support Jodie at her 10-year celebration last week. Michelle owns MikkiB Fashion and Styling in Mount Evelyn, with gorgeous contemporary clothes. Congratulations to Mich, who was also recently celebrating 10 years in business.

Mel, the owner of Blush & Belle in Seville, with lovely homewares and gifts, is now stocking plenty for Christmas. Mel also puts together delightful hampers that I donate to community groups, kinders and schools for their fundraisers. Amy of Wandin Florist – wow! – has stunning floral arrangements for weddings and any occasion. Karen and Donna at La Donna Lingerie have bras and more in Lilydale, with a great range, and are exceptionally caring in their fittings. Bec, the dynamo that owns the Running Company in Lilydale for running shoes and sportswear, is also involved in Lilydale Township Action Group. They are all inspirational local small business owners. Shop local and support local jobs.

### Hume young mayors program

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (12:59): It was such a joy to attend the Young Mayors election celebration and see our incredible young people stepping up, having their voices heard and embracing the democratic process. Watching students from schools across Hume taking the lead, guiding their peers, sharing their values and earning the trust of their community was truly inspiring. This program is all about building leadership and civic decision-making skills while showing young people just how important democracy is. I really enjoyed being part of the election at the Hume Central senior campus, and initiatives like this are vital to ensuring that young people continue to be strong leaders in their communities and their voices remain front and centre. Democracy thrives when everyone participates and has a seat at the table. A huge thankyou to Tahlia Azaria and her amazing team for their dedication and passion in making this project such a success.

### Italian Golf Association

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (13:00): I also want to give a big shout-out to the Italian Golf Association, which held its annual tournament last Monday at the Northern Golf Club in Glenroy. Founded back in 1972, the IGA has grown into a wonderful organisation that brings golf lovers together for tournaments and social events throughout the year. As club president Frank Costanzo said:

IGA has evolved and grown over the years and nowadays is not only comprised of members of Italian heritage but is a multicultural organisation open to all, regardless of background or gender. About 80% of our group live or were raised in the northern suburbs – and that's something we are most proud of.

Congratulations on another fantastic event, and I thank Joe Perri for bringing this amazing organisation to my attention.

### Planning policy

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (13:01): I rise to thank the Boroondara Community Group for their extraordinary advocacy, organisation and determination over the past 18 months, mobilising scores of volunteers against the government's high-rise, high-density concrete jungle vision for Boroondara. I particularly acknowledge the leadership of Jane Oldham, Sally Gluyas and their wider committee, who have galvanised thousands to speak up for their neighbourhoods.

Our community is angry because we are not being listened to. The government has stripped residents of their rights to object to inappropriate developments and will entitle developers to build 16-storey towers or more in and around Auburn village, Glenferrie and Burwood Road, and push four- to six-storey buildings or more deep into quiet, narrow streets, all while neutering heritage protections. Despite having planning professionals at council who can plan for ample growth while protecting heritage and neighbourhood character, the government insists on imposing centralised, one-size-fits-all planning controls.

**A member:** Shame.

**John PESUTTO:** That is right. Victoria needs more housing, but it must be done thoughtfully, respectfully and with genuine consultation. The Boroondara Community Group has embodied true civic engagement, and I am proud to work alongside them as we continue to campaign locally to

ensure that the Allan Labor government stops ripping up our neighbourhoods and destroying the liveability and character of our beautiful areas.

### **Lankan Fest**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:02): It was a pleasure to represent the Minister for Multicultural Affairs at Lankan Fest 2025 this past weekend. The rainy weather did not stop many thousands attending the event, which was held at Crown Riverwalk. Now in its 10th year, Lankan Fest brings together the very best of Sri Lankan culture in a large festival to raise funds for children's education in Sri Lanka and Australia. The event featured cultural performances, food stalls, music and artworks and a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and share Sri Lankan culture with the broader community. It was good to be there with local, state and federal representatives, including the federal member for Holt, Cassandra Fernando MP. As an Australian born with Sri Lankan heritage, it was a personal privilege to attend and to connect with my cultural identity, and as a proud representative of Narre Warren South, home to one of our state's largest Sri Lankan communities, I know how important events like this are. They help our diverse and dual-identity Victorians to feel empowered to celebrate their cultural heritage and the traditions that form their identity. It is why this government is always very proud to support events like this one and has over the years through funding programs like the multicultural festivals and events program. Our Sri Lankan community makes significant social, cultural and economic contributions to our state each and every day. In fact the Sri Lankan community in Victoria is the largest in Australia. A big thankyou to Dr Damitha de Mel, president of Lankan Fest.

### **Mallee Accommodation and Support Program**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (13:04): I want to today acknowledge the extraordinary work of the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, or MASP as they are affectionately known locally, and to celebrate the opening of Doug's Place in Mildura last week. Doug's Place is a housing project of six accessible units funded by the regional supportive housing program, and because it has been driven by MASP, they were delivered on time and under budget. MASP has long been one of the quiet pillars of care in our region. When young people and the vulnerable fall through the cracks, when families are in crisis and when someone has nowhere safe to go, MASP is there, not with judgement, but with compassion, stability, the wraparound services that are needed and the genuine belief in the potential of all people. The opening of Doug's Place is a powerful reflection of that mission.

This is not just a new facility. It is a lifeline – a safe, supportive home for MASP clients, who deserve stability, dignity and the chance to rebuild their futures. And it carries a special meaning. Doug's Place honours a man who spent his life advocating for young people and the vulnerable, and you can feel that legacy the moment you walk through the doors. Hope lives there. I want to sincerely acknowledge CEO Charmaine Calis, board chair Mary Rydberg, the MASP team – they have done it quite tough over the last year and a bit – and every partner who helped make Doug's Place a reality.

### **Food allergies**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (13:05): James Tsindos was 17 years old when he unknowingly ate food containing cashews and died in hospital from anaphylaxis. His loss shattered his family, his friends and the broader community who loved him. In the aftermath James's parents Harry and Venetia have sought answers and through their grief have worked to raise awareness about food allergies, which now impact around one in 10 babies, one in 20 teens and one in 50 adults in Australia. Together with Brighton Grammar, they put on Jam for James Day, an annual music event honouring their boy, a gifted pianist whose talent and spirit touched many. Jam for James Day raises funds for the National Allergy Centre of Excellence and has become a powerful way for students and the wider community to engage with food allergy safety.

The Tsindos family also seek lasting reform to ensure no other family endures what they have endured. That includes improving emergency care so that when anaphylaxis does occur patients receive the life-

saving treatment that they need and, critically, stronger food-labelling laws. In James's case, the cashew product he ate was falsely labelled as cheese, a description that was misleading, life-threatening and in contravention of the national Food Standards Code. So many parents and children live with the constant vigilance of managing food allergies, yet vigilance only gets you so far if the product itself is misdescribed. Allergens, particularly very common ones, should be clearly disclosed. Had they been, James would not have chosen the meal. I commend Harry and Venetia on their compassion and resolve in driving reforms that will save lives, a testament to their enduring love for James.

### **High Street–Wallace roads, Wantirna South**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (13:07): This statement brings to the attention of the house an urgent road safety matter in my electorate of Rowville. I have been contacted by many residents in Wantirna South who hold grave concerns for the dangerous intersection at High Street and Wallace roads. Tragically, this intersection was the site of a fatal accident on Thursday 23 October. My constituents have long known this intersection as hazardous, particularly for motorists making a right-hand turn. The community has rightly started a petition to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, which as of late yesterday had 777 signatures, demanding a comprehensive safety review and the implementation of two vital commonsense safety measures: firstly, the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of High Street Road and Wallace Road to allow for safe turning and to protect pedestrians; secondly, the reduction of the speed limit from 80 kilometres down to 60 kilometres on the section of High Street Road, Wantirna South, between Burwood Highway and Stud Road. This is not an unreasonable request. This stretch of road services two local schools. My community deserves to be safe. Their children deserve to be safe. I call on the minister to heed the pleas of my Wantirna South residents, as per their petition: ensure an urgent review is undertaken and implement these life-saving road safety measures immediately before another tragedy occurs.

### **Albert Park electorate sporting facilities**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:08): I was absolutely thrilled yesterday to be able to announce that the Power House rugby union club is getting a new permanent pavilion adjacent to the Noel Clarke Field – absolutely fantastic. The club was founded back in 1933. They have not been advocating since 1933, but nevertheless it is a longstanding club and it is actually being funded through the Albert Park pit building project. There is also a residual grant and the club's own fundraising.

I should also say that South Melbourne Football Club and Middle Park Football Club, which also have been housed in the Albert Park pit building, will be having new temporary pavilions constructed while the Albert Park pit building is being fully reconstructed. The new building will include seven indoor sports courts, two more than are currently onsite, alongside improved clubrooms for tenant clubs using the outdoor fields, and this will ensure sport benefits for the upgraded facilities for the long term.

I should say that the Albert Park pit building was originally built in 1995. The pit building site will be replaced to bring it into the 21st century and ensure it can meet the year-round demands of community sport and provide a multipurpose venue for a range of events. If you have been there – oh my goodness – with the low ceilings et cetera it does not lend itself to community sport. It needs to be upgraded. So yesterday we had the Albert Park Sports Clubs Association, representation from South Melbourne Women's Football Club and Power House rugby union representation. Josh Blanksby addressed the room and – (*Time expired*)

### **Housing affordability**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (13:10): All across the world renters are making their voices heard. For too long renters have had to struggle to make ends meet with skyrocketing rents while governments tip the scales in favour of developers and investors. But now renters are demanding that housing finally be treated like a human right, and around the world things are finally starting to change. Los Angeles City Council has just introduced a maximum rent increase of 4 per cent per year, the Scottish Parliament has just voted for long-term rent controls and in New York City Zohran Mamdani

campaigned to freeze rents and New Yorkers have voted him in. Things are changing because renters started organising and started demanding better. Yet here in Victoria unlimited rent increases are still legal, and people are suffering. The Greens recently ran a survey and heard some absolute horror stories. Colette's rent was jacked up by \$157 a month. If you think that is bad, Imogen's went up by \$563 a month. Alex's rent went up by a massive \$640 a month. Their bathroom floor is collapsing, but they live in fear of getting another increase in rent as retaliation if they dare to ask for repairs. We heard countless stories like this. Everyone deserves to be able to afford a home. Politicians who are smart enough to listen should realise that, when young people and working people are priced out of a city, the city suffers. But when they can live in their city – *(Time expired)*

### **Be Bold Be Heard**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (13:11): It was great to attend the Be Bold Be Heard celebration forum and presentation last month to see the cumulation of work undertaken by female students across our Geelong region. The students engaged in the Be Bold Be Heard forum and program learn about leadership and are empowered to drive change to address gender gap issues at school while enhancing their student voice. The forum provides a vital space for young women to collaborate, share ideas and build the confidence they need to advocate for fairer and more inclusive school environments. It is a project that truly empowers girls to seek better outcomes within their school and encourages them to recognise challenges, develop solutions and take meaningful action. I would like to make a special mention of and congratulate the students from Bellarine Secondary College, Indy Johnson, Grace Macdonald, Kieley Delbridge and Mackenzie Killen, who participated and presented in this program. They tackled the challenge of better supporting girls in the PE and sporting environment at school, but they also encouraged and brought the boys along on that journey to encourage positive and lasting change. Their engagement and willingness to step up in growth and grow in confidence, which I was able to witness when they presented, just highlighted the strength and the potential of their leadership. I congratulate all the girls on their achievement.

### **Owners corporations**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (13:12): Last week I hosted a listening session at my electorate office as part of the review of the Owners Corporations Act 2006. It was a great chance to bring together residents from my community to talk honestly about what is working and what is not in strata living. My constituents really appreciated being able to speak openly to the panellists. My office has dealt with numerous complaints about poor-quality builds and ongoing defects that leave owners footing huge repair bills with nowhere to turn. We discussed confusing governance rules, rising fees and owners corporation managers who were simply not held to account when they should have been. We also heard how hard it can be for ordinary residents to resolve disputes. Many feel they are up against well-resourced developers or managers and have no real pathway to getting things fixed.

What was clear is that the current system is not working for far too many people. Owners and residents want clearer rules, better protections and a process that listens to them instead of leaving them stuck with problems they did not create. I think it is incredibly important that these issues are fixed now, before Victoria moves further towards higher density living. We cannot keep adding more apartments and houses on top of a system that is already struggling to protect owners and residents. I want to thank everyone who came along and shared their stories. I will keep pushing to make sure the voices of local strata residents are front and centre. As the panel prepares its report – an important piece of work for the Minister for Consumer Affairs – it is absolutely critical that the Owners Corporations Act is modified to radically improve the outcomes for residents and their communities.

### **Roderic Grigson**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (13:14): It is with great sadness I rise to condole Roderic Grigson, a great man who made Cranbourne even better, especially through his beloved Scribe Tribe. Rod was an international civil servant, a prolific writer, an author of several books and my neighbour. But most importantly of all, Rod was loved by his wife Mena and their son Eric, and he loved them

back. Roderic Grigson passed away in early September. He was born and educated in Sri Lanka. He lived there until he was 21, before launching a career in the United Nations. He left the country of his birth with a few dollars in his pocket and entered the United States on a tourist visa. He found work at the United Nations headquarters in New York, where he was employed for 12 years. After studying IT at NYU he volunteered and joined the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Egypt and Lebanon. He served on the Suez Canal during the signing of the Israel–Egypt peace accord and in South Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. After spending two years in the field, Rod returned to New York in 1980 and joined the UN technological innovations team. He spent six years helping develop and implement systems in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese in UN global and regional offices around the world. He migrated with his wife Mena to Australia in 1986, where over time he became a senior executive. He was responsible for overseeing a vast territory, and this was incredibly important to him. Most importantly, though, he was an author. He wrote several books, including *The Governor's Lover*. Vale, Roderic Grigson.

#### **Lara electorate office work experience students**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:16): Today I would like to acknowledge work experience students Farzana, Gloria and Zain, who have joined my office this week. The contribution I am sharing was authored by them, and I thank them for their fantastic work.

#### **Lara electorate schools**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:16): North Geelong Secondary College recently held its multicultural festival, which I was proud to attend. The festival featured entertainment, food stalls and my personal favourite, a cultural parade. Watching students step forward with pride, each representing their own cultural background, highlighted just how inclusive and supportive this beautiful school community is. The school brought together the community in a warm and welcoming way, and it was clear how proud the students were to share their culture. One of the highlights was the human library, where students and community members shared their personal journeys, experiences and family histories. Hearing these stories directly from those who lived them created a remarkable level of understanding, allowing the audience to engage and learn more about the histories and cultures through meaningful conversations. Later this year another multicultural festival will be held at Northern Bay College. Events like these do more than entertain. They strengthen social cohesion by providing spaces to learn from one another and appreciate the values that different cultures bring to our community. North Geelong Secondary College and Northern Bay College show what it looks like when multiculturalism is actively celebrated and embraced, and I congratulate the students, staff and families for creating such inspiring festivals that unite the community. I also commend all year 12 students who are balancing their studies with celebrating their communities and culture. Your dedication and pride are truly commendable. I wish every student success as they complete this important chapter and move forward to the next stage of their life.

#### **Point Cook electorate**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (13:17): There are a lot of things going on in the community that I represent, and I want to talk about a few of them in these 90 seconds. We are building a police station in Point Cook, the very first that we will have. Point Cook community hospital is now underway and gratefully so; we love the crane that is lifting up the build. Werribee Mercy's emergency department is being doubled right now. It is beautiful on the outside and even better on the inside. Wyndham law courts are now open – VCAT, the Children's Court and the Magistrates' Court are all there. The West Gate Tunnel: I joined tens of thousands of people walking through it, and the member for Werribee ran through it with several thousand more. The Metro Tunnel is opening very soon – five new stations. Under-18s will travel free on public transport from 1 January – every single day, every single place – as will seniors card holders, over-65s, on weekends everywhere in Victoria. Williams Landing station is getting some upgrades. Point Cook Road and Central Avenue are being upgraded; we are going to be turning those temporary lights on very shortly. The Point Cook Road and Sneydes

Road intersection is already done. The most magnificent education building at Alamanda College has been completed; the second has been started. I am running out of time. At Saltwater P-9 two buildings are done. There will be two more schools and a kindergarten in 2027. Queen Street pedestrian bridge contracts are almost out. The Laverton footy club – their upgrades are complete. There is so much more going on in Point Cook.

### **Ben Austin**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:19): On Saturday the member for Bayswater and I attended Wally Tew Reserve to see the start of the cricket match between Ferntree Gully and Upwey Tecoma, where the president of Ferntree Gully Cricket Club Lee Thompson spoke in tribute of and held a minute's silence for Ben Austin, the talented 17-year-old cricketer who passed away on 30 October after a tragic incident at training. Apart from being a dedicated athlete and a representative-level player, Ben was an admired teammate, known for his leadership and sportsmanship and loved by so many. Our thoughts are with his parents Jace and Tracey, his brothers Cooper and Zac and his friends and teammates as they navigate their way through this heartbreaking loss. May the beautiful memories of Ben be a balm for their aching hearts.

### **3MDR**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:19): The much-loved Mountain District Radio station, better known as 3MDR, has turned 40. Founded in the wake of Ash Wednesday, it received its full broadcasting licence in 1985 and has been going strong ever since. To celebrate, the exhibition *Local Voices, Loud and Clear* will be held at Burrinja Cultural Centre in Upwey from 27 November until 8 March next year. I hope many will make the time to attend.

### **Year 12 students**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:20): I am looking forward to attending graduation and valedictory evenings across a range of secondary schools and presenting my community award to those nominated by their schools for their kindness and outstanding contributions to their community. Thanks to all of the staff over the school years who have guided and taught these students from their early learning days until their young adulthood, and congratulations to those students embarking on new adventures ahead. Enjoy the journey.

### **Kennedy Community Centre**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (13:20): Hawthorn Football Club have officially launched their brand new Kennedy Community Centre in Dingley Village. It was an amazing pleasure to have the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, the Premier and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events out at the Clarinda district on Monday to officially open the centre in Dingley, which has been supported by a \$15 million investment from the Allan Labor government. Hawthorn's new AFLW home-ground oval will include a dedicated match-day pavilion with a 500-seat grandstand, team change rooms, umpire change rooms, media facilities, a coaches box and a function space. There is also a state-of-the-art Harris Elite training and administration facility, an MCG-sized oval, a gymnasium, indoor training facilities and wet and dry recovery facilities. It is a state-of-the-art project that will benefit the entire south-east community of Melbourne, with at least 20 hours per week dedicated to community use, helping promote sport in the region to get girls and boys active and healthy.

### **Cr Sophie Tan**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (13:21): Congratulations to the City of Greater Dandenong's new mayor Cr Sophie Tan; what a fantastic achievement – the first Cambodian Australian woman to be elected as mayor. It is really well deserved. She will be a fantastic mayor for the city, and I wish her all the very best.

*Bills***Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments***Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 4, page 4, lines 4 to 6, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Clause 4, page 4, after line 19 insert –
 

*“registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner* means a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practise in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice profession (other than as a student);”.
3. Clause 4, page 4, after line 27 insert –
 

*“registered psychologist* means a person who is registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practice in the psychology profession (other than as a student);”.
4. Clause 6, line 19, omit “registered health practitioner” and insert “registered medical practitioner or nurse practitioner”.
5. Clause 6, lines 27 and 28, omit “registered health practitioner or a health service provider” and insert “registered medical practitioner or nurse practitioner”.
6. Clause 6, lines 32 and 33, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
 

‘(b) give the person the following information –

  - (i) contact details for the prescribed voluntary assisted dying care navigator service;
  - (ii) the address of an Internet site of the Department of Health that provides information about voluntary assisted dying.”’.
  7. Clause 7, page 9, lines 2 to 4, omit “a registered health practitioner who is not a registered medical practitioner or nurse practitioner” and insert “certain registered health practitioners”.
  8. Clause 7, page 9, lines 7 to 12, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
 

“(1) This section applies to the following registered health practitioners who provide health services or professional care services to a person –

    - (a) a registered nurse (other than a nurse practitioner);
    - (b) a registered psychologist;
    - (c) a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner.”.
    9. Clause 7, page 9, line 34, omit ‘Law.’ and insert “Law.”.
    10. Clause 7, page 9, after line 34 insert –
 

**‘8B Discussion about voluntary assisted dying must not be initiated by other classes of registered health practitioners**

      - (1) This section applies to a registered health practitioner who –
        - (a) provides health services or professional care services to a person; and
        - (b) is not a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner.
      - (2) A registered health practitioner to whom this section applies must not, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person –
        - (a) initiate discussion with the person that is in substance about voluntary assisted dying; or
        - (b) in substance, suggest voluntary assisted dying to that person.
      - (3) Nothing in subsection (2) prevents a registered health practitioner to whom this section applies providing information about voluntary assisted dying to a person at that person’s request.
      - (4) A contravention of subsection (2) is to be regarded as unprofessional conduct within the meaning and for the purposes of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.”’.

11. Clause 12, lines 27 and 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
- ‘(b) give the person the following information –
    - (i) contact details for the prescribed voluntary assisted dying care navigator service;
    - (ii) the address of an Internet site of the Department of Health that provides information about voluntary assisted dying.’.
12. Clause 59, lines 3 to 10, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
- ‘(1) Before section 75(1)(a) of the Principal Act **insert** –
    - “(aa) who is a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person, initiating or attempting to initiate a discussion about voluntary assisted dying with that person that is not, or would not be, in accordance with this Act; or”.
  - (2) In section 75(1)(a) of the Principal Act –
    - (a) for “provides health services or professional care services to a person is” **substitute** “is not a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person”;
    - (b) in subparagraph (i) **omit** “in the course of providing those services to the person.”.
13. Clause 60, lines 12 to 19, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
- ‘(1) Before section 76(1)(a) of the Principal Act **insert** –
    - “(aa) who is a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person, initiating or attempting to initiate a discussion about voluntary assisted dying with that person that is not, or would not be, in accordance with this Act; or”.
  - (2) In section 76(1)(a) of the Principal Act –
    - (a) for “provides health services or professional care services to a person is” **substitute** “is not a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person”;
    - (b) in subparagraph (i) **omit** “in the course of providing those services to the person.”.
14. Clause 61, lines 21 to 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
- ‘(1) Before section 77(a) of the Principal Act **insert** –
    - “(aa) who is a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person, initiating or attempting to initiate a discussion about voluntary assisted dying with that person that is not, or would not be, in accordance with this Act; or”.
  - (2) In section 77(a) of the Principal Act –
    - (a) for “provides health services or professional care services to a person is” **substitute** “is not a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner is, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person”;
    - (b) in subparagraph (i) **omit** “in the course of providing those services to the person.”.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:22): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I support the modest amendments that have been made in the Legislative Council and that are now in this place to be debated and approved. The amendments do two important things. They ensure that our commitment to lifting the gag clause remains, and it is now lifted in relation to medical practitioners, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, psychologists and, importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander health practitioners. Secondly, the amendments ensure that practitioners who hold a conscientious objection to voluntary assisted dying are still required to provide minimum information to a person who initiates a conversation with them in relation to VAD, but that will now be part of the act. It was obviously explained in the explanatory memorandum, but I was happy to agree to see that now in the act. What we have with the amended bill is a bill that will now achieve what we set out to achieve – and that was, from the get-go, that we would move to ensure that Victoria’s laws are more in line with those of other states and territories, and the amended bill before us does that.

I will only speak very briefly, but I do want to take the opportunity to thank all members of this house and indeed the Legislative Council for the way in which, by and large, the debate was conducted. I do want to acknowledge of course the member for Pakenham – who really needs no more acknowledgement – who has been a steadfast inspiration through this entire policy development and the debate here in the chamber. So I really want to acknowledge you, member for Pakenham, and also advocates from Dying With Dignity and advocates from Go Gentle. But, do you know what, even more importantly, people in my own community have told me of their experiences and why it is so important that we have made the changes that we have made. So on that note, I do want to commend the amendments to the house.

**Michael O’BRIEN** (Malvern) (13:25): I rise to speak on the amendments to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 made by the Legislative Council. My concern about this bill related in many ways to the loosening of safeguards which had been put in place under the original legislation. Given the gravity of the subject with which we are dealing, I think it is important to have very strong legislative safeguards to protect vulnerable people who may be at risk of abuse or exploitation. A number of the amendments that were made in the Council were actually also sought to be moved here. It is a bit of a shame, really, that perhaps there was not adequate consideration given to those amendments in this place. Certainly the upper house has acted as a house of review, perhaps for the first time in a little while, in making –

**A member:** That’s their job.

**Michael O’BRIEN:** Well, it is our job to get it right as well. When you look at these amendments that have been made – and I note the Minister for Health has said she accepts them – the question is: why were they so vehemently fought against in this place? To my mind and obviously to the mind of people in the other place, these are commonsense amendments not designed to take away anyone’s rights but to protect people.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Michael O’BRIEN:** You have had your go. Let us have a look, first of all, at the backflip on the secretary’s authority, which is one of the amendments. We are not talking about a little tick of the box here. There are five pages of amendments that have been made in the other place. For the ministers to seek to dismiss them as being minor – they are not minor at all; they are important amendments. They are safeguards dealing with a very important and sensitive issue that affects many people. Quoting from *Hansard*, the member for Murray Plains asked:

Minister, in your response to the member for Greenvale you set out your expectations of what would be required of a doctor that was a conscientious objector. Given that the legislation actually gives that power to the secretary to determine what happens, how can you guarantee that your expectation will be delivered if the secretary has a different opinion?

The minister went on to say:

I have confidence in the secretaries of the departments right across government being highly competent, ethical people in the way in which they perform their duties.

That is not the point, Minister. The point is it should not be left to the discretion of a bureaucrat in relation to what information must be provided, particularly in circumstances where we are dealing with a conscientious objection. For a conscientious objection to actually have any meaning it needs to

be very, very clear what that objector is being asked to do. Now, as a result of these amendments, thankfully, it is very clear what that conscientious objector is being asked to do, and it is fairly limited, unlike the unlimited matters which were provided for in the initial drafting of this bill where it could be anything the secretary decided to tell a conscientious objector to provide – anything at all. Now it is actually quite limited. Now it is, with amendment 6 to clause 6, to give the person the following information:

- (i) contact details for the prescribed voluntary assisted dying care navigator service;
- (ii) the address of an Internet site of the Department of Health that provides information about voluntary assisted dying ...

Whatever people's views on the substance of these matters, one might think that these are very important safeguards not just to safeguard the rights of people who wish to seek voluntary assisted dying and seek advice from a medical practitioner who may have a conscientious objection but also to protect the rights of that person with a conscientious objection. We have to get the balance right. The fact is the initial drafting of this bill failed to get the balance right, and even members in the other place saw that. Members of the other place amended the bill to ensure that on this issue the balance was restored. I certainly support that amendment, because it is important, yes, that people who want to seek VAD are provided with the information as to how to do so. It is also important we protect the rights of people who have got conscientious objections. Being a long-term member of this place, I am not used to showering praise on the other place; it is quite foreign to me. But in this case I will do so – under sufferance, member for Brighton. I am very pleased in fact, and my understanding is, that members of the Labor Party may have initiated these particular amendments. It was certainly not a partisan issue. It was an issue of common sense: looking at where the original drafting of the bill had failed to provide proper safeguards and trying to correct that. That is the first aspect of these amendments: to protect the rights of people who wish to seek information about voluntary assisted dying but also to protect the rights of those who have a conscientious objection.

The other substantial element of the amendments that were made in the other place relates to health practitioners and the so-called gag clause.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** We are in agreement on that, Minister for Health. We are in heated agreement on that. The government felt that any registered health practitioner should be able to initiate a discussion about voluntary assisted dying with a patient. We are talking about people like podiatrists, dentists, physiotherapists, Chinese medicine practitioners, chiropractors, optometrists and osteopaths.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN:** We hear that there are some members who believe that that is entirely appropriate – that people qualified in Chinese herbal medicine should be able to initiate discussions with patients about voluntary assisted dying.

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** I look forward to the member for Narre Warren North opposing this amendment then. I look forward to the member for Narre Warren North having the courage of her convictions.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** I will take my time, thank you, Minister. I will take my full 30 minutes if you keep on with that. I look forward to the member for Narre Warren North opposing this amendment on the basis that she does believe that Chinese herbal medicine practitioners should be able to initiate discussions about voluntary assisted dying. We are talking about having safeguards about something that is about as critical as it gets.

The other place made a number of amendments. No longer is it just any registered health practitioner; they need to be a registered medical practitioner or nurse practitioner. That would seem to be a far more sensible safeguard to have in place. There are obviously arguments for and against whether there should be an ability to initiate discussion about voluntary assisted dying by a doctor or a nurse, but the idea that somebody looking at your teeth should be able to suggest it to you does seem bizarre and certainly unnecessary.

I remember the days when the government first brought this legislation to the Parliament. They were boasting about how conservative it was, boasting about the number of safeguards that were put in place to try to ensure that there would be the least possible prospect of exploitation of vulnerable people. Now the government is making a show of how many safeguards they are removing. Again I praise the members in the other place for putting back in place some safeguards, which should have always been there from the start. Clearly the attitude of some members in this place is to push things as far as they possibly can, constantly pushing the envelope. No doubt the government will be back here – well, hopefully it will not be the government, but members who are of that mind will be back here in a couple of years time – trying to push the envelope yet again. I do hope that we have a more balanced view taken next time.

What is the government now agreeing to? It is that voluntary assisted dying must not be initiated by other classes of registered health practitioners. So if you are not a registered medical practitioner – if you are not a registered nurse, if you are not a registered psychologist and if you are not a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner – then you must not –

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** No, I mentioned nurse practitioners. I said 'registered nurse'.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** I am talking about what is actually in the legislation. I will ignore the disorderly interjections from the Minister for Health. She is just going to make me stand up here and speak for longer anyway. As I say, I am just quoting from the amendments which have been circulated by the Clerk, so I am assuming the clerks have got it right. I would certainly trust the clerks before I trusted the minister.

New section 8B applies to a registered health practitioner who provides health services or professional care services to a person and is not a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, registered psychologist or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner. New section 8B(2) goes on to say:

A registered health practitioner to whom this section applies must not, in the course of providing health services or professional care services to a person –

initiate discussion with the person that is in substance about voluntary assisted dying; or  
in substance, suggest voluntary assisted dying to that person.

Again this would seem to be an absolutely baseline safeguard that is important in trying to avoid exploitation of vulnerable people. It is one thing for a doctor or a nurse or a psychologist to initiate these sorts of discussions, another thing entirely for a podiatrist or a chiropractor to do the same thing. I do not want to steal the member for Mornington's thunder, but he raised this during the debate in the consideration-in-detail stage when this bill was before this chamber originally. He raised concerns about the breadth of health practitioners who would have been authorised to initiate discussions about voluntary assisted dying, and there was an amendment moved to effectively do what the other place has now done. The minister's response was:

We do not support this amendment. Fundamental to the amendments in this bill is that there should be no wrong door for patients who are receiving end-of-life care. Therefore if a person has a life-limiting disease or illness and they are receiving care, that will most likely be from a care team. What this clause seeks to do is

to enable registered health practitioners who are providing end-of-life care to use their professional judgement and potentially advise that voluntary assisted dying is a lawful end-of-life care choice here in the state of Victoria.

Why the minister thinks that podiatrists, dentists and Chinese medicine practitioners have the expertise to initiate voluntary assisted dying discussions – I mean, I have great respect for all those health practitioners. In their own fields they do outstanding and important work for the community, and nothing I say is any knock on the important contribution that they make to healthcare outcomes in the community. But there is a difference between somebody who has the medical expertise and qualifications to initiate a discussion about voluntary assisted dying and those who do not. I am very pleased to see that the Council has at least made those amendments. As I have mentioned in my previous commentary, this bill is now substantially amended to that effect. Those safeguards have now been restored, and only registered medical practitioners, nurse practitioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners and registered psychologists have that ability to initiate voluntary assisted dying discussions.

Now that I do not have the interjections from the Minister for Health, I am probably in a position where I can discontinue my remarks, other than to say these safeguards that are being restored by the other place are important. I do support them, and it is a real shame that they were not given the proper consideration on the first run-through that they deserved, because this would have been a better bill initially if the government, or those members who are supporting this bill, had taken those considerations on board. I think that sometimes when it comes to not just these matters but all matters of legislation, this Parliament tends to operate on a bit of a tribal basis, and the tribe is that you are for it or the tribe is that you are agin it. On these sorts of matters I think we do need to bring individual judgement to bear on important issues, particularly when we are talking about safeguards to prevent exploitation of the vulnerable. With that, I commend these amendments.

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (13:39): I would like to speak briefly on the amendments to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 made in the Legislative Council. It was always going to be the case with a bill such as this that compromises needed to be made by way of amendments in order to gain the broader support necessary to ensure its passage. Whilst I personally believe some of the amendments made are not particularly necessary, they are ultimately relatively minor, and I am happy to support them in the interest of ensuring that this bill is passed into law. The amendments to the gag clause, for instance, still leave the confusing situation where any of the members in this chamber can initiate a conversation with someone about voluntary assisted dying but a podiatrist or a dentist, for example, who may have built up a long and trusted relationship with someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, cannot. Nevertheless the amendments are an improvement to the gag clause as it is now, and I support them to ensure passage of this important bill.

I sat through or read almost the entirety of the debate of this bill in this place, as well as the debate and committee stage in the other place. I want to thank the Minister for Health and her team for the work they did in developing and bringing this bill to the Parliament. I also want to thank the Minister for Mental Health in the other place for her tireless work taking the bill through the committee stage. My thanks also to Dr Sarah Mansfield and indeed members of this place, including members of the opposition and the crossbench, for their constructive and genuine engagement on this bill.

As many members both here and in the Council have noted, the debate and consideration of this bill have brought out the best in many of us. It has been a debate that has seen members on all sides engage, for the most part, in a respectful and considerate manner. It has been an example of how we should always strive to behave and conduct ourselves as elected members, working constructively and respectively with one another to craft legislation for the overall betterment of our state.

It is unfortunate, though, that this was somewhat tarnished by the language used by some members, both here and in the other place, during debate on this bill. Whilst I appreciate that this is an issue on which some, not just here in the Parliament but in the broader community, have differing views, it was

I believe unhelpful, distasteful and unnecessary to refer to voluntary assisted dying as assisted suicide. The decision to access voluntary assisted dying is one never taken lightly. Those who do make the decision to access it often find themselves wracked with guilt for the families that they will leave behind, fearful that others may perceive them as selfish for their decision. It is a very difficult decision to make, and one that an individual comes to only after a period of serious consideration. I am not ashamed to admit that hearing this sort of language used by my colleagues brought me to tears. I cried for myself, but I also cried for others who have been through this difficult journey and those who have lost loved ones to suicide. I felt it necessary to call this out, and I hope to encourage them to further reflect and consider that words we use in this place really do matter. Not everyone has the same views, and I absolutely respect that, but we are here for all Victorians and empathy goes a long way. I commend the amendments to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (13:43): I rise to speak on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025. Starting out can I say to the member for Malvern: ditto. I absolutely agree with everything the member for Malvern said, and I will in my time repeat some of those things. I think it is important to repeat them, because I did raise these issues when we were in consideration in detail and I think we actually saw the Parliament working as this chamber should work by taking that bill into consideration in detail. It is a pity that does not happen more. But this is not a debate about whether we have VAD or whether we do not have VAD. We have it; it is law here in Victoria, and for those people that want to access it, that is their personal choice.

I suppose I looked at the bill from a legislator's point of view. When we debated this bill in 2017 we talked about the safeguards that were in the bill and making sure that there were those safeguards and that no bill could erode those safeguards any more than was necessary to make it function appropriately in the future, particularly on the issues around the definition of those health professionals that could give advice, like the member for Malvern said. The podiatrist I go to I have the utmost respect for as a podiatrist, but I do not think it is appropriate that that person would be giving me advice about voluntary assisted dying, and the same goes for my dentist. I trust my dentist to fix my teeth, but again, I do not think it is appropriate that my dentist is actually giving me advice about voluntary assisted dying. With the changes that the upper house made, to their credit, with people from both sides of the chamber and the crossbench supporting those changes, I think we have landed at a good compromise to what was a very long list of health professionals that were going to be able to give advice on voluntary assisted dying.

The cynic in me, as a politician, says the government probably put that huge, long list in to allow it to be amended, so those opposed to some of the issues could be seen to have a win. I think that probably those on one side of the Labor Party who wanted to see these amendments felt they had had a win. But I think it was in some ways a hollow win, because I expect the government always expected to lose some of those health professionals out of that particular definition.

The other point I just want to make some comments on is the issues around clause 6, particularly around the powers of the secretary. I have said numerous times that this enabling legislation, where we pass some legislation where a bureaucrat sometime in the future who is not elected by the people of Victoria can make changes – as a legislator I find it wrong. I know sometimes if we have got prescriptive legislation, it is tedious to bring that back to the house for amendment. But I think that is the safeguard that has been built into 700 years of Westminster history, that if it is done by the Parliament, it can be changed by the Parliament. It should not be done by the Parliament to allow a bureaucrat to change it into the future.

I think a lot of Victorians lost faith in the health system through COVID, rightly or wrongly. Decisions that were made through COVID around lockdowns and around restrictions on what people could or could not do meant that a lot of Victorians have lost faith in the health system in Victoria and the decision-makers in it. My community of Echuca, Swan Hill and Koondrook–Barham along the river saw these two different lots of rules across the river because we had someone in Victoria that had a very different view to someone in New South Wales. There was no parliamentary scrutiny about the

fact that schoolchildren actually had to get off a bus and present their certificate to go to school on the other side of the river. It just defies logic as to how that was. Having a great big burly policeman lining up grade 4 and 5 kids to check whether they can go to school, I do not think is the way that our society wants to work. That was the unfettered power of health professionals.

Fortunately, with common sense in the upper house, we have taken away that unfettered power of the secretary to make rules in the future. I know the minister gave some assurances from questions in the committee stage about the second-reading speech and her expressed intentions for what the secretary should do in the future. But as time goes by, as ministers change, as secretaries change, there is a real risk that there could be creep around that, and you would have that unfettered power of the secretary in the future. A bit like the member for Malvern I know the jealousy between the two houses; we feel that we do all the work down here and the house of review up there sometimes gets it right. In this case they have very much got it right, and I think it is the parliamentary system working as it should that there have been sensible amendments. I wish the bill a speedy passage now.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (13:48): I rise to make a contribution around these amendments that have come back from the other place in relation to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025. I note that the minimum information has now been prescribed in legislation. I have got to say I do not have a particularly strong view about that. I was not uncomfortable with that idea when it was put in this chamber. I note that the Minister for Health vocally and strongly defended the construction of the bill. I was happy to take her view on that. On the minimum information, the stated view is that it would be very weird to have a website in an act – I do not know if it is weird or not; I cannot say I have seen a great many websites in bills before this place – but I think the minimum information clause that has come back from the other place is probably the least controversial of the matters that have come back.

I want to talk a little bit, though, about the restrictions on practitioners raising voluntary assisted dying, and I thank the member for Pakenham for her contribution and for speaking too about the sensible, pragmatic approach where it is not a perfect bill, but it is nonetheless a good bill and warrants our support, and I certainly fall into that category. But I do say that as a general principle I would caution all legislators against telling any Victorian that they cannot tell any other Victorian about a Victorian law. I think on first principles we know that ignorance of the law is no defence, be it criminal law, taxation law or any other law, and yet we now have a statute where we proscribe Victorians discussing the law with other Victorians. That is counterintuitive, and I think, from my perspective anyway, it is a substantial overreach on the part of the Parliament. I do not think we should ever, ever be constraining people from alerting people to the existence of a law. I would have been happy to have had a debate in this chamber about what other things can and cannot be countenanced in that discussion. I do not think that podiatrists ought to be going chapter and verse through treatment options, for example. But the very existence of a scheme, the very existence of a law, I think is something we ought to protect the right for all Victorians to discuss. I think it is a shame that this gag clause remains there, in part. In circumstances where someone is an allied health practitioner, they cannot even alert a patient to the very existence of that rule. For that reason I do not support any rule that limits those conversations about what the law says. That of course is different to detailed conversations about what a path of treatment might look like. But the very existence of the law I think ought to be a matter that Parliament does not seek to constrain in any way. I support the idea that protecting people from coercion is important – of course it is – but by the same token, this in effect elevates ignorance of the law to a level that is thoroughly, thoroughly inappropriate, in my view.

Members in this debate have spent a bit of time talking about undertakings that were given in 2017 or features of the debate in 2017, and I would just say that nothing stands still. The community does not; medicine does not. The law certainly should not. I think in the 1900s the US patent office considered closing because everything that could be invented had been invented. That is where this argument is based, in the very strange place of saying, ‘Undertakings were given in 2017, so we shouldn’t be amending the law now in 2025.’ Well, eight years have transpired. Society is not a static place;

medicine is not a static place. The law ought not to be a static place. Frankly, if it was, we could probably shut up shop and go home. This place needs to respond to the issues of the day, and it needs to respond in a way that is sensitive to evolution in thinking amongst our constituents and amongst society and in a way that reflects the views of our own constituents. To those who say that in the 2017 debate a bunch of undertakings were made or certain things were said, I would say there is no need or reason to rely on those things. We are of course a different Parliament to that Parliament. In fact we are two parliaments gone since that Parliament was in place, and we ought to be focused always on the needs of our constituents in a contemporary framework. I am sure things were said about the sorry decline of the blacksmithing industry at some point too, but life goes on.

I do want to raise a couple of matters regarding the interpreter provisions. I maintain that these interpreter provisions ought to have been amended in both this place and the other place. It is a derogation of sovereignty to allow what is effectively a COAG body that is federally funded to determine the scope of the languages that are able to be used to discuss voluntary assisted dying. It is most unfortunate. That is the Victorian Parliament abrogating its duty to determine the administration and the rules that surround this scheme, and I think it is a shame that we have done that. It would be far, far better, in my view, to say that the minister can control the list or that tertiary-educated translators can be in control of this process. It is a great shame that the other place did not see fit to make those amendments.

As to future debates, I know I share a view with others that there will be future debates that canvass some of the big issues that were not canvassed this time. The role of institutions – we heard lots and lots of stories, including from the Cahills and others, about the role of conscientious objection from institutions thwarting the will of patients and their families to access this lawful medication, this lawful service. I just cannot accept these gut-wrenching stories of frail and dying people being wheeled out to the car park or kerbside in order to receive a lawful medication to end their life. We owe it to the patients and the families to fix it. Institutions can hold of course particular faith-informed views, but they ought not to be able to obstruct lawful care in a way that forces people into undignified or traumatic arrangements at the end of their lives.

We also need – and I would hope that future debates countenance people with neurodegenerative conditions and whether there is an ability to create declarations binding –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I bring the member back to the amendments, please.

**Will FOWLES:** Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your forbearance. I can see you have been struggling with this for a few minutes now. I thank you for your patience.

These amendments have limited the scheme in a couple of important ways, but they do not in any way mean the end of it. They do not mean in any way the end of this bill. This is a good bill that advances the debate in Victoria and in Australia and indeed internationally. It is a bill that is the first review of a voluntary assisted dying scheme, and for that reason alone it stands as an important step. It follows on of course from Victoria being the first jurisdiction to introduce a voluntary assisted dying scheme in Australia. For all of those reasons it is important. I do thank the minister and the department for their work in bringing it up.

I reflect on the comments of the member for Pakenham about some of the language in this debate having been very unfortunate on both sides of the aisle. I would hope that all members take an opportunity from this debate to take away two things. One is that there is an opportunity to work in a bipartisan or multipartisan way in this place for the betterment of Victoria and Victorians. The second thing is that when we approach debates like this it is always important to do so with the utmost sensitivity and to be live to the very real lived experience of people right across both chambers who have had that experience. Again, whilst I do not support the amendments that have been made, I do support the bill, and I ask that the house also support this bill and ensure its speedy passage from here.

**Chris CREWTER** (Mornington) (13:57): I rise to speak on the amendments to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 that have returned from the Legislative Council. The first point I want to make is this: these amendments in substance reflect similar amendments moved in this chamber only a few weeks ago. At that time, under a free vote, the majority of the members of the Legislative Assembly voted them down, albeit there were a number of Labor and Liberal members and at least one National, the member for Murray Plains, who did back those amendments. Today they return from the Council with these important variations. As I said then and as I say again today, I support these amendments, even though as a whole I do not support the bill. These are sensible and responsible and provide additional safeguards in an extraordinarily sensitive and consequential area of Victorian law. As noted by the member for Malvern, these are commonsense and do protect people.

Firstly, there has been a backflip with respect to the secretary's authority. It should not be left, as the member for Malvern noted, to the discretion of bureaucrats as to what information is provided, particularly with serious life-and-death situations and with conscientious objection at play. Now these amendments ensure, under clause 6, that there are more limited and prescriptive requirements – that information be given in terms of contact details for the prescribed voluntary assisted dying care navigator service and the address of an internet site of the Department of Health. This is a lot more limited than before.

On the other key point, originally we had a situation where podiatrists, dentists, Chinese medicine practitioners, osteopaths and others could initiate voluntary assisted dying conversations. This has now been restricted to registered medical practitioners and nurse practitioners while ensuring that this must not now be initiated by other practitioners, such as Chinese medicine practitioners and others, as I mentioned. It is important to support these amendments, but overall I still oppose this bill.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** I acknowledge in the gallery the former member for Bennettswood Ron Wilson and the former MLC Marg Lewis.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Economy**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. Between now and the end of question time, the Labor government's debt will have increased by \$2 million. Premier, is this debt increase sustainable?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I thank the latest Leader of the Liberal Party for her question today. I thank her for her question, which is focused on the government's fiscal strategy, which I say is working. Evidence of the fact that the government's fiscal strategy is working is the fact that we are the only government, federal or state, to be forecasting an operating surplus – the only jurisdiction on the eastern seaboard. More importantly, I will share with the house –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I would like to hear the member on their feet. I would like to hear questions, and I would like to hear the answers to the questions. Members will come to order, and members will be removed without warning.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, promising is not the same as delivering.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** This year's budget demonstrated the operating surplus that is being delivered by our Labor government. But more important is what this means for Victorians – what this means for the working people and families who need their government focused on what matters most to them. When you make investments, as we have done through the budget –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very, very direct question. A minute into the answer, the Premier has not even dealt with the substance of the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier is being entirely relevant to the question that was asked of her, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** When you have a fiscal strategy, when you have an economic plan that is focused on Victorians, focused on what matters most for Victorians, it is what you deliver with those investments that counts. It is record levels of support that we are providing – real cost-of-living relief right now for working people and families – whether it is through the free breakfast programs in our schools, the free glasses or the Smile Squad, delivering critically important investments. We remember a time when Fresh Fruit Friday was cut, but we are investing in cost-of-living support –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this question was very directly about debt. Halfway through the answer, the Premier is yet to deal with any of the substance of the question. The Premier is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant in relation to sustainability of the fiscal strategy.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** That is not a very good audition if you want to be Shadow Treasurer again, member for Brighton, because the fiscal strategy is focused on where you can then make those investments that matter to Victorian families. I will tell you what those investments also go into: productive infrastructure that supports thousands and thousands of workers around our state who need a government focused on a pipeline of projects, because it means a pipeline of opportunity for them and their families.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance on relevance. We are now 2 minutes into the answer, and the Premier has not dealt with at all the subject of debt. What is the point of relevance if the Premier just picks up a word in the question and debates that? By definition that is what the Premier is doing – debating the question.

**Danny Pearson:** On the point of order, Speaker, the government has got a five-step fiscal strategy. The first was about creating jobs. The fiscal strategy goes to the very point about debt management. It is at the core of the question that the Leader of the Opposition asked.

**Bridget Vallence:** On the point of order, Speaker, the first step of their strategy is to reduce unemployment, and unemployment under Labor is going up.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a contribution to the point of order. I do not uphold the original point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I am delighted to go back to step 1 of our fiscal strategy, as pointed out by the member for Evelyn, which we are delivering. Step 1 of our fiscal strategy is to deliver jobs. I know some said in their inaugural speech to the house that it is not government that creates jobs. I remind the house that the government has a vitally important role to support working people and families to have access to a job through the investment decisions that it makes through the budget. The decisions we have made to get the Metro Tunnel built, to get the West Gate Tunnel built and to see the Suburban Rail Loop being delivered are not only supporting jobs but also supporting that vital, productive infrastructure that our growing city and state need for the future.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Premier, when will Victoria's debt stop increasing?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I am delighted again to thank the latest Leader of the Liberal Party for a question on the government’s fiscal strategy. This goes to the heart of our fiscal strategy.

**Brad Rowswell**: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to remind the Premier to use correct parliamentary titles.

**The SPEAKER**: I am not quite sure what the member is saying, but the Leader of the Opposition is who you were referring to, Premier.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Again, having the opportunity to go through in detail to the house how this government is delivering on its fiscal strategy, a fiscal strategy that is focused on supporting the investments that the Victorian community need and want, to support –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, this was a six-word question. I do not understand what the point of question time is if the Premier can speak about whatever she wants and not be relevant to simple six-word questions.

**The SPEAKER**: That is not the correct way to raise a point of order, member for Brighton.

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On the point of order, Speaker, in this chamber you have repeatedly advised the member for Brighton that he is not to use a point of order to repeat a question, yet he continues to defy you. I ask that you ask him to cease doing it.

**The SPEAKER**: As I have repeated many times, I cannot direct members how to respond to or answer questions. The Premier was being relevant to the question. She can be relevant in the sense that it includes the substantive question as well.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Through our fiscal strategy, my government is focused on an economy that works for working people and families – an economy that is about growing jobs, like we are more than any other state; growing business investment, like we are more than any other state; and building more homes than any other state. You do that by having a fiscal strategy that is working – an economic plan that is focused on Victorian people, working families and their future.

**Ministers statements: youth crime**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): We know there are no easy solutions to youth crime, but the best solution, the best approach, will always be preventing it before it starts. We know that we need to give kids the opportunity and the supports that they need to give them a future. That is why today I was so proud to be able to announce the government’s establishment of the violence reduction unit. The violence reduction unit that we are establishing here in Victoria is based on a model that is working in Glasgow and in London, where they have seen crime fall in those cities, but also importantly the violence reduction unit will bring together data and police intelligence. It will work across government to disrupt gangs and to target hotspots but also, importantly, it will work across all areas of government where we know we can prevent crime and address the root causes of crime. Whether it is in our schools or in mental health and across the vast swathe of crime prevention programs, it is about working across government and looking at new interventions to break this cycle of behaviour.

That is why I am delighted to also announce that the first program that will be supported through the violence reduction unit is the program 16 Yards. It is an incredibly powerful program that brings together young people with lived experience, yes, of the justice system and of being young people at risk. They get formally trained and are then paired with other young kids at risk not just to help them turn their lives around but to set them on a pathway of hope and personal growth for the future. That is why we are backing 16 Yards. It is also why we back our schools, we back our TAFEs and we back our hospital and health systems in only ways that Labor governments do, because that is how you not only prevent crime but support families to have a better future.

**Economy**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. Today Victorians will pay \$21 million in interest on Labor government debt. How much will Victorians be paying per day in interest next year?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): Again I am pleased to have the opportunity provided by the Leader of the Opposition to talk about the government's fiscal strategy – our fiscal strategy and economic plan that is working. The member for Evelyn provided me with the opportunity by reminding me to take the house through the fiscal strategy. The first step was about creating jobs, and we have done that, creating more jobs than any other state. The reason why this is of central importance to the question from the Leader of the Opposition is because when you are creating jobs you are growing the economy, you are bringing productive returns back to the budget and –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, this was a very, very simple question, and again the Premier is being evasive in not answering the question, on relevance.

**The SPEAKER**: The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: As I was saying about jobs, the reason why we have step 1 as a program in our fiscal strategy to create jobs is because it represents an economy that is growing, and our economy is growing. We are creating more jobs. We are also attracting more business investment than any other state. We also have achieved the second step of our fiscal strategy by returning to an operating cash surplus. And this year we have achieved step 3 as well. As I said earlier, to be the only jurisdiction, the only government on the eastern seaboard, federal or state, to have that operating surplus in the forthcoming year is significant because, again, it represents a growing economy. It also represents what we can do with that investment, because Labor governments invest.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, I will not go through every particular Speakers ruling, but there are numerous Speakers rulings that do require responders to restrict their answer from being broad. What is the point of question time if –

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

**James Newbury**: If the Premier refuses to deal with the substance of the question, what is the point of relevance?

**The SPEAKER**: I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. If the answer is not the answer that those who asked the question want, there is not much I can do about that. But I can call the Premier to relevance, and she was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Again, there is a five-step fiscal strategy that is working, and I have gone through the first three of those steps: creating jobs, returning to an operating cash surplus and returning to a surplus. As I have said before, we are the only jurisdiction on the eastern seaboard to be doing so. But we are also, to directly answer the question that was put by the Leader of the Opposition, on track to meet steps 4 and 5 of our fiscal strategy – our fiscal strategy that has that net debt as a share of the economy stabilising in the coming years.

But what sits alongside this strategy is how you deliver for the Victorian community, because you cannot just be all about cuts, like those opposite are. You just cannot be all about cuts, because not only does that shrink your economy, it shrinks opportunities. It shrinks opportunities for working people and families, who need a government that is focused on growing jobs, on growing business investment and on growing the economy, because every time you support a job you are supporting a family – a family who needs the certainty of that pay packet coming home at the end of every week. That is what remains a firm focus of my government's agenda in focusing on jobs.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:17): Just for the Premier’s knowledge, it is \$23 million each and every day next year. Will the Premier rule out further tax increases to meet the Labor government’s growing interest obligations?

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): The question from the Leader of the Opposition comes off the back of the work we have done as a government to cut or reduce taxes more than 60 times. Those opposite like to talk about tax and revenue.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual.

**The SPEAKER:** It is an assumption that everyone in this house on their feet is factual.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will be delighted to be factual for the benefit of the member for Brighton, who is currently failing in his audition to be the Shadow Treasurer. We have cut payroll tax. We have cut payroll tax for regional businesses to be the lowest in the country. We have over the last two budgets reduced the payroll tax thresholds for small business, so they are paying less as well.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, again, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. Under the 10 years of this government, the tax take has doubled.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Evelyn not to raise points of order in an incorrect fashion. It is not appropriate to make a statement to the house.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Of course as part of our plan to build more homes – those opposite block homes, we build more homes – we have slashed off-the-plan stamp duty concessions as well. They are just three examples, for the benefit of the member for Brighton, of how not only do we have a plan for the economy, we have a plan that backs investments for Victorians as well.

#### **Ministers statements: economy**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:20): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s work to encourage investment and create more jobs in Victoria. Whether it is because we are backing Avalon Airport or because we have secured the state’s first major subsea fibre-optic cable, we are seeing the economy continue to grow. Close to home to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events in Notting Hill, Victoria is now home to the world’s very first commercial quantum diamond foundry, driving economic growth in our great state’s thriving quantum technology sector. These diamonds have got the capacity to play an important role when it comes to being used for ultrasensitive MRIs, as well as being used for brain imagery. The member for Albert Park knows very well about the importance of building, thanks to NEXTDC’s new \$2 billion next generation digital campus in Fishermans Bend, which will help us position our state as a national data centre hub. The reality is that data centres will be to the 21st century what the rail lines were to the 19th century.

It is not just in Melbourne either. Thanks to the Allan Labor government, Farm Frites Australia is establishing a \$300 million Asia Pacific manufacturing base in the member for Lowan’s electorate to manufacture its popular frozen chips from up to 250,000 tonnes of Australian-grown potatoes. We are also investing in venture capital funds to give more innovative Victorian companies the support they need to grow, with a \$75 million investment in five specialist capital funds that target climate tech, health, life sciences, high-growth technology businesses and female founders. On this side of the house we are dedicated to ensuring there are opportunities for all Victorians, while those opposite are more concerned with giving all their members an opportunity to lead the Liberal Party. I am sure the member for Berwick regrets letting the new Leader of the Opposition –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to sledge the opposition.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, they are a time to compare and contrast our government with those on the other side.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to his ministers statement.

**Danny PEARSON:** I am sure the member for Berwick is regretting letting the new Leader of the Opposition call in sick to his trip to China, giving her the opportunity to stay at home and work the phones instead.

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, the minister is just defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the minister to come back again to his ministers statement.

**Danny PEARSON:** We are focused on creating jobs for Victorians and driving our economic economy forward, while those opposite are busy planning the next coup.

### Economy

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:22): My question is to the Premier. Last week the Business Council of Australia ranked Victoria the worst state to do business for the second year in a row. Is this why Victoria has had the worst unemployment rate for 19 of the past 20 months?

*Members interjecting.*

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

#### Member for Evelyn withdrew from chamber.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): It really is no surprise that a Sydney-based interest group representing big multinational companies that the member for Kew used to work for continues to not only talk down Victoria and the Victorian economy but also fundamentally misrepresent the hardworking businesses and the working people who work in those businesses and what they are delivering for the Victorian economy. If they were not talking Victoria down, they might pause and have a look at the fact that we are creating more jobs than any other state, that we have the lowest regional unemployment rate and that we are attracting more business investment as well.

Let us have a look too at what that means in real terms. I know the member for Kew might want to talk about data; well, let us talk about people. Let us talk about what an economy means for people. It was only last week that the Minister for Government Services and I were with SUBCO, who are delivering a fibre-optic cable to Victoria that will help drive the next generation of job opportunities in the digital tech sector. There was the opening too of Mondelēz's brand new and biggest distribution centre in the world. If you love your Cadbury's chocolates, get out to Truganina and check out the centre there.

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, if the Premier wants to speak about people, she should be speaking about those who are unemployed.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Eildon, I ask you not to use points of order to make a statement to the house. There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** There were also the workers that I got to meet at Hanhwa when I visited their facility in Lara with the member for Lara, a very important part of the strong manufacturing industry that we have here in Victoria. In the retail sector, the opening of Mecca's brand new store in the heart of Melbourne CBD is not only an investment in the confidence of Melbourne's CBD but yet another investment in the retail sector as well. As a former retail worker, I will always be pleased to see further investments in the retail sector as well. There are also the investments that are being made in the gas

industry, which is making critically important investments in the exploration works that are going on right now. Just today we had further announcements of those investments.

There are also those investments that government has made more directly, understanding that when government invests in productive infrastructure it is not only supporting jobs in that construction sector and in the supply chain – because for every for every 100 jobs you see on a construction site, there are 200 in the supply chain – but also delivering the productive infrastructure our city and state need for the future. If the Liberal Party had their way, there would be no Metro Tunnel, there would be no West Gate Tunnel and there would be no Suburban Rail Loop.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:27): The business council also ranks Victoria as having the highest property taxes in Australia. Will the Premier reduce Victorians' property taxes?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I note the member for Kew has asked a question about revenue that is collected, and I point to my earlier answer. We have slashed the off-the-plan stamp duty concession – one example of where we are listening to the property industry – and we know that by doing that not only do we support them but we also get more homes built. I know those opposite are more interested in blocking the building of more homes. The member for Brighton is pretty proud of himself, marching down the main street of Brighton on Sunday – very, very proud of himself, I know. How does that sit with his new leader, who supposedly is about building homes? I think the member for Brighton has a very, very different view.

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

**The SPEAKER**: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I say this: when you make commitments like those opposite have, you end up with making a choice. And the choice for the member for Kew is: what frontline services will you be cutting?

#### Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:28): While others in this house have spent the last 12 months fighting against each other, on this side of the house we have been busy fighting for Victorians and getting on with delivering the long-term transport and infrastructure projects that we know Victorians need and deserve. For almost a decade we have been building the Metro Tunnel, supporting over 7000 jobs and transforming our rail network to ensure that we can continue to add more trains more often across our network for generations to come. On Sunday 30 November we will open it, a year ahead of schedule. We have also been focused on delivering the West Gate Tunnel, a vital second river crossing, taking 9000 trucks off local roads and slashing commute times for people coming from Melbourne's outer west. Over the weekend over 50,000 Victorians came along to check it out ahead of its opening in December. In 2016 we announced that we would build the North East Link project, the missing link in our freeway network, supporting about 12,000 jobs at full tilt. We are already halfway through tunnelling what are set to be Victoria's longest road tunnels. These are futureproofing projects. They are projects that shore up our economic growth. These projects do not just connect our communities, they drive prosperity. Anyone with any economic nous knows that what you do not build today costs more tomorrow, and that means costing Victorians more tomorrow. Those opposite have shown Victorians time and time again that they are the party of division, of destruction and of cuts. Labor builds –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister knows not to use a ministers statement to sledge.

**The SPEAKER**: Minister, come back to your statement.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** Labor builds, Liberals cut. They cut services, they cut projects and they cut down each other.

**AKD Yarram**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:31): My question is to the Premier. The Premier and the minister just now were keen earlier to talk about jobs. AKD has today announced the closure of its Yarram sawmill, costing 73 workers their jobs. The company has blamed the 'sustained slowdown in housing construction'. Why must Yarram and these 73 workers suffer because the Labor government consistently fails to meet its own target to build 80,000 homes per year?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Tarneit is warned. The member for Werribee is warned. The Leader of the Nationals and the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, please cease having a conversation across the chamber.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): I thank the member for Gippsland South for his question. My thoughts are with those workers in Yarram South, who obviously are, understandably, devastated by the news and the disappointing announcement from AKD to close their Yarram operations. I understand that this is a difficult time. I am advised that there is a formal consultation process that is being worked through with the staff, and I am also advised that Regional Development Victoria is also engaging in a process with staff to support workers, acknowledging that this is a difficult time. But I also, in acknowledging that, take issue with the representation that has been made about the housing industry here in Victoria, because, again, the ABS data tells a different story – that we are approving and building more homes than any other state.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mildura, this is your last warning. The member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.**

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The statement was not mine; it was from the company itself, which talked about the 'sustained slowdown in housing construction'.

**Colin Brooks:** On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Nationals was being deliberately misleading in the framing of that question. He left out the last few words of that statement. The company's statement reflects a slowdown in housing construction across the country, not in Victoria.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The minister for public transport can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Minister for Public and Active Transport withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the minister for advanced manufacturing to raise points of order in the correct form. There is no point of order. The Premier was not debating the question. The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The minister for industry has just reminded Victorians once again what we have seen play out in the last couple of days. You cannot trust the Liberal–National parties on one thing.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Attorney-General, this is your last warning.

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

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Are we going to get to the situation in the house where we are going to have to fact-check every single question that is put by those opposite? We will be running the fact checker over the member for Kew and the member for Gippsland South. When it comes to building more homes –

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

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We are building more homes than any other state in the nation. But I will also say this: on this side of the house we know that there is still a lot of work to be done to continue to get more homes built, and part of that work is not just working with industry supporting the supply chain, it is overhauling outdated legislation that says yes to NIMBYs and no to young people getting their homes. And that legislation was in this place last week.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Eildon, this is your last warning.

**Danny O'Brien:** A point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** This legislation is central to having a 21st-century legislative and regulatory framework that gets more homes built –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Nationals, this is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** and it is opposed by the Liberal–National parties, who have demonstrated once again that they are not on the side of young Victorians who want to get into their first home. The member for Kew has had a bit to say about this today –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question. The question was about a very specific set of job closures.

**The SPEAKER:** I am aware of the question. The Premier will come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** And I say this is a test for the member for Kew. Are you going to overturn your party room or back young people to get a home?

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, nasty personal attacks are not relevant.

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

**Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:37):** Victoria has a shortage of housing, rising rents and growing social housing waiting lists. How can we possibly see jobs lost in housing construction at a time when we need more houses than ever?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:38):** I say to the member for Gippsland South that, if he was truly committed to supporting working people and families in his community, he would stand up in his party room and say, 'I support the legislation that will get more homes built.' But we have not seen that. Those opposite are opposing a critical part of the agenda to get more homes built, and that sends a powerful message not just to workers in Yarram. It sends a powerful message to every young Victorian who wants to get into a home that you cannot trust a thing that the Liberal and National parties say when it comes to building more homes.

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

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier 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) (14:39): I rise to update the house on the great work that the SEC is doing to cut energy bills for Victorians. At the last state election Victorians made it clear that they backed publicly owned renewables through the SEC, and we have wasted no time in delivering 819 megawatts of new-build renewables underway, with more to be announced soon, and we are delivering 100 per cent renewables to government operations, including our schools, saving them on their energy bills. I can mention three government schools that are saving annually between \$10,000 and \$75,000 through the SEC. The member for Pakenham would be delighted to know this, as would the member for Bass, and even the member for Nepean should be happy but will not be, because he and his new leader voted against the SEC and the cost of living is not one of their priorities.

We are helping families too. The SEC one-stop shop has already helped thousands of families across Victoria slash their bills by upgrading to efficient electric appliances. We have seen more than 10,000 rebates go to families in Werribee, slashing over \$7 million from their annual energy bills. We have done the same for families in Kororoit and Laverton, with 16,000 rebates saving \$10.6 million off their energy bills annually. The SEC is for Victorians, but these achievements are all at risk because some things just do not change. The new Leader of the Opposition, like every single one of them before, puts privatisation and profits of global corporations ahead of the interests of hardworking Victorians. Their policy is to sell off the SEC, and they will rip real energy bill savings out of the pockets of Victorians.

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be factual. She is not factual. I would like you to fact-check that one, because Joan Kirner was the one selling off the SEC.

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

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** The Allan government is doing the things that matter most to Victorian families, and that is what they will get from this government always.

**Government performance**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:41): My question is to the Premier. SEC Newgate Research shows that 73 per cent of Victorians think the state is heading in the wrong direction, by far the highest of any state in Australia. Why has confidence in the state fallen under the Premier's leadership?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. I understand very keenly from talking to many working people and families on a regular basis that the cost-of-living pressures that they are experiencing are real and are putting great pressure on them and their families. That is why, in spending time listening to working people and their families, in this year's state budget we invested – and those opposite like to talk about government investments and budgets – in significant cost-of-living support. This is what working people and families need their government to be focused on right now, which is why in this year's budget we announced that we will be introducing free public transport for children under the age of 18 from 1 January next year. It is why we are also introducing free public transport for seniors every weekend. It is why we have had another round of the power saving bonus, recognising that alongside the other energy programs it supports people, particularly people on concessions and low-income families, to manage some of the pressures that come from their energy bills. It is why – I know there was a different approach where they cut the education maintenance allowance and Fresh Fruit Friday – we invest through our schools. There are breakfast programs in every school. I have had the privilege to see kids serving breakfast through this program to their classmates, meaning that kids not only get the chance to have a meal at the start of the day but go on to be able to do their very best in the classroom over the day. The Glasses for Kids program and the Smile Squad program are practical ways that we support families with these pressures.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, may I take you to a number of rulings on page 155 of *Rulings from the Chair*, where the Speaker advised the minister to restrict their answer, even though the question was broad ranging, so that it was not a de facto ministerial statement. I put to you that this, by definition, is simply debating the question and has not in any way gone to the substance of the actual question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. It was a broad-ranging question. The Premier has taken the opportunity to advise the house of the many real Victorians that she has had the opportunity to engage with and the very real actions our government is taking in order to support the real challenges Victorians are experiencing.

**The SPEAKER:** There are many rulings from the Chair – many of them contradictory, I might point out. The Premier was being relevant in the sense that she was talking about confidence in the state.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Also we are doing work to support working people and families to have access to the health care that they need, which is why care at the chemist is such an important initiative where we are expanding the number of conditions people can get treated for at the chemist, saving them time and money in not having to go and try and see a GP to get the care that they need at the chemist. We are making these investments because we understand that working people and families need a government that is on their side, that is focused on them and that acknowledges that these cost-of-living pressures are very real for many families right now. We will remain firmly focused on these families, on supporting working people, not only with jobs, as I was saying earlier, but with real cost-of-living support.

**Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:46):** According to the same research, the performance of the Labor government was rated at just 27 per cent. Why is the Labor government failing to meet the needs of Victorians?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:46):** The irony – to be asked about polling and research on today of all days by the Leader of the Opposition. My goodness – today of all days. I think the member for Berwick is doing a very good job over there with his game face on, having to sit there and listen to a question like that. This question exposes what the Liberal Party are all about: themselves, not Victorians.

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

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** These are the same Victorians that we are focused on. Whilst those opposite are focused on themselves and not trusting each other, we are focused on delivering the real cost-of-living support that they need, the investment in frontline services that they deserve and the investment in building for the future, whether it is homes or the transport projects that our growing city and state need. We know the Liberal Party know only one way, and that is to cut, and Victorians know we are focused on them and their future.

#### Ministers statements: education system

**Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:47):** While Labor have been in government we have been focused on one thing. It is not party politics and it is not leadership ballots; it is ensuring that every Victorian student has access to live a life of purpose and to fulfil their full potential in the Education State. This year's NAPLAN results show you that we are on track and that our investments are delivering results. This year not only did we achieve the best results in the nation, we achieved the best results in Victoria's history. In a year when we delivered treaty, we have delivered the best results in the nation for First Nations students, something that on this side of the chamber we are all very proud of. Our NAPLAN results are no accident. We know when they were last in office we slipped down the rankings in NAPLAN. Our long-term investment and our long-term focus on equity and excellence are delivering results. It has meant a long-term

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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investment in mandated explicit instruction for literacy and mathematics, and it has meant mandated investments in building, updating and modernising our schools. Fifty per cent of schools being built around the country right now are being built right here under Jacinta Allan in Victoria, the Education State.

But we are not stopping there. Important cost-of-living support is making sure that the hungry child does not go without – that, through the school breakfast program, they have a full tummy to get through the day of school. It is making sure that the child that has vision impairment can access the Glasses for Kids program and also making sure that every child has dignity on day one at school through our affordable school uniform program – a brand new, clean school uniform. And we know there is always more to do. Next year we will deliver our 100 new schools in 2026, we will remove the requirement for parents to buy digital devices in primary schools and we will be the first state to introduce screen limits in primary school classrooms. This is the investment of a long-term, stable government. We know Victorians know we stand – *(Time expired)*

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:51): (1398) My question is to the Minister for Police. When will Victoria Police increase patrols and active enforcement on Jumping Creek Road to deter dangerous driving and ensure the safety of local families who are living with the constant risk of another crash? Residents on Jumping Creek Road in Wonga Park are increasingly fearful for their safety following yet another serious head-on collision last week. In this most recent incident a driver was taken to hospital with internal injuries and broken ribs. There was also a baby in the car who was, thankfully, unharmed. Residents have reported that there has been no visible increase in police presence despite repeated requests for enforcement on this dangerous stretch of road. They continue to experience daily high-risk behaviour, including drivers overtaking at high speed and ignoring the 60-kilometre-per-hour limit. Local families deserve proactive enforcement that prevents the next tragedy rather than responding to it.

#### **Monbulk electorate**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (14:52): (1399) My question is to the Minister for Planning regarding Boral Limited's proposed expansion of the Montrose quarry. How will the community's concerns around dust, particularly silica dust, noise, traffic, increased hours of operation and environmental impacts be taken into account as part of your assessment of the environmental effects statement referral for this proposal? Boral Limited has applied to expand the Montrose quarry by approximately 12.5 hectares, extending its operational life by an estimated 30 years and bringing the proposed boundary within approximately 500 metres of a primary school. It is already within just over a kilometre of two other primary schools. The incredibly close proximity of the proposed expansion to local schools and early childhood learning centres and residents, the removal of the ridge and bushland, which provide natural buffer zones from the dust and noise, as well as the environmental impacts of the proposed removal of bushland are worrying for us all. I share the local community's concerns and strongly oppose Boral's proposed expansion. I look forward to the minister's response.

#### **Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:53): (1400) My question is to the Treasurer in the other place on behalf of Ella Besgrove. Ella has three businesses in the Harrietville township, and Ella applied for the \$5000 grant for each of those businesses after the tragic circumstances that occurred in Porepunkah. Ella was unsuccessful in all three of those applications. I understand all the businesses in the township of Porepunkah itself were successful, but for any business on the fringe of Porepunkah evidence suggests only 14 per cent of those businesses have been successful. The information that I seek is for the Treasurer to revisit those applications and tell us how many of those businesses have failed in their applications.

**Tarneit electorate**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (14:53): (1401) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Minister, how will the West Gate Tunnel improve travel times for Tarneit residents? Last week I had the pleasure of joining Premier Allan and the ministers for transport infrastructure and also for roads and road safety, along with several colleagues from Melbourne's west, to take the first end-to-end drive through the West Gate Tunnel. Testing is still underway on the final safety and traffic management systems, but we are now in the final stretch before the tunnel opens to the public in December. Once complete, the West Gate Tunnel will deliver faster and more reliable trips into the CBD, cutting time lost to congestion and providing an alternative to the West Gate Bridge. Importantly, it will also remove around 9000 trucks a day from local roads, improving safety and reducing noise for families around Melbourne's west. This is a major upgrade for our community. It is one that will transform city-bound travel for Tarneit residents. I know many locals are eager to see it open.

**Rowville electorate**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:54): (1402) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, when will you instruct the Department of Transport and Planning to conduct an urgent upgrade of the pedestrian signal green walk duration times at the intersection of High Street Road and Stud Road in Wantirna South, across both the High Street and Stud roads crossings, and reprogram them to ensure the green walk crossing times are long enough to allow safe and dignified passage for all pedestrians, including people with a disability? I raise this issue on behalf of the constituents at the Latvian aged care, who have expressed serious concerns about the relatively short pedestrian crossing green light walk duration at this intersection. This intersection is a major arterial crossing managed by VicRoads. Victorian pedestrian safety guidelines recommend that the flashing red man phase should allow at least 1 second per metre of the crossing width, especially in locations used by older people or people with disabilities.

**Kororoit electorate**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (14:55): (1403) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Can the minister provide details on recent and upcoming road safety infrastructure investments in my electorate of Kororoit and how the upgrades will improve safety for local residents? Kororoit, as you know, is one of the fastest growing communities in Melbourne's west, with increasing traffic volumes around schools, shopping precincts and new housing estates. Residents consistently raise concerns about congestion, pedestrian safety, school crossings and the need for safer intersections and a smoother traffic flow. Understanding the government's investment in road safety infrastructure, including upgrades, crossings, lighting and intersection improvements, will reassure local families that safety remains a top priority.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Kororoit, you asked for an action. Can you reframe your constituency question to be a question?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** What upgrades has the minister made to improve safety?

**Brunswick electorate**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:56): (1404) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Last year I asked question on notice 931 about increasing frequency on the Upfield line, and the minister responded that opening the Metro Tunnel would increase capacity on the Upfield line by freeing up space on the city loop. The government's 2016 business case for the Metro Tunnel also includes references to increasing the frequency of the Upfield line by installing a turnback at Gowrie station, but the *Age* reported this year that this plan has been scrapped. The Metro Tunnel opens at the end of this month, but we have heard nothing yet about increasing Upfield services at peak hour. We have been waiting for years. Now the Metro Tunnel is complete, will the Upfield line run more frequently at peak hour?

**Werribee electorate**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (14:57): (1405) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What are the next steps to uplifting the bus services which were funded as part of the most recent state budget? Recently I was joined by the minister to announce the early launch of bus route 194, which will operate from 7 December, earlier than originally planned. This amazing outcome has meant that the growing communities of Harpley, Mambourin and Wyndham Vale will now have a connection that will go through to Wyndham Vale train station, helping them travel further across our state for work or leisure. It is advocates like Mahtab who advocated for the service and drivers like Yu from CDC who will deliver these services. I have had many of my constituents get in touch regarding better transport options for my community, and I would like to quickly thank Alok and Mayur from King's Leigh estate for their advocacy, Anish Chatteraj from Riverwalk estate and Jody Christo, president of the school council at Riverwalk Primary School, for their tireless advocacy. I look forward to working with the minister as I continue to fight for our growing community.

**Hawthorn electorate**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (14:58): (1406) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. What support, including any grants or similar programs, might be available to assist the South Yarra Football Netball Club returning to Fritsch Holzer reserve in Hawthorn? By way of context, in 2022 the government commenced a \$24 million upgrade of the facilities at Fritsch Holzer reserve, which is managed by Swinburne secondary college. Until works began the reserve had long been the home ground of South Yarra Football Netball Club, and there was a clear expectation that they would return once the redevelopment was complete. The path back, however, has not been straightforward, and after the works I understand the school received strong interest from several private school-affiliated clubs able to outbid South Yarra. Thanks to Boroondara council and an important intervention by the then Minister for Education, this was resolved. Since then negotiations between the council, the Victorian School Building Authority and the club have stalled. I ask the minister for such information as will assist.

**Ripon electorate**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (14:59): (1407) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, how can the Victorian government partner with VicTrack to restore old railway stations across Ripon for community use? There are several old railway stations across my electorate that communities want to see restored, in Talbot, Carisbrook, Dunolly and Buangor. Recently I caught up with members of Talbot Action Inc, who want to see the beautiful old railway station in their town restored for local artists, writers and community groups. We have seen this done beautifully elsewhere, in St Arnaud, Avoca, Inglewood, Creswick and Clunes, and we want to do more of it. VicTrack have dropped the ball on maintaining these heritage buildings, and communities want to see that change.

**Bills****Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments***Debate resumed.**

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the amendments made by the Legislative Council be agreed to.

**Question agreed to.**

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

**Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (15:01): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. Victorians know that not only do we have a crime crisis but we have a retail crime crisis in this state – a retail crime crisis that is not new. It is not something that has come out of nowhere. It has been ongoing. It has been deep. It has been shocking, frankly, in the examples, the high-profile examples, that we have seen. But more than that, every single day across this state we are seeing cases where people are dealing with things at work that they should not have to deal with, and that is why the coalition has been calling for action on retail crime. For some time – and for a long time – we have been calling for action. When the Premier committed in May last year to doing something, the coalition, though sceptical, took the government at its word that it would do something and it would do something with haste, because you cannot see the level of offending in this state that we are seeing without taking action – not words, not press releases, but action.

The most recent data shows that in the year to June there were 99,114 offences in a retail store setting, an increase of 20 per cent in one year. So between the commitment 18 months ago and this bill being put to the Parliament today we have seen a huge increase in retail crime in Victoria, which is why the coalition has called for action. Retail thefts were up 26 per cent and retail assaults were up 21 per cent according to recent Crime Statistics Agency data – 21 per cent on retail assault and, as I said, 26 per cent on retail theft. That goes to the broader picture of crime and the increase in the number of offences that are occurring in this state. There have been substantial increases in crime, not just year on year. In addition to retail crime, of which there were basically 100,000 offences in the year to June, there were 638,000 criminal offences in the 2024–25 year, which was 200,000 more than when Labor was first elected – 200,000 more, a third more, roughly, than when Labor was first elected. Total offences have increased by 47 per cent, crimes against people are up by 63 per cent and property and deception offences are up by 38 per cent.

There is a crime problem in this state, and one of the biggest crime problems in this state is in the retail sector. The government in no way can suggest that this crime problem is not clear, because in addition to the shocking incidents on our screens, in media reports and, frankly, reports from people we know who tell us about what they go through and have gone through, we have also seen the biggest retailers in the country talk about that retail crime crisis in Victoria. Leah Weckert from Coles said:

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

The Rebel Sport chief executive said:

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

Reece chief executive Peter Wilson was reported as saying that Victoria was 'the toughest place in the country' to do business. The co-founder of Seek Paul Bassat said:

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

These very, very senior executives are calling out and have been calling out the retail crime crisis in Victoria. What they have called for is real action that will solve the crime crisis in the retail sector. This bill will not do that. This bill will not fix the retail crime crisis in this state, and at its core any bill that comes to this chamber which seeks to solve a problem should be measured on whether or not it will solve that problem. Though the coalition will not be opposing this legislation, we do want noted very, very clearly and do want recorded very, very clearly our strong view that the retail crime crisis in Victoria will not be solved by this bill.

After waiting some 18 months for the promise of a bill, how disappointed, frankly, people will be to see this bill and find not only the measures contained therein to be mixed and, as I will go into later, not actually substantially going to solving the issues it seeks to solve but an entire piece of the solution missing from this bill, and that is workplace protection orders. It is an entire piece needed to address the retail crime crisis. That is why under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

We seek to do two things to this bill, which I will talk about in more detail. Increasing the penalties contained in the bill is the first part – increasing the measures – but the other is introducing a workplace protection order regime into Victoria. It is no good to simply introduce proposed laws, which are, frankly, nothing more than a press release realised through a draft bill, to try to solve a problem. But then the government announced, as part of that solution, the need for workplace protection orders at the eleventh hour, only to backflip on the need for workplace protection orders so spectacularly that they could not even draft the measures for this bill. As we know, this Premier has been fighting workplace protection orders every single day. Every single day, this Premier has been fighting against the introduction of workplace protection orders in this state.

I will start by going to what is in this bill and talking through the measures – because it is quite a simple bill in terms of the measures therein – and then go to a number of sector experts in terms of the Law Institute of Victoria and the Criminal Bar Association, who I thank for the very, very speedy assessment they have been able to do on this particular bill. It is unusual for a bill to be introduced and not be considered by this chamber for 14 days to give the broader community time to think it through. The measures in this bill were promised 18 months ago and, frankly, were rushed into a bill that has been put to the house only days ago. It is unfortunate that the sector has been unable to look at this bill and to have legal experts look at this bill with any real time. Not that introducing a bill that has increased punitive measures does nothing – it does something, which is why we are not going to oppose it – but we have not given the broader community time to consider the measures in the bill. I can understand why. Firstly, the Premier had a promise to acquit, which the Premier was clearly dragged to in the final days of this year. There was a commitment that this bill would be acquitted this year, so a bill that was not fully formed has been brought into this chamber. The Premier has admitted that by way of acknowledging that the retail crime crisis will only be solved with workplace –

**Iwan Walters:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, contributions need to be factual, and verballing the Premier and the hard work of the worker protection group, which has led to this bill coming to the Parliament, is not within standing orders.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** There is no point of order.

**James NEWBURY:** If I can go to the overview of the Law Institute of Victoria's assessment of this bill and highlight their assessment, these measures:

... may unnecessarily overcomplicate the Crimes Act as the proposed offending conduct is already captured through other offences within that Act. Further, a judicial officer is already empowered to consider the specific circumstances of such offending when evaluating an application for bail or handing down a sentence.

More specifically it says certain sections in the proposed act:

... may inadvertently create gaps in the framework by only criminalising abuse directed at those in a 'customer facing role' ... for example –

but not exclude –

accountants, bank tellers ... therapists and policy experts ...

et cetera. What the law institute has said is that this bill gets it wrong, and I will go into detail why. I made the point after seeing the bill very, very early on that this bill creates an offence that exists. In terms of an indictable offence, what this bill does is create an assault offence, in simple terms, where assault offences exist. Frankly, this bill, with that particular offence, does very, very little. It does not

create something new. There is no new power that cannot be dealt with by common-law assault. To make it even clearer, the common-law assault maximum sentence is five years. Right now if you commit an indictable offence of assault, through an indictable offence, in terms of common-law assault, you would be subject to, or you could be subject to, exactly what this so-called new provision creates. The power exists. When the Premier was producing social media talking about how a new power will exist, how a new law will exist to protect people from assault and how the maximum for that offence will be five years, it exists in law. As the law institute has pointed out, assault exists in law, and so all this does is create a new offence on top of an existing offence. It does not mean that the original law of assault is somehow better or different by nature of this bill passing. As the law institute has said, the Crimes Act already captures common-law assault, with a maximum of five years. It is absolutely clear.

The second thing the bill does is add ramraiding, in short, into a new definition of ‘aggravated burglary’. In shorthand, ramraiding will be classified or could be classified as aggravated burglary. As the law institute has said:

... the offence of Aggravated Burglary ... would likely already capture a ‘ram-raid’ in certain circumstances. For example, where the offender commits a ‘ram-raid’ during business hours when there are staff, or there is reason to believe there are likely staff, in the building.

Again, the institute has pointed out that this new offence is already captured in law. So we now have two offences created by this bill which are not new – they exist in law – which is the point that has been made repeatedly over recent days.

When it comes to the summary offences created by this bill – summary offences in relation to assault and threats – these are, as the law institute again points out, ‘substantially similar’ to offences already contained in the Summary Offences Act. What the law institute makes clear – as does the Criminal Bar Association, and I will go into that as well – is that this bill will not fix the retail crime crisis, because frankly it is a bill that is more about acquitting a promise of 18 months ago than creating substantial or meaningful reform that will go to the core of this crime crisis and introducing measures that will actually create change. When you introduce a bill that rebadges or renames existing offences under the act, yes, you get your social media tile and, yes, you get to put out your press release and make the claim that you have put out your press release, but what you do not do is go to the core of the problem. That is what is missing from this bill: solutions to the crime crisis that will actually go to solving the crime crisis, especially when it comes to retail.

In relation to the Criminal Bar Association, I do make the point, as has the association, that my engagement with them was the first time that anybody had sought to go to them to seek their advice on these proposed measures. The government did not bother, and in fact that was a consistent piece of feedback, that the government did not bother to consult with legal experts. When you understand what is missing in terms of this bill and how this bill is simply a rebadging of existing offences, you can see why. I do not think it was by accident that the government did not consult with legal experts. I think it was by design, because they did not want to be told that this bill is nothing more than a press release. This bill is not creating something substantial or something new. In fact the experts would say it is not necessary, because these offences currently exist.

The Criminal Bar Association has described the indictable offence created by this bill as being ‘of little utility’ and one ‘which would otherwise be captured by the existing offence of common-law assault’. Again, it is of little utility and an offence that is captured by common-law assault. I think it is very important for the house to understand what is missing from the bill and that these offences are already captured. That is what the legal experts are saying; they are saying that these offences exist. When it comes to the assault matter that I spoke about, the Criminal Bar Association has described the new offence as being of little utility, and further:

Were a ‘customer-facing worker’ to be physically assaulted (or even threatened) in connection to their employment without the introduction of this new offence, there would be no impediment to the laying of a

charge of common-law assault. Given this, it is difficult to see what the introduction of this new offence will achieve.

Those are not my words. That is the Criminal Bar Association, who actually, frankly, know more than the government and deal with this subject matter every single day.

... it is difficult to see what the introduction of this new offence will achieve.

I mean, it will achieve something. It will achieve the acquitting of the Premier's press release – there is no doubt about that. But what it does not do is create meaningful reform or bring about a new offence that sends a very strong signal.

That is why when it comes to the offences proposed by this legislation, the coalition have moved amendments, because we would say that the offences in this bill require a level of toughness that is not contained therein, and that is why we have moved amendments. On the assault provision, we are seeking to insert a new clause where the penalty moves to, if the assault does not cause physical injury, four years; if the assault causes a physical injury that is not a serious assault, six years; and if the assault causes a serious injury, 11 years. That is in line exactly with the New South Wales model. So when the government looks at these amendments and when the other place looks at these amendments in detail, we make clear that these provisions are modelled off the New South Wales measures, where penalties have teeth. There is no point – and we have seen it over the last week – introducing new measures where those penalties do not have real substance. That is why, through textual amendment, the coalition has moved a series of amendments to increase those penalties.

You can see, I suspect, the government has been forced to draft a two-year review into certain offences created in the bill – purely, I suspect, because the union has required that buy-off because the union is not happy with what is being proposed in this bill. The union has been calling for a bill and calling for a bill that is tough, and the only reason that that two-year review has been built into this bill – I think we can all see clearly – is because the union has required it by way of buy-off, because the union not only wants these measures but wants penalties that are tough.

**Luba Grigorovitch:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Brighton knows only too well to be factual. I would ask him to come back to the bill, actually be factual and not put the words of a union into his mouth.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** I will rule on the point of order. There is no point of order.

**James NEWBURY:** I thank you for your ruling, again. There is frustration when the truth comes out. The big piece, as I have said a number of times, that this bill is missing, which is contained in our textual amendments, is the creation of WPOs. Workplace protection orders are needed, and it is very, very good that the Premier, finally, after kicking and screaming, has agreed that workplace protection orders are needed. So late, though, was the backflip that it could not be contained in the bill. So we have helped, and we have drafted the amendments for the government – we have by way of amendment provided them for the government – and the other place, including the government members, will have an opportunity to decide whether they agree with the implementation of a workplace protection order system or whether they will vote against it, because workplace protection orders are needed.

I will give you one example of a lovely young constituent who lives in my electorate who went through hell because of the horrific experiences she faced from a customer of a major retailer who had a fixation on her. Eventually this really hardworking young woman took a personal protection order out, and many, many times the order was breached, not just in the workplace but also at her home. This poor young woman was followed home, and on numerous occasions the order was breached. She obviously sought the help of police, who at every occasion tried to help as best they could with the resources available to them. They could not always help immediately because of resourcing, but they did everything they could to help. There were occasions when I also made representations on her

behalf, because she went through hell because this person had a fixation on her. What struck me is that she battled this initially alone. What she needed was the big company that she worked for to have the power to seek a protection order and for that company to help her in enforcing it. When a big retail company manages that process and also enforces that process, through pushing to ensure that the order is kept up with in terms of the safety of the individual, we can be sure that there will be a greater force behind that order in terms of the capacity of that organisation to help that employee, which is why we have been calling for workplace protection orders.

We have not been the only ones calling for workplace protection orders. I know that the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association has said:

If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

Well, I guess you do need a brain to have it in this bill. The ACT police on workplace protection orders have said that in the eight months that WPOs have been in use in the ACT:

... police have noticed a "total change in behaviour where [the offenders] have just disappeared off our screens".

That is a fix for that element of the retail crime crisis. 'Disappeared off our screens' – that is systemic change. We need more than press releases. We need solutions that have substance.

The coalition will not be opposing the bill, but we have concerns about the substance of what is introduced by way of this bill. As the legal experts who were not consulted by the government have said, this bill does not create substantially new powers that do not currently exist in the Crimes Act or the Summary Offences Act. They exist. That is what the legal experts say. That is not what I am saying; that is what the legal experts say. But what is missing are workplace protection orders, which is why we have sought to move amendments that increase the penalties so the penalties around the offences have teeth but also introduce workplace protection orders. That regime being proposed will be an opportunity for this government to show whether they really do support the workplace protection orders, because if they vote against it, it just shows that the last-minute backflip was nothing more than just another press release from the Premier. We will not be opposing this bill.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (15:31): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025, a bill I feel very passionately about as someone who started working in retail for my parents in their video library when I was eight until I was 20 and then later supported retail and fast-food workers at the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association, or the SDA, and lastly, as the owner of a grocery retail store and a cafe in the hospitality industry.

I noted in the member for Brighton's contribution there was much discussion about consulting with lawyers. I do want to state here that we have spent a lot of time and energy consulting with the workers – the people in retail, in hospitality, in fast food, in transport, those workers who are on the front line who have been coping abuse from customers. We have been consulting with them, the unions who represent them and the retailers and employers in those industries, along with Victoria Police and the courts, in developing this. I know several of my colleagues will speak to the experience of transport workers in their contributions, and I look forward to hearing those, but I would like to focus on retail and fast food in the limited time that I have to contribute. This does not in any way, though, diminish the importance of this bill to workers within the transport industry.

As anyone who has worked in retail or hospitality would attest, whilst the work can be quite satisfying at times, it is not easy and it is certainly not well paid. Retail and food services are two of the lowest industries for median weekly earnings. Just under two-thirds of retail assistants are women, and over 20 per cent of employees across both industries are aged 15 to 24. These are industries that have a higher proportion of women and young people in customer-facing roles, who are some of the lowest wage earners in the country. The work they and transport workers do is essential, and we all had a

clear lesson in that during the pandemic. But despite the importance of the work, they have been subjected to a rise in abusive, threatening and criminal behaviour from customers.

A recent survey of SDA members showed that 87 per cent of workers experience abuse from customers, and that was national. No-one deserves to be subjected to this level of abuse, least of all the hardworking frontline staff across these industries. The worker cohort that this legislation which we have introduced is designed to protect is defined broadly as including all workers that perform customer-facing duties for a retail or hospitality operator and workers who perform customer-facing duties for landlords or managers of retail shopping centres. Cleaners in food courts and security guards are also protected, whether they are direct employees or labour hire. It also includes customer-facing workers for or as a passenger transport service provider, which includes commercial passenger vehicle and public transport drivers, and operators and workers located at transport premises, such as bus stations, tram stops and train stations.

The bill that we have before us seeks to address the rising scourge of customer violence and aggression through three new offences. One is indictable, and two are summary. The bill will amend the Crimes Act 1958 to introduce a new indictable offence of assaulting or threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker and will carry a maximum of five years imprisonment, which is consistent with the maximum sentence for assault of an emergency or custodial worker. It differs from the general assault offence, which already exists in section 31 of the Crimes Act. It differs in that it does not contain the requirement that the accused person intended to commit an indictable offence, and therefore this will actually apply to a greater range of conduct, which seems to have been missed by the member for Brighton in his contribution.

The bill will also amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two new summary offences, which are assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties, and using:

... without lawful excuse –

... language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting, or

otherwise engage in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting –

towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with ...

the worker's duties. Both of these summary offences have a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment, which is a higher penalty than for equivalent general offences.

Establishing a summary assault offence is consistent with the existing tiered approach to assaults based on the seriousness of the conduct, and it ensures there is a range of specific offences to protect customer-facing workers from assaults. The offence for threatening and abusive words and conduct is based on an existing offence of the Summary Offences Act. But unlike the existing offence, the new offence does not require the conduct to occur in or near a public place, and that will ensure that it is protecting workers who work alone, such as a cleaner in a storeroom. The worker harm offences will apply to conduct that occurs in connection with the performance of the worker's duties. This captures a broad range of circumstances, including while the worker is on shift or on a break, is arriving at or leaving work, or if the conduct is in response to something done by the worker when performing their duties.

We do know that leading up to Christmas is a time when violence towards customer-facing workers increases, which is shameful in and of itself. So this bill provides that the worker harm offences which I have just covered will commence the day after royal assent, with the aim that the offences can protect workers at this time of heightened risk. I am very pleased that the opposition will not be opposing this bill, which will ensure that it gets seen through as quickly and swiftly as possible, so that this law comes into effect absolutely as soon as possible.

The bill will also amend the Crimes Act to ensure that ramraiding, which is the use of a vehicle to forcibly enter a building to facilitate theft or criminal damage, will apply to all buildings, retail or otherwise, and it ensures that ramraiding will be captured by the serious offence of aggravated burglary

with its 25-year maximum penalty. Ram raids can deeply traumatise workers even if they were not there at the time. Knowing that the place where you work has been ramraided does not fill you with confidence when you turn up to work; it makes people feel incredibly unsafe – never mind those who are actually there and have experienced it occurring in their time. The offence for ramraiding will commence a little bit later, on 16 March next year. But in the meantime police can continue to charge current offences such as destroying or damaging property, driving offences and conduct endangering persons.

We also know that at times those who are abusing customers or threatening them may be vulnerable themselves, and we do understand that any new offence has the potential to disproportionately impact vulnerable cohorts. With this in mind, the bill provides different mechanisms to ensure individuals' vulnerabilities are appropriately considered when applying the new offences. For the worker harm offences to apply, it will be necessary to prove that the accused knew or was reckless as to whether the victim was a protected worker, and this mental element must be proven before an accused is found guilty of these offences. It really is an important safeguard that we have built into this. Victoria Police officers will continue to exercise their discretion to issue a caution instead of charging a person, where appropriate, or to recommend an offender be considered as part of a criminal justice diversion program. This bill does not limit a court's judicial discretion to determine appropriate sentences either, and courts will continue to consider relevant sentencing factors, including any vulnerabilities of the accused and impacts on the victim.

It is a really sad indictment on society that we have had to introduce these laws. Poor customer behaviour has long been something which workers in service industries have tolerated, but in recent years we have witnessed a terrible rise. There are some truly awful stories out there. It is a sobering statistic from the SDA survey in 2023 of 4600 retail and fast-food workers that the most likely cohort to have experienced verbal abuse, at 92 per cent, was women aged between 18 and 25 years, followed by 90 per cent of women aged 26 to 35 years. And verbal abuse is not the limit. 12.5 per cent of respondents to that survey said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer within the 12 months prior. Once again, it was young female workers aged 18 to 25 who reported the highest levels of physical violence, at 17 per cent, and young male workers of the same age followed closely at 16 per cent. Last year I met with former Woolworths assistant customer service manager Shefali Batta, who told me about a violent customer incident in which she was confronted by a woman wielding a knife attempting to steal groceries. The woman slashed at Shefali's stomach as she tried to stab her and a security guard, and it was very evident that she still carries the trauma. Sadly, her story is not unique. It is for workers across retail, fast food, hospitality and transport that these laws are being made, to protect each and every one of them, because no-one deserves a serve and everyone deserves to go home in the same physical and mental condition that they arrived at work in.

I look forward to the worker protection orders, which will be introduced next April to Parliament. They will send threatening and violent customers out of the store and see them banned from that workplace. There is a bit of time needed – and I notice the clock is running down quickly – because we need to ensure that when we develop that legislation we do so carefully and in consultation with Victoria Police, the courts, the unions and all the retailers involved as well. We will not be so reckless as to accept these amendments put before the house today. We will develop it properly with all the machinery of government behind us, and I look forward to it coming in next year. I commend the bill to the house.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (15:41): I am delighted to rise and make some comments on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. The Allan Labor government has finally admitted that there is a crime crisis in Melbourne, and we have seen that over the last couple of weeks as bills have started to come to this place relating to crime. Today it is a bill about crime against retail workers and fast-food and hospitality workers, and can I say that as recently as 23 October, only a month ago, the Premier was still saying there was no law and order crisis in Victoria. She said, 'There is no law and order crisis in Victoria.' But something changed. She

has also said the city is safe, and she has also said there is no law and order crisis in Victoria. But something changed. Was it more police on the beat? No, I do not think it was more police on the beat. Was it a reduction in the crime rate? No, I do not think it was.

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Ovens Valley is misquoting to the house, just like the member for Gippsland South did during question time.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** There is no point of order.

**Tim McCURDY:** So what changed? As I was saying, it was not more police on the beat, and it was not changed –

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**Tim McCURDY:** Nothing changed in our meeting today. The changes will be coming in yours very soon – all those backbenchers who are getting a bit touchy. But what changed is the polls. The polls changed, and all of a sudden the Premier said, ‘Well, we’d better look at this crime crisis a little bit differently to how we’ve been seeing it. We’d better get some colour and movement going.’ And now we see that colour and movement and new legislation coming in last week and this week about action stations, because ‘The polls are looking sick. We’ve got to be seen to be taking action, because the Premier’s going to be in trouble if we don’t take action.’ Let us be clear: Labor only govern via the polls. They do not govern for all Victorians. They look at the polls, and they base their decision –

**Belinda Wilson:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I ask the member on his feet to come back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Tim McCURDY:** I am still clearly on the bill. We are talking about crime in retail, fast food and hospitality and the lack of what the government has been doing about it, and as I said, this government does govern by the polls. And let us look at Labor focus groups. Labor focus groups –

**A member** interjected.

**Tim McCURDY:** I have not changed our leader. Labor’s focus groups have more to say than half the backbenchers on that side of the house, and I have got to say there are a few backbenchers getting a bit jumpy because the polls are not going their way and there are a few going to lose their seat. They have been reading the tea leaves, and they are starting to say, ‘This is not going to look good for me. We’d better change. We’d better do something about this crime crisis that’s going on in Victoria.’

As I say, in less than a month we have gone from ‘no crime crisis’ to a crackdown on criminals, and even last week we heard them talking about locking up 14-year-olds for life. That is just ridiculous. That is not going to happen; it is never going to happen. I would not support it, and I suspect nobody in the Labor Party would ever support 14-year-olds being locked up for life. That is just another stunt, I would say. The government likes to continue to talk tough, but it will never happen.

In terms of retail crime let us look at the frontline services. We talk about frontline services in terms of police, ambos and firefighters, and that includes CFA firefighters as well. They are our frontline services. But, I tell you what, retail workers are frontline services as well. They are at the coalface, and they work where the friction is every day of the week. They face the angry shoppers, and they are frightened. They are very concerned about their safety and their welfare.

I have met with some of Australia’s largest retail outlets, national brands, over the last month – think Woolworths, Bunnings, Coles, IGA and Kmart – the big national brands that go across Australia. When I asked them about their retail crime, one of those companies said 75 per cent of their retail crime is in Victoria – 75 per cent of everything nationally is in Victoria. Another company said theirs is not that high, with only 68 per cent in Victoria, and another one said only two-thirds of theirs is in Victoria. That goes to show that national companies are saying, yes, there are retail safety concerns

right across Australia, but there is no doubt Victoria has the highest amount of crime against retail workers. Sadly, as the member for Brighton talked about, this bill will not fix the problem.

We have heard the Premier is not prepared to put her job on the line to say that if crime does not go down, she will give up her position. All she wants to do is more stunts to make sure they are seen to be acting on crime, but they are really doing nothing about it, when it is all said and done. As the member for Brighton also said, it is missing some key elements. It is missing workplace protection orders, and that is the major flaw in this bill. We have seen it before time and time again with these rushed bills. We will be back here again next year beefing them up, tightening them up, to try and get some genuine laws rather than just a stunt that says, 'Look what we're doing. Look over here. This is what we're doing.' At the end of the day, it is not going to change what we have got happening in the retail crime sector at the moment.

On the workplace protection orders, South Australia and Western Australia are preparing to draft workplace protection order laws, and the New South Wales Premier has said he is closely looking at the laws in the ACT. We know that calls for workplace protection orders have been consistent and strong. Even the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association of Victoria secretary Michael Donovan said on the 12 October this year:

If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

**Steve Dimopoulos:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, can you please check that the honourable member is actually the honourable member – that there is no kind of body double? Quoting a union leader in the Labor Party is very, very unusual. I am just not sure that it is actually him.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** There is no point of order.

**Tim McCURDY:** A union representative said:

If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

Further to this, Woolworths, IKEA, Myer, Kmart, 7-Eleven and Bunnings jointly wrote to the Premier on 7 October 2025 and called for workplace protection orders, asking that the Premier implement legislation that enables courts to issue enforceable orders restricting high-harm repeat offenders from engaging in violence, threats or harassment in and around retail workplaces. That was coming from those big national providers that I spoke about before.

Even in the Australian Capital Territory, as we heard the member for Brighton say, an ACT police sergeant on 12 October said that in the eight months that workplace protection orders have been in use in the ACT, police had noticed a total change in behaviour where the offenders have just disappeared off their screens. Sadly, Victorians will not do what is needed. They will do the minimum and be seen to be acting, but at the end of the day I suspect we will be back here next year doing more reforms to support retail workers – because they deserve the protection. The Law Institute of Victoria is also concerned. I will not go through all the listed details – the law institute has mentioned its concerns about the bill – because I know the member for Brighton has done that.

Our amendments include trying to get two genuine outcomes. One is increased penalties for assaulting workers in line with New South Wales, those being without bodily harm, up to four years; with bodily harm, up to six years imprisonment; and reckless wounding or grievous bodily harm, up to 11 years. I think the amendments are genuine changes that could make this bill a better bill. They actually serve the purpose of what it is trying to do – that is, cut down on offences against retail workers. That is what we are trying to do at the end of the day. I do not think this bill will do that at the end of the day. I think we will see a lot of colour and movement but not much change. The proof will be in the pudding, because I suspect we will be back here next year, again talking about retail workers and how we can protect them better, because this bill will not be doing that.

**Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:51):** It really gives me immense pleasure to rise to speak to the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025.

When I think of those industries of retail, fast food and hospitality and of transport workers, I automatically think of the very fine unions that represent those workers. A very, very big shout-out to the members of the SDA; the United Workers Union, my union, the UWU; the Transport Workers' Union; and of course the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) as well – all customer-facing workers who live amongst all of us in our communities. The very essence of this bill enacts our government's commitment to give these customer-facing workers greater protection against assaults, threats and abuse.

Public abuse of retail workers has always been an issue. For many of us, we probably started our very first jobs as casual workers working after school in retail. Most of us faced that, but we all know that it has got much, much worse over the last few years. Many of us who have represented union members in the past know as well that these customer-facing workers who have faced tremendous abuse – assaults and the like – have had to turn to their unions to seek assistance. The union movement, together with the great political side of the movement, is helping to enact this legislation so that it can be passed through both houses, and that is a terrific thing.

The government has heard distressing firsthand accounts from retail, hospitality, fast-food and passenger transport workers across Victoria who have suffered abuse and violence in their workplaces. It is just not on. It was confirmed by a Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association survey, which found that some 87 per cent of workers had experienced abuse from customers in the previous year. That was compared with the 2021 survey figure, where reports of physical violence against workers had risen by 56 per cent. The Australian Retailers Association also reported in June 2025 that 51 per cent of retailers said they experienced physical abuse monthly or more often and 87 per cent of retail workers reported experiencing verbal abuse.

It is clear that something needs to be done and stronger protections need to be enacted to curb this trend. These workers keep our state running, and they are essential to the functioning of our society and our economic needs. They do not deserve to be treated poorly or to feel unsafe at work. Our government is committed to improving the way our justice system protects these workers and ensuring the penalties are proportionate and appropriate.

The bill sends a clear message that poor behaviour will attract a corresponding criminal justice response. It contains three new offences to address violence and aggression against workers – one indictable offence and two summary offences. First is the amendment to the Crimes Act 1958, which will see a new indictable offence for assaulting or threatening to assault a customer-facing worker and will carry a penalty of up to five years in jail.

The bill will also amend the Summary Offences Act 1966. The new separate summary offences account for lower level assaults and for conduct that threatens or intimidates workers, such as with profanities or obscene or insulting language. That will carry a penalty of up to six months in jail. The summary offences will have a substantially lower threshold for conduct than the more serious indictable offence, which will give police a range of options to protect workers, depending on the circumstances.

Under this law you will be protected if you work front of house or back of house, at the check-out or in a storeroom, kitchen or bar. If you work for a workplace that has customers, even if you are a contractor, such as a cleaner, or work in security, it will also apply. The bill will also amend the Crimes Act to ensure ramraiding – that is where a vehicle is used to steal goods – is captured by the serious offence of aggravated burglary.

The next tranche of these laws will be the introduction of workplace protection orders. That will be following further consultation with industry, unions, police and legal and justice representatives, and that work is actually taking place now. Under these orders, if you are violent to retail workers, you can be banned from that workplace.

As I alluded to earlier, many of us know someone in or in fact have been in customer-facing work. Whether it is a supermarket worker, a fast-food or retail employee or a transport worker, the importance of these jobs cannot be understated. Workers in these industries work really hard. They do so to make sure that we have essential items, to help us find our way on our transport system or even to remember our coffee order. I thank all those working in these industries across my electorate and even in Parliament House as well. They keep our communities and our state running. We saw the importance of these workers throughout the pandemic, when they continued to perform their jobs during a time that was uncertain. They were essential workers.

But we all know that these workers can experience the worst of society in their public-facing roles. These roles are filled by a wide range of workers at all stages of life. Often they offer flexibility. However, that same flexibility can also attract workers who may be more vulnerable, such as younger teens entering the workforce for the first time or older adults who are transitioning into a new type of job. In fact most retail workers are women and a third are under the age of 24. Retail crime has a devastating impact on these Victorians and the businesses that they work for. Through this bill our government, the Allan Labor government, is making it clear that deliberate acts of violence and abuse that occur in connection with a customer-facing worker's duties are just unacceptable.

The bill has been informed by consultation with a worker protection consultation group which comprises Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions and union and industry representatives as well. The worker protection consultation group has helped to oversee the development of this legislation, ensuring that we hear from a wide range of people and get the balance of these changes absolutely correct. As I acknowledged before, those unions – the SDA, the United Workers Union, the RTBU and the Transport Workers' Union all do absolutely incredible work for their members, particularly those members who are in these customer-facing roles. I know that those unions work tirelessly to combat unfair treatment in trade union industries, many of which are public facing, not only to fight for these types of laws but also to achieve real gains in wages for these workers, to ensure they have safe workplaces and to ensure that they have the dignity and respect that every single Victorian deserves. Hats off to them all.

This bill demonstrates the crucial role that unions play in protecting workers and pushing for change when problems occur. Every Victorian deserves to feel safe at work, and that includes people serving customers, driving trains and buses or working in restaurants and shops. These laws will commence in time for the Christmas season, which we know is one of the worst times for bad conduct against retail and hospitality workers. In many cases these changes should bring some peace of mind to parents who are sending their kids off to their first jobs, and we want these kids to have the very best possible experience as they enter the workforce. I hope that this bill serves as a strong deterrent and makes it clear to anyone who believes it is acceptable to abuse or assault a worker that they should think twice. On that basis, I commend the bill to the house.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (16:01): It is a pleasure to rise and talk about the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. Eighteen months ago the Allan Labor government promised to introduce worker protections to support retailers that were experiencing unprecedented crime. We waited, we waited and we waited. We were told we were going to see the biggest changes that were going to protect retail workers. We are now 37 sleeps before Christmas, and we see a bill before the Parliament that has so many holes in it. It has more holes than Swiss cheese. Compared to other states it clearly shows that this government is all about a press release but lacks detail and has left workers unsafe just before the busy Christmas period, when we know that many shoppers are frustrated. It is busy and you see lots of issues within the shopping centres and the precincts. This could be a great opportunity to strengthen the legislation to protect retail workers and customers, but instead, this government has failed.

That is why I support the amendments that are proposed by the member for Brighton, which talk specifically about introducing workplace protection orders. We know that for the first time in a long time we have got both employers and employees on a unity ticket. You have got the SDA, the unions,

and the Australian Retailers Association on a unity ticket to say, 'Let's get worker protection orders in place, and let's get them now.' The proposed amendments before the Parliament today talk about ensuring that there are worker protection orders similar to in the ACT and South Australia, because by doing that we can ensure workers are safe immediately.

A press release came out on Monday 17 November from the Australian Retailers Association that welcomed the Liberal–Nationals announcement to tackle retail crime:

"It's encouraging to see both sides of Victorian politics recognise the scale of the crisis and take action," Mr Rodwell said. "Retail crime is not a political issue – it's a community safety issue, and an urgent one."

The ARA and NRA strongly support the Victorian Opposition's call to bring forward the passing of Workplace Protection Order legislation.

"The model for this legislation ... is already successfully operating in other jurisdictions. There is no reason for delay," said Mr Rodwell. "If the Opposition introduces –

workplace protection orders –

... we urge the Government to work constructively to pass it – because every day without these protections is another day retail workers are left at risk."

I want to repeat that: every day without these workplace protection orders is another day retail workers are left at risk. That is why this government should support these orders.

On top of that, we have seen the government's announcement that they are going to provide some PSOs to work volunteer hours – volunteer hours – to try and ensure retail precincts are kept safe. It is not good enough to have volunteer hours, to have many of these PSOs from transport networks work in retail, doing additional hours and doing effectively a second job because we know that retailers are struggling to keep safe. That is why the Liberal–Nationals announcement for a 200-person strike team, in addition to the PSOs on the transport network, will ensure safety for retailers. Victorians should not have to choose whether they are safe on a transport network or in a retail environment. We should be able to have both, and that is why only the Liberal–Nationals will ensure that you are safe on the streets, safe in your homes and safe in your workplaces. This government has failed to do that, and that is why we urge this government to do it and do it properly: introduce the workplace protection orders that we are suggesting in this amendment.

The other amendment is to ensure that those that assault workers have serious consequences, not the six months that has been proposed but similar changes to what New South Wales have done – changes that incur penalties of between four and 11 years. If you assault a worker, you should get serious consequences. Six months is not good enough. Even with these proposed changes, we will have the weakest laws in the nation when it comes to protecting workers. It is not good enough. If the government were serious about protecting workers, they would look at what New South Wales are doing and they would implement the same. We have an opportunity to look at what is happening in the other states: workplace protection orders and the same in terms of assaults on workers.

The third part of all of this is to remove the dangerous knives that are being used in shopping precincts. We are seeing machetes being used in Northland, in shopping strips, in Highpoint and in many of our big shopping centres and precincts, and this government is not doing enough to get those dangerous weapons off the streets. PSOs are one thing, but we want to make sure the PSOs have the wand and search powers to be able to do this. Jack's law would do that. Jack's law, which has been introduced in Queensland, has seen over a thousand dangerous weapons taken off the street through stop-and-scan powers to stop individuals and scan them, to take the weapons off them and to charge them. That is the opportunity that we could have with Jack's law, which would be introduced under the Liberals, and we encourage the government to follow suit. The government has failed to do that. It is not good enough having the wands if you do not have the powers, so we are suggesting that as part of all of this we have a specific Jack's law to deal with that.

The other failure in this bill, which should be part and parcel of it, is the reporting of retail crime. We know that many of the smaller shops have to close their store and go down to the local police station to report crime because police are stretched and do not have the resources to turn up at the stores. A proper online reporting system would allow retailers to properly report crime when it happens and report theft when it happens, particularly with the huge increase in theft that we are seeing in stores. We have seen a 30 per cent surge in retail theft over a year, thousands and thousands of thefts happening each and every year – a 6 per cent year-on-year increase in retail theft. We are seeing an 87 per cent increase in worker verbal abuse. We are seeing workers abused and stores having theft happen in unprecedented amounts. You only have to talk to the likes of your IGAs, who are on a WhatsApp group because they do not have the police protection that they need and have to close their stores when there is a crime, because what we see is many of these gangs go from store to store to store, with weapons, to threaten staff, to take whatever they can, to turn stores upside down and to traumatise people and leave victims behind. It is not good enough that they have to run a safety program on a WhatsApp group.

We need an online crime prevention program that reports crime, along with PSOs to protect some of these stores, and also assault legislation and worker protection legislation. That would be a plan. This government just has a headline. It is no use having a press release; we need a plan. This government has been running around and running around. They are taking our PSOs off our public transport network, leaving it unsafe. It will be a lucky dip as to whether you see a PSO on a train station, because they are being relocated to work additional hours – volunteer hours – in retail precincts.

This government do not know what they are doing. They do not know whether they are Arthur or Martha. Why can't they be both? Let us be both. Let us manage our retail precincts. Let us manage our train and public transport network. That is what the Liberal-Nationals will do. We have a plan. We have been working with the SDA and we have been working with the retailers, and that is what they have called for. Although we say thank you for the half-arsed plan we have here, it would be great if we had a better plan that was properly done and properly worked through, like was promised 18 months ago. You see, if this happened and this plan came overnight to react to the crime crisis, you would understand. Eighteen months this Premier has had – this absolutely incompetent, lazy Premier who has been waiting for 18 months and done nothing. She has failed to keep retail workers safe, and that is why Premier Allan needs to do her job –

**Katie Hall:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just in terms of parliamentary language, I do not believe 'half-arsed' is appropriate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke):** I uphold the point of order, and I remind members to keep using parliamentary language and refer to members by their proper titles.

**David SOUTHWICK:** This is a hopeless, useless, weak government that is not keeping retailers and workers safe at all. They have failed, and Jacinta Allan needs to wake up and do – *(Time expired)*

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (16:11):** It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak after the member for Caulfield. The words 'don't let the truth get in the way of a good story' could never be so accurate as in the last 10 minutes that we have just heard, but I have got to say, it absolutely gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025.

I must say, as a former secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, this is one campaign that we have been running for many, many, many years, and it was very much received with open arms last week from not only the current secretary, but everyone across the transport network. This is something that is very important, and the words could not be more true: you do not go to work to be in harm's way. You go to work to be safe, to be respected, to be there with dignity like you deserve, and that is what this bill is aiming to promote. To the members of the mighty Rail, Tram and Bus Union – my former union – the Transport Workers' Union (TWU), the United Workers Union (UWU) and of course the

Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association (SDA) and all customer-facing workers that are out there that keep Australia and Victoria moving: we thank you and we say that we see you and that we know you should not be in harm's way.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in the workplace, and this bill will protect our customer-facing workers who assist to keep Australia moving, and that is what is important. The bill creates new offences under the Crimes Act 1958 and the Summary Offences Act 1966 that seek to prevent assault, threats and abuse against customer-facing workers in passenger transport, in retail, in hospitality and in fast food. These reforms implement the government's commitment to give vulnerable customer-facing workers greater protections against assault, threats or any abuse, which is completely and utterly unacceptable in society, but especially in the workplace.

Customer-facing workers in the passenger transport industry have for too long been subject to abuse, and I have seen that firsthand; it is not something that is okay. It was made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when customer-facing workers continued to perform their duties during a time of great uncertainty, that customer aggression and violent behaviour against these public-facing workers in Victoria were on the rise. National data indicates this, with the Australian Retailers Association finding that 51 per cent of retailers said that they experienced physical abuse and 87 per cent of retail workers reported experiencing verbal abuse – again, completely unacceptable.

Over 50 per cent of retail workers are women and more than a third are aged between 15 and 24 years old. These are people that we should be protecting and looking out for. It is a combination that increases the retail worker cohort's vulnerability to violent repeat offenders. Unfortunately, too many of us have seen this occur, and I say to you that if you do see it occur, stand up. Also, do not forget to thank your retail worker or your hospitality worker or anyone that is there pointing you in the direction of which way to go. A simple smile or a simple thankyou is a very easy gesture to give, but one that a worker will definitely appreciate.

I want to commend the Premier for all of the announcements made last week and the announcements that I am sure will continue, along with the ministers who have also done a lot of work in this space, because these amendments matter. These bills that we are putting up and we are currently discussing and debating are incredibly important. Campaigning for safety on the job for all public transport workers was one of our major campaigns when I was the secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. It is why I am so rapt with the announcement that was made last week and so rapt that this has come to the house today, because public transport workers should be able to expect to go to work every day and every night without ever being spat on – yes, they often get spat on – and without being verbally abused, which also happens as a daily occurrence, threatened or, even worse, physically assaulted. Some of the photos that I have seen from public transport workers coming home from work bruised and battered or worse still are just horrific. It is unacceptable. They have the right to expect, just as much as all other kinds of public-facing workers, dignity and respect in the workplace.

I could talk to you about why I think this is so important, but instead I want you to hear the stories of a few people concerned. I have spoken to many Rail, Tram and Bus Union members since the announcement last week, and I picked out just a few. There is a customer service officer who was working behind the customer service desk at Epping station. One evening an angry member of the public spat through the slit of the plastic screen at her, spitting on her before he attempted to smash the screen in. That could have been someone's mother, someone's sister, and a member of the public did that because he was having a bad day. Then there is an authorised officer – too often, authorised officers in my opinion are the unsung heroes of our network, and too often they go unrecognised and get abused – who was yelled at by a passenger, angry that they could not bring their bike onto the train, looking for someone to take it out on. Who did they take it out on? The authorised officer. There is the station officer who just a few weeks ago had a knife pulled on him late at night – again, completely unacceptable. There is the train driver who was verbally abused before being physically assaulted while she was between her shifts at the depot station. All of these people that I have mentioned are public transport workers and proud RTBU members. They have names, they have faces, they have

loved ones and they have friends. They have houses to go home to and families to go home to at the end of the night. They do not go to work to be in harm's way or to cop abuse. It is unacceptable. Literally, not one day goes by when a public transport worker in our state is not subjected to either verbal abuse or worse still at work, and that is why this bill is so incredibly important. Everyone has the right to be safe and respected at work and to feel safe and respected at work – everybody, in this place and out there. This bill sends a clear message that such treatment will attract an appropriate criminal justice response.

The bill contains three new offences to address violence and aggression against workers – first of all, an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new offence of assaulting and threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker. The bill will also amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two new summary offences: a summary offence of assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties and a summary offence of using without lawful excuse language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting or otherwise engaging in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties. Both summary offences have a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment, and this is higher than for the equivalent general offences.

The new indictable assault offence distinguishes itself from the existing general assault offence in section 31 of the Crimes Act 1958, and it does not contain the requirement that the accused person intended to commit an indictable offence. This means that the new offence will apply to a greater range of conduct than the general assault. The bill will amend the existing offence of aggravated burglary in the Crimes Act to capture this conduct. The amendment applies to all buildings, not just retail premises, and will ensure that the aggravated burglary offence, with its 25-year maximum penalty, can apply to ram raids.

In relation to who is protected by this legislation, the worker cohort is defined broadly to include all workers that perform customer-facing duties for a retail or hospitality operator. Workers who perform customer-facing duties for landlords or managers of retail shopping centres, such as cleaners or security guards, are also protected by these offences. Contractors, including labour hire, will also be protected.

This bill really goes to the depth of what we as the Labor Party believe in. We believe in dignity, we believe in safety, we believe in respect and we believe that everyone in this society is absolutely equal. You, as our people who keep Victoria and Australia moving, deserve our thanks. You deserve the certainty that every minute that you spend at work you will be treated with humanity, with compassion and with respect. You deserve to know that you will come home from work and be able to see your loved ones and be safe. Again, to the members of the SDA, the UWU, the TWU and the mighty Rail, Tram and Bus Union and all customer-facing workers: I thank you. I commend this legislation to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:21): I also rise to address the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. In doing so I note a number of things. Firstly, I agree with parts of the previous member's contribution insofar as it is an obligation upon members of this house and it is an obligation upon this government to keep people safe. It is an obligation upon those who put their hand up to be representatives of their community to treat everyone with dignity and to treat everyone with respect and for that to be reflected in our state's law. But I have a fundamental disagreement with the circumstances and with the posture that this government has adopted in order to get us to this point.

Retail crime is not something that just started last week, it is not something that started last month, it is not something that started last year; it has been there for some time. The Australian Labor Party, the party of government, for the time being at least, in this state, noted it in May 2024 at their Labor Party state conference. The now Premier promised to better protect retail workers from assaults and abuse. That was May last year. We are more than 12 months on from that promise. In that time the retail

crime data tells no lies and speaks for itself. There has been a 41 per cent increase in threatening events in Victoria whilst, comparing that to New South Wales, there has been a 13 per cent increase in New South Wales. Many people in the retail sector have been quite vocal about the need to change the law and to get serious about the law. The Coles chief executive said:

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

The Rebel Sport chief executive said:

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

The Reece chief executive has said Victoria is 'the toughest place in the country' to do business. The co-founder of Seek said:

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

So from a retail trading perspective, with the best intent and heart of small and family businesses across this state in mind, this is not a new problem, and I know that there are good people within the union movement in this state and in this country who have been asking this government to do more than they have been doing about this circumstance for some time also. Good on them for doing it.

But I look to other jurisdictions. This bill does not increase the penalty for assault on workers; it merely tries to expand the definition of 'indictable assault', effectively making no tangible changes that would protect retail workers. The penalties proposed in this bill are also not in line with other jurisdictions. For example, in New South Wales there have been a number of amendments to laws, with the key penalties including up to four years imprisonment for some, without bodily harm; with bodily harm, it is up to six years imprisonment. For reckless wounding it is up to 11 years in South Australia. Similarly, there is a prescribed occupation, being retail, and there is a maximum sentence of five years in that jurisdiction. Assault causing harm: there is up to a seven-year possible penalty in South Australia. Then you look to Victoria, where the government has announced these plans, has brought forward legislation, and there is a six-month summary offence for assault and/or verbal abuse. Yes, there is five years under the existing assault penalty, but the proposal here is not as strong or in line with other jurisdictions.

I think the question that Victorians need to ask themselves is this, and it is a very simple question: who do you trust to protect retail workers? I ask that question of Victorians. I ask that question of retail workers, who are the unnecessary, the avoidable and the innocent victims of crimes which could have been prevented if this government actually gave a stuff about them. I say to them and I say to every Victorian: who do you trust to do this? This has not been a new phenomenon. Retail crime was not invented just last week. Why has it taken the government so, so, so long to get to this point? Why in that time have there been so many unnecessary, innocent victims of retail crimes? I think to my own community, where just two weeks ago there was a firebombing in Mentone – innocent victims again, businesses decimated, destroyed. One day of not being able to trade is a kick in the guts to any small business in this state, let alone the three- to 12-month period that these small businesses are experiencing at the minute. We are not talking about theory here, we are talking about the impact of inaction and the impact of crime on the lives and the livelihoods of Victorians. It is a particularly serious topic. I say to Victorians, as I say to you: who do you trust?

By one measure, what Labor are seeking to do is to effectively say, 'No, believe us when it comes to these matters. We can be trusted to understand this circumstance and to deal with it in an appropriate way.' What they are effectively saying is, 'It's okay. Trust us to give the arsonist who has just thrown a petrol bomb at a small, innocent business owner the fire hose in order to put it out.' That is what is being asked by this government, and we will not have a bar of it. Victorians know who can be trusted. They know who takes their personal safety seriously. They know who cares for them seriously. They know that when Labor say, 'We care about people and we care about their safety,' Labor cannot be

trusted, because over the last 11, almost 12 years they have proven themselves to be untrustworthy when it comes to community safety.

There is a crime crisis in this state that is the making of this government. It is the making of inaction by this government. Yes, I fully see it – last week there were a number of policies announced. Why did it take so long? Why have there been so many innocent people, innocent victims, in businesses and in homes impacted by crimes, perhaps unnecessarily? Why have there been so many people whose lives have been destroyed before Labor has recognised that they should do something about it? Arguably a lot of the stuff that was announced last week is but window-dressing, and again, Victorians know the truth of this. Those innocent victims of crime on this government's watch know the truth of this.

The Allan Labor government cannot be trusted to keep our community safe. They cannot be trusted to keep our small businesses safe. They cannot be trusted to understand the impact of these crimes on our community and on our small businesses. I say to Victorians: if you want a government in this state that actually understands the heart of this issue, if you want a government in this state that is on your side and in your corner every day of the week, whether it comes to crime and community safety or whether it comes to paying down our debt and growing our economy, Labor have had a crack, and they have failed. It is Victorians who are paying the price for the last 12 years of the Allan government, a Labor government. We are only 12 months away from the opportunity to elect a new, fresh, cohesive and responsible government in this state, and I implore Victorians to consider that.

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (16:31): I proudly rise today to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. This bill will introduce stronger consequences for those who assault or abuse front-facing workers. It will protect workers from violence, threats and abuse and make retail, hospitality, fast-food and transport workers safer. The bill contains three new offences to address violence and aggression against workers: firstly, an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new indictable offence of assaulting or threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker; and secondly, two amendments to the Summary Offences Act 1966, with a summary offence of assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties and a summary offence of using, without lawful excuse, language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting or otherwise engaging in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties. Both summary offences will have a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment, and the new indictable assault offence will have a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment, which is consistent with maximum sentences for other assault offences, like assaulting an emergency worker or custodial worker.

I often say to young people across Ripon that working in hospitality and retail is a great way to build up your customer service skills and that it teaches you so much about human behaviour. I remember applying for a job at my local IGA supermarket as soon as I turned 14 and nine months old, and I worked on the check-out and in the deli for over three years after that. It was during the John Howard era, when WorkChoices was running rampant and workers protections were weakened by individual contracts over collective bargaining. I was earning next to nothing and did not know my rights, but I was still so proud to be earning a wage that was my own. The job taught me so much, especially how important it is to be kind to strangers and how much people love to complain about the weather in country Victoria.

Unfortunately nowadays, though, far too many workers in supermarkets are seeing the very worst of human behaviour. The same goes for retail workers, hospo workers, bus drivers and train conductors. They are being subjected to an unprecedented amount of assault and abuse. It is not on, and enough is enough. Every single person has the right to go to work without being subjected to violence, intimidation or abuse, yet far too often workers across Victoria are experiencing exactly that. Bus drivers and taxi drivers in Ripon should be able to do their jobs safely. V/Line workers on the Maryborough and Ararat train lines should not be subjected to violence. Retail workers in Wedderburn

and Beaufort should feel protected as they serve the public. But the reality is that too many of them face threats and aggression simply for doing their job.

The data backs this up as well, with 51 per cent of retailers having this year said that they experience physical abuse monthly or more often, and 87 per cent of retail workers report experiencing verbal abuse. Between January and August 2023 there were also 381 reports of assault against taxi drivers here in Melbourne, compared to 319 in the same period in 2022. This offending has a lasting impact not only on workers but on their families and the entire community. This is why this bill matters. It sends a clear message that anyone who abuses or assaults a front-facing worker will now face penalties of up to five years in jail. This is not about being punitive for the sake of it, it is about protecting workers and making sure that they can go home safely to their families.

I want to sincerely thank the unions across Victoria who campaigned tirelessly for these changes. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the mighty Transport Workers' Union; the Rail, Tram & Bus Union; and the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association. Their tireless advocacy and their commitment to workers have led to these reforms, and our government is proud to partner with them to get it done.

The Christmas period is fast approaching, and we know that stress levels can rise at this time of year. People are racing around trying to get everything done. They have got a big to-do list, they are trying to smash it out and they are also tired and exhausted at the end of the year. Many are having to navigate family dramas or figuring out how to afford everything that their kids want, but there is absolutely no excuse ever for taking out stresses on a worker. With that in mind, our government have worked closely with Victoria Police to make sure that they are ready to operationalise these offences as soon as possible. The bill provides that the worker harm offences will begin two weeks after the bill receives royal assent. This rapid commencement will be an important measure to put an end to the mistreatment and harm that some members of our community choose to direct towards our frontline workers. Our government will also monitor these reforms via a review of the offences within two years. This will make sure that the new offences are working as they should and will enable the government to consider the broader impacts of the reforms, including any adjustments or other steps that need to be taken.

Workers in retail, hospitality, fast food and passenger transport are essential to our society. They are the beating heart of our economy, and we would be, frankly, stuffed without them. We saw this no more clearly than during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was these workers that kept us fed, connected and safe. Now it is time that we keep them safe, especially those workers who are just starting out in the workforce. The member for Sandringham was asking the chamber earlier, 'Who has retailers' backs, and who has hospo workers' backs?' We know on this side of the chamber it is only a Labor government that actually, genuinely has their backs. This bill will crack down on those who assault or abuse workers, and it will show them that there is a clear consequence for their actions. It will provide a stronger deterrent against deliberate acts of violence, and it will protect front-facing workers. Our community has been calling for these changes and we have been listening, because unlike those opposite, who are completely focused on themselves today and every single day, we are focused on workers rights. We want to see, on this side of the chamber, workers of all ages coming home safely, and we want to see respect for the people who serve us our meals, who drive us home safely at night, who check us out at the supermarket and who keep our transport system running.

Some may argue that harsher penalties alone cannot change human behaviour, and they are right to an extent. Legislation is only one part of the solution, but it is a critical part, because when the law reflects our values, it sets a standard for the community. It tells people what is acceptable and what is not. It gives workers the confidence that the system is on their side. Alongside this bill, our government will continue to invest in education, awareness and prevention to stamp out violence from the very beginning. We will work with employers to ensure that workplaces are safe and supportive, we will work with unions to make sure that workers know their rights and can stand up for themselves and we will work with Victoria Police to ensure that enforcement is swift and effective.

I want to also acknowledge the workers who have spoken about their experiences. It is not easy to relive moments of abuse or violence, but by sharing their stories they have helped shine a light on a growing problem. Their voices have driven this reform, and their bravery will mean that workers are better protected into the future. This bill is about fairness and it is about justice. It is about sending a message that in Victoria we value the people who keep our state running. Whether you are a teenager working your first job at your local supermarket, like I was, or a bus driver with decades of experience, you deserve to be safe at work and you will always be supported by the Allan Labor government. You will absolutely not be supported by those opposite, who are completely obsessed with themselves and not for the people of Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (16:40): I would like to say it is my pleasure to rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025, but some of the concerns have already been illustrated by my colleagues, including the member for Ovens Valley, who I think only got half the speaking time due to the amount of points of order that were called on him. This is of particular interest, I think, to every Victorian and everyone who represents Victoria in this place at the moment, given that retail crime data shows an increase of 41 per cent in threatening events in Victoria compared to a 13 per cent increase in New South Wales. But any increase in this space is incredibly alarming.

I have got two step-kids. One works in fast food and one works in retail. My parents own a retail business. I worked in all of those. I worked at McDonald's when I was 15. In fact I was a founding crew member at McDonald's in Swan Hill when that was first built, back in the last century. I worked in hospitality. I am sure you did too, Acting Speaker Edbrooke. I always had a side hustle working in pubs, but that was during the early 2000s and 1990s when threats toward us were not really a thing. I would get the odd complaint working at Macca's, because we know that if you go through the Macca's drive-through every now and then it is like throwing darts at a dartboard, depending on what you get in the bag when you leave the place. It just was not a thing. I do have concerns now, particularly for my step-kids and teenagers and young people and anyone working in retail, fast food and hospitality now, because it can be quite dangerous. It really can.

In fact there have been a couple of interesting articles of late in the Mildura News. Stuart Kavanagh covers the court cases in the Magistrates' Court in Mildura quite closely every week. There were two that I noted, one on 10 December and one on 13 December, which got me thinking when this bill was introduced. As has been stated by the Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Ovens Valley and the member for Sandringham, our main area of concern is that the bill does not increase the penalties for assaults on workers. It merely tries to expand the definition of 'indictable assault', effectively making no tangible changes that would protect the retail worker.

This is a concern given the stories that have been in our local press of late, as I mentioned earlier. One of those spoke about a young woman who has been barred from every supermarket in town after a shoplifting spree. She was accused of swinging a fist at a young worker at an IGA after they asked to inspect her bag, which was doing their job, because it was suspected that she had stolen from the store. The magistrate, Mr Coghlan, referenced a recent 'tsunami of offending' when it came to shoplifting and pointed out that this particular person had hit 'every supermarket in town', sometimes in a violent fashion. He also said:

There has been a significant surge in violence inflicted on workers at retail stores, not just in Mildura, but across Victoria ...

Magistrate Coghlan went on to say:

She seems to have hit the whole lot in Mildura, Coles, Ritchies and Woolworths ... (it) seems ... the prosecution case is particularly strong ...

In this case the accused was actually refused bail, surprisingly, and was remanded in custody until the next court date.

There was another one. This was from 10 November, and again Stuart Kavanagh was the reporter. This one was in Mildura: a mum accused of stabbing two sports store staff members with a syringe during an alleged 10-day shoplifting spree. I know the store; it is where I buy all of my sports gear, including my socks. This is INTERSPORT in Mildura. I could not ever cite the staff in there for having bad customer service, in fact quite the opposite. It is exceptional customer service from Speedy and his entire team, and there is always plenty of stock. It is actually a great store. Could you imagine, though, while you are just at work one day at INTERSPORT, being stabbed with a syringe? This was a part of another alleged spree of shoplifting across Mildura at stores like Chemist Warehouse, Coles, SportsPower, INTERSPORT and First Choice Liquor. This went on during the whole month of October, and it was during the alleged incident at INTERSPORT that the person was accused of injuring those two staff members as they confronted her about the alleged shoplifting. I have actually been in INTERSPORT when a crime has been committed. It is just in alarming plague proportions. In this case the accused was bailed. The accused was bailed, again, after stabbing two retail workers. Bailed – I have no words.

What is missing from this bill is one of the most needed elements to address the current retail crime crisis, and that is workplace protection orders. The state government has been opposed to the measure and has only backflipped in the last week because of overwhelming pressure. The lack of that measure in this bill is the clearest indicator that this backflip was rushed. It has been noted how important workplace protection orders are in actually seriously addressing protecting retail workers and hospitality workers. The importance of introducing this is to implement legislation that enables the courts to issue enforceable orders restricting high-harm repeat offenders like those that take a syringe into a sports store, clearly with the intent of doing harm – and yet she is on bail. This will probably end up on that crime Instagram channel that I have seen myself pop up on before as well.

The mind just boggles at what is happening right now, with media releases and no serious attempts to actually curb what is occurring on the ground. You can read the data, but we all know in this place you can make data sing any way you want. Who the government should be listening to are the people on the ground, not the data. Again, you can make it sing any way you want to, but it does not help retail workers in any way, shape or form more than it does now, because police have, like I said, already banned these two particular offenders from going into these stores. But police cannot patrol the CBD or Deakin Avenue in Mildura every single day. They have got enough on their plate, and they are under-resourced. They plead to the magistrates that community safety is at risk – and still bail. It just defies belief.

Imagine how the parents, families and the rest of the team feel, not just at Coles, at Ritchies IGA, at SportsPower, at Chemist Warehouse, everywhere, because there is this crime epidemic through retail, through hospitality, when they are still getting bail and there is a press release, a press conference, a fancy slogan to say they are doing something about it but nothing that will actually make a difference to any of this, because it is already being done, as is illustrated by these two cases in particular. What is the point? How are workers supposed to feel protected in their workplace? It is a joke.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (16:50): ‘Listening to locals, working in government, fighting for our community’ is my mantra, and the protections enshrined in this bill that we are discussing today reflect the work I have done in the Werribee electorate to address those crime concerns raised with me. It is all well and good to yell and shout about crime like those opposite do, but the real work takes listening and learning from those on the front line. The latter, as I will explain, is where the law reform in this bill comes from, and it is the same way this government will continue to address crime in our community. During the pandemic, the front line between the community and basic needs became more apparent. In my community, many people could not stay at home because they were essential workers, keeping us fed and safe. That front line during the pandemic became clearer, but the abuse these customer-facing workers copped increased. Many people on both sides will talk about their experiences working in customer-facing roles. It is usually that first step into employment, and as a vocational education teacher and year-level coordinator I usually heard the worst experiences of the

young people that I taught. It is not just the Karens or the people having a bad day coming up to them in the store and making their lives hell; it is the people who set out to abuse someone on that day. None of my ex-students or any young person deserves this.

One of the key issues in this work over the last 12 months has been defining the worker cohort. We have already introduced strong protections for emergency service workers in this context, which is something this bill works with. In relation to who is protected by this legislation, that worker cohort is defined broadly to include all workers that perform customer-facing duties for a retail or hospitality operator, or for transport, as we have heard. Workers who perform customer-facing duties for landlords or managers or retail shopping centres, such as cleaners in a food court or security guards, are also protected by these offences. Contractors and labour hire will also be protected. That worker cohort also includes customer-facing workers working for or as a passenger transport service provider, which I will get to in a moment in terms of the advocacy I have heard from them too.

For my community in Wyndham, ABS statistics show that people in these roles form a significant part of the local workforce: 11,553 people work in retail trade; 12,823 people work in transport, postal and warehousing; and 5192 people work in accommodation and fast food – so a huge chunk of the worker population in Wyndham. Earlier in the year, I was contacted by the management of Sims supermarket in Werribee – it is a great supermarket with an excellent deli – and the union representative of those workers. People regularly targeting the store, not only stealing but also abusing staff in the process, had left that amazing team feeling vulnerable. I liaised with our local Victoria Police to share their concerns and fed in the experience to the government team and the minister responsible, who were considering how the law can further protect people from this. Theft is already illegal, and police in our community do act on complaints as appropriate. But it is clear we need to make protections against the abuse of customer-facing workers clearer.

A week ago we saw a distressing incident at Woolworths in Werribee, with young people allegedly abusing and threatening workers. I had already been in touch with management before this incident and raised concerns that they had to police and fed that experience into government. However, this incident made it clear to me that workers like Amit and Mili, with their teams, need a strong message sent with the law that it is not okay for people to abuse or threaten customer-facing workers. We met online last week, and I also discussed the next steps with these reforms: a scheme for workplace prohibition orders to keep those people away from the stores and help stop that re-traumatising from the behaviour that we saw from those people. I welcome the Premier's announcement that this will be the next step for the government and for the working group that has been working on this.

Listening to and learning from the experience of the community is what this bill does. It was informed by close consultation with the worker protection consultation group, comprising Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions and union and industry reps. There has been a lot of discussion about the particular new offences that are created in this bill. There is the amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new indictable offence of assaulting and threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker, which is building off that work that this Parliament did a few years ago, led by the Labor government, around the emergency service worker provisions.

It will also amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two new summary offences: assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with that worker's duties; and using without lawful excuse language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting or otherwise engaging in conduct in a threatening – and all those other things – manner towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with that worker's duties. It is a fairly big list, but I think it is important that it captures those different circumstances that these workers may face.

It is not as clear-cut as someone coming up and yelling at them at the check-out; it can be that persistent behaviour of people coming back in to always have a go at them about different things. Amending the Summary Offences Act to make it clear that this is not okay sends a strong message to people who may be choosing to go in and be, essentially, serial pests towards these workers. It is sad that we have

to have this kind of message, but it is something that we have seen increasingly since the pandemic, as people have seen these workers become so clearly that front line between the rest of the community and those essential needs like food and groceries and transport.

I would also like to reflect on the fact that a lot of our transport workers in particular cop this. People do require public transport in circumstances where they may be more at risk of offending and they may have no other options. But that is no excuse to have a go at bus drivers like Yu, who we met with last week with the minister. He has been working for over a decade as a bus driver in the Wyndham area, and when we spoke to him about these sorts of laws, he said that that will send a really clear message to those people who seek him out to have a go at him at his job.

On Monday before Parliament I took a whole heap of letters to our local stores and down to our Metro Trains counter as well to have a chat to the staff down there about what these provisions mean for their everyday work, and the overwhelming majority spoke about how this sends a message. Yes, we want to have laws that are applicable in court and where there is a clear sentence and there is justice out of it in that sense, but I think it is also important to send clear messages when it comes to the type of behaviour we want to see in the community. We have seen this with standards in schools around parent behaviour and student behaviour in particular. There has been an increase in people just being generally unfriendly and uncooperative in society. Having laws like these not only has that mechanism to hold people to account but also sends a clear message to people who are thinking of doing the wrong thing.

The summary offences have a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment. That is higher than for general equivalent offences. The new indictable offence distinguishes itself from existing general assault in section 31 of the Crimes Act as it does not contain the requirement that the accused person intended to commit an indictable offence, making it a lot easier to try and achieve a prosecution in that sense. The bill also amends the Crimes Act to ensure ramraiding is captured by the serious offence of aggravated burglary, something that we have seen in the Werribee area, particularly around tobacco shops. This offending is not just done at night anymore; it is done during the day while there are workers in those stores, and it is important to have a clear law that will cover that particular type of offending.

Walking around the community on Monday as well, talking to these different workers, it was clear that one of the key things that they are seeing from this government is that we are coming out on the ground and listening to them. We are going out and doing this work with the worker protection consultation group. It is not just about what we see in headlines, it is about doing the work on the ground. Usually I would draw a contrast between this government and those opposite when it comes to doing the work on community safety. However, they would rather spend their time and advertising budget talking about me or rolling their former police officer leader rather than getting out and working on genuine reforms for community safety. So instead I want to return to talking about the workers we are protecting.

This bill, when passed, will come into effect before the busy Christmas period. Hopefully, the griches opposite do not prevent this from happening. We know that the lead-up to Christmas is a time when violence towards customer-facing workers blows out of proportion. The bill provides that worker harm offences in this bill will commence the day after royal assent, and we will get that to the Governor as quick as we can with the aim that these offences can protect workers at this time of heightened risk. Listening to locals, working in government and fighting for our community is what I will continue to do every day, and with this bill I know our amazing customer-facing workers will be that bit safer this Christmas.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (17:00): Crime in Victoria is at its highest level in 20 years under this Allan Labor government, with nearly 640,000 crimes reported just last year. That is one crime committed every 49 seconds in Victoria. Under this Labor government Victoria has a crime crisis. Victorians are suffering a retail crisis. There is theft from a retail store every 13 minutes. Over the past

year retail assaults have increased by 21 per cent, retail thefts have increased by 26 per cent and retail crime has increased by 20 per cent. These are damning statistics – the statistics do not lie – that show that retail crime under the government has increased over the past year, and this Labor government has failed to do anything to keep our community safe and been failing to keep our retail workers safe. Of course these are statistics that I talk of, crime statistics of assaults in retail, but these are people that suffer these assaults and that suffer this crime. Behind these statistics are people that work in retail who are forced to suffer verbal abuse, being spat on, being assaulted or being threatened with a knife or machete or having to watch on while thugs steal from the shop.

This tired Labor government after 11 years in power has completely failed to keep Victorians safe. They have completely failed to keep retail workers safe. The mere fact that this Labor government has been dragged to this place to introduce this new bill we are debating today relating to worker harm in retail, fast food and hospitality as well as transport is an admission by Labor that there is a retail crime crisis and that there is a crime crisis in Victoria, and it is all happening under this Labor government's watch. It is a bill that has taken too long. With retail crime on the increase, why has it taken so long for Labor to do anything about this? It is a bill that will, sadly, do nothing to solve Victoria's retail crime crisis because the penalties are weak and there is no provision for worker protection orders that will be vital for keeping retail workers safe.

While we will not oppose this bill, it is so weak that it must be strengthened to be meaningful. I support the member for Brighton's amendments, because only the Liberals' amendments to this bill will toughen penalties for those who commit retail crime and assault retail workers, because frankly, this Labor government's proposed legislation is weak. It will do nothing to fix retail crime. It will do nothing to stop retail workers from being assaulted and attacked. That is despite Premier Allan and this Labor government having promised to better protect retail workers from assault and abuse nearly 18 months ago. Retail crime has been on the increase. At that point 18 months ago, retail crime was on the increase and assault of workers in retail was on the increase when this Labor government promised to do something about protecting retail workers. Eighteen months later they introduce this rushed bill that is weak and fails on penalties to disincentivise people to do this to those who work delivering frontline services in retail.

You have got to ask: what on earth has this Labor government been doing for 18 months? While Labor made hollow promises 18 months ago, the retail crime crisis only worsened. Now we have got Christmas sales and the Boxing Day shopping period upon us. The government has only acted after significant pressure to do so, not only significant pressure from the community – the community's expectation is that its government keeps the community safe – but also pressure from its own union, its Labor-led union the SDA. They have only come to this place because of that pressure. That is not leadership. Not only that, retail crime in Victoria is worse than in other states in the country. What a disgraceful legacy left by this Labor government. Coles chief executive Leah Weckert said back in August this year, 2025:

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

Rebel Sport chief executive – and again, many young retail workers have their first job at Rebel Sport – Anthony Heraghty said back in August 2025:

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

That is in relation to an increase in retail crime. As a massive advocate myself for small business in my region and across the state of Victoria, retail theft, retail crime and assault of retail workers is felt particularly deeply by small retail businesses, those small, family retail businesses in our shopping strips and in our local communities. When a worker is abused or attacked with a knife or a gun – which has happened in small retail stores in my community, a worker being attacked by a knife or a gun – they completely and understandably need to take some time off work to deal with the trauma. That is completely understandable, but what that means for that very small business is that it leaves the

business short on workers. It leaves them without their valued staff, and that can lead that business to having to close for periods of time and to lose sales. That is not good for our economy. It is not good for our local communities' economies.

Retail crime has a ripple effect, which is another reason that it is shameful that Labor has taken so long to do anything about this. What they are doing with this bill is totally inadequate, and that is because workplace protection orders are totally missing from Labor's proposed legislation. How serious is this Labor government about fixing retail crime and stopping retail assaults if it has failed in its promise to introduce workplace protection orders? Workplace protection orders are needed. Again, the bill is missing one of the most needed elements to address the current retail crime crisis in these workplace protection orders. It is certainly something that has been called for by the SDA. Back in October this year the SDA said:

If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

Woolworths, IKEA, Myer, Kmart, 7-Eleven and Bunnings jointly wrote to the Premier back in October 2025 calling for workplace protection orders. They said orders would provide targeted legal protection where existing measures, such as banning notices, have proven insufficient. These measures, we know, are already in existence – in the ACT, for example – and they are working well. ACT police sergeant Mick Serbatoio said that in the eight months that workplace protection orders had been in use in the ACT police had noticed a total change in behaviour, where the offenders have just disappeared off the screen from retail settings. Do not forget that this Labor government in a media release promised workplace protection orders to be introduced by the end of 2025. There is only about a month left in 2025. Where are the workplace protection orders? Certainly not in this bill – it is a hollow bill in that regard.

The Liberals and Nationals in government will introduce workplace protection orders to ban abusive or violent offenders from shops and shopping centres and from contacting staff. Following extensive consultation with the sector, we will create new offences for assaulting, threatening or harassing customer-facing workers and bring the penalties in line with other states, and we will establish a dedicated digital platform where staff and employers can report abuse and crime, upload evidence or apply for workplace protection orders directly through Victoria Police systems. We have listened to the concerns of the retail working sector and the union. We have listened to retail workers so that they can be protected. Our plan will deliver immediate protections, tougher penalties and faster justice to keep workers and shoppers in retail safe. Every day, retail workers are being abused, threatened or assaulted just for turning up to work and doing their job. But the Liberals and Nationals will crack down on retail crime, because we will be tougher on crime. We will tackle the crime crisis. We will be smarter on justice – certainly smarter than this Labor government. This bill will not fix the retail crime crisis; this bill fails on fixing the retail crime crisis in Victoria.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (17:10): On behalf of the thousands of retail, transport, hospitality and fast-food workers that I represent in this place as the member for Greenvale, I am proud and very grateful to rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. I certainly welcome the strident support of those opposite for the hard work of the SDA, the United Workers Union (UWU), the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) in protecting and advocating for their workers, and I look forward to their wholesale endorsement of the broader parts of our agenda to protect workers across Victoria.

This crimes amendment is an important bill because it does seek to ensure that it will better protect workers in retail, hospitality, fast food and passenger transport – those settings I articulated before – from violence, threats and abuse. I thank again, genuinely, the representatives in the SDA, the TWU, the RTBU and the UWU, the state secretaries, the industrial officers and, above all, the members who have articulated and advocated so strongly – to me as the member for Greenvale, to members across this place and to the government – who have contributed to the development of this bill through the

worker protection taskforce that my friend in the other place Mr Galea has been instrumental in working on as well. Their efforts have led to this bill coming to this place.

The bill of course creates new offences under the Crimes Act 1958 and the Summary Offences Act 1966 that seek to prevent assaults, threats and abuse against customer-facing workers in retail, hospitality, fast food and passenger transport. These are important next steps in protecting workers that join similar legislative reforms that have already been implemented in other jurisdictions, including New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, the ACT and overseas, and others have made references in this place to Scotland and the UK more broadly. I think it is important that we recognise that specific offences, as well as tougher penalties, do provide a vital deterrent against assault after the fact. That is why I am very pleased that the government is engaging in the careful and very important work of developing a further suite of reforms, the worker protection orders, to proactively deter crimes and violence against retail workers and others before they occur. The Premier and the Attorney-General have talked about how important that work is and how important it is to consult, to get it right, and it is why I look forward to them being introduced in this place very soon.

We saw during the pandemic in particular – but I think it is self-evident in so many other different ways – that customer-facing workers in retail, hospitality, transport and fast food are integral to the effective operation of our economy and indeed our society. It was made clear during the COVID pandemic that when others could protect and shield and stay at home, they could not. They were working. They were on the front line. They incurred the cost of doing that. They became sick. Many of them and their families, particularly in my part of the world, incurred a toll that was much worse than that. They continued to perform their duties during a time of great uncertainty, and they kept our economy and our society, as I said, afloat during that time. I think this bill recognises that pivotal frontline role that workers in those sectors do play, and it also calls out how abhorrent it is for deliberate acts of violence and abuse to take place in those workplace settings in connection with the job that people are doing in seeking to provide, quite literally, customer service. It is unacceptable – it is completely unacceptable – and I think as a house we recognise that, and I welcome that the opposition have indicated they will be supporting the bill ultimately.

The bill sends a clear message that violence against workers needs to attract an appropriate criminal justice response. Everybody has the right to be safe and respected at work. While the Australian Retailers Association surveys, which I think the member for Evelyn may have referred to in her address – certainly others have – from June 2025 discuss how 51 per cent of retailers said they experience physical abuse monthly or more often and 87 per cent of retail workers have reported experiencing verbal abuse and indicate that there is a significant scale to this challenge, it is not new.

I think members across the house have talked about their own professional experiences. I was never really allowed front of house. I was kept firmly as a kitchen hand or, as the generous expression went, a dish pig at pubs and bakeries, notwithstanding my TAFE Tasmania barista qualification. But in spite of that, while kitchens have some of their own challenges, which you might be aware of, the stories that those who were working front of house would come into the kitchen with – horrific stories of abuse simply for doing their job, simply for seeking to serve, seeking to look after customers – stick with me now more than a decade on from moving into other employment. No-one, particularly young people, particularly those who are perhaps without necessarily much economic agency, deserves to be put in that position. It is unacceptable, and this bill calls it out.

I want to refer to some of the data, because I think it is important we give light to the scale of the challenge that this bill is seeking to respond to. I note that the SDA undertook a pretty comprehensive survey in 2023. It was a couple of years ago now, but it was a very significant scale, with 4600 workers surveyed, so I think it provides a good statistical and qualitative picture of the experience that workers on the front line have. That survey found that verbal abuse remains widespread, abuse is becoming more frequent and physical violence is increasing, with 12.5 per cent of respondents reporting having been physically assaulted by a customer. I think that is quite a stark number. Think about that for a

moment – 12.5 per cent of the 4600 people who responded to that survey, approximately 500, have been physically assaulted at work. That is a scandalous statistic. It compels us, I think, to take action. It is why this bill is important. It is responding to a real challenge, and people have the right to feel safe at work. It is core to our entire movement; it is core to our party – protecting the rights of workers to go about their work safely and with dignity. Spitting incidents remain prevalent. Nine per cent of workers stated they had been spat on by a customer. Online abuse is rising sharply, sexual harassment and violence are on the rise, and repeat perpetrators pose a particular challenge. This manifests through specific case studies that the SDA also called out. A worker in fast food described how they were threatened with their skull being caved in when somebody was dissatisfied with a burger as part of their meal. A retail sales assistant aged between 18 and 25 talked about how a man tried to sexually and physically assault them in the coolroom – they had a knife on them. They went to jail – they are now out on parole – so a criminal penalty was relevant there, but imagine the lifelong consequence that those kinds of actions have upon somebody, particularly a young person perhaps in their first job. These are real challenges that need to be addressed, and that is what this bill does.

I think this context explains why the bill on the table is so important. The bill, as I said, establishes new worker harm offences specifically aimed at protecting retail, hospitality, fast-food and passenger transport workers from assaults, harmful threats, intimidation and abuse. It also amends the Summary Offences Act with two new summary offences, both of which will have a maximum of six months imprisonment. There is a new indictable offence which distinguishes itself from the existing general assault offence in section 31 of the Crimes Act, as that does not contain the requirement that the accused person intended to commit an indictable offence. I think that is important, because it gets to the heart of the challenge that this bill is seeking to counter.

The member for Preston I hope will have an opportunity to contribute to this bill in due course, but the instance at Northland earlier in the year I think highlighted most profoundly and viscerally why the measures in this bill are needed to keep workers safe, because criminality and violence should in no way impinge upon a worker's capacity to do what it says on the tin: to go about their work serving the public and to get home safely without either physical or psychological injury.

In closing my contribution today, I again want to thank the SDA, the RTBU, the TWU, the UWU and all of the worker representatives who have helped to advocate on behalf of the frontline workers they represent in bringing this bill to this place. I thank Mr Galea in the other place for his work in leading the worker protection consultation group and indeed all members of that group for their advice and expertise during the development of these reforms. I thank the Attorney for working so closely with that group and indeed the other justice ministers in ensuring that this bill and the bills which are to come – the provisions around worker protection orders – effect the change that we all seek to see. I commend this bill to the house. I hope it does have a speedy passage, because I want this law to be in operation by Christmas.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (17:20): I rise today to speak on the Crimes Amendment, (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. The purpose of this legislation is to amend the Crimes Act 1958, the Summary Offences Act 1966 and the Youth Justice Act 2024 to create new worker harm offences for assaults, threats and abusive behaviours directed at customer-facing workers in the retail, fast-food, hospitality and passenger transport industries. It also expands the definition of 'aggravated burglary' to include ram raids, as a direct response to the rampant occurrence of this tactic in the illicit tobacco wars playing out in this state. We are not immune to this in the regions or indeed in South-West Coast. The bill also inserts a review mechanism for the worker harm provisions and makes consequential definitional changes across legislation.

This all sounds great, but if you look at the details, as is often the case with Labor's bills, the reality is that this legislation falls terribly short. The penalties proposed are weak. The bill does not increase the penalty for assaulting workers; it simply expands the definition of 'indictable assault'. That makes no tangible difference to the protections retail workers actually receive. Worse still, allowing assaults to

be tried summarily means offenders can face as little as six months in prison. Under existing indictable assault charges the penalty is five years, so that is a significant downgrade, not an upgrade.

In South-West Coast the reality of retail crime is confronting and deeply troubling. I have spoken directly with Coles staff in Warrnambool, and I have witnessed shop footage of a young worker being violently assaulted while doing their job. I have spoken to this young person, and actually hearing how they were affected was quite disturbing. In another appalling case an offender who was out on bail who had already damaged a local food shop turned on innocent shoppers and even went so far as to kick a baby in a pram. These are not isolated incidents, they are clear evidence of a system that is failing to protect frontline workers and the community.

The challenges of retail crime cannot be separated from the broader social crisis we are facing: homelessness and the lack of mental health services. I have spoken in this place many times about the growing number of people sleeping rough in both Warrnambool and Portland, about how families are forced into cars and caravans because there is nowhere else to go and about the heartbreaking reality that our community services are stretched beyond breaking point. When people are left without housing, without support and without access to timely mental health care, the consequences spill over into every part of the community, including our shops, our transport hubs and our hospitality venues. Local police, health workers and charities tell me the same story over and over again: they are dealing with people in crisis who should have been helped long before they reached the point of desperation.

Warrnambool has been promised mental health services, yet not nearly enough have been delivered. We have been promised investments in homelessness services, yet families are still waiting, and housing targets that the government has set itself have been woefully missed. The Allan Labor government talks big about fairness, but fairness is not leaving vulnerable people on streets untreated and unsupported. Fairness is not forcing frontline workers to bear the brunt of abuse and violence that stems from systemic neglect. If we are serious about protecting retail and hospitality workers, then we must also be serious about addressing root causes: housing insecurity, untreated mental illness and the absence of proper support services in regional Victoria, a direct result of the long-term neglect of this Labor government. South-West Coast deserves better. Our community deserves investment in crisis accommodation, the Lookout, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services – services that give people opportunity to find dignity and hope. The government's neglect and lack of investment in support services is a foundation of this problem, and until this is addressed retail crime will remain a symptom of a much deeper problem that this government continues to ignore.

These are not isolated events. They are part of a growing pattern of violence and abuse directed at frontline workers. Under this bill retail and hospitality workers remain exposed. The government has failed to include one of the most critical protections: workplace protection orders. These orders would give the courts the power to stop high-harm repeat offenders from entering or harassing retail workplaces, providing targeted safeguards where existing measures have proven inadequate, and we know exactly why this matters. In Portland a local bike shop was broken into, its front window smashed and the offender arrested the same night, yet before the owner could even board up the damage, the same individual brazenly returned to the scene, taunting the shopkeeper with his freedom. In Warrnambool, just minutes after being released from custody barefoot, a man was spotted by detectives walking down Raglan Parade in a brand new pair of runners that had just been stolen from Target in Koroit Street. The same offender had already been charged with theft and bailed earlier that day, yet within 10 minutes he was back offending. It is a pattern of repeat offending that leaves local businesses and workers exposed.

When offenders can walk out of custody and immediately commit another crime, it shows how weak penalties and missing protections are failing our communities. Shopkeepers, staff and customers in Warrnambool are left vulnerable, while offenders are emboldened by a system that does not deter or restrict them. This is exactly why workplace protection orders and stronger sentencing provisions are needed – because without them frontline workers and small business owners in South-West Coast will continue to pay the price for this government's inaction. That is the reality of weak laws and missing

protections: hardworking business owners left vulnerable, offenders emboldened and communities shaken.

Workplace protection orders are already being considered in South Australia and Western Australia, and in the ACT they have shown that they can deliver safer workplaces. Major retailers Woolworths, Myer, Kmart, 7-Eleven and Bunnings have all called for workplace protection orders. The Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association has called for them, but this government has ignored these calls until overwhelming pressure forced a rushed backflip – and even then it failed to include them in this bill.

Another glaring gap is enforcement. Protective services officers, or PSOs, who are present in many of our communities, do not have the power to act in these situations. They are left standing by while workers and shoppers are threatened and assaulted. Our local police try their best, but they too are hamstrung by lack of resources. This is unacceptable. The people of South-West Coast deserve better. Retail workers, hospitality staff and transport workers should not have to go to work fearing abuse, threats or violence.

The coalition will move amendments to strengthen this bill. We will push for tougher penalties and the inclusion of workplace protection orders, but we will not oppose the bill because doing nothing is not an option. This government talks about fairness, but fairness does not leave staff in Warrnambool in shops like Coles, Woolworths, Bargain Buys, the Lifeline op shop, the chemist or the burger shop to fend off assaults. Fairness is not telling families in my electorate that a pram with a baby in it being kicked when mums are simply having a coffee is just part of life. Fairness is delivering strong laws, strong protections and strong enforcement. South-West Coast deserves a government that takes retail crime seriously, and this bill as it stands does not do that.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (17:29): I am pleased to have the opportunity this evening to make a contribution on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. I start my contribution this evening by acknowledging and thanking our retail, fast-food, hospo and transport workers for the incredible work that they do each and every day right across the state. As I am sure many members of this house have had the opportunity to do, I had the opportunity to visit the Sunbury McDonald's on McHappy Day on the Saturday just gone, to spend some time with the team there, as I have done previously, and to have a great chat with Lin Larkin and the whole team at Sunbury Macca's. To just have a chat about their role and the work that they do is something that I thoroughly enjoy. Of course, all funds raised on that day go towards such an important cause.

But also making some reflections on some previous roles that I have had, I started my working journey at IGA in Sunbury – that was the first job I had – and then went to the competition at Woolworths, also in Sunbury, spending a considerable amount of time working with those who work in retail and our supermarkets locally and across the state, knowing and understanding the important role that those workers play and knowing and understanding what occurs when really vicious behaviour occurs in these settings. From the position of being on the shop floor in the grocery department at the time and then as a duty manager later on through those six years that I was at Woolies in Sunbury, seeing some of these incidents where people are targeted, where workers are threatened, was incredibly damaging. It is damaging for so many reasons, and many of those have been articulated by other members in the house this evening throughout the journey of this debate. I remember some times when, as a relatively young duty manager, we had some issues on the shop floor where members of the team were threatened and violence occurred, and the damage and the harm that was done to the entire team is something that I will never forget. Knowing that people are just going about their business, going to work and doing everything they can to be good, decent, quality employees and are subject to violent or vicious behaviour, is shameful. We have an obligation, and this is where this piece of legislation and a lot of the work that has been done throughout the journey, both to bring this bill before the house but through other programs and mechanisms as well, goes to providing for harsher penalties for those that want to do the wrong thing. We should make no apologies when it comes to protecting workers and the incredibly important work that they do.

The legislation that is before the house this afternoon goes to that better protection in retail, hospo, fast food, as I mentioned, and passenger transport, from violence and threats and abuse, and delivers on a commitment made by the Premier to introduce the bill by the end of this year. As has already been alluded to, the bill contains three new offences to address violence and aggression against workers – one indictable offence and two summary offences – and an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new indictable offence for assaulting or threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker. The bill also amends the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two summary offences – a summary offence of assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with worker duties, and a summary offence of using, without lawful excuse, language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting or otherwise engaging in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or in an insulting manner where the customer-facing worker is in connection to their duties. It goes to those beefed-up and additional powers that target those who want to target people within our communities that are just doing their important job, their important work.

We in this place have an obligation and have a really important role in making sure that we are identifying the risks for workers who are in these industries. For many of those that may be their first job; they may have been there for 50-plus years. Regardless, no worker should have an instance where they are threatened at work. No worker should have an instance where they are threatened with violence. I have seen this, as I mentioned earlier, in a previous role. I have seen the damage that that causes and the work that then needs to occur to be able to assist those that are targeted by people who want to do the wrong thing – those who want to do harm. It is, of course, immense and is in many instances life changing and ongoing.

What this piece of legislation seeks to do – as have the number of announcements made by the Premier last sitting week – goes to addressing a cohort, an element within our society, that needs to be called out but more than being called out need to face serious consequences when they, often consistently and repeatedly, do the wrong thing. This government makes no apologies for that. We make no apologies for making sure that we are standing with workers, whether they be in transport or hospo or whether they be some of the amazing people that I got to meet on Saturday whilst very poorly constructing a Big Mac. Those workers, those teams, deserve our support, and I want to take the opportunity in the house this evening to thank the amazing people that do amazing jobs within our community. Whether they be in retail or hospo or transport or in fast food, making sure that we are supporting and standing with those workers is something that we on this side of the house very proudly do.

I would hope in their reflections and in their contributions, in the times where they have the opportunity to reflect on where they might sit on these matters, members take the opportunity to – rather than wishing to pull apart or dissect for the purposes of politics – put the worker front and centre at the middle of this debate. And making sure that our agencies – whether that be Victoria Police or whether that be all of the support that often goes to helping and shaping somebody, particularly when they might first start their job for the very first time or, as I mentioned earlier, have many, many years of experience – have the opportunity to be able to support and assist is something that is incredibly important.

The provisions and the changes that are contained in this piece of legislation around the summary offences and the changes to the Crimes Act are something that I fully support. I support those through the prism of making sure that we are standing with those workers, we are supporting those workers and we are doing all of the things that have been articulated both in this legislation and by the Premier and others last week, going towards providing for consequences for the serious behaviour, violent behaviour and aggression that we see in the community but knowing that the vast majority of workers need our support. They will have it from this government, both today and every single day.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (17:39): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. Before I actually go to some of the details in the bill, this is a societal issue that we have. I know probably quite a few of the MPs in this house

would find that in our own offices we have challenges even now with people that come in that were never there once. Somehow people are not as civil as they were to each other before. There is a great saying that you treat others as you would have them treat you, but I do not think that is in practice in a lot of society now, and that is one of the real challenges that we have. Even as you stand in queues in shops and stuff, you see people who are just plain rude to the staff that are in there, and that is just wrong. As I think the member for Sunbury just said, they are providing a service to us to make sure that we get what we want. But you can do it in a way that is not harmful and abusive to the people that do that. I think society has a lot to answer for as it has crept to this point of view that people can just give someone else a spray because they are not happy; it should not happen into the future.

This bill goes towards some of those particular issues that have already been talked about. It creates new worker harm offences for assaults, threats and abusive behaviour directed at certain customer-facing workers in the retail, fast-food, hospitality and passenger transport industries. It expands the definition of ‘aggravated burglary’ to include ram raids. I think if you look at the television shows that a lot of people watch, they almost normalise a lot of these crimes. People just back into something and throw something in the back and drive off. They then petrol bomb the car later on when they change to another car so that there can be no fingerprints, no DNA or whatever. As one of the police officers I was talking to said, the TV shows have actually made it harder for the police to find evidence to convict people, because the TV shows now normalise how you destroy evidence so it cannot be found. So there are some real challenges for the police particularly on this issue around the destruction of motor vehicles. The bill inserts a review mechanism for the worker harm provisions and makes consequential definitional changes across legislation to ensure consistency.

Most importantly, the bill largely commences on the day after royal assent. I think we all hope that royal assent comes as quick as possible, because there were a number of comments made by ministers before this bill was introduced that it needs to be there for the Christmas–new year break. Everyone seems to get more stressed around Christmas and new year. They desperately want to get what they want, they want to do what they want to do and they do not necessarily care for other people. Most of this bill commences when it receives royal assent, except for the ramraid amendments, which commence in March next year.

As has already been said, the Premier made some promises about better protecting retail workers from assault and abuse back at the May 2024 Labor Party conference. We are now 18 months on. It has been a long time in the gestation period. Again we have an issue like we have had with some of the other legislation around crime in recent times: there is a headline and there is a lot of fanfare in the newspaper, but in reality it takes a long time to catch up and make things happen. I think it is disappointing that we have waited since a promise by the Premier from May 2024 to actually have legislation here in very late 2025, because a lot of workers over that time will have been victims of the crimes that we are trying to stop with this. There has been an increase of 41 per cent in threatening events in Victoria compared to only 13 per cent in New South Wales. It is horrific that we have had that here in Victoria.

A number of business leaders – and I will read a few of them out – have been calling for action now for quite a bit of time. The chief executive of Coles said:

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

The chief executive of Rebel Sport said:

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

Reece chief executive Peter Wilson said Victoria is ‘the toughest place in the country’ to do business. That is pretty damning on our state and damning on the government that they have not acted sooner. The co-founder of Seek said:

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

So it is about time that we have these laws, which will actually help protect workers into the future.

The bill standardises some crimes of assault and threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker. The offender must know or be reckless as to the person’s status as such a worker. We need that. There is this issue around how if they do it and they know they are doing it, there will be a severe penalty into the future. The issues around ram raids I have already talked about. It creates a summary offence where a person uses profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting language or engages in threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting conduct towards an applicable customer-facing worker. It must be connected to the worker’s duties. The accused must know or be reckless as to the worker’s status, and it has a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment or 25 penalty units.

I will go back to where I started. Why are people so angry and so irresponsible that they would treat a shop worker in this particular way? To me, it defies logic. There are a number of things. The main things that I understand are missing from this piece of legislation – although they were identified, it was too late to be included in the drafting – are what are called workplace protection orders, which actually mean that there can be orders put in place that stop people who have been offending from coming back onto those particular premises, effectively like an AVO, in the future, and that would help into the future.

Michael Donovan, who is known to a lot of us, has said:

If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

Woolworths, IKEA, Myer, Kmart, 7-Eleven and Bunnings – and you can think about the number of those stores that are across the state and the number of people that they would employ – actually wrote to the Premier on 7 October 2025 and called for WPOs, asking that the government introduce workplace protection orders and implement legislation that enables courts to issue enforceable orders restricting high-harm repeat offenders from engaging in violence, threats or harassment in and around retail workplaces. These orders would provide targeted legal protection where existing measures, such as banning notices, have been insufficient. Such measures are already delivering safer workplaces, as demonstrated in the Australian Capital Territory. A police sergeant in the ACT police said that in the eight months that WPOs have been used in the ACT, police have noticed a total change in behaviour where the offenders have just disappeared off their screens. So some good outcomes have been delivered by having those WPOs in place. This legislation does not have that.

The opposition will not be opposing this legislation, but there are some textual amendments that have been circulated, and I support those. I suppose I would like to spend my last couple of minutes on an issue that I think is very important. In this legislation and in all the crime legislation that we have had in recent times, there have been a lot of headlines around the maximum sentences that are being put in place. The key here is the median sentences. They are the sentences that most people are getting. Most people are not going to get 25 years. Most people are not going to get life. But the issue we have, as I understand it from talking to those that I know in the legal profession, is that the median sentencing is declining, so people are going to jail for less time on average than they were in the past. That is a trend that continues to happen, and some magistrates that I know who I have talked to are concerned that if they make a sentence that is significantly above the median, it is appealable. If it is appealed in a higher court and they lose the case – and that happens too often – they get into trouble with their superiors because they are sentencing too high and it is being brought back down on appeal. It clogs the court system up with appeals, and we do not get the desired outcome where people know there is a severe penalty for the for the crimes that they commit.

I think there is a good argument to make sure that there are some changes to the sentencing rules so that magistrates and judges start to put in place higher sentences and so they have got legislative support so that they are not appealable and convicted felons do not believe they can win a case because it is outside the median sentencing. Yes, increases in maximum sentences are great, but let us change the sentencing rules that give the magistrates and the judges the power to issue tougher sentencing for severe crimes or for repeat offenders. It is wrong that you have just got repeat offenders going round and round. The police lose confidence because they arrest them and then they are back out on the street before they have served any decent time. Yes, let us have maximum sentences, but let us increase the overall sentencing so there are real penalties for people that offend in this state.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (17:49): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. I will start by thanking the worker protection consultation group made up of police, the Office of Public Prosecutions, unions and industry reps. I want to thank them for their work, because this is a really important bill that we have before us today. The bill will better protect workers in retail, hospitality, fast food and passenger transport from violence, threats and abuse. This is completely unacceptable behaviour, and I think everybody in this chamber agrees. It is good to know that those opposite are supporting this bill. I think my community certainly supports this bill. I have had many discussions with people who are sick and tired of seeing people abusing retail workers, hospitality workers or transport workers, whoever they may be, and find it totally unacceptable in our society to have that sort of behaviour and for people to get away with that. I think we have a responsibility to protect workers. As I said, I myself have witnessed that sort of behaviour – not a huge amount, but I have seen it – and I have heard from many others in my community who have experienced that, who have been perhaps in the supermarket or on a bus or somewhere where they have seen this abuse occur and threats of violence to those workers.

I think there is also that whole thing around the trauma that those workers experience when they cop that abuse. It does not necessarily have to be physical violence, but they have abuse and threats thrown at them, and in some areas it is pretty consistent – it may be an event that has been happening to them daily in recent times. That trauma and the damage done to those workers with that continual abuse is really significant and has a great impact on their health and wellbeing. I can only imagine what it must be like returning to the workplace after an experience like that, particularly when those people walk away having given that terrible abuse to those people.

I fully support this bill and, as I said, know that my community do as well. Like all of us, they expect to go to work and do their job and go home after their day's work, but unfortunately for some that is not the case. We have heard many speakers in this place on their experiences or that of their constituents. Many workers are there providing a service to our local communities when others are finished for the day. People working after normal working hours or on weekends are providing a service to our communities and to our constituents, and yet they are facing abuse, threats and sometimes violence, which, as I said, is totally unacceptable. From transport workers, who do their job to get us where we need to go, to retail workers assisting and serving customers in our shops, hospitality workers serving our food and drinks in our cafes and restaurants, and fast-food workers, often already under the pump, handing over our fast food – all of these workers are at risk of violence, threats and abuse, and none of these workers deserve that. As I said, we have a responsibility to try and protect those workers. They are there to do a job. They are not there to be a punching bag or be abused by people in the community who should know better.

From my experience, what I have observed at times are people who you would think would not do that – it would be mums or dads – and you would think: what are they thinking? What right do they have to serve that abuse out or to make threats to workers in our communities? I think there are many people in our community who do those things who really need to take a good, long, hard look at themselves. As the member for Murray Plains mentioned earlier, it is not dissimilar to our offices at

times, where our electorate officers face that sort of abuse from time to time. As I said, no workers should have to put up with that at all.

The bill contains three new offences to address violence and aggression against workers. The first is an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new indictable offence of assaulting or threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker. The bill also amends the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two new summary offences: a summary offence of assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties; and a summary offence of using, without lawful excuse, language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting, or otherwise engaging in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties.

When people are getting on or off a bus or are in a taxi or any other form of transport, abusing the driver is not acceptable. When they are in a restaurant or cafe and are not happy with whatever may have happened, it is not acceptable to be abusive. It is not acceptable to threaten in any way that worker. We know that a lot of those workers are on minimum wage; they are not even being paid very well, so to have to stand there and put up with that sort of behaviour, as I said, is unacceptable.

I know, as someone who was a president at Trades Hall many years ago before I was in this place, that there were incidents back then too. It is not something new. I think the increase in that sort of abuse is recent, yes, but the unions have always been fighting for workers to protect them from that sort of abuse, so as I said, it is not something that is new but is something that has certainly increased in recent times, and it is important that we as a government ensure that those people have protections and that people face penalties for doing what they are doing, and are not able to walk out because there are no consequences to what they do. This is really important. Often the unions would report their workers being impacted. I know in recent times from speaking to unions that front-facing workers, particularly retail workers, are being confronted with these issues on a regular basis – and they too want something done about it. The worker protection consultative group would have heard from our unions and industry bodies and others about the issues and how they need to be addressed and how important that is to working people in our communities.

I have family members and friends who work in those industries, and it is not unusual for them to be confronted or abused or threatened by someone who is not happy with whatever it might be – whether it is a service, or because they are just not a nice person. We know that these things are happening, and it is our responsibility as a government to put things into place. The work that has been done on this bill is to be commended. Those opposite have made comments about it taking so long. Any bill needs to have that consultation. We need to be talking to the people that are impacted, and that is exactly what this consultation group has done. They have put forward the issues that they experience in their industry, and they have made it clear what changes they believe need to be made. The bill is a really important bill in terms of trying to reduce the number of these sorts of incidents in the retail industry, the hospitality industry, the fast-food industry and for transport workers. As has been mentioned, in a lot of those areas, particularly in retail, fast food and hospitality, there are young workers who often are in their first job in the industry that they are working in. It is important that we ensure that they are protected, and I commend the bill to the house.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (17:59): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. I begin by acknowledging that everybody in this house will want the same end. We want retail workers and everybody who is in a customer-facing role to be safe. In fact it is no great stretch to say that we want all people to be safe. The first remark I want to make, as someone who practised in the law for many years, is that this bill is unfortunate in the sense that we should have a justice system that promotes the values and the virtues of respect. That is, after all, what a justice system is supposed to achieve. Through all of the principles of sentencing and all of the enforcement regimes that our law enforcement agencies pursue on behalf of the community, what we are really trying to do is denounce wrongdoing, particularly violent conduct. We are trying to rehabilitate those who are capable of being rehabilitated, and we are there to try to promote the

virtue of human dignity and respect. So we should not really, as a matter of policy, require legislation to carve out for specific cohorts of workers, but here we are, because we have a justice system in decline.

I cannot think of any year of my service in public life when we have seen this: in this reporting season, our largest retailers and employers in the country who operate domestically and some internationally have all reported that, for the first time that I can remember, retail crime and the risk of harm to their workers is such that it is not only deterring investment but making it hard for them to keep their workforces safe. That is an appalling indictment on Victoria's justice system under this Allan Labor government. Whether it is Bunnings, whether it is Wesfarmers, whether it is Officeworks, whether it is Woolworths, whether it is Coles, whether it is Reece, whether it is Rebel Sport or a host of other leading employers in this country, to see them all, in unison, come out and call for stronger measures is not only extraordinary in that sense but extraordinary in another sense.

I do not doubt that those opposite are genuine when they say, like we do, that they want to keep all workers safe – all citizens safe. I do not doubt that. But the question I therefore have is: why does this bill fall short of what is required? The Premier promised in 2024 that there would be strong legislation, so we were all waiting for it – waiting a very long time for it. And here we are. The sad fact about this bill, whilst we will not oppose it, is that it does not do what we need it to do, because the new offences in the bill are not really new offences. It is taking conduct that is already criminal in nature and which already carries custodial outcomes for those at the more serious end and rebadging them. We will not oppose that. Sometimes, as a matter of legislative policy, it is not altogether a bad thing to take conduct which is already criminal in nature and separate it out to give it a tag as a matter of sending a message out into the community. I could understand that, but this does not even enhance the sentencing for that kind of criminal conduct. The assaults, the intimidation, the violent abuse – it all carries the same sentence it does under the existing act. We needed it to present a stronger set of consequences for people who engage in this kind of conduct and expose customer-facing workers to harms no-one should have to face, yet this bill falls short of that.

But worse, the bill falls short of an obvious opportunity that everybody has been calling out for: workplace protection orders. These orders are necessary to equip the courts, particularly the Magistrates' Court, the busiest court in our state, with the powers they need to effectively injunct people who pose a risk to customer-facing workers from presenting in those workplace settings. Given the Premier's remarks last year at a Labor Party state conference, where you could have expected her to make a commitment she would follow through on, we were expecting that in this bill, and yet it is not there. That is why we have moved amendments. The member for Brighton, the Shadow Attorney-General, has moved amendments to achieve that very end. The question has to be asked: if those opposite do genuinely believe in worker safety – and I do think that it is genuine, like it is for us – why is that missing? This is the problem we see not just in this bill but in so many pieces of legislation that come before us – obvious next steps that are missing – and you have to ask why. Why aren't these workplace protection orders there? Why aren't there more serious consequences in the form of sentencing for these types of offences? You could, for example, have included in this bill measures which would tighten up the sentencing criteria and the principles of sentencing where you have violence against customer-facing workers, but that was missed too.

It is as if this was a measure that the government knew it had to put out there because it need to do something for so many leading employers in this country, who employ hundreds of thousands of people, and tick a box and say, 'We've done it.' Well, they have not done it, and the problem will remain because there is nothing here that gives courts more powers in relation to injunctive orders in the form of workplace protection orders, and there is absolutely nothing that even encourages courts to impose stronger sentences, apart from the passage of the bill itself. It is a missed opportunity to include specific sentencing principles and criteria that would send the message to the judiciary that we want stronger measures in this space.

For my own people in the seat I represent of Hawthorn, this is a problem, as it is for everyone else. In Hawthorn we have seen a 31 per cent increase in criminal incidents overall, and the third-highest offence is retail offending. Even in my own electorate we are feeling the brunt of retail crime – not just thefts but violence in retail and related settings. We have all got stories that we can relate in this chamber about how urgent this is and about how serious it is, and if the government were as sincere as I believe them to be, they would adopt and support the amendments we have moved. We all share the same objective, don't we? We all want the same thing, don't we, for workers and for everybody in our community? We want people to be safe. So let us show them that despite our many differences we can actually work together. How hard would it be on this occasion for the government to say, 'Let's adopt that amendment; we'll support that amendment'? It can be done; it should be done. And it is a missed opportunity, because unless we start doing that, the foundations and the principles of our justice system will continue to erode to the point where our justice system before too long will look like a complicated patchwork quilt of measures that are responding to various pressures on our justice system.

What we really want is a justice system that promotes the virtues. You should not need to keep doing this, but when you have a government that clearly has weakened bail laws and has seen sentencing fall away to the point where the sentencing principles which courts impose when they deliver sentences and impose them do not reflect community expectations; when you have a government that is not investing as much as it needs to, given population growth, in Victoria Police resourcing; when you have a government that, because of its financial mismanagement, has to cut crime prevention, has to cut youth engagement and has to cut youth custodial supervision orders; and when you have a government that is guilty of all of these failures, this is what you end up with: reactionary bills that only go halfway, if at all, to addressing the ultimate problem.

We stand ready, as we always have been, to work constructively with the government on this and to make sure we pass legislation, because we all want, as I said, the same thing. We have brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, mums, dads, uncles and aunts. We all have them working in retail settings, and we all want them to know that they can go to work and that they can come home safely – a goal we all wholeheartedly share. On this occasion I will conclude by calling on the government to have a look at the amendments. I think the government wants them too. Let us get it done on behalf of all Victorians.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (18:09): I am sure you have heard the saying that common sense is not so common. Well, these days it seems that common decency is not so common either. Some 800,000 retail crime incidents were reported across Australia in the last year, and almost nine in 10 retail workers experienced verbal abuse. Assaults against taxidriviers and transport workers are also a serious and ongoing problem, and more than half of transport gig workers have said they experience threatening or abusive behaviour. We know that teachers are facing it in schools and we know that all people are facing increased levels of disrespect and violence, and it is just not okay. It makes me really sad that we have to bring in laws for people to treat each other with respect and consequences for when they do not, but here we are. As we saw during the pandemic, our retail and transport workers are essential workers, and we rely on them each and every day to get where we need to go, so we can have the food on our table, toilet paper in the bathroom and milk in the fridge. Everyone deserves the right to feel safe at work – safe from abuse, safe from assault and safe from threats. This bill introduces offences, penalties and jail time for people who threaten the safety and wellbeing of staff.

I was so proud to stand by the mighty SDA at state conference when the Premier announced these laws would be coming, and so proud to be part of a government that is delivering this legislation for our retail, hospitality and transport workers. I thank Michael, Mauro and Dean for their strong advocacy on this issue, and each and every person who works at the SDA, both past and present – including my dad, who dedicated his life to the union – for their hard work and commitment to the rights and conditions of retail and fast-food workers across the country. I also want to thank my good

friend the member for Monbulk and Michael Galea from the other place who also were SDA workers, and Michael has done a great job working on this legislation as well.

I could not wait to start work at 14 and nine months, and my first job was at the Chicken Machine in Glenroy – still a local institution – where you could get two chooks for 12 bucks, I reckon, back then. I later worked at Payless Superbarn, which eventually became Festival IGA and is now the Pascoe Vale Road Market in Glenroy. As soon as I could I proudly became a member of the SDA. I actually found my old membership card the other day – it was member number 3556 – so I wonder what they are up to these days. I loved working at the supermarket packing shelves, in the deli and at the check-out, and I was the best packer in town, I have got to say. No-one's bread was ever squashed or their eggs broken. I would minimise bag usage, as you can imagine, but always separated out the chemicals and kept the fridge stuff separate so when you got home you could quickly put it in the fridge and your cold stuff stayed cold. The worst I ever had to put up with was old blokes singing Foster & Allen songs to me – *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*. You probably know that song, Acting Speaker Mullahy. I never experienced verbal abuse. It just seemed different back then, and I am really sad that that is no longer the case.

My kids are teenagers, and one has just started part-time work and another will be 15 soon, and she is champing at the bit to get a job. I would love them working at Coles Glenroy with the lovely staff there or the new Giant Pantry, who offer free coffee and breakfast for seniors on Thursdays, and I encourage locals to check it out. While I think part-time jobs are one of the best things kids can do, teaching them skills, responsibility, time management and self-sufficiency, to be honest I am worried for my kids and the safety of all customer-facing staff these days. Sadly, there is good reason to be worried.

In August 2023 the SDA surveyed retail and fast-food workers in relation to the nature and prevalence of abuse and violence by customers. Less than half of the respondents said they felt safe in their workplace, and young women aged between 18 and 25 years were most likely to have experienced abuse. The survey found that in the last 12 months 87 per cent of workers said they had experienced verbal abuse from a customer, 12.5 per cent of respondents said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer, a shocking 9 per cent of respondents said they had been spat on in the last 12 months and 17 per cent of respondents reported that the incidents of customer abuse and violence they experienced were of a sexual nature, which was also higher among female workers, with young female workers at particular risk.

The survey also asked whether workers had experienced abuse, harassment or violence from a customer that referenced their ethnicity, race or cultural background. Tragically, 24 per cent of workers responded that they had. Workers who identified as other than white were most likely to have been spat on by a customer, which I find abhorrent and disgusting in every way. Workplace aggression and abuse can have long-lasting effects on workers' physical and mental health, and the most common health impacts include stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, burnout and depression. Fourteen per cent also reported high blood pressure, 11 per cent PTSD and 8 per cent suicidal thoughts. I will use some quotes talking about these impacts from the report. From a female aged 18 to 25:

It has literally gotten to the point where I left the store an hour into my shift because I couldn't stop crying.

From a female aged 26 to 35:

Not motivated to leave home because I don't want to deal with people.

From a female aged 56 to 65:

Ruminating beyond shift, sometimes for several days.

From a female aged 26 to 35:

It impacted my studies severely.

From a female aged 56 to 65:

Waking up during the night thinking about what occurred during the last shift.

From a female aged 26 to 35:

I recently had an operation to remove a lump in my thyroid which was due to high levels of stress.

From a female retail manager aged 46 to 55.

I had 3 heart attacks in November 2022. I was 48. Doctors said it's all to do with the increased stress from work. Customer abuse has risen significantly, and bad behaviour has increased causing my health to suffer significantly.

Some other quotes from the report include:

A man attacked my store manager by choking and punching him.

...

A man tried to sexually and physically assault me in the cool room.

...

Lots I mean lots of men make disgusting comments almost daily to the team.

...

I've had items thrown at me at the registers. I've had a customer lean across the register to try and grab my shirt. I've had verbal threats made and physical gestures made at me.

In another:

I politely pointed out to a customer in self serve that they'd missed scanning some meat that was under their purchases from outside the store and I was called a ...

I am not sure if I can use the word. Can I say 'bitch' in here? I just did.

... and shoved backwards into another customers trolley while they ran from the store without paying for any ... groceries. \$350 worth. It's a weekly occurrence in our store. And there is verbal abuse every day ...

Another worker had a customer threaten to jump the counter and slit her throat when she asked for ID because they wanted to buy some cigarettes.

Christian McColl is doing work experience with me this week. He works at Hungry Jack's in Pascoe Vale, and he told me a story this morning where a man punched through the glass at a worker in the drive-through because his order was taking too long – unbelievable. It is hard to believe the level of violence and disrespect people pay to each other.

The Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025 will protect customer-facing workers from assault and abuse. It will include all workers that perform customer-facing duties in retail or hospitality and will also include others, such as cleaners in a food court or security guards in a shopping centre. Contractors, including labour hire, will also be protected. The bill also covers customer-facing workers in transport, including bus drivers, taxi and rideshare services, delivery drivers and people working at train stations. I thank the Transport Workers' Union for their ongoing advocacy for these workers.

The bill introduces a new indictable offence for assaulting or threatening to assault one of these workers and will carry a penalty of up to five years in jail. Importantly, the worker harm offences will protect workers both on shift or on a break and when they are arriving at or leaving work. The bill also amends the Crimes Act 1958 to ensure that ram raids will be recognised as aggravated burglary and will apply to any building, not just shops. This carries a maximum sentence of 25 years. Sadly, in my electorate we have seen a disturbing number of ram raids. Designer Eyes in Glenroy has been ramraided several times, with over \$20,000 worth of damage done in one incident and thousands of dollars worth of stock stolen. Repeat violent offenders are a significant issue for workers as well, with 52 per cent of workers reporting that the same customer was abusive or violent towards them on more

than one occasion. We will be introducing workplace protection orders against violent individuals to ban these people from entire workplaces. Our retail, hospitality and transport workers deserve to be protected from violence, threats and abuse. I commend the bill to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (18:18): I am pleased to rise today to contribute on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. It has been interesting listening to the contributions today. I will probably lead on a bit from where the member for Hawthorn teed off. This is an important bit of legislation. We do not oppose it, and why would we? We know it is incumbent on everyone in this chamber – it does not matter what side of government you are on – when a bill comes through like this where the intent is to protect people to support that intent. Workplace harassment has gotten out of control in Victoria. We have seen the statistics. Retail crime is up 41 per cent. That is a staggering amount of an increase. Any legislation we bring into this house to protect customer-facing workers is very, very important. I can remember back in 1988, 1989, when I was working in pubs –

*Members interjecting.*

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Yes, I was. I was working in pubs back in 1988 and 1989, and it is fair to say we copped a fair bit of abuse, but we tended to deal with that ourselves in our own unique way. That could have been a range of actions you took to deal with that type of harassment back then, but things have changed. It is 2025 now, and I probably would not recommend that anyone deal with workplace harassment or customer harassment the way we did back then.

I agree with what the member for Hawthorn said. I think the government's intent is good, I really do, and I think they are genuine in what they want to achieve with this bill, they really are. There are a lot of people in this chamber that will have young teenage kids that are coming up, and they want to get that first job, whether it is at Macca's, KFC, Woolies, Coles, IKEA or Bunnings, wherever it is. You would like to think the children of members in here and anyone that has a child coming through wanting to earn that bit of pocket money can go to work and be safe and not be harassed. Human nature tells me that that is not going to happen everywhere, so it is important to bring these laws in to protect those people at the start of their careers, because you do not want these teenagers coming into the workforce to be traumatised forever. It should be a good experience getting your first pay cheque and coming home and bragging to Mum and Dad: 'Look, I've earned a couple of hundred bucks this week.' You do not want them coming home and saying, 'Oh my goodness, I had a customer in today that threw a coffee at me and spat at me' – all the terrible things that they do. We see it all on social media. You see the people throwing cups of coffee at people, and it is terrible.

I can remember when my daughter got her first job in a pub. She was 18, obviously – I hope she was not 17. She was 18, and she was assaulted one night. I fortunately knew the father of the boy that assaulted her, and I rang the father and by the end of the conversation he assured me his son would not assault my daughter again. There were a few harsh words said. But that was a horrible experience for my daughter. She came home extremely shaken, and as a father it took all of my self-control, to be honest, not to drive around to that person's house, drag his son out and maybe teach him a little bit of respect, not only for people that serve people but for women as well. It is fair to say I was rather upset.

Previous speakers have said this: the part of this bill that is missing is the workplace protection orders (WPOs). This is a very, very important part that should be with the bill. We have had industry call for it. There is a quote here, if you will allow me to read it, that says:

ACT Police sergeant Mick Serbatoio said ... In the eight months –

the WPOs –

... have been in use in the ACT, police had noticed a "total change in behaviour where [the offenders] have just disappeared off our screens".

That is important, and that is impressive. If that is the effect that WPOs have, why aren't they in this legislation?

It has been quoted today that we have been waiting 18 months. Why has it taken so long? That is one thing I continually get frustrated about in this place, that we have a recommendation from three years ago and it takes three years to come in. Why does it take so long? I admit I am not in government; there might be mechanisms that I am not aware of. But I have seen bills that, when a decision has been made, have been introduced in this place in two or three months. So why do these bills that protect people take so long? What is the hold-up? What is the resistance? Why aren't people doing their job if this is what we really want to achieve?

Again, on the WPOs, Woolworths, IKEA, Myer, Kmart, 7-Eleven and Bunnings all wrote to the Premier in October talking about WPOs and the importance that they would have for their businesses. So my question is: why aren't they included in this bill? If the government is serious about retail crime and protecting workers, are they going to bring in WPOs, and how far away is that? I understand the government want to get this bill in before Christmas to give those extra protections, but the penalties are basically the same. There is nothing really new in this bill – a little bit of rebranding. But the WPOs, from everything I am reading, are the linchpin that would really make this bill good. This is why the member for Brighton has put forward the amendments.

I have seen this chamber work really well when we have worked together. I have seen it on many occasions. We have seen it in the last month. So I would say to the government: have a look at the amendments that the member for Brighton has put forward, which are directly aimed at the WPOs. Look at what the member for Brighton has done, and let us get some bipartisan support around these amendments. Why do we have to wait any longer? We do not. They are there as amendments. So read the amendments and support the amendments, because we do want – everyone in this chamber – these teenage kids and not just them but all customer-facing workers to be safe. To be honest, some of the stuff we see on social media is sickening, what they do to customer-facing workers. I have said in this chamber quite a few times that I hate the person videoing it more than anyone else. Put your phone down and help someone. Do not put yourself in danger if you are not physically equipped to help, but if you are, put the phone away. Do not use it and put it on social media. Do not use it to say, 'Look at this poor bugger.' Get in there and give them a hand. On this occasion let the government support the amendments. Let us work in a bipartisan way to really, really protect people, especially in the retail industry.

I had a situation in my electorate just last sitting week where – I will not name the store – a store in Warragul was targeted by four youths. They robbed the store, and even worse, they actually tasered one of the staff. What have we got to? How did we get here? Another store in my electorate in Longwarry was ramraided by a car after actual threats and extortion to say, 'If you don't ring this number, we will be doing this.' This state has got to a point where it is a bit of a Wild West situation. I think if the government take on board the amendments that the member for Brighton has put forward and they take them seriously and actually say, 'Okay, these will work,' let us pass them now so all the retail staff over the Christmas break have some reason to cheer. I will about leave it there. I just encourage the government to read the reasoned amendments and support them, and let us get this bill right.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (18:28): I too rise to support the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. I of course rise to support this bill in my capacity as the state Labor member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, which actually are home to many, many workers across all of these critical sectors. I support it in my capacity as someone who also started my working career journey working for many years in the hospitality, restaurant and cafe sector, particularly along Lygon Street in Carlton, where I definitely did have my fair share of experiences – a lot of good ones and some not so good ones. I am proud to be supporting this bill as a long-time Transport Workers Union (TWU) member, whose frontline workers continue to serve and carry our community across the state and the country.

Our customer-facing workers in the retail, hospitality, fast-food and passenger transport sectors all play an essential role in keeping our economy running, served and cared for. This was particularly made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when customer-facing workers continued to diligently perform their duties during a time of great uncertainty, because without our customer-facing workers the reality is our economy and community stops. From those that stack our supermarket shelves and serve on the check-outs; those staff at the local service station or bakery who are working at all hours; those who serve our takeaway or sit-down breakfasts, brunches, lunches or dinners or serve our favourite coffee order; those who help us find the right outfit for work, school or that night out at the shops; those who drive our taxis and our Ubers; those on our trains, trams and buses; those who check us in for that much-needed family holiday at the airport or place our bags in the overhead lockers; and those who physically transport and deliver those goods and services to help our places of business and government, retail precincts, schools, hospitals, places of entertainment and more to function to those who increasingly courier our home grocery shopping and online orders to home, the reality is our customer-facing workers will only continue to play an increasingly important role over the coming years, and they deserve our respect, courtesy and support.

The economic value of these sectors and these workers is significant. 360,000 jobs in Victoria, nearly 10 per cent of our total employment, is related to retail, and that is expected to grow by a further 111,200 jobs by 2034. According to the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, the economic dashboard for November 2025 found that accommodation and food services continues to remain the fastest growing job sector – 20 per cent growth over the last year. In terms of local businesses and workers for Merri-bek, our retail businesses make up 7.1 per cent of our local businesses – 1774 shops. In terms of transport, they are 13 per cent of our local businesses, 2200 in the transport sector. In terms of retail workers, they make up 8 per cent of the local workforce, 7500 employed in retail. In terms of transport workers, there are 4000 local residents, 4.2 per cent of our local workforce.

But we know as jobs have grown across the sector, abuse towards retail and customer-facing employees has grown. The government has heard deeply distressing firsthand accounts from retail, hospitality, fast-food and passenger transport workers across Victoria who have suffered abuse and violence in their workplace. This is unacceptable. Everyone has the right to be safe and respected at work. This is confirmed by the data, with the Australian Retailers Association reporting some 800,000 retail crime incidents across Australia last year. Seventy per cent of retailers report an increase in customer theft. Fifty-one per cent of retailers experienced physical abuse monthly or more often. Eighty-seven per cent of retail workers report experiencing verbal abuse, and most retail workers are women, with a third of them under the age of 24. Violent, threatening behaviour towards passenger transport workers is also an ongoing issue. Between January and August 2023 there were 381 reports of assault against a taxi driver in Melbourne, compared to 319 in the same period in 2022. This offending is harmful to those workers, their families and the wider community. That is why we are moving this bill that seeks to prevent assaults, threats and abuse against customer-facing workers across those sectors of hospitality, fast food, passenger transport and retail. These reforms implement the government's commitment to giving vulnerable customer-facing workers greater protections against assault, threats and abuse. They deliver on the commitment made by the Premier to introduce a bill by the end of 2025.

The bill contains three new offences to address violence and aggression towards workers: one indictable offence and two summary offences. First, an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 for a new indictable offence of assaulting or threatening to assault an applicable customer-facing worker. The bill amends the Summary Offences Act 1966 with two new summary offences: a summary offence of assaulting an applicable customer-facing worker in connection with the worker's duties; and a summary offence of using without lawful excuse language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting or otherwise engaging in conduct that is threatening, indecent, offensive or insulting towards an applicable customer-facing worker in connection to their duties. Both summary offences have a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment. This is higher than for the

equivalent general offences. The new indictable assault offence distinguishes itself from the existing general assault offence in section 31 of the Crimes Act 1958, as it does not contain the requirement that the accused person intended to commit an indictable offence. This means that the new offence will apply to a greater range of conduct than the general indictable assault offence, and the maximum sentence of five years imprisonment is consistent with the maximum sentence for other indictable assault offences, including assault of an emergency or custodial worker.

In relation to who is protected by this legislation, the worker cohort is defined broadly to include all workers that perform customer-facing duties for retail or hospitality operators. Workers who perform customer-facing duties for landlords or managers of retail shopping centres, such as cleaners in food courts or security guards are also protected by these offences. Contractors including labour hire workers will also be protected. The worker cohort also includes all customer-facing workers working for or as a passenger transport service provider, and this includes commercial passenger vehicle and public transport drivers and operators, and workers located at transport premises such as bus stations, tram stops and train stations. Taxi and rideshare services are included in this definition. The bill ensures that the offences will apply to acts of violence, abuse or intimidation connected to an event or action that took place while the worker was performing their duties, even if the act occurs when the worker is no longer at the workplace. For example, if a person is refused service and then waits for a worker to complete their shift to then assault or abuse them, the new offences will also apply.

The bill also amends the Crimes Act to ensure ramraiding is captured by the serious offence of aggravated burglary. There has been a growing concern from the community regarding ramraid conduct, where offenders use a vehicle to forcibly enter a building to facilitate theft or criminal damage. This can deeply traumatise retail workers in particular, whether they are in the store or not at the time of the offence. This bill will amend the existing offence of aggravated burglary in the Crimes Act to capture this conduct, and the amendment applies to all buildings, not just retail premises, and will ensure that the aggravated burglary offence with a maximum 25-year penalty can apply to ram raids.

We know from industry and unions that the lead-up to Christmas is a time when violence towards customer-facing workers increases, and this bill provides that worker harm offences will commence the day after royal assent, with the aim that the offences can protect workers at this time of heightened risk during, in the lead-up to and throughout the Christmas period.

Along with these measures we are also introducing new workplace protection orders. Workers, union representatives and businesses who are all on the front line of workplace crime have called for workplace protection orders to force threatening and violent customers out of the store. That is why we will introduce new laws to establish workplace protection orders as the next step in our response to retail crime. Under such orders, if you are violent to retail workers, you can be banned from that workplace. Currently only the ACT has those orders in place, and different types of models are being developed interstate. These models have the same motive: keep a violent, threatening person away from the premises and the precinct. Victoria will consult with police, unions and industry and look interstate and overseas to review what models are working, building on the work of the worker protection consultation group, with legislation to be introduced from April 2026. Above all, we want a model that is going to do the job.

The bill has been informed in close consultation with that worker protection consultation group, comprising Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions and union and industry representatives. Particular unions I want to shout out to are the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association, SDA; the Transport Workers' Union, the TWU; the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, RTBU; and many

others from the union and employer sector. Michael Donovan, the branch secretary of the SDA, has said:

The retail workers union, the SDA, welcomes the Victorian government's commitment to increase penalties and to criminalise attacks on frontline retail and fast-food workers as a first step to address customer aggression and violence.

TWU's director of organising Sam Lynch also praised the bill, saying:

Union Members fought hard for this win. Under the Allan Government's new laws, transport workers will get the protection and respect they deserve.

Bus, taxi and rideshare drivers, who often face the brunt of public aggression, will be safeguarded by tougher penalties to reinforce the important role they play in our community. Of course this will also help support local safety outcomes through our local retail precinct. On 11 February this year the Central Coburg Business Association wrote to me about these very issues. They said:

On the 30 of January 2025, our association co-hosted a Safety Information Night in collaboration with Merri-bek City Council and supported by Brunswick Police Station, with strong attendance from local businesses ...

Addressing safety concerns in Coburg requires an approach that includes both immediate interventions and long-term structural solutions ... (including via) ...

... A greater and more visible police presence through Central Coburg would serve as a deterrent to crime and antisocial behaviour.

Consideration should be given to dedicated local unit patrolling high traffic areas such as the Mall, surrounding shopping precincts (Sydney Road, Munro Street, Bell Street) in Central Coburg and public transport hubs.

I am very delighted to say that along with this bill, we have been taking action to make central Coburg safer, including through the dedicated local Operation Priority by Victoria Police. We have strengthened bail laws, we have cracked down on dangerous and illegal weapons and we have invested in those services, welfare and supports to help people in need.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (18:38): I too rise on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. As I do rise to speak on it, it is great that we are in agreement in the chamber on both sides that we want the best outcome for those in hospitality and those that work in retail stores, because you only have to walk down the street these days and within a very short time of being on your own along a CBD stretch – it does not matter where it is around Victoria, whether it is in regional Victoria or here in the city – you only have to walk into shops and you can hear abuse being thrown at workers. Unfortunately, you walk in and you can actually see items being stolen out of shops also. So we need to make sure that with these amendments that we are putting forward, we do it in good faith to make sure that we keep all our workers safe.

As the member for Narracan said before – and I think every member standing up said it – we all have someone, whether it be a direct family member or a niece or nephew or an aunt or an uncle who are in a situation where they are in hospitality, and it is unfortunate these days that they cop abuse. It is not a new thing. It has just been progressively getting worse. I think that in probably the last 18 months to two years, it has ramped out of control. I think if you speak to anybody that works in retail or hospitality, they will all have a story – probably a daily story or definitely a weekly story – of that person who comes into the store and is rude and abusive and uses bullying tactics to actually undermine the workers in the store. We only have to look locally in my area down in the Latrobe Valley, and you can see on Facebook and social media – I suppose you could call it posting and boasting – intimidation inside some of our retail stores. If we have our big retail stores writing to the Premier asking for help because it is an epidemic out there, we need to make sure that we make these changes that work.

As we have said on this side here, we have got some amendments, which I think are reasonable and actually put the full stop on it. I think we do have some people that just show up and that is the way that they do act in society these days, but we do have some that go out with the intent to walk into a

store and create a scene while others fill a trolley and walk out. We had a talk with the police, and at one of our local shopping centres, Traralgon Centre Plaza, they had an operation down there. They actually had police vans parked out the front and the back of the plaza, and that visible presence for seven days made a remarkable difference inside the store for the shop owners and for the people that they employ, because they had the visible presence of the police walking around, which virtually straightaway deterred a lot of the unruly activity that goes on down there. They stopped it in its tracks.

In conjunction with this, the Coles supermarket also had some undercover people in the store, we are told, who were going around and stopping people, who they were watching, from walking out with items over that particular week. At the end of the week, they actually checked what they had saved, and it was hundreds of thousands of dollars which they had stopped going out from one store, whether it be food or alcohol and other items. It is not unusual to see people just walking with a trolley into a supermarket and stacking it up as high as they can and just walking out. Unfortunately now they have to direct their workers not to engage with people that are doing this because of the consequences that can happen. Unfortunately that is it. We would all love to be able to stop it in its tracks, but if we send a worker out there or if we send the shop owner themselves out there, they are more than likely to be (1) definitely abused and (2) unfortunately assaulted. At the moment it is probably nearly a rule of thumb that if someone steals from a shop, let them go, and hopefully the police can deal with it outside.

In Morwell we had a prominent real estate agent that had a prime position on Commercial Road, and because of all the things that were going on in the street, they actually decided to shift from that prime commercial property and to move down to the back lots because of daily activities which they had seen which continually put their front-of-house office staff in trouble. It was not people walking in to abuse them; it was people running from one store to another, most of the time looking for refuge because there was unruly activity that was out there. This is another level of violence that can take place on the streets and in our shops that has unintended consequences for other shops outside our hospitality and retail stores.

We have had in the last 18 months in Morwell a new cardiology business which has started up, Gippsland Cardiology Service. Derk Pol, who is a cardiologist, works at the hospital. They decided what they would do was open up a new business for the people of Latrobe Valley and Gippsland and surrounds, but the issue that they had, opening up on the shopping strip, was the unruly activity of people using verbal abuse and physical intimidation. There was a lot of work that needed to go on between the council and the police to make sure that these elderly people who are going for a heart check-up have a safe avenue to go in to visit the cardiologist. The Latrobe City Council have taken extraordinary steps to try and entice people to move into empty shops in the CBD, particularly in Morwell, to help them out, because there are a lot of people that are actually shutting their businesses.

This is the hidden part of it. We talk about the thefts and so forth that come from our supermarkets – Coles, Safeway, Woolworths, IGA – and our bigger stores, like Bunnings, but it is the smaller retailers who pay the price. They are paying the price of people being as bold as anything and just walking in en masse and taking what they want. And even shops which deal in second-hand clothing for people that need to be able to walk into a store and buy second-hand goods are being targeted. These are shops that are run by volunteers donating their time to help the community out, to make sure we are clothed and we are fed. But what happens? We have this element in our community that want to intimidate, that want to cause grief and that just want to run amok because they do not have tough consequences to pull them up.

This is why we have put forward some amendments, and I hope that the government do have a really good look at them, because why should we be back here in 12 or 18 months because we have forgotten this time to put harder sentencing in or we have not put in the correct wording to make sure that, once and for all, here is a full stop? We are here to protect our loved ones that are going to work, to go into retail, who are making our coffees of a morning. We are here today to pass a bill which is once and for all going to keep them safe. At the moment I think we can make the bill that is going forward tougher. I think right across the board we should be able to do that as a Parliament. But this needs to

happen; it needs to be done. Maybe we are thinking on this side it is not tough enough, but I commend the bill to the house.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:48): I rise to speak in support of the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. While I am speaking of course in support, it saddens me to think that I have to speak on this legislation, because it means that we are accepting that we need legislation like this to better protect workers that perform customer-facing roles in industries such as retail, hospitality and passenger transport. I think it saddens me because it is terrible to think and to hear of the experiences that many workers in the retail and hospitality industries have when it comes to the most appalling and awful behaviour of abusive, violent customers that think that they can treat workers in this way. It is also really sad to think that most of these workers are young and this is probably their first job – they have all the excitement and enthusiasm of getting that first job, being more mature and having financial independence – and then they have to put up with the most awful and terrible behaviour from members of the public.

While it is sad that we have to debate and introduce laws like this and it is terrible to think that there is this sort of behaviour going on, it is important, and it is legislation that is very much needed. It will strengthen the laws and add new offences in response to acts of aggression, violence and abuse that are directed at workers in customer-facing jobs. There is a lot of evidence that shows that these incidents are escalating both in severity and also in frequency. Crime Statistics Agency data has reported that assault and related offences in retail settings have climbed something like 21 per cent year on year, so obviously it is very much time to take action and to provide legislation that further supports workers in these industries.

The main aim of the bill is to address this alarming rise in violence and abuse against these workers. Everybody has the right to be safe and respected at work, and these amendments are designed to do that. I know the previous speaker was talking about things like the laws not being tough enough. Well, we are talking here about jail time of up to five years and for summary offences up to six months, so they are certainly pretty heavy penalties for these crimes and these acts against workers in the customer-facing industries that we are talking about here today.

This legislation, if it is passed this year – and we have our last sitting week in the first week of December – will come into effect very quickly afterwards. So it could actually be in place in time for Christmas. We do hear that leading up to Christmas there is a lot of additional stress in the community and that this busy period can also lead to even more violence and abusive behaviour towards workers in the retail and hospitality areas and also public and passenger transport.

The substantive changes are to the Crimes Act 1958 and the Summary Offences Act 1966, and what we are trying to do here is to introduce provisions that clarify and address the specific circumstances around violence and abuse against workers in customer-facing roles. It was determined that the current legislation is not specific enough in order to protect workers in these areas because of the circumstances in which they are working, so therefore we need to change the legislation and add additional offences in order to protect them better. I think the lead speaker for the opposition was again misleading Parliament, as has been happening for most of today, if not on other parliamentary sitting days as well. He was making a big fuss about how this is not a new law. Well, it is a new law, and it does create offences that specifically work towards supporting retail workers in those customer-facing industries. For example, under the current criminal legislation there is an indictable offence, but with the assault or the violent behaviour that this legislation is looking at, we are making sure that there are proper penalties for people if they do not comply – if they do terrible things like assaults or really terrible violence on these workers. Under the current legislation there has to be some sort of intent from the person in order to get the maximum penalty under the legislation. In the circumstances of workers, say, in the retail industry, the perpetrator may not come in with that actual intent, but it can arise in the circumstances of the interaction with the worker, and therefore it is more difficult to prosecute. These are the sorts of things that we are doing to adjust the legislation so that it better reflects this and allows for the more successful prosecution of offenders that commit these terrible acts.

There are another two offences, which are called summary offences, that will also be introduced as part of this legislation and, if it is passed this year, will be ready for the Christmas shopping trade. Those go to the more low-level offences – language that is profane, indecent, obscene, threatening, abusive or insulting towards a protected worker in connection with the performance of their work. We have heard today repeated examples of customers spitting on customer-facing workers, and these things are just absolutely disgusting. I do not know what is going through the minds of those doing it. These summary offences go to these sorts of things to ensure that workers are protected and that offenders can be charged and penalised and have the full force of the law against them.

The second summary offence is also talking about workers in connection with their duties. Why we are not saying ‘while they are at work’ when these offences are committed and we are talking about ‘in the course of their duties’ is because often one of these young workers may finish work and go into the car park to get into their car; they are then confronted yet again by a customer who has had some sort of interaction with them, maybe inside the store that they work in, who has then followed them out. It is really appalling behaviour that we have to stop. Those that do these sorts of things have to get some really severe and strong penalties to show that it is not on to treat people like this and that we need to protect workers, because they do have the right to go home and not feel demeaned and uncomfortable in their place of work.

There is also a further amendment to the legislation in respect to ramming offences. We have heard recently of a number of cases where people that are trying to burgle a premises will actually ram it with some sort of a car or vehicle in order to smash it open and go in and burgle the place. This car ramming is now going to have increased penalties; it will be an aggravated burglary rather than just a ramming. Often in the case of these rammings there are already workers inside those shops. It must be terrible for them – there they are, minding their own business at work – to have some sort of vehicle come crashing through the front door of the shop or premises that they work in.

As I was saying, it is really terrible that we have to introduce laws like this. I too started, like many others have spoken about in here, in the retail industry. I know my son in hospitality has been the subject of an assault by a customer. While physically he got over that, you always wonder what lasting effects this will have on him in his future life. This is legislation that is important. There is a lot of mention about the workplace protection orders. That is not off the table.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (18:58): I rise to speak about the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025 in the very limited time that I have left. The issue at hand is that there is this retail crime data that shows that there has been a 41 per cent increase in threatening events in Victoria, compared with a 13 per cent increase in New South Wales. The purpose of this legislation is to act on that and create new worker harm offences for assaults, threats and abusive behaviour directed at certain customer-facing workers in retail, fast food and hospitality; expand the definition of ‘aggravated burglary’ to include ram raids; insert a review mechanism for the worker harm provisions; and make consequential definitional changes across legislation to ensure consistency. The environment has led to many business leaders calling for action. You have got the Coles chief executive saying that it is definitely the case that in Victoria retail crime is escalating more than we are seeing in other states.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **AKD Yarram**

**Danny O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:00): (1419) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Regional Development, and the action I seek is for her and her department and the

government to do everything they can to support the people of Yarram, most particularly the workers at the AKD sawmill, who turned up today to be told that they had lost their jobs – 73 workers and their families. This is a devastating blow, obviously for them but also for the wider Yarram community, which has a population of only about 2000. If you consider that proportion, that is a huge impact on a community like Yarram and on the families but also on the harvest and haul contractors, the trucking contractors and all the businesses that supply this mill. AKD has indicated that it is struggling to justify the continued operation of the mill, given the downturn in housing construction that has occurred and the general broader economic environment, which is a serious concern and I think an issue that all Victorians are equally concerned about.

Yarram has had its share of troubles in recent years. Firstly, the government's decision to shut down the native timber industry had an impact, particularly on harvest and haul contractors there. There is another, smaller native hardwood timber mill in Yarram which is, thankfully, continuing along, the Radial Timber mill, but they are also struggling for log supply. We have also seen recently the Bendigo Bank close – the last bank in Yarram, closed. So Yarram has had a few knocks lately. I know the minister is aware of this issue, and I thank her for contacting me earlier today, but I do need the government to do what it can. I am aware that Regional Development Victoria has been and met with management onsite this afternoon. I am not aware of the outcomes of that, and I am not sure whether there is much the government can do, certainly about the closure of the mill per se as it seems to be a fait accompli, but can the government do whatever it can to assist in terms of the workers and their entitlements, which I would hope would be protected anyway, and particularly in helping them to redeploy – not to some far-flung place but by trying to actually get some more jobs into Yarram. This is a significant employer in the town. It has been pretty dry in the Yarram area in the last year or two, so the agriculture sector has also been battling. It is really important that the government supports this community. Yarram is a wonderful community. It is a strong and vibrant community, and it needs all the help it can get to get through this very difficult phase.

#### **Wyndham law courts**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:03): (1420) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to provide me with an update on the stages of opening of the newly opened Wyndham law courts. The Magistrates' Court is open, the Children's Court is open and VCAT is open. The courts are open. Some said we could not get it done, but we have, in Wyndham. They are the largest law courts outside of the CBD, and they are an anchor for great legal jobs across the community. I cannot wait to see the development across the area; East Werribee is going to be going gangbusters over the period ahead. I look forward to the Attorney-General's response.

#### **Warrnambool rail line**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:03): (1421) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is the delivery of six-carriage VLocity trains to the Warrnambool line and the immediate undertaking of the works required to restore full capacity and dignity to train travel for the people of South-West Coast. My community is furious. After years of promises – years of being told upgrades were coming, improvements were coming and better services were coming – what we have received is a service that has gone backwards. Residents have lost the standard of rail travel they once had, despite hundreds of millions of dollars being spent. Passengers on the Warrnambool line often face journeys of up to 6 hours door to door, travelling from Portland by bus and then train, and yet are offered no basic food service. Those boarding a train fare even worse, with not so much as a vending machine available. For travellers with medical needs, such as diabetes, this lack of a buffet car is unacceptable. Meanwhile the coffee vendor at the Warrnambool station remains in limbo, with no clear direction or commitment from the government. The new trains are not designed for long distance travel; seats are uncomfortable, space is cramped and there is nowhere safe to store bags – an enormous concern for elderly travellers and international visitors.

While the rest of Victoria has had access to the Myki system for years, my community are still stuck collecting paper tickets as though we have been forgotten by time. We now regularly see people standing on services – standing on a long-distance service. This is not only unfair but dangerous. If the train were to strike debris or an animal on the line, anyone standing becomes a projectile. This is not a remote risk; this has happened. My office is inundated with complaints, and I have already warned the government that as they head into the summer period offering free transport, these problems will only be magnified. After half a billion dollars spent, the service is now substandard, and the explanations being offered simply do not wash. Other regions already manage selective carriage closures to ensure passengers can safely alight on shorter platforms. There is no reason the same solution cannot be implemented on the Warrnambool line. South-West Coast deserves the same standard of transport as other parts of the state.

I call on the minister to deliver six-carriage VLocity trains, restore full capacity and finally provide a modern, safe, reliable rail service for the people of my electorate. Our community deserve a train service that is safe, reliable and fit for purpose, and I will continue to fight until Warrnambool passengers get the service they deserve.

#### **Noble Park Community Centre**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (19:06): (1422) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action I seek is for her to join me in a visit to Noble Park Community Centre. Noble Park Community Centre runs an extraordinary range of programs, from English language classes that help new migrants settle in and thrive to creative programs in art, craft and music and digital literacy, and recreational activities that keep people active and connected. It is also a crucial hub for many community groups who access the facility for regular meetings. The community centre also hands out donated food weekly to locals who are in need of support, along with assisting charities, including Reaching Out Because We Can and Servants of the Two Hearts, who serve a hot lunch every Tuesday to locals who might be in need of a meal or just great company. Recently the Noble Park Community Centre was a recipient of a connecting carers in their community grant 2025 during National Carers Week. I would like to thank them for the amazing work that they do in my community with the hundreds of people they support in so many ways.

#### **Lampard Road–Porter Place, Drouin**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:07): (1423) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is funding to deliver vital upgrades for an intersection in Drouin. My community was made aware the other day of the government's investment for a 45-unit social housing complex at 2–6 Lampard Road in Drouin. Although I do welcome the investment in social housing in my area, because it is actually very important, this will have consequences for an intersection we have where this is being placed. The intersection is at Lampard Road and Porter Place, which also meets Main South Road in Drouin. Main South Road is one of the most congested roads in Drouin. When this development goes ahead, the intersection will become nearly unbearable for my constituents to get in and out, and for the people that will move into that unit complex it will become unbearable. We need this intersection upgraded when they start constructing the 45-unit social housing complex. I have had the opportunity to sit down with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and explain to her the congestion issues in Drouin, and in particular Main South Road in Drouin, and this will just add to the complexity and the congestion within that township. I am urging the minister to have a look at this intersection, sit down with me again so I can explain to her the problems around it and hopefully get some funding to upgrade this intersection when this unit development is constructed.

#### **Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (19:09): (1424) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the Treasurer to come down to my electorate to meet with members of the Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula to talk about the 2025–26 state budget and how it affects them. I am very happy to say that since I became the member for the electorate of Hastings I

have had many ministers come down to my electorate to meet with a whole variety of community and business leaders to talk about the specific challenges that many small and large business owners in the electorate of Hastings face. In fact in 2023 and 2024 we had the then Treasurer the Honourable Tim Pallas come down on a couple of occasions to meet with business leaders to talk about how the Labor government supports small and large businesses. These meetings have been highly successful and talked about for many months afterwards. I would be very excited to continue this tradition and to have our current Treasurer come down for a Treasurer's budget business briefing so that members of the community can hear firsthand from the Victorian state Treasurer and gain insights into the government's priorities, investments and policy direction and understand how decisions made in Spring Street impact both Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula and in particular the Western Port region. I absolutely know the Treasurer would be very warmly welcomed and that members of the business community would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with her. I look forward to the Treasurer's response.

### Education funding

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (19:10): (1425) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is to reinstate the P-12 college complexity allowance. The recent changes to the student resource package, or SRP as it is known, removes the P-12 college complexity allowance. Although this change is being phased in over several years – and we have plenty of P-12 colleges in my electorate, such as Manangatang P-12 College, who have written to me, and also Murrayville Community College, who have also written to me, and the likes of Robinvale and Merbein, which are also P-12 colleges – this will have significant and long-lasting financial impacts on those communities. Once these changes are fully implemented the cuts will result in reduced VCE subject offerings, which will limit pathways for senior students, and fewer VET and applied learning opportunities, which are critical for local employment readiness, because we know that engagement in tertiary education out in our electorate in the great north-west of the state is much, much lower than in the rest of the state, so employment readiness is vital, particularly through VET subjects. It also impacts through decreased capacity for one-on-one learning support, especially for students with additional needs.

The complexity allowance has enabled schools like Manangatang and Murrayville to provide tailored academic and wellbeing support, including literacy and numeracy intervention, mentoring and social and emotional programs. We know in the state of Victoria, the Education State, that literacy and numeracy are at a historic low, so now you are disadvantaging remote communities like Manangatang and Murrayville even further – it does not make sense. There will be less flexibility to attract and retain high-quality staff willing to work in small remote communities. Murrayville Community College in fact is the most remote school in Victoria, and it is being disadvantaged by this government once again. When is the straw going to break the camel's back?

I have had letters from both principals, and Natasha Mudie from Murrayville Community College said:

Our school is a small and successful college serving a remote community and we do not understand why colleges like ours, which performs such an important role in our community, have been singled out for a reduction in the SRP. We have never been wasteful with our resources and have been able to use them extremely effectively to achieve excellent student outcomes in the past.

I ask the minister to reinstate the P-12 college complexity allowance.

### Glen Waverley electorate community safety

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (19:13): (1426) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Police and Minister for Community Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to update the house on the measures the Allan Labor government is taking to keep residents in the Glen Waverley district community safe. Our government recently announced a further suite of reforms to strengthen Victoria's justice system and ensure our community remains one of the safest in the nation. A key part of this is the establishment of the new violence reduction unit, an early intervention model

designed to stop young people from falling into the cycle of crime before it begins. The VRU will work directly with young people to keep them engaged in school, help them transition into further education and support pathways into meaningful employment. It will also provide critical assistance to families when early signs emerge that a child may be at risk. This is about offering vulnerable young people a vision of hope, helping them see a future in which they can contribute positively to their community, rather than being drawn into harmful behaviours.

International evidence is clear: cities such as Glasgow and London have used similar models to significantly reduce violent crime by addressing its root causes. Here in Victoria these reforms complement our broader evidence-based approach to crime prevention. This work will operate alongside new sentencing arrangements targeting gang leaders who recruit or exploit young people. Targeting vulnerable youth for criminal purposes is appalling, and this government is stamping it out by introducing life sentences for the worst offenders who prey on children and teenagers. These reforms build on other decisive steps we have taken – banning machetes, introducing tough new bail laws making it extremely difficult to obtain bail for those charged with the most serious of offences and cracking down on crimes committed against frontline workers. The Allan Labor government is committed to doing whatever it takes to keep Victorians safe, preventing crime where we can, responding firmly when harm occurs and supporting communities to thrive. I look forward to the minister's response.

### **Retail crime**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (19:15): (1427) My amendment this evening is to the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and the action I seek is for the minister to intervene to curb the escalating crime in Victoria in regard to retail. The government is now debating the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. But despite being dragged to this bill, the Premier has proposed flawed legislation that will not solve the retail crime crisis. Penalties are weak and the key ingredient of workplace protection orders is missing. The coalition will aim to address both of those issues through amendment.

As the Shadow Assistant Minister for Small Business (Metropolitan), I have been closely monitoring the retail crime crisis affecting Victorian businesses. The Victorian Crime Statistics Agency data released on 25 September this year makes for absolutely sobering reading. There were over 99,000 retail crime offences recorded in the year ending June 2025, and that is up 20 per cent from the previous year, the highest level on record. Thefts from retail and stores increased by 26 per cent, and assaults in retail settings rose 21 per cent. A criminal offence now happens in Victorian retail environments at least once every 5 minutes and an assault every couple of hours, and these stats only represent the tip of the iceberg. The reality is far worse because the reporting simply is not there. Small business owners tell me they no longer report every theft and staff face daily abuse. Chapel Street is home to hundreds of small businesses experiencing the same rising crime rates. The government recently announced deploying protective services officers to large suburban shopping centres for a 90-day trial. This overlooks retail precincts like Chapel Street, and it raises concerns about which railway stations will further lose PSO coverage – a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

The fundamental issue is that Victoria is falling way behind the rest of Australia in this space. One in 10 Victorian workers work in retail, yet Victoria remains without comparable protections for its retail businesses and workforce. New South Wales and the ACT announced retail-specific crime units. South Australia continues investing in Operation Measure. Most states have legislated specific abuse protections since 2019. Australia's leading retail and industry associations have called for urgent action in a joint letter to the Premier. The retail association, the Franchise Council of Australia, Retail Drinks Australia, MGA Independent Businesses Australia, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia are demanding action. Ritchies IGA and franchise stores across Victoria have called for action. How many times and from how many businesses does the government need to hear this before they actually take action? It is another case

of the Allan Labor government being yet again too slow, too late and lacking the ability to work with small business. It is time for a fresh start.

### **Greenvale Reservoir Park**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:18): (1428) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Water in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to update me on the formal and much-anticipated opening of Greenvale Reservoir Park southern section next month. Thanks to the major investment that I secured last year with support from my community, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water have made great progress on the major works which were needed to safely reopen the southern section of Greenvale Reservoir Park, as anybody travelling along Somerton Road now can attest. It is an investment that has unlocked nearly 40 hectares of green space in the heart of my electorate and has delivered new bike paths and walking trails, upgraded internal roads, toilets, shelters, water fountains and barbecues, including the barbecue pits which are so important for multicultural communities' and families' traditions. I cannot wait to join my community getting back to Greenvale Reservoir Park for barbecues, walks and the enjoyment of all that new open space which has been a special place in the hearts of local families for generations and known to many of course as Ford'un Arkast. I look forward to the minister's reply and to joining me at the reopening.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the Minister for Small Business and Employment to respond to the member for Prahran and refer other matters, I am mindful that there is a matter in front of the house and ask members not to anticipate debate in regard to the bill in front of the house.

### **Responses**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:19): Responding to the member for Prahran, let me make it very clear: our small and family businesses are the backbone of our local communities, and that is why this week this Parliament has laws before the house that protect workers – not only retail workers but also small and family business workers. We know that they are absolutely integral in our community, and that is why we will do everything on this side of the house to protect and support workers and in particular, can I also add, support small and family businesses not only in Chapel Street but across Melbourne and Victoria. That is why we will continue to provide the right supports, whether it is our mentoring grants or whether it is our multicultural precinct support grants, working in partnership with stakeholders. I met with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry last week and looked at opportunities to better support and grow small and family businesses in Victoria. But I am also keen to provide an update to the member on the programs and supports that are provided for small and family businesses.

A number of other matters were raised by members to ministers. I will make sure that these matters are referred to the relevant ministers for attention.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:21 pm.**