



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 5 February 2025**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

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

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

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

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



# CONTENTS

---

COMMITTEES	
Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....	71
Membership .....	71
PETITIONS	
Silverleaves Beach, Cowes .....	71
PAPERS	
Papers .....	71
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices .....	71
COMMITTEES	
Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....	71
Membership .....	71
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Community safety .....	71
Community safety .....	72
Cannabis law reform .....	72
Peninsula Film Festival .....	73
Yawa Aquatic Centre .....	73
Invasion Day rally .....	73
Jim Parkes Reserve .....	73
Canada .....	74
Books Behind Bars .....	74
Lunar New Year .....	74
Midsumma Pride March .....	74
Warrnambool Gift .....	74
Australia Day awards .....	75
Ian Wells .....	75
BILLS	
Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024 .....	75
Statement of compatibility .....	75
Second reading .....	76
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Suburban Rail Loop .....	78
MOTIONS	
Prahran electorate crime .....	84
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Disability services .....	98
Windsor Community Children's Centre .....	100
Ministers statements: kindergarten funding .....	102
Animal welfare .....	103
Youth justice system .....	103
Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop .....	104
Homelessness .....	105
Economy .....	106
Ministers statements: Lunar New Year .....	106
WorkCover .....	107
Housing .....	108
Ministers statements: Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund .....	110
Written responses .....	111
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	111
Western Metropolitan Region .....	111
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	111
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	112
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	112
Northern Victoria Region .....	112
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	112
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	113
Eastern Victoria Region .....	113
Western Victoria Region .....	113
Western Victoria Region .....	113
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	114

# CONTENTS

---

Northern Victoria Region .....	114
Western Victoria Region .....	114
Northern Victoria Region .....	114
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	115
MOTIONS	
Pahran electorate crime.....	115
Werribee electorate infrastructure.....	117
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion .....	136
MOTIONS	
Abortion services.....	136
STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Trust for Nature .....	149
Report 2023–24 .....	149
Environment and Planning Committee .....	150
Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria.....	150
Country Fire Authority.....	151
Report 2023–24 .....	151
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	152
Budget papers 2024–25 .....	152
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	153
Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria.....	153
Department of Justice and Community Safety.....	153
Report 2022–23 .....	153
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	154
Budget papers 2024–25 .....	154
PETITIONS	
Corrections system .....	155
ADJOURNMENT	
Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo .....	160
Working with children checks.....	161
Police resources .....	162
Gender services.....	162
Housing affordability .....	162
Duck hunting.....	163
Fire Rescue Victoria.....	164
Cooba solar project.....	164
Housing.....	165
Beaufort Primary School site.....	165
Probationary driving age.....	166
Pahran electorate crime.....	166
Neighbourhood houses .....	167
Nursing students .....	168
Meat industry .....	168
Responses .....	169

**Wednesday 5 February 2025**

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

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Membership*

**The PRESIDENT (09:34):** I advise the house I have received a letter from David Davis resigning from the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee, effective from 4 February 2025.

*Petitions***Silverleaves Beach, Cowes**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 4370 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the concerns of the Silverleaves community at the lack of State Government funding for emergency coastal erosion mitigation works to prevent homes, public infrastructure and public land from being undermined and lost.

**The petitioners therefore request the Legislative Council to call on the Allan Government to:**

**Urgently fund and implement DEECA's proposed geotextile revetment to protect homes, public infrastructure and public land in the short term, and work collaboratively with the community to plan and fund long term solutions to mitigate and manage coastal erosion.**

**Melina BATH:** As the petition is a petition that qualifies for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of the next sitting week.

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

Auditor-General – Reporting on Local Government Performance: Follow-up, February 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

*Business of the house***Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Membership*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That David Davis be a participating member of the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements***Community safety**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): Antisemitism has no place in our society and we all must work together to make sure it is eliminated. We had last year the very distressing

attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea, one of the more vivid and distressing examples of antisemitic attacks in our community. I went down on the morning of the attacks and spoke with members of the congregation and then paid a subsequent visit to the synagogue. The sights and the smells will forever stay with all of us who walked through those doors and saw the terror and the horror that was inflicted on that particular part of Melbourne's Jewish community. But there have been more attacks against Melbourne's Jewish community as recently as the weekend and some incidents overnight. The Jewish community in Melbourne gives us such richness and strength. We value the contribution they have made to building this city and this state. In our community no-one should be afraid to walk the streets showing their culture, showing their faith. That is why this government is taking action to introduce more powers. We have got legislation in the other place to deal with vilification. I am proud to stand with the members of the Jewish community in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

### Community safety

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:50): I join with my colleague in expressing concern about antisemitism and the risks and threats that are faced by not just the Jewish community but many others in this state. Indeed there was the timely letter by the City of Glen Eira in the last 24 hours – the current mayor and four previous mayors joining together to say that the threats and the violence have got to stop. They have called on the Premier to act and ensure that there are greater policing resources deployed to make sure that there is actually proper –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** You will agree with me about the significance of that letter.

**Ryan Batchelor:** I am just saying the chief commissioner has the power to do that, not the Premier, under the police act. Read the legislation, Mr Davis, before you come in here.

**David DAVIS:** Well, the state government sometimes needs to provide resources for the Chief Commissioner of Police – that is what I said – the resources for the police to undertake the work that is required. The letter, as noted, was to the Premier, and the Premier needs to respond to that letter. The antisemitism is actually completely and utterly unacceptable, but the letter makes the point that the threats and the violence are actually broader than antisemitic matters as well.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I did. I actually read it aloud into the transcript here last night, so I am sorry, the member is wrong.

### Cannabis law reform

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:52): After that I am feeling frivolous. It is lovely to be back after what no doubt has been a quiet and uneventful festive season recess for everyone here in the chamber. I was fortunate enough to get to Thailand for three weeks and could not resist the urge to undertake a little concurrent cannabis professional development. My wife and I have been to Thailand half a dozen times over the last 40 years, but this was our first visit since Thailanders both legalised cannabis and established a commercial market. We have always partaken of the local cannabis product in the past, but it was just a little bit nervousness inducing, given the potential to fall foul of the local Thai authorities – a bit of a buzzkill, so to speak. This time we were able to enjoy both local and imported product in a range of great retail settings, from a boutique beer and cannabis store with a nice upstairs smokers lounge to a coffee lounge near the beach with the best cannabis affogatos I have ever had. It was terrific. But most of the dispensaries were basically a lot like our own tobacco stores, albeit without the extensive armour plating to stop ram raids and firebombings. Thailand is also a salient lesson in how an appropriate regulatory framework recognising local commercial, public health and licensing arrangements is so important. Thailand has gone from a totally laissez-faire cannabis market to now having a regulatory framework, licensed premises – *(Time expired)*



**Peninsula Film Festival**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:53): I would just like to update the house on a few events and visits I have been able to make during the parliamentary break. I was able to attend Victoria's biggest film festival, the Peninsula Film Festival, as it continues to grow year on year. I think it will be 15 years next year. It was over a Friday, Saturday and Sunday night, and I was thrilled to be able to attend the Saturday night and officially open the event. There was a massive crowd, as I said – thousands of people, volunteers, sponsors and collaborators. Rosebud Rotary, Searoad Ferries and Beyond Blue were all there, amongst many others. It is fantastic that the Victorian government is able to contribute to this event, which means so much not only to the region but to Victoria.

**Yawa Aquatic Centre**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:54): I was also able to drop into Yawa Aquatic Centre in Rosebud and see their VICSWIM kids program. We know swimming is an incredibly important life skill. We want kids when they leave primary school to be able to swim 50 metres. The centre delivered 17,000 lessons to 11 local primaries last year. It runs 370 lessons per week. It is incredible what they are doing there. The centre is going from strength to strength. Starting with a handful of 2000 to 3000 members, there are well over 5000 now. The community is getting into it, whether it is swimming, whether it is their wellness centre, whether it is the gym. It is an incredible facility and one that I am so glad we have been able to support.

**Invasion Day rally**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): On 26 January 2025 I joined thousands of Victorians from all walks of life on the front steps of Parliament to stand alongside our First Nations people on a day of mourning, invasion and remembrance of their survival through genocide. My family and I listened with an open heart to the lived experiences of our Indigenous peoples – elders, young people, people in our community who are from the oldest living culture on earth. Despite the denial and resistance to changing the date of 26 January, it is difficult to embrace unity because true unity involves truth-telling. This involves acknowledging the pain of history and how our colonial legacy and racist systems continue to pervade and disproportionately impact the lives of our Indigenous communities from one generation to the next. Indigenous people in this country are imprisoned at a higher rate than in any other country, constantly wearing the cultural load and holding space for ignorant parts of our community that would rather hold tightly to the status quo than make space. 26 January was a day of listening, walking together and resistance. I heeded the calls and voices of our Indigenous communities that 26 January is not the day to celebrate.

**Jim Parkes Reserve**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): Recently Mr Tarlamis and I had the great privilege of being in Beaconsfield to open the new and upgraded Jim Parkes Reserve, all funded as part of a 50–50 partnership between the state government through the Growing Suburbs Fund and Cardinia Shire Council. It was terrific to see the much-upgraded facilities in this very important local park that is central to the Beaconsfield community. It was great to have local councillors there, including Mayor Jack Kowarzik, local councillor Brett Owen and in particular members of the Beaconsfield community, including members of Jim Parkes's family. He was a great presence in the community and was involved in all sorts of clubs. In fact I believe from what his family have said he was involved at one point in almost every single association in Beaconsfield, so the park is a very fitting honour to him. Also there of course was the Beaconsfield Progress Association, including Graeme and Ann Taylor. It is always great to have their active support and involvement in fighting for their local community. It is great to see the new facilities, the new playgrounds and the new parklands and pathways which make the park more exciting, more enticing and more accessible to all members of the Beaconsfield community.

### Canada

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): On another matter, I might just briefly make a remark as well. We are privileged here as a member of the Commonwealth from time to time to speak up for our brothers and sisters in other Commonwealth parliaments across the world, and I would share my solidarity and the solidarity, I hope, of this chamber with our sister Canadian provinces and territories and their parliaments in their time facing capricious threats. Vive le Canada.

### Books Behind Bars

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:58): Over the summer break I was privileged to connect with Daniel Vansetten. Daniel, now in the third year of his law degree and achieving distinctions and high distinctions across the board, knows all too well the importance of access to literature in prisons. Daniel was formerly incarcerated himself. He is now a prison rights advocate and founder of a program that provides textbooks to people in prison for self-directed higher learning. The Books Behind Bars project aims to empower people in prison by giving them access to educational resources with a goal to help people in prison succeed and have autonomy. Many studies have shown the benefits for all in our communities when prisoners have the ability to undertake university and other higher level study. Daniel drove all the way from South Australia to collect my whole collection of textbooks from my law degree, as well as many others generously donated by members of my community, and spoke about the meaningful impact this donation will have on many prisoners' lives. He is an incredible person doing incredible work, and I hope the many other members in this place who have studied law will consider donating their old textbooks to this life-changing program that is empowering prisoners right across the country.

### Lunar New Year

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): Firstly, of course, happy new year to everyone in the chamber. Yesterday was my first day back, but today is the first day I get to make a contribution, so happy new year. I know it is February, but here we are. I enjoyed a very busy weekend last weekend. Firstly, I attended the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse Lunar New Year festival at Box Hill. It was a very well attended festival, and whilst it was a marvellous celebration welcoming in the Year of the Wood Snake with spectacular lion dancing, it was also a great celebration of our cultural diversity not only in Box Hill but throughout the state of Victoria. I wish to pass on my congratulations to the fantastic Asian Business Association of Whitehorse and to president Bihong Wang and her incredible team for pulling together such a great celebration. In Victoria we know that China is one of our most important trading partners, a trade relationship that is valued by the Allan Labor government. I wish all my constituents in my region a very happy Lunar New Year. Xīn nián kuài lè. Gōng xǐ fā cái.

### Midsumma Pride March

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): Secondly, on Sunday I also attended a fantastic celebration of equality in demonstrating our support for the LGBTIQ+ community in Victoria at the Pride March in St Kilda. It was wonderful to see so many attending this important event as we marched down Fitzroy Street in celebration of love, support, inclusion and diversity, because in Victoria love is love and equality is not negotiable.

### Warrnambool Gift

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (10:01): On Saturday 30 November 2024 I had the pleasure of attending the Warrnambool Gift. This athletic event continues to grow in Warrnambool, with 672 entries in 2024, and that is up from 482 in 2023. Significant athletes that competed on the day included dual Olympian Ellie Beer; the White Tiger, Paralympian Chad Perris; and Australian 400-metre titleholder Cooper Sherman. Five previous Stawell Gift winners also competed in the event. It was held at the impressive Reid Oval in Warrnambool, which was in recent years upgraded with the help of a \$7.1 million grant from the Allan Labor government. As one of the athletes commented to

me, the surface of Reid Oval rivalled Stawell in its perfect soft green. The event was very well run and was supported by around a thousand-strong crowd in the stands. I thank all the organisers and volunteers and in particular Gilly Hayden and Richard Wearmouth and the committee for a very, very successful event.

### **Australia Day awards**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (10:02): I want to congratulate all recipients of Australia Day awards across the Eastern Victoria Region. The sorts of contributions that have been made to communities in often very quiet, unassuming ways have an opportunity to be recognised and to be celebrated, and what we have seen is a really wonderful and diverse offering of people who have been recognised, everything from the Rotarians and the work that they do in Moe right through to the collection of support for people in need from the Dandenong Ranges right out through to East Gippsland. We know that there are so many people making such a profound difference, and that should never go unsaid.

### **Ian Wells**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (10:03): I want to speak today about Ian Wells. Ian Wells was a passionate member of the Gippsland Motorcyclists Toy Run. He was a man dedicated to making sure that our littlest Gippslanders had presents under their Christmas tree even when they grew up and lived in disadvantage. Ian was desperately, tragically killed one week after marrying his beloved Kathleen when his motorcycle ran off the road at the Tyers-Walhalla Road late on Saturday night. The Red Knights that he is part of are in mourning. The community is in mourning. Many people will know Ian from the sausage sizzles outside Bunnings in Morwell. They will know him from the community. They will know him from the work that he did to contribute to something that will go on and will be remembered because of his hard work. Vale, Ian Wells. My love to his family and everyone who loved him.

### ***Bills***

## **Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024**

### ***Statement of compatibility***

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:04): I lay on the table the statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the bill as introduced into the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

The main purpose of the bill is to insert into the Constitution Act 1975 provisions that entrench existing legislated provisions for access to abortion services as per the Abortion Law Reform Act 2008.

These include:

- that a registered medical practitioner may perform an abortion on a woman up to 24 weeks of pregnancy
- that a registered medical practitioner may perform an abortion on a woman after 24 weeks of pregnancy in certain circumstances
- that the relevant medications for abortion may be supplied and administered by certain classes of persons.
- that a practitioner who holds a conscientious objection is not obliged to participate in abortion provision, except in emergency circumstances, but must adhere to certain obligations.

Section 48 of the charter states that none of the provisions of the charter affect any laws applicable to abortion. As the charter does not apply to the bill, the bill is compatible with the charter.

Dr Sarah Mansfield MLC  
Victorian Greens Member for Western Victoria

*Second reading*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:04): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Recently the fissures of debate around abortion have cracked back open.

Like many, I have watched from afar as discussions about abortion rights in the US unravel and asked, ‘What about Australia? What about our rights? Can we be sure about them?’

We’ve heard horror stories of women dying as a result of being denied urgent care. At least three women have died in Texas after being denied care for miscarriages because health providers feared prosecution under abortion laws. These included one mother of two who was allowed to bleed to death while being actively cared for in an emergency department, when a simple, routine surgical procedure would have saved her life.

We hear these stories, and we think, ‘Only in America.’

But then only last year I listened with horror to the emboldened words of QLD MPs in the lead-up to the state election.

And again, in October of 2024, Liberal MPs in South Australia attempted to reignite the culture war around abortion – which was only defeated by one vote.

In the face of re-energisation of conservative political agendas, we cannot take access to abortion for granted. We have seen that all it takes is a change in government and access to fundamental health care may be at risk.

If we want to get a sense of how important access is, between a quarter and a third of people who could potentially fall pregnant have an abortion in their lifetimes. It is common, and part of basic, fundamental health care. It is something that has occurred throughout the ages, regardless of the laws of the day. And yet something so common, and so obviously necessary, continues to be one of the most heavily politicised areas of health care.

Ideology and religion have dominated political debate about abortion, and conversely, abortion has had undue influence over politics.

While this is played out more overtly in other countries, Australia has never been immune to this politicisation, which has long determined abortion access.

In fact, you don’t have to go very far back in time to see this.

In 2006, I along with many others celebrated as our federal Parliament voted to give power to approve use of RU 486 – or mifepristone, a medication used for abortion – to the Therapeutic Goods Administration. While giving the drug regulator powers of approval over a medication might sound like a dull administrative – and almost unnecessary – vote, it was in fact monumental.

Because prior to that, only the health minister could approve use, following a deal done in the 1990s by the then Prime Minister John Howard with conservative independent Brian Harradine. Access was therefore dependent on the health minister of the day – which from 2003 to 2006 was Tony Abbott, someone who was well known to be staunchly against abortion. This arrangement effectively meant that mifepristone was inaccessible in Australia, despite it being a medication well established as extremely safe and an important option for people requiring an abortion. If ever there was to be an example of politicisation of health care, this was it. The historic vote in 2006 – which came about due

to the collective advocacy of women across the federal Parliament – restored things to the way they always should have been.

I remember this clearly because at the time it felt like a huge leap forward had been made. And while it was, the barriers to accessing abortion in Australia were still everywhere.

Abortion was still a crime in Victoria, unless performed to preserve the life or physical or mental health of the pregnant person. The legal basis for this was the Menhennitt ruling in 1969, whereby abortion could be performed if necessary due to risks to the person's mental or physical health that were greater than that expected with a normal pregnancy. While this meant that abortion was not illegal in certain circumstances, the fear of potential criminal prosecution – for both the pregnant person and the medical practitioner providing care – was always a lingering concern. It also meant that stigma remained, and access was very limited, with abortions mainly being performed in private clinics, but still sometimes clandestinely and unsafely.

The stories of women in the USA dying, injured, or becoming gravely unwell are stories that were commonplace in Victoria prior to the 1970s. Before then, it is estimated that 90,000 women every year in Australia had illegal abortions, facing fear and risking injury and death to do so. While the rich and well connected could quietly access abortions from qualified doctors in hospital, the poor had to access so-called 'backyard' abortions, typically performed by people with no or limited medical training in unsanitary conditions, where the motivation was usually profit rather than compassion. Police were an integral part of this system, accepting bribes to stay quiet and tip off abortion providers about potential raids. It was a lucrative business.

Between 1939 and 1983, septic abortion, where a severe infection following abortion occurs, was by far and away the leading cause of maternal mortality at the Royal Women's Hospital, killing hundreds of women. Deaths due to abortion would have greatly exceeded official statistics, with abortion frequently not included in the cause of death. Those whose abortions went wrong before making it to hospital often had their bodies secretly disposed of to avoid prosecution of the person who performed it. And these deaths occurred because abortion was criminalised.

In 2008, two years after the federal vote on RU 486, I was working as a junior doctor and found myself in conversations with people who were working on a campaign to decriminalise abortion in Victoria. Many of them were integral to achieving the reforms up to that point, and it is rarely recognised that but for a handful of people, like Jo and Bertram Wainer, abortion would still have to be accessed via illegal networks today. The campaign was successful. I know some members of this current Parliament were here then and were part of the historic vote to decriminalise abortion in Victoria. Abortion is now fully decriminalised in all states and territories, but it's taken up until the past five to 10 years for this to occur – it's still very much in the rear-view mirror.

Legislative changes don't immediately lead to improved access.

Even after the RU 486 vote in 2006, it took another six years for mifepristone to be registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration, and until just two years ago, it was still far more heavily regulated than in other comparable countries.

And still now in Victoria, there are approximately 15 local government areas with no prescribers of this medication. We have a long way to go, and there are many people out there – within both government and organisations across our communities – who are working so hard to address access barriers. They are making gains. But this could all be at risk if the laws that enable their work are wound back.

I stand here today to introduce a bill to Parliament that will enshrine the access to safe abortion that is afforded in this state into the Victorian constitution – thereby protecting this hard-fought right from the whims of a future government.

The bill will enshrine the Abortion Law Reform Act in the constitution in a way that makes it extremely difficult for future Victorian governments or parliaments to pass legislation to limit, dilute or abolish the current provisions providing for the legal access to abortion – requiring a special majority, or three-fifths of the Parliament, for the act to be diminished.

However, it will not prevent future non-substantive amendments to abortion laws, such as the making of typographical changes, nor will it hinder any legislative amendments that seek to broaden or expand upon the current provisions regarding access to abortion services. One obvious change that is needed is for the act to use gender-inclusive language to ensure that all those who need abortion services – women and gender-diverse people – are protected under the law.

The Abortion Law Reform Act stipulates that medical professionals can perform abortions and can supply and administer drugs for an abortion and regulates the performing of abortions both before and after 24 weeks of pregnancy, including through the provision and administration of drugs.

The act provides that medical professionals can conscientiously object to performing abortions in non-emergency circumstances, but they must refer a patient seeking an abortion to a medical professional who does not have a conscientious objection.

Three years ago Victoria took the important step of entrenching the legislative ban against unconventional gas extraction, known as fracking, in the constitution.

It is now time to do the same for abortion.

The Abortion Law Reform Act 2008 was and is landmark legislation that says to all Victorians unambiguously in law: my body, my choice when it comes to accessing abortion in this state. Entrenching this law in the constitution sends a clear message to anyone who thinks that they can start kicking around abortion as the latest political football. My body, my choice. Always.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:14): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

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

### *Production of documents*

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Sonja Terpstra:** President, I rise to make a point of order before we begin debate on this motion. I would like to draw your attention to point (2)(b) of Mr Davis's motion, which is asking for the government to table future documents in perpetuity – for the rest of this term – on this particular matter. I have concerns that this represents an undue burden on departments to continuously create and provide documents for the next two years that are not in existence at this point in time. The standing orders make no mention of the ability to order documents into the future that do not yet exist, and my understanding of documents orders is that they can only be used to order production of documents that currently exist. On this basis I would ask that you strike out point (2)(b) of the motion, which I believe would be consistent with your previous rulings, like one that you made on 28 August last year when you ruled against the creation of new documents. This appears to me to be a way that the coalition is trying to get around your previous ruling.

**David Davis:** On the point of order, President, there is nothing to stop the chamber from ordering documents where documents are actually created. This says that new documents will be created. I draw the President's attention to clause (1)(c), which references VCAT case Z773/2022. In that case it makes clear that the government from time to time has been creating an updated register. Where we know that the government from time to time creates an updated document there is nothing wrong with requesting that the government in a timely way after that provide that document to the chamber. If members read that VCAT ruling, they will understand that these documents are in fact created from time to time or updated from time to time. Given that the document that this initially refers to is an

out-of-date document now – it is not the most recent document – the motion seeks the most recent document, but it also requests that the government table those documents as they are created.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Further to the point of order, President, I understand the way in which Mr Davis has couched this motion is that the risk register is an existing document and would be updated, but it may be a matter for the authority itself in terms of how it wishes to create more information in regard to the register. It may choose not to update the register but to create another document. You have made an assumption there, Mr Davis, about a document in existence that may in fact be updated. This is something that has not been determined yet about the way that that agency may in fact use the register. I think on that basis my point of order should be upheld, because there is no certainty around the way in which the agency may choose to provide this information, and at this point in time it does not exist.

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, I did not make this up, and that is why I put the reference to the VCAT case quite clearly – because the VCAT case in writing makes it quite clear that from time to time the authority does update the register in fact. That is what it says. In that sense I am asking, through the motion, that from time to time, as those documents are created – and are existing documents at that point – they are released to the chamber in a timely way.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Further to the point of order, President, I think, as Mr Davis explained about the VCAT decision, that applied to a document that was in existence and was updated. Also it is a matter for the tribunal to determine, based on the evidence before it, what should be made available. In this case we are still not clear as to how the Suburban Rail Loop Authority may choose to provide the information in a risk register. Again, I think Mr Davis is trying very hard to say that the VCAT decision should apply in this case, but it is not the role of this Parliament to determine the application of a precedent; it is the role of the courts to determine that.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja Terpstra:** But also – I am not finished, Mr Davis – the Suburban Rail Loop Authority has the ability to decide how it updates the risk register, and it may choose to provide additional documentation. Again, the motion makes assumptions about things that are not yet in existence – are hypothetical – so for that reason (2)(b) should be struck out.

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, to be quite clear, VCAT made a decision on a particular document at a particular point in time.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Not this document.

**David Davis:** No, that is right. I am agreeing with you on that. But in that case, in the transcripts and in the judgement, there is reference to the fact that the Suburban Rail Loop has in fact updated the document and from time to time does update the document. So I am not making it up. It is not hypothetical. It is actually –

**Sonja Terpstra:** It is hypothetical.

**David Davis:** No, it is not. It is indicated in that judgement that they do update it. So that is the point, and that is why I phrased it that way and referenced the case not about the document that it released but about the future documents.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Further to the point of order, President, a final point on this: again Mr Davis is making an assumption about the way in which the agency may choose to provide information. It is up to them to decide how they choose to update a register, whether they update it or provide a new register, and that is not determined; it is a hypothetical assumption.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am happy to rule. I do not think anything in part (2)(b) of Mr Davis's motion would be offensive to the standing orders. The potential that there could be an updated register is real, and I do not think Mr Davis is calling for any document that does not exist to be created. I suppose

ultimately it is probably a new approach, but in saying that, these things get tested in the house, so this will be tested by this motion in the house.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:22): I am pleased to move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) project is the largest infrastructure project in Victoria's history and is not yet fully funded;
  - (b) the SRL project has already seen the cost of the project escalate from \$50 billion for three stages to at least \$34.5 billion for stage one alone;
  - (c) an early version of the SRL risk register, a strategic risks spreadsheet created prior to March 2020, was released by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority under the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal's direction of 12 December 2024 in case Z773/2022;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council:
  - (a) within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the most recent SRL risk register; and
  - (b) every three months commencing from the date of tabling of the register in paragraph (2)(a) until the expiration of the project or the expiration of the 60th Parliament, the most current version of the SRL risk register.

That is what we were told: the big loop around was going to cost \$50 billion in three stages. Mr Mulholland is worried that the one at the further end will never appear or will be much later, but either way the project was to cost \$50 billion for three stages and now will cost at least \$34.5 billion for stage 1. That is what they list in their documents, but actually many think it will be far greater than that.

This is in essence a very, very simple document. This is a very risky project. It is a project that is risk-full in terms of engineering and complexity, but importantly for the state, it is a project that is risk-high on the issues around cost and cost blowouts. The risk register deals with a number of those issues. It deals with ways that they could be mitigated. The community is entitled to understand how its taxpayers money is being spent and what controls and what buttressing are available to make sure that community money, taxpayers money, is not squandered or used inappropriately and what steps are being taken by the authority and the government to make sure that the Suburban Rail Loop is brought in at a price that is reasonable and that proper mitigation steps are taken.

The Parliament has an important scrutiny role. This is squarely about that scrutiny role. That scrutiny role is important in terms of looking at projects and trying to constrain costs. We have seen blowouts of more than \$40 billion in overruns on major projects in recent years, and this has contributed significantly to the state's debt position, the unfortunate position we are in. There is a strong public interest in understanding how the risks are being mitigated in this project and how the risks are being managed. In the point of order with the President just now we discussed that the VCAT judgement in December pointed to the fact that in evidence the authority had indicated that the risk register was updated from time to time, so it is not a nebulous or unknown fact. It would be indeed what you would expect, but it is actually stated baldly in writing in the judgement and in the evidence that was provided to VCAT by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and its witnesses.

I think we are at a point here where we all know this project is fraught with risk and cost overrun and we know that there needs to be proper controls. So this is one step – one practical, reasonable, plausible step – that the chamber can take to try and constrain these costs and to understand what is going on and what steps are being taken to manage these extraordinary risks that the state is facing. We have seen this week the ratings agencies have pointed to the infrastructure spending of various states, and Victoria is very prominent amongst them. Infrastructure spending is incredibly important, but it is important that the infrastructure spending is targeted and well managed, that costs are constrained and contained and that waste is minimised. The risk register is a part of that process.



**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:27): I rise to speak on this documents motion as proposed by Mr Davis. Given the changes to the standing orders, the government is nobbled and prevented from fully responding to these things; I only have 5 minutes on the clock to do so. It is very convenient for the opposition to do that, because they do not like to hear a full response and the facts that we can actually provide people to give some certainty around these matters. That is something that is lost on the opposition.

I might just say that the SRL East, the Cheltenham–Box Hill part of SRL, has been consistently costed at \$30 billion to \$34.5 billion, and the business and investment case noted that contributions to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop will be sought from state and federal governments and from value capture, which is being used for other projects like the city loop. I heard Mr Mulholland’s discussion around value capture, and I was quite surprised. I do not think the opposition actually know what value capture is, because if you read some of the reports from Infrastructure Victoria it recommends that the government should do more around value capture because it means we can realise potential gains from important landholdings around important projects. If you want to argue against Infrastructure Victoria, who are the experts in talking about what infrastructure we need, you need to actually make sure you do your homework and read the documents and read the information that has been provided.

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Mr Welch, go and read what Infrastructure Victoria have actually said, because you are embarrassing yourself. Those opposite want to pause the project. It is a project that is critically important to people in my region, and I will take great delight in telling all of my constituents in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region how much the opposition oppose the Suburban Rail Loop, because many people in my region only have access to bus as a means of public transport. This project will mean that they will be able to get from Box Hill down to places like Deakin University. People in my region voted twice for this project. It is a great project, and every time I am out in my region people tell me that they cannot wait to use it. I will take great delight in telling everyone how much you oppose it. You do not want people in my region to have access to public transport.

Opposing the project would mean you would sack 4000 workers – real jobs that put food on the table for people in my region. In this cost-of-living crisis you want to take well-paid jobs away from people in my region. It would also mean the long-planned rail line to Monash would be cancelled. It would lead to years of delays to deliver the loop, and it would lead to massive cost increases as a result of the delay. What a waste of money. You want to come in here and talk about taxpayers money. This would be a massive waste of taxpayers money, and money that Victorians have voted for twice.

I will just talk about what happened when you were last in government, in the 57th Parliament. When you were last in government, 3282 FOI requests were denied by you.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, this is actually a narrow motion dealing with documents and dealing with a set of documents. It is not a general frolic to attack the opposition on a wide front.

**The PRESIDENT:** On the point of order, the first speaker from the government has more scope around this topic, and I will call Ms Terpstra to continue.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I will remind the chamber and anyone who may be watching at home that under the LNP government they provided no documents for 50 per cent of the motions that we asked for. No documents were provided in response to requests by Labor for documents on ambulance response times, the Patrick Stevedores relocation and the east–west link business case, for which just an executive summary was released. So those opposite have no credibility on any of this stuff. I might remind the chamber that when David Davis – Mr Davis – was health minister at the time, at one point health performance data was held back for 18 months. So to come in here and to say that the government is bad, we never release anything – we generally release documents. We have nothing to hide in regard to these matters. But this motion also talks about risk. Mr Davis is calling for the release

of documents that may in fact impact on commercial-in-confidence information, which would increase the risk to the project substantially. So again, this motion is a motion that is ill conceived; it is really a political attack on the government – surprise, surprise. There is nothing surprising about that.

But if ever those on the opposition benches were in government, you could just see the chaos that would reign supreme. This government builds things. We build things, and we are investing in important infrastructure that Victorians need. For a modern city like Melbourne, we need to make sure we have an orbital rail loop and we can get more cars off the road, and in doing so we are creating jobs for Victorians that will be secure jobs and will put food on the table. We are also getting cars off the road, which is going to make it easier for Victorians to get around the state and the metropolitan area. We do not oppose the production of documents, as is normally our practice.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:32): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's very good motion about the Suburban Rail Loop risk register and the strategic risk spreadsheet he referred to. The SRL is, no doubt about it, a very risky project, and our ratings agencies acknowledge this. S&P acknowledge this. They are very concerned that the state government is ploughing ahead with a project that still has not received funding, and I think the question to that side of the chamber is: will Mr Carroll cancel it? Will the Labor backbench cancel it? Are the government looking into delaying this project for other projects? That is certainly what the Labor backbench would like to happen. Are the state government going to delay this project? And I want to clear up a few points, because the independent Parliamentary Budget Office cost this project at around \$216 billion. It was interesting hearing the member for Eastern Victoria Region the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop yesterday in response to my very simple, short question on what year the SRL will reach Werribee.

**Ryan Batchelor**: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis did raise the issue that this is a very narrow documents motion, and perhaps Mr Mulholland should speak to it.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: I ask Mr Mulholland to come back to the motion at hand.

**Evan MULHOLLAND**: I am. It is on the Suburban Rail Loop and the risks of the Suburban Rail Loop, and the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop yesterday failed to answer a really simple question about when the SRL will reach Werribee. Her answer in the end was 'Read the business case.' Well, the business and investment case for the Suburban Rail Loop specifically refers to SRL East and SRL North. It specifically states that a business and investment case for SRL West has not been completed. There are a few points that we can raise here.

**Ryan Batchelor**: On a point of order, Acting President, we have had points of order from the other side, seeking that speakers on this side speak to the motion about the production of documents. Mr Mulholland in his contribution is straying from the scope of the motion before us today. I would ask you to bring him to it.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: I ask Mr Mulholland to return to the matter of the production of documents as it relates to this issue.

**Evan MULHOLLAND**: I am more than happy to, but it is important to note that the government has no timeframe on when the SRL will reach Werribee. In fact it is a very risky project that is going to cost \$216 billion and is not going to be completed until about 2052 in SRL East and SRL North. Ms Terpstra goes on about freedom-of-information requests and documents – 7000 NDAs have been signed on the North East Link.

**Ryan Batchelor**: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a motion requesting the production of a risk register for the Suburban Rail Loop. I am not sure what other infrastructure projects have to do with the motion. The member seems to be unwilling to comply with your rulings. I ask that you bring him to back to the motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: Mr Mulholland to continue on the motion.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I am speaking directly to the motion, and if the member for Southern Metropolitan would allow me to finish my sentence, I was comparing 7000 NDAs signed on the North East Link with the fact that the SRL is shallower and longer than that. So how many NDAs are you going to sign for the SRL to shut people up across the community? It is a risky project. It is risky for all Victorians. It is going to cost us \$216 billion. Our rating agencies acknowledge the risk of this project and acknowledge the risk of this state government ploughing ahead with this project without federal money. It does not have federal money.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am just wondering if Mr Mulholland is going to attribute quotes which almost certainly came up in the course of the city loop debate, when this occurred a couple of decades ago, in the course of his contribution about this project.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** There is no point of order.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** If that is the best argument, this project is doomed to fail. Just like the minister had extinguished her title of Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, I suspect that soon she will no longer be the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop because it is simply a project that will not exist. It is a very risky project, and I commend Mr Davis's motion.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:37): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion, which is seeking access to a risk register on the Suburban Rail Loop. As Ms Terpstra in the exchange prior to the commencement of the motion pointed out, it also seeks to have access to future hypothetical documents, which is an interesting way to expand the scope of what this –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** It is a very David Davis motion, Minister Shing: have a crack at seeking to cast an exceptionally wide net to get access to a range of things that do not even really exist yet. Who knows what they will come up with next sitting week in the exploration of future documents that Mr Davis wants to get his lovely hands on.

The motion before us today, despite the fact that Mr Mulholland seemed unwilling to speak to it, seeks to get a copy of the risk register from the Suburban Rail Loop – a strategic risk spreadsheet, which was apparently created prior to March 2020. Obviously some matters at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal which have gone to this no doubt would be scintillating reading, the decisions there. The question before the house today is whether the chamber will seek to use its longstanding powers to request the production of documents in order to gain access to this and future versions of the risk register.

As is the convention, the government will not oppose this documents motion. The government, in assessing its response to the documents motion, will no doubt undertake a thorough exercise of an examination of the privileges that accord to the executive, akin to the Crown privileges that existed when the powers that are relied upon to request the production of these documents – those powers of the House of Commons when they existed at the time – were transported into this setting. The question about whether any form of executive privilege applies will be one that will be thoroughly considered.

I think the context of what this documents motion seeks to have produced now and into the future goes to the question of whether commercially sensitive information is likely to be included in the risk register for the Suburban Rail Loop and whether the production of that register would put the state and therefore the taxpayers at a commercial disadvantage in the course of future negotiations with respect to infrastructure project works on the Suburban Rail Loop but potentially other infrastructure projects in the state of Victoria. What the opposition is seeking to do through the request for the production of these documents is put onto the public record, potentially, matters which could place the state at a commercial disadvantage. It is one of the reasons why they have got no credibility when it comes to infrastructure investment. It is why when they were last in government they had no infrastructure priorities.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** They did plan to close the New Street level crossing, Minister Shing, but beyond that there were really no infrastructure priorities of the Liberal Party when they were last in government. What this documents motion here today demonstrates is that they have not learned a thing about how to deliver infrastructure projects in this state and that if they were to ever return to the government benches, we would expect that infrastructure progress in this state would come to a grinding halt.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Prahran electorate crime**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:43): I am pleased to move this motion but sad in another way, because it points to a very serious situation in and around Prahran and a situation that is replicated elsewhere in the state. I move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the resignation of the Victorian Greens party member Mr Sam Hibbins as the member for Prahran;
- (2) the by-election is to be held in Prahran on 8 February 2025;
- (3) that despite the significant increase in local population, between 2020 and 2023 the Prahran police station experienced a fall of 16 per cent in the total number of weekday staff and a fall of 27 per cent in the total number of weekend staff, and all too often the Prahran police station has not been open and fully staffed;
- (4) independent Crime Statistics Agency data for the year ending 30 September 2024 shows total recorded criminal incidents in the Prahran electorate to be rising to record highs, including the increase of:
  - (a) residential burglaries in Prahran by 39 per cent;
  - (b) motor vehicle theft in Prahran by 68 per cent;
  - (c) thefts from motor vehicles in South Yarra by 64 per cent;
  - (d) residential burglaries in South Yarra by 43 per cent;
  - (e) retail theft in Windsor by 158 per cent; and
- (5) the tolerance bordering on acquiescence of the Victorian Greens for the rising incidence of crime, particularly violent crime in Prahran.

We have seen a series of terrible incidents in and around Prahran in recent months and recent years. Indeed as recently as this morning there was a stabbing in Chapel Street. I can only hope that the individual involved is safe and secure, and I can only hope that the perpetrator is detained and taken to court and convicted for what has occurred here. Victorians are entitled to be safe. They are entitled to be safe in their own home, they are entitled to be safe in their business and they are entitled to be safe in their street. All too often now through parts of the Prahran electorate – in Windsor, in South Yarra and in Prahran itself – the risk is very high. People see that the streets are not safe. They see that it is not secure or pleasant indeed in many cases to walk through some of these areas. My office is in South Yarra – in the Vogue centre, for those who know it – and there are a series of places near there where you do feel unsafe, including Toorak Road and further down the other end of Chapel Street. There is actually a significant feeling of unease in many cases when you move through those areas.

When you talk to businesses in the area, it is clear that they feel unsafe. They feel that their business has been impacted and they tell you that their business has been impacted. The incident today typifies the decline in safety of people in and around the Prahran electorate. This is partly Port Phillip, partly Stonnington and partly the City of Melbourne; it is an area where people should feel safe. Businesses should be able to go about their work. They should be able to open their business with safety, but that is not the case now under Labor. I have to say – and I am going to be very direct here – Mr Hibbins did not help in this case. He was not an advocate for safety in the way he should have been. At various

points I held public forums in the area and have held public forums about safety and about the need to make sure that the community is secure. Mr Hibbins was not supportive – or not as supportive as he should have been – in these matters. He was very quiet on these matters. Members of Parliament sometimes need to speak up, they need to ask questions and they need to put pressure on government and contact the police on some occasions to make reports to help those victims who have suffered and to make sure that the safety and security of people is to the fore.

What we have seen is a decline in the number of actual police at the Prahran police station. Now, this is not nebulous; this is from freedom-of-information requests. I compared the freedom-of-information requests I have from a series of weeks in 2020 and a similar parallel set of FOI requests in 2023, and it is clear that the number of police who were available on the roster has fallen. The crime has gone up and the number of police on the roster has fallen. Now, that is the result of decisions made by the Andrews Labor government in resourcing. It is a matter of decisions that have been made, perhaps by police command in resourcing, and it is completely and utterly unacceptable to the local community. If people want the opportunity to send a message, they do have the chance to send a message to the government and to the Greens on Saturday to say, 'Enough is enough. We don't want to be victims, and we want proper policing and proper community prevention done.'

We have seen the state government recently abolish the crime prevention portfolio. Why on earth, when you have got rising crime, would you abolish the crime prevention portfolio? This is a bizarre set of decisions. The issue with Prahran police station has now got so bad – I am aware of one recent incident where an individual went to the Prahran police station and a big poster on the door said, 'Go to Malvern.' They went to Malvern police station, and guess what was on the door at Malvern. It said, 'Go to the Prahran police station.' In a way it sounds like a comedy, but it is not a comedy. This is a person wanting access to the police and to actually be provided with some service and support.

The men and women in blue – our police force, Victoria Police – by and large do a very good job. I am very supportive of them. But they have got to have the resources and the wherewithal and the ability to do the policing that they need to do, and I am not convinced that police command and particularly the state government are giving them that resource. That is why I have held crime forums. That is why I have run that set of FOIs to try and understand what is going on and why it is being wound back. I mean, here is another example: the state government in the years shortly after 2014 wound back the use of the cells at the Prahran police station – there are cells there – and they did this through the device of a review to see if the cells at the police station were compliant with international human rights obligations. I kid you not. The review said that they did not comply with international human rights obligations, and they closed the cells. So the cells at the Prahran police station no longer operate in the way they did for many, many decades. I cannot tell you how long – I am not sure – but it was for a very long time. That is what has been going on. We have been seeing increasing violence and increasing concern, and I think people are increasingly fearful of the issues that are faced. So I say the time is here now for all of us to stand up and say that the crime rate that we are facing – and Ms Crozier will understand this and can talk about this in a personal manner –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** You certainly can. She can point to what is occurring in and around that area of Prahran that should be as safe and secure as other areas of Victoria. I note the recent statistics from the Crime Statistics Agency: burglaries up 39 per cent, motor vehicle theft up 64 per cent, thefts from motor vehicles in South Yarra up by 64 per cent, residential burglaries in South Yarra up by 43 per cent and retail theft in Windsor up by 158 per cent. I can tell you what, that is wildly understating what is going on in parts of Windsor. The retail theft issues in parts of Windsor are very real and very serious. Businesses are facing threats that they cannot easily manage, and when they ask for assistance they will not quickly get it. I say it is time for the state government to step in and make sure that additional resources are provided so that Victoria Police can do what is necessary, and I say that at the same time we need to be making very clear the views of the local community. It is wrong – people

should be safe, and I am here to vouch for the fact that the Greens political party has been weak on these matters in the Prahran area through the last period since 2014.

Mr Hibbins was not a fierce advocate for safety in his area. He was a person who was quieter on a range of issues, and this is one of the issues he was much quieter on. He attended one of my forums, I can say, which was run conjointly with one of the business groups in the area, one of the traders groups. This is a number of years ago, but even at that forum he was relatively quiet. There was not the preparedness to stand up and say, 'This is completely unacceptable.' He seemed to accept that those who go out on the street on bail can roam free. And I think that that is the truth of the matter: the Greens and some in the Labor Party – I make it clear that not all in the Labor Party but some in the Labor Party – very much feel that those who commit crimes should be bailed, given another chance and bailed again and bailed again and bailed again and bailed again and bailed again and bailed yet again. That is what is going on at the moment. There are threatening people who have been caught by police and brought before the magistrates, and they are let out on bail. That is something that the Greens wholeheartedly support. Nobody is ever to be provided with the full force of the law; they are to be given a get-out-of-jail-free pass to roam the streets, to invade more homes, to threaten more businesses and to put people at risk. I think the time has come to say enough is enough. We need to have a very clear message. I say in my area, in South Yarra and Prahran, and Ms Crozier's home area people are entitled to be safe, and they are not at the moment.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:56): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion with pleasure today. It has been a fierce campaign over the last few weeks in the seat of Prahran, and I will start by saying that only the Greens have put forward any cost-of-living initiatives, with our proposal to trial public transport fares at 50 cents here in Victoria to ease the cost of living for Prahran commuters. In Queensland their 50-cents trial increased PT patronage by 11 per cent, it has reduced traffic congestion and it has provided savings of hundreds of dollars to commuters every month. In the midst of this cost-of-living crisis the Greens believe that the time is now to push for a trial here in Victoria. It is only the Greens who have put forward initiatives to lower the cost of housing and renting with our initiatives to tax –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, this motion does mention the by-election, it does mention Mr Hibbins and it does focus, frankly, on crime and the issues of safety, but it does not focus on public transport, although that is a very important issue at a different time.

**Katherine COPSEY:** On the point of order, Acting President, the motion refers to Prahran and the Greens. I am being relevant to the motion, and I will come to the point that Mr Davis has been labouring if he has some patience.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Acknowledging that first speakers do have more leeway, this is a fair way out, so I will ask Mr Copsey to come back to the matter at hand.

**Katherine COPSEY:** I will finish the sentence I was reading and then continue with my speaking notes, and Mr Davis will find that, with patience, I will turn to the issues he has raised. Only the Greens have put forward initiatives to lower the cost of housing and renting with our initiatives to tax vacant land; to build more public housing; to improve tenants rights, including by ending no-fault evictions; and to freeze and cap rents. The Greens have already delivered some of these reforms, including new laws to put renters and apartment owners rights before Airbnbs, but there is much more to do. Only the Greens –

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, Acting President, I think every member in this chamber has read Mr Davis's motion. Ms Copsey is going nowhere near what the motion is about. She is doing her pitch to the people of Prahran via the Parliament, and I would urge her to come back to Mr Davis's motion, which is an important motion which those constituents in Prahran are talking about.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Though points of order are not an opportunity to debate, I do uphold the point of order. Ms Copsey, please come back to the motion.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Only the Greens have put forward a proposal to rejuvenate Chapel Street in Prahran – which Mr Davis spent a certain amount of time addressing in his speaking notes – to reward and invest in those who want to build, own and operate businesses and to penalise commercial land bankers. The points that Mr Davis has raised in his single-issue motion – it is, true to form, a motion that offers no policies and no solutions and proposes no action or leadership, just the same old empty law and order rhetoric cut-and-pasted from the Liberals’ 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 campaigns. Better luck next time, guys. And because it is empty law and order politics, true to form it is also pretty sloppy work from the Liberals. This motion talks about a significant increase in the population between 2020 and 2023, when the population of Prahran actually dropped during those pandemic years. It talks about police hours during the pandemic two years ago, but it does not use the most recent data or longitudinal data relating to the Liberals cutting police funding when they were last in power. It cites only data in relation to crimes against property, but then says it is about a rise in violent crime.

Being the Greens spokesperson for justice, I actually do take the issue of crime seriously, and this means – unlike the Liberals in putting forward this motion – actually doing more than a quick cut-and-paste job, because caring about reducing offending and reoffending rates rather than law and order politics involves understanding evidence-based crime prevention initiatives from all over the world. This means that, unlike this motion, I understand the difference between offending against property and violent offences against a person, and I know that crimes against property are strongly positively correlated to periods of economic, housing and cost-of-living hardship. Any serious policy response to crimes against property must include policies to address these criminogenic factors, which is why the beginning of my speech was relevant to this motion. Furthermore, only the Greens have proposed evidence-based justice initiatives, such as justice reinvestment, to prevent the cycle of reoffending, because the Greens on justice are actually about real solutions, not about the same old, empty law and order politics that has failed Victorians for decades.

In contrast to the Greens’ positive vision for Prahran, this opposing campaign has been entirely defined by what they are not, who they oppose, what they will not do and what they do not believe in. It is a vacuous campaign that, much like this motion, is entirely bereft of initiatives, solutions or leadership on the issues that matter – slogans and empty politics. The Liberals’ motto in the Prahran election is literally ‘Put the Greens last’.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Katherine COPSEY:** They cannot even be bothered to give the people of Prahran a single reason to vote for them. Ms Crozier has referred to our excellent candidate in Prahran Angelica Di Camillo. Angelica is a local Pilates instructor and also has a background as an environmental engineer, and she is a fantastic local representative who is going to be an excellent addition to this Parliament.

*Members interjecting.*

**Katherine COPSEY:** The Liberals cannot even be bothered to give the people of Prahran –

**John Berger:** On a point of order, Acting President, I think if Mr Davis is going to interject, he can at least do it from his position.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I think Mr Davis has left the chamber to go back to his place, perhaps. Yes, I do uphold that point of order. Please interject in your place, Mr Davis.

**Katherine COPSEY:** In contrast, the Greens’ positive campaign in Prahran has made clear not only what we stand for but what solutions we offer. We have released policies to ease the cost-of-living crisis, to lower rents, to lower transport costs and traffic congestion, to lower carbon emissions, to protect the environment and biodiversity, to support the LGBTIQ+ community and to protect abortion and reproductive health rights. I am immensely proud of being part of a campaign that is offering a young, vibrant, progressive leadership on key issues that the people of Prahran deserve. I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk about the Greens’ positive campaign in the upcoming

Prahran by-election on 8 February. Early voting has already opened for the residents of Prahran. If you have not gotten out yet, you can head to the early voting booths in Windsor and South Yarra. I have been spending a lot of time there, as has Mr Davis.

Prahran is a young, diverse and progressive electorate. It has, proudly, one of the largest LGBTIQ+ communities in the state, and it had among the highest yes votes on the referendum anywhere in the country. About 60 per cent of the electorate rent, and that is the second-highest percentage in the state. It is an electorate that takes pride in its arts and its live music scene, in its pumping night-life. Talking to the people of Prahran every day during this campaign, it is really apparent that people of Prahran deserve to be represented by someone who shares their progressive values, but even more so, someone offering a genuine vision and solutions on the big issues that matter to them.

That means actually putting forward solutions, not just constantly talking people down and talking about everything that is failing and what you are not going to do. Far and away what I have been hearing on the doorsteps and streets of Prahran is, 'What is your plan to ease the cost-of-living crisis? How would the Greens lower the cost of renting and housing? Locally, how would you rejuvenate high streets and Chapel Street?' What is really apparent on the streets and in the campaign and indeed in the wording of this motion today is that only the Greens are offering any kind of policy platform, any kind of vision or any solutions to respond to the issues that the people of Prahran care about.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:04): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this matter, as my office is in Prahran. My office is probably 100 metres away from Chapel Street and right next door to the Prahran train station. I visited the Prahran police station and I met with the police superintendents and all the hardworking officers there, and I commend them for all the work they have done. Because of the hard work that I know they do each day, I am proud to be able to stand here today and defend the work that our hardworking men and women in blue do.

Fifty-one police officers are allocated to the Prahran police station as part of the Allan Labor government's record \$4.5 billion investment into Victoria Police, including nine specialist police for family violence. This comes from an overall total of 3600 new police officers across the state, with 415 family violence officers and 48 youth crime officers. Thanks to the hard work of our men and women in blue – the hardworking police who protect our community of Southern Metro, Mr Davis – we have seen public order and security offences go down by 8.7 per cent from 657 to 600 offences, driven by a decrease in disorderly and offensive conduct, down by 37 per cent to 202 offences. Public nuisance offences are down by 4.5 per cent to 127 offences, and public security offences are unchanged at 15 offences. Justice procedures offences are down by 8.5 per cent from 872 to 798 offences, driven by a decrease in breaches of orders, down by 14.6 per cent to 562 offences. And more broadly, the Allan Labor government invested over \$1 million in crime prevention projects across the City of Port Phillip, including \$780,000 to install CCTV along Fitzroy and Acland streets and the St Kilda foreshore.

This side of the chamber will not be lectured about results. They may talk big on the other side of the chamber, but this side of the chamber actually cares about results. Under those opposite, crime soared 6.8 per cent in 2011–12, marking the first annual increase in more than 10 years. When the Liberal Party were in power, they cut 400 staff from Victoria Police, including essential forensic experts. And let us not forget the Kennett era, which Mr Davis would love to return to, when the Victorian government effectively went to war against every Victorian police officer. What it comes down to is that the Liberal Party does not put their money where their mouth is, quite literally.

The Allan Labor government has introduced the toughest laws in the country to end the illegal tobacco trade in Victoria. Individuals found to be selling illicit tobacco will face fines of over \$355,000 or up to 15 years imprisonment, and businesses will be slapped with fines over \$1.7 million. They can have their operating licences suspended immediately for 90 days and be blocked from holding a licence for up to five years. We passed the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill in 2024 to crack down on organised crime through strengthening Victoria's unlawful association scheme, bringing in



a new serious crime prevention order and banning the public display of gang colours. Through these laws, identified organised crime groups are banned from entering Victorian government worksites, ensuring that the construction industry is free from bad actors, equipping Victorian police with the powers to stop criminal association and preventing other people from joining them in the criminal network. Serious crime prevention order schemes will also come into effect, which will allow the Chief Commissioner of Police to apply to the court to impose a broad range of conditions on someone who has participated in serious criminal activity or is likely to help another engage in serious criminal activity.

The key difference with our approach versus those opposite is simple – ours works, because it is designed to prevent crime and to reduce recidivism while limiting the impact to the community. That is why the Andrews Labor government introduced new scholarships to build expertise in crime prevention through the first-of-its-kind graduate certificate in 2023. It focused on key research and effective evidence-based crime prevention strategies, as well as developing expertise, planning, implementation and evaluation. In 2022 the Andrews government introduced an inbuilt security feature in general issue numberplates to reduce car theft through directional security markings embedded in the surface, with 430,000 numberplates per year from 2022. All general issue standard car numberplates, trailer numberplates and Commonwealth government Z numberplates and ministerial numberplates include this security measure. The Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill was introduced in 2022 to strengthen Victoria's asset confiscation laws, giving authorities greater powers to investigate and seize proceeds of crime and disrupt organised crime on the black market. And we passed comprehensive laws targeting deepfake porn. That includes related sexual offences, including image-based sexual offences, leading our nation in reform. The maximum penalty for these crimes was increased to three years imprisonment, and they were upgraded to indictable offences, with extended protections as an option for victims, including the choice to have their identity suppressed.

We overhauled our road safety camera network to prevent reckless and unsafe driving on Victoria's roads following the endorsement of an inquiry into the increase in the Victorian road toll in 2019.

We are progressing work under the Youth Justice Act 2024 to hold serious and repeat offenders accountable for their behaviour as well as the women's safety package to protect women and children from violence, both from family and others. In May the government announced the strengthening of a women's safety package to change culture and legislation and deliver additional support to victim-survivors of family violence. Since 2016 we have invested more than \$4 billion and we have implemented all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, leading the nation in our legislative response to family and sexual violence and violence against women.

To prevent young offenders from becoming repeat offenders, we invested over \$34 million in crime prevention. These programs have demonstrated a 29 per cent reduction in offending and a 24 per cent reduction in severity. These include Operation Trinity, focused on the south-eastern and eastern suburbs to decrease the number of aggravated burglaries and associated offending predominantly enacted by young offenders, leading to over 600 arrests for aggravated burglaries associated with car thefts, and Operational Alliance, which has helped dismantle young offender gangs committing crimes in our communities. Alliance has arrested nearly 430 people and has laid more than 4600 charges through the most recent data provided. The ability of police members to apply for bail revocation for repeat offenders has been strengthened and clarified through legislative change, with any likely offending or serious breaches of bail conditions a justification to make these applications.

I will not stand here and let the hardworking men and women of the police that look after Prahan in my community and Southern Metro be denigrated. Our investments have supported Victoria Police to do their job. This includes \$6.6 million in the 2024–25 state budget for to expand the youth crime prevention and early intervention program, reducing the rates of offending among young people. We are combatting the scourge of knife crime with discrete search powers, specified through legislation, and machetes are a controlled weapon and not to be sold to a person under 18 years of age. The

Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Act 2024 will allow for the police to conduct their searches more easily, more extensively and in more places, such as train stations and shopping centres.

We have brought in the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 to protect more Victorians from vilification and serious hate speech and conduct by introducing new criminal offences for behaviours such as inciting hatred or threatening physical harm against someone for their identity or faith, and we are strengthening existing civil protections against vilification and creating more options for remedies, seeking a resolution for harm experienced. As a result of national cabinet, we are helping to establish a national database to track antisemitic crime, incidents and behaviours, something that is incredibly important to the community of Southern Metropolitan Region, which has the largest Jewish population in the country, a community I am proud to represent.

This side of the chamber knows that crime prevention begins with all Victorians having access to safe and fit-for-purpose living conditions; affordable and free education; good services, infrastructure and transport; and a great job. That is why I know the Andrews and Allan Labor government over the past 10 years, the entire reform agenda, has made a difference, from building 10,000 new social and affordable homes through the Big Housing Build via the September 2024 update – 10,000 new homes fast-tracked for development – to 130 reforms to strengthen renters rights and our \$1 billion investment to build new homes in regional Victoria. Our expansion of the free TAFE program and more than 80 free TAFE qualifications and short courses are provided without the cost of tuition fees, even if you are already a holder of a VET qualification or degree.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:14): I have been looking forward to speaking to Mr Davis's motion, an important motion. I have just been listening to Mr Berger. Well, what an absolute –

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I was listening, and you were talking about issues that were not relating –

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: At least Ms Copsey and I and Mr Davis live in the electorate. You do not even live in the electorate, Mr Berger.

To go back to Mr Davis's motion, which is an important one that talks to the issues around Prahran, what it says is, yes, we do have a by-election, and Labor are not even running in the by-election. They are too gutless to run. They are too gutless. You have got a former MP, Tony Lupton, who understands the issues, unlike you, because he lives in the electorate. He is standing as an independent and is so disappointed Labor is not putting their hand up. At least he has got the balls to do it, unlike this Labor government, who are just a damn disgrace and have let Prahran down enormously, as have the Greens.

Mr Davis's motion goes to a very important element. This is what we are hearing; I spoke about it yesterday in the chamber. It talks about how:

... despite the significant increase in local population, between 2020 and 2023 the Prahran police station experienced a fall of 16 per cent in the total number of weekday staff and a fall of 27 per cent in the total number of weekend staff.

We know that police numbers are going down. There are 800 vacancies across the state. The government has not dealt with that issue. The latest report on government services data shows that per 100,000 people the number of police has decreased from 242 to 235.

The fourth point of Mr Davis's motion goes to the Crime Statistics Agency data, which shows total recorded criminal incidents in the Prahran electorate to be rising to record highs, including an increase in residential burglaries in Prahran by 39 per cent, motor vehicle theft in Prahran by 68 per cent, theft

from motor vehicles in South Yarra by 64 per cent, residential burglaries in South Yarra by 43 per cent and retail theft in Windsor by 158 per cent. They are the statistics, they are the facts, they are the raw numbers, and they indicate the number of victims of this increase in crime – and that is the problem. The government has dropped the ball. They have been hopeless on this issue, and people have been crying out for years about the crime crisis that we have got in Victoria. It is real.

As I said yesterday, I have been a victim myself of an aggravated burglary in this area, and the police who attended were magnificent – cannot fault them. But do you know what they told me in the middle of the night as we were trying to work out where this goddamn piece of work went to? They said, ‘Ten years ago we would be lucky to be called out to an aggravated burglary once in a blue moon. Now it’s every single night.’ They are frustrated. They know that crime is on the rise. They know people like me and others who have been far more affected than me, far worse off than me, have had significant damage, and it does have real consequences. You do live in fear, and we should not be living like that. We should not have to live like that, but we are in Victoria. It is not just this isolated area, it is right across the state. It is terrible. It is a terrible reputation that Victoria has. It is just terrible all round, because there is that unease, and the police themselves are frustrated. You talk to the police – I do talk to the police. I have been to community safety walks close by in the area. It is a pity you were not at that the other day, Mr Berger, if you cared about the electorate so much.

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** That was not Prahran, but it was not far away, in Fitzroy Street.

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** No, no, I am saying it was close by. Again, Acting President, through you, what Mr Berger fails to understand is that these issues are a huge concern, and I have just got a text message from someone who is so frustrated about the lack of action by the government. Then the Premier came out yesterday – nobody believes her, because just last week she was arguing something completely different. Nobody believes her, and why would you? I mean, she was the minister for the Commonwealth Games – that got sacked.

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** It speaks to the character of the Premier actually, Ms Terpstra, because she took the Commonwealth Games to the last election and people voted on that, especially in regional areas. They were conned. They were conned by the Premier, they were conned by the former Premier and they were conned by the government.

**John Berger:** On a point of order, Acting President, I just wonder where the link to the Commonwealth Games is with Mr Davis’s motion.

**Georgie CROZIER:** On the point of order, Acting President, I was responding to the interjection, but I will come back to the very important motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I did not hear the interjection. I ask you to come back to the motion.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I was just making the point that Victorians were conned at that point and they were conned again on the crime stats, and this –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Please come back to the motion.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am making a point about being conned about the Premier fixing this very important problem. She should have done it by now. She is hopeless – inadequate. Nobody believes her. But this motion, which goes to the Prahran electorate, where the Premier is not running a candidate – the Labor Party are not running a candidate –

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Ms Terpstra, I go to the point that Mr Berger got up there and talked about his electorate – he does not even live in the electorate. Nevertheless, this part of Prahran, a very significant part of the electorate, which has been –

**Sonja Terpstra:** Your candidate in Werribee does not live there either.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Neither did Mr Pallas, the former Treasurer, who lived in Williamstown. Most of your people do not live in their electorates. But getting back to this important motion, with these issues – burglaries up 39 per cent, motor vehicle theft – we have had shops close on Chapel Street. People do not want to open businesses. There are the tobacco wars – firebombing. As I said yesterday, people are coming up to me at the polling booth – and not just one person. I mentioned Kate yesterday; there was also Michelle, another woman. Women do not feel safe, and they should feel safe, especially in their own homes.

**Sonja Terpstra:** You're not helping things.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I have been a victim of an aggravated burglary, and you have no idea what that is like, Ms Terpstra.

**Sonja Terpstra:** I didn't talk about you. You don't know what I know, so don't assume things.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, you have no idea, and I know –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Order! Ms Crozier to continue without assistance and through the Chair.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Those women that have spoken to me at the polling booth think the government has failed on every level – and they have. I understand where they are coming from. They are now considering selling. They said to me, 'We're selling. We don't feel safe. We've lived here for years. This was a vibrant, fun area. It is just full of crime. The shops are filthy. The drug abuse, the antisocial behaviour that goes on, the graffiti, the rubbish – it is disgusting.' All of these issues amount to a community that does not feel safe. These crime statistics reflect what is actually happening, the reality of what is happening on the ground.

I hope the government do support Mr Davis's motion. Even though they are not on the ground in the by-election running a candidate because they do not have the balls to, they need to understand that this is a reality and it is actually affecting the way people live, how they are operating their businesses and whether they want to bring their children up in this area or whether they move from the area. That is what they are saying. They are asking, 'Do we feel safe? Do we move our family from this area because of the crime?'

This issue, whether the government likes it or not – and I do not think they do like it – is a very relevant one. It is significant. It should not be diminished in any way, and it is disappointing that from across the aisle Mr Berger said that we were denigrating police. What a slur on our police force, who, I can tell you –

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I guarantee I speak to more police officers than you do, Mr Berger, and I can guarantee that they feel very let down by the Allan Labor government. They have been writing it on their cars for many months. The police know the frustrations; they understand. There is catch and release with bail. There are kids that are on bail, bailed for multiple offences, one after the other – no consequences. It is no wonder there is so much crime going on in this area where the government has ignored it and the Greens have too.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:25): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion with respect to community safety issues in the Prahran electorate. Obviously there is a lot of focus and attention on Prahran at the moment. There is a by-election going on. The previous

member has resigned as a member of Parliament, and many candidates are contesting the election. There is obviously a lot of interest from the Liberal Party and a lot of interest from the Greens in this community ahead of the by-election. This is an attempt, clearly, to put a focus on an issue largely in a political context, which I do not think we can ignore, but I will leave my comments about the motivations for the motion there. We did not seem to have Mr Davis bringing motions of this nature to this place before the issuing of the writs. It will be interesting to see whether he continues his advocacy for the community after the declaration of those writs.

We do understand that all members of our community have the right to be safe in their community and in their homes. Not only do they have the right to be safe, but they have got the right to feel safe too. It is undeniable from both crime statistics and reporting and community sentiment that there has been an increase in certain types of criminal incidents in parts of our community. Why that is, unpacking that, is a matter for criminologists and sociologists. I do not think we should take the word of political actors seeking to attribute political motives and responsibilities for the drivers of that crime. The question that we have as legislators, as representatives of our community, is what can we do to support those communities to be safe and to feel safe. From the perspective of the government, how can we support Victoria Police with the resources that they need and with the laws that they need to make the policing decisions that they need to respond to the needs of the community.

I do question somewhat Mr Davis's motivations, but I also question his understanding of some of these matters. We had just earlier today Mr Davis mischaracterising a request from the mayor of the City of Glen Eira to the Premier about police presence in the Caulfield community. He said the letter was requesting an increase in police resources. The letter in fact asked for an increase in police presence at a particular station. Matters like that, operational matters, are the purview of the Chief Commissioner of Police. It is not the role of the elected government to be dictating to the Chief Commissioner of Police where individual police officers should be stationed. To do so crosses an incredibly important line that is drawn in the Victoria Police Act 2013 about responsibility in policing in this state, one that we on this side respect.

What we can do and what this government has done is invest to support Victoria Police to be able to do its job. Since we have been elected 3600 extra police have been provided to Victoria Police, with a billion dollars invested in new police stations – the resources that they require to enable things like Operation Trinity, which my colleague Mr Berger spoke of in his contribution, where we have, in response to increasing incidents of aggravated burglaries, dedicated operations and taskforces of police resources, detectives and the like, out trying to catch the criminals who are perpetrating these offences. In Operation Trinity we have seen our hardworking members of Victoria Police out on the streets, often until dawn, trying to keep the community safe. We thank them for their efforts, and they are succeeding – 2400 arrests Operation Trinity has made targeting those organised criminals who are behind much of the aggravated burglary that is occurring in this state and the car theft that is going with it. The car theft recovery rate from Operation Trinity is at around 94 per cent.

We also have Operation Alliance, which is again a targeted approach by Victoria Police to look at particularly young offenders and youth offenders who are operating in an organised way perpetrating much of the increase in criminal activity that so many in the community are concerned about – 430 arrests under Operation Alliance laying more than 4600 charges. Victoria Police have got our backing, and they are doing a good job tackling the crime that we are seeing in our community. We will continue to back them. We will continue to back them with the resources and the laws that they need. What we will not do is seek to undermine them by using them in a political way, like some seem to want to do.

Of course we know that tackling crime needs police resources. But it also needs more than just police resources, it needs a crime prevention approach. It needs an approach that understands that preventing crime is not just about arresting people, it is about investing in the programs, the resources and the community-based infrastructure to keep crime down. That is what a crime prevention approach does. You do not just have to invest in police resources, which we are doing, you also have to look at ways

of preventing crime in the community, and that may be through doing broader community safety and crime prevention activities like the installation of community crime reduction teams, the installation of things like CCTV cameras or other sorts of community safety initiatives. But it also goes beyond that to ensure that those who would otherwise be offending are diverted away from criminal endeavours and criminal activity so that there are ways for particularly young people to be engaged in pursuits that are not about the furtherance of crime. That is why our investments in community support services are exceptionally important. It is why investments in alternative pathways through education are so incredibly important. It is why alternative vocational pathways are incredibly important.

It is about putting in the community support infrastructure that is required so that individuals who might go down a path of crime can be prevented from doing so or those that do touch the system have the necessary diversion and rehabilitation processes and practices in place. But it is also about investing in broader community infrastructure in these places through things like the urban renewal that is taking place in the electorate of Prahran that this government is investing in – new housing, for example, across many of the public and social housing estates in and around Malvern Road, the Horace Petty estate, Simmons Street and Bangs Street. Investments in community infrastructure that come through urban renewal are just as much a part of strengthening the communities, making them better places to live and often making them safer places to live as ensuring that there are enough police at the 24-hour police station that exists in Prahran. Nearby obviously there is another 24-hour police station in Malvern serving these communities.

What this government understands is that we do need to act to make sure that our community is safe and feels safe. The way we do that is by giving Victoria Police the resources that they need to tackle crime, whether that is police out on patrol or whether that is specialised taskforces like Operation Trinity targeting particular types of crimes and the success that they have. But it is also about investing more broadly across the community in crime prevention activities to make sure that those who would otherwise go down the path of committing crimes are given alternatives to that so they do not become worse criminals and better criminals. More resources for police, stronger laws, better crime prevention, urban renewal: that is this government's approach to dealing with the matters raised by this motion. We will continue to do it long after the by-election on 8 February.

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (11:35): I rise today to support motion 792 put forward by Mr Davis, and I thank him for bringing this vitally important, timely debate to the house. He outlined some of the issues in the motion – a rise in crime in the area and significant falls in police staffing at Prahran police station. As a former police officer for several decades with Victoria Police and having served in the southern region dating back to the late 1990s and having worked in Malvern, Prahran and the surrounding areas, I am dismayed and very concerned to see the increase in aggravated burglaries, carjackings and shoplifting crimes in the areas of Prahran, Windsor and the surrounding suburbs. The motion itself outlines some numbers and statistics which I guess, to me – and I am pretty sure to the rest of this house – are extremely high: residential burglaries in Prahran itself have risen 39 per cent; motor theft in Prahran has risen 68 per cent; theft of motor vehicles in South Yarra has risen 64 per cent; residential burglaries in South Yarra have gone up 43 per cent; and there is an amazing statistic in relation to theft in Windsor, 158 per cent. To those who are not sure in relation to crime, the numbers give a clear picture of what is happening in the area.

What also is concerning is that despite the population growth in the area there is a lack of staffing at police stations. The local police station at Prahran has suffered a fall of 16 per cent in the number of weekday staff and a 27 per cent reduction in weekend staff. What this means is less policing – stations are not being fully manned, and patrols are not being fully conducted due to lack of resources to keep residential constituents in Prahran feeling safe and secure. Complaints from locals in Prahran have clearly indicated that too often Prahran police station has not been open or fully staffed. The increasing apprehension of local communities shows the dynamic of the area itself. I know that Mr Davis and Ms Crozier – who have worked very hard in the Southern Metropolitan Region given the absence of the former Greens MP – have the thanks of all the community knowing that Mr Davis and Ms Crozier

are fighting to reduce crime, particularly in the area of Prahran, where crime has risen to a record high under this Allan Labor government.

One must not only look at the statistics from the Crime Statistics Agency to understand the magnitude of the issues and the work this government need to undertake urgently to ensure the community is safe; if they take this issue seriously, they take the community's safety seriously. In the year ending 30 September 2024 residential burglaries have gone up a whopping 39 per cent, as I quoted earlier, in Prahran and South Yarra. These numbers give you a clear indication of what is happening in the surrounding streets. Retail has a great concern in relation to this theft that has risen in Windsor; with a 158 per cent rise, it is totally unacceptable. Traders are screaming out on Chapel Street, Commercial Road and Malvern Road in Hawksburn in relation to the amount of thefts that are happening day in, day out and are fed up with the never-ending cycle of theft in the community, causing them to lose their revenues and their earnings and having to close shops. This is why it is imperative that the Allan Labor government steps up and works with the police in Prahran to guarantee they are adequately resourced to provide the services residents and businesses expect.

I hear the government say it is not their role, it is the Chief Commissioner of Police's role to distribute the resources around Victoria, but with the large number of vacancies across the state with the police, how can the police chief commissioner commit resources to one of the stations when across the state it is experiencing a crime crisis. I strongly support more resources going to Prahran police station to enable it to become a 24-hour station and to remain fully staffed and operational. This will not only help to reduce crime but offer peace of mind to residential people in Prahran, Windsor, South Yarra and nearby areas that proactive measures are being taken to mitigate the impacts of crime.

It has been refreshing in recent weeks to see our Liberal candidate in Prahran Rachel Westaway taking crime seriously after the absence of the former member, who made very little to no mention of crime in his 10-year tenure in this place. I understand he is a member of the Greens, but when there is crime being committed there is no issue with saying what is happening in the area to represent his constituents. Since her preselection, Rachel has been very active in Prahran prosecuting why a vote for the Liberal Party this Saturday will be a vote for more proactive measures to reduce crime. Rachel will take crime very seriously and will be part of a strong, united team that wants –

**John Berger:** On a point of order, President, it sounds like Mr Luu is campaigning in this discussion. I do not think he is talking about the motion at all.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Luu, can I just call you back to the motion.

**Trung LUU:** It is important that we want to bring down crime not just in Prahran but across all of Victoria, and I look forward to seeing a peaceful and safe community. This motion is vitally important, and given the absence of the MP it is important that we have representatives who support the local residents advocating and speaking out in relation to what is happening in the area. People in Prahran and surrounding suburbs are concerned about the rising crime, which has dramatically doubled, tripled or increased fourfold. We need action now to have the police resourced adequately to ensure that the stations are open, patrols are conducted and crimes are investigated so people can feel safe in the area.

I would like to end this speech by thanking Mr Davis and Ms Crozier for their consistent advocacy for strong policing and strong crime prevention in the area.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:44): Here we are again with the Liberals wasting the time of the Parliament with another motion that I do not know at what time this morning Mr Davis sat down to write his notes on. We saw earlier his notices of motion done on the fly with numerous matters, and this is another one. We are seeing points that are in here that are clearly focused on whatever their ambitions may be in Prahran, not going to policy, because they do not have any policy, they do not have any values to inform those policies to make Victoria a better place. I want to start by acknowledging all of our officers at Victoria Police. They do incredible work. You only have to think of the heat of the last few days, the weather, the rain – our officers are out there day in, day out,

morning, afternoon, night, keeping our community safe. I actually want to acknowledge the work they do. It is incredible. Through personal networks, knowing people working in the force, it is incredible, incredible work that they do.

I also want to acknowledge the investment of the Allan Labor government – a record investment of more than \$4.5 billion in Victoria Police to deliver a modern, world-class police service. We have more than 3600 new officers on the beat to keep Victorians safe, and we have invested more than a billion dollars to deliver new and upgraded police stations. It is about ensuring that we have the workforce and that we have got the infrastructure, the equipment and the facilities for that workforce to do their job as best they can, to do their job in the best possible facilities with the best possible equipment.

We will continue to ensure that Victoria Police have the tools they need to do the job that they do, that is so important to all of us. We know that they are running the dedicated programs, including Operation Trinity, which is seeing them out every night until dawn targeting those who are committing burglaries and car thefts. We are seeing Operation Alliance disrupting and dismantling active gangs across Melbourne. Whilst the opposition may bring this motion, completely focused on a by-election, completely focused on their short-term objectives, their objectives basically change. Every Tuesday morning they come in here and maybe have a little bit of a look in the paper, see who their leader of the day is, and then of course that is what we get served up to talk about on the Wednesday.

With regard to Prahran, the City of Stonnington is serviced by two 24-hour police stations, in Prahran and Malvern. Since 2015–16 the Victorian government has invested \$353,000-plus in nine crime prevention grants to improve community safety in the Stonnington local government area. The current Leader of the Opposition stated that the Prahran police station had not been upgraded since 2005, and that is wrong – Prahran police station was upgraded last decade. At the time, even the Liberals agreed that the upgrade would enhance the ability of Victoria Police to continue targeting crime in that local area. The current Leader of the Opposition falsely claimed that no new officers had been allocated to Prahran station since 2005. Well, we know that is wrong too. The new Leader of the Opposition is clearly on his L-plates – and it is hard to keep up. I had to try and rack my brain for all the different leaders of the opposition in recent years.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** It is a very risky mantle to hold here in Spring Street, because we know no sooner does someone take leader of the Liberal–National coalition, no sooner do they take that position, than people are coming after them.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr McIntosh, I need to interrupt you there. There have been points of order from opposition MPs as far as relevance to this motion goes. I call you back to the motion.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, President. I will move on, but I am just noting that the political safety of leaders of the opposition is a matter for discussion – but perhaps for another day.

Community safety is our government's highest priority, and we have been very clear every Victorian has the right to be safe and to feel safe. The crime statistics released at the end of last year highlight the critical work police are doing to keep our community safe. Victoria Police made over 70,000 arrests for the year, holding more offenders to account than ever. When we talk about police, I was actually just looking at an article with a photo from the early 1990s of 200,000 demonstrators out the front of Parliament – police, teachers, nurses, but the police were there front and centre – because we know what the Liberals will do to our workers in this state. With this motion, we are talking about ensuring there is a workforce available, and a Labor government always ensures the workforce is supported, has the right equipment, has the right infrastructure and will not go to war with workers like we know those opposite will – economic policies of reducing wages. For this motion I would like to take on the interjection by my colleague here, but I will leave it.



This motion talks basically out of one side of the mover's mouth while we know the history of the Liberal Party and while we know what they would do if they were given the chance. In terms of the infrastructure that our police need, much like the infrastructure that our teachers need, that our nurses need, that so many frontline service workers need, we know those opposite would cut it. The fact that the history is there for one and all to see, particularly for regional Victorians, who are very clear on this history of what Liberal governments have done and what they will continue to do, is because it is in their DNA. This motion on the eve of the by-election is absolutely opportunistic, but it is not surprising, because when we come in here on a Wednesday there has been no thought, no lead-up, nothing of substance behind what is put forward. We know that is what the Liberal Party historically have done and will continue to do. It is reactionary. There are no values that underpin anything, hence why you have no plan coming from the Liberals for this state, hence why there are no policies that inform positions that they would take if, God forbid, they had their hands on the lever.

I want to again acknowledge and thank our Victorian police officers. The work they do is incredible. Throughout our lives we will all be touched by the services they provide and the assistance they provide in keeping us safe and keeping our society as one that respects the rule of law and one where we can live harmoniously and live respectfully with each other. It is Victoria Police that uphold that and enable that to happen. I think all of us can acknowledge the incredible work they do day in, day out and the sacrifices they themselves make and their families make to do that for all of us.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:54): I also rise to speak on the motion by Mr Davis today. At the outset I also join others in this place in acknowledging the incredible work that Victoria Police do day in and day out for our communities. Whether it is in my region, whether it is in the Southern Metropolitan Region, as we have had a lot of discussion about today, across the state they do an incredible job, and I would just like to begin, as I feel like I should, by acknowledging that.

As Mr McIntosh has already outlined in his speech, this is a government that has invested a huge amount, in fact an unprecedented amount, in supporting our police services. Indeed as Mr Batchelor mentioned in his remarks too, it is worth repeating that it is not the role of government to be making operational decisions about a police force. I would have thought, I would have hoped, that that would be a concept apparent even to those in the opposition. It is quite concerning that that is apparently something that needs to be said. If you think that is the role of government to be making those sorts of low-level operational decisions in a lot of cases, but particularly in a police force, I think that says a lot about the values that you would be taking into this place should Victoria have the misfortune of having you as a government in a few years time. I would be very concerned about where that road might lead.

This is a government that has invested in and continues to invest in our police. We have an enterprise bargaining agreement deal which is underway, and all things looking well that looks to be supported. I am very, very glad to see a deal being reached where we can continue to give our police the best deal that we can, because our police members give their all to the Victorian community day in, day out. In my interactions with them and in interactions with my constituents, we know that they are working as hard as they can.

This is a government that has also sought to address the issues where we see them and to address these concerns that are also being discussed, including through the strengthening of bail laws last year, just a few months ago. We are already starting to see the effects of those reforms, but we know that there is more work to do. The Premier has been very up-front, consistently acknowledging that where there is more work to be done then she will absolutely do that. And the proof of that has been seen once again this week in the announcement of the review into bail by both the Minister for Police and the Attorney-General, and I for one look forward to seeing the results of that review. We have also seen a very significant announcement of new penalties for those who are deemed to have assaulted a retail or other frontline service worker. That is a very, very important thing.

Mr Davis talked about retail crime as one part of his motion, and that sort of offending has a very significant impact on shop workers, whether they are experienced shop workers or whether they are perhaps teenagers in their first job. It is a very confronting thing to deal with customer aggression and violence, which so often goes hand in hand with these sorts of instances. This is a government that is taking that seriously, and that is why I am very excited to see the progress of those laws coming into this place as well. So it is a serious issue and one that warrants a serious response. Over on this side we are taking it seriously through what has been discussed briefly now by me but in more detail by my colleagues, but we know that it is apparently not being taken seriously by many others.

As many have said, this is a very political motion concerning a by-election mainly between the Greens and the Liberal Party, and yet we have only seen one Greens speaker on this motion. I am not sure why the Greens are not particularly interested in fighting and making that argument to their constituents or would-be constituents with an opportunity to do so. I am not sure why they have not taken that opportunity. But I am also not sure why the Liberal Party have not taken the opportunity. They have only had three speakers. This is your own motion. You still have not got your act together. Coming into this week we were told we were going to be debating a motion on Australia Day. I am sorry: I presume, Mrs McArthur, that was your motion. I can only presume that. The knives are out on you this week, and you did not get your way on that. So I am sure you are quite upset about that and that we are talking about the tram tracks today. We know your opinion on that. But here we are. We have chaos again. We have got the new leadership. The knives have been sharpened. There is a new broom in town. The knife sharpener in the middle of the Liberal party room has been at full use in the last few months, and evidently it still is, because we have had chops and changes all week and now we are debating this motion.

Here we are today with this motion, and again, there are only three Liberal Party members. Apparently you guys have run out of steam already. This is your own motion, and you cannot even be bothered speaking to it. What an absolute disappointment. Maybe Mrs McArthur could have told us about how much she loves the electorate of Prahran with all its many tram tracks. We missed that opportunity. I am not sure where you stand on this. I am not sure if you, Mrs McArthur, have been campaigning for your candidate in Prahran. As a member of the new shadow cabinet, surely you would be front and centre. Surely you can be explaining to them why you think that they are all terrible and why they are all drinking soy lattes on their bicycles, and you can dismiss their concerns, as that is all you do. Because you do not speak for the people of Prahran any more than you speak for the people of Western Victoria – neither in fact, would I say, may the Greens in some cases.

I am a member of the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. I have lived most of my life in or around the south-eastern suburbs. For a few years, though, I did actually live in the electorate of Prahran – about 10 years ago.

**A member:** You should have been the candidate.

**Michael GALEA:** No, no, no. It is a lovely place – a fun, vibrant place, as Ms Crozier said – but despite that –

**The PRESIDENT:** I apologise, I have to interrupt. It is time for questions and ministers statements.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Disability services**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:00): (781) My question is directed to the Minister for Disability Ms Blandthorn. The NDIS review identified the persistent challenges of attracting and retaining disability workers. A key reason is inadequate pay and conditions. Funding received by support services through the NDIS is insufficient to fund decent wages and conditions to attract workers. In Victoria around 7000 workers once employed by the Victorian public sector were

transferred to non-government providers under the NDIS rollout. Their wages and conditions have been partly subsidised by the Victorian government, but the subsidy is due to expire in December. Workers face the prospect of poorer wages and conditions, leading many to quit the sector, exacerbating the workforce crisis. Will the government commit to extending the subsidy to maintain subsidies to employers of Victorian disability support workers?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:01): Can I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and for his continued advocacy in this area in particular, although across all of my portfolios, to be fair to Mr Ettershank. As the chamber would be aware and as I know Mr Ettershank understands well, as a part of Victoria's transition to the national disability insurance scheme, the NDIS, the state government operated disability services were transferred to the NDIS, if you like, and that included five non-government providers, as I think you understand, Mr Ettershank. This transfer of services as well as our continued and significant contribution to the scheme recognises, as did the establishment of the NDIS in and of itself, that there needed to be an agreed and national approach to disability service provision in the best interests of people with disabilities and their carers and their families. As a state government our ongoing funding of disability services includes our \$3 billion direct contribution to the NDIS – that is in the previous financial year – towards the operating costs of the NDIS scheme, and that includes that type of service provision.

I recognise the concerns that you have raised, Mr Ettershank, and I also acknowledge that this is a time of continued uncertainty in the disability sector. Certainly it remains a point of concern, as we have concluded the review but are in the process of discussing with the Commonwealth the implementation of the review's findings and certainly what that also means in terms of what have been described, although not defined, as foundational supports. The state certainly feels this uncertainty as well, as I think I have explained to this chamber before and have certainly explained in the community. I do assure you, Mr Ettershank, that we will continue to raise these issues with the Commonwealth. We will continue to talk to the Commonwealth about how we can best provide disability services to people who need them and their families and their carers.

Specifically in relation to the transfer agreements, we are working closely with providers who deliver these services to ensure that there has been and continues to be a successful transfer of people who use those services, including residents in houses as well, their families and of course the workforce, as you identified; there were 7000 workers who were transferred at the establishment of the NDIS. I am advised that DFFH continues to work with those providers as they prepare for the conclusion of those contracts, but fundamentally this is an issue about how the NDIS as a service funds those providers. We do our bit as a state government in contributing towards the NDIS, that \$3 billion contribution a year, and I will continue to encourage the Commonwealth to ensure that the provision of services is fair and adequate and meets the needs of those who use the services as well as those who work in them. I thank you for your interest in this matter.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:04): I thank the minister for her response. The NDIS review recommended establishing a system of foundational supports for disability. These supports, including disability advocacy support, were originally funded by the state before the establishment of the NDIS. There has been disagreement over which level of government is responsible for funding these foundational supports. The need for advocacy support to tackle abuse, discrimination and violence towards people with disability continues to grow, but like other parts of the disability sector, the funding awarded to disability advocacy groups is inadequate to attract and retain staff. I previously called on you to provide emergency funding to Victorian disability advocacy services until the NDIS's recommended system of foundational support is in place. Can the minister update the house on what actions are being taken to support the sector to help them meet the increased demand for those advocacy services?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:05): I thank Mr Ettershank for his supplementary question. As I have previously advised this

chamber, there is a continued lack of clarity from the Commonwealth not only about who funds foundational supports but about what foundational supports are. I would note that the state has not yet actually agreed with the Commonwealth on what foundational supports are, which is the important first part of that question. To your more precise point, there is also not an agreement about whether foundational supports, however they end up being defined, include advocacy services. We, I think, would hopefully all argue that they should, because advocacy is critical to those with disability, but that has not yet been resolved either.

As I know Mr Ettershank and hopefully others in this place are aware from a previous question that I answered on a similar topic, the government does deliver the Victorian disability advocacy program to ensure that there is a strong advocacy sector in Victoria. It is one of the many things that sets disability services in Victoria apart from those in other states. It is one of those areas in which we are better placed than other states and territories in this conversation, because we do have programs such as this, a program which helps people with disability advocate for their own rights and systemic change.

### **Windsor Community Children's Centre**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): (782) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, I refer to the Windsor Community Children's Centre situated on land gifted by the state government to Swinburne in 2013 and which, according to the Minister for Skills and TAFE in a letter, will, prior to commencing the disposal process, need 'input and endorsement from the Department of Education and Training'. Minister, did your department give this endorsement despite such a sale being the death knell for the Windsor community childcare centre, and if so, why did you allow this harsh action?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:07): I am not sure if Mr Davis maybe was not here for his first question time as leader yesterday, because we spoke about these issues yesterday. But from the outset I would remind those in this house that child care is – not dissimilar to the conversation we were just having in relation to the questions that remain unanswered around the national disability insurance scheme – a Commonwealth government responsibility. Our role is in the delivery of kindergarten services – three-year-old kinder and four-year-old kinder. Free kinder – have you worked out yet on that side of the house whether you support free kinder? Because your Shadow Minister for Education has written to me asking for kinders to be able to charge fees to parents. This side of the house is committed to free kinder, and in Stonnington we are committed to ensuring that every three-year-old and every four-year-old has access to free kinder.

As I explained yesterday, Mr Davis – had you been paying attention – my department, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it is a very, very simple question: did the minister or the department give the endorsement and, if so, why did they take that action?

**The PRESIDENT:** I thought the original question was 'Did your department give input?' not 'endorsement'. I will call the minister back to that question. It is not just one side of the chamber, but it is really hard to hear the minister's answer. I think the minister should be able to give her answer in silence.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** As I was seeking to explain, the Department of Education and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing are each working to ensure that children who are three-year-olds and four-year-olds have access to kinder. Indeed just this morning, as I will be pleased to update you on in my ministers statement, we made an announcement about inclusive kindergarten. Mr Davis – through you, President –

**Gayle Tierney:** On a point of order, President, I am sitting right next to Minister Blandthorn, and I cannot hear her because she is being screamed at by Mr Davis from the other side of the chamber.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. If a question gets asked, I think respect the minister trying to respond to the question.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** What I want to be clear about is that discussions between the Windsor Community Children's Centre and the Swinburne University of Technology are a matter for those parties. Rezoning is a matter for the Minister for Planning.

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I ask that Mr Davis stop aggressively pointing at the minister as she is trying to answer the question. You have just ruled that Minister Blandthorn should be heard in silence, without assistance, and Mr Davis has not taken heed of your previous ruling. I ask that the minister be allowed to continue in silence.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. Pointing has been ruled disorderly in a number of precedents.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Taking up the interjection, that applies to everyone. Mr Davis, please, you have asked a question. If we cannot hear the minister's answer because of your interjections, I think you are getting to the point where you are making your question void.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** On this side of the house we know how important it is that every family with three- and four-year-old children can access child care and kindergarten in their local area. Child care is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government, and I would urge anyone in this chamber who has issues in relation to the delivery of child care in Stonnington to take that up with the Commonwealth government. But from our perspective, what we are interested in ensuring is that every three-year-old and every four-year-old in Stonnington can get access to the Best Start, Best Life reforms, which include free kinder. Those opposite do not support free kinder, but our priority on this side of the house is working with Stonnington, as I know that the Department of Education are doing, to ensure that every three-year-old and every four-year-old can access free kinder.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): I note that the minister did not answer directly the simple question of whether the department gave the endorsement or not and, if so, why they took the harsh action. The community will be able to understand the reason she did not answer it is because they did give the endorsement and they have given the green light to the sale. I ask: Minister, will you insist the Windsor Community Children's Centre be given at a minimum a reprieve of 12 months, until 31 December 2026, before its lease expires and it puts the children out on the street?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am concerned that is not a question that comes under this minister's responsibilities.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, I just indicate that the other minister's letter makes it clear that the department needs to give approval, this minister's department, and in that sense she does have responsibility.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the original question mentioned input rather than approval.

**Ryan Batchelor:** On the point of order, President, the supplementary question made reference to the lease. The land is owned by Swinburne University, which is the landlord. It is not within the minister's responsibilities to have that lease.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before a further point of order, Mr Davis, I think, Mr Batchelor, that I reflected your point of order in that I said that I am not too sure if this would fall inside her responsibilities. I was going to give her an opportunity to answer anyway.

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, the letter I quoted said that before commencing the disposal process they needed ‘input and endorsement from the Department of Education and Training’ – input and endorsement – just in response to that point of order.

**Ryan Batchelor:** Further to the point of order, President, the Department of Education and Training ceased as part of the machinery of government changes in December 2022. Perhaps Mr Davis could clarify what department under the administration of the minister he thinks this is relevant to.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am not too sure if that is a point of order. I am loath to put a question to Mr Davis on that, given that it is the non-government members that ask questions. But given the points of order, as I indicated at the time – I never want to assume too much that I am the fount – I am not too sure if this question would be under the minister’s responsibility, but I am happy to give the minister a chance to answer.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:15): I again thank Mr Davis and the chamber for their assistance, and I would reiterate that discussions between the Windsor Community Children’s Centre and Swinburne University of Technology are a matter for those parties. My advice is that the Windsor Community Children’s Centre can continue to operate from the Union Street site until late in 2025. But what I will also say is the Victorian School Building Authority and the Department of Education are working very closely to ensure that where our responsibility extends to the delivery of free kinder there are sufficient free kinder places for every three-year-old and every four-year-old in Stonnington.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Please do not point at me, Mr Davis. Where there are issues in relation to the long day care, you should take them up with the Commonwealth.

#### **Ministers statements: kindergarten funding**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:16): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is continuing to support families across Victoria and our littlest learners as they return to kinder for 2025. Families around the state have started their kinder journey last week and this week, with many attending brand new and updated buildings thanks to continued investment from this government. This morning I announced the recipients of the 2024–25 Building Blocks inclusion grants, including \$9 million in funding to upgrade facilities and playgrounds and to refurbish equipment. This funding will be shared among 406 kindergartens across Victoria, including Perridak Burrton Early Learning Centre, who will receive funding to transform their play area into a culturally rich and inclusive outdoor environment for all children to enjoy and learn in. Forty-one kinders will receive grants of up to \$200,000 to upgrade buildings, playgrounds and amenities, making them all-inclusive for children of all needs and all abilities, while 361 services will receive grants of up to \$10,000 in funding to buy movable and accessible equipment, such as adjustable furniture and sensory equipment.

Further, it was a busy start to the summer with the announcement that 150 kinders will receive \$6000 bush kinder grants, doubling the number of bush kinder grants across the state. We know that early learning is fundamental in children’s education, and programs like bush kinder support our kids’ wellbeing and physical development. Bush kinder offers our littlest learners the opportunity to explore and play in nature. This round of grants helped establish 43 bush kinders in regional Victoria and 107 in metropolitan Melbourne.

It is this side of the house that invests in early childhood education. It was this Labor government that launched Building Blocks in 2020 and since then has provided more than \$200 million for over 230 capacity and planning projects. Further, we have committed more than \$128 million to 7200 improvement, inclusion and other early childhood infrastructure grants. Our \$14 billion Best

Start, Best Life reform is focused on helping all children thrive, and we cannot wait to see how children of all needs and all abilities thrive at kinder.

### Animal welfare

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:18): (783) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Environment. The Grampians bushfires have burnt through more than 80,000 hectares of national park and private land. DEECA claims to have assessed over 9000 animals from these fires, but Zoos Victoria state that not a single animal has been transferred to Werribee zoo or Healesville Sanctuary for treatment, despite the Werribee hospital being specifically established for this purpose. It is our knowledge that out of the over 9000 assessed, only four have been put into the care of a wildlife volunteer. What was the fate of the other 9000 animals assessed?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:19): I thank Ms Purcell for her question and her ongoing advocacy for wildlife. I am aware of the devastation absolutely in terms of the bushfires, and I have been into the Grampians and spoken to a whole range of different people about the impact that they have had, and of course wildlife has been referred to in those discussions as well. I will refer this matter to the Minister for Environment, and I am sure that they will respond to you as per the standing orders.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:20): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. We have also been informed that the Game Management Authority are actively shooting wildlife in the Grampians as part of the Wildlife Emergency Support Network response. Why are the GMA involved in the Wildlife Emergency Support Network instead of the many capable veterinarians, trained macropod darters and wildlife volunteers who could instead be out there saving our wildlife?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:20): Again I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary, and I will forward that question on to the Minister for Environment for a response. But I think she would be well aware that the devastation has been significant, and I would imagine that a whole range of different people and groups have been called in to assist.

### Youth justice system

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): (784) My question is for the Minister for Youth Justice. I refer to your responsibility under the administrative orders, jointly and severally, for section 3B of the Bail Act and refer in particular to your statement yesterday that you will submit material to the Premier's review of bail laws, and I ask: in your submission will the rights of the Victorian community to safety take precedence over the rights of offenders and those seeking bail?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:21): I thank Mr Davis for his question and his interest in our youth justice system and also in relation to the bail settings. I think you clearly were not listening to the discussion that we had in my answer to your question yesterday. I think for the Bail Act more generally the Attorney-General is the lead minister. The Bail Act, if you are familiar with it, is about 114 pages, and about one page of that is 3B, in relation to children, which I have joint coverage with the Attorney-General on. It is a responsibility I take very seriously, and that is why –

**David Davis:** So you are doing a submission? Tell us how it is going to be framed.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I will take that interjection, Mr Davis. I never said 'submission'. I said 'if required'; I trust that my colleagues will come to me, and I will support them with information if required. I will do that work because I trust my colleagues on this side of the bench, because community safety is a priority for the whole of government – not just for the justice ministers but for the whole of government.

But on the review that you referred to, I think the Premier was very clear. That work is appropriately being led by the Attorney-General and the police minister, who have responsibility for bail and community safety in terms of crime prevention. When people end up at the end of that process in custodial settings or on a supervision order, of course we take it very seriously in corrections and youth justice to supervise those people in custody and out in the community. But that work will be done and led appropriately – and they have my full support – by the Attorney-General and the police minister. I think the Premier was very clear. They will come to me. If they require any information, I will be happy to provide it, and I trust that they will come to me as required, because we trust each other on this side of the bench, unlike those opposite. I am not going to go into detail about conversations I have with my colleagues, and I will not be recording them, but I will work with them. I am committed to working with my colleagues in relation to ensuring the community is kept as safe as possible, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): The Premier has said there will be a review and Minister Carbine has said there will not be a review, so I ask the minister: is it a review, and will you consult with the Victorian community in framing your submission to the ministerial review?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:24): I thank Mr Davis for his supplementary question. I think the Premier was quite clear that there is a review on some of our justice settings, led by the Attorney-General and supported by the police minister, and they will be doing that work obviously as a government. Remember, community safety is a whole-of-government priority for us. All ministers are interested in community safety, and the way we achieve community safety is through a number of angles. One is obviously through the settings in the criminal justice system, but my view is that an investment in early childhood education is an investment in the long-term safety of our community, an investment in free TAFE is an investment in the long-term safety of our community and the rehabilitation programs we run in custody are an investment in community safety, Mr Davis.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, on one hand the Premier says it is a review; Mr Carbine says it is not a review, it is a discussion. The minister over here just interjected that it is a continuous improvement – a continuous improvement is what was said. My point of order is: simply tell us, is it or is it not a review? I want to hear whether your submission will have community input.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister actually answered the question about the review in the first part of his answer. If he wishes to continue, I will call the minister.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I want to inform Mr Davis that the Premier released a press release in relation to this, about making improvements to our community safety settings, and I direct Mr Davis to that press statement if he would like to see the detail.

### Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:26): I am so pleased to be in this place representing Australia's largest housing project, the Suburban Rail Loop. The SRL, despite any concerns that those opposite might have, will actually unlock 70,000 new homes in the first stage. That will be built on the doorstep of world-class public transport with local jobs, services and open spaces nearby. We cannot let growth happen by accident. Failing to plan for growth means more-expensive homes further away from families and jobs. It means more traffic, more time commuting instead of being with your loved ones and less opportunity to live closer to where you grew up. We know this and the government in Canberra knows it, and that is why the Albanese Labor government has committed \$2.2 billion in its budget so that we can have tunnel-boring machines in the ground next year building the communities that Victorians deserve.

Those opposite are actually trying to say that now is not the right time for the Suburban Rail Loop, or like Peter Dutton, they are claiming that a project years into its delivery is a hoax. When is the right



time? Are you going to cancel the Suburban Rail Loop? Are you not going to proceed with nation-building infrastructure? Are you going to cancel the opportunity to have housing that goes somewhere other than Brighton, because I am sure that your friend, if indeed you might call him that, in the other place is going to be particularly interested to know it.

Anyone who has been to Box Hill in the last 18 months knows that this project is well underway. Major construction will start in coming months, and we will have tunnel-boring machines, as I said, in the ground later this year. We know and Victorians know that now is the right time to deliver the Suburban Rail Loop as a long-term project, because without it we will only move backwards. On this side of the house we have got a positive and united vision for our future, while you opposite stick your heads in the sand about the future that Victorians deserve. We are not blockers, we are builders. What they are going to get under us is more homes, better communities, better access to transport and more opportunities overall.

### Homelessness

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:28): (785) My question today is for the minister for housing. In the 2023–24 financial year over 1500 people in the Greater Shepparton region found themselves homeless, many of them families. Unable to secure housing, they turned to caravan parks for a safe place to stay. These parks charge upwards of \$600 per week to stay in small cabins. This causes more financial strain on already vulnerable people. Is the government aware of the hardships these families are facing due to the high costs of temporary accommodation?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:28): Thank you, Mrs Tyrrell, for that question. It is a really important one, because we know that the risk of homelessness, of rough sleeping, is something that causes people an enormous amount of anguish, and homelessness is something which we are working across all levels of government to address. The standard and the benchmark that we are working toward – and it has been really important to be able to work with Minister Clare O’Neil in this space – is that homelessness becomes and remains rare, brief and non-recurring. We know that there are a range of reasons, often involving significant complexities, that can lead to homelessness or otherwise prevent opportunities for people to move into secure housing, and we also know that across that continuum of housing we move from homelessness into crisis and temporary accommodation, then the social housing system is there alongside affordable housing. There is significant work that goes into making sure that we have not just investment in housing stock, because the key to addressing homelessness is more homes, but also a range of opportunities to bring housing online sooner rather than later. That includes modern methods of construction and assistance for people responding to the pressures around natural disaster and the homelessness that occurs in that context.

So we are going to continue to deliver housing. We do have a range of supports that are provided to people to defray and to reduce the cost of transitional housing if they are in a private setting that sits outside of formal supports and case management, but we want to make sure also that within the social housing space we have better access to refuges, for example, for victim-survivors of family violence, for young people and for people who need to stay connected to their communities. I am really happy to give you detail in relation to the areas that you have mentioned and what supports are available. We partner with service delivery organisations, housing providers and a range of councils as well, who are really important supporters and partners in being able to identify where and how people are living rough. Supports, as I said, take a variety of different forms, and that might include financial support, whether it is for people who are presenting to a neighbourhood house for assistance, whether it is about food relief or whether it is about temporary accommodation or indeed that longer term housing that people are looking for.

Again, I am happy to talk through any specific details or examples that you might have, but we do work really closely with our areas across rural and regional Victoria to understand not only where

homelessness is occurring and not only where risk of homelessness is occurring but also where rough sleeping exists. The data is really hard to gather, but we do, here in Victoria, have a really broad and open door as part of the allocation of resources into homelessness, which again is significantly higher than other states.

### Economy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): (786) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, it was reported that you have instructed officials to take complex economic terms out of briefs that are presented to you. Is this a fact?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:32): I thank Mr Davis for his question. No, not exactly. What I would say is that when you come to a new portfolio, one of the first things you say to the department is ‘Do not assume that all the acronyms are going to be known by the new minister.’ What I would point to is that I can assure you that the emergency services portfolio language was much more complicated than the Treasury portfolio process. What I think is important is that all ministers and all MPs, when we are talking to the Victorian community, should use plain language. We should use language that means that we can communicate in a way that we are really speaking to people on the ground and understanding their needs and that they feel listened to. Using complex language is a bit exclusionary. It is a bit elitist. It is something that I think this house would recognise I do not use a lot of. In the AG portfolio you did not hear me talking about mens rea and stuff very often. So in relation to your direct question, I would expect that in all departments full of hardworking public servants who are paid by the taxpayer they should be able to go to a barbecue and have a conversation that people understand.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I think what I take from that is that the minister is actually confirming that she gave instructions that the briefs be dumbed down. I think that is what you said. ‘Not exactly’ was the phrase used, but they would be dumbed down in some way. I ask therefore, Minister, have you been briefed on vertical fiscal imbalance? And if so, what do you understand it to mean, and what will you consequently do?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:34): Mr Davis, I answered your question in my substantive response. You did not like my answer, because you tried to tell me my answer was something else. In relation to the number of briefings I have had, I can assure you the benefit of being the emergency services minister was I did not have any summer plans, so it meant that I spent many, many hours talking to our hardworking bureaucrats about many, many things.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: I did not work from home. No, it was all in the boardroom. You are welcome to come and have a briefing in the boardroom any time. I was meeting with business representatives and meeting with community representatives and organisations about a range of economic priorities for the Victorian public, Mr Davis.

### Ministers statements: Lunar New Year

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:35): Lunar New Year or Tet is a time of joy, renewal and connection, and I have had the great pleasure of joining community events across the state of Victoria welcoming the Year of the Wood Snake. This year, the Year of the Wood Snake, symbolises wisdom, resilience and growth. It is a time to approach challenges with patience while embracing opportunities for growth and success. The new year is one of the most important occasions for many across our state, with celebrations bringing families, friends and the entire community together to mark a new beginning. From the bustling festivities in Melbourne’s Chinatown last Sunday to the lively celebrations in the suburbs of Springvale, Box Hill, Richmond, St Albans and Braybrook at the Quang Minh temple and

the upcoming festivals in Footscray and beyond, the Allan Labor government has supported many of these celebrations through our festivals and events funding as well as through our small business supports. Lunar New Year showcases the rich cultural traditions that make Victoria a thriving multicultural state. Temples were filled with prayers for prosperity, streets came alive with lion and dragon dances and firecrackers, and families gathered for shared feasts, each tradition carrying deep cultural significance.

Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths here in Victoria, and it is something we celebrate and champion. The Allan Labor government understands that Victoria's multiculturalism makes our state more vibrant, and festivals like Lunar New Year bring people together, fostering connection, cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. To all those celebrating, I wish you and your families happiness, health and prosperity in the Year of the Snake. Thank you very much to everyone who has put so much work into these community festivals, and happy new year.

### WorkCover

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:37): (787) My question today is to the Treasurer. Following the passing of the WorkCover scheme modernisation bill, which sees injured workers denied support or kicked off the scheme, can you inform the house: to date, how much money has been added to the state's coffers as a result of these changes to WorkCover?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:37): Mr Puglielli, that question would be better directed to Minister Carroll in his capacity as minister for WorkCover, for reasons similar to those I gave to Ms Lovell yesterday – if you are happy for me to do so.

**Aiv Puglielli:** On a point of order, I seek your guidance, President, on whether questions regarding the status of consolidated revenue following changes to government policy can be directed to the Treasurer. Where should they be directed?

**The PRESIDENT:** It is a fair point of order. The point is, and I think the Treasurer made a point which I agree with, that when it is in a different portfolio, even if adding a question about a figure of money, it does not mean it falls within her responsibility. As she advised, it will fall to the responsibility of a different minister. There are some people who have been around a long time, like me and Mr Davis. Back in 2007 there was a Treasurer in this house, Minister Lenders, who gave the exact type of answer our current Treasurer gave when it came to these sorts of questions. The President at that time had no problems with the response of the Treasurer indicating that it was not within his purview. You can leave the question to the Treasurer, or you can ask whoever is responsible for WorkCover here to pass it on to the minister for WorkCover. I am not saying you have to take up that option; you can leave the question to the Treasurer if you like.

**Aiv Puglielli:** I am happy for that to be passed on.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call the minister who represents the minister for WorkCover.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I will happily get you an answer from the relevant minister.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:40): By way of supplementary, do you have any projections of whether the budgetary impacts of this policy caused by denying coverage to injured workers will be continuing over the medium term?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:40): I will add Mr Puglielli's supplementary question to his first and get an answer from Minister Carroll.

### Housing

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:40): (788) My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, housing data released for the last 12 months shows just 61,260 new homes were completed, just 75 per cent of the target Labor set for itself. Why has the government yet again failed to meet its new homes target of 80,000 homes per year?

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, President, I might seek your guidance on this and –

*Members interjecting.*

**Harriet Shing:** I am trying to assist, Mrs Hermans. When I first got the portfolio of housing, I outlined the responsibilities for housing, which relate to homelessness, crisis accommodation, transitional housing and social housing, which is public and community housing, and then a measure of the allocation and inventory on affordable housing. The matters that you have referred to and the nation-leading approvals and building numbers that we have that outpace New South Wales and Queensland by I think about 16,000 and 7000 respectively are actually matters that sit with the Minister for Planning. She has spoken extensively about this work, including on the planning reforms that have been intended to facilitate better and faster decisions around meeting that 800,000 target. President, I am very happy to take some guidance from you. I can answer as the minister for housing in very general terms, but I suspect, Mr Mulholland, that you will remain dissatisfied with that answer. In the interest of assisting you, again, it might be something that is most appropriately directed to the Minister for Planning. I have been really clear on this, though, previously.

**Evan Mulholland:** On the point of order, President, the minister is now the minister, as I understand it, for housing and building and Development Victoria. The minister has on several occasions in this place used both ministers statements and other opportunities to talk about the housing statement. I would consider it appropriate for the minister to be able to respond to a question as such.

**Harriet Shing:** Further to the point of order, President, the housing statement itself, and I was at pains to point this out, covers a number of different portfolios: planning, housing, regional development, precincts – you are right – Development Victoria, the work around industry and jobs, and local government. Again, I want to make sure, Mr Mulholland, that when you are asking me about housing you understand the nature and the scope of the housing portfolio. If you want to talk about building, I am very happy to go to the detail of building, of codes, of the work that is happening with the VBA, the work that Anna Cronin is leading. I am very happy also to talk about precincts and the work around Development Victoria and precincts development. But again, Mr Mulholland, you are talking about a target at large that the Minister for Planning has led around easing those planning constraints around pathways for approvals.

**The PRESIDENT:** Further to the point of order was kind of like the answer to Mr Mulholland's question. The fact is that Mr Mulholland and any non-government member has a right to ask any question to any minister. In line with that, any minister has a right to answer that that question may not fall inside their responsibility in their portfolios. I think, Mr Mulholland, you would like your question to stand, and I will call the minister to answer the question.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:44): Noting what I have just put onto the record about the interface between various portfolios, what we have done, Mr Mulholland, is a significant overhaul of the system of planning, of building, of industry and developer partnerships, and of the work that we are doing to develop and to make better use of land, including disused land, government land, around the state. This includes development, for example, of the old VicRoads site in Kew, which will convert that site – it is about 4.7 hectares off the top of my head – into around I think about 467 homes. Now, again, the fact that I am standing up and talking about planning matters, which the Premier announced with the planning minister, means that again I would ask for a little latitude to be given in this space. One of the things, though, we know is that a point of congestion for

the development and delivery of homes and of new builds was planning approvals and resources. It was also about a streamlining of those pathways. This is where the development facilitation program has been incredibly important. It is those partnerships through the investment affordability statement and the partners that we have there.

This has been part of a series of ongoing conversations, whether it is with the master builders, with the UDIA, with the property council, with investors or indeed with our partners across the housing sector. We know that when we invest, for example, in a small second dwelling, where you have a pocket of land of at least 300 square metres, you can create a small second dwelling, also known as a granny flat, of up to 60 square metres without need for a planning permit. We also know that work is being done around improving access to and streamlining the stamp duty exemption for people who are buying off the plan, irrespective of whether it is a first or subsequent home, an apartment, a unit or a townhouse. These are the sorts of systems-wide changes that are the very levers that we are pulling that are making a difference.

So when we look at the statistics, when we look at the figures, we have gone from a system that had a number of congestion points in it to something which is actually realising rates of approval at a pace faster than any other jurisdiction in Australia. What we are doing is working, and it is working because we have a whole-of-government approach. It is working because we are partnering with industry, we are partnering with communities, and we will continue to do that work. We are seeing efficiencies being delivered in everything that we do. Again, this is why those nation-building projects, the infrastructure that enables the delivery of housing – and this is where SRL is so important – enable us to deliver housing in a way that also informs livability. The plan for Victoria has also been a process of extensive consultation and discussion and the review of course of the Planning and Environment Act 1987. So, Mr Mulholland, I have been very general there. I hope that that does assist.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): Minister, you have stated in this chamber on five separate occasions a promise of 80,000 homes each year – one at least on 3 October 2023, ‘80,000 new homes each year for the next 10 years’. Do you accept at least partial responsibility in your capacity as minister for housing, building and Development Victoria for the government’s failure to achieve its promised housing target of 80,000 new homes per year?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:48): What I accept, Mr Mulholland, is that it is tough going when we have the member for Brighton peering in a window opposing the development of precincts that will enable housing to be delivered.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, this is a very simple question that has been asked. The fact is the minister should answer the question rather than attack the opposition.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call the minister back to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** What I will accept is the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and the circumstances in which we find ourselves relate to constant opposition – constant vocal, vehement opposition – from you and from your colleagues, who are implacably opposed to delivering new housing. Mr Mulholland, when you talk about my portfolio of housing, I think back to a number of the projects that you in fact blocked. You used this chamber to block housing. You used this chamber to block housing across a number of social housing projects. You have opposed them. You and the Greens have teamed up to oppose the delivery of housing. So, Mr Mulholland, the real question is: do you accept responsibility for your inaction?

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister is defying your ruling, attacking the opposition again, accusing the Greens indeed and the opposition of blocking things, but none of what she has referred to has occurred since the government announced targets.

**The PRESIDENT:** I do not think that was a point of order. The minister’s time has expired.

**Ministers statements: Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:50): I would like to speak about how we are making funding for our state’s emergency response fairer through the new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund – obviously a perfect transition from my previous portfolio to my new one. It is a valuable opportunity to back the Allan Labor government’s commitment to ensuring that our hardworking emergency services volunteers and frontline ES personnel have sustainable funding to be able to do what they do so well, and that is to protect and save Victorian lives and property. We are seeing the huge impact of climate change and population growth here in Victoria on our emergency services. CFA and VICSES have of course been on the ground sacrificing time with their families over the holiday period responding to fires in the Grampians and surrounds – more than 57 days straight responding to that incident. We are also very grateful for many of the SES volunteers who have responded to wild weather incidents that have hit the state. The new fund will help support our broader range of emergency services to better respond to the needs of Victorians and to bring us into line with other states.

Alongside the fund, we are investing \$250 million to support our dedicated emergency services organisations and volunteers. It means more operational funding for VICSES units and CFA brigades; a rolling fleet replacement scheme for CFA and VICSES; a doubling of the annual volunteer emergency services equipment program – a very popular program; and more money for volunteer training and modernisation of the VicEmergency app, which I would encourage you all to download if you have not already. Because our CFA and VICES volunteers give us so much –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sheena Watt:** On a point of order, President, the minister was making some remarks that I found particularly interesting, but I had terrible trouble hearing. Is it possible that you could make a ruling? I was terribly interested about the future health of our state when it comes to fires and emergency services –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Sheena Watt:** Yes, exactly. That is right. I would ask for your ruling about making that clear for all of us in the chamber to be able to hear and enjoy her contribution.

**Nick McGowan:** On the point of order, President, I know I missed yesterday, but I did think that the minister is now the Treasurer, no longer the Minister for Emergency Services. So I was sitting here wondering why the minister is giving a statement on emergency services and how that relates to her portfolios.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think there is nothing in the standing orders around what topics the minister will choose to do a ministers statement on. The minister is doing a ministers statement in her role as Treasurer, I believe.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Further to the point of order, President, and responding to the interjection, the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund is the responsibility of the Treasurer. You might have noticed when we announced it last year that I talked about the benefit to the volunteers but the Treasurer actually announced the fund. Now I am the Treasurer, so I am talking about the fund –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** This fund is a responsibility for the Treasurer, but importantly –

**The PRESIDENT:** I kind of felt that was a point of clarification, which we do not have, but it was still helpful, I think.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Because CFA and VICSES volunteers give us so much, we will provide an exemption to eligible active volunteers and life members. That was not part of the previous fire

services property levy, so this is something that has been welcomed. It is about making sure our emergency services are fairly funded and have the equipment they need to do what they do best, and most importantly, it is what thousands of VICES volunteers asked us to do.

**The PRESIDENT:** On the earlier point of order, I did not actually address Ms Watt's point of order about not being able to hear. With ministers statements, we are all on board that unless someone is being provocative in their statement and provoking response from one side of the chamber or the other, they should be heard in silence. I am happy to give the minister the opportunity if she wants to go over it again, because it was very hard to hear. But if members are happy that we can continue on without that, I will take Ms Watt's point of order into account into the future, because it was right.

### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT (12:56):** Can I thank the Treasurer, who will get Mr Puglielli two answers from the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC under the rules of the standing orders, and similarly Minister Tierney, who will get answers for Ms Purcell from the Minister for Environment.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1331)** My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Can the Minister outline how the fair fuel plan will promote price transparency for motorists in the Southern Metropolitan Region? Labor's fair fuel plan will help motorists with the cost of living. Under the plan recently announced by the Premier and the Minister for Consumer Affairs, fuel companies will need to publicly report their fuel prices the day before, and those prices are going to be locked in for 24 hours. Households in Melbourne are spending around 100 bucks a week on fuel, a high cost to many struggling with everyday living expenses. Data from the ACCC shows that in 2023 Melbourne motorists could have saved around 300 bucks – a bit more than 300 bucks – a year by filling up at the lowest point of the fuel cycle and shopping around for the best deal. Labor's fair fuel plan is going to give motorists more information on where to get the best deal, saving them money when they fill up their cars.

#### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:57): (1332)** My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Housing and Building regarding the government's mismanagement of Victorian public housing waiting lists. Recently my constituent Mrs Hai Nguyen-Gibson from Footscray reached out to me, sharing the difficulty of her son Xavier, who has been on the waiting list for three years. They are priority 1 and now homeless. Could the Minister please update my constituent and her son, Mr Gibson, on the government housing application? If it would help the minister, the application number is 7104049129. It will provide housing that they desperately need. Mr Gibson first applied in 2001 and was placed on the Victorian housing register priority list in 2022. Since then, Mrs Nguyen-Gibson and her son have been calling and emailing Footscray housing for an update and have been passed from person to person with no real progress, despite Xavier being on a priority 1 waiting list.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1333)** My question today is to the Minister for Education. It relates to the Maroondah Positive Education Network, which operates in partnership with Maroondah City Council in my region. This excellent program enhances the wellbeing and educational outcomes of students across 30 schools in our community and has recently lost its state government funding without prior notice. This program was specifically mentioned in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System as a select example of a mental health program and framework in education. The commission specifically encouraged the Victorian government to continue to explore the potential to scale this program, yet its state government funding

has been cut. Minister, will you urgently reinstate the funding of the program to guarantee its ongoing success and sustainability?

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

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (1334) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Like many other colleagues in this place and the other place, I recently had the great privilege of attending the Springvale Lunar New Year Festival on 26 January. What a wonderful event and celebration of the Year of the Wood Snake it was. I would like to particularly thank the Springvale Asian Business Association for running what was once again another spectacular event. It was a very hot day, but everyone enjoyed all the entertainment, all the food, all the stalls and everything else that was there. I see my colleague Mrs Hermans from across the chamber smiling at me, and I acknowledge that she was there as well, alongside Mr Tarlamis, the member for Mulgrave and other members, including the member for Clarinda. A terrific event it was, funded in part through \$100,000 from multicultural grants through Minister Stitt's department. I ask the minister how funding through this and other similar programs is supporting multicultural festivals such as the fantastic Springvale Lunar New Year to continue to thrive.

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

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

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): (1335) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, what action is your government taking to address the appalling increase of students being suspended in this state as a result of increases in violence and unruly behaviour within schools? In Cranbourne, which I represent, school suspensions have skyrocketed from 127 in 2020 to 223 in 2023. A staggering total of 1709 students have been suspended from Cranbourne's two public secondary schools in Cranbourne and Cranbourne East over the five years from 2019 to 2023. In Victorian schools under the Allan Labor government almost 90 primary and secondary students are being suspended every day. Poor classroom behaviour is having a terrible impact on the learning outcomes of our most vulnerable students, with one in three of these Victorian students failing to meet the basic standard.

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:03): (1336) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Constituents who travel along the Goulburn Valley Highway between Kerrisdale and Yea have been faced with delays since the Dairy Creek bridge at Guymers—Dairy Creek roads was damaged in a truck rollover in April 2024. The placement of traffic lights at the site has helped the flow of traffic but does cause delays for motorists travelling on this road. The ever-increasing cost of hiring the traffic management signs and lights is another concern raised by my constituents. The question from my constituents is: when will the guardrails on the Dairy Creek bridge on the Goulburn Valley Highway at Homewood be replaced and the inconvenient traffic restrictions removed?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:04): (1337) My question today is also for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, Chapel Street in Prahran is in my electorate, and my constituents want to know how it and other local shopping strips can have improved access and revitalisation. It is sad to see shopfronts sitting vacant, undermining Prahran's vibrant local food, drink and creative scene, which is why the Greens have put forward a plan to tax commercial landlords who leave properties vacant, which would raise revenue that could fund direct support for traders, artists and pop-ups in vacant shops. Residents are also concerned about poor pedestrian access, difficult cycling conditions and trams and tram stops that are not accessible for people with mobility issues and wheelchair and pram users. What is the government's plan to revitalise Chapel Street, bring more foot



traffic and increase dwell time on the street to improve the vitality of the strip and to make it fully accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, tram users and locals?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:05): (1338) My consistency question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, how is the Allan Labor government supporting our vibrant Asian Australian communities and all Victorians to celebrate the Lunar New Year? The Lunar New Year is so important to our Vietnamese, Malaysian, Singaporean, Chinese and Korean communities. On Sunday 2 February Melbourne's Chinatown came alive with vibrant festivities, welcoming over 200,000 people to mark the Year of the Wood Snake. It symbolises wisdom, transformation and growth, qualities that resonate deeply with the values of our multicultural community. The Chinatown Lunar New Year celebration is a testament to Victoria's rich cultural diversity, bringing together families, businesses and community groups to honour centuries-old traditions. I acknowledge the Melbourne Chinatown Business Association for their work in organising this remarkable event. Lunar New Year is a time for renewal, prosperity and unity. May this year bring good fortune, health and happiness to all that celebrate it.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:06): (1339) My question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Minister, in a report *Active Victoria 2022–2026* you wrote:

Now is the time to ... secure the benefits of sport and active recreation, while we support the sector's long-term recovery from the pandemic.

You talk of physical activity as a proactive factor in mental health and wellbeing. You even boasted of the benefits to regional Victoria from the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. Then at a recent conference in December you spoke of the need for 500 new trained workers annually to meet the demand of outdoor education, yet a few weeks after that, a week before Christmas, the government cut funding to Halls Outdoor Education, a Gembrook-based provider of outdoor ed for nearly 30 years. The provider is the only provider of certificate III in outdoor leadership and ropes training in Victoria and New South Wales. Minister, why was this funding cut so close to Christmas despite its critical role in supporting youth training and regional jobs?

### Western Victoria Region

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:07): (1340) My question is for the Minister for Water. The Port Phillip Bay and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar boundary review approvals process opened for consultation three years ago and has been stalled in the final stages since April 2024. In the meantime environmental threats such as non-permitted use of a private helicopter in what would be a no-fly zone for wildlife protection, a shed conversion and the non-permitted use and filling in of registered wetland have occurred due to an oversight in planning regulation and a delay in formally protecting this distinctive area of the Bellarine. Minister, what is the hold-up? Will you ensure that the Ramsar classification is expedited as a matter of urgency for the Bellarine wetlands?

### Western Victoria Region

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:08): (1341) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence. Minister, I know that farmers in Victoria's south-west continue to face the lowest rainfall on record. This is impacting stock and harvest and putting pressure on feed and water security. I also know that the Allan Labor government is backing those farmers with over \$12 million to help them prepare their properties for increasing dry conditions through infrastructure upgrades to pipes, tanks, troughs, dams, stock containment areas and grain and fodder storage. My question to the minister is: how many farmers in my electorate of Western Victoria have been supported by the south-west drought support package?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:09): (1342) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Police, and it is a really important issue. On 20 January I attended a community walk down Fitzroy Street into Acland Street with hundreds of people from the St Kilda community. It was the City of Port Phillip for Cops community walk, and their message was for the Victorian government: ‘We need what matters done.’ These residents and the traders do not feel safe. They do not feel safe in their homes, they do not feel safe in their communities, and they are asking for greater police presence. They are asking for CCTV, to have some monitoring, so that the issues that are arising every single day can be dealt with. These are really significant. I am asking the police minister to provide the resources the community needs.

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:10): (1343) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and Minister for Transport Infrastructure, regarding the extreme heat policy on V/Line train services. Once upon a time it had to be very hot in Victoria for trains to go slow, but I was on the train to Bendigo when it was less than 30 degrees and the conductor announced the extreme heat policy applied. Yesterday it was high 30s, and the full extreme heat timetable was applied to Bendigo, Swan Hill, Echuca, Seymour and Shepparton train services. Trains that travel at 160 kilometres an hour slow to 90 kilometres an hour or less, so the journey takes longer, and some services are replaced by coaches. Other states, like Queensland and South Australia, have built public transport networks that are resilient in extreme heat. Even trains on the Nullarbor Plain travel at full speed despite the high temperatures. It is no surprise that Victoria, particularly northern Victoria, gets hot in summer. So what is the government doing to build a more resilient rail network so that, like on the Nullarbor Plain, extreme heat rail speed restrictions do not have to apply during the summer?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:11): (1344) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask: will you commit to an urgent safety audit of all Victorian wind farms? Last September owners of the Labor-backed Golden Plains wind farm recommended that farmers and local CFA volunteers wear hard hats, after serrated trailing edges detached from brand new turbines. The CFA at Rokewood have now had to close their shed and wear hard hats anywhere near it too. They have had to relocate to another farmer’s shed to operate the CFA. Tragically, a 36-year-old construction worker lost his life after being crushed by a wind turbine blade at the same Golden Plains wind farm. Now we have a collapsed turbine at the Berrybank wind farm near Lismore in south-west Victoria – shockingly, due to high winds, no less. Fortunately, no workers were on the site. Given these ongoing safety concerns, the death of a worker – *(Time expired)*

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:12): (1345) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the government expedite the upgrade of the Urquhart Street and High Street intersection in Woodend by immediately releasing the design plans for consultation and committing to fund the works? The intersection of Urquhart Street and High Street, which is the C792 in Woodend, poses a serious safety risk to drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. It is a four-way intersection with no traffic lights and a confusing layout, with parallel service lanes on High Street merging into the junction. Traffic congestion has greatly increased since a large supermarket opened across from the intersection in 2018, and police reports of dangerous near misses at the intersection are increasing. It was reported in 2022 that the Department of Transport had already begun work on designing the intersection upgrade, and Macedon Ranges Shire Council recently passed a motion asking the government to release the designs for public consultation. The state Labor government must stop delaying this vital upgrade.

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:13): (1346) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is to ask the minister if she will install some street lighting on Somerton Road between Aitken Boulevard and Fleetwood Drive. The neglectorate of Greenvale is just that – neglected. It has had lots of ministerial visits recently. Almost once a week I see different ministers out in Greenvale. They must be sniffing the wind out there. But I am asking the minister to drive along Somerton Road at night and see how safe she feels. I have asked about this before. It is very unsafe to drive along Somerton Road and indeed the deep end of Mickleham Road as well, where there are no streetlights. The minister can do something about this. She can fund streetlights on Somerton Road so that residents in the north feel safe. The other side might jeer, but I care about my community and care about them being safe on our roads.

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, Acting President, as is customary at the end of constituency questions I have got to notify the house that there is an outstanding question I would like to be answered. It happens to be constituency question 1256.

**Motions****Prahran electorate crime****Debate resumed.**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:15): I was discussing many aspects of this motion as it relates to the Prahran electorate prior to question time at 12. I was informing the house, I believe, that I lived in Prahran for a couple of years about a decade ago, in fact not too long after the local member who has caused this by-election actually got into office. The only time I actually saw any local campaign by that member was on the subject of public transport, and responding to Ms Copsey's comments earlier on that subject, I note that his one campaign on public transport was to make all the Pakenham and Cranbourne line trains that run express through Hawksburn, Malvern, Armadale and Toorak stop at those stations. Never mind the fact that these stations were already very well serviced by 10-minute services on the Frankston line, he wanted people on the Pakenham and Cranbourne line trains – constituents of mine have to travel sometimes up to an hour on those trains – to make additional time in their day so that people in the Prahran electorate could have even more train services. More train services are a very good thing but not at the expense of making journeys longer to the outer suburbs. Unfortunately, that is one of the many reasons why I never quite felt I fitted in with that community, as wonderful as it is. My heart is back in the outer suburbs, where there are real things this Labor government has actually been doing, and for that matter that includes upgrading the frequency of those trains on the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines some time ago.

As I said, I know, Mrs McArthur, the Prahran electorate is not your cup of tea. This is a by-election that is being fought within the tram tracks, so I am sure that everyone else in your party groans every time you open your mouth to discuss it. I am sure they groan on your side, 'Oh, if only you hadn't knifed someone to get onto the front bench.' At least you were two votes short of Mr Mulholland. She almost got you, Mr Mulholland. Two votes – it was so close to getting you as well, Mr Mulholland. Nevertheless, I do acknowledge the evidently regal ascent of Mrs McArthur to her role and the promotion of those views, which show to the Prahran electorate that the Liberal Party – just as it is out of touch with my constituents in the south-east, just as it is out of touch with the outer suburbs – is out of touch with Prahran. Evidently, as I say, the fact is that after just three speakers on their own motion, the Liberals have run out of puff. I would have appreciated your contribution, Mrs McArthur. I would have appreciated your valuable insights into the Prahran electorate, Mrs McArthur, but you have run out of puff on that side. You do not even want to debate your own motion. And the Greens, who are the other main party contesting this by-election, only had one speaker. It is very, very disappointing that they do not want to engage in this debate as well.

But nevertheless, this is a government that will continue to defend its record in Prahran and across the state and indeed, as I said at the outset of my contribution, most importantly, this is a government that will invest in supporting our police and the justice system to get the best outcomes for Victorians and community safety, because that is what this government is focused on. While you two are focused on fighting each other and throwing things across the chamber, this government is still working, whether it be for Prahran, whether it be for Pakenham or whether it be for Polwarth. Wherever you are in this state, this is a government that is working for Victorians. We are doing our bit, as I discussed extensively earlier in my contribution, to improve community safety, because it is an issue that we take very seriously. But what we have here is a party that has no idea what its position is on the inner city, whether it loves it or hates it, and a party as well who will not even speak up on behalf of their own campaign.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:19): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion regarding the Prahran electorate. I had the benefit of listening to the contributions in this chamber, and I note that earlier in the contributions there was next to nobody on the opposition benches. That is how much they actually care about this motion; they could not even sit in the chamber and listen to their own speakers. I have got 3 minutes and 20 seconds left on the clock. What I would like to talk about is that the Allan Labor government knows and understands what local communities need, and that is why I just want to give a shout-out to our upper house members who actually service the electorate of Prahran, because they have been very strong in their advocacy around the needs of that electorate.

I am very happy to say that the Allan Labor government has made record investments – more than \$4.5 billion – in Victoria Police to deliver the modern, world-class policing services they deserve. I just want to give a shout-out to our serving police officers, because they do a fantastic job and every day turn up to protect Victorians. Some of the debate that has been in the chamber today around this motion has been all about crime and victims of crime, and I just want to express my deepest sympathy and condolences to anybody who has experienced crime and has been a victim of crime. What we have done is we have delivered more than 3600 new police officers on the beat to keep Victorians safe, because we listen to our serving police officers, who tell us what they need, and we deliver what they need. We have also invested \$1 billion into new and upgraded police stations across our state and will continue to invest in this critical police infrastructure, because what we do is actually listen to those serving officers who tell us what they need, when they need it, not like those opposite, who want to campaign in here on this issue. They have no interest in actually helping Victorians; we know that. We will continue to ensure that Victoria Police have the resources they need and the tools they need to keep communities safe.

As I said, the City of Stonnington is serviced by two 24-hour police stations, in Prahran and Malvern, and I think that is something that those opposite actually voted against. Also, since 2015–16 the Victorian government has invested \$353,754 in crime prevention grants to improve community safety in the Stonnington local government area – and might I say the council actually has a role to play. Ms Crozier was talking about graffiti and dirty shops and that sort of stuff. Well, council have a role to play as well. They should make sure that they work with all levels of government to ensure that if the community are reporting that there is graffiti and dirty streets, the council takes responsibility for cleaning that up. As I said, we have announced a number of community safety grants in the Stonnington local government area, and I look forward to hearing about how the local council is utilising that money if people are reporting that they are feeling unsafe, because the council has a responsibility there as well.

The current Leader of the Opposition stated that the Prahran police station has not been upgraded since 2005. Well, that was wrong, and I have just gone through all the investment that we have provided to the police to do what they need to do. Again, I will thank every day our serving police officers for the important work that they do in keeping our community safe, because they do a fine job on behalf of Victorians each and every day. We know what would happen under the Liberals if they got in government: they would cut, cut, cut. They want to cut public services and wages.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:23): This is an important motion. It highlights the failure of the state government and it highlights the failure of the local lower house MP in the form of Mr Hibbins to advocate strongly for Prahran, to make sure that the resources were there and to make sure that the community was safe. The community is not safe, and we have seen today another stabbing in Prahran, on Chapel Street. The community understands that this is just far too extreme and it has got to be stopped. That is why the police resources need to be provided by the government, so they can be allocated. They are winding back police – that is what this government has been doing, winding back police at the Prahran police station. That is what the figures show convincingly from the freedom-of-information requests. And there has been a huge surge in crime – Ms Crozier spoke eloquently about her own personal story as well. The fact is this is something that needs to be dealt with properly, and the government has not done that and the Greens member that was there did not deal with it. The Greens as a party have shown a softness and acquiescence on these matters. They do not seem to care for the people in that seat. They do not seem to care about the violence that is there. They are more interested in defending the offenders in many cases than the victims. So I urge people to support this motion.

#### **Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

#### **Motion negatived.**

#### **Werribee electorate infrastructure**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:32): I move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the resignation of the Honourable Tim Pallas, former Treasurer, as the member for Werribee;
- (2) the by-election is to be held in Werribee on 8 February 2025;
- (3) that Labor has taken Werribee and other western Melbourne seats for granted for too long, failing to provide adequate infrastructure given the massive population growth, including:
  - (a) electrifying lines to Wyndham Vale, despite promising to do so;
  - (b) neglecting Werribee's bus network, which will suffer another blow after manufacturers were banned by Labor from ordering replacement diesel buses;
  - (c) building adequate road infrastructure, forcing the growing local community to wait endlessly in traffic;
  - (d) the Suburban Rail Loop West, which has no estimated construction and completion dates and is simply a cynical ploy by Labor to string along the long-suffering people of the west;

and calls on the Labor government to finally prioritise the people of Werribee over Premier Jacinta Allan's Suburban Rail Loop.

I am delighted to speak on this motion today in my name, motion 791, on how Labor has taken Werribee for granted – I think there is no question about that – not just Werribee but the entire western suburbs, and it is really offering an opportunity to go through a lot of the neglect that the western suburbs face. I have spent a good deal of my holidays actually in Werribee with my colleague Moira Deeming and my colleague Trung Luu as well out in the western suburbs, doorknocking, speaking to people, going to community events and attending listening posts with our fantastic candidate Steve Murphy. It is important to note the neglect that people feel in the western suburbs from road

infrastructure. I want to point those opposite to election commitments at not one but two elections. In 2018 and 2022, with big fanfare, this Labor government promised the *Western Rail Plan*, which was designed to electrify the rail lines to Wyndham Vale and to Melton. It included extra stations; they are currently on a V/Line network.

**A member** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes, the people of Melton are desperately in need of it as well – electrifying the train lines. What we have after the election is a different story. After promising it at two elections, we have a broken promise. The Deputy Premier, probably future Premier, calls it an ‘evolving’ promise, because we know that the *Western Rail Plan*, along with Geelong fast rail, has been axed. It has been shelved – just say it. It is the people of Werribee that are paying the price for this government’s gross financial mismanagement. They say they do not have enough money, it is going to cost too much, they will have to blow up Sunshine station and start again. But unfortunately it is always the western suburbs, and in my case the northern suburbs as well, that miss out, because they have made a political equation when it comes to the Suburban Rail Loop. They have made a political equation that they need to stay in power through the eastern suburbs more than they do in the west, and ‘We can just neglect the west, because they’re always going to vote Labor.’ Well, the people in Werribee are sick of that attitude.

The SRL is a terrible project. We all get that; all the experts get that. But if there was any equity in the Suburban Road Loop, it would have actually started in Werribee. But no, it was dreamed up at tax-evasion city down the road at PwC in a locked room where not even the department secretary knew about it, and it was decided it would start at Cheltenham and go to Box Hill. They said in 2018 it was going to cost \$50 billion for the whole thing, and now just SRL East and North are going to cost \$216 billion. That is not me saying that, that is the independent Parliamentary Budget Office saying that. When this government mismanages the budget, which is heading towards \$188 billion, about \$25 million a day in interest just to service the debt – Ms Terpstra, that is over a million dollars per hour just to service the interest on this government’s debt – somebody has to pay for that, and time after time it is the people living in the growth areas that pay for that, because this government has made a political equation that it does not need to service the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Whether it be crime, whether it be cost of living, whether it be proper rail infrastructure, whether it be proper bus services to our growing areas, this government just does not care about the growth areas of Melbourne. It does not care about Werribee. Every time I knocked on a door, the comments were the same: ‘We get neglected; we’re a safe seat.’ I will tell you what, I was doorknocking the day of the government’s \$300 million, \$400 million announcement – during a by-election they have finally decided to spend money. I was doorknocking that day in Werribee, and to be honest it only made things worse, because the comments to me, the comments to Mr Luu and the comments to Mrs Deeming were: ‘We’ve had the Treasurer as the MP for the last decade, and we’ve got nothing.’ And now they want to come and promise everything, and now they want to change the bail laws, even though they were screaming about it, even though youth crime and crime are out of control in Werribee. ‘You’ve got to be kidding me’ is the response from many people. You cannot just play catch-up when there is a by-election. You have got to support our growing communities to provide the infrastructure as people are moving in, not decades afterwards, not making it so people have to spend ages in an emergency lane on a freeway just to get to their own neighbourhoods, not making it so people are spending half an hour to an hour just to get out of their own housing estates. This is the neglect we see from this government, and the people of Werribee are absolutely sick of it.

This motion presents an opportunity for this government to finally prioritise the people of Werribee over the Suburban Rail Loop, which they will not do, because MPs in the eastern suburbs have won the argument. The people of Werribee need to know that MPs on the Labor side in the eastern suburbs have won the argument on the Suburban Rail Loop. The Premier has no way to back out, because she was the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. She was also the Minister for Commonwealth Games

Delivery. The former Premier backed out of that for her, but she feels she cannot back out of the Suburban Rail Loop, even though we know it is going to be an absolute disaster.

I think it is important to note what other Labor people are saying about this by-election and saying about what they are feeling. I will quote from the *Age* just a couple of weeks ago in January, where it says:

... Labor figures say they are bracing for a swing, aware that byelections tend to turn against incumbents, and voters are weary after being governed by the ALP for more than a decade ...

“We know it’s going to be a difficult one to win ...

And we know through the *Herald Sun* of 25 January that:

State Labor MPs have become increasingly anxious about affordability and viability of the SRL project as the state faces ballooning debt expected to reach \$187.8bn by 2026–27.

again it is from an anonymous source; we know it is probably Mr Galea, but it is an anonymous source –

They consider the project a dead weight hampering the government’s ability to drive down debt and invest in key areas including health and education.

...

Sources close to the Premier –

this is definitely not Mr Galea –

said the SRL was becoming harder to defend as a priority given the state’s widespread financial woes.

We know that the federal government wanted to prioritise the Suburban Rail Loop:

Two sources with knowledge of talks between the state and federal governments, who were not authorised to speak publicly, said Canberra had made clear its willingness to provide additional funds towards ...

the airport rail. It seems the only one still asking for money for the SRL was the Premier, Jacinta Allan. We know there is pressure as well from our credit rating agencies about the SRL proceeding without federal government funding. We know that Labor MPs state and federal are concerned about the Allan government’s pushing ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop. As one federal Labor MP said to me, it is a lemon on steroids. Federal Labor know that the SRL is not the right project for this state at this time. We know from the *Herald Sun* in late October that a wide range of north and western suburbs ministers and MPs, including Deputy Premier Mr Carroll, have raised concerns about the affordability and viability of the project as the state faces ballooning debt. Well, we know after that comment and revelation Mr Carroll was forced, like a hostage video, to go out and say that he supported the Suburban Rail Loop, even though we know he does not. There is nothing in the Suburban Rail Loop for his constituents and the good people of the western suburbs.

Labor have taken the western suburbs for granted; we know this through rising crime. I mean, you only had to listen to the news headlines on 3AW this morning to hear about multiple carjackings, a police chase and youth crime, and the government in a very cynical ploy does nothing about it and then says, ‘Well, our bail laws must be too soft.’ Well, this government weakened our bail laws. They removed the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail in March 2023 so that you would face a tougher test to get bail again. Then they cannot get a half backtrack but still weaken the bail laws. They blocked our attempts to reverse those changes, and I remember at the time – and I was sitting right in this place – Mr Galea said, in terms of us putting forward that bill to strengthen the bail laws again, that we were only interested in a *Herald Sun* headline and a news report on 3AW. Well, that is exactly what the Premier did yesterday – a *Herald Sun* headline, and it goes on 3AW, about a new review of our bail laws to keep Victorians safe. Now we find out today that it is not a review. Mr Carbine goes out, gives about a half-an-hour press conference saying, ‘Oh, it’s just a discussion. It’s an ongoing discussion.’ So you have got the Premier on one hand stating that it is going to be a formal review – does not give a timetable – and you have got a police minister who is asked to co-

chair some sort of review process, saying it is not a review. This government are at odds with each other at every turn, and the people of Werribee have had enough.

I asked the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop some pretty clear questions yesterday regarding SRL West. I asked her some pretty clear questions about what year the government expects the Suburban Rail Loop to get to Werribee, to reach Werribee. I think it was a pretty fair question. I have heard a lot from that side of the chamber about their housing statement, and in a recent bubble of activity towards the end of last year they produced a map of all the activity zones and all the SRL precinct zones. I found it curious on their map that they have included an SRL precinct zone in Werribee. Now, when are those homes going to be built, because the SRL East and the SRL North do not finish until 2052? Presumably the earliest the SRL West could start is 2053. In fact I will go back to my question that I asked of Ms Shing. She said in response to that question that I have to read the business case. I actually did read the business case, and I found out what it says about SRL West. The fact of the matter is their business case says nothing about SRL West. In fact it specifically says:

SRL West from Melbourne Airport to Werribee will be subject to further investigation, planning and development.

And there is not currently a business and investment case for SRL West – there is not one. You do not know when it is actually going to get to Werribee. You have already included a precinct zone that you are going to gazette, but on earliest estimates it could not possibly get to Werribee until towards the end of this century. ‘Vote for us, Werribee. Vote for us this Saturday, and you are going to get an SRL station at the end of this century.’ Well, I will be dead. I will not be cutting the ribbon, neither will anyone on this side. Everyone will be six feet under, because the reality is that this government does not know what they are doing. They do not know what they are doing. They have also suggested in this business case by acknowledging that the SRL West does not exist that:

There is already billions of dollars of investment in rail projects in the West, including projects such as Metro Tunnel –

which we know is over budget –

... Airport Rail –

which we know has been delayed –

and the Western Rail Plan ...

The Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop wants me to go and read about SRL West in a business plan that refers to the *Western Rail Plan*, which has been shelved after being promised at two elections for the good people of Werribee, Wyndham Vale and Melton to get electrified trains and new stations. They are still referring to it in their business and investment case. If you are Infrastructure Australia, you are thinking, ‘They’re investing in the *Western Rail Plan*,’ and then you look at their state budget and realise they are not, because they have consistently lied to the growth areas of Melbourne, and they have consistently prioritised the eastern suburbs of Melbourne with a massive Suburban Rail Loop. We know that there are about 7000 NDAs signed on the North East Link. You are going to have a shallower depth for the Suburban Rail Loop, more disruption. We have not even begun to scratch the surface when it comes to toxic soil removal, which presumably you will try to put out at Werribee as well, as is the habit of this government. Need a place to dump toxic soil? ‘Let’s go to Werribee.’ It has been consistently the case, with the people of Werribee being this government’s dumping ground.

We know that whether it is crime, whether it is the cost of living, whether it is infrastructure or whether it is just the state of the roads, this government has completely neglected the Werribee electorate. As I said, I have spent most of the last month, every second day, out in Werribee, whether it be at Hoppers Crossing gurudwara or the Rockbank temple, Western Gujju’s kite festival or a bunch of other community activities. People come up to me nonstop talking about the state of the roads, the lack of infrastructure, crime, the cost of living and the fact that they feel neglected and let down by this Labor government, who have frankly neglected the people of Werribee. They have left them behind. Only



Steve Murphy will be able to fight for the electorate of Werribee. He has a long history in Werribee as a business owner and a former policeman. It has been great being out in the local community with Steve, because everyone knows him. I was at the Little River pub – a great place to visit if you are after a cheeky schooner – with Steve Murphy, and almost everyone in the pub knew him. There were people who he had sold their first home to. He is a great candidate. He has been part of the community for decades. Even the federal Labor member gave him a community hero of the year award. Even the federal Labor member sees Steve Murphy as a community hero, because he is one.

*Members interjecting.*

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** He has been in Werribee through and through since John Lister was in nappies. He is the right person for Werribee. He is doing a great job. I am looking forward to being back out in Werribee on Friday, and I will be there on Saturday as well. Steve Murphy understands the community and understands the failings of this state government.

I will finish by saying this Labor government have a choice: they can either properly invest in the growth areas of Melbourne or they can continue along with the Suburban Rail Loop. You cannot have both. We know you cannot have both, because you have already backed out of the *Western Rail Plan* and Geelong fast rail.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** You can have both? Okay. I will take the interjection from Ms Terpstra and ask if she can provide an update on the Geelong fast rail and the *Western Rail Plan*, if we can have both. You clearly cannot. You have made a political choice. This government has made a political choice to neglect the growth areas of Melbourne in favour of the Premier's \$216 billion vanity project, being the Suburban Rail Loop. You have got to make this choice. We know which way you will vote, but our vote will belong to the people of Werribee. And the people of Werribee will know that we have fought for them in this place and the Labor Party have neglected them like they have for the last 43 years.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:52): I do rise, and I thank Mr Mulholland for giving us the opportunity to talk about all things Werribee this afternoon and indeed all things about our fabulous local Labor candidate John Lister. I always enjoy Mr Mulholland's speeches, but what I found particularly interesting today is that in a 20-minute speech it took him until well after the 17-minute mark to even mention their candidate. Perhaps it is because in the debate on the last motion we had Ms Crozier very stridently yelling at everyone 'Where do you live?' in relation to Prahran. Maybe this is because he was not so keen to draw attention to the fact that their candidate is a real estate agent who lives in Essendon, a lovely man, I am sure – I actually bumped into him out on the hustings a few weeks ago; he was pleasant enough – but I can compare him to John Lister, a lifelong Werribee local who lives in Werribee.

In fact through John I have learned about some of the dynamics of the area. Just as with places like Berwick and Cranbourne, you have an old Werribee and a new Werribee. John, as we know, is currently renting in the old Werribee, and he is looking for a house at some point, like many millennials. Mr Mulholland surprisingly attacked a fellow millennial by saying he was in nappies when the Liberal candidate was getting up and about, but John is well into his 30s. He is a very experienced schoolteacher, in fact, and far from coming from nappies actually comes from a lifelong Werribee history. That has involved volunteering for his local CFA and volunteering for other CFAs when he has lived in different parts as well. I know it has been a particularly taxing time for him to be talking with friends who have been on the front line of the fires whilst he has been out knocking on doors each and every day.

It has been a genuine privilege to be out there as a south-eastern MP doorknocking with John, an expert in the western suburbs. We have had some great conversations with locals. I have to say people have had very positive and very good responses to someone who is a genuine local, who many of them

know – whether it is from their children or indeed it is the students themselves or friends of friends – as a very well regarded local teacher. In fact he might not appreciate me saying this, but I understand that some of his former year 10 students actually made a Facebook group in his honour – a fan club in fact – so indeed his social media was started by his own students before he even started it, which goes to show the commitment that he has shown to his students, to his local community, and his passion for that community.

When he talks to people – indeed we spoke with people in the Harpley estate; we spoke to people in Wyndham Vale as well – he can talk from genuine experience from his friends having houses in those areas. He knows the issues from looking for a future house for his partner and himself and their dog, and he has been to these places in his capacity as a firefighter. He has supported those students, who live right across the Werribee electorate, and he has got that deep connection that comes when you have a genuine local connection to the area and a genuine local story. I have to say, we have a broad, wonderful movement in the Labor Party, and I had not come across John prior to my going out there to campaign for him. But I was genuinely very, very inspired by seeing a great local person, a local person living Labor values, who will be an outstanding member for Werribee. He lives and breathes Werribee, and he is going to absolutely be an incredible local representative. And being a local representative – for all those things that Mr Mulholland was talking about, I probably will not have enough time to go through them – indeed his passion for that local area is highlighted in this government's commitment to the schools in that Werribee district as well. In and around the Werribee electorate, just since we have come into office, this government has built seven new local schools. In fact, Walcom Ngarrwa Secondary College was one which John and I were actually doorknocking nearby a few weeks ago. It was lovely to hear the sounds of bells and announcements in the distance from this wonderful new school, and certainly a fabulous new school it looked to be as well. In addition to that, we have got Nganboo Borron School, Laa Yulta Primary School, Ngarrri Primary School, Lollypop Creek Primary School, Riverbend Primary School and Riverwalk Primary School as well. That is seven new schools, in addition to major upgrades at two further schools, those being Manor Lakes P-12 and at Werribee college as well.

On top of that, we have also of course been expanding and investing in early childhood education in Werribee, as we have across the state, making three- and four-year-old kinder free. Mr Mulholland talked about the cost of living. That is a major cost-of-living aid for local Werribee families. So too is the school saving bonus – \$400 per student at each and every government school in this state. Back in my electorate for a minute, it was great to be out with Minister Carroll in Springvale South a couple of weeks ago at the uniform shop at a wonderful local primary school, and indeed we now have passed \$100 million of savings to Victorian families across the state just from that program alone. So if you talk about the cost of living that actually matters to Victorian families – indeed Werribee families, just as much as it does to south-east families – these are the sorts of things that matter. These are the things that matter to people. Having new, up-to-date schools matters. Under the previous government, not a single new school was built in the Werribee area. In fact, they actually cut back millions from the Werribee Mercy Hospital. That is a legacy that you go to Werribee voters with at this election, and that is a legacy that you are trying to polish and sell, but they see right through you.

When it comes to transport, we have seen massive investment. Driving back through Werribee with John, he pointed out the Cherry Street level crossing removal as we went through it. That was done a few years ago. What a difference that made, unlocking access to Wyndham Vale in particular, and what a difference that made to that community. As with other level crossing removal projects, we have seen the impact that has had. But we also know that there is more to do, and John is not out there each and every day campaigning so he can tell people what Labor has done over the past 10 years. He is out there every day campaigning so that he can be the voice to drive that further, to make the next chapter of difference, to be that passionate local advocate for Werribee that I know he will be. He is out there, and already we have seen an announcement just in the last couple of weeks between the federal and state governments about the continued upgrades. We have already seen Ison Road, the bridge over the railway line, which is already under construction. Indeed, I got to see the works on that

myself as I was driving around the roadworks around it. It is very apparent to see what a difference that will make.

But we are now going one step further, and John has been able to secure a commitment – indeed not just a commitment, as it is already now underway – to get the Werribee Main Road interchange with the Princes Freeway built. That continuation on to Ison Road is going to make a huge difference to families in the west and the south-west of Werribee, in places like Mambourin and Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale as well, because I know from the response, having doorknocked with him before and after the announcement, just what an impact that announcement made. These are the sorts of things – not the only things – that Werribee locals have been saying to John that have been said to me as well. And that is what good local Labor candidates do – they listen and they deliver. And that is of course too what good Labor governments do – listen and deliver. And that is exactly why John will make an outstanding member of the Jacinta Allan Labor government here in Victoria, because he is a local, and he lives it. His constituents' frustrations are his frustrations. If it is schools, if it is hospitals, if it is justice – indeed we have got the new Wyndham law courts, some of the biggest in the state. We have also got the new Wyndham police station.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** That is exactly what I am talking about, the new Wyndham courts. That is the same place, Mrs McArthur. You said you have been to Prahran. Have you been to Werribee, Mrs McArthur? I know Mr Mulholland has also said he has been out in Werribee, and that is very good. I am sure he has many opportunities to pass through Werribee on his way down to pay fealty to Mrs McArthur and beg her not to take his spot.

When you have been out there I am sure you would have seen, if you had gone down the main road through Werribee on the old Princes Highway, the new law courts and the police station, as I saw them. Indeed if you drove there from the south-east, you would have gone past the works of the West Gate Tunnel, a major, major transport infrastructure project that is going to benefit the western suburbs first and foremost. They are the sorts of things that we have as a legacy to stand on. But as I said, John is not campaigning to go and say, 'Vote for me because my side of politics did all these things over the last 10 years,' even though the list is considerable, and I have barely touched on it. John is going out there and saying, 'Vote for me because I'm a local. I know what the issues are, I hear your concerns and I give a damn.' And giving a damn is a hell of a lot easier when you live around the corner from someone than when you live about 30 kilometres away. That is what John Lister will be doing as an effective local Labor MP. I know he will be, if elected, in our caucus room and in our Parliament absolutely championing his community every day. That is what he is going to be doing. So I actually do thank Mr Mulholland for the opportunity to speak on this today. He may have spent a small minority of his speech talking about his candidate, but on this side we are very, very proud indeed to talk about a fierce local champion, who is going to build off the legacy of all the infrastructure improvements in the western suburbs of Melbourne and deliver more and better outcomes for his constituents.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:02): I thank the member for bringing this motion to the house to discuss the important issue of access to transport and infrastructure in Werribee and the greater west. The Greens will be opposing this motion today. The Greens understand that people in the Western Metropolitan Region are facing the brunt of a longstanding issue: a lack of social, economic, educational and cultural infrastructure and investment that supports this rapidly growing community. The current resources are not meeting the needs and demands of the communities. As one of Australia's fastest growing municipalities, the Greens believe the community needs a wider and more comprehensive approach.

We know that transport disadvantage is a significant problem across Victoria and particularly in outer urban areas like Werribee. Transport disadvantage perpetuates a cycle of poverty and social exclusion. This transport disadvantage creates significant levels of financial stress when those living on low

incomes have no choice but to own a car, which not just is a big up-front purchase but also locks people into the ongoing costs of maintaining that vehicle in a cost-of-living crisis through skyrocketing fuel costs and exorbitant insurance costs. The Greens have been supportive of the long-running Better Buses community-led campaign calling on the government to provide the west with greater connectivity, reforming bus routes to provide fast, frequent, clean electric buses to get people where they need to go. We would like to acknowledge the work of David Ettershank from the Legalise Cannabis Party, who has also been supportive of the Better Buses campaign. Ensuring that all Victorians have access to housing, employment, essential services and opportunities for personal growth is crucial for their wellbeing, social connections and participation in civic, community and cultural life.

The Greens have consistently advocated for improved public transport services and safer, more efficient cycling infrastructure. We have successfully secured major upgrades to South Yarra station, facility improvements at South Kensington station, the introduction of a 1-metre minimum passing law for vehicles overtaking cyclists to enhance safety and the development of bike lanes on St Kilda Road. We are committed to securing affordable, accessible and environmentally conscious transport for all Victorians.

The Western Metropolitan Region is a vibrant and diverse community. Nearly half of all residents were born overseas in non-English-speaking countries, with over 184 different languages spoken in the area and over 100 different faiths practised. It is fantastic to see an area in Victoria with so much opportunity for cultural exchange and learning. Diverse ideas only strengthen the rich tapestry of creativity and innovation that can emerge in business, arts or technology. As a spokesperson for multiculturalism and anti-racism, I would like to see greater investment, not just in transport but to address the cultural needs of Werribee residents. The Werribee multicultural festival is already a testament to this, with communities celebrating their culture and diversity. Building on this, the Greens would like to see a more integrated approach to infrastructure in the Werribee community, with increased investment in schools, hospitals and other community services that consider cultural needs.

It is important that affordable and accessible transport is available to keep those communities connected. If we want migrants to be active participants in the Victorian community, we must support them to access services and connect them to other people. There is good evidence from Sydney and Toronto that shows recent immigrants are more likely to use public transit than the general population.

In the Werribee population, there is a higher proportion of First Nations people than across Victoria. It is important First Nations residents are supported with the agency to own, design and control infrastructure for their social, economic and cultural needs. We see in the most recent Australian census that 12 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not own a car. So it is unsurprising – sad but unsurprising – that First Nations people aged 15 and above are 9.1 times more likely to report either being unable to get to places they need to get to or being housebound – 8.2 per cent compared with 0.9 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians. The Greens want to ensure First Nations people are uplifted to achieve educational and employment success.

While transport disadvantage affects many in Werribee, we can clearly see that it is particularly sharp amongst First Nations people and migrant communities. These communities may face so many challenges, everything from obtaining a drivers licence to financial hardship, language and literacy barriers, identification requirements and the need for both a vehicle and an experienced driver to practise. The cost of fuel and recurring defaults on traffic fines further add to these difficulties. Limited access to driver licensing remains a major obstacle for First Nations people in reaching essential health, education and employment services. Investing in more frequent, reliable and affordable public transport would help bridge this gap, ensuring that everyone has access to the opportunities and services they need.

Transport is a key enabler for access to health care, goods and services. The health sector in the Western Metropolitan Region has an infrastructure shortage; with rising populations the forecast

demand is for 1500 beds in the next 15 years. There are currently only 298 public hospital beds in Wyndham alone. This is a staggering 1202 shortfall, and the Greens acknowledge Wyndham City Council's recommendation to the state government to address this.

Werribee has a young population with a larger proportion aged under 45 compared to wider Victoria. The region also has a higher concentration of residents with vocational qualifications rather than tertiary education. Young people deserve equitable access to education, employment and essential services regardless of their location or socio-economic status. However, without reliable and affordable transport options, these opportunities remain out of reach for many.

A report from the International Transport Forum at the OECD highlights how financial constraints and employment status significantly impact young people's ability to own and operate a car. In high-income countries like Australia declining car ownership among youth is driven by rising participation in higher education, delayed workforce entry, insecure employment and soaring house costs. The increasing costs of driving, including licensing, fuel, maintenance and insurance, further reduce disposable income, limiting mobility and access to opportunities. In Werribee, where socio-economic disadvantage is already a pressing issue, characterised by lower incomes, lower home ownership rates and higher unemployment, transport accessibility plays a crucial role in social and economic inclusion.

Many residents work long hours every week, yet public transport leaves them with fewer options beyond car ownership, increasing the financial strain. Expanding reliable and affordable public transport would provide a critical alternative, ensuring young people and low-income residents can reach education, employment and essential services without the burden of private vehicle costs. A lack of access to public transport does more than create inconvenience. It isolates vulnerable communities, limits economic participation and entrenches inequality. If we are serious about addressing disadvantage in Werribee and the broader west, we must invest in better public transport.

Investment in transport, education and health care is not just about infrastructure, it is about equity, opportunity and ensuring Werribee thrives. The Greens will continue to fight for a future where every resident, regardless of their background, can access the services and opportunities they deserve.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (15:11): Werribee is just one of the long-neglected and exploited seats in Labor's so-called red wall in the western suburbs. They had the Treasurer of Victoria as their local MP for over a decade, but instead of being rewarded for their loyalty or even just giving a fair share of taxes, the people of Werribee have been treated as second-class citizens, forced to endure crumbling roads, inadequate public transport, overcrowded schools, an overstretched health system and an under-resourced justice system, all while this government pours billions into pet projects in the inner city and marginal seats – projects that it seems are feared to be the final nail in Victoria's economic coffin. This government love to talk about fairness and equality, but when it comes to delivering services and infrastructure in Werribee, the plans and commitments promised to locals before the elections always seem to be revised to 'tentative plans' or 'evolving commitments' once Labor are back in. They seem to love to sell land to developers but hate to reinvest that money to ensure that infrastructure can keep up with the population growth.

Take transport. Labor's promised multimillion-dollar upgrades and the electrification of lines to Wyndham Vale were promised in 2018 but never delivered. The people of Werribee were left with overcrowded and unreliable train services that fail to keep up with demand and a bit of a verbal but not on-paper promise for an SRL West loop that apparently will not even be able to be begun until 2053. Then there are the bus services in suburbs like Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes and Hoppers Crossing. They are irregular, they are impractical and they leave residents without viable public transport options. Again, there have been some recent announcements and they look great on a Facebook post, but they do absolutely nothing to overhaul the underlying problems, which are that the bus routes are a spaghetti bowl and that there is a \$60 million shortfall in bus funding for the west compared to the rest of Victoria.

Then there are roads. We all know that congestion has long been at crisis levels, caused by unsafe, poorly maintained roads and a lack of funding for upgrades on key corridors. But the pre-by-election promise to upgrade the Werribee Main Road–Princes Freeway interchange is not even expected to be completed until 2030, and we know what kind of promises they are anyway. Making travel safe, reliable and viable, like so many other ‘Labor budget priorities’, seems to be theoretical, like their forward estimates, or they are just effectively cancelled by being left to languish in the planning stages forever and ever and ever, like the Melton hospital.

Education is another disgrace. Parents in Werribee are desperate for new schools and proper funding for existing facilities. Schools in Werribee are some of the most overcrowded in this state. Students have been forced into makeshift classrooms, rotated in groups to access sunlight and grass on school grounds and at times told to stay at home and do online learning instead. Just compare Werribee and Cranbourne: both are on the outskirts of Melbourne. They are both experiencing massive population growth, but since 2019 Werribee has received only four primary schools, one secondary school and one specialist school, whereas Cranbourne has received seven new primary schools and three new secondary schools, including a supported inclusion school. It is indefensible.

And let us not forget health care. Werribee Mercy Hospital is and honestly has for years been at breaking point. In the last year, emergency department waiting times have increased by 40 per cent, with some patients waiting over 12 hours to receive urgent care. I myself was left in the emergency room there in a portable while I was miscarrying for 12 hours. Again, there have been announcements for health hubs and health precincts. They look great on a brochure, but they do nothing to increase overall health services. Compounding these failures is the government’s failure to invest in crime prevention and justice infrastructure. The people of Werribee are frightened. Lawlessness and violent crime are skyrocketing. The bail system is broken, and police resources are stretched. Police stations are underfunded and understaffed. Response times are increasing, and criminals are emboldened. We all saw that one young offender in the news saying, ‘Why do I commit these crimes? I do it because I can get away with it.’ And no wonder. We know the Werribee Magistrates’ Court is old, unfit for purpose and overwhelmed with terrible delays, which deny the victims of this crime wave the justice that they deserve. Again, there was a lovely announcement, and we all thought it would be solved by the building of the Wyndham law courts. But now of course we find out that the government has not funded the staff necessary to run that court.

As we can see, Labor actually can find the money in the budget. Labor actually can find the political will to sign employment contracts when it comes to projects and pay rises that totally coincidentally happen to benefit certain Labor-affiliated unions. But when it comes to basic service delivery like paying for court staff or nursing staff to fill up the beds in their renovated hospital wards that would actually deliver services to people and get criminals off the street, all of a sudden the cupboard is bare. Labor say, ‘We have no money,’ and they cannot find the political will to sign a contract anyway.

The people of Werribee are not actually asking for special treatment. They are simply asking for their fair share. They deserve roads that are safe and efficient. They deserve schools that can accommodate their children and hospitals that can provide timely care. They deserve to be safe from crime. They deserve a government that values them not by their tax contributions or their union contributions but as people. They deserve a government that invests in them. They actually deserve a Liberal government.

Since it has turned into a bit of a campaigning opportunity for this notice of motion, even though I have waited until I have read my whole speech, I will mention Steve Murphy, who I have known for a very long time. It was said by those opposite that it is shameful that Stephen Murphy does not live in the electorate of Werribee. He did live in the electorate of Werribee for 30 years. That is why everybody knows him. The only reason that he moved out was the 5-kilometre rings of steel that this government imposed on everybody in Victoria and trashed their lives. They had to lose money by moving to a different suburb to be within 5 kilometres and not break the law whilst serving their own children and grandchildren. So that is why. That is not a man who moved out for a better life. That is

not a man who abandoned his community. That is a man who loves his family and suffered and sacrificed for them.

I met John Lister as I was out campaigning in Werribee these last few weeks. He is a lovely guy, like so many Labor people are. But we all know by now that he is just a Labor cog in a Labor machine and that Labor MPs represent Labor, they do not represent their electorates.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:18): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the motion before us. I will be very happy to make a contribution speaking against Mr Mulholland's motion, a motion that I see as nothing more than a cynical attempt by those opposite to feign interest in Werribee, a community that they have long neglected and worked actively against at every turn.

I just want to start my contribution by saying I think it is kind of extraordinary that this motion and also yesterday the contributions that were in this place regarding Werribee were brought to this chamber by Mr Mulholland, a fellow colleague of mine in the Northern Metropolitan Region. I have got to say that there are in fact two members of the Liberal Party that represent the Western Metropolitan Region, and it was good to finally have an opportunity to hear from them in this contribution. I think it says something when you put forward a motion that Labor has taken Werribee and the other western suburbs seats for granted when you indeed also have members representing the interests of the western suburbs and they have sat back. There is a lot to be said about Werribee. I am very happy to join with the speakers before me, Mr Galea, and make some contributions about the beautiful seat of Werribee. I know that those opposite and the mover of this motion know that there is a real hypocrisy at play here, because the critical infrastructure projects that have been opposed by those opposite are staggering. This is the same party that has fought against investment in Melbourne's west – it has got to be known – and it is now wanting to lecture us about delivery in Werribee. For me, I just cannot take it. I will stand with my colleagues on this side and with the people of Werribee when there is something that I am very happy to let folks know about, and that is the investments in infrastructure, transport, health, education and community services.

For me, one of the most transformational changes has been the removal of the level crossings – a project that we know those opposite have opposed every step of the way, only for it to backfire spectacularly because, I have got to tell you, the folks out there are really enjoying that. The removal of level crossings in Werribee has revolutionised the way people move around the suburb. No longer do cars sit idly by at boom gates burning fuel and wasting time. The removal of the Cherry Street and Werribee Street level crossings in March 2021, alongside the Hoppers Crossing Old Geelong Road removal, has been nothing short of transformational. These projects have unlocked new opportunities, they have improved traffic flow, they have reduced congestion and they have increased safety for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike. Where there were once some really frustrating useless dead spaces, we have now got upgraded roads and improved community assets. Productivity has soared. People are spending less time in traffic and more time where they need to be, whether that is at school, at work or with their families, who are enjoying the many, many community centres that are around the place, including some fabulous sports fields.

We know this and I know this because I too have been speaking to the people of Werribee, either on the phone or on their doorsteps, and they tell us and they tell me how these projects have transformed their quality of life. Yet every time this government has pushed forward with level crossing removals, the Liberals have fought tooth and nail against them. They claimed it was not necessary. They argued it was too costly. But the people of Werribee, they know the truth that these removals have changed lives for the better. They have provided safer, faster and more efficient transport connections for our growing community. The government's commitment to Werribee extends beyond transport infrastructure, although I could speak about that for quite some time. I am prompted now to talk a little bit about the Ison Road overpass, which we will deliver, which is a crucial link between Wyndham West to the Princes Freeway. This project alone will improve safety and ease congestion, directing traffic out of the town centre and ensuring smoother movement across our city.

For those who claim that this government has failed to deliver infrastructure for Werribee, one thing that I want to highlight that needs to be celebrated is Eagle Stadium. If you know about it, you would see firsthand our investments in community infrastructure. It is a thriving community centre with upgraded amenities and folks there all the time. While those opposite attempt to rewrite history, the facts remain: we are delivering for Werribee's future; we are doubling the capacity of the emergency department at the hospital, ensuring that families in the west have access to world-class health care; we have opened the first-ever early parenting centre, helping parents navigate the challenges of raising young children, with experts at hand providing critical support; and we have unprecedented investment in schools, which Mr Galea spoke to earlier – the range of new schools that have been opened out there. Thank you for that, Mr Galea.

We have invested over \$1.9 billion into the western suburbs, building 35 new schools and upgrading more than 200 existing schools. We have ensured that every government school built since 2021 has a kindergarten on site or next door, making it easier for parents to manage the dreaded double drop-off. When I compare that with the record of those opposite, they talk about roads, yet they fought against the West Gate Tunnel, a project that I am so very much looking forward to, that will dramatically cut travel times and provide an alternative to the congested West Gate Bridge. They talk about community investment, yet have historically ignored Werribee, failing to deliver even the most basic infrastructure to support the growing population. And now with a by-election approaching, they suddenly claim to care. But the people of Werribee are not to be fooled by last-minute attempts to win votes – I know this. They have shown time and time again that they are not standing with the community. They have opposed projects that benefit Werribee, and they have failed to deliver real solutions on their own.

Let us be clear, we are not just talking about investments in Werribee, we are actually delivering them. We have made the Werribee line level crossing free, allowing for more frequent train services, and invested \$151 million in new housing projects in Wyndham. More Victorians are calling Werribee home because of our investments. We have expanded schools, upgraded hospitals and improved community services to meet the needs of our region. The community of Werribee deserve leadership that invests in their community, removes dangerous level crossings, builds better roads and creates opportunity for families to thrive.

This motion calls on the Labor government to finally prioritise the people of Werribee. Well, this is exactly what the Allan Labor government has done and will continue to do. Just look at the options presented. I am going to take some time to talk about those options, which the good people of Werribee will be considering this coming Saturday. The options in front of them are representation by someone who puts people first as a teacher and an emergency services volunteer or someone who literally seeks to profit from selling Werribee. So let us not be fooled by this motion before us. They have ignored Werribee for years and they want to pretend they care right now.

I have spent so much of my summer talking as well to the good people of Werribee. I too have been on the doors, and they are absolutely thrilled that their candidate is Mr Lister, a teacher and emergency services volunteer known to them, someone that absolutely they know will stand up for their community. The community of Harpley, who I have spoken to many, many times, and Wyndham Vale and elsewhere, I have got to tell you, are excited about the prospect of Mr Lister being their representative in our state Parliament. I hope that we can continue to fulfil the wishes of the people of Werribee and enjoy their support this coming Saturday.

There is very much more that we can continue to do, and I know that whether it is the Ison Road overpass, the new schools, the investment in mental health for young ones and also emergency services, there is so much that the folks deserve and care about. There is a strong feeling of support for Mr Lister out there, and I cannot wait to do my bit, like so many others right across Werribee, to make sure that they all know that there is a really clear choice this Saturday. And that is an opportunity to vote for someone who truly cares about Werribee, so much so that he goes to sleep each and every night in that community and he wakes up and he walks to his local cafe in that community. I know that he lives there, he works there and his family is known to that community so very much – and a



big hello to his mum. I know that Labor will continue to support the communities of the west, delivering the infrastructure, the services and the opportunities this community deserves.

I absolutely oppose this motion, and I cannot wait till it comes to a vote because I will stand up strongly opposing this motion. I urge others in here to do exactly the same and vote for Mr Lister this Saturday.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (15:28): I rise to make a contribution to motion 791, on the Werribee by-election, and I thank Mr Mulholland for moving it. It raises a number of issues very close to our hearts – and then I realise it is being moved by the Liberal Party. I do not know how many motions we have raised about the west over the last two years – public transport, justice, services, the environment, multiculturalism, western suburbs Nazis – and with the possible exception of my learned and very respected colleague Mr Trung Luu, we have heard nary a peep of support from Liberal members.

There are big, big issues in the west and in Werribee, but I am afraid this motion smacks of pure political cynicism. The teals have ripped you a new posterior vent in the inner east, and you believe that a Dutton-inspired culture war will rally the working classes of the western and south-east suburbs to deliver some salvation. But I am afraid I think you are dreaming. There is a general understanding across the west that the Liberal Party does not believe that sentient life exists west of the Maribyrnong – or at least not until you get to Torquay.

Mr Mulholland raised the question of the *Age* and some sources there, so let us talk about the article from Chip Le Grand recently, which starkly exposed the Liberal disconnection from the west. If I might summarise Mr Le Grand, in the second-most multicultural place in Victoria you went for an old white Catholic real estate agent who lives in Essendon. Now, I am sure Mr Murphy is a very nice man, but talk about not reading the room – seriously. You had a potential candidate who could draw from across the Indian diaspora – that is 20 per cent of that electorate – and you went for Mr Murphy. But then of course your 19-member administrative committee does not have a single member who actually lives west of the Maribyrnong, does it? So this sudden concern about the aspirations of the unappreciated residents of Werribee – let us be real – is all crocodile tears. This motion is about embarrassing the Labor Party and shows scant sincerity about the west.

So perhaps to help you shape the remainder of your campaign in the west, because there are still a few days to go, let us talk about some of the issues that really do matter. First, let us talk about law and order. That is a big one. Everyone, first and foremost, has a right to be safe in their own home or in public, but the Liberals keep bleating the same tired slogans and dog whistles – ‘Get tough on crime’, ‘Get more cops on the beat’ – an approach that simply does not work. Then there is this tired dog whistle about youth crime waves. Show me where simply having more police on the beat enforcing the law more vigorously has done anything to fundamentally improve public safety.

A couple of points: one, there is a shortage of police not just in Werribee but also across Victoria and across Australia, so where are you going to get these police from? Secondly, the best way to keep young people out of trouble is to keep them engaged in their community and have them finish school and get a job. It is also much cheaper. It costs \$6000 a year to keep a young person in school, but it costs \$7700 a day to have that same kid down the road at the Cherry Creek corrections centre. You could triple the spend on keeping youth engaged, supported and in school and reduce crime and save money at the same time.

On a subject close to my own heart, can I observe that Wyndham loves cannabis. On a warm night in late summer you can walk down many a street in Werribee or Wyndham Vale and breathe in the delightful aroma of ripening homegrown weed, yet we spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year on criminalising the simple possession of weed. This is not about commercial dealing or growing. We are simply talking about having it on you or growing a couple of plants in the backyard. What is criminal is the waste of taxes on policing, and I know from speaking with local police that they hate enforcing these laws. What is more, if you are a multicultural or Aboriginal member of the

community – and that is a lot of folks in this electorate – you are eight times more likely to be arrested for cannabis possession and half as likely to be offered diversion. While we are on law and order I would also say that the locals are very disappointed that they will soon host the second-largest court complex in the state but still have to travel to Sunshine or the city to access specialist court services, because the government is not proposing to adequately resource them.

Secondly, on traffic and public transport, the shocking state of traffic in Werribee is testament to the atrocious planning and underinvestment in roads and public transport by both major parties over many decades. Let us face it, the *Western Rail Plan* and the western bus plan for the western suburbs are largely off the rails and must be reset, resourced and prioritised by this government. But improvements can be made right now, particularly to public transport; fast, frequent and reliable buses connecting residents to major activity centres and train stations can be done almost immediately. The Better Buses campaign, which we have championed for 18 months, provides a rapid way to make major improvements. One bus can take 50 cars off the road, so it has major benefits in terms of cost of living as well as environmental issues. In the west, talking about cost of living, it is worth remembering that the average household has a little under three cars per household. The motion refers to the Suburban Rail Loop West. Honestly, I have talked to a lot of people about public transport over the last two years in the west, and no-one has ever mentioned it. There is, however, a very strong feeling that there are tens of billions of dollars being dropped into a hole in the ground for a couple of train stations when people in the west would basically like a decent train service with decent buses that connect to it.

In terms of housing, that is a big issue. The cost and availability of housing in Werribee is much like it is across Melbourne, but there are some unique issues that arise from being the fastest growing corridor in Australia. We get a heap of complaints from people who have bought into new estates on the promise of a range of marvellous services, retail outlets and access to public transport, only to find the developers have delivered little or nothing. One large estate in the west was promised public transport and a shopping centre and five years later has nothing to show for it. Another estate was promised an aquatics centre, and they got a pond. I jest not, they got a pond. We have raised this repeatedly in this Parliament, and all we have got is the offer of one referral from a minister to Consumer Affairs Victoria. We will be looking to bring amendments to the Parliament that will force developers to document the services they use in their sales pitch and make them enforceable.

Fourthly, services: the provision of services and infrastructure in Werribee has profoundly failed to keep pace with its growth. On almost any indicator the western suburbs are underfunded compared to the eastern suburbs. This is largely because the Labor Party takes it for granted, believing it to be a safe seat, and the Libs do not really get that anything matters west of the Maribyrnong. All we seek is the same level of investment in infrastructure and services as all those politically marginal seats in the eastern suburbs. To give but one example, swimming pools are chronically underprovided in the west, where temperatures can be 10 degrees higher than in the east. The City of Wyndham has just one aquatic and recreation centre for every 48,000 young people. That compares to one for every 5000 young people in the City of Melbourne, and we can point to any number of other services that are in exactly the same position.

I will conclude with two points. Firstly, we know the west is the best, but it gets so much less. The reality is that the government needs to recognise this and act on it, or 2026 will be an electoral disaster. Secondly, in terms of the motion from the opposition, you may have raised a few issues that are of concern to the people of Werribee and some that, frankly, just are not, but you offer nothing meaningful by way of positive change. You offer opportunistic criticisms and glib one-liners but no solutions and no commitments to actually improving the lives of folks in the west. Accordingly, Legalise Cannabis Victoria will not be supporting the motion.

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (15:38): I rise today to support the motion put forward by my colleague Mr Mulholland. In a nutshell this motion states that Labor has taken Werribee and other western suburbs seats for granted for too long, failing to give adequate infrastructure given the massive population growth in the western suburbs. This motion goes to the heart of the Allan Labor

government's appalling failure to properly plan for the future need for the growing western suburbs of Melbourne, an area that I proudly represent in this place and continue to fight for every single day.

This motion before us speaks about the questionable priorities of the Allan Labor government, who have been in power for over a decade and who have also been privileged to represent the good people of Werribee for four decades, and yet in that time they have failed to deliver the essential services and infrastructure that residents in the outer west rely on. To give an example, my office is on Watton Street in Werribee. I had an appointment with constituents in Manor Lakes, and it took me 35 minutes to get there – I travelled 9 k's. Yet I had another appointment with constituents in the west, in Sunshine North, 26 k's away, which is three times the distance, and it took me the same time. That is the lack of infrastructure and roads this government has put in place to rely on in Werribee. I can appreciate why Labor is hesitant about this motion, given I am sure many of those on the other side are bracing themselves for a significant voter backlash as voters in Werribee head to the polls this Saturday to cast judgement on their record. It is about neglecting the west as second-class citizens. It is the record of this Labor government of overpromising and underdelivering.

This government is stubbornly steaming ahead with its ill-fated Suburban Rail Loop, a \$220 billion project that will do nothing for the residents – my constituents – of Werribee in the rapidly growing suburbs in the west, of Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes and Mambourin, despite concerns from various agencies and authorities. These areas require significant investment in infrastructure to cater for the growing populations. Residents in Melbourne's west need action now, not words or hollow promises. Constituents in these communities were promised major transport infrastructure projects, and in not just one but two state elections Labor has failed to deliver on them – like the *Western Rail Plan*. Labor failed to expand the Wyndham Vale line – that was cancelled last year. The electrification of the Melton rail line – another cancellation. These infrastructure upgrades are critical for the western suburbs, and the failure by the Allan Labor government to prioritise these works is inexcusable. Instead, the Allan Labor government are putting all their eggs in the one basket, the Suburban Rail Loop, which if they continue to forge ahead with risks this state's financial bottom line and will worsen our state's ballooning debt, which already nears \$187 billion for 2027–28.

Rating agency Standard & Poor's has already sounded the alarm bells on a further reduction in our state's credit rating if the Allan government presses ahead with this Suburban Rail Loop project, especially without guaranteed funding from the Commonwealth government. The state Labor government are yet to even finalise when they expect the \$2 billion promised by their counterpart in Canberra to prop up the Suburban Rail Loop or when they can expect the \$7 billion promised for the Suburban Rail Loop East.

As I traverse the great electorate in Werribee, I hear residents wanting access to quality public transport. It includes additional reliable buses. I am on record in this chamber fighting for additional bus services given the failure by this government to invest in train infrastructure, because as we know, buses are the cheapest form of transportation to alleviate the needs of the western suburbs. The bus services in the west under Labor are too infrequent and are not direct routes. A standard local weekday route is roughly about 40 minutes across the western suburbs. If you are unlucky, in some areas it takes over 70 minutes – unbelievable, but it is true. This government must start delivering tangible results for people in my electorate. Stop with the platitudes and start delivering real services. Start by increasing the frequency, the reliability and the accessibility of bus services, provide for better train stations and prepare for the future expansion of Melbourne's west, because we deserve just the same first-class transportation services as those residents living in the east or elsewhere in the state.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:44): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Mulholland's name calling on the house to note a number of things in regard to the Werribee by-election, but it also sets out a litany of falsehoods, I guess, that could be pointed to as the opposition trying to build a narrative that the Labor government does not care about people who live in the western suburbs and particularly in Werribee. Nothing could be further from the truth. I know many speakers on the government benches over here have gone to the detail about the investment that

the government has placed in Werribee and continues to do so. There is no doubt that Werribee is a growing community. Lots of young families live there, and of course what that means is there is a demand on services and also on roads and basic infrastructure.

And I note that of course with the Werribee by-election just around the corner now, what we have heard many people speak about in this chamber is the great candidate that we have in John Lister, who is a proud Werribee local and has a very longstanding connection with that community as well through his family. He will be a great member for Werribee, and I look forward to welcoming him into this Parliament. I know he will be a staunch advocate for the people in Werribee. I note Mr Galea also talked earlier about how he is such a popular local that his former school students have started a Facebook group and Facebook page social media platform because they just love him. It is wonderful to hear that school students who Mr Lister has taught hold him in a special place in their heart, because as we know, education changes lives, and it sounds like John Lister is a fantastic public school education teacher. I just think it is an incredible asset – it will be an incredible asset – for the people of Werribee to have him here in this Parliament, and I note that it will not be long until he is here.

But I will just talk a little bit now about the name of the community in Werribee, for example. The very name comes from the Wadawurrung and Boonwurrung word for ‘backbone’, referring to the shape of the course of the Werribee River – and of course the Werribee River is a very important and beautiful river in that community – but it also refers to and can refer to the strength of the Werribee community. It is a very strong and proud community, and we hear often about the representations that John Lister is already making for that community. John himself is a very proud local, as I said, and he has also been a CFA volunteer for many decades and a proud public school teacher.

I am going to talk about infrastructure, because that is what this motion is about. The opposition say we are doing nothing about road infrastructure, nothing about the growing local community and the endless traffic. Again they want to bang on about Suburban Rail Loop and all that sort of stuff and those long-suffering people in the west. I was having a look at the election results in Werribee, and I think that the seat was held by Labor from 1979 to 2002, when it was abolished, and then there was a re-creation of the seat that came in 2014 to the present, which was held by Tim Pallas. It is an insult – and I have listened to Mr Mulholland’s contribution this entire time, where he has gone on and said that the people of Werribee have been taken for granted, that it is a safe seat and all this kind of rubbish. Well, the fact is you insult the people of Werribee because of the fact that they have made consistent decisions about returning a Labor member to that seat for many, many decades. They know there is a choice to be made, and every time they have made a choice to return a Labor member, because they know what they would get under you lot is nothing but cuts, cuts, cuts. In fact I refer to Mr McCracken’s comments that were reported in the *Herald Sun* on 16 January, where he said:

So I guess it’s a really difficult balancing act of how much do you cut, what do you cut, what services can you live without ...

I will tell you what will happen in Werribee if you lot are ever in government or if you actually win that seat: you would cut, cut, cut. You have already said that you would cancel the Suburban Rail Loop, so the people of Werribee will never see Suburban Rail Loop West because you would cut it. You have already said that. So what we know is and what we are doing –

**Evan Mulholland:** You don’t even have a business case for SRL West.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, we do. You just said earlier today, Mr Mulholland, that you have read the business case, so please: you cannot say one thing and then change it. We know how good you are at leading misinformation campaigns, because you do it every day in here, so what I am going to talk about is setting the record straight, because it is actually very, very disingenuous that you constantly talk down the western suburbs. You constantly talk down Werribee. You insult the people of Werribee by telling them that they should vote for an alternative. They know what they are voting for because, as I said, they have returned Labor to Werribee since 1979.

I will go on and I will talk about the record investment. We have since 2015 – and this is just when the seat was re-created – backed the Werribee community in delivering record investment in Melbourne’s growing west. The Metro Tunnel and West Gate Tunnel will open in 2025, and all they talk about is, ‘Oh, the bus network’s no good’ and this, that and the other thing. Well, I am going to go through it, because what we have got is a comprehensive plan about not only improving the road network but improving public transport options. Metro Tunnel and West Gate Tunnel will open in 2025, but if you listen to those opposite, we invest nothing – nothing – in the west. It will be a game changer. It will help people in the west to get home sooner and connect them to their critical jobs and services. There are also other things we have done. We are making the Werribee line level crossing free, creating capacity to deliver more trains more often, and we will be able to do that because Metro Tunnel will open and it will be able to relieve pressure on those services.

We are creating more homes for Victorians, including more than \$115 million for the Wyndham LGA as part of the landmark \$6.3 billion investment in housing across Victoria, with already 360 new homes complete or underway. The early parenting centre in Wyndham – we have delivered a kinder onsite or next door to every new government primary school since 2021. We have delivered an urgent care clinic in Werribee. As I said, we are making the Werribee line level crossing free. We are building the Ison Road overpass in Werribee to help provide a vital link from Wyndham West to the Princes Freeway to improve safety and ease congestion by directing traffic out of the Werribee town centre.

But wait, there is more. This is what they do not talk about over there: the investment in public education that we have been able to deliver. Since 2015 we have invested upwards of \$1.9 billion and built – wait for it – 35 new schools in the growing western suburbs. We opened 10 new schools in 2024 – 10 new public schools – including Walcom Ngarrwa Secondary College, Nganboo Borron School and Laa Yulta Primary School. We have also invested in upgrades to more than 200 schools across the west, including a \$9.4 million upgrade and expansion of the Manor Lakes P-12 College.

Let me talk about roads again for a moment. We have invested \$964 million towards maintaining Victoria’s road assets between now and mid-2025, which is equivalent to \$2.6 million every day. Crews are out on the ground in the city and suburbs and the regions delivering our road network. We have invested nearly double the average – \$493 million more than the previous Liberal–National government. I could go on.

The rhetoric that is being built by those opposite about the fact that it is a safe Labor seat and we always take it for granted, again, is very insulting to the people of Werribee, who have time and time again since 1979 made a choice to return Labor members to that seat. As I said, we know how quickly the outer suburbs are growing. That is why I said we are investing in roads, we are investing in schools and we are also investing in public transport. Again, we have also invested in a key arterial corridor upgrade, which is the Point Cook Road and Sneydes Road intersection – \$19.2 million to improve road safety and to get road users home quicker.

Finally, I will talk about bus networks, because if you listen to Legalise Cannabis, it is all doom and gloom, but I think there is a bit too much weed being smoked over on those benches, because they obviously do not know –

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is right, a weed-led recovery. Absolutely, Mrs McArthur. Again, a bit too much of the funny stuff is being inhaled over there for them to notice what we have actually invested since April 2024. Wyndham received more than \$21 million for a new bus connection between Harpley estate and Cornerstone estate communities and Wyndham Vale station. There is some other stuff here, but the point is it takes time and effort and investment to make those proposals and to get a bus network working and to look at how we can improve things. It takes time. We have been working on these things for some time. This includes 60 extra services per week to route 215,

Caroline Springs to Highpoint shopping centre, and a new bus interchange open as part of the elevated Deer Park station.

There is a lot of work that has been going on across a whole range of areas, including the bus network. I know Legalise Cannabis will say, 'We've moved this motion in the Parliament and we got this happening.' They will claim credit for things that they have never done, but we know and the good people of Werribee who keep voting to return Labor members also know that it takes a Labor government to deliver on the things that matter to them. I will conclude my remarks, but the government will not be supporting this motion.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (15:54): I am very pleased to speak on this motion about Werribee, because what a great place it is and what a fantastic candidate we have got out there – Steve Murphy, an absolute hero. He has lived there for 30 years, and the only reason he is not there now is because of the absolute ring of steel that you put around people where they could not move out of their place. Where has Mr Pallas been for the entire time he was a member? He has been in Williamstown, and he has retreated back there. As for your candidate, my goodness me, he was his staffer; you did not want to talk about the fact that he worked for Mr Pallas. He worked for the man that has imposed 58 new or increased taxes on us, the worst Treasurer –

**Sonja Terpstra**: On a point of order, Acting President, I note Mrs McArthur's very animated contribution in regard to the motion, but I do not think that talking about the Treasurer has anything to do with the –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja Terpstra**: Let me finish. Can I finish my point of order without interruption, thanks. The motion talks about us failing to invest in infrastructure, so I am struggling to understand how Mrs McArthur's contribution has anything to do with the motion. I ask that she be brought back to the motion.

**Evan Mulholland**: Further to the point of order, Acting President, I ask the member to look at point (1) of the motion, which mentions the Honourable Tim Pallas.

**Sonja Terpstra**: Further to the point of order, Acting President, just because you mention his name does not mean it is germane to the motion. The motion is about infrastructure.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora)**: I would ask Mrs McArthur to return to the topic, please, and that she be heard in silence.

**Bev McARTHUR**: Thank you, Acting Chair, and thank you, Ms Terpstra for wasting my time. You are in a situation where you are going to get completely thrashed on Saturday. I was out there in the Wyndham Vale booth and all those people were coming up to us and they were saying –

**Tom McIntosh**: On a point of order, Acting President, I love the enthusiasm, and I do want to hear the contribution, but I would just ask you not to point, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR**: Sorry.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora)**: Thank you, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR**: Out there in the Wyndham Vale booth there were people coming up to us left, right and centre, and they were saying, 'I'm never voting Labor again.' The poor old Labor how-to-vote card people have retreated. They are almost invisible. We know that the people in Werribee are voting with absolute gusto to send you a message that you have treated Werribee with complete contempt. You have got a major transport infrastructure problem, you have got overcrowding in schools, you have got a lack of hospitals, and only today we learn about what is happening in the Werribee courts where victims and people are affected. Vote Steve Murphy.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:57): I thank Mrs McArthur for the contribution. I thank all of my colleagues, including Mrs Deeming, Mr Luu and Mrs McArthur, for fantastic contributions pointing out how Werribee has been neglected. It has been neglected, and you only have to look at the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund, for example. Werribee, or Wyndham, is always the highest in terms of what it gets taxed from the government but also what it is missing out on. Currently there is about \$33 million sitting in a state government bank account, propping up the budget, that should be spent out in Werribee that is not being delivered to those communities because the government loves to hold onto their developer taxes and fails to deliver it back to the communities. It actually waits about two years to deliver it back to the communities. If you look at the last two years, for example, if you are building a major project or building a maternal and child health centre or something like that, construction costs in the last two years have gone up 20 per cent, which means that growth areas like Werribee get less back because of this government's botched delivery for new growth areas.

We know, and I know that that side do not like saying it, that John Lister was a staffer to Tim Pallas, so he is part of the problem. He is the reason why we have got \$188 billion of debt. It is amazing to see that side of the chamber so curious and so excited to speak about how important he is. We have got the Labor Party on that side of the chamber – not Mr McIntosh, for some reason – speaking about how important it is for those who represent their local communities to live in their local communities. What hypocrisy. How many Labor MPs live on literally the other side of Port Phillip Bay and get flown into a Labor seat. But all of a sudden you have got this by-election and it is so important that we have a local. Steve Murphy has lived in the electorate and owned a business in the electorate for 30 years. Joanne Ryan, a federal Labor MP, awarded him a community hero of the year award. He is that local. All of a sudden you have got Labor saying how important it is to live in the local community. He moved to Essendon to live within 5 kilometres of his family – of his children and grandchildren – because of Labor's ring of steel and lockdowns. But I was really hoping for a contribution from Mr McIntosh so he could speak as well. I know he wanted to speak on how important it is to live in your electorate – not my electorate, your electorate.

We see their infrastructure announcements as well. I have never seen a quicker time period for an infrastructure project than how quickly Major Road Projects Victoria and the Labor government were able to award a builder. We have been waiting for a builder appointment up in Wallan for the ramps for about three or four years. But you get the funding, you award the builder –

**Tom McIntosh:** On a point of order, Acting President, obviously we are talking about other parts of the state, but I believe we are here to talk about Werribee – the great seat of Werribee.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Mr Mulholland to continue.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Yes, I was actually talking about Werribee because I was making the comparison that all of a sudden when there is a by-election things can happen really quickly. They are desperate for announceables after neglecting the electorate of Werribee for so long. I was doorknocking, as was Mrs McArthur, the day of their hundreds of millions of dollars announcement for Ison Road. It only made people more grumpy, because they know they had the Treasurer as their MP for 10 years, who did nothing to keep pace with growth in terms of infrastructure. Steve Murphy is the man to fix this up. He is the right person for the job. This Labor government wants to put a lithium battery factory in a fire zone and fill the Little River with solar farms. I have to say Catriona Rowntree, who we all know from *Getaway*, has endorsed Steve Murphy, who is the man who is going to fix this.

I will finish this motion by saying vote one Steve Murphy. I implore this chamber to vote for this motion if you support Werribee over the Suburban Rail Loop. The Labor Party have a choice. It is Werribee or the eastern suburbs and the Suburban Rail Loop.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

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

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:08): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 790, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

***Motions*****Abortion services**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:09): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that it was 17 years since abortion was decriminalised in Victoria;
- (2) acknowledges the many decades of advocacy by fearless individuals that preceded abortion reforms;
- (3) recognises that significant barriers still exist for people seeking to terminate a pregnancy, including:
  - (a) social stigma;
  - (b) some healthcare providers' refusal to participate in abortion provision;
  - (c) costs associated with surgical and medication treatment options as well as employment leave, travel and childcare arrangements;
  - (d) the complete lack of service provision in many local government areas across Victoria;
- (4) further notes the recent efforts in multiple parliaments across Australia seeking to limit and/or repeal reproductive freedoms and access to abortion services;
- (5) reaffirms its commitment to abortion as essential, routine health care and a basic right; and
- (6) commits to actively guard against current and future threats to abortion and Victorians' reproductive freedoms, including but not limited to consideration of amendments to the Constitution Act 1975.

I stand to speak on motion 787 in my name. When I began working as a GP, abortion had been decriminalised for five years in Victoria. It meant that when I was seeing patients who wanted to consider having an abortion, I did not have to worry about the legality of our conversations or of my referrals, but that did not mean that I could provide the care that these patients needed myself. In fact I could not prescribe abortion medication, because until 2023 abortions were not considered a standard part of care for a GP, and anyone who wanted to provide them had to undertake special training, meaning there remained relatively few providers outside specialist clinics or hospitals. While it was technically still a crime when I was at medical school, potentially explaining why we did not learn anything about it then, we still did not learn anything about it during my GP training, well after decriminalisation. Yet abortion is incredibly common.

If you are working as a GP, you will inevitably see people who need to have an abortion. In my time as a GP I saw many, many people seeking an abortion. Being in those very private and personal conversations is a profound privilege, and I can tell you every circumstance, every perspective and



every experience was different. The decisions were highly individualised, sensitive and not something that politics had any place in. The reasons people need abortions are so varied, but all are important. I saw people where the decision was immensely difficult for them, potentially even challenging their own beliefs and values, others where it was absolutely clear to them and some who experienced profound grief and loss even when that decision was straightforward. There were people who had to have an abortion despite a very, very wanted pregnancy and others who could not contemplate a child or another child. There were others who chose in the end not to have an abortion after considering one but were grateful to have been able to make a genuine choice. I also saw those who, after deciding to have an abortion, still struggled to access it despite it being legal in this state.

Abortion is time-critical health care, and while it may be legal, too often people are still being denied access due to a lack of local available providers, cost or travel times. Decriminalisation has not translated into access, and we have a long way to go to address these nonlegal barriers and ensure access for all people when they need it, particularly for rural and regional Victorians and those from multicultural communities. While I fully respect the right of those who conscientiously object to abortion to do so on a personal level, I do not accept that this extends to preventing those who are seeking an abortion from accessing it. We know that according to stories heard by 1800 My Options there are doctors who refuse to refer someone to an appropriate provider of abortion despite this being illegal. Institutional conscientious objection is also alive and well, with many health services not providing abortion despite being publicly funded, since abortion is not a basic health service, a requirement expected of the state government.

In data analysis undertaken by Women's Health Victoria last year it was revealed that 53 local government areas across the state had no surgical abortion providers, 31 had no medication abortion dispensing pharmacies and 15 had no medication abortion prescribers. Regional and rural areas do it particularly tough, with a higher number of people seeking abortion despite the higher likelihood that they are living in an abortion desert, and part of this goes to the correlation between a lack of abortion service providers and a lack of people willing and able to provide certain forms of contraception, particularly long-acting reversible contraceptives. If they were able to access an abortion through their local provider, they then face what is known as the rural health trifecta: travel distance, logistics like child care, and money. Last year Women's Health Grampians compiled a fantastic project known as *Tell Your Story*, a collection of testimonies of lived experiences of accessing contraception and abortion in the regions. One participant shared:

When I found out I was pregnant, it was a big shock because I was on the pill. I attempted to get a medical appointment in Horsham, St Arnaud, Bendigo, Ararat, Stawell, Halls Gap, Maryborough, Beaufort, Charlton, Donald, and Ballarat. No one was taking in new patients. I was unable to use the local abortion services, they all had 8 weeks wait lists, which would make me too far along to have a medication termination and would need surgical intervention. I ended up getting an appointment for a medical abortion in Melbourne. I had to take four days off work, pay for travel, three nights' accommodation and \$1200 of medical expenses.

I know that many in this government, including the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas, are all too aware of these access barriers and are doing really, really good work to try and address them. The announcement that was made today about a mobile and virtual women's health service is something we wholeheartedly welcome. While I am sure the timing is no coincidence given this motion today, these are exactly the sorts of initiatives we need more of to help people like the one I have just quoted.

I am aware that this motion we have brought forward today has seemingly caused all sorts of political headaches, not just for the coalition but also for Labor, because despite announcements like the one we heard today from the government, they still struggle to know how to respond in the Parliament to a simple motion about the need to protect abortion rights. This highlights how abortion – what should be routine basic health care – remains a politically charged issue. Moreover, it demonstrates there is still so much stigma surrounding abortion, and it is stigma that remains one of the biggest problems we need to tackle. Stigma creates shame. It prevents people from seeking an abortion. It prevents medical practitioners and pharmacists, especially in rural areas, from publicly advertising that they

provide abortions or provide abortion medication, and all too often it prevents them from providing services at all. A clear demonstration of this stigma, extending all the way to how our government deals with abortion, is that Victoria's public hospitals do not even keep data on abortions performed. They are not required to, unlike most common procedures. We have never received a good answer about why this is the case, but the lack of data makes it hard to know what needs exist and where resources are required. The ongoing stigma and reluctance to talk openly about abortion should serve as a warning to those who think that the legal rights to access are safe. When something only exists in the shadows, it is easier to erase before anyone notices.

We do not have to look far back in time or even too far around our country presently to see that there are plenty of political opportunists ready to remove access to safe legal abortion. We saw it in Queensland when abortion flared up as an issue in their recent state election. We were assured by the now Queensland Premier that abortion was not on his agenda, yet one of his first orders of business was to pass a motion banning any bills, motions or debate on abortion, which has the effect of not only silencing discussion but crucially preventing any expansion to access. Last year in South Australia we saw attempts to wind back access to abortion in certain circumstances, and this motion was only defeated by one vote. There is still a bill from a Liberal and a Nationals MP sitting on the books in the federal Parliament that seeks to wind back abortion provisions. As I said earlier, abortion was still a crime in this state until 2008, and all it could take is a new mix in this Parliament to see it recriminalised. Protecting the right to abortion is just one fight on the road to free and accessible reproductive care. There is so much more that needs to be done, but we cannot make progress if what we have already had to fight so hard for is taken away. I say to all members in this chamber: the time is now to work together to ensure that the right to abortion is entrenched as routine health care every day, in every health service right across this state for good.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (16:17): I do rise to make a contribution on Dr Mansfield's motion. It is an important motion. From the outset I do want to acknowledge that there are many different views across the Parliament about these issues, but I also acknowledge the very strong support there is across the political divide for the right for a woman's body to be hers and hers alone and for health decisions to be made by women without political interference. It is really, from my perspective, very simple: abortion care is health care and women have the right to choose.

Labor has a strong track record when it comes to strengthening women's rights and improving access to reproductive services across our state. I do not mean this in a disrespectful way toward Dr Mansfield or the Greens, but we do not need a motion from the Greens to be motivated to continue to reform, strengthen and defend women's access to reproductive health services, including abortion services. We have been getting on with that important work. I would argue very strongly that the women and indeed the men of the Australian Labor Party have been continuously getting on with the job of reforming women's health policy, including reproductive health policy, for decades. Both our state and our national party policy platform unequivocally enshrine a woman's right to access termination services. Of course there are different views within our ranks, but as a party we have got a mature way to deal with those differences of opinion. I want to be crystal clear: our party's policy on these matters is settled and it is proudly pro choice. In government we have not wasted the opportunity to continue to strengthen women's health, including access to termination services and support, and I will talk more about that shortly.

I am curious though about the timing of this motion and the fact that the Greens have also introduced a private members bill this sitting week. I absolutely respect that Dr Mansfield is coming to this debate as a health professional, and nobody doubts Dr Mansfield's views are strongly and genuinely held, but it does feel like a bit of a coincidence that three days out from the Prahran by-election we are having this debate. Now, do not get me wrong, I listened carefully to Dr Mansfield this morning when she introduced her private members bill, and it is quite right to call out the appalling loss of rights experienced by millions of American women. Nobody on this side of the chamber would ever take for

granted the reforms that have already been achieved in Victoria. We know that these gains are hard-fought, and they must be protected and defended.

Just back to the Victorian context for a minute: even a cursory look at recent history in relation to reform of policy in this area shows you that progressive Labor governments have championed women's health rights. In 2008 the Brumby government decriminalised abortion following a report from the law reform commission. That involved extensive public consultation that was undertaken by the law reform commission, and it was really interesting to look back on *Hansard* from that time and see the contributions of MPs, including some that are still in the Parliament today. That debate feels very familiar to the debates we continue to have. I was interested to read Mr Davis's contribution, which was instructive. It is also worth noting that Daniel Andrews was the health minister at the time that we decriminalised abortion. And a shout-out to my friend and colleague Lily D'Ambrosio, who along with many other women in the Labor movement, in the Parliament and across the community spearheaded that campaign to decriminalise abortion in our state. That is a reform that we will never take for granted on our side of politics, and we will never wind it back in government.

In 2015 the Andrews Labor government delivered safe access zones. Another great champion of women's rights, former health minister Jill Hennessy, worked across the Parliament and the community to deliver this legislation. I think it would be remiss not to acknowledge that Fiona Patten also championed this reform, and this meant that women could access abortion services in Victoria without being harassed and shamed by people who thought they had a right to mess with women's privacy and their choices.

The current Minister for Health, Mary-Anne Thomas, is continuing with the reform of women's health at pace, and we are working hard – to your point, Dr Mansfield – to improve access to abortion services and to remove barriers for women, particularly those women who face barriers accessing affordable and comprehensive care. I am thinking in particular of people in regional areas where it is not as easy to access these services.

I just want to touch briefly on some of the key areas of reform that our government, the Allan Labor government, has been pursuing. We have delivered the first ever statewide sexual and reproductive health phone line, 1800 My Options, which is helping Victorian women to find out where the services are that they need and linking them with important health services across the state. We have invested \$153 million in the women's health package, and that is about transforming the way health care for women is delivered in our state. We have opened 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs, and 12 of those are in regional Victoria. We have got 23 public hospitals across Victoria providing surgical abortion, and more than half of them are in regional Victoria. And just today, the health minister announced the free virtual women's health clinic, which will make it easier for Victorian women to access women's health services, including abortion.

I note that the Greens are advocating for a change to the constitution as a mechanism to defend women's reproductive health services, and respectfully, nothing would prevent a future conservative government intent on winding back women's access to abortion from simply coming in here and changing that back. As long as they had the required statutory majority they could do that, and that would be the end of that. We must never go down the US path, where women are in fear of accessing abortion and health care and where workers are criminalised and women have even died. We are never going down that path in Victoria, but frankly the way to protect these hard-won gains is to engage directly with the Victorian community about these issues. I am sure that the respective positions of all political parties and candidates will be closely scrutinised – because Victorian women care about these issues – at the next election and beyond.

Anyone can move a motion in the chamber, but I would argue strongly that it takes a progressive Labor government to deliver reform in this area. It takes careful policy development; it takes consultation with the health sector, the broader community and the Parliament; and it takes leadership to deliver legislative reform. The Allan Labor government will always support Victorian women

seeking reproductive health care. Our government will always defend women's rights and a woman's right to make her own decisions about accessing abortion services, and this right will always be protected under a Victorian Labor government. I say that Victorians know that they can trust Labor to always stand up for them when it comes to reproductive and healthcare rights for women.

I thank the chamber. This is an important debate. I do thank Dr Mansfield for her comments, and she has a particular perspective, having worked in the health system. I do not want to disappoint anybody in this chamber, but government policy development and announcements are in no way linked to the motions that we debate in this chamber on a Wednesday. I do not want to disappoint anybody, but that is not how it works. Again, this is an incredibly important area of public policy, and there are many, many people on our side of the chamber absolutely committed to continuing this important work. I thank the chamber for listening.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:27): I rise to speak to Dr Mansfield's motion, motion 787. That is an important issue, the issue around abortion, and as the minister has just been speaking about in terms of the huge number of reforms that have been undertaken over many years on this important issue, it should not be diminished in any way and it should be recognised.

I frankly think that it is somewhat hypocritical of the Greens to say they are acting in the interest of protecting the issue of abortion from politicisation, yet this motion and the private members bill that they have introduced into the Parliament today to entrench abortion in the constitution are nothing more than a political manoeuvre. As the minister has just said, entrenching laws into the constitution does not stop this chamber or the Parliament from undoing that work.

I want to go back through a little bit of history.

**A member** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: As you know, you need two-thirds and you do not have it, so you are still bringing it on. You know what you are doing. This is a politicisation for the Prahran and Werribee by-elections. That is all this is about, so let us not beat around the bush. What your motion goes to, Dr Mansfield, is that it is 17 years since abortion was decriminalised in Victoria, and that is true. In this place in 2008 there was a very extensive debate. I was not in the Parliament at the time. I think Mr Davis was and Ms Lovell was, and they will tell you just how difficult a debate that was because of the very emotive and the very strong views of some.

That was well documented, that was well reported on at the time, and I think there was probably only the President who was in here at the time who went through that debate. Members on this side who I have spoken to have said that they never want to go through that debate again. In fact as one said to me, 'That bill is sealed, and I never want it to be reopened.' It was an important debate at the time. Victoria was really leading the way. The minister was talking about the Labor Party, but the Liberal Party allows people to have a free vote on these sorts of issues. If you go back in history and have a look, it was in 1969 in the South Australian Parliament where the young Libs were promoting the rights of women. They were leading the charge. There was a huge amount here in Victoria with the Bolte government. They were looking at some reforms around abortion. It was only the Democratic Labour Party that, from my readings and understanding, pulled that back here in Victoria with the then Liberal Party. The Liberal Party was very progressive in many ways about women's rights and about choice, because that is what our values are about – freedom of choice.

As people know, I do have views on this. The minister referenced Ms Patten's contribution and when she was trying to bring in a private members bill. I voted against that strongly at the time because I felt it was actually a dangerous reform and she was, I think, misleading women and trying to get health services to conduct abortions and terminations. It just cannot be done. It cannot be done. I do not know if I misheard Dr Mansfield – I think she was referring to medical abortion, not surgical abortion actually, and allowing services in Victoria to have those services, which I do not disagree with. There is much in this motion that I do agree with. Obviously I agree with the first point. Yes, it was 17 years

ago that this debate was held. But I do say that there are still some issues around the delivery of abortion and contraceptive care in Victoria. I will come to those abortion deserts in a minute, and I note the minister's response to some of those issues raised.

The second point in the motion acknowledges the many decades of advocacy by fearless individuals that proceeded abortion reforms, and that is true. As I have already previously mentioned, there were many people on both sides, all sides of politics, that had strong views about the rights of women and the freedom of choice. And if you look at the Menhennitt decision that led to some of the reforms here in this state of the doctor at the time, Dr Davidson I think his name was, who was not found guilty. This is what was built on. So it has been many, many years from a whole range of people. It has been not just women, it has been men and it has been others who have argued for safe access.

Some of the stories are terrible. And going back to that 2008 debate when colleagues, my friend Andrea Coote said to me the debate was so intense. Here comes the President; I think he was here at the time in the 2008 debate, and he is probably agreeing that he never wants to go through that again. But it was pretty full-on. We have got that reform. Why change it? We have got this good law. It is working in Victoria. I think this is just unnecessary scaremongering by the Greens, purely political in the scheme of the by-elections that will be occurring on the weekend. No doubt they have got their press releases ready to pump out and put out into these electorates.

On this side of the house we will always have a conscience vote on this, and it is not that I disagree with the issue. I am pro choice. I have said it many times. I have worked at the Women's. I have seen people come in and storm the hospital. I have been there. I have seen it. I have seen the sad circumstances of some very tragic, tragic events, and unnecessarily so. My views are my views. But I respect that others have different views from me, and they have every right to have a different view to me around this very difficult issue. They have a right to not agree with me about my view on being pro choice and women having the right to have that choice. These women's rights, for me, are very, very important. I am somewhat disappointed that we are debating this issue today – not taking away the importance of it, but it being used for the purposes that it will be.

The third point of the motion goes to significant barriers, and there are significant barriers. I note that there are many issues that have been raised by Women's Health Victoria where they have talked about the local government areas in rural and regional high-disadvantage areas that do not have IUD or hormonal implant service providers listed on the 1800 My Options map. I am hoping that has now been resolved with the minister's announcement today or what has been discussed in terms of looking at some of those issues that have been highlighted. Across the state 67 per cent of LGAs had no surgical abortion providers, 39 per cent had no medication abortion dispensing pharmacy and 19 per cent had no medication abortion prescribers, as I said. These issues are really important to address, and as the CEO says in this media release of last October:

... the lack of choice that women from under-served communities have starts with their access to contraception and goes all the way through to their right to choose if, when and how to have an abortion.

I agree with those sentiments. I fully endorse what they are they are calling for to give access to those things. There are a lot of abortion deserts in this state, as they are called, and more needs to be done.

To just go to the last point, which is what I have a real issue about, the constitution is our framework that looks at our governing. It should not be abused like this by putting this in for political purposes. It is a very important document. It goes nowhere near addressing this issue. It is really important that the constitution gives the Parliament authority to make the laws and gives us that framework. Do not dabble with it by putting such an emotive issue in the constitution like this. I will not be supporting the motion. I will leave it to my side of the house to see fit how they will be voting.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:38): I am pleased to speak in support of this motion brought by Dr Mansfield today, and I thank her for bringing such an important topic to the chamber,

particularly at a time where the right to choose does feel like it is increasingly being attacked across the world and even here at home.

I have been pregnant when I did not want to be, and I have accessed abortion multiple times in my lifetime. I will just take up Ms Crozier's point that we have these laws and that they are working well, because they are not working well. Not once when I have accessed abortion in my life was it easy, was it accessible or could I necessarily afford it. It was not easy, just because of the way that accessing expert medical care continues to be perceived. I ran the gauntlet of protesters once in my life before the government created safe access zones – and I thank them for that – but there is more work that needs to be done. That is because abortion right now in this state is not physically accessible and it is absolutely not affordable.

I will never forget how confronted I was when I found out in my early 20s and then again later in my life that I was pregnant, because I was always pro choice despite my religious upbringing. But I think for many of us, when we are pro choice, we never expect to end up in that situation ourselves, and in my mind I was never going to have to be someone who actually accessed that care until I was confronted with it. It took me multiple calls and I finally got an appointment. In that time and since accessing abortion again, the price for a surgical abortion – I paid \$500 for a surgical abortion around 10 years ago – has almost doubled in that time, in a cost-of-living crisis. The cost of a private surgical abortion is now around \$1000, and it is a price women choose to pay over languishing on a public waitlist for up to a month or more because there are no spots for them. There are no spots for them with the public providers. They are faced with staying in a situation that they do not want to be in or somehow finding the way to cough up \$1000 in these times that we are currently living in.

Representing a regional electorate, I see this issue and I feel it more deeply every single day. My home of Northern Victoria is host to the majority of what have become known as abortion deserts. Every single time I speak about my own personal experience with this issue, I am contacted by constituents who have had an absolute nightmare experience navigating our state's abortion system. Just some recent comments on an Instagram post that I did last week read:

Access to abortion is absolutely abysmal in this state, and you're made to jump through so many hoops to access it

...

... I paid over \$700 just before Christmas for a medical abortion, had to wait 2–3 weeks before I could even go cos despite a blood test, they had to see it on a scan.

...

I'm in NE vic, and a few months ago had to inquire about medical abortion in my area, there was only one provider and wait times for the service were so long that many women are actually unable to access the service within their required time frame and are then needing to go elsewhere (ie Melbourne) to have the surgery.

...

I had a surgical termination pre covid in QLD for \$300, too my shock it cost me \$720 for the medical option this year in VIC. I'm grateful to be able afford this but extremely sadden that the price is so out of reach for a lot of us.

This is just a handful of personal experiences accessing abortion in Victoria in the last few months.

We are constantly told by the government that there are options, and I will always be grateful that abortion was decriminalised in this state, but those options that they say exist for us continuously fall flat or are completely out of reach for many, many Victorians. In the regions of Northern Victoria where there are essentially zero surgical options for abortion we are told to seek out a GP who will prescribe medical abortion, yet there are barely any prescribers, and those who do offer services are often too afraid to show this on 1800 My Options out of fear they will be attacked by anti-choice protesters. It results in doctor shopping, where my constituents will pay for appointment after appointment until they can finally find someone who will prescribe it to them. Those that do not will

try and get a telehealth abortion, only to find out there are no imaging appointments available to confirm the pregnancy is not ectopic and reach a dead end yet again.

For incarcerated women the access is even worse. According to advocates who spoke to the *Saturday Paper* recently, it is considered the most urgent of healthcare needs that are inadequately addressed. One advocate said:

... abortions are available, but it's a long process ...

But as we all know, with the time-sensitive parameters around terminations any suspension has reverberating impacts on the patient in question. Appointments are cancelled and rescheduled at the last minute, increasing the possibility of trauma, and when a service is finally accessed, appropriate aftercare can be denied. One custodial officer noted that:

... while there are prison social workers and psychologists, "a reproductive counsellor is not within those delegations. So often the prisoner was left with no real aftercare in terms of counselling and emotional support."

Despite it not being easy, all of my abortion experiences were actually still ones of great privilege. I was in an unfortunate circumstance, but I did have the money to pay for private care and to access quick surgery, the ability to take time off work and the ability to travel. I was not burdened by having to make childcare arrangements – it is very, very important to note that a large proportion of people who access abortion in this state are already parents themselves – and I did not have to hide something from those required to care for me.

But many other women in this state just cannot say the same thing. It is leaving them with nowhere to go and nowhere to turn, and in the worst-case scenarios they go to unsafe choices. While abortion rights are under attack across the world and even here at home, here in Victoria our true threat, our realest threat, is a lack of services and accessibility. My office has actually spent some time talking to choice groups and women's organisations recently due to our fears about this issue as well, and this government says that they will defend our right to choose, which I appreciate, but they are not doing anything right now to make access to abortion a reality, just as around the world the rhetoric on it grows and our right to abortion is slowly being eroded.

Just some of the reforms that could be implemented right now to actually improve abortion access in Victoria are: increasing public surgical providers, particularly in remote and regional areas, to stop women from languishing on waitlists or being forced to pay a private price they cannot afford; increasing imaging options across Victoria to make telehealth medical abortion less burdensome; and removing the ability for religious hospitals to conscientiously object. It is completely outrageous that some hospitals that receive taxpayer money in this state can still refuse to provide abortion or contraception. In fact, I had to get my IUD taken out a few weeks ago. I had to wait for a spot in a hospital that would take me because the religious hospitals would not remove my IUD as emergency surgery. It is completely outrageous, and not allowing these hospitals to provide abortion services is limiting access in this state. We can make medical and surgical abortions free to eligible community members, upskill and empower the medical workforce to increase providers and very, very importantly, improve data collection and listings on 1800 My Options to ensure that it is always relevant and always up to date so people know what choices they have.

I am aware there are other members who want to speak on this motion, and I understand how much of an important topic it is, but I obviously have lived experience with this, and it is very, very important to me and close to my heart, and there are countless others like me who have navigated this system. It is a nightmare. Nobody wants an abortion, but for many of us it is a reality in our lifetimes. You might not know it, but someone you know, someone you love, they have had an abortion, and we are just asking the government to please listen to us. We want to be able to access this care safely, we want to be able to afford this care, and right now that is just not possible, and it is scary when this issue and our rights to access reproductive health care in a safe way are under attack across the world. I commend the motion to the house.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:47): I also rise to make a contribution on the motion brought by the Greens regarding abortion care. I just want to commend Dr Mansfield for raising this issue. I will talk a bit about my thoughts on the motion in a minute, and I actually agree with what Ms Crozier had to say about the real intent behind this motion. But I just really want to commend Ms Crozier, Ms Purcell and Dr Mansfield for the way in which this debate is being conducted, because there are so many women in this chamber now, which is a great thing to see, and so many of us will be and have been touched by the need to make a decision around abortion. I note Ms Purcell's disclosure that she herself has had to access abortion services, but there will be other women in this chamber who have had to access abortion services as well.

I was just saying to Mr Batchelor while I was listening to the debate, I can recall my mother when I was younger telling me many tales about what other older women had to endure. I feel fortunate as a woman born in the late 1960s that I had the benefit of accessing contraception if I needed it, I had the benefit of accessing abortion services, and in later years now the introduction of medical terminations where previously there was only surgical termination as an option. But the stories that my mother told me about the many women in the 1940s and 50s who died on their kitchen floors while performing abortions on themselves is a horrific tale and legacy. I know for younger women like Ms Purcell, they may not have had those stories told to them, but it left an indelible mark upon me as a woman listening to those tales and understanding and connecting strongly with the trauma that was felt by not only those women. The women who died were then also not around to care for their very large brood of children, often, because they were all told they had to have kids – they really did not have a choice in the matter. If you were a good Catholic woman, you had kids, whether you liked it or not. For those women, they did not have contraceptive services. I reflect on those experiences, and it is not to take away anything from Ms Purcell. Your experiences are very valid and important, and that is why I commend all of you for speaking about it in the way that you have today, in a very sensitive way.

When I first was elected to this Parliament, I had meetings with Women's Health East – and I want to give a shout-out to Women's Health East, who do a power of work in my electorate, but also to the network of Women's Health networks across Victoria – who brought to my attention the lack of access around abortion services. I looked into this, and I was actually shocked and horrified because I think, as all good feminists do, we often talk a lot about women's health and reproductive rights. I am a co-convenor of EMILY's List, a very staunch feminist organisation. It just goes to show that none of us can take our eyes off this issue ever, because it is not just under attack now, it is constantly under attack.

When I came into this place in 2018, what I will talk about is that whilst there was not a front-on attack about restricting access to abortion in a legislative way, what we saw that was introduced by the then federal minister for health – and I think he might even have been the minister for women at that time – Tony Abbott was to make sure that if you were a chemist, you had to undertake special training to be able to dispense the RU 486 pill, and if you did not have the training, you could not dispense it. That also meant that your access to a termination of pregnancy was restricted. All the things that Ms Purcell just talked about – (a) you have got to find a doctor; can you get to a doctor in time. Because this is a time-sensitive matter; you have got 12 weeks pretty much in that period of time. If you cannot get to see a GP, you cannot get access to an appointment, you cannot find a chemist who will dispense it, how do you get there? You find yourself pretty quickly being pushed over into the surgical termination route. Then you have got to find a provider, then you have got to get there, then you have got to find the money.

The compounding circumstances and policy decisions of conservative governments to ensure that these little landmines were left along the way were still there when I got elected in 2018. I am so grateful that we now have a willing partner in the federal Labor government, who we have worked closely with through the Minister for Health in this place and also federally, to help wind back some of these little landmines, these zombie policies that were left behind by the conservative federal government. Those things bother me. Those things bother me today, that women's health and reproductive rights and access to abortion services are still seen as a political plaything.



To point (6) of this motion about saying we should have it in the constitution, I agree with what Ms Crozier said, and Minister Stitt said the same thing: it is not going to protect it. You know, we put it in the constitution, we get the statutory majority, another government can still do the same thing – get a statutory majority and take it out – so it is not going to protect it. What we need to ensure is that we have conversations with women and girls around why it is so important to do exactly what I just spoke about, which is to never take your eyes and attention away from this issue, because it is under attack by conservative governments.

Overseas, in America, it is horrendous. We hear stories about women dying. Again, we have gone back to what I talked about earlier, in the 1940s and 50s, that was experienced by women right here in Australia – dying on their kitchen floors or languishing in a bed somewhere bleeding to death and being denied basic health care. If you look at what Amnesty International actually says about access to abortion rights, it is a human right. Access to abortion is a human right because it is health care – it is health care. You would like to think in this day and age that the politicisation of women's health and reproductive rights would end because we are so much more educated, we know so much more about these things, but no. There is a constant need to weaponise women's health care. We are all over it – over it completely.

The point is I think this motion does do exactly that. As well intentioned as it might be, it is wedge politics, Dr Mansfield. It is about wedging the government again to say, 'Why don't you take this step?' Because it is not going to fix the problem. Minister Stitt took us through extensively all the things that the Labor government is doing, and I will not repeat them. But I want everyone in this chamber to know and anyone who is watching at home that the work that we are doing is ongoing. Yes, there is more work to do. I agree with Ms Purcell, there are abortion deserts out there, and particularly a lack of access for women who are 18 to 24. It is bloody frightening. I could not believe it. I think Dr Mansfield talked about the lack of data, but there is data; if you look at the Women's Health Atlas you can see where women are accessing abortion services. You can see the chemists who prescribe the RU 486 pill, and there is also the morning-after pill. Again, there are more gains to be made by asking for the federal government to have the morning-after pill freely available. I mean, we talk about free pads and tampons, but having the morning-after pill being made free of charge to women and something you can pick up from the chemist locally would be a game changer because it takes that pressure off women having to find a doctor's appointment and even coming up with the money if they cannot find a bulk-billing doctor. So again, the financial imposts on women and the costs that they may have to face are really, really challenging.

But I want women to know in Victoria that we, as a Labor government, continue to work on removing those barriers. I am committing to everyone in this Parliament today and certainly to the constituents in my region that I will not stop working on this. I will continue to advocate through our own government and with the federal government that we need to do more to make sure that women can have free and easy access to contraception as they deem fit and that they can access the morning-after pill if they need it and the medical termination pill RU 486 and surgical termination if they need it. Nobody wants to choose to have an abortion. It is not something you want to go and do easily, but you need it when you need it because you make life choices according to your own life and your own health, and that is not a matter that should be politicised. Again, this is nothing but a wedge motion. Trying to wedge the government is not going to fix it. It is just not going to fix it, and we are frightening people by talking about it quite frankly, because people do not want to see American-style politics come here. Australia is not America, but we are right to be alarmed about this, because there are constant moves by conservatives to continue to have this debate. I mean, you drive into Parliament and the abortion protesters are out at the back gate every week. So look, I will conclude my remarks there, but we will be voting against this motion.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I rise to speak to this motion on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, and it has been a passionate debate so far because I think we can all agree that healthcare services should be accessible, they should be safe and they should be affordable, and it

is something we are clearly all in agreement on. Abortion care is health care, and I am pleased to see that the government's announcement this morning is pointing more in that direction. However, access to abortion here in Victoria is not an easy thing. We are still dealing with the aftermath of a history of criminalisation, of stigma and of shame. We should not have to have this debate today, but in the wake of recent concentrated efforts to politicise access to abortion care we are forced to speak up and to ensure that our right to body autonomy is protected. We have seen the South Australian Parliament narrowly vote down a motion to heavily reduce access to abortion care. In Queensland their Parliament is now prohibited from amending their abortion laws or expressing any view for the next four years. And when we look at the scenes in America we see some of our worst fears realised. We have a duty not to be silent in the face of these attacks. Abortion access is a community responsibility, so I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this motion today.

Here in Victoria we have learned the hard way that legalisation does not guarantee accessibility. The reality is that people face many barriers when trying to access abortion care. For those living in regional or remote communities, living with a disability or as a member of a culturally and linguistically diverse community, these barriers are even greater. When there are limited services, this also impacts the quality of care that can be provided. Where I live in the south-east, last year a woman sadly lost her life soon after accessing a surgical abortion. Harjit Kaur, a mother of two – a wife, a mother – accessed an abortion for financial reasons. Harjit deserved quality, safe health care. She did not deserve to die. When we have conversations about access to abortion services, people throw around things like 'pro life'. But when abortion access is restricted, lives are ruined and people die – what is pro life about that?

Access to abortion services is a postcode lottery, and people living in high-disadvantage regional communities are always losing out. Travel, accommodation, time off work, caring responsibilities – these all add up and make it so much harder for people to access the care that they need. Women's Health Victoria's *Realising Access: Abortion and Contraception Inequities and Enablers in Victoria* highlights that seven out of 10 Victorian local government areas have no surgical abortion providers and one in five have no medical abortion providers. Clearly something needs to change, and again I reiterate that the government's announcement this morning makes steps towards rectifying some of those issues. Yet more needs to be done. We have seen in the ACT great work in this space. They have made medical and surgical abortions free to access, and that includes for people without access to a Medicare card. But even where abortions are free there must be health practitioners with the skills to provide them, or these changes mean nothing. There is a real and persistent shortage of GPs who provide and are trained in these services, and I appreciate Dr Mansfield's reflections on that issue. Upskilling is costly, and understandably many do not want to risk suffering the stigma often associated with offering these services.

The Victorian government must act to improve access to abortion services in our state, and they must start by listening to those in the sector about what they need. Over the summer break my colleague Georgie Purcell and I made a point of listening to these voices in order to understand our role in advocating for improved access to services. I want to thank those who have already taken the time to meet with us and those who we are yet to meet with. What we heard about is the real lack of local services, the costs to access, gaps in the workforce training and the need for better data collection. By understanding these barriers we can better understand how to effect change.

Fiona Patten's Health Legislation Amendment (Conscientious Objection) Bill 2022 might be a good place to start. This bill dealt with taxpayer-funded hospitals refusing to offer reproductive health services and becoming a kind of corporate conscientious objector. As Ms Patten so eloquently put it in her second-reading speech:

An organisation does not have a conscience, it cannot think, which means it is ideology not conscience that is preventing access to contraception, abortion and voluntary assisted dying.

Any reforms to abortion laws in this state must include the removal of the right of hospitals that receive any taxpayer funding to refuse to offer reproductive health services – this is corporate conscientious

objection. Currently, public funds are being used to deny people access to essential health care. At a time when there are so few providers of abortion services in our state, the institutional denial of these services has to be stopped. When it comes to conscientious objectors, we also have a real problem with data collection. We do not know how many there are and whether they are complying with their obligation to refer patients to other providers. Despite calls from the Victorian AMA for doctors to be more up-front about their conscientious objection, we continue to hear stories of people who go to their local GP expecting a commonsense conversation about their options and instead are met with judgement and silence. This forces people to have unwanted pregnancies or to have abortions much later than necessary. It is shameful that health care is being denied in this way.

A consideration of amendments to Victoria's constitution is just one step in improving access to abortion services. But in the current climate, it is also an important one to safeguard access. We commend the Greens for their advocacy on this issue. Legalise Cannabis Victoria wholeheartedly supports this motion, and we call for the Victorian government to undertake a broader suite of reforms that will improve access to abortion services, because legal does not mean accessible. Healthcare services should be accessible, safe and affordable, and abortion care is health care. It was the Brumby Labor government that legislated abortion access in Victoria, and it will be an Allan Labor government that protects it. Unfortunately, progress is not linear, and until we take firm action people will continue to politicise this essential healthcare service.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:05): Thank you, Ms Payne, for your contribution before me and for giving me a little space here to join others and make a contribution on the motion before us. Can I take this opportunity to reaffirm that the Allan Labor government, like all Labor governments before it, will always stand up for women's reproductive rights. Women in Victoria know this, and this is why they have entrusted us with government for 21 of the past 25 years, and they trust us to protect healthcare services. We will never take that trust for granted.

It really is an honour to speak on this motion following two amazing Labor women, so can I just take a moment to acknowledge and thank Minister Stitt and Ms Terpstra for their contributions, as well as the contributions from others here in the chamber. It is worth noting that all of the contributions so far have been by women, women not only sharing their experience and commitment to access to health care but also sharing their lived experience. We are fortunate to be a chamber that enjoys having women in here that have a background in the health sector, much like myself.

I will also say that for many years the former member for Altona, the former Minister for Health and Attorney-General Jill Hennessy led the fight to protect a woman's right to make her own reproductive health choices. Like so many in this state, I was incredibly inspired, I have got to say, by her leadership when she introduced the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Safe Access Zones) Bill in 2015. That bill passed into law with the strong support of the Victorian Labor government and ensured that women could access reproductive health care without fear, without intimidation, harassment or obstruction. Before that law women in Victoria, as was rightly said by Ms Purcell, were being harassed and demonised simply for walking near a healthcare clinic irrespective of whether they were seeking advice or not. Thanks to former minister Jill Hennessy and this Labor government, it is now an offence to engage in behaviour that harasses or intimidates women seeking reproductive health care within 150 metres of hospitals, GP clinics and health services that provide abortion care. I know that she did not do that alone and was supported not only strongly by members of the Labor team but also by members of the crossbench here in this place, and I will take a moment to acknowledge Fiona Patten for her esteemed leadership during that time.

Victorians know that progressive Labor governments will always protect women's health and women's safety. I am truly inspired by the incredible women that lead this state to be a better place for all, whether it is women in the workforce, women in leadership or women accessing the health care that they deserve. We are standing on the shoulders of trailblazers like Jill, and we will continue to fight for many generations to come. As was said by Minister Stitt, our record is clear. We decriminalised abortion in Victoria 17 years ago, a landmark reform for women's reproductive rights.

We established safe access zones to ensure women can access abortion care without harassment and introduced the first sexual and reproductive health plan to better ensure access to contraception services, abortion and fertility services.

One that I am particularly proud of and that I am quite close to is 1800 My Options, which I recall being spoken about in a number of contributions. 1800 My Options is a service run by Women's Health Victoria, and I had the good fortune of serving on the Women's Health Victoria board before coming into this place. I saw very much each and every day the work that they were doing to provide fully informed health care to Victorian women about their sexual and reproductive health. To the workers on that line that work tirelessly to support women often in very distressing situations, can I send to you my thanks for all that you do. You are not alone in being such an important part of our health services system. You are of course supported by other women's health organisations like Women's Health In the North in the northern suburbs and Women's Health Victoria. There is also an incredible expansion of abortion care through our 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs that have ensured that 23 public hospitals provide surgical abortion services. More than half of them, it is worth noting, are in regional Victoria. We are not stopping there – and I sound a little bit pollyanna about it because the truth is that it is still tough out there, okay. It really is. We know that significant barriers still exist for people seeking abortion care, including the stigma and some healthcare providers' refusal to provide abortion services.

I know the incredibly tough work that 1800 My Options did to map who was in fact providing a full scope of care across the state so that they can provide the full advice to Victorian women. There are of course costs associated with surgical and medical abortion, and thank you to the speakers earlier who detailed the costs involved. They are not only costs at the service provider, they are also travel, child care and leave, and these are incredibly troubling times for women as they try to navigate all of that while getting some really critical health care. Can I just say I too am completely furious that there are over 10 local government areas that lack service provision. It is not good enough, and we must, must, must do more. I know it is something that Mary-Anne Thomas, our Minister for Health, has taken up with great gusto. Thank you to you, Minister, for all your efforts.

Can I also declare, like Ms Terpstra, I am a member of EMILY's List, a really proud pro-choice, feminist-led organisation. I remember signing up my pledge to continue to be a staunchly pro-choice MP as I entered this place, and I will continue to do that. This is just one of the ways that I can, but I know that that goes beyond the speeches that I make in Parliament. It is also about the advocacy that I do inside our party and inside our community, both with organisations like 1800 My Options and Women's Health Victoria, Women's Health in the North and others.

I have got to tell you that there is still so much to be done when it comes to under-served communities across our state, and I am thinking of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular. They are at the front of my mind, as some of the work that I did was at Women's Health Victoria and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the peak health organisation here in Victoria. They came into Parliament I think it was last October or November, I cannot recall. But we have so much more to do to make sure that abortion services in our state are available to everybody regardless of the colour of your skin, where you live or how much money is in your bank account. Like Ms Terpstra, I just will not stop, and I know that there is so much more that we can do. I thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon on what is a really important motion.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:13): This is such a significant issue, and it is an issue not just of health care but of access to services. This is an issue of bodily autonomy. This is something that strikes right to the heart of women's access to services that enable us to make the choices that are right for us. So it was with a measure of dismay that I read this motion that reopens a settled issue in a way that again seeks to impute a desire upon this Parliament or indeed the community to move away from the rights as protected to access medical services, whether that is surgical or medical abortion.

Ms Crozier made a contribution in this place about 2008 and what occurred around decriminalisation. That debate is well worth reading. It was a marathon effort, as a number of matters in this chamber have been marathon efforts. It was a process that led to an outcome which is settled in this Parliament. There were I think four members of this place who are still here, and their contributions are worth reflecting upon. I would hate to see –

**The PRESIDENT:** I am sorry, Minister, it is 5:15. I have to interrupt you for statements on reports and papers.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**Trust for Nature**

*Report 2023–24*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:15): I rise today to inform the Council about the significant contribution of Trust for Nature, an organisation that has played a pivotal role in the conservation of Victoria's natural environment since its establishment through the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972. Going over their annual report 2023–24, it is clear that it is important to acknowledge their vital work in safeguarding our state's unique ecosystems and biodiversity. They are an important partner in doing that. In the 2023–24 financial year Trust for Nature protected over 1800 hectares of native habitat, bringing the total area under its stewardship to more than 116,000 hectares, an area equivalent to over 64,000 Melbourne Cricket Grounds. This achievement underscores the organisation's ongoing commitment to environmental conservation on private land, ensuring the protection of Victoria's most threatened flora and fauna for future generations.

One of the organisation's flagship initiatives, Iconic Estates 2, is funded by the Allan Labor government. This project aims to permanently protect an additional 1350 acres of critical habitat on private land, contributing towards the government's broader target of increasing permanently protected private land by 200,000 hectares by 2037. As of this year, Trust for Nature has registered 16 new covenants across the state, covering nearly 408 hectares, and remains on track to exceed its target of 40 covenants. This work not only protects biodiversity but fosters the creation of interconnected habitats that support some of our rarest and most threatened species.

In addition to protecting habitat Trust for Nature has made significant strides in restoring degraded landscapes. The organisation has set an ambitious goal of restoring 5000 hectares of land in priority areas by 2025. In the past financial year alone 581 hectares of priority habitat were protected, bringing the total to 785 hectares since 2021. With over 3600 additional hectares already earmarked for future restoration, Trust for Nature is well positioned to meet its targets. Through partnerships with Cassinia Environmental and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action the organisation is contributing to the Victorian government's \$77 million BushBank program. This collaboration aims to restore and protect over 20,000 hectares of habitat across the state, playing a vital role in mitigating the impacts of climate change and improving the health of our ecosystems.

Importantly, like the Allan Labor government, Trust for Nature recognises that environmental health is deeply connected to the wellbeing of our communities, particularly our First Nations people. The organisation has demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging with traditional owners, updating its conservation covenant deeds to explicitly acknowledge traditional custodianship of country. This provides greater opportunities for cultural practices on covenanted properties. The Warreen Beek rangers program is a shining example of this commitment. It provides training and employment pathways for First Peoples, integrating traditional ecological knowledge into land management practices. This inclusive approach to conservation respects and honours the cultural heritage of our land whilst enriching environmental stewardship.

However, challenges remain. The accelerating impacts of climate change, invasive species and ongoing habitat destruction continue to threaten Victoria's biodiversity. With two-thirds of our land privately owned, the role of organisations like Trust for Nature is crucial in protecting, managing and improving these natural areas. The organisation has responded to these challenges by launching the Habitat Forever campaign in 2023–24, which is an initiative aimed at scaling up private land conservation efforts and securing additional resources to meet their ambitious goals.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to the dedicated staff, board members, volunteers and supporters of Trust for Nature. Their collective efforts are making a meaningful difference in protecting Victoria's natural environment. It is through such partnerships and collaborative work that we can ensure our ecosystems remain valued, protected and thriving for generations to come.

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:19): I rise to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into the 2022 flood event in Victoria. This is an inquiry that was a bit of a marathon effort. This was an inquiry that an enormous amount of hours of preparation went into. There were 880 submissions put in by the people of Victoria who had been affected by the floods in October 2022; 608 of those submissions came from Northern Victoria, from my electorate, and 344 of them of course came from Rochester, the town that was most affected by the October 2022 floods. Of course, as I said, countless hours went in by people in the public to contribute to this inquiry, to write submissions, to participate in giving evidence and to make sure that we got a very good report and some very good recommendations that would lead to better management of floods in the future. There were countless hours of staff contributions that also went into that, and MP participation. Out of that came 90 findings and 73 recommendations.

We all know that flood recovery has been very slow, and I have a reminder of that each day as I drive home, because just at the top of my street there are three houses that have been demolished and not rebuilt and there are two houses still waiting to be refurbished after the flood. That is a daily reminder to me of just how slow flood recovery has been in this state. The government is also slow in responding to the flood inquiry. We tabled this report on 30 July last year, which means that the government's requirement to respond within six months was up in January of this year. We have now sat two days this week and we still have not seen a response from the government on the inquiry into the 2022 flood event. That to me is an indication that the government have not given consideration to the people of my electorate who were so badly affected by the flood. The government have not given them the consideration that they deserve. They deserve a prompt response to this inquiry so that we can be better prepared for future flood events. The government heard very loud and clear when we were at the regional hearing in Echuca last year how nervous people are when it starts to rain. When we had heavy rains early in January 2024 and some localised flooding, particularly around the Goornong area, the people of Northern Victoria were extremely nervous. It really triggers them to hear that rain – that another flood is coming.

We also saw within this report and within the 73 recommendations two recommendations – 49 and 57 – that both recommended that the government fund the two independent search and rescue squads in this state, which are the Echuca and Moama Search and Rescue Squad and the Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad. Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad was actually the agency that had the highest number of call-outs during the floods – 980 requests for assistance. Our committee strongly recommended that the government should increase funding for these two organisations for operations and training. Yet when the government did announce earlier this year that they were going to establish an Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund to fund a number of agencies, including the Victorian SES, the Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad and the Echuca and Moama Search and Rescue Squad were left off the list of organisations that could actually benefit from funding from that fund, and that has been a source of tremendous regret in our community. Our community believe that these

organisations do the job. They are essentially SES units, particularly the Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad – they do road rescue as well as the flood and rain event recoveries. They should be funded to do that work by the government and they should not have been left off the list of beneficiary organisations for the new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund.

### **Country Fire Authority**

#### *Report 2023–24*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:24): I rise to deliver a statement on the Country Fire Authority's 2023–24 annual report. You may have noticed that I have been talking about the CFA a lot this week, as I do most weeks. That is because I have so much respect for the self-sacrifice demonstrated by our frontline responders in the CFA day in and day out. We have all felt the sweltering temperatures over last weekend and early this week, and that of course has made conditions much more dangerous for our CFA members, who are forgoing precious time with their families to protect their communities. This is why the Allan Labor government is backing our CFA brigades across the state with record funding.

This report shows how this government has delivered 10 new CFA stations and 91 new firefighting vehicles. I was recently fortunate enough to see some of those new vehicles in action when I represented the Minister for Emergency Services and joined Mr Tarlamis at the graduation of a cohort of female driving educators at the CFA State Logistics Centre in Scoresby. Perhaps for the next one the other member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region may join me, because at that one we had the good privilege of being able to speak with CFA volunteers from Diamond Creek, Panton Hill and Plenty fire brigades and hear about their commitment to their roles. The CFA and indeed our state could not function without the enormous dedication of these volunteers, and it was the same dedication I have seen across all emergency services in my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services. I have regularly met with members at all levels of the CFA, Life Saving Victoria and VICSES, and I have got to tell you every meeting fills me with growing pride both as a Victorian and as a member of the Allan Labor government as we stand in support of our frontline emergency services workers.

One recent example that comes to mind is meeting with the volunteers from Greater Dandenong VICSES – this happens to be a bit of a theme this evening – to announce the recipients of the Valuing Volunteers Program. It was an absolute pleasure meeting Erin, the deputy controller of the unit, who treated me to a perfectly brewed cuppa, a bickie and some good stories about the beautiful volunteers there. Valuing Volunteers is just one of the many avenues by which our government tops up funding for emergency services. Last year there was an extra \$1.4 million in funding to units and brigades from VICSES, the CFA, Life Saving Victoria, the Emergency Services Foundation, the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, and independent volunteer marine search and rescue units.

I have also been so fortunate to spend time with volunteers from Life Saving Victoria. In December I was particularly happy to spend some time in the Southern Metropolitan Region with the member for Albert Park Nina Taylor to see how the club is taking advantage of the Victorian government's volunteer emergency services equipment program. It is so exciting to see the government's \$30,000 contribution, which has allowed the club to purchase a new side-by-side vehicle and outboard motors. It is meaningful investments like these that allow our frontline volunteers to do what they do best and keep Victorians safe. I have already spoken this week about VESEP grants, but I raise them here again because they contribute to the growth of the CFA, and that is so much reflected in this annual report that I am speaking on tonight. In addition to the VESEP grants our government has invested \$11 million to upskill CFA firefighters and deliver volunteer driver training and licensing as part of our \$258 million CFA capability package, and this report details how 25 new pumpers are due to be delivered to CFA brigades beginning this year. With government support like this it is no wonder that according to this report the CFA attracted more than 2400 volunteers last year, 55 per cent of whom were aged between 18 and 44.

I know I have said it a number of times already this week, but it bears repeating just once more: I could not be more proud of the way Victorians from all walks of life come together for their communities and contribute to emergency services organisations like the CFA. I look forward to seeing the CFA grow from strength to strength when I read its next annual report, and I look forward to spending more time with volunteers across the Victorian emergency services throughout 2025.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

#### *Budget papers 2024–25*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29): Today I want to draw the attention of the chamber in this report section to the section of the budget that deals with the energy output. That section looks at increasing activity around the transition to low-emission technologies, but it also should be focused on the security and reliability of the network, ensuring that we have a stable, reliable supply of electricity and gas, and that is what we do not have at the moment. The *Australian Financial Review* has been working hard in the recent period trying to highlight some of the deficiencies in our energy system – in our gas supplies and in the security and reliability of our electricity supplies. Price in both cases is an important consideration too. We need energy that is affordable, that is reliable and that is secure.

We have seen a number of significant steps by the government in recent months concerning solar energy. Solar energy has a very important part. It is a natural source of energy and can add to the supplies in the grid more generally through a larger scale but also through the provision for homes. I sought through FOI the Jacobs modelling, the energy market modelling of Victoria's minimum demand trajectories and the impacts of potential policies. This is a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action final report. It is a chilling report in many respects because it does point to the insecurity of our system on days when there is massive solar kicking into the system. The government has recently put a backstop in place. It is true that this is in other states, but it is done in a way that impacts some of those who would have legitimately thought they could get better feed-in tariffs and better security of putting electricity into the grid. Part of this is the inability of the government to plan and look ahead. Part of this is the inability of the government to actually have a secure and reliable supply. We saw the feed-in tariffs cut to virtually nothing – cut by 99 per cent – just a few months ago, so the feed-in tariff is now almost worthless. The truth of the matter is with the backstop in place the government can switch off the arrangements people might have to put feed-in tariffs into the system in any event. All of this is again a sign of chaotic modelling. People, for example, in the domestic situation have put in solar panels in good faith with an understanding that there would be a lengthy period when they got genuine feed-in tariffs. In good faith they have put this in, and the ground rules have now been changed from under them because the system had become unreliable and insecure in its supply.

The state government has also with gas been unable to ensure that supplies are coming forward. There are the chaotic and difficult arrangements put in place by the government on gas – first of all banning gas exploration, then putting the matter into the constitution to ensure that there would be no fracking. But much beyond that, there is conventional onshore gas and gas within the 3-mile zone going offshore, and there should be significant exploration occurring. The government's solution to that: put up the charges by 300 per cent this year and another 150 per cent next year, a cumulative increase of 450 per cent in the charges that are in place – the regulatory charges – for gas exploration and licences. You could be a small firm wanting to get into this market. There is a huge cost barrier that has just been erected by the government, to get worse on 1 July. That is already put in place. It is coming; it is set. So this is a 450 per cent increase in the charges to even get an exploration permit – massive barriers. This is because of the ideological approach of the minister, who has got a hatred of gas and is determined to push forward with her particular views no matter the consequences for businesses, no matter the consequences for households, no matter the consequences for reliability and no matter the consequences for price. Victoria is fast phasing itself out of competitiveness with other states and jurisdictions.



**Legal and Social Issues Committee***Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:34): I rise to make a statement on the report from the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the state education system in Victoria, which was tabled in the Parliament in this chamber on 15 October last year, a very detailed report. I have spoken about some of it in the past. In my contribution today I particularly wanted to talk a bit about chapter 7 in that report, which talked about funding of state schools. When it was written, the report included recommendation 54, which was that the Victorian government continued to advocate to the Commonwealth for the Commonwealth to step up and fully fund government schools here in Victoria. I am very pleased that an agreement has been reached between the Victorian government and the Commonwealth to ensure that Victoria's government schools are fully funded under the National School Reform Agreement over the next 10 years.

The report of a committee back in October noted that there had been a 41 per cent increase in state government funding to government schools in the last decade – from \$8.4 billion in 2010–11 to \$11.9 billion in 2019–20, which the state has been investing in our government schools – compared to a 31 per cent increase in the rest of Australia. So a 41 per cent increase in the time period here in Victoria and a 31 per cent increase around the country.

We have seen a commitment from the Victorian government to fund 75 per cent of the national schooling resource standard by 2028, but there was a gap. After consecutive terms of the Liberals in Canberra, Victoria's public schools were not being funded, and it has taken a Labor government in Victoria and it is has taken a Labor government in Canberra to make sure that Victoria's public schools are fully funded for the first time ever. The agreement that was reached between the Victorian government – with the negotiations led by the Deputy Premier, Minister for Education Ben Carroll – and the Commonwealth represents the largest investment by the Australian government in public schools in Victoria ever.

**Bev McArthur:** You are meant to fund state schools.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** An interesting interjection from those opposite who do not think it is the federal government's role to fund government schools. Well, I can tell you this: Labor always backs public schools, whether it is the state government or the federal government. If you going to the ballot box anytime soon in Victoria, you are going to have a choice between parties that support public education, the Labor Party, and those that do not support public education – that is the Liberal Party.

This investment is long overdue and it is welcome. But I will end just on this point: funding is a means, not an end, and a record investment in public schools should not be the end of our ambition. What we want to see in Victorian public schools is a continued pursuit of excellence, and that is what this Labor government is delivering. From this year we are rolling out structured synthetic phonics programs to better help our kids read and write – 25 minutes in prep, 1 and 2, to be fully implemented in the next couple of years, starting this year.

There is absolutely more that we need to do. It is a point I made in my inaugural speech. There is always more to do in supporting high-quality education and high-quality schools in this state. You can only do that if you have got the resources, and only under Labor at a state level and a federal level are those resources for our public schools being delivered.

**Department of Justice and Community Safety***Report 2022–23*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak today on the Department of Justice and Community Safety annual report. We have certainly heard a lot about our justice system this week. We have certainly heard a lot about bail as well. I want to point the chamber's attention to a few things. Firstly, the shocking incidents we heard about this morning, where seven teenagers,

including six who were already on bail, were arrested after a police chase across Melbourne's west after a stolen car crashed into a tree. Among the youths aged 15 to 17, one of them had been released on bail dozens of times, said an officer with knowledge of the case who was not authorised to speak publicly. A white Škoda SUV, which police said was stolen in an aggravated burglary in Tarneit, was spotted driving at high speeds on Greens Road, Wyndham Vale, just after 11 pm on Tuesday. Police cars and a helicopter followed the vehicle through Werribee, Tarneit and Point Cook before it crossed the West Gate Bridge to the city. It continued back to the western suburbs where police said the offenders dumped the car in Featherbrook Drive, Point Cook, and jumped into a white Volvo. The second car is alleged to have been stolen in an aggravated burglary in Kalorama Street, Tarneit. The Volvo allegedly sped off along the Princes Freeway outbound towards Little River before returning to the Werribee area and then crashing into a tree in Truganina. Police said that weapons were found in both vehicles.

Emma Prespanoski, a Tarneit resident whose Volvo was stolen in a home invasion before it was crashed, said that she felt dirty and violated to learn that a group had broken into her family's house while she and her family slept. We are seeing this over and over again: victims of crime suffering and incidents happening, with home burglaries, carjacking and weapons, only to find out that the perpetrators were on bail. She said:

You want to be shocked, and you want to be outraged, which I am, but you've got this other desensitisation hanging over your shoulder that this is just what you've become used to ...

It's a really big issue. There's no change happening. There needs to be a real shift towards that.

The real shift towards that starts this Saturday in Werribee. I mean, every single day you hear about another shocking story inflicted on the good people of Werribee and the good people of the western suburbs and indeed the northern suburbs. The community up in Greenvale are really looking forward to having our Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections David Southwick up for a crime forum next week, which I know has gauged a lot of interest in the community, just like in the western suburbs, where people have been neglected in terms of crime.

But we see other reporting as well on Jacinta Allan. She started the sitting week promising a bail review. As it has been reported and briefed out by grumpy Labor colleagues, this so-called bail review was not mentioned in cabinet, was not mentioned in caucus and indeed was not mentioned at their recent caucus retreat in Healesville last week. It was not mentioned. You would think something of that significance, which made the front page of the *Herald Sun*, would get a mention at their caucus retreat in Healesville. The only thing that gets a mention at their retreats is a karaoke machine – nothing else of significance. She did not seem to want to inform her colleagues about this. But we know it was just a headline. They are obviously very worried about Werribee. This is a Premier who does not actually care about people and does not actually care about the victims of crime. She only cares about her opinion polls when this suddenly becomes an issue. We know that she weakened the bail laws. Those opposite weakened the bail laws. Those opposite voted against our attempts to reverse their changes weakening the bail laws. Mr Galea said, and I quote him from *Hansard*, we were only motivated 'to grab that headline on the front of the *Herald Sun*'. Well, this Premier is only motivated by a headline in the *Herald Sun* now that the opinion polls have gone against her – what a display. We had the Minister for Police Anthony Carabines having to clean up the Premier's mess by saying that it is actually not a review into the bail laws, it is just a discussion and he is not interested in doing a review. This government is at war with itself. They are briefing against each other, and the people of Werribee deserve better.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

#### *Budget papers 2024–25*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:44): I cannot quite shake the thought of being lectured by the Liberal Party about being at war with yourself. I have seen a few different positions in the chamber right in front of me this week. If we ever do decide to go to war with ourselves,

Mr Mulholland, we will come to you, Mrs McArthur and Mr McCracken for advice; you can rest assured about that.

**A member:** What about Mrs Deeming?

**Michael GALEA:** And Mrs Deeming. I apologise for excluding you, Mrs Deeming. We will certainly come to you if we want to cause that sort of chaos. But fortunately we on this side of the chamber do not. In fact we enthusiastically support our Premier, Jacinta Allan, including with the wonderful initiative of the school saving bonus, and this is where I refer to the budget papers 2024–25 and specifically the output initiatives of the Department of Education.

The school saving bonus is a terrific initiative of this government, led by Jacinta Allan with Ben Carroll as her deputy and Minister for Education. It is a terrific initiative which is seeing real change and real benefit for hardworking Victorian households. It is a single \$400 payment for every single child at a government school, providing support for resources, things like uniforms, textbooks, other things, excursions – most prominently and most especially uniforms. Indeed we have seen with uniforms the great take-up of that initiative. We have seen this, for example, in schools in my electorate. I was recently out at the terrific Athol Road Primary School in Springvale South with Mr Tarlamis; Meng Heang Tak, the member for Clarinda; and Minister Carroll as well. The excitement on the children's faces and the excitement on the teachers' and the principal's faces as well – what a difference this program is making.

I have spoken many times in this chamber about making Victoria the Education State, and I have spoken many times about the wonderful new schools in my region, in Clyde North, with a new primary school opening last year, two new ones opening the other week and a new high school opening the other week as well. These are all evidence of that as part of the 100 new schools. But the school saving bonus is a meaningful way that we can benefit so many Victorian families, and boy do we know that they are enthusiastic about it too, because we have already seen more than \$100 million paid out through this program for uniforms and for other necessities, and that is money that is not coming out of the pockets of everyday mums and dads in Victoria.

That is what meaningful action means, not just building the wonderful schools and providing the resources but providing those simple and effective cost-of-living relief measures that actually make a difference to people. Couple that with, as my colleague Mr Batchelor commented in his statement as well, the investments that are being made now by the federal government. I have been quite open in criticising, where criticism was due last year, the federal government not coming to that 25 per cent. We have seen the education minister relentlessly push for that fair share of funding. Whilst he was focused on those numbers, the Liberal Party were focused on their own numbers.

But what Minister Carroll got was that outcome. We got the full 25 per cent of funding from federal Labor, and I will give them plenty of credit, because it does prove that only Labor governments can be trusted to invest in public education. Only Labor governments can be trusted to invest in the 100 new schools right across Victoria that we need. Only Labor governments can be trusted to fully fund those schools, be it at the state level or be it at the federal level. Don't we all know it, and doesn't John Lister know it. As a wonderful schoolteacher in the Werribee electorate, who teaches at Wyndham Central secondary college, he knows firsthand the pressures that are on our state schools. I hope next week he is going to be right here in this place too, championing every one of his students and his school community as well as the broader Werribee community.

### *Petitions*

#### **Corrections system**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:49): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

This is a speech I do not want to be giving today about a horrible situation that I wish did not exist. However, despite the warnings and the pleas, this government refuses to act on the issue, so we are left with a situation where over 6500 Victorians have signed a petition to this Parliament calling for action. That is in addition to the over 20,000 people that have called for action on a change.org petition. The action that they seek is not something extreme, it is not something controversial and it is not even something that people are divided on. It is something that is nothing short of disgraceful, and it must be fixed. This petition centres on emergency management days, or EMDs, which are awarded to Victorian prisoners and reduce their sentences. The EMDs were originally meant for extreme examples of prisoners that were denied their normal entitlements. Up to four days of a prisoner's sentence can be removed for every one day they were inconvenienced due to industrial actions, emergencies, disruptions or deprivations. However, because COVID was declared an emergency, prisoners are getting hundreds of days off their sentences, some even more than a year. As the petition states, over the two years where Melbourne and Victoria suffered through the world's longest COVID-19 lockdowns thousands of prisoners received more than 360,000 days off their prison sentences. This is equivalent to over a thousand years of jail time.

The reason this petition came into being is because of a meeting I had with Bianca Unwin and her dad Boyd. Bianca's sister Katie was murdered in 2018 by her partner Shane Robertson. Robertson was sentenced to 24 years of jail, 19 without parole. However, in May this year Bianca was advised that Robertson had had his sentence reduced by 427 days due to COVID. This will mean that he is now eligible for release earlier than his non-parole period. Since being informed about this reduction – via a generic email, by the way – Bianca, her dad Boyd and their family have done everything they can to raise the issue and do something about it. Despite being irreparably broken, she and her dad are here today, and they have continued the fight for justice. This government argues that as part of the COVID-19 response prisoners have experienced restrictive regimes such as significantly less hours out of cell to support physical distancing or lockdowns or being placed in quarantine. In fact one of the reasons that this was given is that these violent prisoners were only allowed out of their cell 1 hour a day. Doesn't that sound familiar? One of the fundamental reasons for sentencing people to prison, aside from community safety, is to make them understand the cost of their crime. That includes not being able to go where you want when you want and seeing who you want.

Further, during the pandemic many parts of Victoria were also told that they would only be allowed out for 1 hour a day. So how is it that prisoners are entitled to more compensation than any other Victorians? I want to make this clear: the sickening irony here is that if you were a Victorian that missed a loved one's funeral, you will not get compensation for that time during COVID, yet if you were somebody that murdered someone in Victoria during this COVID period, you will get compensation. That is disgusting. The injustice is an affront to every person who suffered tangible disadvantages during the COVID period – those who lost their jobs or their incomes, those who could not celebrate a wedding or the birth of a new baby and those who could not say goodbye to their loved ones. Unless you are a Dan Andrews zealot you will understand that these lockdowns affected all of us, and this is something that is still being felt today.

The people that continue to suffer the most are those who have lost loved ones due to violent crimes who are seeing the offenders get compensation in the way of hefty sentence reductions. Violent prisoners do not deserve compensation for something we all went through. The inconvenience experienced by prisoners pales into insignificance when it comes to the loss that people like Katie's family and communities have suffered.

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (17:54): I rise to speak on the petition brought to the house sponsored by Dr Heath, and I thank everyone that has taken the time to sign the petition and share their views on this issue. I know these discussions are difficult discussions to have, especially for victims of crime that have suffered so greatly, and I do want to also mention that there are supports

available through the Victims of Crime Helpline for people that need support that are here in person or anyone watching online.

In particular I want to acknowledge the family of Katie Haley for their advocacy on this issue. I have heard from a number of members of Parliament, both in this chamber and the other side, who have made strong representations – Dr Heath being one of them but also Mary-Anne Thomas, the member for Macedon; Josh Bull, the member for Sunbury; and Vicky Ward, the member for Eltham – and have also shared their perspectives and shared your perspectives with me. I know that this is a difficult issue for many victims of crime in how our justice system works, and in many regards I feel that nothing we do will take away people's pain in many of these matters. Emergency management days are and have been a longstanding arrangement of governments of all persuasions. In relation to COVID-19 there were additional days to acknowledge the hardship and the extended restrictions in that period where emergency management days were implemented.

I became Minister for Corrections in December 2022, and shortly after I came in a lot of those emergency management days that related to the COVID-19 pandemic were removed, but they have been a part of our system for a long time. It has been about providing an operational tool for the staff that work in our system to manage times of crisis and times of difficulty, obviously a pandemic being one of those circumstances. They should be implemented with a balanced approach, and I do understand and as the minister I have seen that during that pandemic period there were some quite large grants acknowledging the challenges of the operational environment.

I do not need to remind everyone about the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and Dr Heath, you have touched on some of that, and those impacts were felt no less in the prison system. Health authorities highlighted the risks of closed environments, the increased risks of the virus spreading, and that was not just a risk for prisoners – I think we always think about the prisoners being the focal point, but it was also the staff, including the corrections staff, the doctors, the nurses, the tradies and the other security team members that work shifts at our correctional facilities. They are people that come and go in the prison system. Some members of this Parliament are former corrections officers, and they would understand that they spend time in the facility but they also spend time in the community. They are community members. To mitigate the risks, prison authorities and the leadership of Corrections Victoria implemented unprecedented restrictions on prisoner movement that stopped visits and halted programs to minimise face-to-face contact to stop the spread of COVID.

I know that the restrictions endured by all Victorians were difficult, as someone that obviously also experienced that. It is also true inside our prisons that the restrictions and conditions were more restrictive than normal. Those restrictions were necessary to protect lives and protect the health and wellbeing of the hardworking staff in our corrections system. Like so many essential workers they turned up every day in difficult circumstances, and it meant that we did avoid some of the incidents that occurred in other jurisdictions. In particular we saw in WA and Queensland there were instances where there were prison riots and people that created trouble as a result of those restrictions. We did not experience that in Victoria, and this operational tool was one of the issues that assisted with that. But I do understand every decision made was made to protect the workers and the broader Victorian community. That is what has been explained to me by Corrections Victoria staff.

But I can understand that in criminal justice settings there are difficult decisions that require the balancing of rights, and these decisions can present genuine legal and operational challenges that need to be properly considered. I have always been clear that I expect the prison authorities to take a balanced approach with the use of these tools. I have listened to the debate and thoughtful contributions made so far, and I will continue to listen to those contributions. It is an issue that I am looking into with the safety of the community and the views of victims at the forefront. I think it is a difficult one to balance, especially retrospectively.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:59): Minister, this is a disgrace. This is not a balanced approach. This is favouring prisoners over the rest of the public and especially victims of crime. This

is not fair. It is unjust and you should rectify it, and you should apologise to all the victims who are so aggrieved by what has happened with prisoners who have caused such damage to individuals and loved ones being let out of prison early because of the pandemic. The whole of Victoria was locked up half the time for 23 hours a day. They have not been compensated. I do not think the staff in the prison system were compensated either, but the prisoners seem to have benefited from this thing. This is a plan, a project, that was introduced by the Kirner government in 1991 to replace the abolition of automatic remissions being applied to sentences. Much like the situation we find ourselves in, in 1991 the Victorian community had lost faith in the sentencing as prisoners were being granted an automatic remission reduction of a third of their sentence. In other words, a prisoner could be sentenced for 12 years with a non-parole period of nine but be out in six. When Labor wiped out remissions and introduced emergency management days (EMD) in 1991, they said:

Both the public and judiciary have expressed their concern regarding the length of sentences of imprisonment imposed by the courts and the actual time served by prisoners, especially where a serious crime is involved.

We have victims of crime in the chamber today whose loved ones have been so affected by criminals that are going to be let out of jail early. It is not right, Minister, and you need to redress this situation immediately. When introducing the legislation in 1991 which sought to remove remissions and introduce emergency management days, the then Labor Attorney-General Mr Kennan said:

This policy recognises that the public has a right to know what period of imprisonment will be served by a person who receives a prison sentence in a Victorian court. It is no longer acceptable to the Victorian public that administrative interventions like remissions and early release should reduce the period fixed as the minimum term by the sentencing judge.

However, that is exactly what is happening now, with victims of crime in Victoria and their loved ones finding out there is a prospect some prisoners will be released earlier than their minimum sentence thanks to EMDs.

Minister, this is not acceptable. You have to do something about it. We all suffered under the egregious restrictions that were placed on us by the Andrews Labor government during the pandemic – worse lockdowns than anywhere else in the world – yet it seems the only people that are being compensated in this state for that approach are prisoners who have been convicted of shocking crimes like murder. How can you possibly let this happen? They cannot be released early while the victims suffer. You must do something about this. It is absolutely terrible, and it is so unfair on the victims of crime who are with us today and all those in the rest of Victoria who are bearing the brunt of this ridiculous policy that you allowed to happen. Now the victims of crime are paying the price. Why should a prisoner get out of jail so early because of the pandemic where you locked everybody else up for 23 out of 24 hours a day in Melbourne. Nowhere else in the world were there such restrictions, and yet not the staff in your prisons, not the general public but the prisoners are the ones that are going to benefit from the fact that there were lockdowns in this state. You have to redress this situation. You have to apologise to the people in this chamber and the rest of the people in Victoria who are so affected by this shocking situation. It is just terrible that Renee has had to gather the 6000 signatures that she has collected and 20,000 on a change.org petition. Twenty thousand people in this state are concerned about this issue. You must listen and you must act.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (18:04): This is an absolutely shocking issue. The government's own website has advice for helping people that you know have been victims of violent crime. It talks about the impact on those victims, which makes it sound like they are the ones in lockdown – they have nightmares, they struggle to go out. Even if they are allowed to go out to exercise for more than an hour a day, sometimes they cannot do it. It is the kind of thing that you really struggle to recover from – ever. Then you are retraumatised throughout the whole process – the assault, the investigation, whether or not you get a conviction – and then you can find out in a cold email that the person who assaulted you or who murdered your sister is getting out so early. It is not justice. It is not loving. It is not kind. It is barely humane.

The government has also acknowledged that these emergency management days have caused great distress for victims in this state, and still no proper action has been taken.

You brought up the federal issue. The federals in 2021 passed legislation to remove EMD eligibility for federal prisoners in Victorian prisons. This was because federal prisoners were getting early release if they were in Victoria during COVID, and here are just some of the examples. A terrorism-related offender was granted 342 EMDs on remand and then released within hours of his sentencing. The AFP stated that he was a risk to community safety and there was not time to put a control order in place immediately. One thousand EMDs were granted to five offenders serving sentences for attempting, preparing and engaging in terrorism acts. More than 300 EMDs were granted to a child sex offender who was considered high risk and had an extensive criminal history and a history of breaching community-based orders. More than 160 EMDs were granted to a drug trafficker, despite the fact that the court had already considered the onerous COVID imprisonment conditions when sentencing. Both the then coalition government and the Labor opposition supported these changes. They took action straightaway, unlike the Victorian government. While some people raised concerns about the retrospectivity of these changes, which have also now been raised in chambers here, the now Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus KC said:

... we do not think those concerns outweigh the clear advantages associated with ensuring greater certainty and consistency when it comes to the length of federal sentences and the interests of community safety.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:07): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to support Dr Heath's emergency management petition in this house today. I consider it a privilege. I want to acknowledge the victim's family in the gallery today and to extend my condolences and the condolences of all my Liberal Party colleagues for your very deep and very personal loss. Under this Labor government, the state of Victoria stands alone in its appalling use of legislation, like the emergency management days, which benefits – no, 'benefits' is too small a word; it compensates violent criminals. In fact I would go so far as to say it is actually rewarding violent criminals, and it is putting our Victorian community and our families at risk.

Other states and jurisdictions overseas have various approaches to good behaviour by prisoners or even special rules that were put in during the COVID pandemic. However, nearly all interstate and many international laws specifically exclude violent or high-risk offenders. These laws were designed to specifically reduce prison populations and reduce infections during COVID, and I note they were applied largely to prisoners in specific circumstances. These circumstances included prisoners who were already about to be released, who had committed minor crimes and had shorter sentences, and they had sensible limits on the amount of prison time that these prisoners could have deducted. In New South Wales, special laws for prisoners were introduced during the COVID period. However, those charged with murder, serious sex offences or terrorism and those who were jailed for life – in short, those who were classed as a serious offender – were disqualified in New South Wales, and by 2023 the New South Wales government had repealed these laws entirely, completely, to ensure that not a single prisoner was being released.

In the United Kingdom only prisoners who were deemed to be low-risk offenders and were within weeks of their release dates were allowed to be released, but they were also electronically tagged and temporarily released in stages. Under the UK system, offenders could still be recalled at the first sign of concern, and violent and sexual offenders and those of security concern were not considered. France took action to release prisoners who had less than two to six months remaining on their sentence, but only if the offender had not been charged with acts of terrorism, domestic violence or a violent crime. There are a wide variety of examples in the United States of prisoners receiving either prison reductions or early release during COVID, but these were primarily aimed at those who had been charged but were not yet convicted or who were serving shorter sentences, near the end of their sentence, jailed for parole violation, or were incarcerated for nonviolent and non-sexual offences. Even the left-wing state of California had limitations on how many day credits prisoners could rack up, limiting it to only 12 weeks, with less day credits for those who were convicted of violent offences. In

California, I might add, they only considered the early release of prisoners on the provision that they would ‘not pose an unreasonable risk of violence to the community’.

None of these reasonable limitations exist in our state of Victoria. Under this government – under this incompetent, selfish Labor government – crime rates are soaring, violent criminals are roaming our streets and the everyday law-abiding, silent majority of Victorians are increasingly at risk in our public spaces and in our homes.

This Victorian Labor government’s only limit for day credits is based on whether an offender has misbehaved while in prison. Victoria is a dangerous state under the Allan Labor government’s irresponsible laws, and it is failing to consider what violence and violent offences put the offender in prison in the first place, or what might occur when these offenders are released. It is simply not optional for this government to turn its back and say, ‘We are discussing; we are considering.’ It is simply not good enough. You must change these laws.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:12): I want to thank Brad Battin for being up in the gallery today and I want to thank my colleagues, but I want to say that I am stunned by your apathy, Minister. I am stunned that we have got victims of crime here – what is it going to take for this government to make a change? It is not a balanced approach to sit in front of victims of crime and to then consider the rights of a murderer before the victims in this group. I just think, my gosh, how long? How long are you going to think about it? Your words were ‘look into it’. How long are you going to look into it? You have had enough time.

The coalition has been asking questions about EMDs for years and is yet to receive any clarity about what sorts of prisoners are getting these reductions and what offences they have been jailed for. We still do not know whether any prisoners were denied emergency management days or what the largest number of emergency management days that a prisoner got is. This was actually a concern that was raised when these laws were first introduced in 1991 by the former member for Berwick Rob Maclellan. He said:

...the director-general should make a report as part of his annual report to Parliament, including a comment on how many emergency management days are being given and the reasons for them, such as industrial action, fire, flood, or other emergencies. Parliament needs to be kept informed and assured that emergency management days are being used only for emergency situations, not as a surreptitious means of reintroducing automatic remissions.

This is what you have done. You have just put in a blanket reduction for the most violent and high-risk prisoners. If you had told me during COVID that the only Victorians that would get any sort of compensation would be the most violent, high-risk offenders, I would not have believed it. But that is the state in Victoria. Minister, you have the power. Find some guts, stand up and do something, because we need change.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:14): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:14): (1369) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I seek the action of the minister to urgently address and duplicate Donnybrook Road. I understand the new Minister for Transport Infrastructure thinks that Donnybrook Road is not a matter for her, even though you have got the member for Yan Yean saying that Major Road Projects Victoria is investigating the duplication of Donnybrook Road. Some say that planning is underway. Still, there is not a single dollar allocated to fix Donnybrook Road.



Donnybrook Road is a misery for many of my constituents, and we saw towards the end of last year the whole state slowed down because of the state of Donnybrook Road. On the Hume Highway the Labor government reduced the speed limit from 100 kilometres an hour to 80 kilometres an hour around Donnybrook Road because of exit congestion. That is because the bridge over the Hume is single lane, and the Donnybrook and Kalkallo side is a single-lane road where they have built tens of thousands of homes on either side of an old farm track. Meanwhile on the Mickleham side of the road, when we were in government we signed a developer contribution plan which enabled the duplication of Donnybrook Road on the Mickleham side, so you have got a lovely four-lane highway on one side of Donnybrook Road – let us call it the Liberal side – and then you have got the other side of Donnybrook Road and the bridge, which is an old farm track with tens of thousands of homes on either side. For the residents living in those homes, many of whom I have spoken to and met with on numerous occasions, life is a misery every morning and afternoon, because it is the worst game of lemmings you have ever seen. That is what this government has done with Donnybrook Road.

I raised Donnybrook Road about 14 times in the chamber last year. I am planning on raising it even more this year until the government finally does something about it. I have been on Donnybrook Road recently, and in fact I have met with residents with our Liberal candidate for Calwell, Usman Ghani, and our great Liberal candidate for McEwen Jason McClintock, who is hot on these issues and advocating for the community on these issues, because Labor has left Donnybrook Road in ruin.

**Wendy Lovell** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I know Ms Lovell has advocated as well. Even if you put aside the fact that it is not duplicated, the state of Donnybrook Road, in terms of potholes, is an absolute disgrace. The action I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to drive out with me to Donnybrook Road at about 8 am or 7:30 in the morning, or at 6:30 in the afternoon, and come with me so you can see why Donnybrook Road needs to be duplicated.

### Working with children checks

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:17): (1370) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for child abuse prevention education to be a mandatory requirement of the working with children check. I understand that the working with children check is the legislative responsibility of the Attorney-General. However, the action I seek relates directly to the first national action plan of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*. Former Premier Daniel Andrews signed on to this plan, recognising that every child has the right to be protected and safe from sexual abuse. The first national action plan expired at the end of 2024 and will soon be replaced with a second plan. This gives the Victorian government the perfect opportunity to respond to calls from survivors of child sexual abuse and advocate for a nationally harmonised working with children check that includes mandatory child abuse prevention education. These calls have been led by survivors through the Australian Childhood Foundation's Our Collective Experience project. It is my hope that the Premier will meet with the Australian Childhood Foundation and project lead, survivor Emma Hakansson, to discuss these proposed reforms further. We must listen to survivors' knowledge about what they know would help keep them safe.

Survivors should not be left asking why it is harder to get a responsible service of alcohol certificate than it is to be approved to work with children. People working with children must be able to understand child sexual abuse, including the tactics of perpetrators, how to promote children's rights and voices, indicators of abuse, how to talk to children about concerns and how to respond appropriately to disclosures. The damning truth is that in Australia 30 per cent of people over the age of 16 years have endured child sexual abuse. That is almost 4.5 million people who carry that experience with them their whole life, each with their own devastating story. No-one wants to think it could happen to them or someone they know, but it does. Until we act on the calls of survivors, we are failing these children and allowing this abuse to continue. So I ask: will the Premier commit to calling

for a nationally harmonised working with children check that includes mandatory child abuse prevention education as part of the second national action plan?

### Police resources

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:20): (1371) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Police. The attrition rate for police members in Victoria is currently sitting at approximately 5.5 per cent – far too high. On any given day in the 18,000-strong force there are around 1100 vacancies, positions unfilled, and 700 members on long-term sick leave. If we add in the casual sick leave, there are roughly 2000 members missing from frontline policing in Victoria every day. The reality is under Labor there is a net negative flow of personnel, a net drain. More Victoria Police members are certainly leaving than finishing the academy.

Speaking with members in my electorate recently at stop-work meetings, they are hugely frustrated by the lack of resources – staffing shortages that are impacting their ability to tackle crime and ensure that there is a greater level of public safety. Nowhere are these challenges more felt than in rural and regional Victoria. Let me place on record my immense gratitude for the incredible work that our police members perform every single day to keep us safe, and often at significant personal risk. I understand from a very sensible and reliable source that rural stations are often used to backfill when police numbers are short in metropolitan Melbourne. While resourcing pressures in the regions are stretched, that thin blue line is certainly getting thinner. The statistics are alarming. In a 10-year period of the Allan-Andrews Labor government and averaging the LGAs of Latrobe, Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Cardinia, South Gippsland, East Gippsland and Wellington, here are some of the crime stats; assault up 23.5 per cent; residential aggravated burglary up 210 per cent; motor vehicle theft up 108 per cent; justice procedures, including intervention orders and breaches of family violence intervention orders, up 72 per cent; and family violence and harassment up 51 per cent. Behind all these statistics are people. Indeed there was a tragic case of Mr Wright suffering from an aggravated burglary in Latrobe Valley recently. He paid with his life, and his family are bereft. These are real people.

Clearly there is workload burnout and there is the natural attrition which occurs, but there needs to be a suite of resourcing support for our force. My ask is: will the minister provide a budget for an advertising campaign for new recruits, particularly in rural and regional Victoria? We know that country recruits feel comfortable returning to country stations. We need more police in our regions.

### Gender services

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:23): (1372) My adjournment item is for the Minister for Health in the other place. Puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones turn children into lifelong patients requiring medication costing over \$1 million in their lifetime. They can cause infertility, changes to brain development, sexual dysfunction and brittle bones. Yet the most extensive review of scientific literature, the Cass review, found very poor evidence for the safety and efficacy of these treatments. Now routine use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for children has been stopped in many countries, and new treatments have also been stopped in Queensland. This follows reports that unauthorised paediatric gender services have been carried out in Cairns without the necessary consultation with patients or their parents. My request for action is for the minister to conduct an audit of consent procedures for gender treatments of children in Victoria.

### Housing affordability

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:24): (1373) My adjournment matter for the Minister for Housing and Building concerns the government's clear unavoidable responsibility for Victoria's housing crisis. The outlook for developers in our state is dire. There is no shortage of reasons. Each could be its own adjournment matter: planning, regulation, employment requirements, procurement restrictions, union activism, Big Build driven construction inflation and skilled worker shortages, and that is before we talk about the levies, fees, charges, premiums, duties, assessments, contributions – indeed the government's whole thesaurus-inspired collection of money-raising, project-killing tax

grabs. We know about these regulatory legal and financial obstacles, yet Labor ministers apparently consider them an unavoidable cost of doing business. The Urban Development Institute of Australia estimates a third of housing costs come from government charges. The sheer number and variety of charges somehow lets the government off the hook.

I want to highlight two specific issues and show how they apply to one housing development. It is in Rockbank in the Western Metropolitan Region, and it is another example of how Labor have slowly but surely hammered areas just like Werribee, as we have discussed today. This is not some theoretical site with imagined worst case scenarios, it is a real-life housing opportunity being strangled by government. It is houses unbuilt, prices escalating beyond the reach of first home buyers, dreams dashed.

Issue one is Melbourne Water, whose crippling lack of resources means that essential approvals take not days but can drag on for years. Melbourne Water's engineer told the Rockbank developers their project was 13th of 13 in his queue and that many have been waiting for six to 12 months or more. This costs time but, more importantly, money. Across multiple developers, over 5500 housing lots are affected by this in the western growth corridor alone. The interest costs on the finance involved are massive. In this case it is \$45 million yearly for an area with around 5500 housing lots. That is \$8000 for every single house, simply due to Melbourne Water's lack of capacity.

Secondly, the escalating MSA, the Melbourne strategic assessment levy, which is supposed to support native vegetation, has a disproportionate impact on development. On one particular Rockbank site the government wants \$3.6 million for an area with 132 lots. That is \$27,000 straight on the cost of every house. Shockingly, there is not even any native vegetation at the site. Minister, I ask you to investigate and publish a response to these two impediments, which are adding, when margins are included, \$40,000 to simple houses for first home buyers.

### **Duck hunting**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:27): (1374) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for him to abide by expert advice and remove all threatened species from the game list. The Allan government is yet to announce whether the 2025 duck-shooting season will go ahead, despite the grave risk of avian influenza, severe noncompliance by shooters last year and the ever declining populations of our native waterbirds.

Last year the Premier called the changes proposed for 2025 'commonsense'. Excuse my misunderstanding, but I believe common sense would mean listening to the recommendations of their own parliamentary inquiry that recommend they ban duck shooting. But they clearly define it differently, because in documents obtained under FOI last week it was revealed that the Minister for Environment not only did not ban duck shooting but went against his own department's advice on the 2024 hunting regulations by personally signing and ordering to please leave the blue-winged shoveler on the game list. This advice by the minister was made only three days after 5500 public submissions and survey responses were received last year. It is actually quite astonishing how fast he could apparently read and make that decision, and of course this was against his own department's advice to leave the blue-winged shoveler off the game list due to its threatened status.

The Allan government clearly cannot be relied upon to protect our wildlife, and they would rather see our wetlands littered with dead native waterbirds drowning after they have received gunshot wounds but have not been killed than to admit they were wrong and should have followed the advice they were given in the first place.

The minister actually did not stop there. He also personally overrode advice that said to ban electronic duck callers, which astonishingly, even many shooters themselves admit to being unethical devices. They are banned in many parts of the world, but the Minister for Environment independently acted to support their use. So now we know for certain that not only does the Allan government not listen to their own parliamentary inquiries but some of their ministers are not even listening to their own

departments on the advice that they receive when it comes to our native animals. I seek for the minister to rectify his uninformed decisions and to ensure that all threatened species are removed from the game list if a duck-shooting season is to proceed in 2025.

### **Fire Rescue Victoria**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:30): (1375) Last month we were all shocked by the devastation of the Los Angeles wildfires. In response LA's fire commissioner observed that years of underfunding had crippled the Los Angeles Fire Department's ability to respond. At the heart of the crisis nearly half of LA's fire trucks were out of commission awaiting repairs and calls for fleet replacement programs had fallen on deaf ears. Similarly, firefighters in Victoria have been warning that for years FRV is under-resourced and underfunded, yet this government continues to ignore those calls and the calls for critical funding. Despite 42 per cent of Fire Rescue Victoria's fleet being beyond its 15-year service life, Deputy Premier Carroll insists our service is, and I quote, 'world class'. This summer has proven otherwise.

On Boxing Day a fire truck from Bundoora broke down en route to the Halls Gap fire, with no spare trucks available statewide. The next day a CBD truck overheated while responding to a house fire. On 30 December multiple trucks broke down yet again at Halls Gap, leaving fire crews stranded on the freeway. On New Year's Eve aerial appliances in Ringwood, Dandenong and Traralgon were all offline. A 17-year-old truck in Brooklyn was taken off commission on New Year's Day, followed by another in West Melbourne on 2 January. By 12 January only two of five strategically placed ladder platforms were operational. As temperatures soared on Monday this week a 22-year-old truck in Oakleigh failed to start, unable to respond to a fire call, and was taken out of commission. On Tuesday night Oakleigh's replacement truck broke down at a fire call. As of yesterday FRV had 29 trucks out of commission. There are no spare trucks across the state to replace breakdowns.

As demonstrated in the Los Angeles fires, this government's failure to invest in a rolling stock and replacement program is putting lives at risk. It is also putting the lives of firefighters at risk. With the focus on Werribee this weekend, it is worth noting that by 2030 Wyndham will have a population similar to Canberra, yet there are no plans for additional FRV trucks and appliances to be stationed there. Canberra, by contrast, has a fire service with 34 trucks and 330 full-time staff. Fire Rescue Victoria is in crisis. It is in freefall. I therefore ask the Treasurer and former Minister for Emergency Services to fund and resource the FRV fleet to meet Victoria's needs now and well into the future, including the CFA.

### **Cooba solar project**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:32): (1376) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to reject planning application PA2403122 for the Cooba solar facility at Colbinabbin in my electorate of Northern Victoria. My constituents in the heart of the Heathcote wine region have serious concerns about the underhanded tactics employed by the Venn Energy group when preparing application PA2403122, an application for one of the largest solar energy production facilities in Victoria. The bushfire management plan and cultural heritage management plans are missing from the public application documents. Land productivity data has been severely manipulated to downplay the true productivity of the land proposed to be occupied by this facility and the surrounding farmland. Incorrect rainfall and soil type data has been used in the report submitted for the application. There is no social licence for this facility. Venn Energy used flawed consultation processes, leaving the community feeling as though they are not being heard. I have been given pages of objections by my constituents from Colbinabbin to this planning application. The harm this is causing to the community is indescribable. Minister, do the right thing by my constituents and reject planning application PA2403122 for the Cooba solar facility.

### Housing

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): (1377) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is for the state government to urgently address the public housing crisis that it has created in Victoria and provide practical, implementable solutions to fix this terrible situation effectively and quickly. I am asking the minister to address this immediately. I want to give some personal stories here that are about very recent events over the last few days prior to arriving here in Parliament. On Monday this week a mother with her two young children arrived at my electorate office because they had become homeless that day. The lady they were staying with – her lease was up. She was moving out. This lady had no lease and nowhere to go with her two children. She arrived at my office, and we had nowhere to send them because Wayss has got this standard response – and I have heard this now from many people – of saying, ‘Sorry, we don’t have anything that we can do.’ It is simply not good enough in this government to have nowhere for young Australians and single mothers to go with their children. That was on Monday.

I want to give you another example. On Friday last week at McDonald’s in Berwick there was a young teenage girl. A constituent of mine happened to see her along with her friend and thought that she looked a little bit dishevelled and very upset. They asked her, ‘How are you? Are you okay?’, and she burst into tears. This teenage girl, trying to go to school, had nowhere to live – nowhere to go that night. She gave the name of where she goes to school, and the constituent followed up with the school to see if she had turned up on Monday. They discovered that she had not. We discovered that she was a good kid that turned up to school regularly, all the time, and who had lost her job as well. She had been keeping a part-time job, but she had no way of washing her uniform and she could not go to work clean because she had nowhere to live. This is a common story in my area of the south-east.

I have met person after person with these terrible, terrible stories. They are just desperate for housing. What is this government going to do? What is it going to take? This government has failed Victorians in housing. We need that housing. We need somewhere for these young people and these mothers with children to go. It is appalling.

### Beaufort Primary School site

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (18:37): (1378) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and it relates to the former site of the Beaufort Primary School located in Leichardt Street in Beaufort. The minister may recall that at the 2022 state election Labor promised \$800,000 for a master planning process and stage 1 of development works at the site. At the time it was noted by the Pyrenees shire CEO Jim Nolan that there had been no timeline given for the commitment. That has been a significant problem because, quite frankly, nothing has happened at the site. It is extremely disappointing for the local community, who were promised that the site would be rejuvenated. But with no accountability measure, like a simple timeline, to give some assurance to the Beaufort community, locals are feeling fed up, angry, cheated and frustrated by the clear and evident lack of progress.

The buildings, which are heritage listed, are continuing to fall further into disrepair. Graffiti litters the precinct. There is broken glass and other hazards. Overgrown grass and other plants grow in what is left of the gutters on the dilapidated buildings. It is something I personally feel very strongly about because it is the place where I went to primary school as well. I am one of many former students, teachers and parents who grimace every time we go past the old primary school, left derelict and near ruined by this neglectful Labor government.

The member for Ripon, who appears to have little influence in the Labor government, is obviously confused about what this asset means to the community, and it is even clearer since the 2022 state election that that commitment had been given. There does not appear to be any willingness to actually make that commitment a reality. There were excited locals, now disillusioned, who believed that a community hub would come to fruition. There was a hope that the site could be a great hub to bring people together, perhaps for the purpose of creative pursuits, adult education purposes and to renew

the sporting facilities there. Sadly, these hopes and dreams have been smashed by the Labor government, and it does not look like it is going to happen at all.

The member for Ripon, as ineffectual as she may be, should at least try to influence the minister to ensure the government meets its promises. So my question is this: Minister, will you provide a comprehensive timeline, including key stages, orders of works, funding allocations for each stage, community consultation and feedback and a copy of the master plan when it is done, to Parliament? We deserve answers, and the community at Beaufort are sick of being continually ignored and taken for granted by this neglectful Labor government.

### **Probationary driving age**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:40): (1379) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of the many young people and parents who would like to reduce the probationary licence age in Victoria to 17 in line with every other state and territory. I raised this issue last year and the minister's response said that the change would not be in the community's best interest and raised concerns about increasing the accident rate. As a parent of two P-platers and one L-plater, I agree that safety is crucial, and training is vitally important to ensure our young people are ready for the responsibility of driving solo. Any road accident statistic is a bad one, regardless of your age. But in Victoria right now you need to do more training to serve coffee than you do to drive on our roads. We require learner drivers to record 120 hours of driving in a logbook, but unless they have someone teaching them properly, at the end of it they may still not know how to park a car.

I encourage the minister to consider the driver training programs in New South Wales. If a learner driver completes a one-day safer driving course, they earn 20 hours of credit on their logbooks, and if they do 10 hours of professional driving lessons, they receive a further 20 hours of credit. I have been contacted by people across the state keen to see the law changed in Victoria, particularly in regional areas where there is limited or no public transport available, and not everyone has a parent or carer available to ferry them around.

Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a minimum probationary driving age of 18. New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the territories enable a lower minimum age – everywhere except Victoria. I have spoken with a former police officer, a driver trainer, and heard from many families who live near the border who believe that young people in Victoria are at a major disadvantage. I received a letter from a grandmother in Kyneton. She shared her experience of driving her grandson who lived 3 hours from TAFE while he did an apprenticeship that was another 50 kilometres away. She thinks this change would be a godsend.

I have also been told that there are many trying to get around the rules by using an address in New South Wales to get their licence. For young people who have done the hours of training and are ready to drive safely on their own, a drivers licence opens doors to educational and employment opportunities, access to health services, to engage in community events and sports and to help others. I spoke with industry leaders keen to see this change to make it easier for young people to engage in the workforce, particularly in apprenticeships that may require an early start.

In 2017 a parliamentary committee inquiry looked at the issue and recommended that Victoria lower the age to 17. They heard from numerous stakeholders, understood the risks and recommended change. On behalf of the many young people, parents and grandparents who have written to me on this issue, I ask the minister to review the government's position and consider the benefits of introducing incentives to improve driver training and bring the age of probationary licences to 17 in Victoria, in line with every other state and territory.

### **Prahran electorate crime**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:43): (1380) My matter tonight for the adjournment is for the attention of the Minister for Police, and it concerns the serious and worsening situation of crime

in the inner east, in particular in and around the Prahran electorate. We know that tragically at 8 am this morning on the corner of Chapel Street and Malvern Road, a middle-aged man was stabbed in the lower body repeatedly. He has obviously been taken to hospital, and you can only hope and pray that he is all right. This crime occurred in front of a tobacconist, but this is on the back of a series of similar incidents, serious incidents involving machetes, involving violence of various types. We know that the crime numbers in the Prahran area have gone up massively. Residential burglaries are up 39 per cent, motor vehicle theft is up 68 per cent and there are massive increases in retail theft in the Windsor area of the region.

What is required now is for the Minister for Police to ensure that Victoria Police has the resources to begin urgent crisis patrols. We need crisis patrols to actually ensure that there is real pushback, that there is real visibility of police. We need to make sure that these incidents stop. It is no longer good enough for the minister and for the government to look the other way. They have got to stop these violent incidents. It is just simply unacceptable.

People forget that the first and most basic duty of governments is to guarantee the safety of the community. People have every right to feel safe in their home, in the street, in their business, as they go about their shopping or whatever other activity they are doing during the course of their daily life. We need those urgent crisis patrols up and down the area to make sure that these criminals see the presence of the police, so that they can see that there is going to be an intervention if they undertake one of these extraordinary incidents.

I can only say that nobody wanted to see this happen – nobody wants to see the terrible outcomes that we have had in this recent period – but it has to stop, and the government has got to turn around and intervene. They have got to make sure that Victorians are safe, and they have got to make sure that people in my electorate and Ms Crozier's electorate are safe and that these crisis patrols are urgently brought into action.

### Neighbourhood houses

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:46): (1381) I rise to speak of an issue that is deeply impacting the very core of my region, and that is our neighbourhood houses. Over the past few years they have faced disaster after disaster, whether it has been Black Summer bushfires or the restrictions from the COVID pandemic. Through it all they have been a lifeline for residents, helping them navigate relief payments and access to services and dealing with the overwhelming mountain of paperwork. But as reported by the ABC in January, these centres now face an impossible choice – cut services or close their doors.

Despite delivering much-needed support to their communities, these centres have been left to struggle with rising costs and insufficient funding. All of this can be placed at the feet of the Allan Labor government. Since the conclusion of the pandemic, operational costs, including training, waste collection, utilities and wages, have skyrocketed along with community demand. Morwell Neighbourhood House centre manager Tracie noted that these neighbourhood houses are facing not just financial strain but also an unsustainable funding model. The current neighbourhood house coordination program only covers the salary of one employee, leaving centres to spend their limited time and resources on fundraising within their community or navigating the complexities of government grants rather than focusing on service delivery. In some cases they have been forced to cut their services or consider closing down altogether.

Recent data showed that 45 per cent of all centres in this state are now operating at a loss due to these revenue and cost pressures. Just think about that – nearly half of these centres are in the red because of wasteful government that is caving in to union demands and raising pay for public servants and government ministers. Without government support, these centres are forced to borrow funds, which results in increased interest payments and a weakened balance sheet. The impact is not only financial – the closures and the reduction of services will result in job losses, diminished social cohesion,

worsening mental health outcomes and erosion of trust in government. In short, the consequences are manifold and disastrous.

My adjournment for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers and the action that I seek is for the minister to conduct an immediate review on the current funding models for neighbourhood houses and urgently reallocate emergency funding to bridge the gap between the end of the disaster recovery grants and the allocation of new and ongoing funding. These centres are the heart of the community, and we cannot afford to let them collapse.

### **Nursing students**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:49): (1382) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to graduate nurses. In December last year there was concern that had been raised in the media about graduate nurses having their hours cut back at both the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Alfred. The Royal Melbourne actually reinstated the hours for the graduate nurse program back to full-time capacity but not so in other places, and that is leaving huge amounts of gaps and concerns for those nurses who are really relying on those extra hours and the income.

The graduate nurse program is obviously a very good program that is supportive of those nurses in their transition and assists with their clinical and theoretical skills during that transition year. The issue I want to raise, though, is that I asked the minister a question in October about the numbers of graduate nurses for 2022 and 2023. I was told 12,000 nurses graduated. I have not got the numbers for last year, but they will be released, I expect, in due course. 8700 of those 12,000 were given graduate placements in our public hospitals. What I want to understand, and the action I am seeking from the minister, is: of the 3300 others that did not take up the offer to participate in the graduate nurse program, how many of those nurses are working in the public system? Have they left the state? Are they in the private system? Does the government track those 3300 nurses that have graduated but have not undertaken the nurse graduate program?

The reason I am asking is that I think it is important to understand exactly where new graduates are going, what experience they are getting, how they are being supervised and whether that is being properly monitored. I think we need to understand the expertise and the support that new nurses require, especially in the very stressful situation that we have in our health system.

### **Meat industry**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:51): (1383) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and it concerns the challenges small livestock producers face in accessing slaughter and butchering services. The action that I seek is for the minister to urgently respond to and implement recommendation 27 from the final report of the inquiry into food security in Victoria. An abattoir in central Victoria recently wrote to its customers with the sudden and unexpected news that from the start of the 2025 year the abattoir would no longer accept requests for small-service kills. This decision will impact a large number of small-scale livestock farmers and artisanal producers in central Victoria, leaving them in the lurch, with no other abattoirs close by who are willing to process their slaughter requirements.

For the last few decades ownership of slaughter facilities in Australia has been consolidating into the hands of a few multinational companies, which have been buying up abattoirs across the country. These companies often also own feedlots to raise livestock as well as the meat-processing facilities to finish the final product. They have purchased abattoirs in order to vertically integrate their businesses, controlling the product flow from paddock to packaging and improving their profits through process efficiencies. That means that the large commercial abattoirs now refuse to process smaller kills, leaving small-scale producers shut out from the slaughter services that they need to process their meat and get it to farmers markets, local butcher shops and the restaurants they supply.



The troubling announcement came just after the release of the final report of the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into food security, which warned about difficulties for small producers in accessing kill facilities. The state Labor government tried and failed to fix this problem back in 2019 when it amended the Meat Industry Act 1993. In her speech on the bill Jacinta Allan noted that consolidation in the meat-processing sector had created barriers to small producers gaining access to abattoir services. She claimed that the government's legislative tweaks would respond to the need for a regulatory framework that supports the operation of micro or mobile abattoirs to facilitate small-scale processing. However, four years on from that reform it is clear that the amended framework is not actually enabling micro abattoirs but in fact seems to be hindering them. Evidence was given during the food security inquiry that there is much confusion surrounding the regulation of mobile abattoirs. The city of Bendigo's submission to the inquiry says that gaining the necessary licences for on-farm or mobile slaughtering is challenging, resulting in few businesses offering these services. Recent changes in the abattoir industry make it even more urgent for the government to act quickly and streamline and coordinate the regulatory framework in order to facilitate more mobile and micro abattoir services.

### Responses

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:55): There were 15 matters on the adjournment this evening and they will be referred variously to the ministers who have carriage of them.

A couple of matters came up under the housing portfolio. One was from Mrs McArthur. I will provide a response to her in writing given that she had to leave the chamber earlier than perhaps anticipated this evening. Mrs Hermans asked a question which was pretty wideranging in its scope. I want to touch on a couple of things that are relevant to the matters that she raised, in particular the mum who was at the end of a lease in a situation of great vulnerability and had concerns, having presented to Mrs Hermans's office, around housing and accommodation. The other was a student who needed immediate assistance and was not able to attend school for a variety of different reasons, including extreme vulnerability and disadvantage.

Mrs Hermans, there have been a range of investments made across multiple budgets to address not only the shortage of supply but the delivery of services to address need. This is where again in this year's budget we do have on top of the \$300 million that has been allocated for homelessness services an additional \$197 million. This is work that is going on. This is allocation of funding that is going toward addressing the sorts of issues that occur when people are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes early intervention and prevention, which is where, again, we do have significant investment into understanding those areas of need and responding to them.

Homelessness services in Victoria meet a really high demand for accommodation services, providing more accommodation than in fact any other jurisdiction – 35,090 clients were accommodated across the 2023–24 year. But there is always more work to do. As I responded to Mrs Tyrrell on a question today, one of the things that is so essential – and it seems simple but it is really important to continue to state in making sure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring – is housing stock. This is where, again, we are bringing additional stock online with that investment of \$5.3 billion across the Big Housing Build, of which \$1.25 billion is in regional Victoria, plus the additional \$1 billion under the Regional Housing Fund and the partnerships that we have with the Commonwealth, including through the Housing Australia Future Fund, the Social Housing Growth Fund, the social housing accelerator program and other supports for delivery, including – and this is relevant perhaps, Mrs Hermans, to the matters that you raised tonight – for women and children who are victim-survivors of family violence and for young people.

We know there are specific areas of vulnerability, which is also where the education youth foyers play a really important role, as do the efforts that are undertaken by organisations such as Kids Under Cover,

and the Village 21 model is an incredibly important part of that work. Again, we know that in providing a response to areas of need it is also important to provide wraparound services to people who often have very, very complex needs.

That work does go on. We are determined to ensure that that commitment to providing access to services and to improving whole-of-life outcomes and opportunities, health and wellbeing for people in need is met and continues to be part of the work that we do. There is no finish line for homelessness and for rough sleeping. The work needs to go on and needs to be continued in perpetuity. It needs to be undertaken by all levels of government, and this is where those investments play such an important role.

But it is also about workforce development. There are a range of reports that indicate that support for the sector is of crucial importance. That is around recruitment, training, professional development and retention. These are the things that occupy the priority and time of the sector and of government. I am also grateful for the efforts of the sector within the Council to Homeless Persons and the work that they do. We have got entry points. We have got the approach to targets that are set and embedded in the housing allocation and targets, whether that is for family violence victims and survivors, whether that is for Aboriginal people, or whether that is about making sure that we are assisting people in particular areas of vulnerability to age in place, for example.

There is a lot in this space. If ever you do have particular matters that you wish to draw to my attention, as you have done in the past, I hope you will continue to do that so that issues can be addressed in a person-centred way based on the circumstances that are at play here. But finally, people will often have experiences, as you have indicated in your adjournment, relating to the end of a private rental arrangement that lead to situations of housing vulnerability. There are supports available, and this is where the amendments and changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the creation of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and the streamlining processes in the housing statement are all intended to address the sort of disparity that you have raised in your adjournment here tonight. I hope that provides you with some context as the work goes on.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:00 pm.**