



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 4 February 2026**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Martin Cameron, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Wayne Farnham, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Paul Mercurio, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak and Iwan Walters

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

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

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

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

**Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>9</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam <sup>5</sup>	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>6,7</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>11</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>12</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 13 February 2026

<sup>6</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>8</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>10</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>12</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

**Party abbreviations**

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

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**Wednesday 4 February 2026**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.**

***Bills*****Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026*****Introduction and first reading***

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in relation to the TAFE network, to guarantee the provision of certain courses of vocational education and training free of tuition fee, to provide for the TAFE funding guarantee and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (09:34): I request a brief explanation of the bill from the minister.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:34): The Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026 enshrines access to free TAFE in legislation, elevating the importance of free TAFE as a pillar of Victoria's education and training system. The bill also legislates a TAFE funding guarantee, ensuring that TAFE providers receive a minimum of 70 per cent of training and skills funding, acquitting our election commitment.

**Read first time.**

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

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

**The SPEAKER** (09:35): General business, notices of motion 1 to 2 and 55 to 56 and orders of the day 4 and 11, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

***Documents*****Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Emergency Management Act 1986* – Report to Parliament on the Declaration of the State of Disaster.

***Motions*****Motions by leave**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house notes there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the Labor government to supply even one police officer to open Clyde North police station to the public.

**Leave refused.**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Sunbury to advocate for his community to keep Sunbury police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns Premier Jacinta Allan for welcoming accused war criminal President of Israel Isaac Herzog to Victoria, notes Herzog's comments have been cited by the UN commission for inciting genocide in Palestine by Israel and resolves to never welcome the leader of a state accused of genocide in this state.

**Leave refused.**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Bayswater to advocate for their community to keep Boronia police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Hastings to advocate for the community to keep the Hastings police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Glen Waverley to advocate for their community to keep Forest Hill police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes there are 376 fewer police under Premier Jacinta Allan and the complete failure of the member for Eltham to advocate for her community to keep Eltham police station open 24 hours, seven days a week.

**Leave refused.**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Mordialloc to advocate for his community to keep Chelsea police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that there are 376 fewer police under Premier Allan and the complete failure of the member for Melton to advocate for their community to keep Bacchus Marsh police station open 24/7.

**Leave refused.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Australia Day**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (09:39): I would like to offer my congratulations to those receiving honours in my electorate for the great work that they do for the community: Dr David Forbes AO for practice and research into the prevention and treatment of mental health and in academia; also to Ms Kathleen Margaret Toko AM for significant services to mental health governance; to the late Norman Abraham Faifer AM for his service to building and construction as chair of the Australian

Construction Industry Forum; Dr Bernard Lustig for service to the Jewish community through a range of roles; Dr John Slutzkin for service to the Jewish community for hockey and a volunteer for the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation since 1955; Robert Bontschek OAM for service to the Jewish community and also for his work on the J-AIR radio station; Steven Curtis for service to the Jewish community and as co-founder and board member of Saltpillar Theatre since 1986; Mr Alex Leslie Dafner for service to the Jewish community, spending 52 years as a board director of Kadimah Jewish Cultural Centre and National Library; George Andrew Ermer for service to the community in a range of roles, including founding board member of Kids Under Cover; and Ms Debra Korman for service to the community in a range of roles, including coordination of Kehilat Nitzan.

### **Bushfires**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (09:41): I also wanted to thank Sikh Volunteers Australia, Rabbi Rabin and Shlomo Nathanson, who I joined with to help with food relief for the victims of the fires at Ruffy. I thank them for the great work that they do.

### **Ashwood electorate events**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (09:41): It is fantastic to be back with you all for another wonderful year, which we have got off to a great start down in Ashwood. The new year, as always, highlights the importance of our multicultural state. In what has become a local custom, we open our multicultural calendar with the Tamil Festival at the annual Thai Pongal celebration, and this year thousands of us welcomed the new year. I thank chairperson Siva, his whole team and the whole Tamil community for once again putting on a fantastic event. On Australia Day, which was the next day, we gathered at Monash council to welcome our newest Aussies on our national day. Citizenship ceremonies are always one of the best parts of our job and even better with a fantastic sausage sizzle staffed by the wonderful Ashwood–Mt Waverley Lions Club, which, yes, I am a member of, but I was not on the tools. Tuesday – the day after – I and the member for Glen Waverley were welcomed by the Chinese Association of Monash to celebrate Lunar New Year. I thank Michael Mao and his committee for sharing the day with us all, and *xīn nián kuài lè dà jiǎ*.

### **Norm Gibbs Community Leadership Award**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (09:42): I want to quickly acknowledge the recipients of the Norm Gibbs Community Leadership Award for last year. I am going to try, and I might have to come back next week: Mikael Looi from Holy Family Primary, Patrick Muller from Parkhill Primary, Jimmy Boys from Mount Waverley Secondary, Nicci Rudge from Glen Iris Primary, Caitlin Mujie from Avila College, Alyn Anuchiracheeva from Mount Waverley North, Ira Veer from Essex Heights, Abel Ebi Joseph from Salesian, Taviru Perera from Syndal South Primary – see you next week. (*Time expired*)

### **Leongatha Healthcare**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (09:42): It has been a very difficult time in Leongatha for the past few weeks with the sudden closure of Leongatha Healthcare, the largest GP clinic in town and indeed the region. The closure occurred over a weekend with very short notice to staff and the 18 GPs employed at the clinic, and patients were generally not notified. I pay credit to my colleague Melina Bath in the other place who spent time there on the Monday morning informing bewildered patients of the closure as they arrived, as there was neither a sign on the door nor a message on the answering machine advising patients of the closure. There has been significant concern from patients about access to their medical records, return of pathology results and access to medicines stored onsite, not to mention their ongoing concern with connection to their GPs. Thankfully, many groups have stood up to help notwithstanding this was a private business decision. I would like to thank Bayside Health regional, formerly Gippsland Southern Health Service, and CEO Louise Sparkes and her staff, who have stepped up in many ways, not least of which by increasing the resourcing of the urgent care ward at Leongatha Hospital and allowing former GPs from Leongatha Healthcare to see patients from there.

They have also managed to recover and store medicines from the clinic at the hospital so patients can access them. Likewise, local GP clinics have helped to take on patients where they can, and the Gippsland Primary Health Network has increased availability of online and telehealth services. I am pleased that former GPs are seeking to establish a new clinic, and I am working with Ms Bath and our federal colleague the member for Monash Mary Aldred to try and help facilitate this new service as quickly as possible. I appreciate the anxiety and stress this has caused the 8000 or so patients at the clinic.

### **Bushfires**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (09:44): This summer has been a tough one for so many right across Victoria. The bushfires that burnt through our regions were devastating, and it is always heartbreaking to see the impact they have on families, communities and livelihoods. I want to pay tribute to our incredible fire services and volunteers: you work tirelessly to keep people safe and to provide support when they needed it most. Your courage, professionalism and selflessness are what gets us through these difficult times. I also want to particularly acknowledge the incredible efforts of the Tarneit community. Local volunteers stepped up to provide food, care and comfort to those that were doing it tough. In particular I would like to recognise Sheikh Abdullah Hawari and Hanif Shaikh from Virgin Mary Mosque for their leadership and compassion and of course our local Sikh community as well, who so often are the first ones there to provide food and comfort to those facing natural disaster.

In times of disaster, unity is everything. It is about looking out for one another, standing together and making sure that nobody is left behind when times are hardest. To everybody who donated their time and their resources or simply checked in on a neighbour or friend, thank you. Your kindness and generosity are what make our community so strong.

### **Annie Dignam**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:45): Huge congratulations to Homewood local Annie Dignam, who topped the state in VCE agriculture and horticulture. I am so proud of Annie, but I know her parents Brendan and Jo are doubly proud. On a gap year in Far North Queensland on a station at the moment, Annie plans to study agricultural science at Melbourne University on her return. I am so impressed to see remarkable young women like her keen to work in agriculture. Even more impressive, at this young age Annie and younger brother Harry did a couple of shifts on the Homewood CFA truck during the recent fires, as well as on their private firefighting vehicle.

### **Mary Cruz Fernandez**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:46): Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville offers wonderful opportunities for young Aboriginal women across Australia. At last year's presentation day guests gained an insight into the success of a former student, Mary Cruz Fernandez, who made the most of every opportunity available, including earning her boat licence, which boosted her confidence. Mary grew up in both Darwin and Wurrumiyanga on the Tiwi Islands. Mary is Tiwi mob on her mother's side and of Spanish heritage on her father's. She attended Worawa from 2017 to 2021. Since leaving she worked with the Cathy Freeman Foundation in Wurrumiyanga before commencing the Navy Indigenous development program. She spent six months living in Cairns, completing military and TAFE training, gaining valuable skills and independence. She now works in CatholicCare NT, travelling every two weeks to deliver programs to remote communities. She supports the safe house program, creates activities for children and is preparing to run a women's group on country. She is so impressive.

### **Wiyal Primary School**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham) (09:47): I rise to update the house on the exciting education and infrastructure projects supporting our rapidly growing communities across the Sydenham electorate and the broader north-west. Last Thursday we opened Wiyal Primary School in Fraser Rise and welcomed 525 new students there from prep to grade 6 in their very first term 1. It is one of 18 new

schools that have opened this year, and it also completing Labor's delivery of 100 new schools since we came to office. Of course this new school includes two new learning hubs, an administrative building, a library and a community hub, the most magnificent indoor multiuse court and many other great facilities. It has been named Wiyal Primary School because it means 'peppermint tree' in Woiwurrung language, and it was chosen through meaningful consultation with traditional owners and the local community. Foundation principal Paris Spencer and the dedicated team have created modern and welcoming spaces that already are full of energy. On the same site there is a new kinder underway, and this will be complete by 2028. These education investments are building upon all of the investment we are making locally, including the upgrading of the Melton Highway and Leakes Road intersection and the Melton Highway infill.

#### **Emergency services**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (09:48): I would like to thank our CFA, SES and other emergency services members, who have done such a terrific job over the last few months, whether fighting fires in Longwood, the Otways, Natimuk and Horsham or elsewhere across Victoria. Indeed I was extremely worried for my own parents and their neighbours in Horsham, with the fire getting quite close to them. In particular, in my electorate I would like to acknowledge and thank the Mount Martha, Mount Eliza, Moorooduc, Mornington and Baxter CFAs, who service parts of my electorate of Mornington, along with the SES Hastings unit. Not only do they look after our area and other incidents, but they go out of their way to support tackling fires and other emergencies across Victoria. I know that units such as Mount Martha and others sent units and personnel to fires across our state.

Not only are they fighting bushfires, they also kept our children happy, bringing Santa around over the Christmas period. I know that my own kids bumped into them while having dinner at Volpino in Mount Martha and again when checking out the amazing Frances Drive Christmas lights, along with the Florence Street lights. I would also like to acknowledge Matt Baker, who won Victoria's best Christmas lights just down the road from where I live. It is so important at this time to acknowledge our emergency services, acknowledge that community spirit and acknowledge all volunteers across Victoria.

#### **Broadmeadows electorate events**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (09:50): The year certainly kicked off in full swing, quite literally. It was fabulous to join the Glenroy Cricket Club for their annual ladies day celebration. Their bootscooting theme brought a great sense of fun to the day among sharing personal journeys, all the while raising funds for breast cancer support through the McGrath Foundation. I also had the pleasure of dropping into the Hume soccer club on Saturday, and it was great to recently visit the Upfield football club along with the member for Greenvale, Minister Erdogan and our federal member Basem Abdo for the wonderful community celebration co-hosted with Soraya with Love.

I have also had the immense privilege of being warmly welcomed at both the Guru Ravidass gurdwara and the St Thomas Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church and catching up with Eritrean Families in Hume and the North. I thank all of these communities for their important work in our community and for their strong commitment to service, compassion, social justice and dignity for all of humanity. I loved being part of the Tamang Society new year celebrations, welcoming the Year of the Horse, and it was a great honour to represent the Minister for Small Business and Employment last week at the Australian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Zeynep Sertel OAM**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (09:51): I take this opportunity to offer my warmest congratulations to Zeynep Sertel upon being awarded the Order of Australia, and I thank her for her lifelong dedication to education, leadership and youth development in our community.

**Peter Osborne and Barney Osborne**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (09:51): Finally, I congratulate local residents Peter Osborne and Barney Osborne on reaching the extraordinary milestone of turning 100. My sincere thanks to the Glenroy RSL for hosting their celebrations and honouring their remarkable lives.

**Mildura electorate bushfires**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:51): Over the summer communities across the south of my electorate in particular have once again been tested by fire. Today I want to place on the record my deep gratitude to all of the firefighters, volunteers, private landholders with appliances and support crews who stood between devastation and what could have been disaster. On 18 December the Jeffcott fire, which has largely been forgotten, tore through the district of Charlton and Jeffcott, impacting 15 farms and destroying one family home along with irreplaceable veterans medals and numerous outbuildings. These are families who have lost so much yet heartbreakingly remain ineligible for assistance because it happened before the 8 and 9 January fires. Why on earth wouldn't we extend when a disaster is declared and make bushfire recovery for the entire summer? A very wise man told me recently that you will not win these arguments with logic. Their resilience down there, though, has been extraordinary. And then we saw structure fires in Charlton and Sea Lake, where the Sea Lake hairdresser unfortunately and the Bottom Cafe were destroyed. But thankfully the CFA crews – because the FRV aerial pumper in Mildura was still off line – responded swiftly and they saved the Sea Lake Pharmacy, which could have been an absolute disaster. Then of course there were the Big Desert and Hattah–Kulkyne fires.

**Narre Warren North electorate schools**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (09:53): My favourite thing to do in December is to present my respect and integrity awards. I would like to put on the record all the amazing recipients. Congratulations to Sophia-Rose and Yashica from Fountain Gate Secondary College, to Jackson from Juniper foundation learning, to Lily from Hallam Secondary College, to Sienna at Gleneagles Secondary College, to Vaiga at Hallam Primary School, to Max at James Cook Primary School, to Nathan from Timbarra P–9, to Gianna from Harkaway Hills College, to Luke at Lysterfield Lake College, to Xander and Krishna at St Paul Apostle North primary school, to Ayla at Southern Cross Primary School, to Madison at Maramba Primary School, to Robert at St Paul Apostle South primary school, to Sarah at Narre Warren North Primary School, to Amina at Fleetwood Primary School, to Xavier at Fountain Gate Primary School, to Neriah at Chalcot Lodge Primary School, to Halima at Mossgiel Park Primary School and to Lochan at Thomas Mitchell Primary School. The award is for demonstrating outstanding responsibility in their learning behaviours and being organised in all elements of their school life, displaying kindness, respect, courage and resilience in challenging situations, all of which cost absolutely nothing. Congratulations to all of you. I am so proud. It was a real honour to present the awards, and I cannot wait to do it again at the end of this year.

**Country Fire Authority Rowville and Scoresby brigades**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (09:54): I rise today to acknowledge the extraordinary bravery and dedication of our local CFA volunteers during what has been a devastating 2025–26 bushfire season. Over the course of this summer Victoria has faced catastrophic conditions, especially across the Wimmera, north-central, north-east and Gippsland regions. While many of us were seeking relief from the heat, the men and women of the Rowville and Scoresby CFA brigades were doing the exact opposite, heading into danger to protect lives and property while endangering their own.

I want to specifically highlight the efforts of our local strike teams. Members from both Rowville and Scoresby have been deployed nearly every day, primarily to the north-central town of Alexandra, providing significant support to the tragic Longwood and Walwa fires, which claimed over 135,000 hectares. In particular, Scoresby's hose lay has been pumping critical magnitude amounts of

water supply to be a major part of the bushfire response, while Rowville's drones have been deployed throughout the state to provide crucial information to form a strategic response.

To the captains, the crews and, most importantly, the families who support them to secure our community in the state: the Rowville electorate and I are immensely proud of you. Your commitment is the backbone of our community safety. We owe you a debt of gratitude that will never fully be repaid.

#### **Bondi Beach attack**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (09:56): In the days following the horrific antisemitic terrorist attack at Bondi, people across Ballarat responded with compassion, kindness and unwavering solidarity for our local Jewish community. It was deeply moving to see the steps of the Ballarat Synagogue covered in flowers, cards and messages of love and respect. In moments of darkness Ballarat showed its light. I want to acknowledge the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation president John Abraham for his leadership, strength and generosity during this incredibly difficult time, as well as other congregation members. On the Monday after the attack John opened the doors of the shul to students, teachers and families from St Alipius school, creating an opportunity for reflection, support and shared prayer. It was a privilege to be there. A week later John brought together religious and community leaders for a service that reaffirmed our collective commitment to unity and peace. Ballarat's response showed the very best of who we are. I am proud to represent a city that rejects antisemitism and celebrates our rich diversity of faiths and beliefs.

#### **James Waight**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (09:57): Congratulations to the City of Ballarat Citizen of the year James Waight. Jim is an extraordinary community champion who has turned his love of cycling into more than \$300,000 raised for Ballarat's Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute. From his own cancer diagnosis, Jimmy has ridden over 18,000 kilometres and is making a real difference.

#### **Climate change**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (09:57): I would like to start by thanking all members for your very kind messages of support over the past week. I am very grateful. I feel as though my health is improving, and I fully intend to spend the rest of the year causing trouble where necessary.

On that note, late last year I read Tim Winton's novel *Juice*, which is set many generations into the future, well after the social order we know is destroyed by global heating and climate catastrophes. Winton's main character is part of a secret army hunting down and killing the descendants of those who ran the gas, oil and coal companies of the present. It is part of the growing fiction genre known as cli-fi, and while none of us can predict the future, my guess is that our descendants will not live as comfortably as we do as they battle an increasingly hostile climate. That future of course is not too far away, considering this year's widespread and damaging fires and the most extraordinary floods south of Lorne. About a dozen cars were washed into the sea at Cumberland River alone, and others were seen floating down Wye River. Insurance will become increasingly expensive and harder to get, and that is why the Greens are calling for polluters to pay for the damage done by the climate disasters they cause. Fossil fuel companies should pay up. I do recommend Tim Winton's book, but I must emphasise the Greens want them to pay with money, not blood. But of course I cannot speak for our descendants.

#### **Jan Kennedy Awards**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (09:59): Each year I have the privilege of presenting the Jan Kennedy Award to community-minded students from schools across the Glen Waverley district. It is always inspiring to see the leadership, generosity and civic spirit of young people in our community. I congratulate this year's recipients Claire Zheng, Emme Lin, Felix Philips, Gabrielle Andrews, Ishita Singh, Krish Bhojna, Loretta Nervosa, Mary Elise Cheah, Max Barter, Michael Bilton-Roos, Olivia

Phillips, Rose Bele, Sadheesha Guneseekara, Stephanie Konstantokopoulos and Zachary Corga. Each of these students has demonstrated a genuine commitment to their school communities, and they should be incredibly proud of their achievements.

#### **Saraswati Puja**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (09:59): On another matter, I was delighted to attend the Saraswati Puja celebrations hosted by the Bengali Association of Victoria. Celebrating education, the arts and culture, it was a wonderful reflection of the rich cultural life of Glen Waverley. I thank president Narayan Banerjee and the BAV team for their warm invitation.

#### **Tamil community**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (10:00): I also extend my thanks to Siva and everyone involved in delivering another outstanding Tamil Festival Australia. From the music and dance to the food, workshops and rides, it was a fantastic day for families. I wish our local Tamil community a very happy Thai Pongal, and I look forward to celebrating this important harvest festival here in Parliament tomorrow.

#### **Joint Australian Rorwali Grand Association**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (10:00): Finally, I was pleased to attend the cricket tournament hosted by the Joint Australian Rorwali Grand Association. Their skill and sportsmanship on display were impressive. Led by president Irshard Khan, JARGA continues to bring together Pashtun communities from across Melbourne. I was proud to inform the members they were successful in securing \$7500.

#### **Hawthorn electorate volunteers**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (10:00): Following the Christmas, new year and Australia Day period of celebrations, I would like to acknowledge and thank the extraordinary volunteers across my electorate of Hawthorn who gave up their time over this period to support those in need in our community. This period can be a challenging time for many families, and once again my community stepped up with generosity, kindness and quiet determination. Through my Hawthorn community Christmas drive hundreds of items were donated: toys, books, food, clothing and household essentials, all generously given by local residents and businesses who simply wanted to help their neighbours. These donations were distributed to and through a number of outstanding local organisations, including Hawthorn Community Chest, Boroondara Community Outreach, the Salvation Army Camberwell, It's the Little Things Community, Servants Community Housing, Camcare and local Scout groups. These organisations and their volunteers work tirelessly to ensure that support reaches individuals and families who need it most. I also want to recognise the remarkable efforts of frontline volunteers, from food relief to hamper packing to community barbecues and outreach services, who give up their own time to care for others. Their work reminds us that our community is not an abstract concept. It is built day by day by people who choose to show up, lend a hand and look out for one another. To every volunteer who helped make this period a little brighter in the electorate of Hawthorn, thank you. Our community is stronger because of you.

#### **Australia Day**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (10:02): Last Monday I joined the Maryborough and Carisbrook communities for their Australia Day celebrations. Today we saw 13 proud locals become Australian citizens and dozens of new babies celebrated with medallions. Across Ripon so many incredible local heroes and groups were honoured with Australia Day awards. I would like to congratulate each and every one of them. In Central Goldfields shire, congratulations to Citizen of the Year Nick Weaver, Young Citizen of the Year Harriet Thoroughgood and Community Award of the Year the Goldfields Community Festival. In the Pyrenees shire, congratulations to joint citizens of the year Jane Graham and Ben Curnow, Young Citizen of the Year Felicity Rentsch and community Event of the Year

Beaufort CWA's Anzac Day field of poppies. In the Northern Grampians shire, congratulations to joint citizens of the year Len and Bev Reid, young citizens of the year Isobel Green, Zarleya Hutchinson and Maria Taylor and Senior Citizen of the Year Des Richards. In the Loddon shire, congratulations to Citizen of the Year Robyn Vella and Young Citizen of the Year Oscar Holt. In Ararat, congratulations to joint citizens of the year Judy Price and Lisa Heard, Young Citizen of the Year Peta Chaplin, Community Leader of the Year Robert Keith and Volunteer of the Year Ararat Cemetery Trust. In the Golden Plains shire, congratulations to joint senior community heroes of the year Gerda Ross and her late great husband Dennis Ross and joint Community Group Award winner the Linton Emergency Food Relief Pantry. Each of these individuals and groups contribute so much to our region, and I am immensely proud of all of them.

#### **Iranian community**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:03): I want to express my solidarity with our Victorian Iranian community, particularly the large number of Iranian Australians who live in the Box Hill electorate. Over the last six weeks we have seen awful images and heard terrible stories emerging from the streets of Iran as the Iranian regime has brutally cracked down on its local population. Many local families are having to deal with the trauma of not knowing the whereabouts of loved ones or having loved ones detained or killed, with demands for money being made to secure their release. The Iranian people are a proud people and continue cultural traditions that have existed for thousands of years. They are highly educated members of our community who have made new lives in Australia, with success in all disciplines, and contribute to community activities, including Box Hill's own Persian Fair. The vast majority came to Australia to escape the regime, and all share the same vision that the Iranian people determine and shape the destiny of their own country.

#### **Lunar New Year**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:04): I would like to warmly wish a very happy Year of the Horse to everyone in the Box Hill community who will be celebrating this special occasion over the next few weeks. Lunar New Year is celebrated across many cultures, including Chinese and Vietnamese communities across South and South-East Asia, and it is a time to come together with family, honour traditions and look ahead with hope. As we welcome the new year, we celebrate shared values, renewal, resilience, respect and unity and the spirit of moving forward together. To everyone celebrating across the Box Hill community, I wish you good health, happiness and prosperity in the year ahead.

#### **Country Fire Authority Bass electorate brigades**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:05): More than 200 fires in the landscape, communities threatened, homes and structures burnt, beautiful life lost, livestock killed – the speed, the scale and the destruction not seen before. Thank you to all CFA firefighters, forest fire teams, support agencies and locals who worked day and night and continue on. Community at their heart, they dropped everything to help, support, protect. They are the best of us. In our Bass electorate brigade members from Pearcedale to Pound Creek formed strike teams deployed to Longwood, Eildon, Tallangatta, Dargo, Meredith and Rhyll. We are yet to gather all names; herewith are those for the record today: Tooradin – Tony Riley, Cameron Devenny, Jason Smetham, Ian Trueman, Dan Mantel, Darren Schmidt, David Bulman, Simon Judge; Clyde – Ian Earl, Leticia Presta Miller, Aden Foster, Blake Elliot, Brett Moore Carter, Tegan Emery, Nathaniel Morton and Lee Bostock; Lang Lang – Derek and Jordan Hichisson, Dean Birkbeck, Dean Kenneth, Marc Burton Walter, Amy Bardwell, Darren Hanisch, Tim Brooks, Sean Dawson; Phillip Island – John Pitman, Matthew Grogan, Rhyce Davis, Richard Davis, Timothy Anderson, Alex Dickson, Wayne Carter, Georgia Anderson, Kyle Murdoch, Simon Furniss, Steve O'Brien, Garry Thompson, Pete Gray, Joe Myall and Terry Quarrell; Kilcunda – David Wingfield, Daniel Murdoch, Allan Richardson and John Westby; Corinella – Dave Cox, Alex Conway and Dylan Styles; Inverloch – Matt King and Rob Higgins; and my Pound Creek colleagues

Anne Davis, Tania Frank, Julian Walker, Carlo Fasolino, Chris Buxton, Merv Mee, and Mark Pardoe. Heartfelt gratitude. Thank you for your exemplary service, commitment and camaraderie.

#### **Tim Picton**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:06): I rise to acknowledge the passing of Tim Picton, who was well known to this place through his contribution to Victorian politics and the broader Australian Labor Party. Tim died as the result of an allegedly violent and unprovoked attack that occurred outside a Perth nightclub on 27 December at 5:30 am. I think it is important to say that Tim was actually someone who was very comfortable smoking Winfields outside a nightclub at 5:30 am. He was someone who for a long time had a bit of a Jim Morrison, young Bob Hawke kind of vibe to him. He was charismatic, he was iconoclastic; he liked people and people liked him. But his great magic was that he would then walk into the office or onto the campaign trail, and he would be the same person, but he had this extraordinary drive and determination. He was effective and he was competitive in a real team captain sort of way. He brought people with him, and he had achieved more at age 36 than most of us will achieve in our lifetimes. At his memorial were two premiers, the Prime Minister and 680 of us who all thought we were amongst his closest friends. Our thoughts are with his brother Chris, his sister Jo, his wife Priya and their four-year-old daughter Charlotte. People say 'Rest in peace' or 'Vale' at these occasions, but I do not think Tim was ready for that, and so I will just say that we will miss him, we will miss what he was and we will miss what he would have been.

#### **Monbulk electorate schools**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:08): Welcome back to a new year. Can you believe it is already February? A hearty welcome to the new school year to all the students across the hills and foothills, especially the preppies embarking on the beginning of their 13-year journey through their primary and secondary school system, and our year-12s, who are starting their final year. There were several last first-day breakfasts happening across the hills that I was aware of, and I think there was a bit of excitement there. I wish every student much joy, success and learning for the year ahead. And I send all my best to their dedicated teachers and staff at their great schools. Our teachers do an excellent job of encouraging, facilitating and guiding the learning of our future generations. Here is to a great year for them too.

#### **Monbulk District Community Awards**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:08): Late last year I had the pleasure of awarding one student per graduating year level at a number of our local primary and secondary schools a Monbulk District Community Award, recognising a student who demonstrated exceptional kindness and community service within their school and beyond. I am pleased to place on the record the following recipients by first name and initial surname: Eastern Ranges School, Ryan F; Emerald Secondary, Emily D; Monbulk College, Ebony E; St Joseph's, Hayden N; Sherbrooke Community School, Mariam G; Upwey High, Emily M; Billanook Primary, Rhys B; Cockatoo Primary, Connor G; Gembrook Primary, Nathan A; St Paul's, Ella R; Upwey Primary, Jasper F; Upwey South Primary, Finn N. I have a number of school visits coming up to hand out leadership awards, and I have to say I love attending these ceremonies. The pride you see is simply the best. The future is bright indeed.

#### **Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Queenscliff flotilla**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:09): Congratulations to the Queenscliff coastguard for the fabulous community open day that they had to celebrate their 50 years of service and their new marine rescue vessel.

*Statements on parliamentary committee reports***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates*

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (10:10): It is indeed a joy to contribute to today's committee reports discussion. My contribution will be based in large part on the report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, specifically chapter 4 relating to the Department of Education and item 4.1, which is the overview part, which says that one of the objectives of the Department of Education is in fact to provide equitable and inclusive schooling to all Victorian students. That is an eminently sensible pursuit of the Department of Education; it is the right pursuit for the Department of Education. But it came to my attention over the summer that there has been now exposed quite a significant hindrance to that aspiration being achieved. I refer specifically to the private information of students past and present within our state system being leaked, being accessed by people who should not access it, exposing the Department of Education's systems to third-party actors, perhaps foreign actors – people who wish to do our students harm, people who wish to do our state's reputation harm, and people who seek to potentially interfere in our democratic values and democratic processes. The great tragedy of this is that it has happened on this government's watch.

I do note that the Minister for Education Minister Carroll, the Deputy Premier, did make comments on 15 January to a number of news outlets – 7News, the *Age* and the *Herald Sun* – all largely consistent comments. The minister said, and I am happy to provide this to Hansard for their information as well:

“The safety, privacy and security of students, staff and families remains our absolute priority ...

Parents and students have been provided with information and guidance on how schools are managing the situation ahead of the return to school.”

All of that may be true. All of that might be the right thing to do, and I do not disagree that it is the right thing to do. But we have not heard from the minister since. We have not heard from the minister what the scope of this data breach has been, which students have been affected, whether they are past students or present students, or what information has been accessed. So, yes, I am aware that general communications from the Department of Education have gone out and have been disseminated amongst Victorian government schools, as is the right approach. But since that happened, and since the minister made this statement on 15 January, there have been no further communications that I am aware of to past or present students that have been impacted to identify for them what information has been hacked and what they should do about that, and that is an absolute and utter disgrace.

I felt so strongly about this that I wrote to the Victorian information commissioner asking them to investigate the circumstances leading to the breach, the nature of the information stolen, when the breach occurred, when the Department of Education found out about the breach, whether the data protection policies and practices of the Department of Education are adequate, whether or not the post-incident disclosure actions of the department represent best practice and, finally, the involvement of the Minister for Education's office, including notification and management of the data breach. I am pleased to inform the house that the Victorian information commissioner wrote to me later that week saying that he accepted the principles outlined in my letter – the principle of undertaking an investigation – and in fact the Victorian information commissioner would undertake an investigation into this serious data breach.

I am confident that the Victorian information commissioner, as an independent officer of this Parliament, will do the right thing – will investigate this matter thoroughly. We will provide recommendations. What I am seeking from the government is an assurance that they will take the recommendations provided by the Victorian information commissioner seriously and that they will act upon those recommendations seriously. It is unacceptable that Victorian students' information has been leaked in this way and exposed in this way. I make the correspondence I referred to in my

contribution available to the house, and I encourage the Minister for Education and this government to do so much better.

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:15): I align myself with the words of the member for Preston in recognising Tim Picton and his family earlier in his members statement. I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into fraud and corruption control in local government, a follow-up of two Auditor-General reports. I know listeners will be very keen to understand what those Auditor-General reports were. They were of course audit report 40, *Fraud and Corruption Control: Local Government* of 2019, and audit report 316, *Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants* in 2022. You will be glad to hear that of those reports, even though they were limited in their scope on the number of councils that they looked at, those recommendations have in the main been undertaken and completed by councils. But that is limited to those councils that were looked at in these Auditor-General reports, not the broader local government sector, which is the guts of the report that we have delivered.

I would like to acknowledge the chair of the committee Sarah Connolly, the member for Laverton. We appreciate all the work that you do.

**A member** interjected.

**Mathew HILAKARI**: I will make sure, Deputy Speaker, that I do use titles as appropriate in this place. That is why I acknowledge Nicholas McGowan, the deputy chair from the other place, member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. One thing: I did see Mr McGowan this morning in Queen's Hall, and I did note that I have always appreciated his good humour, candour and engagement on this committee, which is something that I hope all deputy chairs aspire to on their committees as well.

The chair provided a terrific foreword to this report, and I would like to quote from it. This report had 31 recommendations and 58 findings; there was a lot of meat in this report. The chair said:

Fraud and corruption controls are the quiet machinery of integrity. When controls are weak, allowing fraud and corruption to occur, the consequences reach far beyond Council offices; they erode public confidence, weaken financial management, and diminish the standing of local government itself.

I think that encapsulates it very well, so I thank the chair for providing those very starting words, because we all know how important local government is. We all know how difficult it is when local government goes wrong and how much our communities feel it, because local government is so close to people and the services that they need on a regular basis. As I said earlier, on the 2019 and 2022 reports by the Auditor-General, we found that the implementation had been successful of these reports – limited in scope and number of councils as they were. Those audits at the time, however, had identified serious weaknesses in oversight, transparency and prevention of fraud and corruption at the local government level. That is a sector issue, which has been dealt with by some in the sector but not the sector as a whole.

During the hearings themselves one thing that we noted of significance was the real challenges of rural and regional councils in delivering the protections that the community deserves and the ratepayers deserve, and this is a systemic barrier. It is something for all of us in this place to consider, that the size of councils has prevented them from doing some of the work that they need to do in preventing fraud and corruption. We did hear, from a number of CEOs of those people who assisted councils with those protections, that there was a challenge in both providing those services in the time that they had on any given day but also in getting the quality staff that they needed, particularly in rural and regional areas, those staff with the skills and the training and the aptitude to provide the services to those

councils where, in the main, councils are working very hard to achieve these outcomes and to protect the finances of the community.

A reoccurring theme in the inquiry, as the chair noted, was the need for stronger coordination, leadership and legislative compliance. That is a challenge to this place, that the legislative compliance was not always up to date and in line with the legislation passed here, and it is something that we need to be mindful of going forward in the legislation that we implement but also how we seek to ensure that it is complied with. I am running out of time, but this is, as I said, a lengthy report with 31 recommendations and 58 findings. I look forward to going into more depth on a future occasion.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates*

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (10:20): I would like to speak to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2024–25 budget estimates report from October 2024, and I would like to specifically highlight today matters regarding the Department of Transport and Planning specifically related to the public and active transport portfolio. There are aspects within this report which reflect upon the regional rail revival program, and I would like to give an update to the house on some of the issues that this project is presenting, particularly to the agricultural and the freight community.

There is a proposal at the moment that there will be a removal of the rail crossover at Sunshine. For the freight industry, this is an essential crossover that enables freight from the west of Victoria to get to port in an effective and efficient way. The removal of these rail crossovers will add a minimum of 45 minutes to each freight route. This is something that will cost additional time, which of course is more money, which will be passed on to reduce the margins for our grain growers and other growers in the west of the state. That is the bad news, and the very bad news is that the line that the freight will be diverted to has extremely limited capacity, which means that there will be likely congestion issues along that line. While the best case scenario is an additional 45 minutes for each route, the problem is that that is only if you can get a slot, so this could be absolutely catastrophic for the freight industry and particularly for our growers, who rely on getting their food and produce to market effectively. It will put additional pressure on our growers financially, but it may push some out of business, whether it is some of our growers, whether it is the people who are involved along that supply chain and freight chain or whether it is the freight companies themselves. I urge the government to immediately review the business case and the impacts of these rail crossover removals, because it could have a significant impact on freight and the agricultural sector in Victoria.

The committee report also reflects upon additional rail services, and it would be remiss of me not to mention that in the west of Victoria we have no rail services. In fact what we have to support the Overland rail service has been neglected by the Allan Labor government. In fact all of our toilets at public rail stations across the state have been shut up. I heard of a horrific story recently where a pregnant woman who was waiting for the Overland in Horsham had to do a bush wee because the toilets at the station were locked. This is something that has been raised by Horsham Rural City Council. The community have raised it. It is an issue that is not just at Horsham; it is also an issue at Stawell. It is an issue along the line through to Nhill as well, which has been raised. We have got the services there, we have got the facilities; can we just make sure they are cleaned once a week or that there is a way for people to access them, because it is a waste of resources to say, 'There's a toilet there. We're going to keep it locked the whole time.'

When we speak to additional rail services, of course we need to absolutely push on that there is an opportunity to return passenger rail to the west of the state. There is a huge influx of jobs that are being created around the Wimmera region, and that needs to be supported by access to public transport services. There certainly is the demand to support rail services to the west of the state, from Ararat through to at least Horsham, if not looking also from Ararat down along the Maroona line to Portland. This could be achieved by adjustable bogies on train sets that mean they could travel between broad gauge and standard gauge, which seems to be an impossible barrier for this government to consider

looking at. It is not an expensive solution. It is something that should be delivered and should be considered.

While we look at it, we need to look at additional bus services as well in the Grampians region: Halls Gap to Pomonal, the Halls Gap Zoo and the floor of the valley in the Grampians. Sandlant have been offering a service to Halls Gap. They would like a variation and to expand their services into that area to support our local people to access their towns but also to support visitors who are coming to the area.

I cannot go past the issue around our school bus services. I condemn the Allan Labor government for their horrific handling of cutting the school bus lines in and around Casterton. Kids were left abandoned and stranded in the morning because the families were not notified that the pick-up point had changed. We now have buses travelling on incredibly dangerous roads. We have got kids travelling more than 2 hours on a bus. It needs to be reviewed.

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria*

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:25): It is my distinct pleasure to speak on the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. At the outset, I would like to acknowledge our wonderful committee, led by our great chair the member for Wendouree and deputy chair the member for Morwell. I would also like to give my thanks to the other members of our committee, the members for Ripon, Bass, Croydon and Narracan. This is a committee that has consistently worked together to get to the root of the matter we inquired upon and delve deeply to proffer recommendations for improvement. It is a delight to be part of this committee, which always seeks to find solutions to the matters at hand for the betterment of Victorians in the most bipartisan of ways.

Our final report, which was tabled last November, contains 12 findings and 34 recommendations, all with the view of addressing the housing challenges facing regional communities. This report could not have been made possible without the hard work and dedication provided by the ever-professional committee secretariat. As our chair did in her report to this place, I would like to commend the great work of our committee managers Igor Dosen, who has moved on, and Dr Marianna Stylianou, research officer Samantha Leahy and administrative officers Imogen Bacon and Helen Ross-Soden, who returned after parental leave. Their research and evidence gathering, report writing and stakeholder management is second to none. Thanks to them all. Thanks must also go to everyone who contributed to our inquiry through written submissions, by attending public hearings or by allowing us to visit their worksites. The insights we gained from them all made this report possible.

With only a few minutes to speak, I want to highlight some of the key findings of our inquiry. Firstly, regional Victoria's expanding population is increasing housing demand. People are moving to the regions, and this is driving up costs and worsening already low rental vacancy rates. An ageing population and growth in lone person and couple households are increasing demand for smaller homes close to essential services. Not everyone needs a three- or four-bedroom home anymore, so a mix of housing is absolutely important and required here. Another finding was that housing stock in regional Victoria is underutilised and mismatched to household needs. As I have just mentioned, this is due to large homes, an ageing population, growth in short-stay accommodation and demand being driven up, with affordability being reduced.

We heard some distressing stories, which led to another finding: Aboriginal Victorians face greater difficulty accessing secure housing due to larger household size, income inequality and systemic racism. It was very upsetting to hear how difficult it can be for Aboriginal Victorians to secure rentals, and there is definitely racism inherent within the system. That was reflected in many contributions that came to us from them. If there is something we really need to address, it is that problem, which continues, unfortunately, even in the 2020s.

Another finding was that property prices in regional Victoria have risen sharply, up 40 to 50 per cent in five years, while home ownership rates have declined. Low rental vacancy rates have been intensifying competition, driving up rents across regional communities. The supply of new homes is not keeping pace with demand, hindered by limited infrastructure and serviced land, high construction costs, low valuations and financing barriers. Demand for social housing is increasing faster than new supply despite our great Big Housing Build delivering new and refurbished homes. Housing stress and insecurity in the regions are also rising, and housing shortages disproportionately impact vulnerable groups, including young people, Aboriginal Victorians – as I mentioned before – older people, recent migrants, people who might be experiencing mental illness or have disability and those experiencing family violence.

Caravan and residential parks actually play a really important and often overlooked role in providing affordable housing and community connection, especially for older regional Victorians. We did go and visit one of those caravan parks, and it was quite interesting to look at this situation. There were a number of very interesting site visits that we undertook, even just looking at different construction materials and methodologies. As we modernise in many other ways in life, so too does the construction industry need to do so. I know many in my committee have heard me bang on about hemp as a building material, but it is an incredible material and I just want to put on the record that something that can go from basically being planted to being harvested and ready to be turned into a building material in 100 days is something that I think the industry needs to look closer at and pay more attention to. It is also highly flameproof, so I would love to see most of my buildings clad in it eventually across the Dandenong Ranges.

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria*

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (10:30): I too wish to speak this morning on the *Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria* report, which the member for Monbulk contributed on, but I probably have a slightly different view to the member for Monbulk on the issues surrounding the supply of homes in regional Victoria. There is no doubt there is a housing crisis in regional Victoria, and the seat of Polwarth is no exception. We have a housing supply shortage along our coastal fringe, where land prices are very expensive and hilly bushland along the Otway Ranges makes it difficult to develop new homes. We then have the inland towns – Winchelsea, Colac and others – which should be providing a fantastic opportunity for families to live, work and play. The centre of Polwarth is well connected with rail services; nonetheless they are overcrowded and run poorly and the stations are falling down. Apart from that, there is potential there for a future Liberal government to actually improve public transport to the regions.

However, the point is that the land is just not being developed at a price that people can afford. It is quite insane in this day and age that the cheapest parcel of land that will come to market in my electorate is around \$192,000. That is for a very small parcel of land coming on the market soon. You can still get house-and-land packages for just under \$600,000. That is a huge increase. The question this government has not answered on the supply of homes in regional Victoria is: why is there such a large embedded cost in the land? Land in regional Victoria is not subject to large multinational companies bidding tens of thousands of dollars against each other for high sales growth corridors. They are actually parcels of land that have often been owned by individuals for a long time, and they can come to market much more affordably. That is the competitive advantage that regional Victoria should have.

Why isn't that happening? It is not happening, because windfall gains tax now exists. Windfall gains tax is basically almost doubling the price to market of a parcel of land because, unlike in fast-growing metropolitan areas, a relatively small hundred-block subdivision in a rural and regional town could take a decade or more to sell just on volume. That is a huge holding cost. That cost is being borne by the developer. That adds to the cost of the home. We have got the situation where many of our country

towns have not had major infrastructure upgrades, such as power, such as sewerage, such as water. All these services need to be expanded. Those costs are being directly borne by those new home owners. Our once progressive water authorities and power agencies – which once actually used electricity, water and other services to grow and expand communities – no longer have that as their impetus for being, so they are not being proactive. That is missing.

This report does not identify the way that the government can work more proactively with the private sector to unleash land. We have, for example, many recommendations here on how we can have more inclusive zoning and how we can have more social and public housing. They are all good aspects. The government can continue to do that. The reality is in rural and regional Victoria more than 60 per cent of people still want to own and live in their own home. That is an aspiration we should be encouraging. We should be working very closely with people to ensure it happens. The only way that happens is by bringing the average cost of a home back into a bracket that average families can afford to buy. Recent KPMG reporting makes it very clear that the mean for the whole state sees the average affordability for a young family at around \$800,000. That is the average. Out in rural and regional Victoria that is considerably less and probably much closer to the \$600,000 mark. That is at the top end of what it costs to bring a house to market in rural and regional areas, and it should not cost that much.

I also want to quickly touch on the fallacy of the Airbnb tax. Much is made by many in this chamber from time to time that an Airbnb tax is somehow going to make homes more affordable. It is simply not. In my electorate, where the whole coastline is dominated by people who own a second residence, they are in most cases never going to bring that property to market for long-term rental. It is a family asset, one that they use for holidays and for short-term rentals, and it is never going to be the same. The government knows that and is cheekily using that trait of property owners to increase taxes and add costs. What it has failed to do is work with local communities about where you can put and build affordable homes that people who live and work in coastal communities can actually move into. The focus has been on taxing the rich and not working with those who actually need a home in a place that they can afford and one that is achievable. This report has fallen well short of the mark.

### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (10:35): In rising I would just like to begin by echoing the words of the member for Preston in respect to the late Tim Picton, who was a great friend to all of us. I rise to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors, which tabled its report in March 2024. In doing so I acknowledge and commend the Victorian government for its official response to the report on 4 December, outlining its support for the report's 41 recommendations. As a result of the committee's good work and of course the Victorian government and the Minister for Health, whom I acknowledge and thank for her work, we will now be making it easier for Victorians to register as organ and tissue donors because every registration can help save a life.

In Victoria the number of deceased organ donors and lives saved was the highest in the nation in 2024, reflecting the generosity of Victorians and their families and the dedication of specialist staff who facilitate compassionate conversations to save and transform lives across our community. However, in the past three years the proportion of Victorians registered as donors has decreased, with the state's registration rate on the Australian Organ Donor Register now lower than the national average, reaffirming the need for urgent action to increase these numbers. It also tests the efforts of donation specialist staff at the Victorian health services engaging with donor families and facilitating compassionate and meaningful conversations, ultimately driving those successful donation outcomes. However, increasing the number of registered donors has been a challenge since the COVID-19 pandemic, with a downward trend persisting in Victoria and most Australian states and territories over

the last three years. Without the gift of organ donation, many Australians would simply not get that second chance at life.

The Victorian government is absolutely committed, through its response to this report, to improving health care and saving lives through increased organ and tissue donation registration rates. The government's response outlined support for 17 of the inquiry's recommendations in full, with a further 24 supported either in principle or in part, to boost Victoria's registered donation numbers. I would like to draw the house's attention to a couple of those significant parts of the responses that the Labor government will take immediate action on to expand donor registration pathways, including updating Victoria's drivers licence system to prompt and direct people to sign up to the Australian Organ Donor Register. We will be providing links to the registration website. It also will be added across several Service Victoria cards, including for those applying for a digital drivers licence from mid-2026, this year. This is in addition of course to the recent launch of a dedicated information page on the Service Victoria app and website to connect users directly to DonateLife's registration website.

The government has committed to boosting community awareness in areas where there are low donor rates and supporting specialist staff to facilitate those compassionate and culturally appropriate conversations with Victorians. The government will, in principle, work to help keep building capacity for DonateLife and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to continually improve the recruitment and retention of organ and tissue donor specialists. The government supports Victoria's Department of Health and DonateLife Victoria to work with the Organ and Tissue Authority to improve public reporting of donation specialist training, including by publishing jurisdictional level data about attendance and effectiveness of family donation conversation workshops. The government will advocate to the Australian government for additional Organ and Tissue Authority funding to increase awareness campaigns about organ tissue donation that use postcode data to target localities with low registration rates and tailor messaging based on that demographic data. The government has said it will support in full and will consult with DonateLife on undertaking targeted awareness campaigns about organ and tissue donation using Victorian registration and demographic data and publicly reporting the effectiveness of the activities undertaken. The government will ensure that all avenues it uses to promote organ tissue donor registration include, where possible, personal stories from donor recipients and donor families as well as content to dispel myths and misconceptions about donation and encourage people to discuss donation with their family.

The government's response is part of the ongoing work to improve donation and transplantation outcomes, which also includes the Organ and Tissue Authority strategy 2022–2027. The government's response also builds on and responds to the work of the Parliamentary Friends of Transplant Australia's work and advocacy, which has remained committed to supporting and advancing the bipartisan recommendations from this parliamentary inquiry to increase the number of registered donors across respective Victorian communities. I was very proud to co-found that with the member for Euroa from the other side. I acknowledge the Minister for Health for her fantastic support of the parliamentary friends group as well as the member for St Albans and so many other colleagues who are members of that organ donation group: Transplant Australia; Organ and Tissue Authority representatives; DonateLife; Dr Raj Khillan and Dr Preeti Khillan, who do magnificent work with our multi communities; and Aayushi Khillan from Body Buddies too.

**Bills****Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026***Statement of compatibility*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:41): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026 (the Bill).

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

**Overview**

The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* to require distribution companies to prepare network resilience plans and to provide for the approval and enforcement of those plans, and to amend the provisions of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Gas Industry Act 2001* to provide increased flexibility for the setting of retailer obligations to life support customers.

The Bill also makes amendments to the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* relating to renewable energy zones, to provide greater flexibility for the content of REZ orders and REZ scheme declarations, as well as other clarifying amendments to support the transfer of functions from AEMO to VicGrid. These amendments refine specific existing provisions in the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*, they do not engage relevant human rights.

The definition of major transmission infrastructure is amended to clarify the scope for VicGrid to make payments to certain landholders who host transmission infrastructure on their land, from 2025 and after. This arrangement will be by agreement between VicGrid and any person affected, this clarification does not engage relevant human rights.

Section 16Y of the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* is amended by the Bill to provide that Orders made under that section are not to be considered a decision in relation to works for the purposes of section 8C of the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. This amendment in the Bill is limited to dealing with the procedure for making such a decision, rather than the substantive effects of such a decision and therefore may engage but does not limit property rights.

The Bill also amends the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*, to allow for changes to the Self-Determination Fund to ensure the fund can have more than one fund – including non-charitable investment vehicles – to ensure that payments to Traditional Owners can be used for non-charitable purposes. In this way the Bill seeks to promote First Nations cultural rights through changes to the Self Determination Fund.

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

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- Right to life (section 9)
- Right to privacy (section 13)
- Cultural rights (section 19); and
- Right to property (section 20).

I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The provisions of the Bill relating to network resilience plans regulate distribution companies, which are corporate entities rather than natural persons. Corporate entities do not attract the human rights specified in the Charter. However, to the extent that those provisions, or other provisions in the Bill impact or may impact natural persons, the impact on their Charter rights is addressed below.

**Right to life (section 9)**

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Amendments in Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the Bill engage this right.

Part 2 of the Bill will amend the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* to introduce a framework to require distribution companies to prepare and comply with network resilience plans. This is likely to improve the resilience of Victoria's electricity networks and ensure more reliable power supply and reduced outage durations will enhance public health outcomes, especially during extreme weather events. These improvements will reduce the risk of heat and storm-related illnesses and fatalities, and ensure that essential services, like hospitals and aged care facilities, are better able to maintain power during emergencies, ultimately improving community safety and wellbeing.

Parts 3 and 4 of the Bill will amend definitions that support the life support frameworks in the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Gas Industry Act 2001* to provide flexibility to update these definitions to ensure the life support obligations can respond to changing policy and regulatory settings.

On this basis, I consider that the right to life is promoted by the Bill.

**Right to privacy (section 13)**

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

Certain clauses of the Bill may engage this right, including new section 120ZK to be inserted by clause 7, which requires a distribution company to comply with a written notice issued by Energy Safe Victoria requiring the company to give to Energy Safe Victoria information within its possession or control for the purpose of verifying the performance of the distribution company in complying with its network resilience plan. In addition, new sections 145AA and 145AAB, to be inserted by clause 9, enable Energy Safe Victoria and the AER to disclose information to one another, and to handle that information, where that information is required to perform their functions in relation to network resilience plans. The information handled under these new provisions may include personal information.

However, to the extent that the amendments in the Bill may interfere with the right to privacy, any interference with the right will not be unlawful or arbitrary because it will be done in accordance with the law as set out in the *Electricity Safety Act 1998*, with the legitimate purpose of supporting the administration and enforcement of the network resilience plan framework.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is not limited by the Bill.

**Cultural rights (section 19)**

Section 19(2) of the Charter provides that Aboriginal persons hold cultural rights and must not be denied the right to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs. The Charter provides protection for a person to exercise these rights with other members of their community.

Clause 31 amends section 35 of the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018* (Vic) to clarify that the Self-Determination Fund may constitute a fund or funds as agreed, and as varied from time to time by the parties to the Self-Determination Fund agreement. This will provide the Fund's flexibility to include different types of funds (not merely charitable) and enable Traditional Owners to apply these funds for broader community benefit, including economic development purposes. To the extent that this amendment engages cultural rights, it promotes the self-determination of Aboriginal persons by providing greater flexibility and autonomy in how funds received through the legislative scheme are disbursed and used.

On this basis, I consider that cultural rights are promoted by this amendment in the Bill.

**Right to property (section 20)**

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or the common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

'Property' under the Charter includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law, including contractual rights, leases and debts. A 'deprivation' of property may occur not just where there is a forced transfer or extinguishment of title, but where there is a substantial restriction on a person's use or enjoyment of their property. However, the right to property will only be limited where a person is deprived of property 'other than in accordance with the law'. For a deprivation of property to be 'in accordance with the law', the law must be publicly accessible, clear and certain, and must not operate arbitrarily. A broad,

discretionary power capable of being exercised arbitrarily or selectively may fail to satisfy these requirements. The concept of ‘arbitrariness’ as it relates to the Charter refers to something which is unjust, capricious, unpredictable, unreasonable or disproportionate.

Clause 8 of the Bill amends the power of entry in section 129 of the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* to expand the reasons for which an enforcement officer may enter any land or premises to search for a particular thing that may be evidence of the commission of an offence against this Act or the regulations to apply where there may be a thing that may be evidence of the contravention of a civil penalty provision included in relation to the network resilience framework. An enforcement officer can only enter and search land or premises with the informed consent of the occupier of the land or premises, or with a search warrant.

In my view, section 129 of the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* provides an accessible, clear, certain and precise legal framework that authorises the exercise of these powers. Therefore, to the extent that clause 8 may engage the right to property, any deprivation of property will be in accordance with the law and therefore I am satisfied that the right is not limited.

#### **Consideration of reasonable limitations**

I am satisfied that the Bill does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### **Conclusion**

I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**Hon Lily D’Ambrosio MP**

**Minister for Energy and Resources**

#### *Second reading*

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:41): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

#### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

##### **Resilience Reforms**

Victorian communities are increasingly vulnerable to prolonged power outages caused by extreme weather events. Climate change is driving more frequent and severe storms, heatwaves, bushfires, and floods. These events can damage electricity infrastructure and leave households and businesses without power for extended periods. The longer these outages last, the greater the impact on public safety, economic activity and the wellbeing of vulnerable communities.

We have seen this play out very recently in the devastating bushfires that occurred through much of the State in early January, as well as several extreme weather events, including storms in June and October 2021, and February 2024, that have served to reinforce how important it is that we take action to build resilience in energy networks and in our communities.

The 13 February 2024 storm damaged 12,000 km of powerlines and poles across the state’s electricity distribution network, causing power outages that impacted more than 529,000 homes and businesses at its peak.

The devastating storms of 9 June and 29 October 2021 left more than 230,000 Victorians without power. In our cities, outages lasted an average of 49 hours. In rural areas, some communities endured 84 days without electricity. These events exposed significant vulnerabilities in Victoria’s electricity distribution networks and highlighted the urgent need for stronger resilience measures.

In response to the 2021 storms events, I established the Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review Expert Panel in January 2022. The Panel found that while distribution businesses have taken some steps to strengthen their networks, further action is required to reduce the likelihood and consequences of prolonged outages. Communities made it clear that they expect more to be done to ensure networks are built and maintained to withstand the challenges of a changing climate.

This Bill delivers on that expectation. It creates a clear, legally enforceable obligation for distribution businesses to prepare and implement network resilience plans. These plans, which must be accepted by Energy Safe Victoria, will outline the measures businesses will take to prepare for and respond to severe

weather events. Examples include strengthening poles to withstand high winds, relocating assets from flood-prone areas, and deploying mobile generators to support affected communities.

The Bill also ensures that these obligations are enforceable. Stronger oversight and greater transparency will improve accountability and provide the Victorian community with confidence that resilience investments are being made and implemented effectively.

Civil penalties will apply where a business fails to comply with their obligations and Distribution businesses will be required to take all reasonable steps to implement the projects in their plans. This ensures that resilience measures are not only planned, but delivered.

For households, businesses and emergency services, this will mean a more reliable supply of electricity, better equipped to withstand the pressures of more frequent and extreme weather events. For government and taxpayers, it will reduce reliance on costly disaster recovery measures.

This Bill also modernises the life support provisions in the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and *Gas Industry Act 2001*. This delivers another recommendation from the Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review, supporting priority restoration of power following prolonged power outages. By linking life support definitions to those provided in an Order in Council, the framework can remain flexible and responsive ensuring it continues to meet the needs of Victorians who rely on life support equipment in their homes.

The reforms in this Bill represent a significant step forward in strengthening the resilience of Victoria's electricity networks. They will ensure that distribution businesses are better prepared for extreme weather events and that Victorian communities are better protected from the risks and impacts of prolonged outages.

With this Bill, Victoria is leading the nation in embedding resilience planning into the regulation of electricity distribution networks. This Government is committed to building a safer, fairer and more resilient energy system and is taking the action needed to protect Victorians, particularly our most vulnerable, from the challenges that climate change brings.

#### Victorian Energy Upgrades program reforms

The Bill also makes amendments to repeal Part 4 of the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Act 2025*. While Part 4 was originally intended to strengthen existing offence provisions and key definitions in the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007*, subsequent policy analysis has shown that these changes would unintentionally exclude a key business model responsible for delivering a substantial share of Victorian Energy Upgrades program activities.

Repealing Part 4 before its automatic commencement on 18 March 2026 will protect the stability and effectiveness of the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. By retaining the current offences relating to prescribed activities and the definitions of scheme participant and regulated action, this will ensure that key business models can continue to operate and participate in the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. Therefore, Victorians can continue accessing energy efficient upgrades without disruption, and the program can further contribute to our state's energy efficiency and emissions reduction goals.

#### VicGrid Reforms

Coal-fired power stations are closing and are becoming less reliable. Victoria is leading the nation as we transition to renewable energy and deliver reliable energy to Victorian consumers. Supporting this is VicGrid's new approach to planning renewable energy zones and transmission infrastructure, putting community at the core in the delivery of the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework. The Bill clarifies several of the Government's VicGrid reforms enacted in 2024 and 2025.

The Bill clarifies the application of landholder benefit payments under Part 7 of the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* to new major transmission projects created in or after 2025, to ensure eligible landholders are recognised for their important contribution to the energy transition.

VicGrid is overseeing the introduction of a new transmission access regime to coordinate new energy projects, provide certainty for investors and developers, and ensure meaningful engagement with communities, Traditional Owners and landholders.

To support the effective implementation of renewable energy zones and the new access regime in Victoria, the Bill introduces some flexibility to the making of Renewable Energy Zone Orders and assessment of Renewable Energy Zone Scheme authorities. First, the Bill will allow for renewable energy zones to be declared where there is existing sufficient transmission infrastructure or where there is not yet a proposed transmission project in the planning horizon. Second, the Bill will enable VicGrid to adopt the most appropriate method for assessing and issuing REZ scheme authorities, based on the characteristics of the renewable energy zone, the nature of projects seeking to connect and market interest.

The Bill introduces a new head of power for the Governor in Council to make regulations to replace the substantial constraint test in the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* with an alternative assessment

process that builds on previous reforms that require developers to meet government expectations for community engagement and deliver social value and economic benefits. This will enable a limited class of transitional projects at the advanced development stage (including Capacity Investment Scheme projects) to progress, helping to secure Victoria's renewable energy generation needs.

The Bill makes minor technical amendments to ensure VicGrid is notified when control of a declared Transmission System Operator changes so that it can undertake its transmission planning functions.

The Bill also provides that a Ministerial Order under section 16Y of the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* should not be taken to be a decision in relation to works for the purposes of section 8C of the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. This ensures all environmental and statutory planning controls are addressed before major construction begins.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:42): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 18 February.**

### **Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025**

#### *Extension of scope*

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

That the scope of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 be extended to enable consideration of amendments to the Crimes Act 1958 to provide that the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions is not required for a police officer to commence a prosecution for an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) of that act unless the accused is under the age of 18 years.

Last year this government passed nation-leading anti-vilification and social cohesion laws, and these laws were designed very squarely to crack down on people who seek to whip up racism and hatred against their fellow Victorians simply because of who they are, who they love or who they pray to. I want to acknowledge the many community leaders, advocates, legal experts and organisations who worked constructively with the government to ensure the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 passed this Parliament. Of course those laws did not pass this Parliament with the support of the opposition, and even after community leaders and faith leaders pleaded with those opposite to support these new laws, those opposite did not.

In the passage of these nation-leading reforms, an amendment was made to the bill in the Legislative Council. That amendment requires the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions before police can prosecute criminal vilification and hate conduct offences for alleged offenders over the age of 18. While we acknowledge that that amendment was very well intentioned, it has the real potential to delay hate crimes being heard by the courts. Requiring DPP consent before police can prosecute creates an additional step, and that can slow the path to justice for victims of hate-motivated offending. This government is very clear: people who spread antisemitism, racism and hatred must be held to account, and they must face justice as swiftly as possible and at the earliest opportunity. That is why we are proposing this amendment to restore the provision to its original form. Returning the bill to its original framework will ensure that police can act promptly and that hate-motivated offending is dealt with without unnecessary delay.

Following the tragic Bondi terrorist attack last year, the Premier committed as a matter of urgency to bringing new laws into this place to remove the requirement for DPP to consent to police prosecutions of criminal vilification, and that is the amendment that is being moved today. The Premier made this commitment to removing the amendment and effectively restoring the framework to its original provision because this government is absolutely committed to preventing extremism, combating antisemitism and keeping Victoria safe, strong and proud. Of course, as I said, we on this side of the

house believe that every Victorian, whoever they are, whoever they love, whoever they pray to, has every right to live free from hate and harm.

The amendment before the house today restores the framework to its original provision prior to the changes that were made in the Legislative Council, and that is all it does. Once the bill later today receives royal assent this change will take effect immediately and will apply retrospectively to capture alleged hate crimes that have occurred since 20 September last year, when our nation-leading anti-illicitification offences commenced. I commend the motion to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:46): Just for context and the clarity of the house, what the house is currently debating is a scope motion whereby the Attorney-General has moved a motion to expand the scope of the justice bill which we will be dealing with later today – in fact, I believe, next. The government's amendment we have as a coalition always supported. I do not want to talk in double negatives here, but we never wanted the DPP brought into the process, which was a change that was made to the original bill. However, we have concerns, and I move an amendment, only to this scope motion:

That the words 'unless the accused is under the age of 18 years' be omitted.

I would like to say to the house what that means is that what we are proposing to do is to slightly reduce the wording of the scope motion. There should be no mistake in thinking that what we are moving relates to the bill itself or the amendments that the government will move later today. As far as I am aware the government is yet to move those amendments formally in this chamber. All we are seeking to do by way of this scope motion is delete the exemption, as it were, for young people who are committing incitement to be exempt from that process of the DPP tick-off before action can occur. As I said, this amendment only relates to that scope motion.

I can also say that if my amendment were not successful, we certainly would not be opposing the broader scope motion in its original form. When it comes to the bill more generally, if the government were, as the Attorney has anticipated, to move an amendment, as has been shared with me outside the chamber, of course our position has always been that we felt the change, which occurred because of a deal with the Greens, should not have been put in place in the first place. We will not frustrate in any way of course in this chamber the bill and the amendment in relation to that. Without going into the substance of the broader bill, it would be fair to say that there is nothing else in the broader bill that is anything other than non-controversial. So I just reiterate that what we are currently debating is the justice bill being expanded, and this motion allows for that expansion so that amendments that the Attorney has foreshadowed can be inserted into that bill. We are as a coalition proposing to slightly reduce that scope in so much as not allowing, unless the accused is under the age of 18 years, that scope, because our concern is that police have confirmed there is a youth crime crisis for a start.

There is no doubt that incitement of someone who is of the age of 17 – a 17-year-old committing the act of incitement – should not be, frankly, given a free pass. What is concerning – the Attorney is welcome to correct me – is that there have been no instances under the new laws that have been taken through the courts as yet. Currently nobody, despite what we know is happening on the streets every single day, has been found guilty of incitement under those laws that I am aware of. The Attorney may wish to correct me if I am wrong, but there have not been any examples.

Clearly, with the government's amendment that is being moved today, the government has accepted – and I take it in absolute good faith – the amendment that the Attorney has foreshadowed in correcting that mistake in the original bill to take out the Director of Public Prosecutions tick-off, as it were. I accept that in goodwill. The coalition is foreshadowing right now that we will do nothing to frustrate that in the debate that is about to occur on that bill and the passage of that bill through this place. Of course we would not, because that has been our position all along. When it comes to this issue, though, the former Shadow Attorney was managing the bill initially and, I am sure, had a working relationship with the government. I know that the former Shadow Attorney took every opportunity to work in good faith. I would reiterate and say that when it comes to issues such as this, I hope that the Shadow

Attorney now and the Attorney can always deal with issues such as this outside the chamber in the first instance to try and develop policy that can get through the chamber, to put it simply. I would put on record that after making a request, the Attorney and her office have certainly done that in relation to these amendments, and I thank the Attorney for that discussion over recent days.

I have flagged that I am concerned about the loophole for under-18s. In a youth crime crisis, if a 17-year-old commits an act of incitement, I do not think there should be a loophole for that behaviour. We saw just yesterday the chamber come together to speak about the Bondi incident, which is one of the most horrific and tragic incidents in Australia's history, and within hours we had a bunch of feral animals on the front steps of Parliament writing inciting graffiti on our very steps. Just right across the steps of this building they were writing it. My understanding is – and I do intend to do more with this – that some of these animals are using chalk specifically because they know that as it is not a permanent marker, as it were, the police cannot charge them with the type of offence for which they deserve to be charged: a serious offence. This is what police are advising. Police are advising that when you use chalk, it is not of the permanency that, for example, paint would be charged for. This is what the police are advising. Do not shoot the messenger. Yesterday afternoon there was this horrible defacing of our very chamber within moments of or, in fact I am sure, whilst were debating a Bondi motion.

So I would say: why would we be seeking, when it comes to incitement, to say it is okay to incite if you are under 18? Why is it okay? What the government is arguing is that the DPP have to tick it off, but the practical effect is that under the new laws it has not happened. So there is a process that is being put in place where there are no examples of incitement under these new laws. No-one has been found guilty of incitement. Incitement is occurring every single day. Incitement was occurring on the front steps of this very Parliament yesterday while were dealing with a motion on Bondi. Incitement occurred on the steps of Parliament. Could it have been closer? It could not have been closer to this building. It was on the building that incitement occurred. There have been no instances where someone has been found guilty of incitement, and I would put to the chamber that it is because, frankly, the DPP mechanism does not work. It hamstring the entire process. I would say therefore: why would we say we want to hamstring circumstances where someone might be 17 and commit an act of incitement? If they are 17 and they commit an act of incitement, the police should be able to charge them. That is what should happen. They should be able to be charged. They should not have to go through a very longwinded weeks-long administrative process where the DPP ticks it off. That is all we are saying.

I would like to reiterate to the chamber that what we are considering now is not the amendment. To be very clear, it is not the amendment. The amendment has not yet been circulated. What we are amending is a scope motion which enables the government to move the amendment itself to the bill, which we will, I understand, be debating next. I would not want anybody to misunderstand what is occurring. This is simply a procedural motion that allows the scope of the bill to be expanded so an amendment can be introduced. As I have said, not only will we not be opposing the scope motion if my amendment were not to succeed, but in relation to the amendments, as the government, I understand, seeks to move in the bill, we will not be frustrating those or the bill in any way. I reiterate finally that my amendment simply removes from the scope motion 'unless the accused is under the age of 18 years' on the basis that when you are 16, when you are 17, you should not get a free pass for acts of incitement. Unfortunately, the DPP process does exactly that. We know from practice that the DPP tick-off process has resulted in not a single guilty finding of incitement, so the new laws are not working, and we accept the government is moving amendments this afternoon in recognition of that. What we are saying is incitement should not be dependent on age and people who are 17 years old should not get a free pass to commit acts of incitement.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (10:59): I am rising to speak on this motion to expand the scope of the bill that we are due to discuss later this day, the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. I just want to reflect on a few of the things that the member for Brighton has mentioned in moving his amendment to what the Attorney-General has put forward. The fantastic thing about Parliament is that we have receipts. I was going through *Hansard* from when this bill was

introduced into this house way back last year, and this sudden interest in the under-18 provision seems to be very new. In that debate only two members of this house mentioned under-18s or children. I did a bit of a fuzzy search on it, and in that the only member of the other side who spoke about the under-18 provision was the member for Eildon. The member for Eildon went to this provision without any kind of objection to the idea that the DPP should have a role with people under 18 being charged with these offences, stating that under-18 provision as if it was a given – and I am happy to be corrected by the member or those opposite later on. But it is really important that we do not frustrate having this scope for what will be the debate later on in this house around introducing this amendment, because having this kind of ability to be able to debate this amendment is really important.

I say that because we have seen a lot over this summer. We had our condolence motion yesterday about Bondi, where a lot was revealed about one of the ugliest, oldest forms of discrimination that we have seen in humanity in human history. Not only did we see what happened in Bondi, but we saw so many examples of vilification and hatred all throughout the summer, and in fact it is still continues. Over the summer the Islamic community in Wyndham has been subjected to graffiti attacks, and that graffiti – the member for Tarneit knows this because he has seen it, and unfortunately I have seen it too – was seeking to be funny, making light about sacred Islamic tenets. This was broadcast across social media, which is a bit of a bin fire, let us be honest. In that broadcasting I unfortunately opened up the comments and went through the comments, and in those comments, people were saying, ‘Oh, it’s meant to be a joke. Take it as a joke.’ Well, it is not a joke to the Islamic community, and I think it is particularly important to remember this, because when those opposite frustrated the passage of this bill through the houses last year –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural debate on a scope motion; it is not reiterating the debate on the original bill. I would ask the member to come back to this scope motion we are dealing with.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** I was conferring with the clerks at that immediate point, but I was listening to the debate up until that point, and the member for Werribee was being germane to the motion. I just encourage the member for Werribee to ensure he remains safe.

**John LISTER:** I am speaking towards the process that we have taken to get to where we are today, which I think is particularly important in considering this scope motion and the reason why we have to do this. The provisions that we have in that bill, which respect the community, are to be tested on what that community feels was frustrated in that debate, and it was frustrated. We have to remember –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, respectfully, the member is debating another section of the bill, not the substance of the actual scope motion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** Member for Brighton, I will rule on the point of order again. I have been listening to the member’s contribution, and I think he is referring to the process by which this has come here, rather than a future bill. But again, I just reiterate the need for all members to ensure that they are speaking on the motion or the member for Brighton’s amendment to the motion.

**John LISTER:** It is important to consider this process because it does go to why we have to have this motion today. Those opposite voted against that bill last year, and we are now in the position where we have to go back to what was originally in the bill. We would like to make sure that we have the ability to debate that through this motion that we have got before the house today. The member for Brighton seems particularly agitated by the fact that this is history now repeating itself. We have been here before. We should not even –

**James Newbury:** And you got it wrong.

**John LISTER:** No. I will take up the member for Brighton’s interjection. We did what we had to do to get that bill through Parliament so that people could start being protected, because the member for Brighton and his party objected to it and voted against the bill. I again go back to the member for

Brighton's contribution, where he was referring to the under-18 provisions and making sure that there was a change, according to his amendment, to be able to not have that in a future amendment on the next bill. It is the problem with these procedures – anyway, classic Parliament.

This sudden obsession with the under-18 provision, despite not raising it 12 months ago, I think is pretty cynical. I respect that the member for Brighton did say that they do not want to frustrate the process. And I will make sure that we hold them to account in the debate on the amendments, that they will not frustrate this process. The under-18 provisions were there because we know that there are characteristics and vulnerabilities for people under 18 that need to be carefully considered, and the DPP are appropriate to do that. As someone who has spent a lot of time with young people, I know that there are complexities that need to be considered to make sure that this is done properly. However, it does not mean that they can get away with it.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**John LISTER:** I do not know if the member for Brighton has a crystal ball, but we would not be in this position if you did not vote against the bill in the form that the government introduced it 12 months ago. And here we are again. I will remind all the multifaith communities and the multicultural communities – all those communities that have been targeted in my community that I represent – that the Liberal and National parties stood with One Nation in the other place and voted against this original bill, which is why we are returning to this process and this motion today. I will remind the community every day of why we are here and why we have to do this. We had this in the original bill, and now we are back here doing it again. And I will remind that community time and time again, as I have been, that they have been abhorred by the actions of those opposite last year in partnering with One Nation to oppose the original bill.

We did what we had to do to pass that bill, to make sure that it was in force and we could start working with it, but it is clear that we need to go back and we need to make sure that we can prosecute people for this hateful action. The Premier has committed to it. I wish this motion a speedy passage through this place and I wish the amendments a speedy passage, because we need to get this in place now. It is 12 months too late, and we would not be here if it were not for those opposite. I commend the motion in full to the house.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (11:07): I too would like to thank for all their incredible efforts the multifaith and multicultural communities who contributed to the bill proper, and I will concur: we are of course discussing the scope here today. But I was Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, and I know the very careful and prudent work that was led, in terms of consultation, to be sure of reaching a consensus. Indeed that consensus was achieved, and in earnest certainly representatives from those various groups were very eager for the bill to be passed in the first place. So I think it is a little bit rich from the opposition now to be lecturing us about the central tenets of the bill, when in fact they were opposing it rather vehemently historically. That is a little bit of recreating history, and I think if I were to extend that limb a little bit further, if we were to see why they were opposing it, well, in part they opposed the anti-vilification bill because it extends equal protection to LGBTQIA+ people.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** Member for Brighton, before I rule on any point of order that you might have, I just remind you about appropriate language in the chamber and ask you to withdraw.

**James Newbury:** I withdraw. On a point of order, Acting Speaker, a substantive debate on the bill is not relevant to this procedural motion, and the member is debating the substantive bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** Member for Brighton, what I have heard of the member for Albert Park's contribution is, again, dealing with the process by which this motion has come to the house. I was conferring with clerks and those in the chamber for the preceding 10 seconds.

I do not need to hear again from you, member for Brighton. Member for Albert Park, I would ask you to ensure that you are entirely germane to the motion and the amendment to that motion.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have now raised three instances of relevance, two of which you did not hear and the third which you did not find substance in. All of them had substance, and I would just say to you that dealing with the substance –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** Member for Brighton, I do not think there is a point of order. It is a reflection upon the Chair, what you have just said. There are noise and conversations in the chamber. I am seeking to follow the debate.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Duly noted. If we think about the fundamental purpose here today – and indeed we are discussing scope – and what it is that we should all, as parliamentarians, be united on, it is standing firmly against extremism and hate. This is certainly the fundamental tenet that is driving the optimisation of the bill, the anti-vilification social cohesion laws.

Coming to the aspect of the amendment proposed by the motion, the purpose of the safeguard with regard to offenders under 18, the safeguard ensures that the unique characteristics and vulnerabilities of those under 18 are considered. It recognises that in many cases a more appropriate response for those under 18 would be educating them about the harm caused by these behaviours. Requiring DPP consent for those under 18 alone is also consistent with the offences prohibiting Nazi symbols and gestures – laws which, unlike last year’s anti-vilification bill, were supported by the opposition. If we are thinking about elements of consistency, we can see that there is consistency here in terms of what we are proposing with the bill that will be put before the chamber shortly. I am just putting forward that point, and I am speaking very specifically to the scoping issue just to say that there is consistency with what was proposed with the Nazi symbol and gesture laws, which were passed and supported by the opposition. We can see a variance here in their approach, which is intriguing – and that is probably me being generous in using that adjective. But I am just saying, if you are going to throw this vitriol at the government, then you might also want to review the manner and the consistency with which the opposition has applied itself in terms of how the process is to be handled. I just think that is an important point that should not be simply glossed over when it comes to discussing something as serious as fighting against hate and antisemitism in this chamber. I will take that further in light of the very deeply felt and heart-wrenching experience that the nation has experienced with the Bondi massacre. None of us want to in any way protract the process today, because we absolutely and unequivocally – and I can speak for the government, and I would like to think the opposition would be on board with this – want to minimise or mitigate the risk of any delay when it comes to processes to tackle hate and antisemitism.

I think that it is really important to think about how much work it took to get to this point – very diligent and careful work. I understand and I should say from the outset that if we look historically at the position of the government, the amendment proposed in the legislation that we will be debating today restores the framework originally proposed in the bill before it was amended in the Legislative Council. I put a caveat there and note that the amendment that was passed in the Council was made with good intention behind it. I am not here to repudiate the intention or in any way undermine what was sought in terms of that amendment being agreed to. Again I will come back to that point from the outset: that the opposition do need to take a good hard look at themselves when they are criticising us over a particular element, which is the way that under-18s are to be processed in terms of DPP consent, when in fact they opposed the bill outright when it was put before the chamber. You can see here that we are being consistent in terms of our approach and in terms of prohibiting the Nazi symbol and gesture when we are looking at the particular vulnerabilities and characteristics of those under 18. We can see that it is important these are considered when we are dealing with such delicate and difficult scenarios in our community. These are some of the most horrific, damaging and hurtful acts and situations that can occur, and it cuts through all of us: you hurt one Victorian, you hurt all Victorians. I think we are absolutely and unequivocally united in making sure that we mitigate the risk of any delay to hate crimes being heard in court.

Accordingly I would urge all those in this chamber – of course on the side of the government we are absolutely united on this front – to support the motion unamended and to make sure that we are able to proceed with a good and thorough debate but then a speedy passage of the bill for the greater good of our Victorian community, respecting the incredible efforts of multifaith cultural representatives who have made considerable contributions to the fruition of this extremely important legislation, noting that we are debating a motion that precedes the further amendment to the bill. On that front I want to urge the opposition to support the bill.

*Members interjecting.*

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, support the motion, I will correct.

*Members interjecting.*

**Nina TAYLOR:** Well, no, you have put a caveat, because you have put an amendment to the house, and you know that. Just to be factual, there is an amendment put by the opposition to the motion. You have not unequivocally said you will support the motion, because there is an amendment put –

*Members interjecting.*

**Nina TAYLOR:** We will greatly appreciate the opposition supporting the motion, noting that there is an amendment put forward by the opposition. I do not mean to make light of what is actually really serious subject matter, so on that note we urge all the chamber to unequivocally support the motion unamended.

**The SPEAKER:** The Attorney-General has moved a motion to extend the scope of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 to enable the consideration of some amendments to the Crimes Act 1958. The member for Brighton has moved an amendment to that motion to omit the words ‘unless the accused is under the age of 18 years’ from the motion. The house will deal with the member for Brighton’s amendment first. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

**Question agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (78):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio,

Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

*Noes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

**Motion agreed to.**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:26): Under standing orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:27): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. At the outset I say the coalition will not be opposing the bill both in terms of the original substance of the bill – and I will speak to the original substance of the bill in some detail throughout the contribution – but also in relation to the amendments that the government has just circulated in relation to the consent of public prosecutions provision, which has just been inserted into the bill after some debate around the scope of that provision. I would like to put on record from the outset that both in relation to the original substance of the bill and the amendment which I have been handed – which, to be fair, the Attorney-General's office did circulate to me prior to the commencement of debate – the coalition does not oppose either the original bill or the amendment. I would like that noted; and in no way will we be frustrating the bill.

I might start by speaking to the original substance of the bill and then speak in some detail around the amendments that have just been brought in by the government. The bill itself is what we like to call an omnibus bill, which deals with a number of matters, some of which some may look at and not immediately understand the importance of, but they are important things. They are important reforms. Sometimes the little things make big differences to people and make big differences to the way our state operates, and that is certainly the case with a number of amendments in this bill.

Firstly, this bill implements recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Contempt of Court* report, which provides clarity in relation to legacy suppression orders. There has been some debate around suppression orders more generally in recent times and the use of suppression orders. So I would say in principle – not just in relation to the specifics of legacy suppression orders, which are dealt with in this bill – it is important for, I think, the use of suppression orders and the ease with which suppression orders can be varied where it is appropriate for them to be, for want of a better term, modernised.

Part of the reform that we are considering today in this bill in relation to suppression orders is, I would argue, to ensure clarity so that courts can deal with suppression orders and make decisions around suppression orders across courts, but I think it would also be fair to say it would modernise the process of suppression orders. I think more will need to be said around suppression orders more generally, because there is no question that suppression orders are being overused and they are being used primarily in cases where an alleged crime has been committed, often of a sexual nature, against a woman. There is no doubt that in some of the early rough figures that you can look at on suppression

orders it would probably be fair to say in the vicinity of four out of five instances in the listings I have seen on suppression orders are of that kind. There is no question that they are being used by a particular alleged offender. I think that the community more broadly would be very concerned if suppression orders were being used by alleged offenders in those circumstances, because these are very serious matters.

As we have seen in high-profile cases recently, I think the community has an expectation that, if you are charged with an offence, the legal system should not provide an opportunity for you to, frankly, hide your name. There will be circumstances where it is needed – of course there are; genuine circumstances – and in no way would I argue against that fact. However, I think it would also be fair to say if you were alleged to have offended, you may well try and use that mechanism to hide your name from public attention. I am not specifically referring to any person, but you may use a mechanism that enables you to effectively hide your name where there is no good reason to and, had you committed any other offence, you probably would not have done so. I think we need to balance up this policy matter, and I think that this policy matter has come to the fore because of recent issues that have received public attention. I note that these particular measures in the bill are important in terms of modernising suppression orders. They just start in relation to legacy matters, which are effectively longstanding suppression orders, and the capacity of courts to deal with those matters and make variations of those matters. I think beyond this we need to have a broader conversation about policy more broadly. So that is the amendment in relation to that.

There are a number of amendments in the bill that relate to the Coroners Court and investigations, where they are effectively non-controversial matters, in terms of streamlining those processes and ensuring that registered deaths and reporting obligations around them can be simplified. I think many members in this place may have unfortunately dealt with a circumstance where a family has gone through a difficult reporting of a death in a non-controversial manner in their family. That is no reflection, of course, on the registration of that other than to understand that modernising and streamlining, through this bill, those processes to enable reporting to occur more quickly in a very difficult time for a family, as family of a loved one, can only be a good thing. That is what this bill does in relation to that. It does modernise, to use the term again, that reporting process and enables reporting to be done by other expert people – that is probably the simplest way to say it – to ensure that reporting can be streamlined where there is not a substantive concern in relation to that passing.

Further, there are a number of other modernisations in relation to fine-related matters. For example, it clarifies the serving of fines in a number of ways, moving us into the electronic age. We are moving into the electronic age in relation to some of the measures of this bill. It might have taken us a couple of decades, but we are getting there. So there will be clarity of service in relation to electronic means, and an amendment in this bill makes clear that an electronic service is equivalent to a non-electronic service, which, again, I think most people would probably presume is already the case, frankly. But I think it is an important amendment and a reasonable amendment and not a controversial amendment whereby, as I said, most people I think would expect it to be that way. I think that most Victorians would probably presume that is the case. It is not the case. That is what the amendments in this bill do. I will not go into all of the various modernisations in relation to those matters because they relate to a number of other small things that are probably less worth noting other than my broader comments.

I do want to talk about the simplification of the extension-of-time rule for people who receive fines. I think, again, as a member – and I am sure many members in this place will have found this – there have been very genuine times where someone needed an extension of time where they received a fine that was not warranted for them because of the circumstances, but the process by which the government or the department was able to provide an extension of time was quite cumbersome. I know only recently I was dealing with a matter that was self-evident, and as soon as it was raised with the relevant minister, the department immediately ensured that the matter was resolved. However, there are some difficulties in the cumbersome nature of the requirement of that extension being granted. So

one of the things that this bill does is make sure that application process is cleaner, which is a good thing.

Those are probably some of the more substantive matters in general terms in the bill. I would like to also talk a little bit about some of the feedback on those things that have been received. I will start with talking about the Law Institute of Victoria's feedback. The law institute are frankly incredible at looking at forthcoming legislation and providing a lens. The institute is made up of an extremely broad spectrum – in fact the entire spectrum – of the legal fraternity, so it looks at upcoming legislation with a very broad scope and is always able to in an extremely timely and in fact probably unfair timeframe. This bill of course we have had several months to look at, but in some circumstances the institute will look at a bill overnight. I know the team there often watch Parliament, believe it or not. I do not know if that is a work benefit or otherwise – an unfortunate side of being in the office – but they will often overnight have a look at a piece of proposed legislation and provide feedback, so I thank them for that.

I think it would be fair to say in relation to the bill they do consider, though, it is an omnibus bill. It does go beyond simply the minor amendment, and there are a number of matters that I spoke to where the institute has argued that they are more substantive policy changes rather than minor ones, and they have noted that – not in a negative way per se, but they do feel that the omnibus bill goes beyond that. In general terms, like the coalition, they are not in opposition to the omnibus bill, but they do note that. They have made a couple of comments in relation to specific things – the suppression order matter that I spoke about earlier. They agree in terms of the amendment that:

... the status quo necessarily strains Supreme Court resources and impedes access to justice ...

I think with that phraseology – and it is one that I did not use when I was speaking to the issue earlier; I did not use that specific phrase, though I did talk about suppression orders and fairness – access to justice is important. I think oftentimes legal processes are put in place whereby there will be victims who feel that their access to justice, for want of a better phrase, is constrained, and I think suppression orders are an example of that. So they have noted their support of the measures, as I did earlier. They did talk about the importance, considering there will be some practical things that play out as these reforms are implemented, that probably cannot be foreseen on a day-to-day basis through the courts. So the institute:

... recommends that the Judiciary is consulted to confirm whether existing court and tribunal practice notes and forms provide sufficient direction and requirement to notify affected parties to an application of suppression order review.

So I think it is worth noting that from a practical perspective, though, that they support the amendment and that there are some practical things which I would hope the government takes on board in terms of application, because sometimes you can do a good thing and you would not want to see that good thing constrained in terms of how it gets brought into force, as it were, with the institute, who are on the ground, noting that, and their advice I think is meritorious.

The institute have raised, in relation to fines reform, a particular concern around the false information fine. Politely, though, I think it is worth noting that that is their concern and understanding that their concern stems from the fact that false information is sometimes given by people who are disadvantaged. The institute has, to precis them, framed it in that way. I completely understand where that concern comes from. I think when I take the reforms in this bill on balance, I do not see the same level of concern by what is proposed in the bill, but I do think it is important to note their concern. I think that they have provided it in good faith, and so I think that is worth noting.

May I also note feedback from the Community Advocacy Alliance. They have specifically raised concern with the Coroners Court amendments and the streamlining of those processes and are just

wanting to make sure about some details in relation to those processes and the Chief Commissioner of Police. To quote them:

This gives the same power to an interested party as the Chief Commissioner of Police, which basically makes the new power a moot point. Our comment is that it is just window dressing and not a substantial new improvement in power and unlikely to bring justice to offended parties.

I note that. In relation to the Drug Court, which I did not speak to in detail, which was my overlooking the bill also – I should have; that was a mistake on my part – the bill also extends what was a trial of the Drug Court effectively into an ongoing matter. Otherwise, the Drug Court effectively would have been discontinued by the middle of the year, from memory. So that is a notable amendment that is being made in the bill. The Community Advocacy Alliance’s view in relation to part of that amendment is:

The amendments progress the Drug Court division of the County Court by transitioning from the pilot phase to an ongoing phase. This is largely procedural and might be better dealt with politically ...

or dealt with in a different manner. There are questions of course with that continuance around funding and ongoing funding and those questions, and I do not say that in a political way. Those questions, I think, are fair and reasonable to talk about in terms of ongoing funding and clarity around funding into the future. I think I have fairly covered most of the bill in relation to what was originally the case. As I said earlier, on the original matters in the bill the coalition at no time saw it as anything other than an omnibus bill.

I will now move to the amendments that the Attorney has just circulated – just for background. I would like my contribution not to be taken initially as making any partisan points, but rather, I suppose, it is to catch up on how we got to here on these matters. Obviously we have some amendments that have been moved as part of this bill which are effectively the government, however you want to phrase this, admitting the need to change the hate speech laws that were introduced a year ago. They included a measure on incitement whereby to ensure, as the government has openly said, the bills passed the Parliament a Director of Public Prosecutions tick-off was given in those matters. So rather than the police simply being able to charge and the matter proceeding, there was a hurdle whereby the Director of Public Prosecutions had to tick that off. What has unfortunately been the case – and I spoke across the table to the Attorney during the debate earlier – is that there have been no instances of finding of guilt on any matter of incitement that I am aware of, and the Attorney did not correct me. There have been no instances of incitement, no findings of guilt, under these new laws – none.

I think it would be very fair to say that the government has recognised that the DPP tick-off is clearly part of the reason why. You would never say it is solely the reason why, because there are of course other matters in consideration on the capacity to charge. I mean, we can take a lot of things – people wearing face masks and whether or not people are able to have their face masks removed so that they can actually be identified to be charged. All of these things of course play in. I do not want to simply blame this on one thing. However, there is no doubt that the administrative delay and the evidence burden requirement the Director of Public Prosecutions tick-off are causing – and substantially causing – a lack of instances of incitement moving to an outcome that I think the community would expect.

I said this in an earlier debate. I look only at yesterday and the incredible motion that was moved in this place, and the speakers from both sides of the chamber – certainly not all sides of the chamber; there was a notable exception – who spoke to that motion spoke with emotion and spoke either as Jews or as strong friends of the Jewish community. But towards the end of that motion we had people on the steps of our own Parliament committing acts of incitement. It actually just breaks your heart to know that while we were trying to do frankly what is best about our Parliament – and it was an opportunity for us to do that – on the steps of the Parliament incitement was occurring, not in one instance but in many instances right across the steps. I have unfortunately received many photographs, because I was in the chamber, of what occurred on the steps and the graffiti that was strewn across the

great steps of this great place. Incitement is occurring every day. Incitement and, frankly, hate against parts of our community are happening every single day.

I should refer to the member for Werribee, who made a contribution earlier where he spoke about acts of disgraceful incitement that occurred in his community over summer. Unfortunately we have seen a massive increase in the most outrageous and horrible behaviour by the ultra, ultra minority of the community. Good Australians do not behave like this. There is unfortunately an ultra, ultra minority of people who are behaving in the most outrageous way and saying the most disgusting things. But rather than doing it quietly where they perhaps in the past may have silently done it, they are now doing it in the streets. They are now doing it by writing on our parliamentary building. They are doing it in an emboldened way, and I can understand why the government has sought to move legislation to deal with that – of course. I think that all good parties have said we need to do more, we need to be tougher and we need to make sure that crimes exist. I know the member for Caulfield and I have been advocating – he for longer than I, but certainly we advocated very, very strongly under the former Premier for the Nazi flag, the Nazi salute and the Nazi symbols to be dealt with by law. We called for that, and through a parliamentary committee process that eventually led to that being the case. But the member for Caulfield and I, to be fair, publicly called for that before the committee had proposed it and before the government had accepted those findings. These are what all the good people in this place have been calling for.

But when it comes to these amendments, I would say that it is absolutely essential we do everything that we can to make sure that where people commit a crime they are held to account, and there is a general feeling in the community that that is not the case enough in this state. It would be fair also to say that this amendment is an acceptance by the government that the system that was originally put into the bill did not work and does not work, and therefore the government is amending it. I am trying to be as non-political as possible in saying that the government have made an admission that the system that they put in place did not work. The government would say, and I accept what they are saying, that they had to compromise to pass a bill. Okay, so we are here today to try and correct that mistake, which we support. We will not frustrate that in any way; we support that. There was a conversation earlier about whether 17-year-olds should be allowed to incite or be given an additional loophole whereby if they are under the age of 18 they stay under the current system, which does not work. I think it is fair to note that our position was that if you are 17, for example, and you commit an act of incitement, you should not be dealt with differently than an 18-year-old who commits an act of incitement, especially under a system that has been proven not to work and that the government is amending with the admission that it is not working.

We know that if you are under 18 it is very unlikely, because there has been no instance of someone being found guilty of incitement under these laws. These amendments perhaps address concerns raised by us in relation to that loophole for people under 18. But these amendments are certainly welcome. When the deal was done with the Greens to pass the bill, we in this place, the former shadow attorney the member for Malvern and I spoke on those amendments. We were quite strong in our concerns about this particular matter and said that it would not work. We said that frankly it was a deal, and I think the government has accepted that and that we would need to come back and fix it one day because it would not work – and here we are. I accept that the government are doing that. I accept that they have recognised that the original deal done on that amendment has not worked.

What I would say is that it is all very well and good to have laws, but you have got to actually make sure they work. If they are not working, you have got to make sure that they work. You have got to work out how you can make them work. I think there is open incitement being committed on our streets. There is open antisemitism, there is open discrimination. These laws are well meaning and this amendment and acknowledgement are well meaning, but we need to do more. We need to make sure that where these laws exist, if they do not work, we work out how we can fix them. I accept that on this, the government has done so. We will not frustrate that in any way. We support the position the

government has taken. More broadly, we have no concerns with the bill, so the coalition will not be opposing the bill today.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (11:57): I am very pleased that the opposition is supporting the bill. That is greatly appreciated. Certainly this is demonstrative of further action, because we know that there has been strong communication, and it is well understood that further action is required. I think that in this chamber I can speak for the government, and with the opposition being supportive of this legislation we are united in terms of wanting to do more and to take even more action. The passing of this bill from the outset in the first place was demonstrative of action when it was passed. We would have loved the opposition to have supported it when it was in its original framework. The reason that we are revisiting it today, we can see is in part – although it is an omnibus bill – to actually re-establish the original framework, ultimately with the fundamental tenet of being able to combat antisemitism and other forms of hate and to ensure that processes are put in place that do not delay the just and right prosecution of members of the community who commit or incite antisemitism and other forms of hate.

I am very, very – I think happy is the wrong word, but I am certainly unequivocally supportive, as are all members of the government, in terms of getting this amendment through for all the right reasons. I think the horrific antisemitic terrorist acts that were committed at the Bondi massacre will be stained in our memory forever. Taking this action is really, really important in terms of being able to enhance the way that we tackle antisemitism and other forms of hate as they occur in our community.

I should speak just a little bit further. I did speak previously on a motion with regard to the aspect of the under-18 component of the bill. Requiring the consent of the DPP, in terms of prosecuting under-18s, is also consistent with the offences prohibiting the Nazi symbol and gesture, laws which, unlike last year's anti-vilification bill, were supported by the opposition. So you can see that the government is actually being consistent, noting the particular characteristics and vulnerabilities of those under 18. Certainly it is a complex space when it comes to tackling extreme behaviour, no question. I am certainly not an expert in that regard, to say the least.

I will say that the Holocaust centre I know does incredible work. I just want to note that, for the purposes of this discussion, when it comes to helping people – young people, and people of all ages, I believe – who have had antisemitic positions, if you like, or who think in a very racist manner or are hateful, they are so generous of heart in terms of being able to take them on the journey and to reach them with education. Part of that – and I do not want to simplify that, because it takes a lot of courage and a generous spirit to be able to actually reach out and to have those very difficult discussions – is to remember to bring back the humanity in all human beings. I think instead of seeing the 'us and them' and defining ourselves as different, we know that as human beings we all essentially have the same needs. Remembering that we all have blood through our veins et cetera and remembering that very human element is certainly – and I am not here to define the tactics that the Holocaust centre uses. But I must say I have been very moved by the way that they are able to show that courage and conviction and, in a very kind and supportive way, help to educate people who might otherwise have very extreme positions when it comes to seeing those who may not be of the same faith or ethnic background. So I do want to commend their incredible work when we are talking about education, and particularly those under 18. There are people in our community who do that beautiful work, and I am sure in many facets across the community – it will not be isolated to the Holocaust centre, but I think it is important to note that as well. So I am very buoyed about getting those reforms through.

I did say from the outset that this is an omnibus bill. There are other important elements being passed in this bill. For instance, certainly with regard to legacy suppression orders, there has already been significant reform to date, not least with the Open Courts Act 2013. If we think of the premise under which that act and the consolidation of suppression order powers have been brought about, when we are talking about courts and VCAT, the central tenets of that are that there is essentially a tension with allowing legacy orders per se to operate indefinitely, because they were not acquitted through the process of that consolidation. Hence the imperative today is to allow the legacy orders to be treated in a way which is not incredibly expensive and onerous. When you think about victims of family

violence, victim-survivors of sexual offences, we have come such a long way in terms of transparency and in terms of tackling some of the most sinister activities that can occur in our community. So it is important to be consistent in terms of reviewing mechanisms and allowing a pathway that is affordable to review a mechanism, I should say, which is what this bill does, so that those legacy orders do not just by default operate indefinitely, and therefore the bill will allow persons with a sufficient interest in a pre-existing order, including victim-survivors of sexual offence or family violence offences or news media organisations, to apply to the relevant court or VCAT to review the order. The court or VCAT will be able to confirm, vary or revoke the pre-existing order, and you can see that therefore that is allowing a further pathway to justice with important caveats and protections as the case may need. For instance, protecting a particular witness might be an example. So that is certainly a very important piece of reform being brought about by this omnibus legislation.

I do want to proceed to a couple of further aspects of the bill. The mind boggles, I have to say, to even think about this, but when we talk about the criminal act of bestiality and note that there are reforms being brought about, not only is it a criminal act when we talk about penetrative acts, but fundamentally what underpins the protections here is to better protect animals from abuse and sexually exploitative behaviour, with existing exceptions for veterinary, agricultural, scientific research purposes – important caveats in this. But the bill will also introduce a suite of indictable offences into the Crimes Act 1958 to expressly criminalise producing, distributing, possessing or accessing bestiality or animal abuse material. The new offences are designed to disrupt and deter the supply of animal abuse material in and connected to Victoria by ensuring that targeted laws apply to individuals who create and share such content, as well as those who perpetuate demand by consuming it. It appals me, the thought of any of this behaviour. I am certainly an animal lover, and I am sure everyone in the Parliament is absolutely unequivocally united on this. I have to say it beggars belief that anyone would want to view this material, let alone partake in such horrific behaviour. So it is certainly very important that we are cracking down on this kind of behaviour, because it is certainly not in the best interests of the Victorian community, let alone our much-loved animal species. There are many more aspects to this omnibus bill, and I am sure my colleagues and those alike will speak to those shortly.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (12:07): I rise today to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. This is an omnibus bill which has been reflected upon by previous speakers, and I am sure that each speaker will pick up a certain element of it that is relevant to their constituency, relevant to their personal interests, particularly aggrieves them or that they hope will address some issues in the community.

There are two aspects that I would like to specifically focus on, the first of which is the Drug Courts. The Drug Courts of course are an opportunity for people who are heavily drug-affected. Often there is a cohort of people who have got mental health issues also that are partially driving their offending, and the Drug Court does provide an opportunity for people to get that drug and alcohol rehabilitation support. It is very, very important that we have those opportunities available to those that are being sentenced but also to the wider community. I have had a couple of instances in my community of Lowan, and in Horsham and in Hamilton, where parents have actually come forward saying that it is part of the orders that they undertake drug and alcohol treatment. However, they are unable to access that, and this is a very big problem when often the offender or the person who has a drug or alcohol addiction issue knows that they need some support and treatment, the court orders them to get drug and alcohol treatment, their friends and family members want to support them to access drug and alcohol treatment and yet they cannot access that treatment in Victoria.

There has been a gross underinvestment in drug and alcohol rehabilitation beds and other treatment services right across the state. It means that Victorians have to wait longer for that treatment, and that can have disastrous impacts on not just that individual who needs to seek treatment but also family, friends and workplaces. We know that it leads to an increase in violence, including family violence and other violent offending. It is something that this government has failed to address. There are bottlenecks around accessing rehabilitation and treatment. In terms of the detox beds, there has not

been an investment in that area in the state of Victoria, and as a result people are waiting longer and longer and longer for treatment and we are falling behind when it comes to the measure of how many rehab beds per Victorian there are available here, as opposed to New South Wales.

We need to get to a point of parity – and this is something I have been saying for a very long time, about 10 years – so we need to make sure we invest in those support services. It is an important aspect of health services. If we do not address this, we will have consequential issues which are far more expensive for the taxpayer to deal with than actually just providing treatment that people need when they need it. Speaking to people who have an alcohol addiction and have to white-knuckle it until they can get support and treatment – this is not good enough in this state. While the Drug Court in and of itself is a good thing – in my view it is good for the community and for those who are offending due to their drug and alcohol issues – we have got other parts of the puzzle that need to be put in place to be able to allow for those orders to be enacted, not just for those that offend, but for the broader Victorian community as well.

The second element that I would like to speak to in this omnibus bill is in regard to the animal abuse amendments. Of course I do not know of anybody who would say that we would oppose any matters which strengthen legislation to prevent the obscene abuse of animals. The production of that material, the circulation of that material – whatever it is, we do not want to see animal abuse, which includes sexual abuse of animals and sadistic abuse of animals. That is completely unacceptable in this state. My concern is that we have many animal activist groups who will take grey areas in legislation and utilise them for another purpose, and that purpose is to shut down the intensive agricultural production practices. We see that in place in Victoria. We have court cases in Victoria. I know there is an appeal at the moment underway where a case had been dismissed, but unfortunately – and this was highlighted in the pig welfare inquiry that was undertaken in the upper house and published its report in June 2024 – evidence was heard that indicated that is exactly what some extreme animal activists seek to do. They seek to utilise the court system, which is very, very expensive, very time consuming and very, very stressful for producers who are otherwise doing the right thing.

The thing that extreme animal activists find offensive is that an animal is being slaughtered and packaged and that humans will consume that animal at the end of the day. It must be made very, very clear that if there is an illegal trespass onto a property those extreme animal activists are appropriately prosecuted – that if we see the actions of groups like the Farm Transparency Project, where they illegally obtain CCTV footage of practices which are completely within codes and standards not just in Victoria but nationally, that is not then prosecuted as animal cruelty. Some people for conscientious reasons choose to be vegan because they consider the consumption of meat as being a torturous act or something that is not acceptable. I absolutely respect their views, but that view cannot be taken to the next level. It cannot be used as a targeted way to shut down livestock production in Victoria. That is why I have had many discussions with the Minister for Agriculture, and I thank her and her staff for their time, because the issues that were highlighted in the inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria could potentially be enacted through this legislation by broadening the scope, in particular, of cruelty.

As we heard earlier, I cannot understand why anybody would ever think that the production of videos with sexual content could possibly gratify anybody. But I would like to think that very few people think that way. We need to have laws that catch people that are doing the wrong thing, but we equally need to make sure there are protections in place for the intensive animal production sector, where they are doing the right thing, where they are doing everything they can. It was noted through the evidence provided in the pig welfare inquiry by so many peak bodies, by Agriculture Victoria and by farmers themselves that Victoria is world renowned for the way that we treat our animals. Animal welfare is so important to our producers, and there is an intrinsic value in protecting their animals. They do care for them deeply because they want them to flourish, they want to make sure that they are healthy animals and they want to make sure that they are fed well and they are watered well. You see on the television, if you go out on a farm and if you speak to people when they are going through drought or

when there is a lack of feed after fire, the distress of farmers, because what they care for first and foremost is their animals.

I would hate to think that there is an inadvertent capture of people who are doing the right thing within this legislation. While I understand it is a very, very uncomfortable topic – I do not want to ever be speaking in this place about bestiality or sadistic and cruel harm to animals – we do need to make sure that those people are caught in the net for doing the wrong thing. I condemn anybody who is doing the wrong thing. I do hope that this legislation will help to protect animals from those egregious acts. I also hope that there is not the malicious use of this legislation to shut down the meat industry in Victoria. Our farmers are striving to do their best to make sure that they have the best possible animal welfare outcomes in Victoria. I do urge the government to clarify those matters and ensure that there is no grey area that could be exploited for lengthy and expensive court procedures.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (12:17): I too rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. At the outset I must say that when I was looking at this bill over the weekend and making some notes it was completely different to what I am probably going to speak about given the motion that was agreed to and the amendment that has been agreed to. I do want to spend most of my contribution talking about the amendment to the amendment bill in relation to putting back the changes to the anti-vilification law, in particular removal of the requirement that a prosecution can only be commenced through the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I was reflecting just in terms of how we got to this state. I think it is really important to remember that this was an amendment that was put in in the upper house at the request of the Greens because the Liberal and National parties would not support the anti-vilification legislation. You would not know that from many of their members. There was a lot of talk and discussion. Particularly in the communities where a large number of Jewish communities live, there was strong support that the anti-vilification laws be supported on a bipartisan motion and a bipartisan effort to support the legislation. It was very disappointing to see at that time that that legislation was opposed both in this house and then in the upper house by the coalition, which required the government to seek support from other parties to make sure that the legislation could actually be passed. I think we have seen over the last few weeks just how important it is that we have legislation in place and how difficult it is to actually introduce that legislation. We should be very proud of Victoria and of the government that has enabled this legislation to take place. We have seen just even in the last couple of weeks how challenging it has been for the federal government to try and introduce similar legislation, with the watering down and the toning down of some of the legislation and some of the requests that came out from the report from the antisemitism envoy Jillian Segal.

I note the comment from the lead speaker, the member for Brighton, talking about the lack of prosecutions to date. I am aware that obviously there has only been a short period of time, and prosecutions are not the be all and end all. We need to have a discussion in this state, and in this country in general, about what level of behaviour is acceptable. It is not necessarily going to be about fining people or locking people up for saying these hateful things. What concerns me is: what do we want to define as criticism? What level of criticism do we want to accept as a society? Obviously we are a liberal democracy: we value freedom of speech and we value ideas that challenge us. That is why we have houses of Parliament and we have elections every four years. Opposing parties get in with different views to challenge those ideas. But when we have people on the street calling for violence against particular groups and we defend that by saying that they are making a political statement or it is only a group of people who follow a particular political point of view, on that basis does that excuse everything? Is that excusing every behaviour that they can do?

As the member for Brighton as well pointed out, yesterday at pretty much the same time that we were debating in this house a condolence motion for the victims of the Bondi terror attack, there must have been multiple people out on the steps of Parliament vandalising the steps of Parliament, calling for violence against people in our community. We really need to have a conversation in this country and in this state about what level of language we are prepared to accept against our fellow Victorians, our

fellow Australians. Is it acceptable that Jewish people are demonised and continue to be harassed at their workplaces, at their businesses and at restaurants simply because they support a political notion that is not aligned with another group's political notion? I appreciate that the amendment in this bill only goes to a small element of the anti-vilification legislation, but I think it does raise a broader question that we need to answer as a community as to what we will and will not accept going forward.

I did want to just touch briefly on some of the other clauses in the legislation, particularly in relation to changes to the Crimes Act 1958 as they relate to the production and dissemination of sexual abuse material and bestiality. At the outset I want to give a big shout-out to the RSPCA, a really trusted institution that is located in my electorate on Burwood Highway. They do a wonderful job in so many different areas, but one of the hardest jobs that their officers have to face on a daily basis is dealing with elements under the Crimes Act and the abuse, cruelty and neglect of animals. It is one of the toughest jobs to go in and enter a premises and have to find these poor, defenceless animals that have been treated absolutely shockingly by their owners. Some of the stories that the officers have shared in terms of going into these properties – sometimes it is not just about the animals and how confronting it is to see the animals in this state, but also in terms of dealing with these individuals, you are often dealing with some very difficult and unstable individuals. They are in the process of trying to remove these animals from their owners for very good reasons, but as you can imagine, the circumstances in which that happens can be very dangerous for the officers involved.

I think the changes that are proposed in the legislation are really strong. There should not be any doubt as to where the Parliament stands on stamping out this sort of behaviour. Again, I just want to shout out to all of the officers and the staff at the RSPCA for the wonderful work that they do in caring for and keeping our animals safe.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:27): I rise to make some comments on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. I want to focus my comments on specifically the issues and the change with the reference of vilification laws relating to the DPP, Director of Public Prosecutions. Can I say at the outset that this is something that the Liberal-Nationals have been fighting for certainly for as long as I have known. It has been an issue with our vilification laws for many, many, many years. We have had these vilification laws, and I think the former member for Caulfield Helen Shardey advocated very strongly, along with Ted Baillieu, to get hate laws into this state. But for many years one of the issues has been that the bar has been too high to prosecute people.

When we had the parliamentary inquiry in 2021 into the hate laws, one of the key issues that were raised with that threshold was that the bar was too high. One of the groups that actually came to see us and gave evidence was Victoria Police. When we questioned Victoria Police about the hate laws, again, they reminded us that one of the key things to actually fix the current laws as they stand is to remove the Director of Public Prosecutions referral. For those that might be listening to or reading this speech, people need to understand that police, in just about every other job that they do, have the powers to go out if someone is breaking into a home or if someone is committing an offence, to charge them and to have that be seen through the courts or issue a fine, in some instances. Those are certainly the powers of Victoria Police, except for when it comes to these kinds of laws. In these laws what we are saying in this state is, 'Police don't have the knowledge, the understanding or, up until these proposed changes, the powers to be able to prosecute or to charge somebody. There needs to be another body to review it.' To have a review is almost like having a third umpire. How can you have the police do their job when every time they want to charge somebody they are sending it to a third umpire for review, which could take months before it comes back to the police to ultimately then decide what they are going to do with it? That is why we have had no charges on this since the bill was introduced nearly 12 months ago.

This is a government that actually waved this bill in the air and said, 'We're going to strengthen vilification laws in this state, and we're going to keep people safe from hate' – something that we all wanted to do. I sat on that inquiry in 2021, and one of the first things that we did was we separated off

the Nazi swastika and we said, 'We've got to do that immediately.' We did it, in a bipartisan way. We did it – laws that could be enforced. But on this, on the vilification stuff, this government has completely missed the boat.

What is horrific about this is that in the almost 12 months since these laws were changed, because the government did not do their job properly in the first place, they have exposed a community that has been vulnerable since 2023. The inquiry started in 2021. In 2021 there was a recommendation to actually strengthen the hate laws and remove the DPP referral. That was before October 2023, when we had the escalation of antisemitism. All of a sudden we have legislation, which took years to come into the Parliament. In 2021 there was a parliamentary inquiry. We get this coming through in 2025. From 2021 to 2025, for four years, the government sat on their hands and did nothing. In between we had the 7 October attack, and the Jewish community have been targeted since then. I do not know how many times I spoke to the Attorney-General and to the Premier and said, 'Do something about strengthening our hate laws.' Finally we get it, and we get something that is substandard. We are back at the drawing board again trying to fix the mess that this government has created.

What we saw on the steps of Parliament yesterday was a disgrace. We stood here and did a condolence motion for the people that were murdered in Bondi. While we were in here giving a condolence motion about people who were murdered in Bondi, we got these haters on the steps of Parliament calling for global intifada, saying that they want to target a President of Israel that is coming here. If that is not incitement, I do not know what is. And we are sitting in here and saying, 'Everything's right, everything's okay. We are doing our job.' This government is not doing its job. We are sitting here now – from 2021 to now – to finally fix the problem as should have been done in the first place.

How many people have been targeted, vilified? How many kids have had their kippah knocked off their heads and been called 'Dirty Jew'? Outside the front of Mount Scopus college it said 'Jew die'. Who was prosecuted from that? Zero. No-one has been prosecuted for any of the hate, any of the incitement. 'Put Jews in a bin' – the flags, the signs every week on these hateful protests that we see. Who has been prosecuted for that? Zero, doughnuts. Nothing has happened. So I am glad that we are finally seeing something done about it. But why wasn't this done in the first place? I will tell you why: because when this bill was brought in in April, the Greens – and we know what the Greens' track record is when it comes to vilification against the Jewish community – did a deal to make sure the DPP referral was kept in place and the third umpire was there to have police second-guess their own job. No wonder Victoria Police have not been able to do their job.

If you look back to 2023, to the then Victoria Police deputy commissioner Neil Paterson, it was reported on 21 October 2023 that 'Victoria's Director of Public Prosecutions has repeatedly knocked back police requests to prosecute racists for breaches of the state's vilification laws, police have confirmed.' He said:

We've got many examples of us taking action, referring those matters to the Director of Public Prosecutions for a decision on whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute.

The article also went on to say the DPP had advised that the threshold for launching the prosecutions was too high. The third umpire was telling the police, 'Go back and do your job. We're not going to take your stuff seriously.' No wonder police are not charging people, because they have had the third umpire pushing them back and saying, 'No. Go away. There's nothing to see.' Just like the article went on to say the DPP had refused to prosecute after a rally at which members of the National Socialist Network performed Nazi salutes and made offensive statements. The DPP said that does not meet the threshold. This is just a joke. You have got police at the highest level saying, 'Do something,' working with the government, and what does the government say: 'We're going to do a deal with the Greens because, you know what, we say one thing in Parliament but when it comes to really keeping the Jewish community safe, we're going to side with the most racist people of all, the Greens, who every single week have been standing up here and attacking the Jewish community and inciting the

hatred and violence.’ The government have chosen to stand with the Greens, and here they are now again defending themselves.

**Gabrielle de Vietri:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I take personal offence to the statement of the member for Caulfield and ask that he withdraw.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** Member for Richmond, no-one was named and no particular member was called out.

**David SOUTHWICK:** We definitely know how racist the Greens have been, particularly targeting the Jewish community. It was so offensive, particularly in the condolence motion yesterday, to have the Greens stand up and say, ‘We’ve seen people that go out and attack, and the hate has been so divisive and people have been so divisive.’ The Greens have been the most divisive of all. We have seen that. We have seen that since 7 October week in, week out. They come in here wearing keffiyehs and standing up here. Today the Greens called the President of Israel a war criminal, who is visiting here to pay condolences for people that died from the biggest terrorist attack in Australia’s history on Australians – Australian Jews. This President of Israel is coming here to pay his condolences to them, and the Greens think it is okay to call him a war criminal. Then you see what happened on the steps of Parliament. It said, ‘Watch out, President Herzog. We’re coming for you.’ That is incitement to hate. Those people should be locked up. If we had the laws, they would be locked up. But we do not have the laws, and we are sitting here today because this government has been sitting on its hands and doing nothing. That is why I say shame on this government for every single member of our community that has not been able to have protection from these laws because the laws have not been in place and this government has failed them. Finally, we are seeing a change now. I hope this change gets through, but it is too little, too late. I pity the people that have had to deal with this because this government has failed to act for them.

**Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:37):** Like other members, I will deal with the amendments that have been brought to this place through the changes to the bill by the Attorney-General this morning – section 8A of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 – in due course. At the outset, though, I just want to deal with the omnibus dimensions of the bill given that it amends various acts on our statute book really to improve the operation of the courts and the justice system and I think in particular to promote open justice following the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s 2020 *Contempt of Court* report, which, in reading it, highlighted some significant challenges with legacy suppression orders. Other members have talked about those this morning and this afternoon, but particularly their role in unduly, if inadvertently, potentially silencing victim-survivors of sexual or family violence offences, as well as the media and other interested parties and their capacity to comment upon cases, events and actions, particularly – and I think this is important – where an adult victim is able and willing to share their lived experiences.

As the continually unfolding revelations about the appalling predator and manipulator Jeffrey Epstein demonstrate, as well as a litany of truly unconscionable and horrendous clerical and institutional abuses of children in this state and elsewhere, abuse and harm are both perpetrated and perpetuated when those perpetrators can hide in the shadows and avoid scrutiny for those heinous actions and crimes. Upholding the principle of open justice also promotes personal responsibility by holding perpetrators accountable to the community while simultaneously raising public awareness of what are incredibly significant issues. In implementing recommendation 133 of the VLRC’s 2020 report, the bill will allow the lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders made by either those lower courts or the tribunal rather than restrict that capacity to the Supreme Court, which can obviously review legacy suppression orders under its inherent jurisdiction in the Constitution Act 1975 in this state. Applying to the Supreme Court under the current settings is often a deeply traumatising, very costly process that as a consequence can restrict access for applicants, including victim-survivors, whilst also unnecessarily straining the resources of our Supreme Court here in Victoria.

I do note, though, that open justice is not absolute, and there may be competing considerations that necessitate the continuation of an order to suppress or restrict the publication of certain information, including, for example, the identity of a party or witness. These reforms that are manifest in the bill on the table will nonetheless improve access to justice for victim-survivors while also promoting freedom of the media – which I think is something that is incredibly important in a liberal democracy – and assisting to hold perpetrators publicly accountable.

The omnibus bill also amends the Coroners Act 2008 to streamline the investigation, finalisation and reopening procedures for coronial inquiries and amends the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 to enable more doctors to register deaths and clarify their death reporting obligations. This is intended to really provide families with closure sooner. The Shadow Attorney talked about that and other members have talked about that – that at a time of particular distress, heightened anxiety and sadness for families, where possible, without curtailing the capacity of the coroners to investigate, and where appropriate, providing families with that closure sooner is a positive step. In doing so, these amendments will acquit recommendation 4 of the Coronial Council of Victoria's 2020 *Review of Reportable Deaths in Victoria* report and recommendation 1 of the 2024 Coroners Act statutory review. They are the amendments which will streamline investigation, finalisation and reopening procedures within the coroner's processes, whereas in amending the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996, the bill, as I say, also aims to reduce unnecessary reporting of unnatural cause deaths to the Coroners Court. In effect, this will help doctors who may not have a deep familiarity with a person who has passed away to be able to disaggregate between comorbidities and to clarify the degree of certainty that that doctor needs to have as to a person's cause of death before notifying the registrar.

In the context of modern primary health care, where super clinics, for example, are often seeing a lot of people and where one doctor might have one engagement with a patient or person in one instance but the next time they visit it is with another doctor, you do not have that continuity of care necessarily, that depth of understanding, that holistic recognition of a person's medical history. These changes will give doctors more confidence to really clarify where somebody has died of natural causes, without necessarily knowing that 100 per cent among a range of comorbidities – for example, where pneumonia might be a leading cause of death with dementia as an antecedent cause. They do not need to be 100 per cent in their knowledge that one particular comorbidity was the primary cause of death, only that it was most likely in the circumstances. This will enable the doctors to notify Births, Deaths and Marriages of the death, to clarify their obligations and ultimately to reduce the unnecessary burden that is placed upon the coronial processes, on the court, on those investigators, while also avoiding families being dragged into those processes unnecessarily.

I want to talk very briefly about some of the changes to the Public Advocate role and the Office of the Public Advocate. These are changes really to the delegation powers of the OPA and also the process by which a new Public Advocate can be appointed and acting arrangements made. In doing so I want to acknowledge the service of Colleen Pearce, who retired relatively recently after a period of 17 years serving Victoria and often advocating for, in the role of Public Advocate, some of the most vulnerable Victorians. It is an incredibly important role. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with Colleen, to learn from her and to get the benefit of that wisdom and experience in my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Disability. I wish Dan Stubbs, with whom I have also worked in a previous capacity of his, the very best in his role now as the newly appointed Public Advocate, as he commenced on 17 November last year.

Finally, in the context of the omnibus dimensions, I just want to add my full support to the provisions that seek to address – it is difficult to talk about these things in some respects – the dimensions of bestiality, which are abhorrent. The idea that we even need to deal with these things is abhorrent, but of course we do. It is incumbent upon us as a state government and as a Parliament to deal with these horrendous crimes and actions against, as the member for Box Hill said, defenceless animals. The acts themselves are already criminalised. This bill closes some potential loopholes in the transmission and

carriage of depictions of those actions, which I think can only be a good thing. In recognising that fact, I also just want to acknowledge the individuals and organisations in my part of the world, like Second Chance Animal Rescue in Craigieburn, who do an incredible job preserving the dignity and integrity of animals and looking after them when their owners may not be able to or when they have been abused. That is selfless work and really important in my community.

Turning very briefly in the time that remains to part 8A, there has been a long process by which Victoria's anti-vilification laws have been strengthened, led by this government and catalysed in part by the work of the now Minister for Veterans after the abhorrent murder of Muslims in New Zealand in the Christchurch massacre, recognising that our settings at that point were not up to scratch. That committee undertook a very significant body of work which led to the anti-vilification measures that the Attorney legislated last year with the support of this government but not with the support of all of those across this house.

I think it is very, very necessary to note that the events of Bondi were another abhorrent murder of people simply on account of their faith. We talked about that at length as a house yesterday with deep respect and solemnity. The Premier committed to doing whatever she and we could to amend those anti-vilification laws, and removing that need for the DPP's approval in instances of incitement I think does strengthen those laws. I note, though, that children may not be fully apprised of what they are in fact doing, and that is why the work of organisations like the Holocaust museum in providing education is so absolutely pivotal. Every single Victorian, regardless of their faith, has the right to live in freedom and free from fear.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:47): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. This is an omnibus bill that deals with a range of matters, a number of which are sensible and in isolation the Greens would be prepared to support. However, we will be opposing this bill for two reasons: because it further entrenches injustice in Victoria's fines regimes and, secondly, because the government will repeal a really important safeguard that the Greens secured just last year.

With this bill Labor are introducing a last-minute kneejerk amendment, and they are proposing to repeal a key safeguard that the Greens secured, in negotiation with the government, to Victoria's new anti-vilification laws just last year. That is the requirement for the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the DPP, before police can prosecute a charge. That safeguard matters, and here is how it works: without it, police can arrest, charge and prosecute someone in the courts without any independent oversight. Legal and human rights experts tell us that, unchecked, that power could be weaponised against the very communities that it is meant to protect, used to silence political communication, used against peaceful protesters and used as a tool of intimidation. The Greens secured the DPP oversight with the support and guidance of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Human Rights Law Centre and many other organisations to stop these laws from being turned against already marginalised and overpoliced communities – in particular, people of colour and First Nations people.

DPP oversight means that before proceeding to court the Director of Public Prosecutions has to independently review the charges against the evidence. They review it against our human rights charter, and they review it against our obligations under the constitution, the right to political communication and the right to freedom of assembly. The DPP assesses whether proceeding with the charge is in the public interest or not. That is crucial for these kinds of charges, but it all gets thrown out the window if this bill passes, because when Parliament criminalises speech, safeguards are not a technicality. They are the difference between targeted protection and unbridled political oppression. This safeguard is there to ensure that serious offences are used for serious cases with consistency and oversight and not used as an instrument of vexatious policing, for political strongarming or as a shortcut response to complex community tensions.

As well as being a kneejerk reaction for a problem that it frankly will not solve, this move from the Parliament represents a troubling break with the conventions of Parliament, and that is: when legislation is negotiated with the Greens it cannot then be repealed six months later in negotiation with the Liberals; that is not how it works. This visionless flip-flopping from the Allan Labor government erodes our trust in our ability to negotiate with the government, but it also erodes the public's trust that the government will negotiate and govern in good faith. The Greens cannot support that.

Turning to the bill itself and the changes to suppression orders, this bill creates a mechanism to review, vary or revoke suppression orders that were made before December 2013 to continue in force under repealed provisions or common law. These are legacy orders that can linger for years, often without a clear pathway for review and sometimes long after their original purpose has passed. The Greens welcome this reform in particular. Open justice is a fundamental principle; courts should operate transparently, with limits only where strictly necessary. This is an important change for victim-survivors, providing a clearer pathway to have suppression orders lifted when they want to speak publicly or where continuing restrictions are no longer justified. In a system that so often takes control away from victim-survivors, any reform that restores agency in a safe way is welcome. While the overall intent is supported, legal specialists have raised questions about what safeguards will be in place so that victim-survivors will not be drawn into adversarial processes that they did not initiate, because many parties can apply; section 37 includes media, AGs, other parties or any person with a sufficient interest. Victim-survivors must be notified and consent, but there is a possibility that some could feel pressured to do so or may be forced to re-engage with traumatic material. So the Greens are seeking clarification from the Attorney-General on this matter, and we will explore it during the committee of the whole in the other place.

We also note that the bill does not require trauma-informed processes or independent support or legal assistance and consideration for safety measures – for example, the ability for remote participation in a hearing or ensuring privacy and protections for victim-survivors. The bill also does not appear to have a requirement that the media must demonstrate public interest necessity before involving a victim-survivor. Particularly for matters that media initiate, we would have thought that it should be required that media demonstrate consideration of risk of harm. It is recommended that increased funding to the community legal sector is provided to ensure legal advice and support for victim-survivors is available in order to understand the consequences of consenting to revocation. This bill also makes a set of changes to streamlining coronial processes and death registration. It allows doctors who have reviewed clinical records and relevant circumstances to notify a probable cause of death rather than defaulting those cases into the coronial system. The bill also updates how coronial findings can be reopened and set aside in certain cases, making these processes clear and more workable. These kinds of reforms really matter to families. A coronial process can be the source of answers and accountability. While coronial scrutiny is vital, reducing unnecessary delays can ease an already distressing process.

One aspect of this bill that the Greens are seriously concerned about is the proposed changes to Fines Victoria and infringement processes, particularly around service. The bill expands what is deemed service – service being when a fine is considered legally delivered to a person on a specific date – and the bill introduces a new online platform where service can be treated as effective from when information becomes accessible to a person on that platform. Anyone who works in this space knows the reality: people in hardship, people with unstable housing, people living with a disability, people escaping family violence, people with limited English or people with limited digital access are disproportionately entangled in the infringement system. They are also the most likely to miss a notice not because they are careless but because, predictably, the system was designed in a way that fails people in hardship and then punishes them for that failure. If you expand deemed service without the proper safeguards, you increase the risk that people will not know that they have been served and the penalties will escalate. Late fees, enforcement warrants, licence sanctions and added costs can follow. The first time someone truly learns of debts can be when they are already in a deeper crisis. It is cruel and it punishes vulnerable people further to the margins, and the Greens will not support that.

The bill also includes administrative amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 relating to acting appointments and delegations. Guardianship decisions can affect where someone lives, what medical care they receive and how their finances are managed. Administrative flexibility may be necessary to keep services functioning, but it must not dilute accountability, transparency or review rights. We will be asking questions in the other place to ensure that acting appointments and delegations are properly confined and do not weaken safeguards for people whose lives are most affected by these decisions.

Another element of this bill that the Greens support is the amendment to the Crimes Act 1958 to extend the bestiality offence and create a new offence relating to animal abuse material. The Greens support strong animal welfare laws and clear offences that target exploitation and cruelty and support this element of the bill. The creation of offences for animal abuse material reflects the reality that technology facilitates harm and that the criminal law must respond. With any criminal offence, implementation matters and enforcement must be properly resourced.

The Greens also strongly support the extension of the operation of the Drug Court division of the County Court. The bill removes the sunset limitation and ensures the Drug Court can continue beyond April 2026. The Drug Court is an example of a therapeutic problem-solving court that addresses the causes of offending and reduces reoffending. The Drug Court requires engagement with treatment, compliance with conditions and ongoing oversight. It works precisely in the way that punishment alone does not. It tackles substance dependence, it stabilises lives and it improves community safety. If this Parliament is serious about safety, we should be expanding therapeutic pathways, not shrinking them, and for that reason we support that element of the bill.

Finally, the bill makes procedural updates to the Road Safety Act 1986 and related Magistrates' Court processes, including modernising, filing and notice procedures. While these may be sensible, we will be asking questions in the other place about whether this shift will be accompanied by clear alternatives and support for people who need assistance with or cannot access online systems.

To conclude, the government has assembled a bill with several positive and administrative changes, but it has also foreshadowed a significant change to the anti-vilification framework – removing that requirement for DPP consent – and it wants to do that through a house amendment that has not been properly exposed to public scrutiny. This is not an acceptable way to change important laws. Parliament and the community deserve to see in advance precise changes proposed, the rationale for them and the evidence that supports them. Targeted communities deserve to be consulted, and so do the communities who know all too well what happens when the criminal law expands and safeguards are reduced. If the government believes the DPP safeguard should be removed, it should bring forward a dedicated bill, explain why and engage in genuine and transparent consultation with those who are affected. Until that happens and while that foreshadowed amendment sits over this bill alongside the risk of deepening harm caused by Victoria's fine systems in this bill, the Greens cannot support it.

**Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Treasurer confirmed that the emergency services tax will not be enough to fund all of our emergency services. How much more will this government tax Victorians?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her volley across the net with this question about the emergency services levy, because it clearly shows how once again Victorians just cannot take this Liberal Party seriously with questions like this. Let us be clear –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

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

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has only commenced her answer. I will give her an opportunity to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying, you cannot take this Liberal Party seriously, because it is absolutely clear that alongside their ongoing campaign of misinformation and deception about funding of our emergency services they do not understand –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Members for Eureka and Bulleen withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, sledging is not relevant.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. It is entirely appropriate for the Premier, in her answer, to contrast the policy positions of our government with those of the opposition.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I say that because the levy is an important source of support for our emergency services, emergency services who have, as we have seen over the month of January, fought the fiercest of fires and have had to deal with flooding emergencies along the Great Ocean Road just in the matter of a couple of weeks when we have had a very prolonged heatwave as well. It is because of these more frequent and fierce natural disasters that we understand we need to increase support to our emergency services. The only people who are talking about cutting funding are those who would cut the levy, which would cut funding to our emergency services.

I want to explain to the Leader of the Opposition – and I would have thought this was something that may have already been known, but understanding that they are all about misinformation, I can appreciate that it may not – the emergency services levy is not the only source of funding for our emergency services. There are other government funding appropriations that are made to support our emergency services. Let us be clear: you cannot take this divided Liberal outfit seriously. Their own members of Parliament cut and run.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this question went to asking the Premier whether or not the government had any further taxes and what they would be. The Premier has not dealt with the substance of that. That was the question.

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question. She was being relevant to the question. The Premier to come back to her answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The emergency services levy is about backing our emergency services. For example, the CFA today is better funded, better resourced and stronger because of the support we are giving to our emergency services. We will always back our emergency services, and it is not surprising that those opposite are talking about cutting the levy, because they are all about cuts. Cutting the levy cuts funding to our emergency services.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, you have twice asked the Premier to come back to the question. She just continues to sledge. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer. Before I call the Leader of the Opposition on a supplementary question, I would like to acknowledge in the gallery a delegation from the Legislative Assembly of Haryana: Speaker Harvinder Kalyan, Deputy Speaker Krishan Lal and Yoginder Singh.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Can the Premier give a guarantee to all Victorians, including CFA volunteers like those I met in Harcourt, that there will be no further increases to taxes, levies or charges to make up for this funding gap?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): I can make a guarantee that the Leader of the Opposition cannot. The Leader of the Opposition has an \$11 billion black hole that is only being filled by cuts.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier's constant misinformation is not relevant.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I can guarantee this: that as Premier I will continue to support and back our emergency services. The Leader of the Opposition referred to Harcourt CFA volunteers, who were out protecting your community and mine, Speaker, in the most difficult of days and in the most dangerous of circumstances. I am grateful to those volunteers. The volunteers from the Werribee CFA, like the member for Werribee, protected my community in the toughest of times. I make this commitment: whether it is new trucks, equipment, resources or support, our government will always back the volunteers who keep our communities safe.

#### **Ministers statements: medical research**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (14:09): I rise to reaffirm the Labor government's commitment to supporting Victoria's thriving medical research sector. I am incredibly proud that right here in Victoria we are not only the medical research capital of Australia but also recognised amongst the world's best. The Allan Labor government takes pride in supporting our health technologies and medical research sector. We have not taken our racquet and ball and gone home. We have invested over a billion dollars into this sector over the past decade to develop Melbourne into a world-class hub for this sector. An important part of supporting the sector means building cutting-edge infrastructure, which is why we are supporting the development of landmark research facilities right across the state. I was delighted to recently visit the future site of the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease after my good friend the Minister for Planning awarded planning approval – a critical step on the path to driving life-saving breakthroughs in treatment and care.

Our global reputation in this field did not happen by accident. It is the result of years of sustained investment guided by the vision and dedication of researchers, scientists and academics, because on this side of the house we trust the science. Trusting the science means you do not accept invitations to misinformation conventions, it means you do not import divisive slogans from overseas and it means you do not cosy up to those who repeatedly challenge expert scientific consensus. Victoria has a proud legacy of medical research, delivering breakthroughs that have improved health outcomes worldwide. Today our world-class institutes and brilliant researchers continue that tradition, discovering, trialling and developing solutions. Victorians know you do not achieve these things if you spend your time bringing the extreme into the mainstream. You do not support scientific breakthroughs if you platform those who peddle disinformation. You cannot deliver new solutions and good public services if you stand with those who create divisions in our communities.

**Country Fire Authority**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. Over summer the Premier repeatedly claimed that delays in tabling the CFA annual report were due to delays in the Auditor-General process, yet the Auditor-General issued a statement categorically disproving the Premier's claims. Why did the Premier mislead members of the Avenel and Longwood CFA brigades in my electorate by blaming the independent umpire?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): In answering the question, I will correct the misinformation that is contained in the member for Euroa's question. My answer to the tabling of the CFA's annual report went to the auditing processes, and indeed there was some repeated back and forth between agencies and the Auditor-General's office that enabled the final tabling of the report a couple of weeks ago. But the substance of the 2024–25 annual report shows that funding has increased to the CFA, so regardless of what date the annual report was tabled the facts that are contained in the annual report are that funding has increased to the CFA. For any member of this place to say otherwise would be deceiving those volunteers who over this summer have worked tirelessly to protect us and to protect our communities and do not deserve the misinformation and deception. There has only ever been a funding increase to the CFA that is shown in the 2024–25 annual report, and today the CFA is better funded, better supported and better resourced because we back them.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:13): The Premier referred to cuts to CFA funding as a conspiracy theory, despite the independent budget watchdog confirming three consecutive years of cuts. Isn't the Premier the only person peddling conspiracy theories in relation to CFA funding?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): I am pleased that the member for Euroa has given me an opportunity to comment on the process of how the Parliamentary Budget Office released this information to the opposition. When the fire struck on 7, 8 and 9 January, my focus was solely on supporting our emergency services and those fire-affected communities. The Leader of the Opposition's focus was on soliciting false information from the Parliamentary Budget Office to then peddle to those very same communities.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is entirely out of order for the Premier to be reflecting on the independent Parliamentary Budget Office. That is exactly what you just did – shocking.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The member for Brighton is warned.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: On the point of order, Speaker, I will not allow the member for Brighton to verbal me by way of a point of order, because it would be nasty for the member for Brighton to do that. I want to be absolutely clear that my issue is with the Leader of the Opposition and the fact that her focus was on politicisation of funding to emergency services, not on supporting fire-affected communities.

**Danny O'Brien**: Further to the point of order, Speaker, the Premier seems to forget what she just said. She said soliciting a false report from the PBO.

**The SPEAKER**: I do not uphold the point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: This behaviour and the response we are seeing in the house today demonstrate why we cannot take this Liberal leader or this Liberal–National coalition seriously. They are all about cuts, not about backing Victoria.

**Annabelle Cleeland**: On a point of order, the question is to you, Premier, not the Leader of the Opposition.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! Member for Euroa, through the Chair, and that is not a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:16): I am very excited to inform the house that the brand new Frankston hospital is now being powered by the SEC, with 100 per cent renewable electricity, as are the fantastic new Metro Tunnel, the record 19 brand new schools just opened for term 1 and public schools, hospitals, trams and trains right across our state. They are powered by cheap and reliable renewable electricity thanks to the SEC. Spending less on power bills means more money for our schools, our health services and the things that matter most to Victorians, just like our government's focus on Victorians' household budgets. Just last week I was out in the Latrobe Valley talking about the latest SEC project, the Delburn wind farm. It is the first SEC project in Gippsland since the SEC was sold off 30 years ago.

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

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

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** It is investments such as these that are keeping Victoria ahead of other states when it comes to replacement renewable energy and lower power bills. The latest AEMO data, released just last week, confirms that Victoria achieved the lowest average wholesale power prices in the country last year. Because of our increased renewables, Victoria's agenda is delivering cheaper bills. That is the evidence-based convention. Others would want to hold conventions to spread misinformation that takes Victorians backwards on renewables and would send Victoria's power bills through the roof. That is called a misinformation convention, on a platform with One Nation to boot. Only the Allan Labor government will continue to help Victorians with the cost of living, building that cheap, affordable renewable energy that will not only keep the lights on but keep Victoria ahead of all the other states when it comes to those power bills, helping every single Victorian, no matter where they live across this state.

**Fire services**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:18): My question is to the Minister for Environment. Why have contractors with heavy plant and equipment engaged to fight bushfires in Victoria not been paid, with an estimated \$15 million now outstanding?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:18): I thank the member for his question. I do not have a response. I have to fact-check his question, to be really honest with you. I will come back to him. But it does give me an opportunity to commend the extraordinary work of those same contractors he is talking about.

*Members interjecting.*

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** I think the Leader of the Nationals' constituents deserve a proper response to that, and I will come back to him on that. But it does give me an opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary work, capacity, expertise and equipment that those contractors have, which have been extraordinarily handy. This government decided to end native timber harvesting at the beginning of 2024. We retained the expertise of those contractors for exactly this type of emergency. They are out there assisting right now, opening up roadways and access ways, clearing debris and trees that are impacting the free flow of those communities that have been impacted so severely by the bushfires. I will come back to the member in relation to that specific question, because we value the work of those contractors, as I might say we value the work of all emergency responders and people who have been there for the community during the bushfires.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:20): Contractors have been told that Forest Fire Management Victoria has not paid them because they do not have the staff to process time sheets. When will contractors be paid?

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:20): As I said, I have to check the premise of that question. Can I just say, akin to the response the Premier gave to the member for Euroa, I would expect nothing else of the good men and women of FFMVic than to be there for the Victorian community fighting bushfires right now. That is exactly the work I would expect them to be doing, and that is the work of emergency response. It is not the work of bookkeeping. But I will come back to the member in relation to the question he has asked.

#### **Ministers statements: health infrastructure**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:21): Today I rise to update the house on the progress this government is making in terms of the state's largest ever health infrastructure pipeline. This summer the Allan Labor government has been busy building and opening new hospitals. In January we opened the door to the new Peninsula University Hospital. We have delivered more beds, new spaces for mental health and new operating theatres, as well as new maternity and paediatric wards, a women's clinic and a special care nursery for our littlest Victorians. The members for Frankston, Carrum, Hastings and Cranbourne know how important this is.

Just last Sunday I was thrilled to attend the community open day at the new Footscray Hospital alongside the members for Footscray and Laverton. The hospital, which is on track to open in two weeks time, has more than 500 inpatient beds. It has got an emergency department that will allow for an additional 20,000 people to be seen each year, and in December we are opening our 47th ambulance station, at Maribyrnong.

We are building and upgrading hospitals across the state. Just this summer I joined the members for Thomastown, Northcote and Preston to announce the start of main works at the Austin emergency hospital. Demolition works at the Warrnambool Base Hospital are finished, making space for a bigger, better hospital. We are fitting out the Werribee emergency department expansion, and I know that the members for Werribee, Point Cook, Tarneit and Laverton are thrilled to know what this means for their community. Tower cranes are also up for the start of the new Melton Hospital, which is a boon for the members of Melton and Sydenham. And work will continue on the new emergency department at the Northern Hospital, with support for an extra 30,000 patients per year as the state's busiest emergency department – a great project championed by the members for Thomastown, Mill Park, Yan Yean, Greenvale and Broadmeadows. Those opposite cut hospitals.

#### **Oil and gas exploration**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:23): My question is to the Premier. Victorians have just suffered catastrophic bushfires once again. Communities have been forced to watch so many of the things that they love go up in flames – their homes, farms, livestock and wildlife. And while some people faced fires, flash floods inundated communities and swept cars out to sea across the Great Ocean Road. The Premier herself has acknowledged this is climate change. It is, and regional Victorians are now paying the price. We all know that burning coal and gas causes climate change, so why has this Labor government approved five new gas-drilling projects in the last nine months alone?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. I will make this observation: it is of course easy to talk about climate action. A big step towards being able to talk about it is to believe in it and to understand that it is real, that you have got to take action and that you have got to understand that, whether it is getting more renewable energy into the grid, funding our emergency services or having resilience measures in the system, you have got to believe in this first. So I acknowledge that the member and the Greens are at least on that journey of acknowledging that climate change is real and it is having an impact. I also appreciate that the member for Melbourne has also acknowledged that it impacts regional communities like mine, which I am proud to represent – like so many of us on this side of the house are proud to represent. We stand with those regional communities by understanding that climate is having an impact. It means farmers

are having to rethink all of their traditional practices. They have to rethink the changes of the season and what that means for how they have, for decades, gone about being primary producers and change their practice.

But I make the point that it is easy to talk about climate action; it is another thing altogether to do something about it. That is why I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work of our colleague and friend the Minister for Climate Action. We have a Minister for Climate Action who has been doing a huge amount of work in this space. I will be clear: what we are focused on and the measure that really matters here is that here in Victoria our emissions have fallen by 31.4 per cent. That is not just by taking one action alone. There is a cumulative set of actions, whether it is about working with that same agriculture sector and doing work to help drive down emissions; the work in our transport sector of having our public transport network, our tram network, powered by renewable energy; or bringing back the SEC of course, which is about bringing more renewable energy.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** They find their voice now, don't they? The Liberals and Nationals find their voice now, when there is an opportunity to talk down investment in renewable energy, to talk down the SEC. We know where they stand and where we stand, and Victorians know where my government stands on this. We acknowledge that action is needed on bringing more renewable energy and on driving down emissions, and the work we have done has delivered just that: a 31.4 per cent reduction in emissions.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:27): When Australians learned about the dangers of asbestos killing people, governments took action. They banned its use, its sale and its import. If politicians got up in Parliament back then and spoke about, say, subsidising ventilators or handing out free meals to people dying of asbestosis while actively giving government support to the product and the companies that caused it, we would think that was morally wrong. Similarly, we have known about the danger caused by burning fossil fuels for a very long time, and now our community is feeling the impacts and people are dying. So how is it at all justified that the Labor government in Victoria is actively encouraging the expansion of oil and gas drilling across Victoria?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I am almost tempted to yield the floor to the Minister for Climate Action, as she has been making very clear what I mentioned before: a 31.4 per cent reduction in emissions. The member for Melbourne may want to keep talking about this, but we are taking real action on this, cutting our emissions by 50 per cent more than the national average over the past decade. That is what you get when you take these issues seriously and when you believe in the science and the evidence, unlike those opposite.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question was about coal and gas, on relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier is being relevant to the question that was asked. She is able to be relevant because the first question, the substantive question, referred to climate change.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** When it comes to taking action, the Victorian community can see what we have delivered and know that we believe in the science, and we will keep driving more investment in renewable energy and keep tackling emissions. They also know that we do the work – we do not just talk about it, like the Greens do – and at least we believe in it, unlike the Liberal and National parties. And we will keep this work up.

#### **Ministers statements: ambulance services**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:29): I rise to update the house on Victoria's world-class ambulance service. On this side of the house we respect our ambos and the work that they do every single day. It is why we have grown our on-road workforce by more than 50 per cent and why we have invested an additional \$2 billion into our ambulance services. The Productivity Commission,

I am proud to report, confirms what Victorians already know: Victoria has better ambulance response times than Queensland or New South Wales; patient satisfaction with our ambulance services is the best in the nation; where resuscitation is attempted, we have the best cardiac survival rates of any jurisdiction, and indeed we are amongst the top three in the world; and our ambos of course, because we respect them, have amongst the best pay and conditions of any paramedic service here in Australia.

Of course we are also investing in initiatives that will get our paramedics back on the road sooner, and this includes the standards for timely and safe ambulance and emergency care. We have backed in the standards with a more than \$58 million investment, which has already freed up more than 4000 paramedic shifts and improved transfer times by 13.7 per cent. We have invested in these initiatives because only Labor supports and backs in our paramedics and quite frankly only Labor understands how our healthcare system operates here in Victoria and indeed what it is that our paramedics do. We know that when our paramedics are out on the road that is where they are delivering their life-saving work. They are out meeting people in the community to deliver care. They are not sitting around in branches waiting for members of the opposition to show up for selfies. Our paramedics – *(Time expired)*

### Victoria Police

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): My question is to the Premier. Productivity Commission data shows Victoria is the only mainland state with decreased real police funding, down 3.7 per cent since 2021, while every other state has increased funding. Why should the safety of Victorians be compromised because this government cannot manage money?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): The Leader of the Opposition is wrong. For the benefit of the member for Brighton, that is the start of my direct answer to her question, and I will now go through the details why. As I said to the house yesterday, Victoria has the largest police force of any state or territory because we back the front line. We back the work of the men and women of Victoria Police. So I repeat for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, just in case she is ready to run out there with a bit of misinformation: the question is wrong.

**Danny O'Brien**: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the Premier is debating the question, which was about Productivity Commission data, which the Minister for Health has just quoted herself.

**The SPEAKER**: The Premier is not debating the question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Leader of the Nationals! Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, this is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: The Leader of the Opposition is struggling to manage her own outfit, let alone asking me questions about the Victoria Police force.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! Manager of Opposition Business, I have repeatedly asked you to cease interjecting across the table when you rise to make a point of order. Through the Chair.

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

**The SPEAKER**: The Premier will come back to her answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I repeat, because clearly the points of orders that have just been made perhaps show the opposition were not listening. I can understand that; they were talking amongst themselves, planning the next few weeks down on the coast. The assertion the Leader of the Opposition made in her question is wrong. Victoria has the largest –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, it is not relevant to reflect on the Productivity Commission.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier to continue. There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I appreciate those following at home are probably struggling, because we are struggling, to take this outfit seriously, and it demonstrates once again –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Members will come to order. The Premier will be heard in silence. Members will be removed from the chamber for an hour and a half should they interrupt in the short time that is left of question time.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I say this very clearly: it is only Labor governments that back Victoria Police, the largest police force in the country, as opposed to a former government that cut \$100 million to Victoria Police. It is a Labor government that gives Victoria Police the tools and resources they need. It is a Liberal opposition that undermines the work of Victoria Police at every turn.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

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

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:35): Productivity Commission data also shows 33 per cent of Victorians feel unsafe walking alone at night compared to 22 per cent of people in New South Wales. Why should Victorians feel unsafe at night because this government has reduced real funding to Victoria Police?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:36): Again the claim that has been made by the Leader of the Opposition is not correct. We are backing the men and women of Victoria Police. I understand the Leader of the Opposition can sometimes misunderstand. We cannot take these sorts of questions seriously, because they are all about cuts. They are not about backing and investing the work of Victoria Police.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. This question went to Productivity Commission data. The Premier needs to deal with the factual data, rather than misinform the house.

**The SPEAKER:** It is an assumption that all members of this house will be factual when they are on their feet.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In terms of community safety, our government understands from listening to victims of crime that it is not acceptable that we have too many victims of crime. That is why – from listening to those victims of crime and understanding that there need to be tougher penalties, like adult time for violent crime – we need to see consequences for this sort of behaviour, but at the same time we need to tackle the root causes, which we are doing through the establishment of the violence reduction unit. We will keep this work up by funding and backing Victoria Police and agencies across our justice system.

#### **Ministers statements: ADHD services**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): For too long getting treatment for ADHD has depended on three things: time, money and luck. Today accessing ADHD care often means long delays for people waiting for an appointment and out-of-pocket costs that we know stretch families

thin. When appointments are booked out for months, sometimes more than a year, many end up waiting. The consequence of this wait is people going without diagnosis and going without being able to access the care and support that they need. And that is a divide between those who can access care – can afford to access care – and those who cannot.

My government is determined to close that gap and to make sure that we are saving Victorians time and money by getting them better access to diagnosis and treatment for ADHD care, which is why we are making that important change to allow GPs to be able to both diagnose and prescribe medication for adults and kids with ADHD. It means quicker treatments. It means less expense. Sometimes it can cost up to \$2000 for specialist care. Also it means, particularly for kids, that they get that care and treatment sooner, which means they are settled in school and can go on and be the best little learners.

Today we went one step further by announcing that the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department will be a point of call when adults and kids have run out of medication and have been caught short. They will be able to go to the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, a free service, be seen by a GP and have their script sent to the local pharmacy. This is about supporting kids. It is about making access to our great healthcare system even easier and fairer for families right across this state.

*Constituency questions*

**South-West Coast electorate**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:40): (1478) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. With the federal government now delivering an additional \$25 billion to the states' health budgets, will the Minister for Health finally confirm what the Labor government explicitly promised the people of south-west Victoria and build the new Warrnambool Base Hospital to the full scope that the community was told to wait for until it was scoped to perfection? The Premier quietly downgraded the project last year, slashing the scope behind closed doors, clearly hoping our community would not notice they were being short-changed. Minister, I expect you will now commit clearly and unequivocally to delivering the hospital south-west Victorians were promised, not the downgraded version this government is trying to slip through the back door.

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:41): (1479) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Last year we finally opened the Metro Tunnel, and just this month we have made the big switch to ramp up the frequency of services right across Melbourne's rail network. Those in my electorate who sit on the Sunbury line are some of the biggest beneficiaries of this service uplift, as our trains now run exclusively through the Metro Tunnel. For a commuter at Sunshine looking to catch a train into the CBD for work in the morning, guess how long they need to wait now? Just about 5 minutes. It also means outside of peak hours the 20-minute frequencies that Sunshine station commuters had are now halved to 10 minutes. With early and late services, frequency is also halving from 30 to 40 minutes down to 10 or 20 minutes. Thanks to the extra 622 weekly services at Sunshine, these are real, massive changes for my community. My question is this: how many commuters do we expect to benefit on the Sunbury line thanks to the big switch?

**Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:42): (1480) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the information I seek is a timeframe for the Buchan Bush Nursing Centre rebuild. This not-for-profit health service has been operational in some form for around a hundred years. The government provided funding in 2022 for planning, and this planning has now been completed. However, two applications to the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund have been denied, and this should not be dependent on grant approval. We now have a situation where the old building is starting to fail and the departments are reticent to fund these repairs. Why fund planning without the follow-on? The community relies heavily on this service, and with the help and support of the local CFA and

the community, they have raised the funds to secure the new site. It is a very proactive committee. So I ask the minister: can she please provide the timeframe for this rebuild?

**The SPEAKER:** So is your question ‘What is the timeframe’?

**Tim BULL:** No, the information that I am seeking is the timeframe.

**The SPEAKER:** No, you need to ask a question. ‘What is the timeframe’ is your question.

#### **Box Hill electorate**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:43): (1481) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Will the draft plans for the Blackburn activity centre exclude the SLO1 and SLO2 landscape overlay areas? As I have previously noted in this place, Blackburn is a place of heritage, character and natural beauty. The Bellbird area, protected under the SLO1 and SLO2 overlays, is a living testament to the community’s commitment to environmental stewardship over many years. Indeed many of the mature trees that contribute to this landscape were planted decades ago by the same residents who still live in this area. These overlays are not arbitrary. They were established to safeguard the unique tree canopy, streetscape and ambience that define Blackburn’s identity. Retaining the existing zoning of the SLO1 and SLO2 areas and excluding these areas from the activity centre catchments would go a long way to ensuring that this environment can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come.

#### **Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:44): (1482) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Over 600 residents in my community of Ringwood North have signed a petition expressing serious concern about a massage parlour proposed to open at the local shopping strip on Warrandyte Road. Many local families have contacted my office, worried about how this will change the character of their neighbourhood, particularly given its proximity to shops frequented by children. The 2022 planning law changes, specifically amendment VC217, have stripped councils and residents of their ability to object. Minister, my community wants to know: why did this government remove the ability of ordinary residents to have a say in decisions that directly affect the character and safety of their communities?

#### **Ripon electorate**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (14:45): (1483) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. Minister, how will families in the outer areas of Ballarat benefit from the Ballarat bus network review? Since being elected I have proudly helped deliver a school bus connection to Cardigan Village and Lucas and improved school bus timetabling for kids in Miners Rest. I have also secured a bus extension to Lucas for the very first time, as well as the new route C27 bus service connecting Smythesdale, Smythes Creek, Snake Valley and Haddon to the Delacombe town centre. Despite these big wins, some areas are still not connected to buses for everyone, including Cardigan Village and the Ballarat West employment zone. I am determined to improve bus connections and timetabling across the areas of Ballarat and the surrounding communities that I represent, and I eagerly await the outcomes of the Ballarat bus network review.

#### **Brunswick electorate**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:46): (1484) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Many of my Brunswick constituents are asking for a more frequent 508 bus service on the weekend. This busy service connects Moonee Ponds to Alphington and links together key thoroughfares in my electorate, including Sydney Road, St Georges Road and the Upfield train line. But on weekends, the 508 bus only runs every 40 to 60 minutes. Buses are the only east–west method of public transport in Melbourne’s inner north. They are used by older locals, students, others who do not drive and people wanting to leave their car at home. Four years after the Department of Transport and Planning’s Victoria bus network reform consultation, people in the north say that they

want more frequent and reliable buses. The community is still waiting for the public transport they need. When will the government increase the frequency of the 508 bus on weekends?

**Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:47): (1485) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. I am very grateful to our neighbourhood houses across the Bellarine – Ocean Grove Neighbourhood House, Portarlington Neighbourhood House, Drysdale’s SpringDale community centre and Queenscliffe Neighbourhood House – for assisting my Bellarine constituents with applying for their local power saving bonus. I am really excited also to be out in Ocean Grove, where my office will assist constituents to apply for the power saving bonus, on Tuesday. We will be able to help people with that application. My question for the minister is: how many Bellarine households have benefited from this round of the power saving bonus? I look forward to hearing an update on how Bellarine has benefited from this bonus round.

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:47): (1486) My constituency question today is for the Premier and comes from residents and the Buloke Shire Council. The question is: why is it that when a bushfire disaster is declared, it is only for specific incidents and/or dates and not the entire bushfire season? This allows some bushfires that have occurred outside date parameters to fall through the cracks, much like the Jeffcott fire on 18 December, which saw 2200 hectares burnt and a house and numerous outbuildings lost. Yes, the damage is much smaller than it was in the catastrophic fires in January, but the impact felt by those property owners is no less, and the impact on the council, who are still waiting on flood recovery money from 2022–23, will certainly be felt by every single ratepayer in Buloke Shire Council.

**Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:48): (1487) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it has a very similar theme to the member for Bellarine’s. How many households in the Glen Waverley district have taken up the latest round of the power saving bonus? This government understands the real cost-of-living pressures facing Victorian households, and that is why we have delivered another round of the power saving bonus. The \$100 payment provides direct relief on electricity bills for eligible concession card holders: the pensioner concession card, the Veterans’ Affairs pensioner concession card and the Veterans’ Affairs gold card as well. In Glen Waverley my office is ready to assist constituents to access this support. Residents can bring along their most recent electricity bill, a drivers licence, Medicare card and concession card and my staff will help them submit their application. Or if you cannot get to the office, I am even happy to do house calls for you as well. The power saving bonus concludes on 31 March, and I strongly encourage eligible households in the Glen Waverley district to apply for this as soon as possible so they do not miss out on this important \$100 bonus.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have got eight questions on notice that are now overdue. Shall I email the numbers to the Clerk?

**The SPEAKER:** That would be most helpful. Thank you, member for Brunswick.

**Annabelle Cleeland:** On a point of order, Speaker, I also have a point of order about overdue questions. I am going to one-up; I have got 16 overdue and would love a response. They touch roads and road safety, health, public and active transport, ambulance services, disability, environment, education and emergency services. Help us out, please.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask you to hand the list to the Clerk.

*Bills***Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:50): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. Like so many bills that have come before the house in my almost eight years here, this one aims to make a number of really important changes to improve the operation of our courts and, most importantly, our justice system.

Talking about courts and our justice system, I do want to take a quick opportunity to once again note and acknowledge the recent opening of the Wyndham law courts at the end of last year. Having been the member for Tarneit and now the member for Laverton, I have opened many, many, many, many projects in Wyndham, and being at the opening there alongside my great friends the member for Tarneit, the member for Werribee and the member for Point Cook and having that first glimpse at those law courts, I have to say they were absolutely amazing. My breath was completely taken away by the outside architecture of this amazing building and then going in and seeing the entrance and the foyer and going up and having a look at the courts.

It has been a long time since I have been in court. I was a judge's associate many, many moons ago and spent a lot of time in court in Queensland. Courts have a particular smell. I often think that they have a smell sort of like this room here, which is a little bit scary. I say it is just the age of the seats, the chairs and all that kind of thing here in the room. But I have to say these law courts were absolutely incredible. The courtrooms were the sort of place where you would just love to go and watch. It was absolutely amazing. When I spoke to the Chief Justice of Victoria and others in there in the legal fraternity, I said to them, 'I don't remember courtrooms being this fabulous.' I think courtrooms used to have brown carpet or even orange carpet. Orange is a very bright colour. There were all of those kinds of things in a courtroom. It was really, I remember, 1960s, 1970s kind of architecture.

But seeing Wyndham and looking at the beautiful, beautiful architecture and the wood and the other natural elements and the light that they have brought into those courtrooms, they have done this specifically not just to be a fabulous place to work and a fabulous place perhaps to go for sentencing, but it was actually explained to me that when you have these really smart architectural sorts of designs built into a place like a courtroom, which can be really adversarial and really confronting for a lot of people, it actually brings the temperature down in the room. It makes people that have got mental health issues a bit more calm. When you have got trials and sentences dealing with really sensitive, tragic circumstances and there are heightened emotions, it can really bring things down. I think it was the Chief Justice who said to me that it enables the judge or the magistrate to have better control in the room – something I think, Speaker, sometimes you probably wish you had here in this place as you take back control.

I say to the community: if you have the opportunity, go and get a coffee, go and have a look, because this is the kind of stuff this Labor government is building, and it is building it for people in Wyndham and it is building it right across Victoria. But I have to say this piece of infrastructure was I think the best and most extraordinary I had seen in eight years – well and truly worth the wait. The Wyndham community are really going to appreciate and love having those law courts there and being able to have justice delivered closer to home.

Those courts also have dedicated Koori Court services, and I checked them out. They were absolutely amazing. That is really about improving access to the justice system for Indigenous Victorians living in the western suburbs, and there are a lot of them. The children's division and the family hearing day services open in July this year, with the full Koori Court coming online early next year. The law courts there also have VCAT services. Many people in my community do go to VCAT, and they like to know those services are up and running. It is also the first community-based venue to bring VCAT services,

would you believe, to Melbourne's booming western suburbs. That includes our government's Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, a dedicated one-stop shop for all rental matters to be heard and resolved, which is a great win for those living in Melbourne's west who rent. I have said time and time again here that I have spent many years as a renter and talked about the trials and tribulations that go with that.

In finishing up about Wyndham law courts, I will say that we will very soon have a dedicated specialist family violence court. That will be up and running from next year as well, making an absolutely profound difference for families in the western suburbs that find themselves experiencing family violence. In Melbourne's west, particularly in the Wyndham municipality, we know that the number of family violence call-outs and things happening there in the home is far, far above many other municipalities and is something that I think having this sort of specialist family violence court will be really good for, so people are able to access justice more quickly and closer to home. I mention all of this because physical access to justice is really important. When appearance and timing are things that are crucial in having legal matters heard and resolved and when documents need to be lodged with the courts and things like that, having a courthouse close by with all the services you could possibly need – and then Werribee cop shop, the police station, right next door – leads to better outcomes in communities and better outcomes for community safety. Of course you do not just get that by building more courthouses and expanding services, and this is what I am here to talk about this afternoon. Our law books also have a really important part to play. I have not said the words 'law books', I think, since doing my law degree in Queensland, which is a very, very, very long time ago, but that is what this bill is really about.

One of the bigger focuses of this bill is in relation to what we call the legacy suppression orders. This acquits a key recommendation, number 33, from the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2020 report on contempt of court, if anyone is counting. As many of us will know, suppression orders play a really important role in ensuring that sensitive information that is disclosed in a courtroom proceeding – and there can be a lot of things disclosed and a lot of things said in those proceedings – is prevented from being disclosed, repeated and, really importantly, published outside of the courtroom. There are a number of reasons, including to ensure the safety of parties, witnesses or other persons that may be involved in a case. Under the current rules that govern suppression orders – the Open Courts Act 2013 – all suppression orders have an expiry date of up to five years, which in this day and age kind of does not seem a lot. However, legacy suppression orders – orders that have been made by our courts before the act was introduced and came into effect – had no expiry dates attached to them. So what that means is that information is sealed by the order, which effectively has become a permanent gag order. That is what this bill is going to do – in particular, it is going to empower courts to be able to review these orders under the current act.

I have said time and time again here that it is really important that legislation keeps up with the community's expectations and the times that we live in. Part of the legislative agenda that this government has gone ahead and rolled out while I have been here for the past eight years is sometimes having bills like this, which do not seem that big or that important but are tidying things up and modernising services, procedures, regulations and legislation to ensure they are in step with community expectations. This actual change will be particularly important, and it builds on the work that we have been really busy doing for victim-survivors of sexual assault and violence in freeing them up, finally, to tell their story – prohibiting gag orders, restricting non-disclosure agreements and now this. This gives those victims-survivors greater control, which is something I think they lost when they had that crime committed against them.

This is a really important bill. I do not have time to go through all the bits and pieces, but what I will say is the bill makes a number of changes at its heart – which is always at the heart of Labor governments like ours – that are all about fairness, about dignity and about making sure our justice system truly works for the people that it serves. I think that is a really important reminder to folks here in this place. It strengthens protections, it removes barriers, it modernises outdated processes and it

closes gaps that simply should not exist anymore. From victim-survivors who deserve a voice, to families waiting for answers, to communities who expect a system to keep pace with the world around us, the changes in this bill are sensible. They are meaningful improvements. They reflect the kind of justice system that Victorians want and expect, and they reflect the kind of justice system that Labor is always committed to delivering for all Victorians. This is good, this is practical reform that will make a real difference in people's lives, no matter where they come from and what pocket of Victoria they live in. I am very pleased to commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (15:00): It is great to be able to rise in the chamber for the first time in 2026 and get up to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. Of course, as we have heard, this is an omnibus justice system bill, and it is at a stage where we do need to go through and make changes, whether they be minor changes or significant changes, to this omnibus bill when it comes through. The reform is required due to court decisions and the *Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants v DPP*. Once we have seen everything that comes through we have to go back through and actually make sure that it is written properly and everything is going to be working, because the one thing we do know when we go and change bills is that there are certain people out in our society that will be looking for any ways or means to find any loopholes in their favour that they can use. So to make sure that we are constantly in the Parliament having a look at some of these is the way to go.

There is ongoing Coroners Court reform. I noticed the member for Laverton spoke about courts in her area. We had one of the most famous courts in Morwell late last year when the Erin Patterson court case went through, so we had a hive where most of the media that stand and listen here in Parliament were down in Morwell. We are talking on justice legislation, and when that court proceeding went through, the police in the area actually had more powers – powers which I have called for many a time, with move-on powers that they could actually use in the community, having that visible presence on the street. I can stand here and let the chamber know that in the week before that court case took place, the police went out into our community, which like every other community has certain elements within the society that try to cause a bit of grief. We all see it no matter where we are in our wonderful community in Victoria. The people were unruly, and because of that court case the police had certain powers to move people on and to stop and search them. It made an absolutely huge difference to the community, especially the people in Morwell who go about their daily business.

We also have recommendations to simplify the discontinuation and reopening of coronial investigations, and I think that is to make sure that the access to that is streamlined for everybody, whether it be the people at the legal level that are doing it but more so the people in the community that are relying on these coronial investigations to take place – that they are done in a timely manner. So this is making sure that is okay to be able to do that.

There is pressure for Fines Victoria and the enforcement agencies – and I know it is a bit of a broad scope when we do mention them. One of the main things that comes through my office a lot is people that have been issued fines. The fines sometimes are very straightforward, and it needs to be reaffirmed that they have, at the end of the day, done the wrong thing and this is what their options are to move forward.

But some people fall between the cracks. Whether or not they receive a fine for committing an offence, they do not actually understand the fine as it comes through. For that enforcement we need to make sure that there are avenues for people. English may not be their first option, and we do have certain people in our community that have come in from overseas. We need to make sure that we can also explain and set out what their options are to contest those fines that do come through.

Also, there is a part here addressing animal abuse and bestiality. When I did come into the Parliament, two things I did not think I would ever talk about are bestiality and UTIs, which I had to speak about in my second or third speech that I did or bill that I did stand up for. So we need to make sure that we talk on everything.

*Members interjecting.*

**Martin CAMERON:** Yes, I know. It is very hard, isn't it? I know we need to make sure not to confuse the two. But I take the point of the member for Lowan when she was talking about how – and I think everybody that stands up will touch on this particular part in this omnibus bill – we need to take all precautions to make sure that paraphernalia that is out there is not seen by anybody in society, especially our children. But we do, on the other hand, need to make sure that, if people that are in the profession are involved in any way, we are protecting them. I think the member for Lowan used the example of pigs and making sure that when we are en masse producing any animal as such, these particular individuals are protected. So we need to make sure that when something like this comes up, yes, on one side, we are making sure that the level of court guidance and this bill are making sure that the community is safe, but we need to also make sure, on the flip side, with unintended consequences, that we are not making a rod for our primary producers that are in this area, producing food for us. These are our farmers, these are our veterinarians, that are going out onsite as well. We need to make sure that that is okay and done as well.

Touching on the clarification and continuation of the Drug Court division in the County Court, of course drugs are prominent in everybody's society. It does not matter where you are, it does not miss anybody inside our community, right across Victoria and around Australia. Having these checks and balances is good, but we also need to make sure that if you are given alcohol or drugs corrections, there are services for you to get to, because I know down in the Latrobe Valley, if you do get issued a corrections order, it is very, very hard to get into these services. You may get an initial visit or an initial consultation with someone, but then the follow-ups, the second and third visits, are very, very hard to get into. Sometimes in the Latrobe Valley – and it would be the same anywhere in regional Victoria – we do not have the opportunity to do it in our area; we do have to travel to metropolitan areas. So we need to make sure that when we are changing legislation and bills here we do have the option, especially in drug rehabilitation in the County Court when they are issuing stuff for us to have to go and do, of having these services available in our communities. We do have limited services down there, so we need to be looking at all costs to make sure that we have all these services available for our constituents. The bill, I know, we agree with and we are wanting to push through, so I hope that it does get through.

**Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:10):** I rise to support the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 as well. This is a bill that amends various justice and community safety related acts to improve the operation of the courts and justice system overall. The bill will go to quite a number of reforms to a number of acts, including the Coroners Act 2008 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996, and amend fines and tolling legislation, public advocacy and the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019. There are five acts in particular, with the time I have, that I would like to focus my contribution on. One is around the anti-vilification and social cohesion reforms. The second is around the contempt-of-court reforms. The third is around animal welfare and bestiality reforms. The fourth is around the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, and fifth is the Road Safety Act 1986 reforms.

As the member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, but of course as someone who is a proud son of migrant parents, I remain firmly committed to doing all I can to help build a more socially cohesive, resilient and tolerant community. That is why I have always continued to support measures in this place to combat hate, violence, intimidation and racism through those anti-vilification reforms we previously passed, banning the Nazi salute and Nazi symbol; supporting our First Nations communities through voice, treaty and truth processes; standing up for our multicultural communities to combat antisemitism but also Islamophobia and other forms of hate; and standing against hate to support our LGBTIQ+ communities as well.

The devastating terrorist and antisemitic attack of 14 December 2025 against our Australian Jewish community on Bondi Beach means we must continue to do more to combat hate and antisemitism at its core. I particularly acknowledge everyone who made a contribution yesterday through the

condolence motion, particularly my friend the member for Box Hill and also my colleague the member for Caulfield. My heart and that of my community remains broken for the victims, their families and the entire Jewish Australian community, who were celebrating the first night of Hanukkah with their children and loved ones, a sacred time of honouring light over darkness. Our prayers and thoughts also remain with the first responders, emergency services, witnesses and brave everyday Australians who experienced the horror of the attack and did what they could through many heroic acts, which have since emerged and are being brought to light, to keep people safe. Every community in Australia, including the Jewish community, has the right to celebrate their traditions openly and safely without fear of prejudice, persecution or violence. Hatred and extremism have no place in a multicultural and diverse Australia and can never be justified towards innocent civilians, no matter their faith or cultural background. The evil perpetrators of these attacks will not succeed in their efforts to divide and destroy us. That is why, building on our original anti-vilification laws, we must continue to do more.

This bill proposes to provide that the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions is not required for a police officer to commence prosecution for an offence of incitement on the grounds of a protected attribute or when threatening physical harm or property damage on the grounds of that protected attribute – those being race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, disability, mental illness, age, status and more – or personal association with someone with a protected attribute. Essentially this reform will lower the threshold for people to be prosecuted for alleged acts of anti-vilification conduct, particularly antisemitic conduct, and seek to better stamp out behaviours that seek to vilify and harm people and communities based on these attributes.

In this respect I would like to draw the house's attention to an email I received on 22 December from a local constituent, which I believe best helps encapsulate the mood and sentiment locally on these issues:

I am writing as a constituent to raise serious concerns about the rise in anti-Semitic behaviour within our state and the impact this is having on public safety and community cohesion.

I am not Jewish, but I feel compelled to speak out. I also recognise what is occurring in Gaza as a genocide and strongly condemn the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Holding this position does not, and should not, require tolerating hatred or intimidation of Jewish Australians, who have suffered immensely in the aftermath of the murder of over 1,200 Israelis by the terrorist group Hamas on 7 October 2023, an act of terrorism and brutality that I equally and unequivocally condemn.

I am a 40-year-old mother of two young children, and I am increasingly worried about the kind of society we are creating. I want my children to grow up in a community where differences can be debated without fear, where minority groups feel safe in public spaces, and where hatred is challenged rather than excused. What they see normalised now will shape the Australia they inherit.

I fully respect and support the right of people to peacefully protest, including in relation to international conflicts and human rights. However, many rallies have crossed a clear and unacceptable line, with openly anti-Semitic language and conduct that vilifies Jews as a group and, at times, incites hostility or violence ...

towards them.

When demonstrations move from political expression into racial vilification or intimidation of Jewish Australians, they cease to be legitimate expressions of dissent and become a threat to public safety and social cohesion, and should not be allowed to continue unchecked.

I am particularly concerned about the enforcement of existing laws. Many in the Jewish community feel there has been a lack of accountability for anti-Semitic conduct, including high-profile incidents such as the events at the Sydney Opera House on 8 October 2023.

The impact is also being felt at a very practical, local level. Jewish-owned businesses –

including one in Merri-bek as well that was previously reported, but others –

have been harassed and targeted, with some forced to close due to safety concerns, including a ... bakery in Sydney. When people cannot operate a business or enter public space safely because of their identity, it represents a failure of public order and equal protection under the law.

The Bondi attack just one week ago –

at the time –

directed at the Jewish community, has left many of us shocked, devastated, and deeply unsettled. While it targeted Jewish Australians, it was also an attack on all Australians and on the shared values that underpin our society. It highlights the urgent need for firm, early intervention against hate-fuelled intimidation and violence.

There are also escalating security costs for Jewish schools, synagogues, community organisations, and businesses, alongside the cancellation of Hanukkah and other community events due to safety concerns, resulting in financial losses ...

I urge the government to consider –

and she lists a number of measures, including –

Ensuring police consistently enforce anti-vilification, public order, and incitement laws at protests and public gatherings ...

again, amongst other measures.

All communities deserve to feel safe in public spaces. I ask that you advocate for firm, principled action to address anti-Semitism, uphold the rule of law, and protect community safety while respecting human rights.

To that constituent, who is a young mother and a doctor as well, I say that is what this bill today and this reform are all about.

The bill also implements recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2020 *Contempt of Court* report to enable applications to lower courts of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, VCAT, to revoke legacy suppression orders. These legacy suppression orders of course, as we know, heavily impact the right of victim-survivors to speak out. One of those victim-survivors I want to point to is a local constituent who is doing amazing work in this space to combat family violence and is everyone's favourite local neighbour from the show *Neighbours*. She was an actress on there, playing Libby for many years, Kym Valentine, and I have been delighted to catch up on many occasions over recent times with Kym to support her advocacy on these important issues, particularly around better health and wellbeing and family violence prevention outcomes for households locally and across the nation. In her role as a lived experience adviser at FARE, Kym is bringing her powerful voice through lived experience to support national efforts to prevent, deter and mitigate against alcohol-related harm on families, children and communities. She is advocating for an Australia free from alcohol harm, raising public awareness about the widespread harms caused by alcohol, with alcohol, for example, being involved in at least 65 per cent of all police-reported family violence incidents. She is working to highlight that it is children who face greater harm in households where alcohol is consumed at high-risk levels, with men most often being the high-risk drinkers. She is advocating for new reforms around retail sales, availability, delivery and access to alcohol through new proposed laws and regulations and corporate accountability. She is seeking through FARE Australia to partner with government, the retail sector, health and wellbeing professionals and those with lived experience to progress real change in this space. I recently welcomed Kym, before the end of last year, to Parliament to meet with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and others to help progress that advocacy.

The third major reform here of course goes to issues around animal welfare and bestiality. I have had a number of residents contact me on this issue over recent months, including Dale and Lisa and many, many others, who I acknowledge. I say to you that this bill directly responds to those issues and concerns.

Number 4, about the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, is also an important part of the bill and talks directly to some of the important work being done by local organisations across the north-west to help support young people with these issues. I draw the house's attention to the magnificent work of Ahmed Hassan and Youth Activating Youth, the YAY organisation, based out of Merri-bek for a long time at the Brunswick town hall, servicing the whole north-west. They do incredible work for young people in need. Established in 2014 by youth leaders Ali Ahmed and

Ahmed Hassan, who was a previous Victorian Young Australian of the Year, YAY has grown to support multicultural diverse communities and people of all backgrounds across Victoria through dedicated initiatives and programs to reduce youth offending, reoffending and knife crimes, divert young people away from substance abuse and much more. Over 15,000 people have gone through YAY's programs, which have built up young people's confidence, resilience and opportunities to thrive, with over 450 young people also having been directly employed through YAY's partnership and employment pathways. I attended their recent end-of-year luncheon in Port Melbourne, which was attended also by Mark Stone, Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush and many other distinguished luminaries from across Victoria and many young people, importantly, who have gone through the YAY program, reformed their behaviour and gone on to make a good contribution to the community. In this regard I also acknowledge the work of the Les Twentymen Foundation. I have done a lot of work with Les over the years in fighting for youth outcomes across my community, mainly helping establish the Oxygen youth centre in Coburg. I acknowledge the current CEO Paul Burke for his outstanding work and the work that they do to help support youth outcomes as well.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (15:20): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 and in particular to address two aspects of this omnibus bill that have direct and practical consequences for the Victorian community: the amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986 and the continuation and modernisation of the Drug Court division of the County Court. This bill by design is a miscellaneous bill and responds to court decisions, operational pressures across the justice system and the need to clarify or tidy legislation that is no longer fit for purpose. So whilst wideranging, many of its reforms are modest and technical, and they will not make the difference needed by the police to address the relentlessly growing crime rates right across Victoria. Victoria is in a crime crisis, so this is a real missed opportunity.

In my electorate of South-West Coast, crime rates have been significantly rising, and we are paying the price for two years of crime prevention failures under the Allan Labor government, with Warrnambool recording a new high. It is a terrible thing to be claiming that there is a new high in criminal offences. The latest figures from the Crime Statistics Agency confirm that in Warrnambool serious assaults have risen by 47 per cent, aggravated robbery by 33 per cent, non-family serious assaults by 22 per cent, residential non-aggravated burglary by 18 per cent and stealing from a retail store by 15 per cent. These are shocking figures. We also see figures right across the state as bad or worse. Local residents in South-West Coast are experiencing the direct consequences of fewer police in my electorate, as well as across the state, and reduced resources. There are nearly 400 fewer police on the beat since Premier Allan came into office. That is a damning indictment on her governing and her leadership. We do not want to be a state in a crime crisis, but that is where we are here in Victoria.

In May 2025 the government cut almost \$50 million from Victoria Police, and that is why we are seeing police stations close. Portland police station is closed overnight and Portland has also seen an alarming increase in crime, which you can understand when the police station is closed overnight, with a total increase in offences of 37 per cent. Motor vehicle theft in the Portland area is up by 148 per cent, aggravated robbery is up by 133 per cent and serious assaults have nearly doubled. You can see why people are really concerned in their communities.

The township of Terang had an armed home invasion just recently, and can I take the opportunity to commend the police right across the electorate. In that instance, in the Terang community, the police and the community did such a good job and very quickly had the criminal in custody – extraordinary efforts by our local communities, despite an environment where police are just crying out for more resources and more instruments of the law to be able to do their job and put the criminals away where they need to be rehabilitated, treated or whatever needs to happen. The tireless efforts by our police to protect our community demonstrate their significant commitment, but the police are tired and cannot speak up because the government is their boss. But I hear in our community from families, from members of the community who cannot get the police to answer their cries for help because we often do not have enough police to attend to their cries for help. One of the reasons I know as well is that

years ago we used to have nine people in the remand custody cells in the Warrnambool station; now we have got 18, and many of these people are coming from Melbourne.

The police have got custody officers who look after them while they are in the station, but often these prisoners end up in the hospital. Of course, having been a nurse in the past, I hear about that from my old nursing colleagues – that they have got two police up there guarding two different prisoners. That takes place away from the job that they should be able to do, because the custody officer cannot supervise them in the hospital. So you are two police down and you have not got the police out on the street where they need to be on the front line, helping the people who are calling for urgent help. People just do not want to hear that prisoners from Melbourne are being brought up to Warrnambool. And they are not actually just staying a few days; they are staying months in this situation. Enough is enough. This government has really lost control, and the police are doing their absolute best.

I will also now turn to the Road Safety Act 1986. The bill makes some amendments, which at their core are about procedural clarity and fairness, ensuring that motorists are not unfairly penalised because of administrative failures or outdated service requirements. The bill introduces new extensions of time for applications and reviews in circumstances where a person did not receive the actual notice of infringement. We do know that the post is getting more unreliable, and so this does give Victorians more time. But this government has been in for 10 years. It really is typical of an old, stale government that they are taking so long to fix a problem like that. Even with modern technologies and the different ways we can communicate, we are still using snail mail, so it is no surprise that people are not getting their infringements.

At a time when public confidence in road safety is at an all-time low, nowhere is this felt more acutely than in the South-West Coast. Our communities see it and they live it every single day with the condition of our roads – widening potholes, crumbling shoulders and damaged surfaces that pose a risk to drivers and passengers alike. Motorists are paying out for blown tyres, bent rims and suspension damage, often without any clear avenue for redress, and that is despite roads being a state government responsibility which are causing damage to their cars. People are doing the right thing. They maintain their vehicles, ensuring they remain roadworthy, yet they are forced to drive on roads that are anything but roadworthy. The simple truth is that roadworthy cars do require roadworthy roads. Nobody wants to see road safety sacrificed for speed, neglect or bad behaviour. Enforcement has an important role to play, and firm penalties for dangerous driving are necessary to keep our roads safe. But enforcement alone is not enough. It depends on a system that the community sees as accurate, accessible and fair, and that includes roads that are properly maintained. When governments fail to invest in basic road conditions, they undermine their own message of safety. You cannot lecture motorists about safety while expecting them to navigate damaged, deteriorating roads. Restoring public confidence starts with fixing the fundamentals, and that begins with roads that are safe, reliable and fit for purpose.

Now I will turn to the Drug Court division provisions in the bill, part 7 of the bill. These amendments provide an ongoing legislative basis for the Drug Court division of the County Court, transitioning it from what began as a pilot to a permanent and formalised part of the Victorian court system. The Drug Court is a specialist jurisdiction and sits at the intersection of criminal justice, health and rehabilitation. It recognises the reality that a significant proportion of offending, particularly repeated offending, is driven by untreated substance dependence. We know that drug and alcohol misuse is a significant and ongoing problem, and that is why the South-West Coast needs the Lookout centre that we have been campaigning for for many years, so that people can get drug rehabilitation services in the south-west. Our community sees this impact every day on families, on health services and on the justice system, and there is a strong recognition of the need for local, accessible support services. This is essential. While legislative reforms are definitely important, they need to be matched with real investment on the ground so people can get close-to-home help before their lives unravel further.

With the budget fast approaching, the government must prioritise meaningful and effective initiatives that save lives and strengthen social cohesion, and in Warrnambool that looks like the Lookout project for drug rehabilitation. Those on this side of the chamber understand what genuine reform looks like.

My colleague beside me the member for Lowan is a strong advocate, along with my community, of getting the Lookout funded in the next budget. We have been doing that together for some years. But if this government is out of ideas or lacks the energy, we stand ready to govern and provide drug rehabilitation that is desperately needed.

This bill does make meaningful changes to allow the County Court to adjourn proceedings into the County Court division, expanding the range of matters the division can hear and modernising sentencing and order-making arrangements. However, while diversion through the courts has value, our priority must be prevention and treatment early, supporting people before they enter the justice system. This bill does not go far enough. It is a failure of this government to grasp the seriousness of the challenge of the failing justice system. Without commitment to early intervention, rehabilitation or effective police powers, this legislation falls short of what the community rightfully expect.

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (15:30): I am also pleased to make a contribution on this bill. I would like to just pick up on some of the closing comments the member for South-West Coast made around early intervention. This is a government that has invested heavily in early intervention in the areas of alcohol and other drug abuse. Just recently I visited the fixed site for our pill testing service. For many people, particularly young people, who enter this service, it is the first time they have spoken to a health professional about their drug use, and they have the opportunity to learn about the risks and proceed with the necessary caution by having the full information about the drugs that they are ingesting. I do not believe that reform was supported by those opposite, even though it has been an enormously successful reform in minimising and reducing risk, particularly for young people attending music festivals and events where they might be taking drugs. I know that our commitment to alcohol and other drug reform has been led very ably by the Minister for Mental Health.

Certainly in my own community of Footscray I have seen the benefits of funding for Cohealth to run an outreach service in the Footscray mall. That outreach service means that people have access to confidential help, advice and referrals, including access to naloxone, which I think the member for Preston and I have in our electorate offices. These are important reforms to make sure that we minimise the harm of drug and alcohol use, which of course can lead to a whole range of lifelong problems for some of the very vulnerable people who are using drugs and alcohol and may have mental health challenges. I want to pick up on that because I find it insulting that the opposition, who often vote against these reforms that we introduce to reduce harm from drugs and alcohol, can talk out of both sides of their mouth when saying that this bill has not gone far enough. Actions speak louder than words. I will be surprised if I ever see the Liberal Party and the National Party supporting these important prevention reforms that we continue to roll out in our communities to make sure that we reduce and minimise harm.

I am pleased to make a contribution to this omnibus bill, the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. As has been mentioned by many, this bill does a range of things. It amends the Open Courts Act 2013 to implement recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2020 *Contempt of Court* report by allowing lower courts and VCAT to vary or revoke legacy suppression orders made prior to that act. It amends the Coroners Act 2008 to enable the Coroners Court to streamline investigation, finalisation and reopening procedures. It amends the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 to enable more doctors to register deaths and to clarify their death-reporting obligations. It amends fines and tolling legislation to make minor, fines-related amendments to other acts to strengthen fine enforcement by correcting minor anomalies and inconsistencies and to make minor procedural improvements. It amends the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 to clarify the delegation powers and acting arrangements of the Public Advocate. It amends the Crimes Act 1958. As has been mentioned, there is a special place in hell for the people who produce bestiality material, and it introduces indictable offences that prohibit the production, distribution and possession of and access to these animal abuse materials. It amends the County Court Act 1958 and the Sentencing Act 1991 to extend the operation of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court – another fantastic reform – and amends the Road Safety Act 1986

to enable the Magistrates' Court of Victoria to carry out certain administrative functions under the Road Safety Act more efficiently.

With the time I have left, I will speak to the changes to the Open Courts Act 2013, the Coroners Act 2008 and births, deaths and marriages. This bill introduces a transitional provision in the Open Courts Act to allow the lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders made prior to the commencement of the act in December 2013. Many of these orders operate indefinitely, and currently applications to vary or revoke pre-existing orders can only be made to the Supreme Court under its inherent jurisdiction, which of course is a costly process; it strains the resources of the court and it hinders access to justice. These amendments will address this problem and implement recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Contempt of Court* report.

The bill will allow persons with a sufficient interest in a pre-existing order, including victim-survivors of a sexual offence or a family violence offence and news media organisations, to apply to the relevant court or VCAT to review the order. The court or VCAT will be able to confirm, vary or revoke a pre-existing order. This work of course is in line with existing reforms the Allan Labor government have made to support victim-survivors of sexual offences or family violence, such as the landmark changes we introduced last year to change the use of NDAs for workplace sexual harassment matters, which I spoke to at the end of last year.

The bill will also introduce a new discretion for coroners to discontinue investigations into certain reportable natural cause deaths which do not require further investigation once the cause has been identified. As someone who has worked in a previous professional life with the Coroners Court, I think this is a really good reform. As someone as well who has had a friend whose death was investigated by the Coroners Court, I think this will really help to avoid the need for the coroner to make findings into a death and remove the need for the court to provide the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages with particulars of the death. The end result of that is that it will reduce investigation finalisation times, and that of course will provide families with closure sooner when they are grieving the death of a loved one. These amendments acquit recommendation 4 of the Coronial Council of Victoria's *Review of Reportable Deaths in Victoria* report and recommendation 1 of the 2024 Coroners Act statutory review.

Another change I will quickly go to is the amendment of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, which will enable more doctors to notify births, deaths and marriages of deaths and clarify the circumstances in which they can do so, reducing the unnecessary reporting of natural cause deaths to the Coroners Court.

Currently, some doctors might not feel comfortable signing a death certificate where there might be multiple natural causes, such as dementia or pneumonia, or they are not 100 per cent certain of what is the ultimate cause of death. The bill will clarify that a doctor can notify the registrar of a person's death and cause of death if they are unable to form a definitive opinion as to the probable cause of death. I commend these reforms to the house.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (15:40): I am pleased rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. Sometimes bills pass through this place and you think to yourself, 'I wonder how long it's going to take the government to realise it got it wrong?' In this case the answer is less than 12 months, because it was less than 12 months ago that this government did its deal with the Greens political party to give the Director of Public Prosecutions a veto on filing charges in relation to anti-vilification offences. When the government originally brought its anti-vilification laws to the Parliament, it accepted the recommendation of the Legal and Social Issues Committee of this place – a unanimous recommendation, a bipartisan recommendation – which said the DPP's consent should not be required for police to bring a charge in relation to anti-vilification. The government originally accepted that recommendation, and the government originally reflected that recommendation in the bill it introduced to this place. But then as the bill progressed and debate continued, the government decided that rather than sitting down with the opposition and sensibly

working with us to resolve concerns and have a bill that could pass this place on a genuinely bipartisan basis, the Premier and the current Attorney-General would rather do a deal with the Greens political party to gut their own bill than sit down with the Liberals and Nationals and get a broad-based, bipartisan outcome. Now, in less than 12 months, we see the government bringing this bill in here to fix its own mistakes and undoing part of the deal it did with the Greens. It is very much to this government's shame that it chose to do a deal with the Greens in the first place.

The tragedy of Bondi did not happen in a vacuum; it is part of a continuum, and it is part of a continuum that we have seen for at least the last two years – increasingly antisemitic behaviour.

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Half the members of the Labor government are in because of Greens preferences, so the member Eureka might want to think about that before she interjects. This is the government that did the deal with the Greens political party to gut their own anti-vilification bill. We know that the DPP have used their veto in the past to stop charges being brought forward; this came out through the bill briefing on that anti-vilification legislation. I was Shadow Attorney-General at the time, and I asked the question, 'Has the DPP's veto been used to block charges being brought forward?' The answer was yes. The government was not able to tell me how many times, but the fact that the veto is being used is enough to tell the government and Victorians that having that DPP veto stops these laws being effective. But when push came to shove, the government had the chance to sit down with the opposition; the government could have deleted four words. That is all our ask was: four words from that entire bill – four words – and there would have been broad-based, bipartisan support that would have done this Parliament proud. But this government decided then, as it does now – as it does every day – to play politics instead. This government's political calculus was to do a deal with the Greens political party to gut its own bill rather than sit down and work with the Liberals and Nationals, and that is where we are now.

In fact it was interesting because when the original bill was introduced, it was introduced by Ms Symes, who was Attorney-General at the time. Then when the deal was done, it was by the current Attorney-General, the member for Carrum. And when asked about this in the other place, Ms Symes said in the Legislative Council *Hansard*, 1 April 2025, page 1368:

We went in great detail through the fact that I am hesitant about the Greens amendment, but when I formulated the bill there were very mixed views on whether you should or you should not have DPP consent. I fell on the side in the development of the bill that you do not require it, except for those under 18. In the good-faith consultations that have happened since the introduction of the bill, the now Attorney-General has been persuaded by the Greens argument ...

Ms Symes was washing her hands of the decision to give in to the Greens, to gut their own bill and to give the DPP veto over bringing charges for anti-vilification offences. Ms Symes did not support it. She voted that way, but you can tell from her words in *Hansard* that she did not support it. This was a deal done by the Premier and the current Attorney-General, and it was done to gut the bill.

While the government might be undoing this aspect of the deal, there are other aspects that have not been undone, and I think the government should get back to the table and undo these ones as well. For example, another part of the Greens deal that Labor signed up to was a new provision in determining whether an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) is to be prosecuted:

The Director of Public Prosecutions must take into account all the circumstances (including the social, cultural and historical circumstances) surrounding the conduct that is alleged to constitute the offence.

We have now got a sociology lecture in the Crimes Act 1958. The DPP now needs to consider – not may consider, must consider – social, cultural and historical circumstances relating to an offence. I am sorry, if you incite hatred against somebody because they are a Jew or because they are gay, I do not care about the historical circumstances – no decent Victorian should. Historical circumstances are not a get-out-of-jail-free card for horrible acts of discrimination and incitement, but they are under this

government. If this government had any guts, it would undo every aspect of that grubby deal it did with the Greens and remove this provision as well, because there is no excuse for hatred and there is no excuse for incitement on the basis of protected attributes. That is the position of this side of the house. There is no excuse for it. But this government and the Greens have now put a provision into the law which says, 'Well, actually, there kind of is an excuse. When you consider the social and cultural and historical circumstances, maybe you shouldn't prosecute that poor little person who has incited hatred and threats against somebody else because they're gay, because they're a woman or because they're a Jew.' It is unthinkable, it is unconscionable and the government should have the guts to admit that it got it wrong on this aspect as well and deal with it.

It is not good enough for this government to say, 'Well, we did a deal with the Greens. Whoops, we got that wrong. We're going to undo part of it.' They should undo the whole thing, because social cohesion is in a desperate place in this state at the moment – it is in a really desperate place. And as I enter my 20th and final year as a member in this place, I can say it has never been worse, and that is gutting. I came here to try and improve my state, and on that measure Victoria is in a far worse place now than when I came here in 2006. We need to do much better and we do not do better by ignoring the elephant in the room. We do not do better by pandering to groups because we think that maybe, politically, they might support us or our allies in the Greens. We need to call out disgraceful behaviour for what it is. We need to call it out when we see it, and our laws should reflect it.

While we support this amendment to remove the DPP's veto of Victoria Police for bringing charges against anti-vilification offences, it does not go far enough. At the time, a year ago, I was of the view that maybe it was appropriate that the DPP veto remain for under-18s. I am not so sure that is even right these days. I think the current Shadow Attorney-General made a persuasive case that if somebody is 17 years old and they incite hatred and threats against somebody based on a protected attribute, why should they get a leave pass? Why should they get a get-out-of-jail-free card? Things are bad enough in this state, things are bad enough in our capital city, that we cannot afford to play games. We need to take strong action against those who threaten social cohesion. We need to do it and ideally do it with one single voice, and that means the government should be willing to work with the opposition instead of their mates in the Greens.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (15:50): I rise today to speak in strong support of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. This is a bill of targeted amendments. While this legislation touches on vital improvements to our coronial system, open justice principles and the protection of animals, to name a few, I wish to focus my contribution today on a matter that is deeply personal to my professional history and central to the safety of the community I represent in Mulgrave and in the south-east: the permanent extension of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court. Before I entered this place I spent years as a psychologist. My work was on the front lines, often in the alcohol and other drug sector, in the heart of the south-east. I have sat in the rooms where the cycle of addiction and crime is laid bare, and I have seen the revolving door of the justice system from the perspective of a clinician trying to help someone who has lost their way to a physiological and psychological dependency. This bill ensures that the therapeutic sentencing pathway of the Drug Court does not sunset on 26 April 2026. It ensures that we do not go backward to a time when our only answer to addiction-driven crime was a prison cell that did not work.

This bill is a comprehensive suite of reforms designed to improve administrative efficiency and legal clarity. Beyond the Drug Court, it implements crucial recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Contempt of Court* report. It allows lower courts and VCAT to vary or revoke legacy suppression orders made before 2013, which often have no end date, effectively silencing victim-survivors indefinitely. As a psychologist, I know that for a victim-survivor the right to speak about their experience is a fundamental part of that healing process. These reforms restore control to the victim-survivor, allowing them to share their lived experience when they are ready, which in turn builds community momentum for further reform.

The bill also streamlines our Coroners Court processes by allowing pathologists or supervised medical practitioners to register certain natural cause deaths directly. It will reduce the agonising wait times for grieving families in electorates like mine and it strengthens our animal cruelty laws, expanding bestiality offences to reflect modern community expectations that any non-consensual sexual act involving an animal is abhorrent and must be met with the full force of the law.

As I mentioned, I do want to focus specifically on the Drug Court extension. It is the amendments to the County Court Act 1958 and the Sentencing Act 1991 which I want to focus upon. In my years as a psychologist I learned a hard truth: you cannot punish a dependency out of someone. If a person is committing crimes – maybe burglaries, thefts, shoplifting – to fund a heroin or ice habit, a standard three-month prison sentence is often just a pause button on their offending. They go in, they detox, they lose their housing and they are released back into the community with the same cravings, same circle of friends and fewer resources than they had before. The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court breaks this cycle. It utilises a drug and alcohol treatment order, which is a specialised sentence that combines a term of imprisonment with an intensive, court-supervised treatment program in the community. From a clinical standpoint the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court is grounded in therapeutic jurisprudence. It is not a soft option. In fact participants that I have previously worked with have told me it is much harder than serving time in a regular prison. They are subjected to constant judicial supervision and regular appearances before a judge who knows their name, knows their story and knows their progress.

It also includes mandatory clinical treatment, intensive counselling and rehabilitation, which addresses the psychological roots of their addiction, and frequent drug testing – the strict accountability where any slip-up has immediate consequences. For the residents of my community this bill is a direct investment in their safety. The data is clear: the Drug Court reduces recidivism. Studies of Victoria's first Drug Court in Dandenong, a hub that serves my local community and has done so since 2002, found that graduates committed significantly fewer crimes than those who went through the traditional system. When we stop one person from reoffending, we are preventing dozens of future victims in our local streets. I have personally worked with participants in the Drug Court. I have seen the journey and, for many, have been able to walk through it with them. I have seen the hurdles that they have gone through of course, but I have also seen them bounce back because of the support of the Drug Court and the treatment orders.

As a member of a government committed to fair outcomes and efficient systems, I must also point out the economic reality. It costs the Victorian taxpayer roughly \$67 a day to support someone on a drug and alcohol treatment order. Compare that to the \$257 or thereabouts per day it costs to keep that same person in a prison cell. The Drug Court provides a return on investment by reducing the strain on our prisons, our police and our emergency departments at hospitals like the Monash Medical Centre that services my community. I remember many individuals that I once worked with in the drug and alcohol sector who may perhaps have engaged in petty crime driven by a chronic addiction, whether it be due to past traumas, poor relationships or injuries. In the traditional system, these individuals were just another number, but in a therapeutic setting, the kind this bill makes permanent, they are people with a treatable health condition. By extending the Drug Court we are saying that we believe in the possibility of change. We are saying that we would rather have someone in treatment, working a job, paying their taxes and contributing to society than sitting in a prison cell at the expense of the state. This bill also improves administrative processes in the Magistrates' Court, allowing more functions to be performed electronically. This efficiency means that cases move through the system faster and victims of crime get the closure they deserve sooner.

In my work in the drug and alcohol sector, I have been moved by so many stories of hardship but also of growth and resilience. Seeing the positive outcomes that the Drug Court delivers for these individuals, I am so pleased to be part of a government that chooses to extend this most worthy program. I recall being part of a trial through the Drug Court back in the day where I was assisting

methamphetamine users in group treatment, which demonstrated evidence that the group treatment itself worked and that the support of the Drug Court worked too.

In closing, this bill is a practical and carefully considered set of reforms that improve how our justice system operates day to day. It responds directly to expert reviews, removes unnecessary barriers, strengthens protections and delivers clearer, more efficient processes across multiple areas of law. From restoring sensible review pathways for legacy suppression orders to streamlining coronial and death registration processes, clarifying guardianship arrangements, expanding serious animal cruelty offences and, as I spoke of, extending the Drug Court, these are reforms that are measured, targeted and necessary. Importantly, this legislation balances efficiency with fairness, transparency with protection, and accountability with compassion. It supports victim-survivors, reinforces open justice and ensures that courts and agencies are better equipped to do their work effectively. I go back to my mention of the Drug Court. I have seen the benefits of it. I have seen what it does to individuals who have succumbed to substance use.

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

#### *Grievance debate*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That grievances be noted.

#### **Crime**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (16:01): There is a crime crisis in Victoria. It is about time we put victims first and deliver prevention that works. Today I rise to address this issue that has been raised with me by many families throughout my community and from communities across the state which have this ongoing crime crisis that is sending profound fear and impacting so many Victorians. Over recent months I have had families, workers, unions and entire neighbourhoods who have come forward who have endured violent crimes. These are not just statistics. They are the real lives of people that are changed forever. We have a failing system that continues to give bail to violent offenders here in our state, a system that is so backed up, our justice system, that, as they say, justice delayed is justice denied. In Victoria it is delayed for, if not months, years. Young offenders still see the system today as a revolving door, with very limited penalties or outcomes for the crimes they commit. Over that time, knowing they can get away with it, they continue to get worse.

Over the years we have seen levels of crime and statistics that grow at rates that we actually did not think were possible. Let us just go through the cycle of how we have ended up here. What has happened to get to the stage where we have an actual crime crisis here in Victoria? The Labor government in 2023 weakened the bail laws. The Labor government introduced the 'toughest bail laws in Australia' only to find out the title did not match the content of the bill. There are over 1400 vacancies on the police rosters across Victoria. There are 367 less police today than there were the day that Premier Allan was elected by her own party to lead the Victorian government. Labor has closed or reduced hours on 41 police stations across Victoria due to the chronic shortages of police. Labor spent \$30 million to build a new police station in Clyde North, a police station that is not open to the public and has no police to respond to emergencies or keep the community safe. Labor closed Malmsbury after spending tens of millions of dollars on upgrades. Labor is spending tens of millions of dollars to reopen Malmsbury – well, partly open it, not fully reopen it. Labor has spent tens of millions of dollars on new beds in the adult system that cannot be used due to building defects. Labor has spent over \$30 million a year on operational costs for Western Plains prison for two years, without having a single prisoner. Labor cut crime prevention in Victoria funding in Victoria, leading to cuts in programs. Labor have failed to address the graffiti crisis that every Victorian sees on freeways, railway lines and abandoned buildings. Everywhere across the state we are seeing far too much of that graffiti. Labor spent \$13 million on a failed machete bin program. Everyone knows that the young offenders did not hand in their machetes. It was only the good, honest farmers who did not use them anymore.

Labor for years failed to admit that we have a crime crisis, and a failure to acknowledge this has led to a failure to fix it. Premier Allan and Labor's failures have led to all Victorians not just feeling less safe but actually being less safe.

As I said before, the victims are not statistics, they are real cases. We do not have to go back too far to see where these cases go. The government are keen on telling us now that they have done enough, and they are on their way to lowering the crime stats. Late last night a teenager was slashed and struck by a stolen car. A 17-year-old was slashed in the face and deliberately struck by a stolen Mazda in a McDonald's car park in Beaconsfield Parade. Two offenders are still on the run for this incident. At a South Yarra nightclub there was a ram raid and arson, just last night. This is just last night in Melbourne – another arson attack, another ram raid in the once safe place of South Yarra. This kind of crime is happening far too often in these areas. These arson attacks are putting many at risk. Many of these are happening in strip shops. We know that many of these strip shops have people living above them and in other locations people living around them, and we already know the outcomes can be tragic.

There is this one, which is a prime example of how good the bail system here is in Victoria. An armed robbery was committed by an offender on bail. This was a young offender who has the worst nickname, I think, for committing an offence whilst on bail. He is known as the Bayside bandit. The Bayside bandit has pleaded guilty to attempting an armed robbery while claiming to have a gun. You may remember this person; this is the one who, when he got bail, got permission to go to Europe on a holiday. Now, I know that sends some really good incentives to continue to commit crime – you get a free trip. I thought maybe, just maybe, this young offender thought each time he commits a crime with an armed robbery he might get a business class trip to go over to Europe – to go to London and have a look around at the tourist hotspots – because that is what is happening in Victoria. That is on top of another offender who got permission to go to the Gold Coast to go up and have entertainment at Movie World. The problem is it is not a joke, because he went out and committed another armed robbery.

Car thefts, carjackings – do you know a car is stolen in Victoria every 16 minutes? And it is not just an inconvenience when your car gets stolen; it can be life changing. Many of these are stolen from people's homes. It is an invasion of their privacy. We have seen a circumstance where a car was stolen with twins in the back of the car. We all know that those that are stealing the cars are not upstanding people of the community. They did drop off the kids. They were uninjured, which is fantastic – unharmed. But they dropped off the twins nearly a kilometre apart because they did not care, and they know in Victoria that they can get away with it. That in itself is why these crimes continue to increase.

Dau and Chol: these are names that no person in this place should ever forget. Two boys, aged 12 and 15, walking home from the game they loved – basketball – were attacked and killed for no reason. Eight have been charged for this horrific crime. But I have to ask the question: how in Victoria have we got to the stage where we have people who are hunting for their victims, where we have gangs of young men who are going around and thinking it is okay to hunt humans for prey as victims of crime? They killed them. They did not rob them, they killed them. That should send shock waves through every single person in this state. These are the violent, tragic events that are happening here in our state, and the government for too long has ignored them.

We know that there is a link between the repeat offending and the fact that these young offenders continually either get bail or get very limited sentences and have zero support or prevention programs here in the state. There has to be a better way. People have heard me in this place: you cannot arrest your way out of the crime crisis we have in this state. Yes, we have to have consequences. I note the Premier has obviously had polling done recently that 'consequences' is a big word that must be used when they are talking about young offenders. The problem is, it should have been used by the Premier a couple of years ago so we did not end up where we are today. Saying we have got consequences and delivering them are two totally different things.

I can travel around the state and the country and find programs – the Maranguka justice reinvestment program in New South Wales, BackTrack in New South Wales, Youth Off the Streets in New South Wales, Police and Citizens Youth Club, Queensland youth development programs, Target 120 in Western Australia – that you do not even have to travel too far for. You can look them up and see that these programs are taking young people out of the justice system and they are not going back into it. They are going back and learning the skills they need to re-engage in the education system, go out and get a job or get the further services and support they need. These are programs that involve the families and bring the families in to ensure that the young people have a stable environment, because if we can change those things, we change the course of their lives and the community is safer. It is as simple as that.

There are so many things that this government has failed to do. But if they do not want to go and look interstate – like we have seen in the past, they like to invent their own things – well, they can look here in Victoria. The YouthYOU program is run down in Hallam. It is a program designed to work on the causation of crime, not the actual offending. This program works on drug addiction, building self-esteem and developing life skills. The program also focuses on healthy lifestyles, which make a big difference in many of these kids' lives. It would be great if we could get even some of the media to come out and have a look at this. They can do a workout with Glenn and me and a few of the participants, who have a gym program there to engage the next generation and to give them a pathway out of crime and away from drugs. I would love to see Santo from Channel 9 come out and go on the bench press, Heidi on the treadmill, Jess from Channel 10 do a few chin-ups or Shannon come out and do some leg curls, because if they come out there and highlight the fact that we have these programs here in Victoria that do not get government funding, that are changing the lives of young people, we will see that there are solutions available right here, right now to ensure that we can change the course of the next generation and reduce crime here in Victoria.

Whilst I say they are not statistics, the reality is: here are some statistics, and these are ones that it is really important everyone knows. I want to be fair. The Premier only came in September 2023, so I will only refer to figures since September 2023, so the Premier can take full responsibility as the leader of this state. All incidents overall with crime have gone up 29 per cent under Premier Allan's watch. Aggravated burglaries have gone up 45 per cent under the Premier's watch. Robberies have gone up 22 per cent under the Premier's watch. Total serious assaults have gone up 26 per cent under the Premier's watch. Car theft is up 72 per cent under the Premier's watch. Theft from motor vehicles is up 60 per cent under Premier Allan's watch. Theft from a retail store is up 59 per cent under the Premier's watch. Let us put that one into perspective: the unions are calling for more action, the government have failed to deliver it and taken too long and more young people who are working in places like Coles and Myer and retail stores for their first job are becoming victims of crime in this state than ever before, under the person who says she stands by every union in Victoria. The Premier has failed that union and the Premier has failed those workers, and they are increasingly becoming the victims who are speaking up each and every day against this government. Carjackings are up 68 per cent here in Victoria. Attempted carjackings are up 83 per cent.

The government love to say that we do not talk about family violence. Well, I am happy to. Family violence since this Premier has been the Premier has gone up 13 per cent. That is 12,147 extra incidents here in this state. Serious assaults are up 47 per cent when it comes to family violence. Stalking is up 23 per cent. If you have not read the media, this is in the *Herald Sun* today:

The mother of murdered woman Celeste Manno has slammed the Allan government for dragging its feet on critical reforms to the state's stalking laws.

It comes amid a surge in the crime to a 10-year high, with latest statistics showing 14,779 stalking-related offences recorded in the year to September 2025, the highest since 2016.

...

Following her killing, the Victoria Law Reform Commission probed gaps in stalking legislation, tabling a final report in September 2022. It included 45 recommendations, of which 34 called on the Victorian government to take direct action.

Laws set to be debated in parliament this week would address just three of the recommendations, including clarifying the definition of stalking and giving courts tougher powers to clamp down on stalkers.

This quote is from Celeste Manno's mum:

It's not good enough, they're doing absolutely nothing ... it's disgusting ...

Could I also please say that in the upper house Renee Heath, a member out in the eastern region, is doing so much in relation to stalking here in Victoria and making sure that people like Celeste Manno's voices are being heard, because we need to see change.

That is all part of this crime crisis here in our state. Youth crime – a 27 per cent increase under the Premier and 10 per cent in 10- to 14-year-olds. Considering they have increased the age of responsibility, that is half the amount of people to commit extra crimes. That is just not good enough. Crime in Victoria, as we know, is out of control. As I have said, each and every one of these people are victims. It is time to take their heads out of the sand, focus on the programs that we can genuinely make change with, reinstate the funding for crime prevention, put the money back into the programs so we can deliver programs in Victoria, have serious consequences for serious offenders, stop giving bail to violent and repeat offenders here in our state and give the police the resources they need. Do all of this, and I will give you a guarantee we will see these crime stats go down, and that is to the benefit of each and every Victorian.

### Opposition performance

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:16): This is an opportunity to rise and grieve for Victorians if the Liberal–National coalition were ever to be let near government and Victorians, with the divided, dysfunctional and disgraceful state that they find themselves in some 43 weeks from the state election. Who could have thought that with the terrible dysfunction that we see in Canberra the Victorian Liberals would find a 'hold my beer' moment and go even further into absolute chaos and carnage in this Parliament, where we see no less than the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party who resigned in January now forcing a by-election.

I think the member for Berwick was a late call-up for this grievance debate, because this is normally the moment for the Leader of the Opposition to shine, to come in here, to put forward their case in the first big grievance debate, holding the government to account. Today we have seen the member for Kew go into hiding like never before as the media ask what on earth has happened to have seen so much dysfunction. We have seen Sussan Ley and Ted O'Brien in the federal Parliament in absolute despair and the member for Kew lose her deputy leader within six weeks of taking on the leadership, and this is a movement that says that they are the alternative government for Victorians.

When people are facing the challenge of making ends meet, it is the Allan Labor government who fronts up and supports their cost of living. When they are trying to get home on time to see their family and the kids that they love, it is a Labor government that is building for the future and supporting them into the future. When we are thinking about funding for emergency services, there is a Labor government that is guaranteeing that funding into the future with revenue sources to support those organisations. At this time we see, rather than the Parliament functioning in its pure form and its importance, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party go.

There are two key things that are the same in the member for Kew's and the member for Nepean's journeys here: they were both mentored by the former federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. Josh had a vision to have the member for Kew and the member for Nepean take over the Liberal Party. In the member for Nepean's own words in his recent statement on 5 January:

I entered public life to serve my community, to represent the Mornington Peninsula, and to stand up for what I believe is in the best interests of Victorians.

This is a former Australian Olympian who has represented our nation, who was brought into this Parliament as a testament to Liberal values, and what did he go on to say?

But when you find yourself having to fight against your own team, it becomes impossible to put those interests first. That is not the standard I came into public life to accept, and it is not the kind of politics Victorians deserve.

The line in the sand was the member for Kew saying they are a united team and they bring each other together. Well, on 18 November 2025 the member for Nepean was elected the deputy leader. The member for Nepean scouted the court, looked down the lines, saw the faults and said, 'I reckon the member for Kew's got this sorted.' But within six weeks – that is all it took – the member for Nepean had seen the most toxic and dysfunctional party room culture and nothing that would change into the future, to the point that it was unsafe for him to remain in this Parliament. Just to get this through very clearly, I know the opposition leader legends will be across the road at Spring Street typing away: 'We'd have ruled a line over it; it had nothing to do with the member for Kew.'

The member for Kew sat around that cabinet table as the Shadow Minister for Finance. The member for Kew was a close confidant of former opposition leader John Pesutto, the member for Hawthorn. This is someone who was at the epicentre and came in as a class of 2022 member of Parliament, and not once has the member for Kew apologised for the egregious, bullying and intimidating culture that the member for Nepean was subjected to.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, listening to this contribution, I am grieving for the constituents of the member for Mordialloc's seat. I draw your attention, Speaker, to standing order 118.

**The SPEAKER:** I do not believe that the member for Mordialloc has breached standing order 118, but I do remind members about imputations.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Nepean was backgrounded by anonymous Liberal colleagues. In his own statement he talked about some of the most egregious statements you can make against a person in our community, let alone a member sworn into this Parliament, who was backgrounded, in his own words, by his own colleagues. Now, there has been no account for one of the most egregious attacks on someone's character, which saw a settlement take place, and those anonymous people that went after the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party still to this day have not come forward. As a collective, the Liberal Party has not apologised for what happened to the former Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, who was the second in charge to the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick. At the time, on that grievance, I gave the member for Berwick a bit of a rev up – we are former Berwick lads, Speaker; I do not know if you know that, but we both came from Berwick, from out that way – and I sent him a bit of a love note because I felt bad for him. I thought, 'This is outrageous.' It was suggested that he was doing a good job. He was sent out here today when the member for Kew was meant to lead the grievance. He had a fair crack. But I said at that time – because James Campbell from the *Herald Sun* reported that a Liberal MP said, 'I thought we'd hit rock bottom last December, but this has gotten worse' – goodness me.

What does February 2026 hold? What does February 2026 hold when the member for Kew has lost the deputy leader; the person who was defeated by the member for Nepean is now the deputy leader, so the member for Caulfield is back again and we have a group that is more interested in cutting grass and cutting each other down than fronting up to the cost-of-living challenges facing Victorians and the housing issues that have seen prices that have stabilised in Victoria, supporting people into the housing market. We have seen those stats released recently. For the people that are trying to get health care and fronting up to emergency departments or urgent care clinics to support their families, it is an Allan Labor government that is funding the investments here, while those opposite are wanting to front up to conferences in Hawthorn.

I do not know if you would ever go to a conference without a drink and a meal for \$160, but that is what the Barnaby Joyce show was charging for a cup of tea and a biscuit. \$160 was the fee, and the

member for Kew had an unforeseen scheduling issue. Could that unforeseen scheduling issue be a media press pack that was going to chase you around the countryside, wondering why on earth you would lose someone as senior as the member for Nepean, who was scouted as future leader talent, who was headhunted by none other than former federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who is the dual mentor of the member for Kew? You can see it coming together here. This is the clown show that wants to be the next government in Victoria.

The member for Kew has a lot on. There is no trust whatsoever for the member for Sandringham and the member for Brighton to do anything in Treasury, is there? Remember, they have both served in that role. They have got a bit of a rivalry down there on the Sandringham line, but we will not get too much into it – who is this and who is that and who is the best. But I would have trusted the member for Sandringham; I would have given him a go. You know the baritone, that gravitas he has, that radio voice. He was not good enough for a guernsey. He was not good enough; he could not split the load.

And now we find that the member for Kew still has not accounted for the \$11.1 billion hole in revenue. You can do this in January. You can do some TikToks and you can mow some lawns, even though you did not have a permit and stones were flicking up everywhere. You can do that. I always wonder at the metaphors in this place. Why on earth would you allow us to then have cuts like the hole? If you look at all the backgrounding that the member for Berwick talked about, cuts are still an issue for the Liberals. There is no late breaking news there. You would literally have cuts of grass – a cuts metaphor – rolling through with your new crew, and you would allow that to be punned and reeled and whatever into the future. But the workload to try to keep this rabble together has meant that the member for Kew has not fronted up to the \$11.1 billion black hole. That is a revenue source that would smash essential services – hundreds of police officers, nurses and teachers and thousands of critical skilled workers in our community. What is going to be rolled back?

I honestly do not think the member for Kew has had the time to get to it, because right now we see in the Western Metro there is a massive blue going on. We saw some powwow chats, with Moira Deeming in the other place talking to a few colleagues. We have seen it in the media. Every Liberal member that still exists in the south-east is running for South-East Metro – one, two, three, four, whatever you go for. Everyone is on the ballot. They get deterred by their five-grand appearance fee. I do not know if you have heard this, but you have got to pay the five grand appearance fee to front up to be preselected. They breathe in deep and go, ‘Jeez, I’d go for free, but five grand’s a bit of a stretch.’ You have literally got them arguing over that side whether they can get a bargain basement two-for-one offer or a discount offer on preselections going in the Liberal Party, and you have got their real talent waiting for 2030. That is the group that wants to be the alternative government in Victoria.

And here comes the kicker. This is why we will never believe that this is a united team that is fit to govern Victoria. The member for Hawthorn has been honourable in all of the dealings that have happened and has been treated appallingly post settlement and what has happened. He has kept his integrity. He has kept his honour through here time and time again. Guess what the deal is. One of the deals that has been backgrounded is that he gets chopped; he is out. The price is his job for the settlement: ‘Is it really a proper settlement payout down at Liberal HQ?’ That is fully distracting the Leader of the Opposition from being able to front up to Victorians and tell honestly what the cuts will be and what the impacts will be of the \$11.1 billion hole. That is the dysfunction here.

Then there is a progressive electorate like Kew, which has its leader going off into Horsham chasing One Nation votes with Barnaby Joyce. And the main defender to come forward was Barnaby Joyce, who was saying on the record –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I am hoping that you will agree that the member for Mordialloc’s contribution seems to be sharply focused on a particular member, being the member for Kew.

**Natalie Suleyman** interjected.

**Brad Rowswell:** Through you, Speaker, and for the benefit of the minister at the table, I am referring again to standing order 118. I raise that for your attention on the basis that the member keeps coming back time and time again in some obsessive way to the member for Kew, only offering personal reflections.

**The SPEAKER:** I am not sure what your point of order is.

**Brad Rowswell:** I believe that the member for Mordialloc is in contravention of that standing order, and I ask you to counsel him against pursuing this line of debate.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Mordialloc not to impugn other members. Reflections are okay, but do not impugn.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** It is a hard truth when \$11.1 billion is the hole in your budget. If that is impugning a member, that is the most sensitive to the core principle of those –

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The Leader of the Nationals might interject, but could you get on the phone to David Littleproud and ask what on earth is going on? Have you kept One Nation at the Murray River? You know how you have got your border towns – do you just push One Nation back there, Leader of the Nationals? The Leader of the Nationals used to know a little bit about Barnaby Joyce. I would love to actually get his personal reflections on what it was like to work near him and what he thinks now, as he absolutely is on a tear nationally. We have seen the federal numbers for the Nationals in the 2 or 3 per cent range. It is in record low territory at the moment. One Nation polling we know is concentrated through, and we know that this is just a big shudder, because there are going to be a stack of independents running in regional and rural Victoria, and there will be a stack of One Nation legends running in regional and rural Victoria, and we will see Liberals running all over the place. It is just absolute carnage. Those are the kinds of circumstances here. We do not have an opposition focused on policy and outcomes for Victorians. We have them in a battle for political survival and relevancy. We have seen it with the Tory party in the UK, and we are seeing it with the Liberals right here as they chase the fringes as fast as they can.

It is an inconvenient truth for the member for Sandringham, a sudden cancel of programming. If they cannot debate budget holes and the cosy relationship that they have with One Nation, having preferred them before, and that is an imputation – goodness me, glass jaws. Is that really the offence right there, that talking about the budget is so sensitive for those opposite?

There was no sensitivity around the impact on the member for Nepean – I come back to that principal point. There is a deep, sick culture in the Liberal Party that backgrounds the most egregious allegations that go to the heart of someone's character, their family, their kids and their partner. And no-one in the Liberal Party has come out and apologised and said, 'This is not the culture that we accept.' Some of us on this side have said that to the member for Nepean. Some of us have been horrified at the treatment of the former deputy Liberal leader, and it is a horrendous shame that such allegations, backgrounded by Liberal people, could be made. And there is silence from those opposite, not apologising for such horrendous behaviour, which has forced him to get out of this place as quickly as possible, against his best instincts and the mentoring that was done by Josh Frydenberg. They have lost a Liberal that could have led them into the future. They are chaos and carnage, and they cannot be trusted.

### Emergency services

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:31): I grieve for the people of Victoria and for the management of this government of our finances, and in particular the impact that has had on our emergency services. But I might begin by grieving for the people of Mordialloc as well, if that is the best that they have got to represent them. It is like the bigger picture with the Premier at the moment. Have a look at the Premier's social media at the moment: it is all about Jess Wilson; it is all about the member for Kew. Someone was humming a song to me before. It was *I've Got You Under My Skin*. I

think that is what it is, because very clearly the Premier and the member for Mordialloc have the member for Kew under their skin. There is an obsession at the moment with her diary, for example, and with my diary. There is an obsession with Barnaby Joyce on the member for Mordialloc's side. It is just extraordinary that they are more focused on that at a time when we have got \$200 billion of debt, when we have got crime up 29 per cent since this Premier came to office, when we have got fires around the state and we have got a CFA in crisis – and this mob is more worried about what conference the Leader of the Opposition is going to. That is why Victorians will turn on this mob this year, because we are the opposition. We are meant to keep them honest. We are meant to keep the government honest – that is our job. Their job is to govern the state, not to worry about what the opposition is doing. If they actually did a little bit more governing of the state and actually looking after our emergency services, then we might be in a better place.

I am going to pick up from where the member for Berwick was talking about Productivity Commission reports on government services. The emergency services report on government services, ROGS, as it is known, confirms one thing today: a \$10 million cut to the SES. All of those on the other side keep saying, 'We've got to support the SES. We've got to actually look after them. That's why we're bringing in this \$3 billion emergency services tax. The SES is one that needs some funding.' Well, maybe it needs rescuing from the current government, because the annual report released in November shows that the SES has lost \$10 million in grant funding from the state government. That was rejected by the minister and by the government, even though it is the SES's annual report, so it is actually their report. If they do not like that one, they could try the report on government services from the Productivity Commission today.

In Victoria, STES organisations – what are STES organisations? State and territory emergency services, as opposed to fire services organisations, which are another part of the table. In Victoria, in 2023–24, the SES received \$101.4 million; in 2024–25, \$91.4 million. Last time I checked, that was a \$10 million reduction. That actually reflects exactly what the SES annual report says, which the government says is not correct.

Then we have had the unedifying spectacle over the last month or so of the government's logical gymnastics when it comes to the CFA. This is not an issue that has come up since the bushfires. This is an issue that the opposition has been pursuing for more than 12 months since the government decided to bring in the emergency services tax. Where is that money is going? \$3 billion of additional taxpayer funding to fund the emergency services and we cannot get a straight answer out of this government on what the budgets actually are. It has been a tortuous process. Back in May I asked the Minister for Emergency Services what the CFA budget would be in 2025–26. She said, 'You will have to wait for the budget.' I knew at the time that the CFA budget is never in the state budget, but I had to suck it up and say, 'All right, we'll wait for the budget.' The budget came out, and I asked another question of the Minister for Emergency Services – 'What is the CFA budget for 2025–26?' – because it was not in the budget. The Minister for Emergency Services said, 'Oh, you'll have to wait until the annual report comes out.' Everything in the state of Victoria when it comes to managing budgets is in the budget. We have an estimate of what we are going to spend, except for the emergency services. You have to wait until the end of the year and then three or four months afterwards – or in this case nearly six months afterwards – to find out what the budget was 18 months ago, because this government does not want to tell us. That is the thing.

We had some extraordinary examples in the last month or so of the government desperately trying to defend its cuts to the CFA, the SES and others, to the extent that in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings in November, ably led by my colleague the member for Mildura holding the government to account, we had the secretary of Treasury, so not even the Secretary of the Department of Justice, and not even in answer to a question from the opposition but in answer to a question from Mr Galea in the other place, explaining why the government's own figures are wrong and should be ignored. I looked at a *Government Gazette* from May last year – and I have got a copy of it here – which outlines exactly how the emergency services funding is delivered and who it actually goes to.

And of course it has now just disappeared on me, but that gazette literally has a breakdown of where the funding will go. It shows that the CFA gets 95 per cent of its funding from the emergency services levy. The gazette actually has a figure in it, \$312 million, so you can work out pretty quickly that 95 per cent equates to \$328 million. If you compare that to previous annual reports, that is a significant cut. But we asked questions. We asked the Treasurer, 'So how is that not a cut?' 'No, it's not, because you're not covering everything.' We asked the Minister for Emergency Services, 'Is that not a cut?' 'No, no, no, because there's other money there too.' We asked the Premier – 'Oh, misinformation, Mr O'Brien and Ms Benham. That's not the figure at all. There's no cut and it would be wrong to assume so.' Okay, so why then does the government in a *Government Gazette* publish these figures?

In November the government got on the front foot with the secretary of Treasury and said:

... I would not want there to be any misunderstandings.

So he has read the talking points from the Premier's office as well.

... the *Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund Act*, the forecast funding requirement for each organisation or program – and this is very important – is indicative only, and it comes at a point in time and ahead of the financial year, effectively.

Isn't that what the entire budget process is? It is an estimate at a point in time. It is designed to say to departments and agencies like the CFA and the SES, 'This is how much money you're going to have. We know things will happen throughout the year – there might be a bit more, there might be a bit less – but here it is.' You would think that would make quite a bit of sense, but you have got the government publishing a gazette signed by who? Signed by the Treasurer Jaclyn Symes, in the other place, and then the secretary of her department says, 'Don't listen to that. That's not what the budget is. I know it's in the official *Government Gazette*, I know it's signed by the Treasurer, but it's not what the actual budget is.'

**Wayne Farnham** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Absolutely, member for Narracan, it is absolutely like something out of *Utopia*. Okay, then the government said that is not what the budgets are. So we put in an FOI, and we asked the Minister for Emergency Services if she has provided a budget at any stage. And we get it. We find in our FOI a departmental brief signed off by the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery Vicki Ward. It says literally here: 2025–26 gross funding emergency services organisations, released output funding, Country Fire Authority, \$345 million for 2025–26, which is less than anything else that had been published before. So I came back again and I asked the minister a question. I said, 'I've got this document that you signed off, and it says the budget for the CFA is \$345 million, and that's less than the previous year.' And she said, 'No, that's not the budget either.' Then we go, 'Right, okay.' Then we come to the fires this year, which have been a devastating event for many, and we had a very solemn condolence debate on that yesterday.

Naturally enough, as the fires hit and after the fires hit, firefighters, CFA volunteers and victims on the ground were pretty angry. They were angry not that the government caused the fires or anything like that; no-one is saying anything ridiculous like that. But they are angry about the facilities they have got and the old trucks that they have got. They started raising this, and I can say I have had a number of conversations with the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Lowan and others in our team. We are not going to politicise while the fires are burning, but we know this is an issue. But people on the ground started to raise it with the Premier. They raised it with the media. They rang talkback and they said, 'We're driving around in a 35-year-old truck. We're concerned that the CFA is not getting enough funding.' Then we got the CFA board putting out a statement saying that there have been no cuts and echoing the Premier's speech with statements that there have been increases in funding each and every year to the CFA. I thought, 'Well, that's a bit weird, because that's not my recollection of what the CFA annual report says.' So I went back to it, and I found that in 2021, the first year since fire services reform, the budget for the CFA, the grant income – it actually literally says 'grant income', which is the funding from the government – was \$351 million. In 2023–24, \$339 million. Now, I am

not going to ask anyone on that side because I know they do not do numbers very well. So is there anyone on this –

**Lauren Kathage** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** That is page 64, member for Yan Yean. You are not reading it very well. Have a look. I will bring you the highlighted version.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Nationals! I will sit you down. Through the Chair.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is \$339 million.

**Jade Benham:** That's less, isn't it?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Than \$351 million? I think it is less. And if you do not believe that is the figure, then we finally get the CFA 2024–25 annual report, and the very same line item shows \$361 million for 2024–25. It is an increase, yes. So then the Premier and the minister go out and say, 'Look, we increased the budget by \$22 million. Just ignore the four previous years because we just want to highlight the one that we've got.'

**Lauren Kathage** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** The member for Yan Yean, Speaker, is saying that is not right.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair, Leader of the Nationals.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** That is exactly what it is.

**The SPEAKER:** And I would ask you to cease waving around your prop.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** That is not a prop. I am just excited. Sorry, Speaker. And we have seen the same attitude today. We literally saw the same attitude today when we had the Minister for Health quoting the Productivity Commission data on ambulance services, which was apparently right because it showed good stuff for this government. To the very next question, when the member for Kew asked about cuts to police numbers, as reflected in the Productivity Commission, what did the Premier say? 'No, wrong. Your assertion is wrong.' Again, it seems that when the line item in the CFA budget looks good for the government, they say that is right. When the line item is bad, that is misinformation from a reckless opposition who cannot be trusted. When the PC says things are going well in ambulance services, yes, that is good; that is correct. When the PC shows that police spending is down in Victoria, as opposed to every other state, where it has gone up, no, wrong, wrong, wrong.

**A member** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is *Utopia*. We know that the *Herald Sun* called it out pretty well when the CFA report was actually released. Shannon Deery wrote in his op-ed that the attitude is 'The sky is blue, but if I say it's green, then it is. Just don't look up.' That is the exactly the attitude of this government. 'We will deny, we will obfuscate, we will tell untruths, and then we will say that the opposition are the ones providing misinformation.' It is absolutely extraordinary. That is why people are angry. That is why the Premier had to sneak out the back of a hospital in Alexandra, because people are angry, because this government just cannot lie straight in bed. They are saying what is black is white and completely ignoring the facts. The facts are they have been cutting our emergency services, despite the fact that Victorians are being asked to pay an extra \$3 billion in emergency services tax. The government will not be straight with the Victorian people. That is why I grieve, and that is why this government stands condemned.

### Opposition performance

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:46): I stand here this afternoon and I grieve wholeheartedly for all Victorians and what they have to look forward to should they ever sit, live and raise their family under a Liberal–One Nation misinformation coalition government.

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bulleen, I suggest you leave the chamber now.

**Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.**

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** If the last few weeks have shown us anything, it is that there is no doubt that those opposite are not only divided but divided by extremism and unfit to lead this state. This is not politics, this is their record. This is what they have shown us here on this side and the Victorian people time and time again. It is who they are. They cannot stop being who they are. Despite being on their sixth leader in seven years – that is a hell of a lot of leaders – nothing at all has changed. They say they do not believe us.

Well, all we need to do now is ask the member for Nepean, who has not just walked away from his position and his portfolios; he has quit. Do you know what a big deal it is to actually go ahead and quit your party, quit your seat and quit on Victorians? As he is a former professional tennis player, I would not say that the member for Nepean is a quitter, but he is quitting on this party, and he has announced it today. And we know why he has quit; he has come out and been quite blunt about it. He has quit because of the infighting around him of his colleagues, who are supposed to be there working for all Victorians and working to get into government at the end of this year.

But it is not just the member for Nepean. They have got their own trial over the member for Hawthorn's bailout coming up next month, and you know what that means. That means that many of those opposite will be dragged back into the witness box, and Victorians are going to get a very good look into the months of chaos and the months of backroom deals that have ravaged the Liberal Party here in Victoria. In many respects I actually do feel quite bad for the member for Hawthorn, because I remember back in 2018, when I was first elected, seeing him on the telly when he realised that so unexpectedly he had lost his seat in real time. I think he handled that really well. No-one had expected that we would win so emphatically the seat of Hawthorn, for the first time since 1953. The member for Hawthorn handled himself, I have to say, with the utmost grace and dignity in his defeat there on TV. It was at that moment that I think a lot of people in his party had him pegged as the kind of leader that those opposite needed – they really needed it. When he won his seat back in 2022 he was heralded as the moderate saviour who would lead those opposite back into government. Well, they tried that, and now he does not even get a look-in. He is relegated to the backbench and, if the news is correct, being pressured to resign altogether to settle this ridiculous loan controversy.

That is what underlines all of this internal chaos. It is a pattern of extremism, and that is what I want to talk about today. The Leader of the Opposition – the new latest Leader of the Opposition – and the member for Hawthorn have a lot in common. What they do have in common is that she also wants to paint herself as a moderate, but at the same time it is the extreme and extremists that run their party. That is why, I am sure, the Leader of the Opposition thought it was a great idea to say yes to attending the conference with BJ – Barnaby Joyce – and cosy up to One Nation. I mean, my God, what was she thinking? One Nation. It is an event, I will remind the house, that aimed to go ahead and promote and spread climate misinformation and culture war grievance – I mean, how disgusting. That kind of conference was to oppose cheaper renewable energy that keeps power bills down for working families and Victorians, and they merely wanted to stoke outrage as opposed to finding real solutions. How convenient – now there is an unavoidable scheduling conflict. But let us be clear: the only reason that the Leader of the Opposition is not attending that cook fest is because the Premier rightly called her out; she called her out on it.

Yesterday when I was flicking through the *Herald Sun* I came across something truly horrific. I cannot believe it has not been mentioned here. The state secretary of the Victorian branch of Pauline Hanson and Barnaby Joyce's One Nation party was walking around Melbourne, around Flinders Street – and not just walking. Apparently this ex-model had her phone out and she was videoing at peak hour down at Flinders Street station all of the wonderful Melburnians and Victorians commuting, probably home

from work – kids, mums, dads, grandparents, you name it. It was packed down there, and do you know what she put out there on her social media? I am assuming this person has a lot of social media followers; I have not had a look. She had a hell of a lot of comments. She said, ‘Spot the Westerner.’ This is One Nation. This is who the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, said yes to, and she was attending that conference – that party’s conference – with Barnaby Joyce. This is about what One Nation stands for. So when we start talking about the Liberal–One Nation misinformation coalition, we need to be real in this place about what One Nation stands for. The state secretary of the Victorian branch was filming people in Melbourne, Victoria’s capital, saying, ‘Spot the Westerner.’ Do you know what they were saying? Spot the white person. Do you know who she was filming? She was filming people from the Middle East – Muslims. She was filming people from the subcontinent – our Indian community; many of them live in my community. So when the member for Kew sits here and wants to talk about leading this state, being a leader of this state, to lift up this state – she keeps saying, ‘Victoria can be so much better.’ We know on this side Victoria always has been and will be a great, great state to live. She said yes to going to that kind of conference. She said yes to sitting beside the kind of man who has those kinds of values.

I have spent many years in Queensland. I went to university up there, and I have been to Ipswich, probably when Pauline Hanson lived there with her fish and chip shop. Queensland is a very different state to Victoria. Brisbane is a very different capital city to Melbourne. Ipswich stands out on its own. It may have changed in the decades since I left, but let me tell you, those kinds of values and those kinds of people have no place not only here in Melbourne but here in Victoria and here in Australia. There is no place for that kind of absolutely disgusting racism. Do you know what else this state secretary of the Victorian branch of One Nation said? ‘Multiculturalism has failed.’ Well, I say to the member for Kew, the new latest Leader of the Opposition: do you think multiculturalism has failed? Through you, Speaker, that is a question that my community need to have answered. I represent an incredibly multicultural, diverse community, and with those sorts of comments and that sort of cosying up with the member for Kew, the new Leader of the Opposition, those questions are important to answer, because there is a really important thing happening in November: an election. The Victorian community need to know: does she stand for those kinds of racist values, those racist principles? Does she think it is okay to go ahead and film Victorians, Melburnians, who are Australian citizens, many of them born in this place?

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, I again raise for your attention and consideration standing order 118, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Laverton about personal imputations. Be very careful. It is a very fine line that you have both been treading, you and the member for Mordialloc.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** This type of behaviour from One Nation – I am not surprised. We are not surprised on this side of the house. We know they are a bunch of racists and always have been. The underlying essence of them is about race and whether you are white or you are not white and what shade of white you may or may not be. But that kind of behaviour here in Melbourne, in the capital of Victoria? I think Melbourne is the greatest city in Australia, and I have lived in many cities. How can you possibly be cosying up to a One Nation party that stands for and allows that? I will say that again: that was the state secretary of the Victorian branch of One Nation. That is dangerous. We do not need those kinds of values and principles and that absolute disbelief in multiculturalism. Our state is an incredible state, partly because of its multiculturalism. We are talking about Victorians. We are talking about Australians here. I was absolutely appalled at that.

I am not surprised the Leader of the Opposition felt inclined to hit accept when she saw that invitation from One Nation. She is trying to appease others in her party – that is all I can say – in the upper house. We all know who that is. Look, I have a soft spot –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** You can only laugh, can't you – I mean, I try to laugh – otherwise you would cry at some of the things that are said by those in the upper house. We have Mrs McArthur. I will remind the chamber that Mrs McArthur was the person that said First Nations people should be thankful for colonisation. I mean, Jesus, who says that?

**The SPEAKER:** Unparliamentary language, member for Laverton.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** Apologies, Speaker. This is the same person who stood to the hilt with Mrs Deeming when she platformed dangerous and hateful views about LGBTIQ Victorians – another thing hurting people. This kind of behaviour and the filming of multicultural Victorians and Australians is hurtful. That is hurtful. That is a horrible kind of behaviour. We know Mrs McArthur, who she needs to appease, is also someone else who began every budget estimates hearing with the Minister for Women by asking that ridiculous question, 'What's a woman?' What kind of question is that? Of all the things that you could ask, you are so worried about that and that is all you can focus on. These kinds of fringe, weird, extreme views – this is not Victoria. This does not make Victoria a better place. These are hurtful things. Words hurt. These are the same Victorian Liberals who passed a motion at their own conference in September last year banning trans women in sport. That is not a fringe moment, that is an endorsement by a party. Again, I grieve for a Victoria that would have to exist under a Victorian Liberal–One Nation coalition.

I would note that there was only one Liberal that had the courage to abstain from supporting that petition opposing the rainbow libraries toolkit. I remember that – a program designed to make libraries safe and welcoming for everyone. Shouldn't a library be welcoming for everyone? They only had one Liberal with the courage to abstain from supporting that petition. This is another extreme fringe opportunity for those opposite to try and tear down this great state of Victoria.

Now we have had the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Caulfield, recently echoing – I just shake my head – Donald Trump. How does Donald Trump make it here into this place? Wanting to make Victoria great again, in a room full of Young Liberals – what a thing to say. Victoria has always been a great state, and I find it incredible that those people opposite that are born and bred in Victoria – because I am not – love to talk down this state. This is a great state, a state to be proud of. It always has been a great state, and it will continue to be a great state. But they feel the need to be pushing out these Trumpesque comments of 'Make Victoria Great Again'. I mean, it is scary. This kind of extremism is scary.

This is something communities like mine – communities in the western suburbs, communities in the south-east and communities in the north and the north-west – need to know about, because extremism does exist and exists as recently as the Leader of the Opposition hitting accept to a One Nation conference, happy to sit next to Barnaby Joyce until we had the Premier, quite rightly, stand up and call her out. She called her out and said, 'Is that what you stand for?' The member for Kew probably had a hiccup moment and thought, 'Whoops, I don't want to be associated with that.' I am sure there are many in her party that will still attend; whether they are from the Nationals or the Liberals, they will be there. They will be there happy to donate and happy to speak and clap at whatever nonsense is talked about at that conference. That is not who we are in Victoria. That is not the kind of thing that we should be talking to our kids about. So I grieve. I grieve for Victorians.

### Crime

**Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (17:01):** I grieve for Victorians who have suffered under a government that cannot fix the crime that has beset our CBD, our iconic shopping strips and even our homes. Perhaps if the government did not waste their grievance debate opportunity on fostering nasty untruths and scaremongering about the Liberal Party and focused on finding solutions to the crime issues in Victoria, Victorians would not be so disillusioned and living in despair. Crime is not a political abstraction, not a set of statistics to be filed away and forgotten, but the lived, daily reality of families in my electorate, of traders on Chapel Street, of workers in our shopping centres and of visitors to this once great and confident city.

In the year to September 2025 Victoria recorded 640,860 criminal offences. That is an increase of more than 62,000 offences, or 10.8 per cent, on the year before – 10.8 per cent. That is extraordinary. The crime rate, adjusted for population, rose by 9 per cent. Over 235,000 Victorians became the victims of crime in that single 12-month period. Let me put that in very real terms that every Victorian can understand: more than 235,000 people. That is not a statistic, that is a suburb. That is a community of Victorians whose lives were disrupted, whose sense of security was shattered, whose property was stolen or damaged or who suffered violence at the hand of another person.

Last night, as reported in the news, a 17-year-old boy from Prahran, from my electorate, was stabbed and rammed by a stolen car outside a McDonald's in St Kilda. His attackers chased him, slashed him with a weapon and stole his car. The detective leading the investigation described the offenders as behaving like 'rabid dogs'. That is the language of a senior Victorian police officer, not a politician and not a media commentator but a detective describing what is happening on our streets. Shame on the government for this and for allowing these issues to escalate to this point.

The communities I represent are on the front line of this crisis. The City of Stonnington is officially Victoria's worst local government area for residential burglaries, and it recorded 932.1 burglaries per 100,000 residents in the year to June 2025. Prahran, within my electorate, is ranked the least safe suburb in the entire municipality. Crime in Prahran increased by 29 per cent from 2023 to 2024. Stonnington's crime rate rose 22 per cent, and over a thousand theft offences were recorded in our suburb alone. That is in a single year in a single suburb. The City of Port Phillip, which borders my electorate, recorded a criminal incident rate of 11,155 per 100,000 residents, up 16.2 per cent. Port Phillip now sits amongst the top five worst local government areas in the entire state for crime.

On Chapel Street, the heart of my electorate, retail thefts account for nearly 30 per cent of all recorded crime, and as we know, our retail businesses and our small businesses are doing it so tough. Half the time they do not even record these issues or report them. Eighty per cent of shoplifters arrested are repeat offenders. One individual was linked to 147 shoplifting incidents over his lifetime. What are we doing about it? These are not victimless crimes. They destroy livelihoods, they drive up prices for consumers and they erode the character and vibrancy of our shopping strips.

Victoria's retail crimes have reached the highest level on record. In the year to June 2025 there were 99,114 retail crime offences recorded across the state, and that is up 20 per cent on the year before. Theft from retail stores surged 26 per cent; assaults in retail settings climbed 21 per cent. I know I am throwing in a lot of statistics here, but these figures are astronomical. Something needs to be done. The government needs to listen. A crime is occurring in a Victorian retail setting at least once every 5 minutes. Since 2022 retail thefts have surged by more than 90 per cent. This is not somebody else's problem, this is everybody's problem. Retail is now the third most common location for crime in this state, behind only private dwellings and streets.

What is the response from traders who have been left to fend for themselves? Desperate and innovative but ultimately heartbreaking measures. On Chapel Street – listen to this – Coles has resorted to blasting opera music outside its store to deter beggars and to deter antisocial behaviour. A major national retailer in one of Melbourne's most iconic shopping precincts has concluded that a loudspeaker is the most effective tool available to it because the government is not doing enough – not because the police are not there and not because the state government has no plan but because nobody is coming to help them. This is not just Coles; it is the shoppers that face this disarray out the front of Coles.

Just this morning the famous Emerson rooftop bar and club on Commercial Road in South Yarra, right in the heart of my electorate, was ramraided and set alight. A vehicle was driven into the building at 1:30 in the morning and a fire was deliberately lit. The venue has been forced to close, and this is not the only venue. We have already found four venues recently that have closed down on Chapel Street – four hospo venues, all putting it down to crime in the local area and the cost of doing business – and now we have had another one close because it has been set alight. This is a venue whose parent company already has six other Melbourne venues in administration. Our hospitality operators are

battling rising costs, crushing regulation and falling foot traffic. Now they are battling arson as well. This is the reality of doing business in a Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan Victoria.

Victoria remains the only state without a dedicated retail crime taskforce. It is something that we absolutely need. New South Wales has one, South Australia has one – and Victoria has none. New South Wales has had online crime reporting since 2016. Victoria has none of these measures, and yet this government wonders why Victoria leads the nation in retail crime. The government's response is Operation Pulse, a temporary 90-day trial deploying protective services officers to four large suburban shopping centres, and the feedback has been positive – visibility works, presence deters. But those public security officers have been pulled from train stations and precincts across the city. This is a textbook case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is temporary, it has opened up gaps in coverage elsewhere and it overlooks entirely the retail strips and precincts that absolutely need the most help. What about Chapel Street, what about Lygon Street and what about the CBD? A short-term trial is simply not a strategy. It is a sticking plaster, it is a bandaid, and the challenge runs deeper than deployment.

Victoria Police is facing a workforce crisis that this government refuses to honestly confront. As the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson has rightly identified, there are approximately 2000 vacant Victoria Police positions across the state. The Police Association Victoria reports 800 unfilled vacancies, more than 700 members off duty on WorkCover and an average of 500 officers leaving the force every year. An independent study of more than a thousand serving officers found that 67 per cent felt burnt out and one in five were likely to leave within 12 months. That is not good management. While this government underfunds its own police force, Queensland is rolling out the welcome mat with a \$20,000 relocation bonus, up to 130 grand a year and fast-tracked training. At least 25 Victorian officers have already gone. They have already taken this opportunity to move elsewhere. We are losing our police officers. Another state is actively poaching our police, and this government's answer is a 90-day trial that basically shuffles resources from one postcode to another. What is needed is a properly funded permanent plan; more officers; better conditions; genuine incentives to attract, retain and value the men and women who keep us safe; and permanent, visible deployment to the CBD, to our shopping strips and to the centres where Victorians work, where they shop and where they live. When it comes to crime and antisocial behaviour, presence absolutely matters. There is no substitute. Every time I speak to a resident in Prahran all they say is, 'We want more police on the streets. We want to feel safe.'

On Monday the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson and I hosted the first Melbourne –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Correct titles.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Sorry – Leader of the Opposition. On Monday I hosted the first Melbourne economic revitalisation forum at Parliament House. We listened, and the message was loud and clear: businesses are leaving Victoria.

*Members interjecting.*

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** They are leaving Victoria, and I will absolutely give you those stats. The combination of rising crime and an uncompetitive tax environment is driving one message: anywhere but Victoria. They are not my words, they are their words. Since 2014 this Labor government has introduced 14 new –

**Mathew Hilakari:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, members must be factual in their statements. I understand the member should reference the ABS and the increased number of businesses in Victoria.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members are assumed to be factual at all times, as has been said many times. That is not a point of order.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Since 2014 this Labor government have introduced 14 new property taxes and increased 13 more. Victoria is the most expensive state in the country for property taxes. In the

past year alone more than 12 major investment firms have shut their Melbourne offices. It costs up to a million dollars to fit out a restaurant in Melbourne. Do you know what, the same fit-out in Queensland costs \$300,000. The red tape here adds months of delay that simply does not exist in other states. Victoria's payroll tax burden is the most punitive in the country, with a base rate of 4.85 per cent, plus the mental health and wellbeing surcharge, plus the COVID debt levies. For the largest employers the effective rate reaches 6.85 per cent. This is a tax on hiring, a tax on jobs and a tax on growth. Is there any wonder Victoria has recorded the highest unemployment rate in the nation for more than 20 consecutive months?

It is not just our businesses being lured interstate, it is our police officers too. Victoria is being outcompeted on every single front. We are losing our businesses, we are losing our investment and we are losing every officer that we need to keep our streets safe. Business leaders at the forum were absolutely crystal clear: they want a plan, fairer taxes, less red tape, safer streets and a government that gets it, not just one that takes it for granted. Melbourne should be a premium international tourism destination. Our events calendar is world class. Our city is beautiful. But our food and hospitality sector is hurting as well. It is great, but it is hurting. This government is squandering the potential to highlight this. Business leaders across the room said to us, 'We've got it good. We need a better environment – less red tape, more safety – and we can actually do business, and a better injection into marketing.' The City of Melbourne has been forced to spend \$4.5 million of ratepayers money on safety initiatives because this government is not looking after them. Victoria Police –

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Yes, Melbourne City Council are already investing in their own security because this state government will not take them seriously. The council has hired its own quasi police force. That is not innovation, that is an indictment on the government. Melbourne cannot be a confident, outward-looking global city if its own residents do not feel safe, and right now the signal Victoria is sending to the world is wrong. Let me be absolutely clear, it does not have to be this way, because the people of Victoria deserve better than having the most expensive state to do business in, the highest crime rate in a decade and a government that has stopped listening. It does not have to be this way, and under a Liberal–National government it will not be.

### Opposition performance

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (17:16): I rise to contribute to this grievance debate. Like many on this side, I grieve for Victorians should the omnishambles of the Liberal Party ever have the reins in this state, though I do not believe even they imagine they will get there. Many of my colleagues – the members for Laverton and Mordialloc – have already painted an incredibly stark picture of those opposite and their extreme views, a divided party, which makes them unfit to lead. But even within the last hour of this very grievance debate I have noticed that what is most frightening is that there is no policy, no direction from those on the other side. The current Leader of the Liberal Party made it very, very clear, when she –

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I request that you encourage the member on her feet making a contribution to this debate to use correct parliamentary titles, unembellished.

**Michaela SETTLE:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the word 'current' is not a title. I said the 'current Leader of the Opposition'. It is not a title.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes. I do not uphold the point of order.

**Michaela SETTLE:** I will repeat that what frightens me most about those on the other side is that they have no policy and no direction. The current Leader of the Opposition made it very, very clear, when she walked out of that divided party room with the new title, that this would be a change of strategy – that under her leadership they would change strategy and they would not focus on crime. Yet in this debate the previous Leader of the Opposition made his grievance all about crime. The

member for Prahran has talked all about crime. What worries me is that either they are not listening to their leader – their current leader – or their current leader is flip-flopping and suddenly crime is back to the most important issue. But really, basically, where we are is that nobody, not them on the other side or anyone in Victoria, has any idea what they stand for or what they are focusing on. We get contradictory lines every day.

I had to have a little smile today. There was a particular moment when I am sure in the party room they said, 'We're going to show unity. We're going to show unity,' and in they came to question time like a little conga line. I thought, 'Unity is not a conga line, guys. Unity is about being on message.'

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to the current member for Eureka's contribution –

**Michaela SETTLE:** And future.

**Brad Rowswell:** Well, there is an election in November, and she may not be the member for Eureka after that point is my point. The point of order I wish to raise for your attention is the use of unparliamentary language. I mean, 'conga line' surely is an unparliamentary term, and when the member referenced that term she included me in that term. I find that offensive. I just think that it is something that is unparliamentary that should be brought to your attention in the context, because I would like to think that we could all do better.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Frankston, if you would like me to rule on this point of order, I can do it with you here or without you here.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It was not a question that was needing an answer, member for Frankston. I do not uphold the point of order. It is a matter for debate.

**Michaela SETTLE:** I do have some sympathy for the member at the table. I can understand that he does not want to be part of the conga line that is the Liberal Party, and he is making it very clear in *Hansard* that he is not a part of that conga line, because of course it is a pretty fractured and divisive conga line. But back to my original point – we were talking about the fact that there is no strategy and there is no direction. We were told that crime would not be the focus of the current leader, and of course we have listened to nothing else but contributions on crime coming from those on the other side. So either they are not listening to their leader or indeed she is changing her focus.

I think that the members for Laverton and Mordialloc very clearly talked about the disunity that goes on on the other side, and of course, as many of us have cited, there was the shock resignation today of the member for Nepean. I am told that he is renowned for his serve, yet he seemed unable to even serve one term. I am not sure that he is great at serving, because he certainly did not serve for four years. Of course he made it very clear that he was leaving the Liberal Party because they had fallen below the standard that he came to public life to accept. When you are even below the standards of the member for Nepean, you are definitely in trouble.

But look, I want to take this back, because unlike those on the other side, I spend most of my time thinking about the people in my electorate – not thinking about what is happening in my party room but thinking about the people that I am there to represent. So more than anything I grieve at the notion that the conga line of the Liberal Party would somehow represent regional Victoria. It bothers me because we have seen nothing but disregard for the people of regional Victoria. While we are going through some of the most trying times – through fires across our beautiful regional areas – we are left with them infighting and making up spurious lines about our fantastic emergency services, and I find that really disappointing.

But I will go even further to talk about the things that really matter to the people in my electorate. What really, really matters in my electorate is free TAFE. I bring that up specifically because the latest Leader of the Opposition, before she won the bar-room brawl that is the Liberal Party room, was the Shadow Minister for Education. I just want to let everybody know I read *Hansard* diligently. There was only once that the current Leader of the Opposition mentioned free TAFE, and do you know what she said when she mentioned free TAFE? She said:

... it is the Victorian taxpayers money that is being spent, that is being wasted ... We hear about programs like free kinder and free TAFE ... but these programs are not free.

She was saying that the money that we spend on free TAFE and free kinder is wasted money. What we believe in on this side of the house is investing in Victoria. We spend money to make life better, easier and cheaper for the people of Victoria. They will cut so that they can crow in their party room that their budget looks a certain way. But those cuts have a real impact on working people and families in Victoria, and we have got to remember that. While the Shadow Minister for Education at the time thought it was wasting money to offer programs like free TAFE and free kinder, I want her to know what they mean to us in the regions.

Free TAFE has benefited more than 250,000 students in Victoria, but what is most important is that it has saved \$674 million in tuition fees. That is an average of \$3000 per course. It is interesting. They are not interested anymore. Why is no-one on the other side interested anymore? They are turning their backs on regional Victoria.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Michaela SETTLE:** That's right – the toenails of Victoria. But bringing it back home to my turf, it has made such a difference, Federation University's offering of free TAFE. We saw some extraordinary outcomes in terms of the people that could utilise that. Really importantly, 60 per cent of the new enrollees in free TAFE were women. This is about offering women a way back into the workforce. It is not just the thousands of dollars that they save per course, but it is also the time. It gives them the time to go and study, to re-enter the workforce.

I read something today that said we need to talk about how we increase productivity. Free TAFE and getting women back in the workforce has got to be one of the best ways that we can shift productivity, and yet the current Leader of the Opposition thinks that it is a waste of money. The vice-chancellor of Federation University talked about the impacts that free TAFE has made in my region. The campuses across Central Highlands, including in Horsham, have really changed people's outcomes in the regions. In 2024 there were 600 free TAFE supported commencements, and that was a growth of 30 per cent. While most of us on this side were pretty horrified at the notion that the Leader of the Opposition would be appearing at a misinformation rally in Horsham, I for one am glad that she is not attending. And you know why? Because we have a beautiful new TAFE hub right there in Horsham providing engineering skills, and I do not want her to get her beady eyes on it because that will be the first thing that she cuts. I am glad she is not going. I am glad she will not see what is out there, because she has made it very, very clear that the first thing she is going to do when she gets in is she is going to start cuts.

On 16 August she said on Sky News, that great friend of those on the other side, that current spending is 'simply not sustainable'. She said:

That means that we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

How can the Leader of the Opposition tell people across Victoria that she is not even going to fix our schools? I just want to compare that with my own electorate. Since I have been there it has been extraordinary to watch the investment that this government has put into schools. The wonderful Darley Primary School has had a \$10 million upgrade. In Ballarat Woodmans Hill college has had a \$10 million year 7 centre. In the last budget we committed money to Bacchus Marsh College for

planning, and I am going to be fighting tooth and nail to make sure that it gets that money to build, while those on the other side have made it absolutely clear that they will not be doing that. They will not be investing in schools. They will not be fixing or increasing our schools. I just want to read it once more, because it is a pretty extraordinary quote:

Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

That is under a Liberal government. That is what the Leader of the Opposition told Sky News. It is pretty clear that they are going to get in and they are going to cut, and what scares me – why I grieve for people in my electorate should they ever get in power – is that they will lose those wonderful schools. And what about the half-a-billion-dollar investment into our health system? I know that my great friend and colleague the member for Wendouree is so proud of that build. We are so proud of bringing world-class services to people in the regions, and at the same time the Leader of the Opposition is telling us that there will be no more investment into health. We have put in the urgent care clinics in Ballarat. What a wonderful, wonderful asset in terms of, again, I will say it is not just the money, it is about the time. You do not have to go and visit the ED. You can go to the urgent care centre and get cheap and great support straightaway.

I grieve for regional Victoria if we ever had the current Leader of the Opposition in charge of the budget. She has made it very clear that she is going to cut. She said to Sky News, their very own audience, that they are not going to fix schools, they are not going to invest in health. When people go to the polls, I want them to look at our record. We are there. We are on the side of the people in Victoria. We are not squabbling in backrooms about who is the leader this week, who is going to be the deputy leader and who is recording this meeting, because that is what they are doing in their divided party room.

### Crime

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:31): I am pleased to rise today on this grievance debate, because in Victoria there is a lot to grieve for. It is interesting that none of the government members actually want to talk about crime. They want to steer clear of it. They do not want to go near it. Even after the meeting on Monday of the Labor caucus, when the state secretary Steve Staikos said to them, 'Your weak point – the government's weak point – is crime and cost of living.' That is why there is not one member over that side that wants to even go near crime.

I will give the member for Mordialloc credit. You know, the government always roll him out into a grievance or a matter of public importance. He likes to swing the big stick. He is not bad at that. He is pretty articulate, but I do feel a bit sorry for him. He is a bit angry today, the member for Mordialloc. I think he is frustrated. He is a hard worker in the government. He is, he is. But he is almost in the cabinet and he cannot quite get there, and I reckon he is getting frustrated. He does not know whether he is left or right. He is sort of stuck in the middle, but he is trying hard. And look, he is my opposite number. So I am not scared to go toe to toe with the member for Mordialloc. But look, he is a good bloke. He is a little bit angry. He is a little bit frustrated. There is a cabinet position up, and you know, we do not know whether he is going to get it or not, and he does not know whether he is going to get it or not. He is stuck in the middle. He is factionless. But we will see where it goes this time. He might calm down if he gets in there, but let us talk about the grievance today.

Let us talk about the grievance, and I will start on crime because the crime in this state is out of control. It is that simple. Now, people will get up, as Labor does. They will get up after I say this because I have a difference of opinion to Labor on crime, and they will say it is misinformation because that is what this government does now. Every time you may have an opposite view to the government, it is misinformation, but statistics do not lie. That is the thing about statistics. They are factual. They are accurate. This is why the government does not want to talk about crime, because they have failed on crime. The member for Eureka, who has exited the chamber at the moment, said of our new leader that crime was not part of her thing. It was always part of her thing. It was in the first press conference when she came out. The first press conference was on crime, health, housing and the atrocious state

of Victoria's finances. So I do not know where the member for Eureka was on that day, or whether she was googling something completely different, but the current Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, has been very clear that crime is one of our priorities in this state, and it needs to be, because this government has failed, absolutely failed on every level.

Even now we know that with tobacco shops in this state I think we have had over 120 firebombings or something – somewhere around that figure of tobacco shops in this state. We know it is linked to organised crime, but the government has decided to put on 16 inspectors for up to 10,000 tobacco shops. But they have not given the inspectors the power to shut those shops down. What is the use? What are you going to do – rock up, give them a fine, whatever? Shut them down if they are doing the wrong thing – shut them down. I mean, it is actually interesting with the government members around crime. Some government members – I will admit this – see it as an issue. The member for Laverton, for example, knows that crime in her area is out of control. The member for Laverton has even written a letter to the Minister of Police, saying, 'I need more PSOs, and I need more police.' Even some Labor members recognise there is a crime issue, but some bury their heads in the sand. It is really quite simple. For the member for Werribee, for example, when he got elected, crime was not even in his top five concerns – not in his top five. Werribee's crime rate is quite high. Not only that, when members of the public raised concerns about crime, what did the member for Werribee say? 'Stop whingeing about crime.' That is exactly what he said. He said, 'Don't whinge about crime.' Talk about disrespecting Victorians.

Apparently now we have a new type of crime. Knives have been around since Moses was a boy, so I do not know why that is new. Assaults have been around for a long time. Carjackings have been around for a long time. Aggravated burglaries, aggravated assaults – they have been around for a long time. They are not new crimes. They did not get invented in the last two years – they have been here for a while – but the reason why they are more prevalent now is because of the government's inability to control crime. That comes back to a few factors. If we look at all incidents since 2023, since the new Premier has come in – we will just go to there – all incidents are up 29 per cent. That is significant, very significant. Aggravated burglaries, 45 per cent; residential aggravated burglary, 41 per cent; non-residential aggravated burglaries, 164 per cent; total robberies, 22 per cent – I mean, there is not one figure in here that is positive. Here is another one: motor vehicle theft, 72 per cent. Now, there is one in here: aggravated retail robbery and assault and retail offences, 57 per cent and 29 per cent respectively. I have read up on this: the reason why we are having so much retail crime comes back to the government's inability to run this state and the finances of this state. It comes back to a cost-of-living pressure; people will commit retail crime because they cannot afford to live because the government has stuffed the finances. It is really that simple. The government has absolutely stuffed the finances.

Talking about our police numbers, I was doorknocking in Drouin and I met a guy from Victoria Police. He was pretty high up, and he said to me, 'Wayne, we need 1500 police today.' Now, that figure is subjective; I have heard figures from 1400, 1500 to 2000. But he was very emphatic to me. He said, 'We need 1500 police today.' He said the problem we have got in this state is our police numbers are going down and our population rate is going up, and he said that is a serious problem in the state of Victoria. We are losing police hand over fist. When you think of our interest bill today – I do not know, what did we pay today, \$20 million in interest? It is only a lazy \$20 million; do not worry about it. How many new officers could that give us? That could give us nearly 200 new officers – nearly 200 new officers for one day's interest in this state. No wonder the government does not want to talk about crime. No wonder the government does not want to talk about a budget when we are spending that many millions – that \$20 million or \$22 million a day – in interest.

When I say the government has stuffed this state, they have stuffed this state; it is really that simple. They have closed or reduced hours for 41 police stations. That is why no-one over there wants to talk about crime. Who can forget the poor lady that went to Malvern police station, running away from someone, and it was closed. I do not hear anyone sledging me on that one now. This is a problem with

the government. We have a car stolen every 16 minutes in this state. There is no-one in the government that can get up on the government's behalf and defend themselves on crime. Even the police minister at one stage said, 'I have the solutions. They're in the bottom drawer.' It is no good them being in the bottom drawer. We still have not had any real solutions to the crime crisis in this state.

There are lots of things to grieve about. I love the state of Victoria. I love living here. I love my electorate, but people are scared. People are scared in their own homes. They are scared in their cars. They are scared walking home, and for good reason. When we read out these statistics of what is going on in this state, people have a right to be scared. I tell my daughter, 'Do not walk home. Get an Uber.' She is 26 years old. God help it, you do not want to put your kids at risk, and people are at risk in this state. It is as simple as that. I never used to lock my house. I did not worry about it. I do now. I have got security doors. There is a reason for that. With the amount of aggravated home burglaries we are having, why would I take the risk. Why would I put my family at risk of someone intruding.

This all comes back to the mismanagement of this state. When the government's own state secretary said to them in their caucus meeting, 'Crime and cost of living are the two biggest weaknesses for you at the election,' that is why no-one wants to talk about crime on the government's side. They know it is a weakness, and they know they cannot defend it. They know they cannot defend cost of living either. It is out of control. Victorians are hurting. They are hurting because of the inability of this government to manage a budget. They are good at opening big, bright, shiny things, but they cannot build them on budget at all. You cannot build them on budget to save yourselves. It is absolutely unbelievable. Most of the time it is probably to keep the CFMEU happy. 'We don't want to upset the CFMEU when they keep donating to us. Why would we do that?'

The government has cut crime prevention programs at a time when we need crime prevention. I have said in the chamber many times that I do not want to see kids locked up for stealing a Mars bar. That is stupid. What I do want to see are crime prevention programs to get kids away from crime, to pluck them out of that environment they are in and put them into something positive so they come out the other end. Why, in the middle of a crime crisis, would you cut the very programs that do that? I will tell you why, because you mismanaged the state's budgets, because you do not have the money to do it. That is why the government has failed.

Even the machete bin program – my goodness, what a debacle: \$13 million, \$375,000 per bin. What a great investment that was for honest people to hand their machetes in. You could have done it the same as when we had the gun buyback scheme, and you could have put them in gun dealers, wherever, where they could put their machetes in there. It would not have been a problem. But you put them outside police stations, where only honest people were going to go. No criminal is going to put their machete in the bin. At \$375,000 a bin I do not see that as great value for money. I do not think any Victorian saw that as great value for money.

That is the problem with the government: they have lost sight of the value of a dollar. They have never had to work for it in their lives. They have never had to run a business. They have never had to do the hard work of a business to survive, because they just spend everyone else's money. It does not matter to them. It does not matter to the government. They are not used to business. They do not know how to make money; they just know how to spend money. When you give someone a dollar and they spend \$2, that is irresponsible. It is that simple. This is where the government fails – they have lost the value of a dollar. It does not matter what it costs anymore. \$375,000 for a machete bin? No, that is acceptable when a bin costs \$4000. Do the math on that. Where does the rest of the money go? Waste. That \$13 million would have been better spent on crime prevention programs, not on machete bins, and yet they are going to sledge me again.

But I tell you what, there is not one member on that side today that will talk about crime and the government's failures on crime, because they have failed, and that is why they are very quiet at the moment. Yes, they will get up and they will talk about the Leader of the Opposition. One thing I will say: I know the Premier is a big fan of Kylie Minogue, and I think her favourite song now is *Can't*

*Get You Out of My Head*, because that is where Jess Wilson, the member for Kew, is living rent-free right at the moment.

### Opposition performance

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (17:46): I grieve for the people of Victoria if the misinformation and conspiracies peddled by those opposite were ever to be the framework by which this state was governed. I do not have any zingers today. Actually, I do want to talk about something serious, because what the Leader of the Nationals was saying in his contribution about our SES and our fire services is demonstrably wrong. I think that any chance that we get in this place to correct the record when it comes to our emergency services we must take. We cannot let them continue to discredit and befuddle what are purely increases in funding to our emergency services, which is something that only happens under a Labor government.

The Leader of the Nationals referenced ROGS, the report on government services, and he was looking at a section on the SES. Can we say that on SES funding the Liberals failed to include funding for the SES when they introduced the fire services property levy. The Leader of the Nationals was comparing two years of funding for the SES. We know over the last years of this government being in place funding for the SES increased. One year there was a particular bump. There was a reason for that particular bump, and that was because we delivered five brand new units for the SES, and there were less disasters. Those five brand new units in the year referred to by the Leader of the Nationals were at Port Fairy, Cranbourne, Aintree, Point Cook and Wonthaggi. If you spoke to the members of those communities, I think they would be very happy that there was a bump that year in the funding.

When I think of Whittlesea SES, who have been turning out with our CFA and supporting them in responding to fires, I absolutely do not accept that we can have those opposite just lying, because we will always support the SES. The Leader of the Nationals might like to look at the graph above the one he was referencing, which is the emergency services fire services funding graph, which clearly shows that everything they have been peddling here and in the media and that they have been seeding into different communities is false. Funding for the CFA goes up and up and up under this government. In fact that very same report shows that our firefighting workforce is the largest and highest funded in Australia. If he wants to refer to that report, how about he refers to that? But that is a fact, and they do not seem to like the facts over there. They are going into fringe issues and conspiracy theories, and they are just focused on themselves.

We know that they are divided. I do not want to dwell on the news of the day because it is sad news for that person and their family – but better news for the people of Nepean. They are all singing a different tune. The Leader of the Opposition is seeking to bring them together to make a band, but they sound terrible because everyone is off on their own thing and their own tune. To keep them together the Leader of the Opposition has to appease people and has to make decisions not on merit but on keeping the extreme wing happy and elevating people with extreme views. In essence that means that her leadership is compromised by that very fact. What we see as a result are policies based on ideology instead of what helps Victorians. I am being generous there because we know they do not actually have any policies.

I want to flag an indicator that I think will be really interesting to watch for to see who is winning that ideological tug of war over the Liberal Party, and I think that is going to be their power policy. Their power policy will show us who has won and who has control of the party. We are focused on making power work for Victorians. We are focused on bringing down power bills through renewable energy. We are focused on the Victorian energy upgrades program. I met a man in Doreen who has replaced most of the appliances in his house with no thought at all for ideology or any natural preference for one type of power over another but simply because it was cheaper in the long run, so he made the switch. That is just the sensible way of viewing it. Under those opposite things that are under threat include the SEC, which we heard just today from the minister is powering the Peninsula hospital in

Frankston. It powers trams and schools cheaper than they would be powered for otherwise and allows them to have extra funds for other services.

What will their policy be? I was a bit mean to say before that they do not have any policies yet because the Leader of the Opposition has announced one policy. This is how she announced it: she said, 'Current spending is simply not sustainable. That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.' That was the first policy announcement, I would say, of those opposite. Is it really surprising? In 2023, when the Leader of the Opposition was the Shadow Minister for Education, she asked 18 education questions in question time. Guess how many were about state schools? None. The Shadow Minister for Education did not ask any questions about state schools in 2023. She seeks to be in charge of them now as Premier, yet at the time her focus was not even on them at all – 18 questions, not a single one about the government education system.

We are always thinking about our government schools and about our teachers. We love our teachers in Victoria. When those opposite were in power, they tried to make teachers work longer for less. In fact in the last year that those opposite were in government the number of Victorian registered teachers went backwards by 1038. Teachers were leaving the workforce under a Liberal government. Who would be surprised when the people that led them could not care less about government education? On the other hand, this government has worked really hard to support teachers, reducing the admin burden for teachers and providing high-quality lesson plans that teachers can use to help reduce their workload. Another of the former Shadow Ministers for Education for those opposite set out their focus, and you could almost hear his excitement to get into government and what their first thoughts would be. He said, 'How much do you cut? What do you cut? What services can you live without?' That was the former Shadow Minister for Education in the other place, who will not be seeking re-election – more good news for Victorians.

'How much do you cut? What do you cut? What services can you live without?' This is not some scare campaign from me, because we know that when they are given the chance, they do cut. I can give you an example of that which is particularly egregious, and that is that when the Liberals were in power they cut the program to help kids who were having trouble learning how to read. To save a measly million dollars in the north, where my schools are, they cut the program that helps kids having trouble learning to read and write – just to save it. They have got an \$11.1 billion black hole in their budget now. If to save \$1 million they are willing to cut support for kids who cannot read, what are they going to do for \$11.1 billion? Think of all that we will lose under those opposite.

I remember walking through Mernda Central College and the former principal proudly showing me their special intensive reading support area that they had established, where dedicated teachers work with small groups of students to support them in their learning. They have seen great results as a part of that. I think about this government introducing phonics and explicit instructions into state schools and the improvement and the fantastic learning I see in my community and in my own children through that approach. I think about the disability inclusion funding that this government has rolled out across all schools in Victoria, meaning if kids are having trouble learning how to read and write – or having trouble learning at all – we do not cut funding to them like those opposite. We wrap around them and we give them the supports they need so that they can continue to learn in the classroom.

The member for Narracan – I wish he was here because I am about to enter the part of my contribution about crime and cost of living. We know that investment in education is actually the best crime prevention, and that is why we are working really hard on crime prevention in schools. We are helping at-risk kids stay away from a life of crime by placing more youth workers in schools and delivering early intervention out-of-school programs. Talking to a local principal in my area, we spoke about a student who had started to go a little bit off the tracks. He was a good kid, but he was mucking up. His mum was a solo parent. She was working three jobs and she was so obviously stretched herself. He was not a bad kid. They got him involved in a school sports program, the rugby academy, and they have seen a massive turnaround in him. So we know that the investment we are making in out-of-

school programs is going to have a real impact on families and it is going to have a real impact on crime prevention. All of these types of programs are at risk under the Liberals.

We know that crime prevention is really important. We have to address the root cause of violence. That is why we established the violence reduction unit, engaging directly with the community and young people, connecting kids with reform defenders, using police intelligence and data to find and address the root causes and joining up all our crime prevention programs under one tent to make sure there are no gaps. It is not just focusing on education but also housing and mental health. It is really important that we address those root causes and at the same time have consequences for those who commit serious crimes. That is what we do.

On those kids that we are talking about who might be having difficulty in school, another reason that can be is if they are having difficulty seeing. We know that kids with vision difficulties, if it is not picked up, can start to muck up in class, and once you start to muck up in class, it can go on and on from there. Under this government we have tripled funding for the Glasses for Kids program in the 2024–25 budget, making it available for an extra 70,000 students. This program has already delivered 10,000 pairs of glasses. My daughter benefited from that program. She had an eye test at school, and we discovered that she had a vision problem we were not even aware of and neither was the teacher. Having the support of that program has been really important.

Kids can get to school for free, we are making uniforms cheaper for families, we are making sure families do not have to buy a device and we are giving free dental support and free pads and tampons to kids at schools. I go back to those opposite cutting a reading support program to save a million dollars. I just want to highlight that through our cost-of-living support for kids and through our excellence in education program, Victoria now has the best NAPLAN results in the nation. When those opposite were in power, Victoria slipped down the national NAPLAN rankings and results fell by a third.

We get the results, we do not leave kids behind, we make sure that the root causes of crime are addressed to make our communities safe and we give people cheaper power in a way that supports the planet. If all this were to be taken away by those opposite – and we know they love to cut; we have seen the evidence – I would grieve. We do not want to let that pass in Victoria.

**Question agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (18:01): I rise to speak this evening on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. As the house is aware after much debate on this bill today, it is an omnibus bill reaching across a wide sweep of the justice system, responding to court decisions, operational pressures, administrative inefficiencies and other areas, including emerging criminal law issues. It has been stated by members on this side that the opposition does not oppose this bill. Much of it is sensible, technical and long overdue, one would argue. There are many provisions that restore judicial balance to our courts following unintended consequences of earlier decisions. There are reforms intended to ease pressure on the Coroners Court, which are positive changes. In isolation, many of these reforms are logical.

However, there is one issue that I did want to concentrate on this evening, and that is the danger that is always in these omnibus bills that something may not be intended but is swept along in the process. That brings me to an area of the bill which has generated some genuine concern from the agricultural sector. You are well aware at this point that the ag sector is something I am incredibly passionate

about. It is something I know a lot about. I grew up on a farm, being involved, and despite my better judgement and swearing as an adolescent that I would never marry a farmer, I did – I know – because they are some of the best people you will ever meet: salt of the earth, grounded, honest people, just producing food and fibre for you and for me. In fact, member for Hawthorn, you might want to pop around to my office. Deputy Speaker, you are also welcome of course. You know what, anyone is welcome to come round to my office if you can find it. I was asked to bring a couple of tomatoes in. Member for Hawthorn, being of Italian descent, you will know that a couple of tomatoes in my book means 10 kilos. So I have got 10 kilos of tomatoes to get rid of and 10 kilos of grapes to get rid of from the grape house. They are exceptional – export quality.

But this particular part of the ag sector that it concerns is particularly the animal agriculture sector. This is the expansion of the bestiality offence and the creation of new offences related to animal abuse material in the Crimes Act 1958. Let me be clear: no-one in this house defends cruelty to animals, and no-one suggests that abhorrent conduct should go unpunished – quite the opposite.

These offences exist for a good reason. But agriculture does operate in a world that is often poorly understood by those that are far removed from it – like those drafting these bills, perhaps, on Spring Street. Animal agriculture and farming involve husbandry, involve breeding practices and involve veterinary intervention, research and biosecurity practices, and at times some of these procedures may look confronting when stripped of context. That is why precision in criminal law actually matters, and that is why concern has been raised by the ag sector. It is not that the intent of these provisions is wrong, it is that the concern is that the breadth of drafting, coupled with evolving community standards, may create uncertainty for people who are lawfully and responsibly carrying out practices in animal agriculture in good faith, as has been done for a long time. It is always evolving; best practice is always evolving.

Those that are involved in the animal agriculture game love their animals. They really do. I am not one to get offended, but I do get quite offended when some take these practices out of context and try to demonise those farmers for making a living. I have had it posed to me that they are not scientists. Well, a lot of them actually are. A lot of them have applied science degrees or agronomy degrees. A lot of them are scientists, and they love their animals. I get phone calls literally every week, particularly from around the Patchewollock area and the Hopetoun area, concerning their sheep, and sheep farmers in particular love their animals. They really do. But of course they are put at risk every single day by wild dogs at the moment, since the lifting of the non-protection order and the wild dog program in the north-west of the state. It is absolutely heartbreaking to see farmers having to go out and euthanise their animals – because wild dogs do not hunt for food, they hunt as sport, and they do not kill the sheep a lot of the time; they maim them. I have had some horrific photos sent to me of sheep that have been attacked. Then the farmer needs to go out and put them down, which is not good for anybody. I always like to say it does not matter how flat you make a pancake, there are always two sides, but often there are three sides: the A side and the B side, and the truth will end up somewhere in the middle – unless we are talking about CFA funding and the Labor government of course.

I do want to place on the record, though, that there have been some concerns around exemptions and defences. Exemptions and defences are not the same as clarity. A defence is something that happens after the fact; it involves a person needing to be investigated, needing to be charged and needing to be placed in a position where they have to justify their conduct. For farmers and workers, many of whom already feel like they are under siege from this government – I have spoken about this many times in this place – they feel like they are being driven out of business by the red tape, by the auditing process and by all sorts of things. This adds yet another pressure to that, which may mean they have to defend themselves after all that. Let us not forget farming communities are often very small communities. So there is the reputational damage not just for the farmer but for anyone that the farmer then supplies to. If that farmer suffers horrific reputational damage because an investigation is launched because of the unintended consequences of this bill, it could put their entire livelihood at risk, because those suppliers may then have to end contracts and it may be hard for them to find a market. Like I said, food and

fibre producers in this state already feel like they are under siege, and they are. They are buckling under the pressure. Then to have parts of their farms affected by fires and to not be able to seek any disaster relief assistance from the government is just another nail in the coffin for the Victorian agriculture industry, quite frankly.

What the sector is asking for in this bill and what the consultation has shown is that they are looking for certainty – certainty that lawful agricultural practices will not be criminalised inadvertently, certainty that material created for legitimate farming, breeding, training and research purposes will not then later be judged through that urbanised lens which is divorced from agricultural reality, because that is what happens a lot of the time. The perception can be confronting when stripped of all context, like I said. It can be very, very divorced from reality. They want the law to be interpreted consistently, not emotionally.

As the member for Lowan stated earlier today, it could then open up a can of worms with regard to the group of animal activists that we have seen invading farms over the past years, which is also a biosecurity risk. Not only is it a crime to trespass on a farm, it is also a huge biosecurity risk. And with foot-and-mouth disease a very real threat, we just have to be very, very careful that there are no consequences following this bill.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (18:11): Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated in substitution of those circulated earlier.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:13): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, a bill that encompasses amendments to many pieces of legislation on various justice topics. However, the most prominent is the house amendment, introduced by the Attorney-General, to amend the Crimes Act 1958 at section 195N. This goes to legislation that we introduced last year in respect of hate speech, incitement and vilification. This amendment removes the requirement for police to refer charges and obtain consent from the Director of Public Prosecutions unless the person is under 18 years of age. However, any charges and determinations of course still require the proper evidence and the usual applications of the law.

This bill, as I mentioned, goes to a number of justice matters, including the legacy suppression orders that previous speakers have spoken extensively on. It also extends the provisions of the operation of the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court. Of course all these matters are very important and are amendments to very progressive legislation that in most cases, if not all, have been introduced by Labor governments. I will, however, confine my remarks to the house amendment and amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 and how those sorts of health matters draw into the Thomastown electorate.

First, it is so important that our laws are constantly reviewed to ensure they reflect community standards, they reflect technology advancement and they respond to changing times and the new challenges of the day. On the changes to the Crimes Act, our Allan Labor government have responded to the growing concerns and challenges of the day, which are the growing divisions in society with the rise of the far right, the constant pressure on our democracy in terms of the hatred of others in our society and the extensive spread of misinformation. We know that reports of inciting hate, vilification and abuse and the threatening of individuals because of their faith or because of their race and other attributes are growing. Thus there is the need for this sort of legislation and of course these amendments to ensure that any charges laid by police really have a quicker resolution so that the perpetrators are not left to be able to continue to spew out their hate and division against others.

I want to talk about the Thomastown electorate, which really is one of the most diverse electorates in the state in terms of the practices of different religions. Whether it is race or cultural background, there are many, many people in the electorate of Thomastown, and every day they work, they live and they celebrate together. I know that the electorate of Thomastown and the community there of course are

not immune to what is going on in the rest of the general society. I know that while people still continue to celebrate and share culture, faith and beliefs there is division that is becoming ever more present and impossible to ignore.

I would like to take some time to reflect on some of the troubling feelings in the streets which we find ourselves with and the fact that we are sitting here having to have conversations about hate crimes and vilification and how we also have to have bills such as this in the first place. In fact earlier today I was just looking at some of the local suburban Facebook posts, and one family, shockingly, reported that their front yard had been littered with notes of racial and other abuse directed at them. Of course they were all anonymous, and it has been reported to the police. But these are actions that really have been unheard of in the past. Of course there are a whole lot of organisations and individuals just stoking this fear and hatred of others in order to promote their own causes. The rise of the far right, as we have all spoken about, is happening around the world. It makes me so frustrated and angry to see these ideologies being pandered to by, for example, the latest Leader of the Opposition by attempting to attend events with people who are the ones that are inciting this hatred and attacking other Australians that live in harmony in the state of Victoria.

Communities like mine no longer feel as safe as they did. We have seen a number of incidents where women have been violently assaulted because of the way they look and what their faith is. These are the things that legislation like this is here to protect against, because everyone in Victoria deserves to have the right to practise their faith and culture openly, proudly and without fear or prejudice. The far right is attempting to deceive Victorians into believing that our thriving multicultural community is a problem. But I can tell you it certainly is not, and this bill helps us continue to protect our community and to stand up and say loudly that we will not accept attempts to do so.

The amendment, as I have mentioned earlier, will make it easier and quicker to prosecute incidents of hate by not requiring the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions and allowing the police to commence proceedings. However, in doing so, I again stress that that does not mean that all the other legislative and legal processes do not continue. The bill also builds on the issue of anonymity through social media, with the requirement for authors of vilifying statements to be generally identifiable, and of course this is most important as well.

Now I would like to talk a little bit about the other piece of legislation in the short time I have got left, and that is what we are looking to amend in terms of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996. What this amendment is designed to do is really bring the legislation and requirements up to date around the post-death registration. Of course it is awful when a loved one passes away, but it is then up to the doctor to issue a death certificate and that death certificate must include the cause of death. In the health system we have today, with super health clinics with multiple doctors working in them and people with complex health co-morbidities, these issues make it more and more difficult to register or to identify the exact cause of death. If the doctor maybe has not seen a lot of that person in the past or maybe because there are multiple health issues, it can make it difficult for a doctor to really determine the exact cause of death. It may be due to a number of causes or it may be uncomfortable for them to make that decision. In that case it is required to go to the Coroners Court, and this really lengthens the delay. It is not about saying that there is something odd or strange about what has happened to that person, it is really just because of the changes in the way we do things and the way we operate health care. We need to make sure that our legislation is up to date. Of course this also has an element of compassion. Families do not want to be waiting around for a coroner's decision. They want to know what happened, and they want to be able to grieve and implement the things that are required for the passing of that person, such as funerals and so on. Again, this is a change to the act that is very important when it comes to people.

I cannot talk about health without talking about some of the incredible investments in the electorate of Thomastown. The new emergency department is almost underway; we are just having to build the buildings for all the special clinics at the place where the emergency department will be. We can see the urgent care clinics. One is based in Epping. That is really doing a lot of great work and moving

people out of the emergency department to get good care much quicker and to do things that often their GPs either cannot do, when it is something like a broken limb, or even if they cannot get to a place if their doctor's hours are too short.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (18:23): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, and I just want to make a few comments. There is a lot that has been said about this bill. It is an omnibus bill, so it covers a range of subjects. But there are a few issues I just want to focus on. In particular, I would like to begin with the amendments to the Open Courts Act 2013 in light of the decision in DPP and police informants. The issue of open courts and open justice is a vexed one, and there are competing policy objectives. Obviously there is the interest in ensuring that the public can always have visibility into the operation of our courts and the reasons for decisions and the circumstances in which parties appear before courts and matters are resolved. That is a perfectly legitimate interest, and in fact, I would argue, an overriding one. There is a countervailing consideration about protecting the identity of victims and even parties to litigation when there are certain sensitive matters, but I would air in this chamber the concern that I think in Victoria we have gone too far in the interests of suppression.

It has its place, but its footprint across Victorian justice is in my view far too excessive. Just a couple of years ago, if you compared the number of suppression orders in Victoria to other key states, you could see a marked difference. In 2023 there were 524 suppression orders in Victoria. The next highest state was South Australia, which had 308 suppression orders, followed by Australia's largest state, New South Wales, which had 121 suppression orders. It has long been an issue in Victoria. It has been debated in here. It has been debated in the media. There was a review which the then Andrews government commissioned in 2017 with the Honourable Frank Vincent, who made a number of recommendations in regard to that. There was the Open Courts Act, which the Baillieu government introduced in 2013, which had as one of its stated objectives the idea of promoting open justice, but the objectives have not been realised in relation to that.

Whilst the bill makes some changes in relation to that, as I said, the case of *Police Informants v DPP* allows the lower courts far greater powers to vary, revoke and review suppression orders made before the operation of certain provisions. I do think we still need the opportunity to review the operation of suppression orders in Victoria. Nary a year goes past when there are not one or more cases of great controversy where the debate about suppression orders is not aired, and I think there is a legitimate concern that courts in Victoria are not open, as they need to be, and that suppression orders are given too easily in this state.

While we are on the matter of courts, I do want to take this opportunity to talk about the report on government services in relation to the justice portfolio which was released by the Productivity Commission just last night. Of great concern in my view is the Productivity Commission's data, which confirms a longstanding trend in Victoria and Victoria's justice system and in particular the delays in court finalisations across the civil and criminal jurisdictions but also the costs of case finalisations in the civil and criminal jurisdictions. It is still the case that in Victoria we are either the highest or among the highest jurisdictions in the country for costs of case finalisations. One of the interesting reflections on that is that in Victoria we have more judicial officers than other jurisdictions. So it is not through a shortage of judicial officers and judicial staff, but for some reason or another it continues to be the case in Victoria, as confirmed by the report on government services data, that it costs more to have your case determined, either in the criminal or civil jurisdiction, and it takes longer. Given that that is a circumstance which has been retained now for many years, there is I think occasion to review why it is so that we rank among the highest jurisdictions in terms of case finalisations.

The other thing that I would say is that, despite those high relative costs of case finalisations and despite the delays that attend those case finalisations, it is also important to know that that is happening in circumstances where, rather than this government investing in reforms that will see better data outcomes in the Victorian justice system, what we are seeing is the reverse. We see in this year's budget, in budget paper 3, a \$30 million cut to the operation of our courts from \$864 million to

\$834 million. That is a metafigure that I am citing there, but that is drawn from the budget papers. So we have a situation where the government should be concerned and the Attorney-General should be concerned that Victorians are not getting the justice system they deserve. It is costing them more and it is taking them longer to secure justice or the outcomes of decisions they seek from our courts, but their own government, the Allan Labor government, is significantly cutting the budget to our courts.

How do we propose to improve outcomes and enhance access to justice in this state in those circumstances? I do not think it is acceptable, and the government has been warned. There has been a review which it itself commissioned some years ago, nearly a decade ago, and yet we are in no better position, it seems, when it comes to the operation of our courts.

Finally, I just want to reflect on the anti-vilification aspects of the bill and in particular the change to the requirement for DPP approval, with the exemption of people under 18. I fail to see the justification in that. We want the responses to hate crimes or allegations of hate crimes to be prompt and for action to be taken without any unnecessary delays that might come from this requirement, so I think it is disappointing that the government has had to do a partial about-turn on this issue. We did warn the government that this was an unnecessary change, and that it should not truck with the Greens political party on this particular aspect of those changes. It is unfortunate, but we hope that it does not result in outcomes that see delays to justice.

More generally, in terms of social cohesion, it is hard to see how this change will improve the ability of law enforcement authorities and those agencies of government and in the community that are dedicated and mandated to look at how we promote social cohesion, but that cannot be achieved without – in cases of serious instances of hate crimes – the ability of law enforcement authorities to take prompt action. If we want that culture change, which we desperately need – and as others have said, which I will echo, it is in the worst state we have seen it in many years – there has to be, as a starting point, a pillar of justice that tells particularly those people in our community who may speak with abandon – and with such abandon, I should say, that they do not care for the impact of their statements on the welfare of others – that there will be an immediate and strong response. So carving out the exemptions that the government has in relation to those under 18 I do not think is helpful, and I think that is a great disappointment; the government was warned on that. With those comments, I will conclude my remarks and echo that we will not be opposing this bill.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (18:33): I rise to speak in support of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, a bill that may be described as miscellaneous in title but which in substance delivers a series of important, targeted and long-overdue reforms across Victoria's justice system. This is not headline-grabbing legislation; it is not about slogans or sound bites. Instead, it is about the steady, serious work of governing, fixing inefficiencies, closing gaps in the law, modernising court processes and ensuring that our justice system works fairly, transparently and efficiently for the people that it serves. That work matters, because justice delayed is justice denied, and justice made inaccessible through cost, complexity or outdated processes is justice denied as well.

One of the most significant reforms in this bill relates to the so-called legacy suppression orders, orders made before the commencement of the Open Courts Act 2013. These suppression orders were often made indefinitely, with no clear expiry date and under a patchwork of old powers. As a result, many remain in force today without review, even where the original justification no longer applies. Currently, if someone wishes to vary or revoke one of these orders, their only avenue is the Supreme Court, relying on its inherent jurisdiction. That process is expensive, slow and out of reach for many, particularly victim-survivors of sexual or family violence, who may wish to tell their story on their own terms. This bill fixes that imbalance. It allows the court or tribunal that made the original order or an appellate court to review it, confirm it, vary it or revoke it. Importantly, it allows victim-survivors themselves to apply and in certain circumstances requires revocation where an adult victim gives informed consent and it is otherwise appropriate. This reform restores agency to victim-survivors. It strengthens open justice and ensures suppression orders do not operate indefinitely simply because the law has not kept up. It recognises that transparency and accountability are fundamental to public

confidence in our justice system while still preserving safeguards where ongoing protection is genuinely required.

Another important element of this bill concerns the Coroners Court, a jurisdiction that sits at the intersection of law, medicine and grief. For too many families, coronial processes can feel slow, complex and deeply distressing, even where there is no suspicion surrounding a death. This bill introduces a new pathway allowing coroners to discontinue investigations into certain naturally caused deaths, once the cause has been identified, without the need for formal findings. This is not about cutting corners, it is about recognising when further investigation serves no public health or justice purpose and when it simply prolongs uncertainty for grieving families. By allowing eligible medical practitioners to notify the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages directly, this reform reduces finalisation times and provides families with closure sooner. That is compassion in practice. The bill also improves the process for setting aside findings and reopening investigations, limiting standing to appropriate parties while allowing the court to act on its own motion when new facts emerge. This promotes efficiency while preserving the Coroners Court's critical public health and safety role.

Closely related are the reforms to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996. In today's health system people are less likely to have a single long-term treating doctor. They may be cared for by multiple practitioners across hospitals, aged care and general practice. The current rules have left many doctors uncertain about whether they are certain enough to certify a death, resulting in unnecessary referrals to the Coroners Court, with people often handballing and not wanting to actually make a decision there. This bill sensibly clarifies that a doctor may notify the registrar where they can form an opinion as to the probable cause of death. It also expands eligibility so that doctors who have reviewed a person's medical history and circumstances can complete the notification. This does not change how deaths are recorded, it simply reflects medical reality, supports clinicians and reduces unnecessary coronial involvement, freeing up the system to focus on deaths that genuinely require investigation.

Fines enforcement is another area where small procedural barriers can have disproportionate consequences. The reforms in this bill strengthen the framework for the electronic service of fines, expand the use of online portals for stakeholders and correct inconsistencies across the legislation. These changes are not punitive, they are about clarity, certainty and administrative fairness. For example, the bill removes the requirement for rigid affidavits when someone applies for an extension of time because they were unaware of the fine. It also clarifies when service is deemed to occur, ensuring enforcement agencies can act consistently while still requiring consent for electronic service. Importantly, these reforms also close loopholes that allow serial fine-defaulters to delay accountability, ensuring the system is fair both to individuals and to the broader community that relies on compliance.

The amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 may appear technical, but they are deeply important for vulnerable Victorians with decision-making impairments. The bill clarifies the Public Advocate's delegation powers and acting arrangements, ensuring that urgent guardianship decisions – often involving housing, health or safety – can be made without delay, even during periods of absence or vacancy. These reforms reduce administrative burdens while strengthening continuity and independence in guardianship decision-making. For people who rely on the Public Advocate as a last resort, this could mean the difference between timely support and unacceptable risk.

One of the most confronting aspects of this bill is in response to bestiality and animal abuse material. While Victoria already criminalises acts of bestiality, there have been glaring gaps. The possession, production and distribution of material depicting these acts have not been expressly prohibited. That gap has allowed harmful content to circulate, fuelling demand and normalising cruelty. This bill closes that gap decisively. It expands the definition of 'bestiality' to include non-penetrative sexual touching and introduces new indictable offences targeting the production, distribution, possession and access of bestiality and animal abuse materials. The offences are carefully drafted, with appropriate

exceptions and defences to protect legitimate journalism, research and creative work, but they send a clear message: extreme cruelty, whether directed at people or animals, has no place in Victoria.

The bill also extends the operation of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, ensuring that eligible offenders continue to have access to therapeutic alternatives that address addiction as a driver of that offending. This is evidence-based justice, reducing reoffending, improving outcomes and making our community safer.

Similarly, amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986 allow the Magistrates' Court to use its case management system more efficiently for administrative functions. This modernisation reduces manual processing, improves timeliness and allows court staff to focus on matters requiring human judgement.

Finally, the bill includes an important house amendment addressing criminal vilification. Following the passage of the anti-vilification and social cohesion reforms last year, it has become clear that requiring Director of Public Prosecutions consent in every police-led prosecution risks creating unacceptable delays. In the context of rising antisemitism and other forms of hate, delay means harm. This bill removes that requirement, except where the alleged offender is under 18, ensuring that serious hate crimes can be brought before the courts swiftly and decisively. It is a measured response that balances due process with the urgent need to protect communities from intimidation and violence. This bill is about making the justice system work fairer, faster and clearer and be more humane. It empowers victim-survivors. It supports grieving families. It protects vulnerable people. It modernises the courts. It strengthens accountability. It does not do this through sweeping rhetoric, but through careful, practical reform. This is what responsible governments look like, this is what fairness in action looks like, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (18:42): I rise to make a contribution to the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. As we know, this is the second bill of its kind in this place for this year, rectifying some of the mistakes that have been made in the past. Whilst there are some important changes in this bill, there is still a lot more to be done to address the issues of crime and justice that are impacting on people's lives every single day.

I might start my contribution by just perhaps sharing some of my experiences. As we know, crime in this state is escalating and it is having a direct impact on all parts of the state, including my electorate. Crime across the state is increasing, and my electorate is no different. Crime in Greater Shepparton is up 10.8 per cent. Whether it be retail theft, home invasions, carjackings or knife crime, everyday Victorians are being impacted. People do not feel safe in their homes, they do not feel safe on the streets, and this is due to the escalation of crime. We are seeing ongoing firebombing across the state of tobacco stores. In fact I think it is over 100. Yesterday morning, in the early hours, a gift shop in the main street of Mooroopna, which is a town in my electorate, was completely gutted following a ram raid, and the store was set alight in what police have described as a targeted arson attack. This has rattled the small-knit community, has caused a great deal of anxiety and has even enhanced the sense of unsafety. Another store in Mooroopna has been targeted and attacked three times in the past few months. Local community champion Azem has a cafe in the main street. His window has been smashed twice. He makes very little profit. He actually helps the homeless. It is these types of reckless acts that really impact communities, small businesses and someone that is trying to just do a good deed.

One of the staff from my office came to Melbourne prior to finishing up at the end of term last year. She wanted to come and have a day in Parliament, and she had not been here for quite some time. Guess what, she got up the next day and her car had been stolen, right here in the heart of Melbourne. The government has been slow on the wheel on this front and have been doing nothing to protect Victorians from this ongoing escalation of crime and war. The government thinks the solution is to deploy 14 inspectors to crack down on the ongoing issue of illicit tobacco sales, with no power to shut them down. We have 367 fewer full-time police officers under this Premier, a police shortage of more than 1400 vacancies and 41 police stations have either closed or are operating on limited hours. How

can we address rising crime when police numbers are reducing at an all-time high, and more and more police stations are being closed or have had their hours reduced?

One statistic that has staggered me locally from my police officers on the ground is that they continually tell me the incidence of up to a 75 per cent increase in crime is taking up to 70 per cent of their time and taking them off the street. We are finding now that they are not able to get out to do the job that they need to do. Seventy per cent of their time is taken up with family violence incidents. I have asked the Minister for Police to provide this critical resource to help our police manage the escalating family violence incidents, and he is very aware of the significant impact that not having enough officers at the Shepparton station is having on protecting communities. The police are frustrated. They want to be there for our community when they need them. They are doing the best they can, but is it any wonder we have police leaving the force when they are sitting all day having to fill out domestic violence incident reports when they also need to be out on the ground protecting and serving their communities?

Family violence and breaches of family violence orders continue to be the number one offence in my electorate, followed by criminal damage, theft from retail stores, theft in general and motor vehicle theft. Stalking-related offences are at a 10-year high in this state, with just under 14,800 stalking-related offences recorded in the year to September 2025, the highest since 2016. Again, how can we address these rising numbers when police numbers are being reduced? People are sick to death of reoffenders getting let out on bail and onto the streets only to reoffend within hours. More than ever before, our court and justice system is overwhelmed and it is under-resourced, all because of the government's track record when it comes to protecting Victorians.

As we saw in recent reports, accused criminals are having their bail applications prioritised ahead of other cases, which is forcing victims of crime to wait for justice and their day in court. As we all know, being a victim-survivor of sexual and family violence offences takes a toll on their life, whether it be physically, emotionally or socially. Through the bill, they will be empowered so that they have the ability to take control of their story by requiring the court or VCAT to revoke a pre-existing order if the victim-survivor gives permission for that revocation. This will enable eligible investigations to be finalised sooner. This is a welcome amendment, which seeks to implement recommendation 4 of the Coronial Council of Victoria's review of reportable deaths in Victoria.

The bill seeks to also amend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 to enable doctors who have reviewed a person's medical history and the circumstances of their death and are satisfied of the person's probable cause of death to notify the registrar of the cause of death. Some other amendments the bill makes are around strengthening fines enforcement, clarifying delegation powers, allowing notices to be sent to addresses supplied in nomination statements, improving processes for declared director challenges and some minor reforms for warrants and enforcement review.

The Infringements Act 2006 will clarify service of infringement notices, establish rules for service by electronic means, tighten criteria for withdrawing notices and expand review grounds and timeframes. The Road Safety Act 1986 will have new extensions of time when no actual notice is received, clarify use of effective statements to avoid liability and standardise provisions across road and marine contexts. The tolling acts will provide clear powers for tolling corporations to notify enforcement agencies of non-payment and modernise service and nomination systems.

I would also like to touch on the acquittal and implementation of recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2020 *Contempt of Court* report. The commission, back in 2018, was asked by the then Andrews government to consider contempt of court law reform. Contempt of court is any conduct that risks interfering with the ability of the courts to perform their role. The VLRC's final report was tabled on 4 August 2020 and recommended to the government that as a state we need a contempt of court act to define different types of contempt and make the law clearer and fairer. In doing so, the bill before the house today seeks to enable applications to be made to lower courts and VCAT to vary or revoke legacy suppression orders made by those courts or tribunals.

As we know, suppression orders over time have been used by our courts and in proceedings to prohibit or restrict the publication or disclosure of specific information. In its report the VLRC used the term ‘legacy suppression orders’ to describe such suppression orders made under the common law or repealed provisions in court acts prior to the commencement of the Open Courts Act 2013, which was on 1 December 2013, more than 12 years ago today. That act itself, the Open Courts Act, consolidated the general powers of the Supreme Court, the County Court, the Magistrates’ Court, VCAT and the Coroners Court to make suppression orders and closed court orders, but the act did not address legacy suppression orders. Because of this gap and limitation in the legislation, such orders do not have an end date, and unlike suppression orders made under the act, they operate for a maximum period of five years. In practice today, legacy suppression orders operate indefinitely or until further order, which is contrary to the principle of open justice. Upholding this principle is a fundamental legal and democratic principle, but it also seeks to promote responsibility by holding those accountable while raising awareness of such issues.

Following the tabling of the commission’s final report, the Supreme Court’s 2020 decision in *Chairperson of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants v Director of Public Prosecutions Victoria and others* cast doubt on the power of lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders. Because of this decision, the Supreme Court is only empowered to review such orders under the jurisdiction vested in the court by the Constitution Act 1975. In addressing this, the bill seeks to enable lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders made by those courts or tribunals. Under the bill these will be referred to as pre-existing orders. Where there is an appeal on a substantive proceeding the appellate court will be able to review the pre-existing order made in the lower court or tribunal and make any order that a court or tribunal could have made under the Open Courts Act. It is hoped that through these amendments they will largely mirror existing suppression order review provisions that are contained in the Open Courts Act.

Another amendment I would like to touch on is the amendment of the Coroners Act 2008 – which I did earlier – to establish a new finalisation pathway for certain natural cause death investigations. This primarily is to reduce the workload by enabling more medical practitioners to certify natural cause deaths and forms part of a systemic effort to reduce pressure on the Coroners Court. Doctors may certify deaths after reviewing medical history or examining circumstances even if they were not treating the patient. We know that for anyone losing a loved one it is an incredibly emotional and difficult time and getting that closure is incredibly important. A coroner can exercise a discretion to use a pathway under the act so a pathologist or a medical practitioner under the supervision of a pathologist can register the cause of death and other prescribed particulars with the registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria. This will enable eligible investigations to be finalised sooner. This is a welcome amendment which seeks to implement recommendation 4 of the Coronial Council of Victoria’s *Review of Reportable Deaths in Victoria* report. The Coroners Court Act will be amended to limit the standing to apply for coronial findings to certain classes of applicant with a connection to the investigation and to allow the Coroners Court to set aside coronial findings on its own motion where new facts and circumstances make it appropriate to do so. In closing, we do not oppose the bill.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (18:52): I will give a brief contribution on the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, and I am very happy to do so. I did a bit of work on this bill, as we all did, and I think members have canvassed many of the aspects very well. Obviously I am supportive of the bill, and it is great to see the opposition are not opposing the bill.

I do not think I have lived an overly sheltered life. There is a lot I have not done, and that is probably for good reasons. When I got to the words ‘animal crush material’ I had to do a little bit of a double take. How? What? I would say others, but that would probably lead to unparliamentary language. Anything we can do to eliminate any potential loopholes used by someone who is that depraved is obviously a good thing and can never be done soon enough. I do not want to go into more of that, but I cannot comprehend someone losing their humanity that much that they think this is a good idea.

When we come to the amendments this morning, obviously I am very supportive of those amendments too. I think last time we voted for the anti-vilification bill we voted for the DPP not to have to approve prosecution. I will happily vote again for that to be the case. There was a little bit of revisionist history narrative at times, but I am not going to go there more than that. I did not get a chance to speak yesterday, but I thank members in the room – the member for Caulfield and member for Box Hill, obviously – who gave powerful contributions to our Bondi condolence motion. Any steps we make to improve our anti-vilification laws are steps that this house is working towards to never have a similar motion again. We talk about education and we talk about getting people to understand, and there is a role for that. For people who are out protesting, they believe exactly what they are saying and they think that is valid. Unfortunately, some of the things they are saying on a regular basis are hurtful for people for no other reason than who those people are.

I implore those people who turn up – and we should have the ability to protest, we should have the right to protest and we should have the freedom of speech to do so – to realise that we are accountable for what we say. We are very lucky in this house that we have privilege, so we can pretty well say whatever we like, but we are still accountable to the Privileges Committee. Again, we should have our say, but be mindful. Be kind. You can argue without being cruel.

One of the things I did over the break – as did many members who joined me and many online as well – is join the Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Holocaust Museum. We listened to a man, Mr Joe Schwartzberg, a Holocaust survivor, who told us his story – amazing man, amazing story. I am not going to tell his story, because it is online, right, so listen to the man yourself – and please do. The point, from what I understand – and I hope I am not verballing anyone – is Joe's mission since he retired from his business has been to educate, to share that story, for no other reason than to say hate does not win, hate does not help. Yet we are arguing this. I feel for the Jewish community, because I would imagine – and I cannot imagine what it is like to be in the Jewish community; I am not Jewish. But I feel for that community, I would imagine, just thinking 'Not again. Still, more? Stop it.' There is no switch to stop it. I think we all in this house wish there was a switch to stop it.

I go to the member for Box Hill's contribution yesterday where he asked us all, 'What more can I do?' I have been asking myself that question for quite a while. Obviously when there are antisemitic attacks either in my electorate or in our state, I call my friends, I speak to them – empathy, sympathy, try and understand. 'What else can we do?' is the question. I do not necessarily know what the answer is to fix all of it, and maybe we never will. But I think we need more of a presence to say this, not just in this house, but everywhere. I think the defence of the Jewish community from the rise in antisemitism over the last few years has to be at least equally contributed by the non-Jewish community. It does not matter which community it is: if a community in our multicultural state is being attacked, it is the rest of us who have to stand up and be the shield from that. It is on me to do everything I can – to answer the member for Box Hill. If the Jewish community feel that they cannot have, as I think the member for Caulfield said yesterday, a Hanukkah celebration in a park, that is a terrible thing. If you want me to go and stand on the edge of the park so you can have your celebration, give me a call. Post World War I there were a lot of reasons why things were complicated and things were bad, but I cannot understand how a population a hundred years ago could go from being a normal population – and I am not having a go at the German people here – to the reality of allowing the Holocaust to happen.

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

#### *Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

#### **Wilson's Promontory sanctuary**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:00): (1499) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to begin work on the proposed

Wilsons Promontory sanctuary. It has been proposed for some time. I was just trying to find the exact dates, and I literally found it a second ago. On 18 November 2020 the government announced a revitalisation of Wilsons Promontory, which includes the 10-kilometre fence across the Yanakie Isthmus. It is pretty extraordinary that here we are now in 2026 and that project has not even begun. I believe that tenders have gone out and that a contract is ready to be awarded. The most recent update on the Parks Victoria website indicates that the project will begin in early 2026. But given, as I said, that this was announced on 18 November in 2020, five and a bit years ago, I am seeking for the minister to actually get it happening.

This is a project that the Nationals and Liberals actually committed to in the 2018 election, and it has been around for a long time before that. While there is some scepticism about this project, and that is understandable, the idea is pretty simple. Wilsons Prom is a massive area – 50,000 hectares – and is separated from the mainland by a very narrow isthmus, the Yanakie Isthmus. So this 10-kilometre fence can actually set up this biosphere, if you like, and give us the opportunity over a period of time to then remove the pests, and pest animals in particular, from the Prom and ensure that a whole range of wildlife and native vegetation are better protected. This project has been a long time coming. It is supposed to be starting soon, but I am calling on the minister to get on with it and ensure that it actually does start and is completed as soon as possible.

#### ADHD services

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:02): (1500) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. This week the Premier and ministers have announced life-changing reforms around making ADHD diagnosis and treatment across Victoria easier, faster and more affordable for families. I know from personal experience but also from constituents who have contacted me that seeking support for ADHD and facing a system that can be quite complex, slow and also costly has really caused stress for many families and individuals. Adults have been required to seek psychiatric support. Children may have needed to see paediatricians or a clinical psychologist, and they can wait months and obviously pay a lot of money to have that assessment. These are barriers that have really left people without care when they needed it. Under these changes we have explained to the community that GPs will be able to diagnose and treat ADHD in children aged six and over and adults following accredited training. This is going to make a difference. I have had so many people reach out to me since our announcement thanking our government for making these changes and sharing their stories of what they have experienced. The action that I seek is for the Minister for Health to provide an update on how these reforms will be implemented locally, including how GP training and services availability will support families across our Bellarine communities.

#### Economic policy

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (19:04): (1501) My adjournment this evening is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the Treasurer to implement the recommendations of the Business Council of Australia's *Regulation Rumble 2025* report to make Victoria's business environment competitive again. Earlier this week I met with business leaders from right across Victoria with the leader of the Victorian Liberal Party Jess Wilson. The message was consistent and deeply concerning. Melbourne is a great city, but right now it is underperforming, and Victorians absolutely know it. Confidence is falling, investment is fleeing and too many businesses are making the hard decisions to shut their doors or to leave this state altogether.

The Business Council of Australia's *Regulation Rumble* report confirms what businesses already know. In 2025 Victoria is dead last in the nation for business competitiveness – eight out of eight for three years running. We are the worst state in Australia for cost and regulation, and we rank last for cost and regulatory settings overall. This is not theoretical. It is being felt on the ground. Empty shops are spreading across our main streets and attracting antisocial behaviour, reducing foot traffic and draining life from once-thriving precincts, including strips like Chapel Street and our CBD, which has

lost its vibrancy. Retail crime is skyrocketing, up 20 per cent from the year prior. Investors are turning their back on the state, and residents and small businesses owners are paying the price.

The report is very clear on why Victoria is falling behind. Victoria has one of the highest payroll tax rates in the country, at 6.85 per cent, combined with the lowest tax-free threshold of just \$1 million. On property taxes, we have the highest commercial stamp duty in Australia and the highest land tax rate for foreign owners. On licensing and regulation, Victorians perform worst in the nation, with cafes facing two-thirds more licensing requirements than the best performing states, and retailers facing nearly double the burden compared to Queensland.

Governments cannot regulate their way to prosperity. The role of government is to create the conditions for success, to remove barriers, to share risks and to facilitate growth and, simply, not to smother it. Victoria has a proud history as the home of small business, tourism and major events. That legacy is slipping away. The advice is clear, credible and coming from those that know best. I urge you to listen to the Business Council of Australia and implement the *Regulation Rumble 2025* recommendations so Victoria can once again be the best state in the nation to do business in.

### Greenvale electorate schools

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:06): (1502) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to inform me of how this Labor government is continuing to support high-achieving students and student wellbeing across my electorate of Greenvale. Throughout the end of 2025 I had the pleasure of visiting wonderful schools across my electorate to celebrate and recognise the achievements of our many outstanding young leaders through the Greenvale young leaders awards. These prestigious awards are presented annually to a year 6 and year 11 student at each school in my electorate who has demonstrated exceptional public service and commitment to their education.

It is an honour this evening to acknowledge each of these winners in this Parliament of Victoria, celebrating their achievements and recording them for posterity: Muhammad Zahid from Roxburgh Homestead Primary School, for his dedication to excellence and for setting a great example to his peers; Ibrahim Alagha from Roxburgh Homestead Primary School, for outstanding leadership as a school sports captain; Saanvi Malhotra from Aitken College, for her academic excellence and active involvement in the school community; Arya Karthik from Aitken College, for her leadership in school-wide fundraising and advocacy initiatives; Eva Mastilovic from Keelonith Primary School, for achieving outstanding academic results; Anabel Tully from Kolbe Catholic College, for setting a great example as a squadron warrant officer; Anna Veis from Greenvale Primary School, for achieving excellence in academics, sport and leadership; Lilia Elmira from Mary Queen of Heaven Catholic Primary School, for leading and being an example to the school; Eva Karacan from St Carlo Borromeo Catholic Primary School, for demonstrating an outstanding commitment to community; Hajrah Abbasi from Bethal Primary School, for supporting and inspiring the school community as a school captain; Acyl Obeid from Bethal Primary School, for being another outstanding leader and a school captain in that school and for positively influencing the community; Brekhna Khan from Meadow Heights Primary School, for inspiring the community and leading as an example of perseverance and care; Mary Enwina from Good Samaritan Primary School, for demonstrating dedication, integrity and compassion as a school captain; Harmony Pursell from Good Samaritan Primary School, for leading by example and for showing kindness, respect and compassion to her peers; Thalia Borg from Westmeadows Primary School, for demonstrating great leadership, compassion and academic achievement; Adem Elma from Greenvale Secondary College, for being a role model and having a positive impact in the Stand Up Project; Maddy Cadman from Craigieburn South Primary School, for consistently setting a positive example for her peers; Lina Dandachli from Roxburgh College, for demonstrating strong commitment, both academically and across our community; and Stephanie Eddy from Craigieburn Secondary College, for supporting her peers and demonstrating excellence across the board.

It was wonderful to meet so many of these students at the end of last year. Congratulations to all of them. Thank you for their leadership and their positive impact, both in their schools and across our community.

### **Polwarth electorate level crossings**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:09): (1503) My adjournment this evening is for the minister for public transport, and the action I seek from the minister is for the immediate installation of train warning systems and whatever is most appropriate at the Urches Road train crossing and the Reddies Road train crossing. This month two young men, Jack McGee and Chris Hewitt, had their lives tragically taken from them and their community and their families, with an unmarked level crossing just to the south of the Cressy township.

This road is in poor condition. This road is an alternative shortcut that many, many people take, linking the Ballarat and Colac roads. It comes on top of the tragic accident in 2017, where a young mother heading home to her family was killed at an adjacent level crossing, also unmarked and unclear. The community has asked me to immediately bring this to the minister's attention because tragedies like this are dealt with by the community. The local CFA are the first on guard – local farmers, often – and now with three local people killed at these two crossings that are quite close to each other, it takes a huge toll. As we have discussed many times in this Parliament in this past week, it has been a summer of many tragedies right across Victoria, falling onto the hearts and souls and minds of those hardworking volunteers in communities. So the Cressy CFA has asked me to bring this urgent action to the attention of the minister and plead with her to find the resources to immediately make these crossings safer. The community of Cressy really does not have it within itself to have to make good and prepare for the tragedy of another local, should it be taken with this train.

The main line that runs through here is not a main passenger service; it is an interstate freight train. They are big, heavy trains that take nearly 800 metres to stop. It is a very dangerous crossing, and unfortunately, particularly with this Reddies Road crossing where the most recent tragedy was, Google Maps now shows that as a preferred route, and the local CFA are very concerned about this because more and more traffic is appearing on what is an unmade gravel road. It is dangerous; it is in a very open, flat area where motorists going along at legal speeds are just completely unaware of the potential catastrophe caused by these large and long interstate freight trains. So I ask the minister to take this urgent request.

### **Working from home**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (19:12): (1504) My adjournment is for the Treasurer in the other place in her capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on our government's efforts to enshrine the ability to work from home at least two days a week as a right for those Victorians who can. Whilst it is true that not everyone can work from home – I get that, we all get that – being able to do so does work for everyone. That is something we have heard from an overwhelming number of Victorians – over 36,000 in fact – who responded to our surveys, and they said this is something that they would really like to see happen.

We have heard so many stories about folks who found the benefits of being able to work flexibly, whether they need to be at home for a plumber, electrician, making repairs or the kids when they are home sick from school or like last month when we had our hottest day on record, avoiding having to go out in that very, very dangerous heat. I have heard similar stories when I have been out in the electorate talking to folks who themselves are working from home. It is always a very embarrassing moment out doorknocking: you knock on the door, and you can hear this shuffling around, and someone runs out and they say, 'Yes, how can I help you? I'm on a Zoom meeting. I'm working from home.' And I always sort of slip in there, 'I'm here to tell you that we're going to make it a right,' before they have to dash back to the Zoom meeting. But working from home is really important and really popular right across communities here in Victoria. People keep asking me: why are we doing this? Where is the legislation? And I cannot wait.

There are so many different reasons why this idea and this policy and what we are doing here stacks up, because for us, we know that we are on the side of working families and people right across Victoria who are looking for that guaranteed flexibility at least twice a week. It saves all Victorians time; it saves them money, which is why I know folks in my electorate would greatly appreciate an update from the minister on where we are at with drafting these reforms.

### **Arts sector support**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (19:14): (1505) The matter I am raising in Parliament tonight is for the Minister for Creative Industries, because we do not have a minister for the arts in Victoria anymore, but the action I am seeking is to reverse the recent funding cuts to some of Melbourne's key arts and cultural institutions. We all know Melbourne is the cultural capital of Australia, and it is why we love living here: art and theatre and literature. It makes our lives full, and the creative industries actually employ around one in 10 working Victorians, so it is actually a huge employer as well. But a lot of that is at risk right now because Labor has cut funding to some of our critical arts institutions.

Right before Christmas Writers Victoria learned that its four-year funding – \$600,000 – would fall to zero. That is a cut of 100 per cent, and it means Victoria will end up as the only mainland state without a peak writers body. Abbotsford Convent also had its funding cut entirely. Musica Viva Australia, a national chamber music program for young performers, also had its state government funding reduced to zero. And the beloved La Mama Theatre in my local community in Carlton had their funding cut by half. They received funding for just two years rather than the four years that they have traditionally relied on.

We respect that many of these funding decisions are grant decisions that are often at arm's length from the minister, but the reason so many organisations are losing their funding is because that total pool of funding for the arts simply is not sufficient and it is not being prioritised by the Victorian Labor government. Just as an example, the Victorian Labor government could find \$350 million for luxury corporate box upgrades at the grand prix. It could find an extra \$1 billion for private prisons. But they could not find a tiny fraction of that to save these arts institutions.

Melbourne is meant to be a UNESCO City of Literature, yet we are being left as the only mainland state without a peak writers body. Melbourne is meant to be the cultural and theatre capital of the country, yet we cannot find funding for one of our most important local theatres. I just did not expect these kinds of brutal cuts to come from a Labor government, but here we are.

We cannot let arts and culture die in Melbourne on Labor's watch. The Greens stand against these cuts because we know how important these arts, cultural and literary institutions are and we know how important artists and writers and musicians are to all our lives. To those who are also outraged about these cuts: I encourage you to speak up, to get in touch with me, to join our campaign to save arts and culture in Melbourne, because arts and culture sustain us.

### **South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (19:17): (1506) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me with the latest update on funding for the South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council, SEMVAC, in Springvale South in my electorate. SEMVAC do so much for families across Clarinda and across the south-east suburbs. Their casework numbers are really impressive, supporting locals with housing and finding work, health, medical services and so much more. They are an important asset for many families, and they provide an important place for people to come together and meet.

That is why I am very proud to see that last year's budget invested \$80,000 to support SEMVAC's work. This was a fantastic result for our local community and one that I was proud to celebrate with SEMVAC during National Volunteer Week last year. SEMVAC is such a wonderful example of volunteerism in our community and bringing people together to connect community. We are so lucky

to have them locally in the Clarinda district, and we are a stronger and healthier community because of them, along with all the other amazing local community and multicultural support organisations that deliver services and foster community engagement, connections and belonging in the south-east. Thank you to SEMVAC and to all our community organisations for the incredible impact that they have in building our thriving and inclusive community in Clarinda.

Again, congratulations and thank you to Dr Kim Son Vu, Cr Loi Truong and all SEMVAC's executive committee and amazing volunteers, who give so much of their time and energy to support our community and those that need assistance. SEMVAC continues to play a vital role in strengthening our community, supporting families, celebrating cultures and providing essential services. I thank the minister. I am looking forward to hearing more on how this funding has helped SEMVAC to continue its important work.

### **Bushfires**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (19:19): (1507) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is to extend financial assistance to the individuals who stayed and fought the Longwood bushfire and to other communities across Victoria facing the same situation. Right now the very people who protected our towns are being locked out of support. They are literally being told that because they did not evacuate they are ineligible for state and federal payments. You almost have to say it twice to understand and believe it: the people who stayed to save homes, stock and lives are the ones being penalised.

We should have learned by now that this is how to respond to a bushfire emergency. When this fire tore through our region, locals did not wait to be told what to do. They did not turn away from smoke. They turned towards it. Farmers with slip-ons, utes, fire pumps, speed tillers, disc ploughs and earthmovers cut firebreaks through the night. These were private appliances and local people using their own machinery, their own fuel and their own time to build containment lines that stopped this disaster from becoming a catastrophe. Without them we would have lost far more homes, far more livestock and, frankly, more lives.

Here is the part that does not make sense to me: those same people are now being told they do not qualify for emergency payments because they did not evacuate, because they stayed and because they defended. That cannot be the test. As farmers you are not just thinking about yourself. You are responsible for animals, neighbours and entire properties. Staying to protect is not always reckless. For many it is instinct and it is duty. This courage cannot be underestimated. People like Callum and Deanna Artrage were rejected from support despite Callum being instrumental in saving homes, assets and livestock. Matt Tennant from TENEX Rail used his truck and heavy machinery to open roads so fodder could get in and communities could reach each other safely and then turned around and hauled 40-foot shipping containers into Ruffy to support the recovery effort, all at his own expense – not a single cent of fuel reimbursed. Katie Hill from Strathbogie spent a month donating her time and discounted livestock transport to help families move and protect their animals, yet she is also ineligible for any rebate. We have to look at this both ways, those directly impacted and those who have given everything to help others at significant personal cost – both deserve support. Ed Mercer, Ash Rowling, Cam Bassett, Will Johansen, Tom Plunkett, George O'Neil, Paul Brown and many others. Local businesses like Pro Turf, Rock Solid Civil and TENEX rolled out with equipment without hesitation. They did not wait for paperwork. They got in and helped like so many. If we have learned anything about natural disasters in this country, it is that government is too slow to respond and communities act first. We must back the people who back their communities, extend the grants, expand eligibility and recognise those who stayed and defended. Give those good locals a fair go.

### **Pascoe Vale South Primary School**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (19:22): (1508) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the Victorian Labor government's ongoing investments to deliver the Education State across Pascoe Vale, including for

Pascoe Vale South Primary School. Bounded by Reynard Street, Coonans Road, Parkstone Avenue and CityLink, the school has long been situated in the heart of the Pascoe Vale South community since its official opening on 2 February 1954, with 196 students. Over those 70-plus years Pascoe Vale South Primary has continued to do a magnificent job in educating generations of those local young students – an ever-increasing, welcoming, inclusive and vibrant learning environment. Today home to 41 teachers and 310-plus students and growing, Pascoe Vale South strives to facilitate an inclusive and empowering learning environment which fosters confident, creative, caring, curious and collaborative learners who dare to be excellent via their core values of respect, caring, learning and enjoyment.

That is why I have been proud to be a member of a Victorian Labor government that has continued to invest and support the wonderful Pascoe Vale South Primary community since 2015 via our previous \$5.1 million investments to deliver a new learning centre with a new school hall, flexible learning spaces, support spaces, playgrounds, six high-quality and flexible teaching spaces, classrooms, an art room, areas for staff resources and withdrawal, a new foyer for the school administration building and the landscape entrance on Reynard Street and the previous funding by the Rudd–Gillard federal Labor government to deliver the school’s library, building and classroom, which I was delighted to assist and advocate for way back 16 years ago when I was the electorate officer for then federal member Kelvin Thomson.

It is also why I have continued to work closely with the school since becoming the member for Pascoe Vale by welcoming Premier Allan and education minister Carroll on 26 March 2025 to meet the school community and to attend their annual Shore Reserve Showdown fundraiser against my old primary school Coburg West Primary. We have secured and delivered the first ever 40-kilometre school speed zone along Coonans Road. We are supporting students through their circular economy and recycling efforts through the container deposit scheme. We have previously helped unveil the school’s magnificent artwork along the Transurban CityLink noise barriers down the back of the school, celebrated the school’s 70th birthday on 24 October and attended the school’s inaugural Arts Carnevale twilight market in 2025 and supported a range of their events. I attended the school graduation and awarded my endeavour award to Isla Bush for her dedication, hard work and perseverance in overcoming challenges. I would like to commend the school community: Carmel Lancuba, the principal; Liz Carey, school council president; Mrs Cummings, disability inclusion leader; school captains Rosa, Massimo, Seng and Jack; and all the school’s teachers, staff, students and families.

Of course, notwithstanding that work, there remains more to do. As per the parliamentary petition I presented to the house on 31 October 2024 bearing 1517 signatures, the school community continues to call for funding and upgrades towards (1) the school’s 70-year-old administration building and (2) the delivery of a new covered outdoor learning area, a COLA. Upgrading the administration building would provide for allied health and specialist support with a safe, comfortable space to work one-to-one with students to meet their wellbeing needs. The COLA of course would address and offer students increased shade and weather protection throughout the year for a range of different activities, but of course it is outside the school gate. We continue to support the school with the free prep bags, cheaper uniforms and free dental Smile Squad as well.

### Responses

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:25): Members raised a number of matters for various ministers. The Leader of the Nationals raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment concerning the proposed Wilsons Prom sanctuary. The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Health concerning the Allan government’s ADHD reforms. The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer concerning the Business Council of Australia’s recommendations from 2025. The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the attention of the Deputy Premier concerning high-achieving students in the Greenvale electorate – and congratulations to those students. The member for Polwarth

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raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport concerning his request for the immediate installation of train warning systems in his electorate. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Industrial Relations seeking an update on the Allan government's working from home policy. The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Creative Industries concerning funding cuts, in the member's words. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs seeking an update on funding for the South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services requesting an extension of financial assistance to individuals who stayed to defend property. And the member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education seeking an update on the Victorian government's investment in schools, including Pascoe Vale Primary School. All 10 of those requests will be passed on to appropriate ministers.

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

**House adjourned 7:27 pm.**