



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 5 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

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John ⁸	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	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 ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁹	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 ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	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 ⁵	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 ^{6,7}	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 ¹¹	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹²	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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 13 February 2026

⁶ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁸ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁹ Resigned 6 January 2025

¹⁰ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹¹ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹² 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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Thursday 5 February 2026

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

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

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, notices of motion 310 to 311 and 66 to 68 and orders of the day 3 and 11 to 12, 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:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Financial Management Act 1994 – Report from the Attorney-General that she had received the report 2024–25 of the Sentencing Advisory Council

National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner – Report 2024–25

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notice of approval of amendment VC265 to the Victoria Planning Provisions

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – SR 1

Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 – SR 4

Social Services Regulation Act 2021 – SR 2

Worker Screening Act 2020 – SR 3

Victorian Professional Standards Councils – Report 2024–25, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt.

*Bills***Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025***Assembly’s and Council’s amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:34): I have received a message from the Legislative Council not insisting on their amendments 1, 2, 5 and 6 and agreeing to the further amendments made by the Legislative Assembly to the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025.

*Committees***Parliamentary committees***Membership*

The SPEAKER (09:34): I have received the resignation of Roma Britnell from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the resignation of John Pesutto from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, effective from 4 February 2026.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That Roma Britnell be a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and John Pesutto be a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Point Cook for his hypocrisy in opposing future housing in Point Cook while expecting other suburbs to absorb Labor's activity centres and shoulder Victoria's housing shortfall.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned. The member for Brighton is warned.

Leave refused.

Mathew Hilakari: The member for Bulleen added 20,000 extra houses to Point Cook previously, and this government –

The SPEAKER: Member for Point Cook, I am not sure why you were on your feet.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house calls out the member for Caulfield to explain why he used the phrase 'Make Victoria great again' and whether this reflects deliberate dog-whistling politics, ideological alignment or just a profound lapse of judgement.

Leave refused.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Victorian Legislative Council is the only remaining chamber of Parliament in Australia to use the undemocratic group voting tickets in their electoral system, that members of the Legislative Council should not be elected through shady backroom deals between preference whisperers and micro-parties, that Victorians deserve better and that the 90 per cent of voters who cast their upper house vote above the line lose any control over how their vote is distributed beyond their first preference.

Leave refused.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to explain why the member for Brighton publicly described himself as the Shadow Treasurer on social media despite not even holding that role and whether this confusion reflects on the opposition's leadership, internal organisation and capacity to manage basic responsibilities.

Leave refused.

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

That this house condemns the member for Point Cook for failing to deliver local infrastructure during his four years in Parliament and now blaming the federal government despite admitting that Point Cook faces real challenges relating to infrastructure.

Leave refused.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to clarify whether she would attend a political fundraiser hosted by One Nation and featuring Barnaby Joyce and to explain what this indicates about her judgement, values and willingness to associate with One Nation and its political agenda.

Leave refused.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:38): By leave, I move:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to clarify whether internal conflict within her party contributed to her former deputy leader the member for Nepean's resignation and how Victorians can have confidence in an opposition that appears unable to resolve its own division and its own deeply toxic internal culture.

Leave refused.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, in reference to my motion on the infrastructure in Point Cook that the member for Point Cook is not delivering, the question about whether leave was granted was not actually put. Does that mean that we can now debate the fact that the member for Point Cook has not delivered in Point Cook and therefore the member for Point Cook has failed?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield! The member for Point Cook can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Point Cook withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Leave was not granted, member for Caulfield, and that was not a point of order.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to confirm whether she endorses the style of divisive, culture war politics and attacks on democratic institutions publicly associated with US President Trump and repurposed by the recycled Deputy Leader of the Opposition and adjunct professor.

Leave refused.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to clarify whether her party would roll back funding for public schools and TAFEs and to explain whether this reflects a preference for private interests over the education and futures of Victorian children.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Leave refused.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to explain why her party continues to block legislation supporting gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights and protections for vulnerable Victorians and whether this reflects ideological rigidity or a disregard for inclusive governance.

Leave refused.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to commit to evidence-based policy and to reject the deliberate spreading of misinformation in political campaigns.

Leave refused.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnet) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to outline how she ensures her team can prioritise their communities' interests in light of the former deputy leader's statement that internal battles made this impossible.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Labor has returned from summer and flicked on the nasty switch.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:42): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 17 February 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Transport infrastructure

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:43): I rise to celebrate an exciting milestone for public transport in my electorate of Niddrie. The brand new, next-generation trams have officially hit route 59, with testing bringing us one step closer to passenger services. As a former Minister for Public Transport I am genuinely excited to see these brand new trams hitting our tracks soon. I am also thrilled that my community of Niddrie will be among the first to benefit from the largest investment in tram rolling stock in Victoria's history, thanks to our Labor government. I want to thank the Minister for Public and Active Transport for visiting my electorate last month and helping to mark this exciting milestone. These new trams are currently undertaking late-night tests as part of the government's rigorous testing and commissioning process, ahead of safely taking passengers later this year. We all know, having grown up in Airport West and Niddrie, that sound of the tram – the 59 – that city soundscape. This is a world-renowned symbol of our city that will take people from Airport West and Niddrie right through to Flinders Street, a major arterial route in Melbourne's north-west. I am particularly pleased about their accessibility, with the low-floor design of the new trams making it easier for people with mobility aids, parents with prams, as well as older Victorians. The new trams will be housed and maintained in the brand new Maidstone tram facility, helping to deliver world-class services in public transport to Melbourne's west. Most importantly too, these trams are built by hardworking manufacturing jobs right here in Victoria. So if you are a night owl, keep an eye out for the new trams during the testing.

Chanukah in Bayside

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:44): Bayside welcomed our first lighting of the menorah with Chanukah in Bayside, led by Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum and Rabbi Shmuel Greenbaum. Residents across bayside joined the event, which had fittingly been organised at Peace Park in Hampton. Congratulations to the Moorabbin Hebrew Congregation for their leadership and for what will be the first of a new tradition in bayside.

Dendy Street Beach

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:45): One million people visit Brighton's famous Dendy beach and bathing boxes each year. The site has become an international icon. Despite Bayside council raising \$5 million each year from the precinct, the council is not investing back into the management of the location. Unfairly, local residents of Dendy Street and surrounds are bearing enormous burdens on their amenity. It is time for Bayside council to step up.

Australia Day

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:45): The bayside community has seen a number of incredibly deserving recipients of an Australia Day honour. Among them, I want to acknowledge Cathy Freeman

for her service to athletics and young people and as an Australian ambassador, and my friends also Vic Buccheri for his lifelong service to the Italian community and Tony Cipriano for his service to youth through Scouting.

Bayside U3A

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:45): Another year has commenced for Bayside U3A. The volunteer seniors group offers short courses for people in active retirement. In bayside the group has now grown to 1600 very active members. On an average week the group runs 100 highly varied courses. Congratulations to the group on what will be another successful year and to president Sue Steele and the team on their leadership.

Early childhood education and care

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:46): The school year has started on a high note, welcoming thousands of Victorian students. Helping families save time and money is what this Labor government is all about. The Allan Labor government has rolled out important measures to put more money in the pockets of families, while saving them time every day. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund will support 190,000 students attending camps, sporting programs, excursions and school experiences, which no student should miss out on due to cost. It is why eligible students from both government and non-government schools will receive \$400 per year towards these activities. We have got rid of school logos on shorts, pants, skirts and socks in government schools to cut the cost of uniforms and will continue to deliver school breakfast clubs, Glasses for Kids, free dental check-ups, free swimming lessons, free pads and tampons in government schools and free public transport for all kids every day, everywhere.

Giving children a strong start is critical. That is why the Allan Labor government is providing free three- and four-year-old sessional kinder and free kinder kits to ensure every child can freely access quality education, saving families up to \$2693 per child. I am delighted that three new kinders are opening in my electorate, co-located at Wirrigirri Primary, The Lakes South Morang College and Glowrey Catholic Primary, saving parents time with the dreaded double drop-off and fuel costs. On top of that, we have duplicated the Epping Road, saving time for parents for the school drop-offs. This is what we will continue to do.

Firearms regulation

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:47): 'Our recreational pursuits and livelihoods are at stake. Don't let us be the unintended victims of two nut cases in Sydney.' This comment was made at a forum I hosted last week with respected ex-chief commissioner Ken Lay, who is conducting a firearms review in Victoria. Following the Bondi attacks, federal reforms are pushing the states to cap firearm ownership. This is a reaction to terrorism, not a solution. We already have some of the strictest gun laws in the world. Participants at the forum included elite shooters, hunters, farmers managing vermin, members of shooting clubs and a gun shop owner. They highlighted how disconnected gun ownership limits would be. One explained he requires seven guns just to shoot one discipline and up to 20 across the multiple disciplines he shoots.

But the impacts extend well beyond elite shooters. One explained that she hunts to supply food for her family but also to control pests on the family farm. She pointed out that different tasks require different firearms. What is used for sambar deer is overkill for a rabbit. Restricting guns will force people to hold on to the most powerful firearm option to meet all needs, a less safe outcome. Junior licence holders cannot own a gun; they must be in parents' names. Under caps, parents could not have their children's firearms and their own. Family heirlooms would have to be surrendered. The Bondi attackers used just three guns between them. This will do nothing to prevent those acts.

Stud–Mcfees roads, Dandenong North, pedestrian crossing

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (09:49): I rise today to celebrate the opening of the brand new pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Stud Road and Mcfees Road in Dandenong North, which was opened late last year. This project was a commitment and a budget allocation made by the Allan Labor government following very strong advocacy from the local community there in Dandenong North, including local councillor Lana Formoso, following far too many accidents, far too many near misses and the sad and tragic death of a two-year-old boy. The new crossing is already making a big difference. It is making it easier and safer to get to the Dandenong basketball stadium, for example, the Dandenong Creek Trail and all of those great local parklands and amenities that our local community gets to enjoy. The upgrade also upgrades some local bus stops, and that is all looking very beautiful. The good news is, though, that work does not stop there. There will be further work starting very soon on a brand new shared user path that is going to provide even easier access to the Dandenong wetlands, again improving connectivity for local people and providing safe transport options. I just want to reflect on the fact that this is a project that represents the very best of my community: strong community advocacy, strong council advocacy as well and all of us working together to make sure that we can ultimately improve the lives of our locals in Dandenong.

Housing affordability

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:50): It has been a tough week in terms of housing affordability. Everyday Victorians are getting punched in the face by this government. There are over a million households within Victoria with a mortgage, and more than half of them were already under mortgage stress before this week. They got punched in the face because despite working their guts out, cutting the extras, skipping holidays and watching every dollar coming in and out just to keep paying their mortgages, interest rates have increased again, and while families hand their hard-earned money to the big banks in the name of fighting inflation, it is wasteful spending from Labor governments that has pushed inflation back up. ‘Oops,’ they say.

But there is now another group that is about to be punched in the face by the Allan Labor government: renters, who are trying to move forward and to get a foot into the property market. According to Resolve Financial, more than 62 per cent of Victorian renters – nearly 1 million people – hope to buy a home within the next two years, but forecasts predict that within the next two years Melbourne’s median house price is set to jump by 14.1 per cent, adding \$150,000 to the cost of a home and pushing the median house price beyond \$1 million. Prices rise when we do not build enough homes, and under Labor Victoria is now falling 20,000 homes short year on year. No wonder it is getting more expensive. Labor has failed on housing and the economy. Victorians needs a fresh start.

Michael Browne

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:52): Last weekend Seaford Primary School hall was overflowing as we farewelled one of my community’s most loved and respected people, Michael Browne, retired principal of Seaford Primary School. Michael treated students, staff and parents with the same calm respect. Quietly but clearly, he sent a powerful message that every child mattered and Seaford Primary was a safe place where they belonged.

Michael was more than an educator. He was a mentor, a leader and a steady presence who shaped generations of students through kindness, curiosity and fairness, values that stay with students long after they leave the classroom. He was a trusted leader for staff, a reassuring face for families and a champion for inclusivity and diversity. In 2024 Michael was recognised by the Allan Labor government for more than 50 years of service to public education, an extraordinary achievement. He worked every day to ensure that students felt seen, heard and respected.

Michael’s leadership and determination led to the major upgrade and modernisation of Seaford Primary completed in 2021, creating a vibrant, welcoming school built for the future. His legacy lives

on in Seaford Primary, in our community and in the thousands of lives he touched. I extend my deepest condolences to Michael's wife Vicki, his family, friends, colleagues, former students and the entire Seaford Primary School community. It was an absolute privilege to have known him. Farewell, Michael.

Carrum Downs Secondary College

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:53): I wish to extend my congratulations to the 2026 college captains at Carrum Downs Secondary: Abigail, Alexa, Madison and Ezra.

Narracan electorate police resources

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:53): I wish to talk about the rise in crime in my area. Since 2023 crime in Baw Baw has gone up 32 per cent – in the last year alone a 12 per cent increase. It is unfortunate that in my area of Baw Baw, which covers 4000 square kilometres, we only have one 24-hour police station, in Warragul. The fact is that I have got the townships of Drouin and Warragul, which have a population of 43,000 people, and it will take a police car to get from Warragul to the other side of Drouin about 15 minutes. This is not serving my community. The fact of the matter is I had a constituent come into my office yesterday. She is in her mid-60s, lives alone and had an attempted break-in, and the response from the police was – and it is not their fault: 'We're sorry, we don't have the resources to attend. We don't have the resources.' This is to a lady in her mid-60s. I can see the Minister for Police sitting there, and it would be great to get the police minister down to show him the police station in Drouin. I have actually asked him before: 'Come and have a look at it and tell me if you don't think this needs an upgrade,' because when you have got a population of nearly 20,000 people in Drouin, to have a station that was built in 1974 that cannot service the community is absolutely abhorrent in 2026. The minister is here now; I invite him again.

Evangelina Kypraios

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:55): A big happy birthday to Evangelina Kypraios, who is turning 80. Evelyn, I hope you have a wonderful day with George and Sandra. Χρόνια πολλά.

Pasquale Petrollini

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:55): I also rise to acknowledge the sad passing of Pasquale Petrollini. Pasquale was the president of the Essendon pensionati club for many years. He was just such a wonderful person. He had great values, and he was always warm and welcoming. I remember going to various functions with kids in tow, and he was always so patient. He and his wife Josie were an absolute dynamo. They did so much to support the senior citizens of the Essendon pensionati club. To Josie; Bruno, their son; Silvana, their daughter-in-law; Liliana, their daughter; Luigi, their son-in-law; their grandchildren Jacqueline, Vivian, Stephanie, Alexandra and Ryan; and their great-grandchildren Ethan, Alastair and Tilley, I offer my heartfelt and sincere condolences. Pasquale was just truly a wonderful person. His wine was amazing. His salami that he would make was always an absolute hit. He is sadly missed, but he made such a wonderful contribution to our community. Vale, Pasquale Petrollini.

Solar Spirit

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:56): I want to raise the plight of Paul Ford, a dairy farmer in my electorate. Paul bought three heat pump hot water services for his dairy washdown from Solar Spirit of Wheelers Hill last April. It was installed by the Powerwise Group, of the same address in Wheelers Hill. But he still cannot use these hot water systems, because the hot water is not hot enough to sterilise his dairy plant. So nearly 12 months on he still does not have a new hot water service. Out of frustration with Solar Spirit, Paul came to see me because they would not actually fix the mess they

made. I rang Solar Spirit a number of times in December. There was one call back to Paul Ford but no action to actually fix the problem. I rang them again recently and said, 'If you don't do something about this, I'm going to name you in Parliament.' So I am now naming Solar Spirit and the Powerwise Group for the shocking job they have done installing Paul's hot water services. They should be taken off the list to claim credits under the Victorian energy upgrades program. I bet they claimed their certificate and got their money, but Paul has not got a hot water service. I say to Solar Spirit: do your job and fix the mess you have made, or I am going to keep raising this issue until you are taken off the list.

Australia Day

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:58): Last week we celebrated some magnificent Australians in the Australia Day honours, and two people in the Williamstown electorate got their share of recognition. Congratulations to Kane Treloar, a long-time member of the Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club, who received the Emergency Services Medal for his service on the Westpac life saver helicopter. Also, Lorraine Woodman, an Altona resident, received an Order of Australia for volunteering at local cricket clubs around Williamstown for over 32 years. Lorraine is dedicated to helping the profoundly disabled participate in sport. Congratulations to both Lorraine and Kane, two real local legends.

Frank Jones

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:58): I also, on a sadder note, acknowledge the passing of Frank Jones, a dedicated advocate for the people of Williamstown and a passionate champion of local sport. A lifelong local, Frank was an active contributor to the Williamstown Catholic Young Men's Society and also president of the Williamstown Football Club and was a member of their team of the century. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones.

Joanne 'Jojo' Wilson

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:59): Also on a sad note, can I acknowledge the passing of Joanne, better known as Jojo, Wilson. She taught at Williamstown Primary School, reintroduced art classes and was a tireless supporter of Spotswood Cricket Club. We extend our deepest condolences to her family Gordon, Clara, Lee, Donna and Chad.

Country Fire Authority

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:59): There has been a lot of noise in recent weeks about funding for Victoria's Country Fire Authority while bushfires are burning and communities are under pressure. The coalition says CFA funding has gone backwards in real terms. The government points to headline figures showing more than \$361 million in grants last year and says funding fluctuates with fire risk. But enough with the semantics and the politicking. Fire-affected communities need real action. The CFA's own annual report shows a \$50 million-odd deficit. More concerning, volunteer numbers have collapsed. Fleet replacement is falling behind. The CFA leadership acknowledges ongoing challenges in maintaining financial sustainability. Firefighters and volunteers are very clear about what this means on the ground. Tankers are old. More than 2000 CFA trucks across Victoria are over 30 years old, and the red tape is stifling. The bureaucracy is making it so much harder. It takes more than 30 hours of training to get onto a fireground – 30 hours for volunteers. We should be encouraging people to volunteer, not discouraging them with yet more red tape. We need to make it easier for our heroes to enter these dangerous, dangerous volunteer roles. A modern, reliable fleet and equipment are not luxuries; they are essential for those standing between fire and community. At the same time, primary producers face nonsensical rules that stop commonsense action and do little to help them in highly stressful situations. It is time to support the volunteers who are supporting all of us.

Australia Day

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:01): I rise to acknowledge and congratulate several local residents and identities who were acknowledged in recent Australia Day awards: Marcus Wigan AM in Eaglemont, for significant service to engineering, to road safety and to tertiary education; the Honourable Bruce Atkinson AM, who is a previous upper house MP, for significant services of the people and Parliament of Victoria and to the region of Nunawading; and Jeffrey Borland AO, for distinguished service to business as a labour market economist, to tertiary education, to microeconomic research and to public policy development. The Public Service Medal went to Anne Congleton in Ivanhoe, for outstanding public service in policy and service design, corporate resource management and operational service delivery – I have worked with her across disability services in the past; and to Jodie Geissler PSM, our CEO at Austin Health, for outstanding public service in health and mental health sectors in Victoria, who is overseeing the \$275 million emergency department redevelopment by the Allan government. The Australian Police Medal went to Detective Sergeant Jenelle Hardiman from forensic services, Inspector Susan Nolan and the counter-terrorism legal unit, Inspector Kate O'Neill and the Whittlesea police service area and Acting Sergeant Nick Parissis and north-west metro for the Neighbourhood Watch program. I want to thank them and congratulate them. And in racing, to Maryjane Crabtree AM at Racing Analytical Services, as our chair, for her work and significant legal, professional and community health work, and of course to sport.

Metro Tunnel

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:02): I just want to bring to the house's attention and to my Melbourne colleagues' attention that I had an opportunity to tour the \$15 billion Metro rail. For the benefit of my own constituents in Polwarth, I just thought I would make the observation that when I toured this \$15 billion project that is five years overdue and \$5 billion over budget, I went to the Arden station. And at the Arden station in the middle of the day, there were no travellers. No-one got on the train, no-one got off the train. There were more cleaning staff. There is even a police station. There were unfulfilled cafe services. And the beauty of this station, this \$15 billion project station, is you come up the escalators, and you come to a grass paddock, a paddock that has got slashers cutting long grass. No-one to be seen, no-one on the footpaths, no-one in the streets, but this wonderful station – in stark contrast to what the people of Colac get and the people on the Warrnambool line. We have half the amount of seats going to Melbourne on our trains these days, with the underfunded small trains that the government has provided. We have the Colac train station, with pillars up and warning signs advising consumers and travellers to keep away from collapsing chimneys. We have got the safety markers on the platform completely disintegrated, no safety barriers left, gardens overgrown, a complete and utter mess and trains that are packed trip after trip after trip.

Brian Harvey

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:04): I rise to acknowledge and honour the life and legacy of Brian Harvey, a deeply respected member of our community and a true champion of grassroots sport. Brian was a much-loved figure at the Diamond Valley Sports and Fitness Centre, where he served for many years as manager and became known not just for his leadership but for his generosity, warmth and unwavering belief in the power of sport to bring people together. Brian's contribution to basketball in Diamond Valley and across Victoria was extraordinary. He was the founder of the renowned civic league, widely regarded in its time as the strongest senior domestic competition in the state, and the creator of the Great Australian Shootout, an elite under-20 tournament that attracted international teams from the US, New Zealand and China. Brian's vision extended well beyond competitions. He played a pivotal role in developing pathways for players of all abilities, from beginner programs on the mini court to wheelchair basketball and special needs programs, ensuring basketball was inclusive and accessible for everybody.

In recognition of this remarkable legacy, the Diamond Valley Basketball Association, Nillumbik Shire Council and Aligned Leisure have proudly named the show court at the Diamond Valley Sports and Fitness Centre the Brian Harvey Show Court. This is a fitting tribute to a man whose passion shaped generations of players, coaches and volunteers. I extend my heartfelt condolences to Brian's family, Josie, Ben, Jayden, J'Rhette, and acknowledge the eight grandchildren that he adored.

Kevin O'Callaghan OAM ESM

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:05): Today I would like to honour two Craigieburn locals whose service and dedication have shaped the Craigieburn community. Firstly, Kevin O'Callaghan: a long-serving volunteer and respected leader, Kevin has dedicated decades to community service, from the ADF to volunteering with the SES and the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee. Kevin was integral in getting the Craigieburn War Memorial built, and he has played a central role in maintaining the memorial and organising veterans commemorations, including now two services on Anzac Day. I thank Kevin for working with my office every year to highlight a local veteran in my Anzac Day information flyer that is distributed to the community. Kevin's commitment to Craigieburn and to honouring the service of local veterans has been formally recognised with an Order of Australia Medal. This follows his previous Emergency Services Medal. Both honours are greatly deserved, and I congratulate Kevin and acknowledge his wife Anne for her ongoing support.

Denis Moore

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:06): I also pay tribute to the late Denis Moore, who passed away on 6 January. A Craigieburn resident of almost 50 years, Denis was a founding member of the Craigieburn Residents' Association, the war memorial and remembrance committee and the Craigieburn Cricket Club juniors and was a long-term member of the Craigieburn Angling Club. Denis was also a former member of the Liberal Party and then the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party for the past decade, so it is fair to say there was a fair bit Denis and I did not agree on, but he was always good to deal with, and we absolutely agreed on advocating strongly and wanting the best for our community. My sincere condolences to John, Simon, Devlin, Raleigh and the entire Moore family.

Lunar New Year

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:07): It was great to kickstart Lunar New Year in St Albans. As we know, St Albans Lunar New Year attracts over 50,000 people from across Melbourne, and I was proud to again support this event. I want to thank the St Albans Business Group, the manager Simon McCuskey, the president Sebastian Agricola and all the volunteers for running such a successful event for over 18 years. To all the St Albans traders, it was great to be able to showcase the best of St Albans. February is all about Lunar New Year celebrations from Footscray, Sunshine and Springvale to Victoria Street, Richmond, and of course it concluded by ringing in the Year of the Horse at Quang Minh temple in Braybrook.

Cuc Lam OAM

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:07): Our Vietnamese community have contributed so much, and I would like to also congratulate Australia Day honour recipient, my very good friend and councillor for Maribyrnong Cuc Lam on being recognised. As many would know, Cr Cuc Lam migrated to this country as a refugee with nothing more than a red suitcase, and it is testament to her hard work and commitment as a community leader and a contributor in local government. As the former mayor, I am

very proud to call her my friend. I also want to thank Senior Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan and Hai Pham from the Quang Minh temple, Dr Pham and many others for their great work.

Mick Geary

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:08): I offer my heartfelt thanks to the amazing Mick Geary, who until recently was executive director of strategy and impact at Holstep Health. After many years of dedication to community health across Banyule Mick is beginning a new role at Anglicare Victoria, who are incredibly lucky to have him. Mick began his journey working in youth homelessness before progressing into leadership positions, including as CEO of Banyule Community Health for eight years. It was wonderful to hear so many words of gratitude directed to Mick at his farewell gathering last week from people who deeply appreciated all he has given over many years. Community health in Banyule is the stronger for Mick's leadership, as are many communities, including West Heidelberg. People's lives have been made the better thanks to the support they received from Mick. I look forward to all he will achieve in Anglicare, and I know Holstep Health will continue to grow and thrive thanks to his strong leadership and foundations.

Australia Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:09): We have incredible community groups in my electorate, and I thank them for creating an inclusive Australia Day celebration: Eltham Lions Club, Diamond Valley Lions Club, Rotary Club of Eltham, Eltham Men's Shed, Eltham Guides and Imagine Re-Evolution. Coordinated by the Eltham Lions Club, this event brought the community together and highlighted values we share as locals and as Australians: kindness, mateship and looking out for each other. 26 January is a day of celebration for many Australians, which can also be a difficult day for First Australians. In the warmth of the town square, with music from the karaoke choir and men's shed band, the sausages on the barbie and the laughter of children making craft, the chatter of locals catching up was fantastic.

Bentleigh Secondary College

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:10): 2026 marks 70 years since the formation of Bentleigh Secondary College. It started off as Bentleigh High School but changed to Moorabbin City Technical High School in the 1980s, followed by Moorabbin City Secondary College a couple of years later. Then in the 1990s it became Bentleigh Secondary College. When the students gathered on the first day in 1956, headmaster Mr LA Cooke's opening words were, 'Buildings do not make a school, but the students and the teachers make a school.' It is absolutely true that quality teaching is most important, and Bentleigh Secondary College has outstanding teachers. But buildings are important too, and I am proud to have delivered a number of new buildings for the school. These include two new indoor courts, which added to the two existing courts. We built the Da Vinci Centre, a state-of-the-art building for STEAM subjects, and more recently we built the performing arts precinct, where talented Bentleigh students tread the boards in their annual major musical productions, most recently *Mamma Mia!* last year. Throughout these buildings you will find dedicated staff and great students. Bentleigh Secondary College is a school of choice for many local families, and I can say confidently that it is stronger today than it has ever been in its 70-year history. I wish all staff and students, past and present, a most enjoyable and celebratory 2026 as they mark this very important milestone.

Bondi Beach attack

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:11): I would like to put on record my deepest condolences to all the families, friends and loved ones impacted by the terrible events at Bondi Beach on 14 December. I again want to show my absolute support for the Australian Jewish community, those

in Victoria and those living in and around the electorate of Oakleigh. You are valued, you are loved and you are part of us, and no violence will ever take that away. Tens of thousands of Victorians are Jewish, and on that terrible day, and likely every day since, this event has had a profound, devastating impact. This is not my Australia, because the events on that day were simply pure evil. I would like to recognise all those who put themselves in harm's way that day – those who shielded others, those who ran towards the danger and those first responders – and the community who treated the injured or gave others shelter. I would like to remind those who seek to divide us that hate never wins.

Bushfires

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:12): I would also like to pay tribute to all our emergency services workers from Forest Fire Management Victoria to the CFA, Fire Rescue Victoria, SES, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and all those volunteers who have been out on the ground fighting the bushfires and supporting communities who have been impacted significantly – neighbour to neighbour, farmer to farmer, everybody. I would also like to thank those who have travelled from interstate and overseas to assist Victoria. Your work has been extraordinary. FFMVic has responded to 464 bushfires, which is quite incredible. But they do not just work when the fires are raging; this is year-round dedication to maintaining public land, protecting our native areas and wildlife and protecting the Victorian community. Thank you for all you do day in, day out.

Sri Lanka Independence Day

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:13): I would like to say happy Sri Lanka Independence Day. It is a great week to be able to celebrate a country I love very much – a beautiful country. Thank you for everything you do.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (10:14): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026:

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 Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) 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 have this opinion for the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill amends the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the Act) to provide for:

- the objectives of the TAFE network;
- the Minister's powers in relation to the TAFE network;
- a new strategic planning framework for TAFE network providers;
- guaranteed provision of certain courses of vocational education and training (VET) on a tuition-free basis; and
- the TAFE Funding Guarantee, which requires a minimum of 70 percent of VET funding to be paid to TAFE institutes and dual sector universities.

Human rights issues

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

- The right to equality (section 8);
- The right to privacy (section 13(a));

- The rights of children (section 17(2)); and
- The right to take part in public life (section 18).

The TAFE network

Clause 5 of the Bill, which inserts new Division 1A of Part 3.1 into the Act, provides for the objectives of the TAFE network, which include but are not limited to:

- Increasing equity of access to VET for persons who face social and economic barriers when accessing education and employment opportunities;
- Delivering VET to school students; and
- Providing learning pathways from secondary education to VET and between VET and university education.

Rights of children

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child.

Given the above objectives, which are directed towards improving educational and employment opportunities for young people, including young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Bill promotes the rights of children in so far as it applies to them.

The ‘TAFE network’ is defined in new Division 1A of Part 3.1 as the principal provider of VET in Victoria, and as consisting of TAFE institutes and participating dual sector universities.

New section 3.1.9A provides that the Minister may, by Ministerial Order, declare a dual sector university to be a participating dual sector university in the TAFE network. New sections 3.1.9B and 3.1.9C further provide that, at either the instigation of the dual sector university or the Minister, the Minister may, by Ministerial Order, revoke a declaration that a dual sector university is a participating dual sector university.

While the act of revocation pursuant to these provisions has the potential to engage the section 17(2) Charter right, I consider that any future limitations on this right are likely to be reasonably justified as there needs to be a mechanism in the Act for a dual sector university to stop participating in the TAFE Network, noting there may be circumstances where it is no longer appropriate or suitable for the dual sector university to be part of the Network. There are also safeguards built into proposed new sections 3.1.9B and 3.1.9C, including consultation requirements and a requirement that, as part of the consultation process, the council of the university notify the Minister of the university’s proposed arrangements for leaving the TAFE network. Further, as a public authority for the purposes of the Charter, the Minister will be required to give proper consideration to Charter rights, and to act compatibly with Charter rights, when exercising the power to revoke. These obligations operate as constraints upon any interference with the section 17(2) Charter right.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that these provisions are compatible with the right under section 17(2) of the Charter.

Appointment of Minister’s representative

Clause 12 of the Bill, which amends section 3.1.19 of the Act, expands the Minister’s reserve powers to provide for the appointment of a Minister’s representative in relation to a TAFE institute board. New Division 3 of Part 3.1 of the Act, which is inserted by clause 16, introduces eligibility criteria for appointing a Minister’s representative, based principally on their skills, experience, education, training or occupation. Further, new section 3.1.28(2) provides that persons are ineligible for appointment if they are a board member of a TAFE institute; employed in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004*; or a ministerial officer employed under Division 1 of Part 6 of that Act.

Taking part in public life and equality

Section 18(2)(b) of the Charter relevantly provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to have access, on general terms of equality, to public office.

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. This aspect of the right prohibits discrimination against a person with respect to their enjoyment of other substantive human rights. Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This component of the right ensures that laws and policies are applied equally and do not have a discriminatory effect.

‘Discrimination’ under the Charter has the same meaning as in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. Direct discrimination occurs when a person treats, or proposes to treat, another person with an attribute listed in section 6 of that Act unfavourably because of that attribute.

It is not clear whether section 18(2)(b) will be engaged by new section 3.1.28 of the Act. In order for section 18(2)(b) to apply, a person must be an 'eligible person'. The term 'eligible person' is not defined in the Charter. The commentary suggests two possible interpretations: either that persons are 'eligible' under section 18(2)(b) if they are eligible under the current law of Victoria, or alternatively that 'eligibility' takes on an independent meaning in the context of the Charter that is not confined to the conditions of eligibility under existing law. Under the former construction, section 18(2)(b) would not be engaged where a person does not meet the eligibility criteria for appointment as Minister's representative under new section 3.1.28 of the Act.

If 'eligible person' were to take on an independent meaning in the context of section 18(2) of the Charter, it would mean an adult with the relevant connection to Victoria, such as residency. If this interpretation is adopted, the right to have access to public office without discrimination would apply to a person irrespective of whether that person meets the eligibility criteria in new section 3.1.28 of the Act and section 18(2)(b) may be engaged.

If section 18(2)(b) is engaged by new section 3.1.28, that right will only be limited where the eligibility criteria give rise to 'discrimination', meaning discrimination on the basis of an attribute within the meaning of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (which includes a person's profession, trade or occupation). On its face, this new provision may involve unfavourable treatment on the basis of a person not having knowledge of or experience in one of the professions or occupations listed in new section 3.1.28 or not being employed in a particular profession or occupation. New section 3.1.28 may also involve unfavourable treatment in so far as subsection (2) prohibits persons from being appointed if they are a board member of a TAFE institute; employed in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004*; or a ministerial officer employed under Division 1 of Part 6 of that Act. For this reason, the eligibility criteria in new section 3.1.28 also engage the right to equality in section 8(3) of the Charter.

However, I consider any limitations on the rights in sections 18(2)(b) or 8(3) to be justified given that the eligibility criteria serve legitimate and important purposes:

- By requiring Minister's representatives to have the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to perform their functions under new section 3.1.31, new section 3.1.28 facilitates the objectives of the Minister's power to appoint a Minister's representative, being to assist the board to efficiently or competently govern the institute; improve the institute's performance; or comply with its VET funding contract. The provision functions as a protective mechanism to ensure appointees are appropriately qualified in a role that assumes significant responsibilities concerning matters of public importance, being the proper governance of a TAFE institute.
- The exclusions in new section 3.1.28(2) are directed at ensuring that the independence required for the role of Minister's representative is not undermined and that the appointee is able to provide independent and impartial advice to the Minister or the Secretary in relation to a TAFE Board.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the rights to participate in public life and equality in sections 18 and 8 of the Charter.

Power to require provision of information

Clause 17 of the Bill, which inserts new section 5.2.1(2)(g) into the Act, empowers the Minister to require a TAFE institute to provide to the Minister any information the Minister may reasonably require for the effective monitoring, development and planning of education and training in or related to Victoria, including in relation to the commercial arrangements and activities of the TAFE institute and any other third party contract that relates to the TAFE institute.

Right to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

To the extent that information collected under these provisions includes personal information, the right to privacy will be engaged. However, any impacts on the right to privacy will not be unlawful or arbitrary. The collection of information is authorised under the legislation and is for the purpose of clarifying that TAFE institutes must provide information if required by the Minister, particularly in the context of the proposed provisions creating a stronger oversight role for the Minister and Department in relation to TAFE institutes' financial management, for the effective monitoring, development and planning of education and training in Victoria. Further, it is intended that the information collected by the Minister will be only used for the effective monitoring, development and planning of education and training in Victoria. It is not intended that the information would otherwise be disclosed or shared by the Minister. The Minister must also act compatibly with the right to privacy and give proper consideration to privacy when determining the scope of an

information request made pursuant to these provisions. I am therefore of the view that the section 13 Charter right is not limited.

Free TAFE Guarantee

The Bill inserts new section 3.1.1A into the Principal Act, which enshrines the Free TAFE Guarantee. New section 3.1.1A requires the Minister to determine in each year a list of courses of vocational education and training that are to be provided by TAFE institutes and dual sector universities on a tuition-free basis to vocational education and training students. The Minister must determine a class of vocational education and training student who is eligible to undertake courses on this list. The provision recognises the importance of Free TAFE as a pillar of Victoria's education and training sector and protects its continuation in the future for the benefit of young people, including young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As such, in my view, new section 3.1.1A promotes the section 8 and 17(2) Charter rights.

TAFE Funding Guarantee

Clause 21 of the Bill inserts new section 3.1.2A into the Principal Act. New section 3.1.2A legislates the TAFE Funding Guarantee, pursuant to which at least 70% of the total amount of training and skills funding paid by the Secretary to TAFE institutes, dual sector universities and other RTOs in a target year must be paid to TAFE institutes and dual sector universities. This provision legislates funding arrangements which already exist. To the extent it could be said to engage rights, this provision promotes the right to equality and the rights of children in so far as it applies to them.

Conclusion

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

The Hon. Danny Pearson MP
Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (10:14): 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:

Today, I introduce an amendment to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* which re-affirms the Government's commitment to put TAFE at the heart of the VET sector, and enshrines in legislation Victoria's nation-leading Free TAFE program. These amendments back up the significant investment made to date to rebuild TAFE and unlock the value of the TAFE Network to deliver Victoria's ambitious growth agenda.

The *Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026* (the Bill) enshrines the value and purpose of Victoria's public TAFE Network, ensures the continuation of this Government's flagship Free TAFE Program, and guarantees a proportion of Training and Skills Funding to TAFE so that it can continue to be effective in its public service, efficient in its delivery and confident in its future.

We have invested over \$16 billion new and base funding into our TAFE and training system since 2014; introduced and expanded access to Free TAFE, built world-class TAFE campuses and facilities and established a more integrated, responsive and industry-aligned training system.

We have put in place the architecture to meet skills demand head on. This includes the establishment of the Victorian Skills Authority, Apprenticeships Victoria and a TAFE Network approach supported by the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery.

Our reforms to date have seen the TAFE Network operate more efficiently and collaboratively to deliver services that draw on the full capability of the Network, maximising value for money and student outcomes.

This legislative reform is the next step to ensure the gains that have been achieved are protected.

Victoria is the birthplace of Free TAFE and this legislative reform will ensure that Free TAFE is here to stay.

Victorians have said a resounding yes to Free TAFE at the State elections in 2018 and 2022 and again in the Federal elections in 2022 and 2025.

Free TAFE is changing lives by removing the financial barrier to training for an in-demand, reliable and well-paying job.

The amendments in this Bill are key to securing the future of TAFE at the heart of our training system.

Bill provisions*Free TAFE Guarantee*

Firstly, this Bill will enshrine in legislation Victoria's nation-leading Free TAFE program, by establishing a guarantee to Free TAFE for eligible learners.

This legislation enshrines a lasting requirement for Government to offer a list of Free TAFE courses each year that are to be offered by TAFEs and dual sector universities to eligible students free of tuition fees.

The Free TAFE Guarantee recognises the importance of Free TAFE as a pillar of Victoria's education and training sector and cements its legacy into the future.

Free TAFE has been a game changer since its introduction in 2019, providing Victorians with access to training, without tuition fees, and delivering real skills for learners in courses aligned with government priorities and skills demand to support economic growth and productivity.

Since Free TAFE's establishment, more than 225,300 learners have taken up a Free TAFE course, saving Victorian learners more than \$727 million in tuition fees.

The day-to-day operation of Free TAFE, including student eligibility and numbers of available training places will continue to be managed by the Victorian Government.

TAFE Funding Guarantee

Secondly, the Bill ensures the continued sustainability and centrality of TAFE at the centre of our high quality skills and training system by establishing the TAFE Funding Guarantee.

This Bill will amend the Act to ensure that a baseline of 70 per cent of Training and Skills Funding is delivered to TAFEs and dual sector universities, giving the sector the security it needs into the future.

The inclusion of the TAFE Funding Guarantee fulfils a commitment made by this Government in 2022 to ensure that TAFE is guaranteed a minimum of 70% of VET funding.

TAFE Network

Thirdly, the Bill creates an enduring legacy for public VET provision in Victoria by enshrining the value, role and purpose of the TAFE Network in the Act. The Bill formally recognises Victoria's unique TAFE Network as comprising TAFE institutes and participating dual sector universities.

This Bill carves out a role for participating dual sector universities to be part of the Network while preserving their unique and independent governing arrangements.

Working as a single, strengthened Network of public VET providers we can harness the collective expertise, scale and reach of our institutes to realise efficiencies, reduce sector fragmentation, and enable shared resource solutions between TAFEs to create a training system that is responsive to the demands of our growing economy.

These changes are not just symbolic. They will provide the clarity and direction our TAFE leaders have been asking for, aligned to government's strategic priorities.

The Bill establishes clear, common objectives for the TAFE Network to ensure better public value by leveraging and replicating the systems' strengths and establishing shared systems and processes – without losing local and regional connections to communities, employers and industry.

In particular, the Bill will reaffirm TAFE's role in providing access to high quality and relevant training and skills for all Victorians, informed by the Victorian Skills Plan as well as its role in supporting innovation and applied research in priority and emerging skills areas.

The Bill also articulates TAFEs' central role in supporting lifelong learning for Victorians and its critical contribution to equity and equality, including support for students facing barriers to education and employment.

Strategic planning framework

Fourth, changes will enable Government to more clearly set the strategic direction and priorities for the Network as a whole by establishing a new strategic planning framework through the TAFE Network Statement of Priorities.

The Statement of Priorities improves on the current legislative framework by better linking government priorities for the Network with individual institute strategic and operational responses to drive Network alignment, supporting TAFEs to achieve greater impact, outcomes and efficiency through Network alignment, not competition.

Direct and coordinate

Fifth, this Bill supports Government to direct the TAFE Network as a whole to achieve greater impact, outcomes and efficiency.

Through expanded Ministerial guidelines we will be able to bring greater consistency and alignment to Network services, resources and activities.

TAFE Network guidelines will support Government to deliver on its response to the *Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service* to mandate and accelerate shared service reforms over the coming years.

They will also be used to support Victoria's planning of training delivery. Guidelines will set the direction for how the TAFE Network aligns its service delivery to Government priorities as outlined in the Victorian Skills Plan, to create a Victorian TAFE Network offering that efficiently meets the skills needs of Victorians and their employers and communities across the state.

Guidelines will be mandatory for TAFE institutes and participating dual sector universities will be required to consider guidelines. It is not intended that guidelines limit the power of Vice Chancellors or dual sector university Councils or otherwise contradict university Acts.

Greater consistency and collaboration across the TAFE Network will ensure that every Victorian – no matter where they live – has access to consistent, high-quality training that aligns with industry needs.

The Bill also strengthens financial oversight to enable Ministerial approval of TAFE institutes' annual budgets to send a strong message to TAFE leaders regarding our new financial sustainability expectations.

The Bill enables more proactive measures to support improved TAFE institute board performance and accountability – for example, where a TAFE Board has failed to comply with guidelines. Here we have drawn from the approach the Minister for Health can take under the *Health Services Act 1988*, to develop an option which will enable the Minister to appoint a representative to a TAFE Board to assist them to improve the institute's performance.

Other amendments

Finally, the Bill also makes some other minor and technical amendments to the Act. For example, we are changing the maximum number of Directors on a TAFE Board from 15 to 12. This approach balances the need for flexibility to bring on additional expertise if required, allows for consistency across TAFE Boards and preserves good governance and public sector management outcomes by limiting the overall size of TAFE Boards.

Consultation

This Bill is the direct result of extensive stakeholder feedback and meaningful consultation with TAFE institutes, dual sector universities, unions, students, and industry. We have listened carefully to those who understand the challenges and opportunities within our training system, and their insights have shaped the reforms we are introducing today.

This Bill will strengthen Victoria's TAFE system, ensuring it remains a leader in skills and training for generations to come. By improving coordination, enhancing quality, and making TAFE more responsive to industry needs, we are creating better opportunities for students and a stronger workforce for Victoria. These reforms mean more Victorians will have access to high-quality, job-ready training – supporting businesses, driving economic growth, and securing the future of skills and education in our state.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:14): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 19 February.

Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:15): I rise today to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I would firstly like to acknowledge the community who have contributed strongly and advocated for changes in regard to supportive legislation to recognise that this is not only a complex area but also a very small number of people who are impacted by this. There are decisions that have been made in the past with good intent, for the most part – I would like to think that there is no malicious intent in the medical fraternity – but as we move forward we can understand more about the impacts of clinical decisions, surgical decisions and decisions which can have lifelong implications for individuals who have medical procedures undertaken upon their body when they are not able to provide a voice to that. That is of course for newborns and children who have had surgical procedures undertaken which have had a lifelong impact on their mental health, on their identity and relationship with their body and in some instances on bodily functions as well – sexual function. They have had an enormous impact. I do thank those and their family members who have had the courage to advocate for changes in this area.

We have learned a lot over time, but we can always do better. Certain aspects and the intent of this legislation have a very, very good purpose. Again, I just thank people for speaking out, because it is not always a comfortable discussion. It is still taboo to talk about sexual function or genitalia. Sometimes it is something that is not disclosed when there are medical procedures or surgical procedures provided to or conducted on children or newborn babies. It is something that is uncomfortable in everyday conversation, but it should not be. As somebody who has come from a medical background, we need to be able to have these discussions in an open way. We need to be able to have these discussions in a non-judgmental way, because only through doing that can we ensure that we have better outcomes for every individual into the future.

There are a number of implications in this legislation, and from the outset I would like to outline that we will be circulating some amendments. These amendments are reflective of the consultation and feedback we have had from the community. It is from the medical community, it is from people who have gone through this journey in the past and it is feedback from particularly clinicians with expertise in this area. They are put forward in good faith because we want to ensure that if there are going to be health safeguards they are truly reflective of the needs of the community and do not have unintended consequences that would actually restrict or reduce the ability for individuals in Victoria to access the clinical care that they require.

I would like to first, though, go through the key aspects of this legislation as an overview, and then I will go through the rationale behind the amendments that we intend to put forward in this place, understanding that it is unlikely that they will pass this place. I will flag that these are amendments that will also be taken through the Legislative Council. While we should never presume, it is my understanding that we will not have the opportunity to take this legislation through consideration in detail and therefore be able to actually take a vote on the specific four amendments that we are seeking to put forward. However, in light of that, we will put forward a reasoned amendment to allow this to occur.

That is the construct and the overview of our position on this, but it is very much with an outcome in mind and that we need to get this right. We need to ensure that the concerns that have been raised do not have unintended consequences and have a greater impact on children who are born with variations in sex characteristics today. It is something that, fortunately, members within both chambers and of course on both sides of the benches in Parliament have some experience with. It is a very complex area to talk about, how you establish a framework when medical decisions are being made, because research changes rapidly, treatment options change rapidly and of course you are dealing with humans at the end of the day. While there is consistency in some particular genetic abnormalities and how they present in individuals, humans are human and we are all different in our own unique way. What the medical fraternity understands to be something that is an appropriate treatment today may not apply to two different individuals presenting with the same condition. There may be a more appropriate treatment option. It is not black and white, which is why we do not always have positive outcomes.

But we can have frameworks in place, and this is something that the medical fraternity do exceptionally well, creating clinical pathways, treatment pathways to ensure there is consistency and less likelihood of inappropriate treatment being applied to individuals. This is beyond just variations in sex characteristics; this is for all clinical conditions and how they present.

I commend and would like to also thank the incredible clinicians who are involved in these decisions and treatments. It is not an easy area to work within; it is not something that is taken lightly. I think there is generally a gentle touch in how people intend to go about this. For treatment, for the most part and beyond, in dealing with individuals who present with variations in sex characteristics, the intent always should be to do no harm. That is something that is the driving force behind the medical professionals I have worked with and engaged with in the past: to do no harm. But that does not mean that unintended harm does not take place. Absolutely we support that the frameworks are put in place. We support these through legislation but, more importantly, organically in terms of how medical practice works in Victoria and across Australia. It works and it improves every single year because we have got amazing specialists in this state, and the medical fraternity, the healthcare fraternity, should be commended for their work in this space.

There has been very strong advocacy from the variation-in-sex-characteristics community, sometimes known as the intersex community, for many years to legislate these changes. In 2021 the government committed to implementing the *(i) Am Equal: Future Directions for Victoria's Intersex Community* report, including oversight for non-urgent medical treatment. There was some commentary in the chamber earlier this week about the term 'intersex'. It is something that was picked up in the minister's second-reading speech. It is not intended to cause any offence to refer to intersex. It is for convenience of debate, and I apologise if that is inappropriate or anyone is offended by that. I have been considering how clinical decisions can sometimes translate very poorly into characterisation of individuals. Through the briefings that we have had, the things that we speak about and how this is talked about in medical terms, the term 'defect' is sometimes used – genetic defect. Those sorts of terms are used in a way that is very clinical, and I do want to make it very, very clear that that does not define an individual – that they are defective. It is clinical terminology that sometimes does not translate well. We see that in many aspects, but I think particularly in this debate I want to make it very, very clear that no offence was intended and that translation should not be deemed as an implication on individuals at all.

Other jurisdictions have brought in similar legislation to what is before this chamber today, including the ACT and internationally in Germany, Spain, Portugal, Iceland and Malta. We do note that the ACT enacted similar legislation to what is before us back in 2023. The Victorian model expands on what is in place in the ACT, but there is much more detail in the oversight framework. There are more detailed consent and capacity requirements outlined in this legislation, and there are more onerous reporting obligations and stronger enforcement and review mechanisms within the Victorian legislation.

To go back a step, people with innate variations in sex characteristics, also referred to as intersex, do not fit the typical definitions of male or female bodies. This is something that is true, but perhaps it defers to something else: what is normal anyway? It is something that comes from a place of clinical decision and clinical terminology. We know that there are more than 40 different variations which can occur in genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormone levels or the body's response to hormones, which can be indicated later in life and be identified later in life as children enter into puberty. Intersex traits are natural biological variations which occur in about 1.7 per cent of births, affecting up to 1500 babies born in Victoria each year. Not all variations are identified at birth. They are sometimes identified later on and perhaps even into adulthood during fertility testing. The vast majority of these variations are relatively minor conditions and do not require immediate treatment, while some require urgent treatment to avoid life-threatening complications. This bill is intended to provide greater clarity for practitioners and parents regarding the resolution of those common issues.

Some cases involve more uncommon variations that require a specific treatment plan. In Victoria this involves around 60 to 120 cases per year. While medical intervention is indicated for some intersex

variations, some intersex people have experienced lifelong physical and psychological consequences from deferrable medical interventions performed when they were infants or children. These consequences may relate to issues such as fertility, poor sexual health, urinary issues or the need for further treatments or surgeries. I think this is where it really hits home for each individual and becomes relatable. In some instances, people have found out that they had treatment and medical intervention as a young child, as a newborn, only when they found out that they were infertile because they had had organs removed at that time. The implications on the mental health of those individuals cannot be overstated. It is profound. It is a sense of identity – your ability to have children, your relationship with your sexuality and your genitalia and all that follows on from that. What we are speaking about is not just around the physiological; it is also about the psychological, and I do not think that can be overstated.

This bill seeks to address the need for prevention of harm from such medical procedures. Treatment will not be able to proceed for cosmetic purposes or to normalise the body, whatever that means, before a person is able to consent. There are four main ways that the government is seeking to establish this framework to better protect against cosmetic or premature interventions without the consent of the individual who will be impacted by the treatment. The main purpose of the bill is to establish a legal framework, including safeguards and oversight, to support people born with variations in sex characteristics and their parents in making decisions about medical treatment involving permanent or significant changes, particularly when they are unable to give informed consent. It also seeks to strengthen the process for obtaining informed consent. It ensures decisions regarding certain medical treatments are deferred until a person has capacity to give informed consent or, if that is not possible, that there is independent oversight.

I would like to pull out some key areas of this legislation just to ensure that I cover everything within the time allocated, particularly around some of the concerns that have been raised. The Australia and New Zealand Society for Paediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes have provided correspondence that they have written to the Minister for Health, and they have also included the Shadow Minister for Health in regard to this legislation. They raised key concerns around the clinical and practical application of the definition of ‘innate variations in sex characteristics’; the proposed processes for determining informed consent and adequate engagement and understanding for those without the explicit legal right to provide consent on their own behalf, such as in paediatric patients; the inclusion of criminal penalties for the provision of clinical care, particularly if the definition or scope of innate variations in sex characteristics remains unclear, and its potential impact on access to medical care for individuals and on clinicians’ capacity and willingness to provide medical care; and the funding and infrastructure required for implementation, including the requirement for additional dedicated clinical time and supports, psychosocial support services, expansion of multidisciplinary teams and prospective clinical data collection to facilitate assessment of outcomes. The Canberra Hospital has required a dedicated clinician solely to prepare general treatment plans, with only two plans submitted over a 12-month period due to the complexity of the process. Given Victoria’s significantly larger population and potentially greater complexity of cases, substantial additional resourcing will be essential to ensure that patient care and safety are not compromised and the composition and expertise of the proposed independent oversight panel and the governance structures for the proposed oversight panel, including timelines for feedback and mechanisms for high-priority cases.

What is most concerning to me is that the leading body for paediatric endocrinology, which of course would be one of the peak bodies whose members are managing these cases currently, provided this correspondence after this legislation was first tabled in this place, indicating that they did not feel they had been able to provide sufficient input and had not been effectively consulted as part of the formation of this legislation. I understand that they provided input to the *(i) Am Equal* paper. However, the views that they shared and the evidence they provided as part of that were not included in the final reporting, so they have concerns. These concerns are also echoed by the AMA. The key concern from the AMA is in relation to the impact of criminalising certain medical procedures, particularly within an area of speciality where there are so few clinicians already. We do not want to have the unintended

consequence that the threat of having to go to jail means that you choose a separate specialty or choose, as an endocrinologist, not to work with a certain cohort of young patients who present with variations in sex characteristics.

There are already mechanisms in place to deal with clinicians who do the wrong thing, whether or not it is through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, who may deregister a specialist or apply conditions to their registration. These are already in place. It is highly unusual for a medical professional to be threatened with jail for not following a structure when the intent is believed, for the most part, to be around getting the right outcome. When it is not, AHPRA should be able to show their teeth and ensure that those medical professionals do not practise. That is certainly what they are enabled and empowered to do and should be doing. So there is a concern around the criminalisation of the failure to follow treatment plans, act outside them or act before a treatment plan is approved. It seems like it is a very straightforward process on paper: you go through a process where there is a creation of a treatment plan informed by a specialist and that this will be available within the necessary timeframe so a clinician can take action one way or another, of course with consent obtained through that process. However, these things take time, as we have seen with the ACT example. Sometimes that time is not always available. Sometimes that can hold up or delay procedures being enacted. Sometimes it can be used to deliberately prolong or delay treatment from taking place. I put on the record the views of the medical fraternity, whether it is a paediatric endocrinologist or whether it is the AMA, who represent many other medical professions, putting forward their views and their strong concerns around that aspect.

We have also received a lot of correspondence from Dr Neil Price, who is a paediatric urologist. He is somebody who has extensive experience in treating children with urogenital anomalies. He acknowledges that there is significant stigma, secrecy and inappropriate medical responses experienced by people with variations in sex characteristics, and he strongly supports improved protections in care. That is something that is echoed by the medical fraternity. There is nobody that does not want to see better protections in place for people who are born with variations in sex characteristics. Dr Price, however, argues that this current bill is poorly drafted, overly broad and likely to cause significant unintended harm. This is something that we should be responding to, and we should try to ensure that the legislation that passes, which is required, does not have unintended consequences and cause unintended harm to Victorians. Similar concerns were expressed particularly by the AMA in regard to the likely reduction of access to specialist care in regard to the criminal sanctions and unclear rules, which will drive experienced clinicians away from variations-in-sex-characteristics care. Parents may lose trust and clarity around their legal authority, increasing stigma and confusion, which is absolutely not what the intent is of the legislation, and I respect that. But we need to make sure we get it right.

There has been concern raised around the proposed decision-making panel that it does not have sufficient medical expertise to be making medical decisions and may delay timely treatment. Specifically, while an individual with lived experience is mandated to be on the panel – and I support that – it does not mandate the inclusion of key clinical expertise or specialities, including endocrinology, paediatric and adolescent urology, paediatric and adolescent gynaecology, and paediatric and adolescent psychology. These are people who should be in the room making the decisions and creating the treatment plans. Given the unique cohort of presentations of VSC, or variations of sex characteristics, that we are speaking about, they are the people who are the experts in the area. They should be in the room, and that should not be something called in or out. Just make sure that they are there, making the decisions at the time.

I will move on to our amendments to ensure that they are circulated, because it is important that the intent of the amendments that we are putting forward is clear. This would ordinarily perhaps be something we could debate in this place as part of consideration in detail; however, this will not occur today. But they are amendments that we will take forward in the upper house, as I have stated. Under

standing orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request they be circulated. For clarity, these are the amendments as opposed to the reasoned amendment.

The intent of the amendments put forward is very much reflective of the feedback that we have received in relation to people with lived experience of this and their families and carers, from the medical fraternity who have expertise in this specific area and from the legal fraternity, and they are designed around that. It is intended to reduce the opportunity for unintended harm. Broadly, the amendments that have been circulated remove the criminal offence for noncompliance with the legislation, which is related to clause 7 on point 4 of the amendments that have been circulated. It will broaden the assessment panel so that it must include the speciality paediatric areas of endocrinology, urology, gynaecology and psychology. This is in relation to clause 19, or points 7 and 8 on the amendments that have been circulated. It includes the applicant's parental involvement on the assessment panel in relation to clauses 34 and 37. Fourthly, we will bring forward the review of the legislation to three years after the commencement rather than five years, which is within the legislation, to allow any problems with the operation of the panel to be addressed sooner rather than later.

I have covered off on the legal requirement quite clearly that may inadvertently push medical professionals out of this very specialised field of VSC. In relation to broadening the assessment panel, I believe I have covered off on that also. To include parents in the discussions with the panel – in my experience parents perhaps are the most informed of any clinician when there is something that is not quite right with their children. Now we have access to the dark web, we have Google and we have people who are very, very up to date with what is happening, and some of it is misinformation. It would be very useful for parents to be involved in those discussions or at least be able to hear clinicians speaking about the conditions that involve their child, because parents want to make the right decision. If they can hear the pros and cons of different treatment options and of why this may be recommended in the treatment plan rather than this, it will provide, I believe, a better journey towards acceptance of the treatment plan and a smoother pathway towards support for the individual who will be the subject of this. The intent of the amendment is about trying to improve the communication flow rather than anything else. Then fourthly, to bring forward the review of the legislation – as I have stated, that is in reflection of some of the issues that have been seen in the ACT.

We understand that these amendments will not be able to be considered today, so it is only for this reason that, under the standing orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request they be circulated. This is a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to reflect further consultation with the medical sector.'

This is intended only to ensure the voices of paediatric endocrinologists and those groups who have not been involved to date who are flagging these concerns are heard. It is not intended to hold this up at all. I want to make that very, very clear. If we could put forward the amendments today, we would do so. The intention is that we know that there are opportunities here to improve this legislation. I am hopeful in this way that it is with good intent to make sure that we can get the right legislation passed and not have unintended consequences, unintended harm and an unintended reduction in the number of clinicians in this specialist field and that this be considered. In light of this amendment not being supported, I do urge the government to have those further discussions with the community, clinicians and medical community, whether it is with people with lived experience of dealing with the medical community and medical decisions through their diagnosis and treatment or whether it is with anybody who has other relevant contributions to that, and to please consider making these amendments prior to this bill being debated in the upper house.

As I said, the intention is not to delay the passage of this legislation. The intent is to strengthen it and ensure that people who are born with variations in sex characteristics can access safe care in Victoria's health system and that we can ensure that the dignity and respect that they deserve is continued through appropriate consent and appropriate treatment.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:45): Respect matters, and in this state it is paramount. I offer my respect to every person in Victoria with variations in sex characteristics. You are incredible people. I am grateful to be in a position to offer my support to this important legislation in my capacity as Minister for Equality. I thank the Minister for Health for her leadership in bringing this life-changing legislation to our department. I thank her, her team and the department for the extensive consultation they have done across community, including the medical profession, to make sure that this legislation is exactly what it needs to be, and that is exactly what it is. I do look forward to its support in this place and in the other place. I acknowledge the extraordinary leaders and advocates who have contributed to this reform, particularly Tony Briffa, who is here today, along with members of the intersex community, supporters from InterAction for Health and Human Rights, Equality Australia and those watching online.

To our Victorian community members with variations in sex characteristics: our government has seen and heard you. We have witnessed the pain of your stories run across your face as you spoke of your childhood, of your teens and of your adulthood – your lives, where so many of you had been taught from the moment you were born about shame, about the fear of being physically different and that you could be seen to not be enough. You are enough, and we want you to be proud of who you are, the beauty you contain and the strength of your spirit. We recognise the disempowerment many of you have experienced through having decisions about who you are being made for you before you even had learned to speak.

Tony Briffa is an incredible advocate for her community and has been championing the rights and wellbeing of people with variations in sex characteristics for over 25 years. The courage Tony showed in appearing on *60 Minutes* to tell her story is worthy of deep respect. The trauma she endured and the choices that were made for her without her consent are deeply disturbing and upsetting. No child should have their rights ignored like that, and for this experience and for the challenging experiences that you have had, Tony, I am sorry; it should not have happened. I extend this apology to all people with variations in sex characteristics who have not received the respect they deserve. I am also grateful to our commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities Joe Ball for his ongoing support of intersex Victorians.

In Victoria this Labor government has been determined since we were first elected to strengthen equality in this state. We aim high – for every Victorian to be equal and to feel valued for who they innately are. Victoria has a longstanding legacy of advocacy for the rights of people with variations in sex characteristics. Intersex Peer Support Australia was founded at Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1985 and played a fundamental role in providing community, belonging and connection for intersex communities at a time when it was needed most, along with advocacy, education and training. I know their fabulous 40-year anniversary celebration at the Victorian Pride Centre last year was a huge success, supported by our government through our Pride Events and Festivals Fund, and I thank the Victorian Pride Centre, Australia's first and built by this government, for being an incredible, beautiful, safe place for joy, celebration and pride. Intersex Peer Support Australia recently merged with Intersex Human Rights Australia to form an amazing organisation, InterAction for Health and Human Rights. Their special multiday retreat enabled intersex Victorians to gather, network and community-build in safety and was supported by our government through our LGBTIQ+ sector strengthening fund.

When we say equality is not negotiable in Victoria, we mean it, and as a government we stand firm in our commitment to achieving equality for all LGBTIQ+ Victorians in both words and in actions. Our Labor government established the first, and still only, Minister for Equality in the country and the first and only dedicated commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities, and Victorians with variations in sex characteristics are an important part of community. Our Labor government also created the LGBTIQ+ taskforce, and I acknowledge my co-chair Adam Bourne, his leadership and his support for community. Establishing the taskforce ensures that lived experience is considered within government decision-making regarding our diverse LGBTIQ+ communities. This has strengthened

voices, including intersex voices. We invested \$1.3 million in the 2021–22 state budget to support recommendations from the Victorian Department of Health’s report (*i) Am Equal: Future Directions for Victoria’s Intersex Community*), informed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group, and we passed strong anti-vilification reforms last year that included sex characteristics as a protected attribute under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

Our commitment to establishing safeguards for intersex Victorians is reflected in our Australian-first comprehensive blueprint to progress equality, *Pride in Our Future: Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ Strategy 2022–23*. *Pride in Our Future* works across four key domains: equal rights and freedoms; equitable access; accessible and inclusive services; visibility to inform decision-making; and safe, strong and sustainable communities. Through our strategic plan we will continue breaking down barriers to achieving equality for intersex Victorians, including improving their health and wellbeing outcomes and experiences of care. We have made positive progress in so many areas, and we will continue building on this work to ensure that all Victorians can live safely, wholly and freely. Today we are the first state and the second jurisdiction to establish an important health safeguards and oversight system to protect intersex people, particularly infants and young children. This is something the community have sought to see for some time, and I am glad we are finally here.

Intersex variations can include differences in anatomy and reproductive organs and hormonal and chromosomal patterns that differ from medical and social norms for male and female bodies. Variations in sex characteristics are a natural and normal part of our human diversity, representing around 1.7 per cent of the population, which means it is about as common as being born with red hair. Here in Victoria we do not just welcome diversity, we celebrate it. We know it makes us stronger. This includes the biological diversity that makes up our intersex communities and supporting their right to self-determination over non-urgent, deferrable medical treatments and interventions. Fundamentally this legislation is about dignity, about protecting the right to bodily autonomy, about protecting fertility and the human right to consent to non-urgent, avoidable medical procedures that can cause harm, harms that can originate through a lack of knowledge, awareness and understanding of the normalcy of intersex variations. Establishing a safeguarding and protective system helps address these issues and reduce the barriers that intersex people often face when accessing health services. It is about improved health and wellbeing outcomes, better experiences of care, and empowering families, caregivers and medical practitioners to access the support they need and the information they need to ensure that all Victorians with variations in sex characteristics can thrive in an identity and a body that is theirs and theirs alone.

A recent report published by Equality Australia, *The Missing Voice*, gave insight into the experiences of people with variations in sex characteristics in Australia. I thank members who shared their deeply personal stories. Some words from Stephanie, for example, are:

I had been sterilised due to a decision made by clinical specialists, and I will have to live with the consequences of that for my entire life.

From Jade:

I feel robbed of an opportunity to be in my own body, instead of one some doctor picked out for me, just so I fit some imaginary binary.

And from Eli:

The biggest thing for me is that my body has never felt like it belonged to me because I don’t know what was done to it.

While these personal experiences might be hard to hear, they speak to the heart of exactly why establishing a health safeguards system for intersex people is so incredibly important. This is not about taking something away from caregivers, parents, or clinicians; it is not about preventing urgent and essential medical care. This bill is about ensuring we provide the best information, services and supports to enable the best possible decision-making that upholds the rights and autonomy of people

with variations in sex characteristics. It is about individual ownership and custody of your own body, identity and fertility. I encourage all members of this place to join together and listen to intersex communities, their lived experience and the positive benefits these protections will have on whole-of-life outcomes, and I urge support of this bill.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:55): I affirm the Greens' support for this important legislation. This is a bill that seeks to protect the health and wellbeing of people born with innate variations in sex characteristics, and this bill does so by putting in place safeguards where it is proposed that a person undergo medical treatment to change their sex characteristics in circumstances where they cannot provide informed consent due to age or impairment. Importantly, this bill does not prevent treatment that is urgent and required to save a person's life or treatment that is otherwise necessary to prevent significant physical or psychological harm. This legislation has been many years in the making, involving deep engagement particularly with those who have generously shared their lived experiences in an effort to drive change.

The bill strikes an appropriate balance between sometimes competing principles of bodily integrity, children's right to participate in decisions about them, medical necessity and independent oversight, and, importantly, it responds to the many medical harms endured by people born with variations in their sex characteristics around the world, including here in Victoria. Surgery and other medical interventions have too often been performed on babies and children to change their sex characteristics to make their bodies align with societal expectations of typical male or female bodily appearance and function. Sometimes these interventions were irreversible and not medically necessary and many people who underwent them were never given a say in decision-making about their body and were not informed about what had happened until they were much older, and this understandably caused immense pain and trauma for those affected.

Thanks to relentless campaigning of intersex advocates and LGBTIQ+ organisations, things have improved significantly compared to the past. Decision-making is now often much more holistic and inclusive of broad perspectives compared to, say, a single surgeon giving advice about or making decisions on behalf of a child and their family. However, babies and children remain at risk of having unnecessary medical interventions to change their sex characteristics, which can wait until they are old enough to give their informed consent.

The bill introduces a range of safeguards that centre the human rights and autonomy of babies, children and adolescents with innate variations in sex characteristics, and the bill achieves this in four key ways. First, it sets out a supported decision-making framework regarding consent whereby a child or young person is provided with age-appropriate information about the treatment being considered and the implications of having or not having the treatment. This is a contemporary approach to consent that is increasingly being adopted for medical treatment for children and young people.

Second, the bill establishes an independent assessment panel to oversee general and individual medical treatment plans for treatments that could result in permanent changes to sex characteristics. Crucially, the panels will include people with lived experience. The panels will not replace current multidisciplinary teams, which play a pivotal role in care. Instead they play a complementary role, supporting them with decision-making, ensuring that important perspectives are included in that process and providing additional oversight and transparency.

Third, the bill provides for the development of treatment plans, which provide approval for treatments that vary sex characteristics. Provision is made for general treatment plans for common treatments informed by the established evidence base and individual treatment plans for more specific treatments. These will be developed by clinical experts, and the panel will provide oversight regarding their approval and administration. Importantly, these treatment plans are not set and forget; someone may have multiple treatment plans or variations to them over the course of their life, depending on the circumstances at the time.

Fourth and finally, this legislation imposes criminal liability for wilful noncompliance with the provisions of the bill related to the treatment of a protected person that does not have the capacity to consent to proposed medical treatment to change their sex characteristics, and this recognises the profound harms caused to intersex people and those with variations in sex characteristics by unnecessary medical interventions. I understand that some clinicians have expressed concerns about inadvertently falling foul of this new law. However, the bill sets a high bar for prosecution and provides that only someone who deliberately and recklessly ignores the law can be prosecuted.

The bill marks a significant change in the way treatments are considered for people with innate variations of sex characteristics. The ACT is the only other jurisdiction in Australia with similar legislation, and the Victorian legislation has taken lessons from the ACT law while maintaining its essence. Understandably, some people have questions and concerns about what this will mean for them, for their children or for their clinical practice. Given a lot of the detail is being left to regulation or to the determination of the oversight panel, there is some uncertainty about what the potential implications could be for certain treatments and practices. We have heard these concerns, but we believe that the implementation process that has been outlined will help to address many of these and that some degree of flexibility is required to allow for changes over time to reflect our evolving understanding of best practice approaches. Critically, the government's bill allows for a three-year implementation phase, during which time general treatment plans will be developed and clinicians can become familiar with the structure and functions of the panel and the many supporting regulations that can be developed. We have been assured that the intersex community and clinicians will be deeply involved in developing these regulations.

We have also heard concerns about resourcing, and we support calls to ensure that the implementation of this bill is adequately resourced. Failure to do so will undermine the very purpose of the bill and the rights of those it seeks to protect. There needs to be greater funding for community organisations who can provide peer and family support, as well as broader community education on variations in sex characteristics. More generally, the government needs to ensure there is further policy and resourcing to help drive cultural change in the community. People born with a variation in sex characteristics face significant stigma and discrimination, and variations in sex characteristics are poorly understood by many in the broader community. There is still a long way to go to address this, but hopefully this bill marks an important step forward.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (11:02): I am really pleased to rise to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. As the title suggests, the bill relates to people who are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions or understandings of male or female bodies. These variations are a natural part of human diversity and occur in up to 1.7 per cent of all births. In Victoria that means up to around 1500 babies every year. Many of these children will never require medical treatment. Their bodies are healthy, functional and diverse. These are amazing people and they are not broken. Yet for decades infants and young children born with variations in sex characteristics have undergone surgical and hormonal interventions that were not medically urgent, were often primarily cosmetic and were performed long before the child was able to understand, participate in or consent to what was happening to their own body. These procedures were frequently irreversible. While many of these decisions were made with good intentions by parents wanting the best for their child and clinicians operating within the norms and guidance of the time, the consequences for many people have been devastating and lifelong.

The Allan Labor government committed in 2021 to establishing an intersex protection system as part of the *(i) Am Equal* report, developed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group. That commitment came after about 20 years or more of advocacy by people born with variations in sex characteristics, advocacy calling for nothing more radical than the same bodily autonomy afforded to everybody else. It should come as no surprise to anyone that people want to make their own choices about their own bodies when they are ready, informed and supported to do so. Their call has been echoed by human rights organisations, medical experts and national and international inquiries. People

have bravely shared their experiences, including of sterilisation, chronic pain, sexual dysfunction, psychological trauma and a deep sense of violation, a feeling that something fundamental was taken from them before they had a voice. These are not rare stories; they are consistent, powerful and confronting. What they tell us is that too often there has been no clear mechanism to pause and draw on broader expertise before decisions are made that carry lifelong consequences. We have listened, and this bill introduces strengthened processes for informed consent, establishes an independent oversight panel and improves reporting and transparency requirements, all with a single clear objective: to reduce the risk of harm to children.

I want to be really clear: this is not about blame. For many families, the birth of a child with a variation in sex characteristics brings fear, uncertainty and isolation. They are often navigating complex medical information at one of the most vulnerable times of their lives without peers to turn to and with limited access to balanced long-term information. Some parents have told us of their regret that they consented to procedures without fully understanding the lifelong consequences and that those procedures could have been deferred or not occurred at all. That regret is not a failure of parenting; it is a failure of the systems that did not adequately support them. This is why strengthened information provision and independent oversight are so essential. This bill ensures parents are better supported to understand their child's variation, the full range of treatment options and the risks and benefits, including the option of deferred treatment until their child can express their preferences or provide informed consent themselves. It also provides reassurance through an independent expert panel. Parents can have the confidence that if treatment is recommended it is necessary, it is evidence-based and it is in the best interests of their child, not driven by outdated norms or unnecessary pressure to act. Importantly, parents will still give consent for treatment to proceed in line with an approved treatment plan and will be able to seek a review if they disagree with the panel decision. The bill does not remove parents from decision-making; it supports them to make better, more informed decisions.

I am aware that there have been hesitations in regard to how the new measures will work in practice and in particular ensuring that children are not denied timely care due to the increased level of oversight, so it is important to note that a number of provisions ensure that necessary treatment will proceed without delay. Urgent life-saving treatment or care needed to prevent serious harm will never be delayed; that is consistent with well-established clinical practice. Urgent treatment is captured as an exemption within this bill so that doctors can act without fear of committing an offence, ensuring it is never a barrier to critical care.

There are also many other treatments that can be preapproved to proceed without delay through general treatment plans, which supports proactive care planning. The panel's independent oversight applies only where treatment is not urgent and a person is unable to give informed consent. In those circumstances an independent expert panel will assess and approve proposals for permanent or difficult-to-reverse treatments, and that panel must consider clinical urgency and adjust approval timelines accordingly, because there are serious and complex circumstances at play here, with medical and moral implications. So the panel brings together strong medical leadership, including specialist clinicians and mental health experts, alongside expertise in lived experience, health law, human rights and ethics. It is rigorous, balanced oversight, grounded first and foremost in medical expertise and protection of the person.

Clinicians have been deeply involved in the shaping of this bill, and I am genuinely grateful for the expertise they have so generously shared. Their feedback is reflected throughout, from tightly limiting the offence to only the most egregious breaches so doctors acting in good faith are not captured to strengthening panel membership and decision-making so clinical expertise sits at the centre. Panel processes are designed to draw on relevant specialist knowledge, address clinical urgency to avoid delays in care and align with established medical practice by using existing definitions wherever possible. Importantly, implementation will be staged over three years, ensuring clinicians remain closely involved in developing guidelines, templates and training so these reforms work in practice as well as in principle.

This legislation recognises that children are not problems to be solved or bodies to be shaped to fit social norms. They are people deserving of dignity, autonomy and protection. It also recognises the significant and overlooked impacts on mental health, because when we listened to the stories – the lived experience and perspective of those with variations – we heard that many adults who underwent non-urgent interventions as children experienced anxiety, depression, trauma, difficulties with identity and a lifelong struggle to trust our medical systems. These experiences do not end in childhood, they echo across lifetimes, and this legislation is not about denying care; it is about care with consent.

It is worth noting that the reforms are also about supporting clinicians. The doctors and specialists working in our children's hospitals are extraordinary, and this bill assists them to deliver best practice care by providing clearer guidelines, stronger frameworks and protection from some of the decision-making risks they carry. This reform has not been rushed. The development of this protection system has been underway since 2021. Victoria will be the first state and the only jurisdiction in Australia to enshrine these safeguards into law, and I acknowledge the Minister for Health for her leadership in making these reforms a priority and guiding them through this Parliament.

This matters. It matters because it sends a clear message about who we are and what we value. It says that in Victoria we believe informed consent matters and we believe that preventing harm must always come first. This reform is grounded in listening to the pain that has been shared, to the lessons we have learned and to the responsibility we carry going forward. It ensures that children are given what many before them were not: protection, time and a genuine voice in decisions about their own bodies. I commend the bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (11:12): I rise to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025, and I do so recognising the comments made by the lead speaker for the opposition earlier, who has circulated some amendments in relation to the bill but spoke of the importance of reforms in this field. In making my remarks today I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Tony Briffa, who has been a highly recognised and very well regarded advocate in this field, and I commend Tony for the work that has been done in this space.

I begin with some reflections on some of the guiding principles which the bill purports to enshrine, which I think are universal and timeless, including, without diminishing the significance of all of the principles that the bill aims to enshrine, bodily integrity, which connotes the importance of autonomy, which we each value. We should strive to ensure for everybody that they have autonomy over their bodies and their futures. That is a very important principle, and I wish to recognise that, as well as the principle of agency, for children in particular and those with cognitive impairments who are of older age – principles that no-one can really contradict. To that extent, I just want to acknowledge at the outset that they are very important.

Reforms like the ones that this bill seeks to introduce are, you might say, overdue, certainly welcome and certainly not before time. But I think they also reflect a growing sophistication in the way we approach reforms in this field, in the health space. We have made giant strides in the area of mental health where we aim to destigmatise and talk openly and with greater candour about the challenges that people in our community face. Certainly for those in the intersex community, I can imagine that this bill will, I hope, bring great comfort for people to know that there will be improvements to the way that we deal with often very difficult questions about interventions for young children. To that extent I can say that we will not be opposing the bill but we will be moving amendments. I just want to reflect on those in my remarks today.

I want to begin with the proposal in the amendments to remove clauses 7 and 8, which seek to criminalise certain forms of medical intervention. We all want this bill to succeed. I do not think there is anybody here who does not want to see the aims of this legislation not materialise. But I think there are two issues here in particular that I would like to flag. One is a general one. I do not think as a matter of general legislative policy we should readily jump at criminalising some parts of medical practice, whether it is in the intersex field or whether it is in other areas of paediatric services, women's

reproductive health or any area of health. We already have regulatory and professional sanctions that apply, fittingly, for misconduct and material derelictions of medical and professional duty. We already have that. But it is also worth noting that there are already criminal sanctions that apply to any medical practitioner who departs in egregious ways from those standards and causes harm. They already exist. Putting aside the very important subject matter of this bill, I do not think it is helpful that we carve out particular areas of medical practice and then criminalise those when similar misconduct in other areas is not subject to the same criminal sanctions. I think there is a benefit, again as a matter of legislative policy, to have consistency across the statute books when it comes to the provision of any medical or clinical service. That is the first point I want to make about the amendment to remove clauses 7 and 8.

The other point that I want to echo, because it was a point well made by the member for Lowan, the lead speaker for the opposition, is that we do not want to deter medical practitioners from entering this important field. The idea that this will not deter them, I think, is well meaning but misplaced. I think it will have a deterrent effect when we want to encourage more practitioners into this field. We want it to be a field where there is more awareness, thankfully, of some of the choices and benefits to be had from delaying any deferrable medical procedure so that the long-term decisions that cause great harm and great trauma to individuals can certainly be avoided. It is for that reason that I do think it is unhelpful to include a criminal sanction and a criminal regime specifically for this area of medical treatment and clinical delivery.

The amendments also touch on a couple of other aspects that I just want to comment upon. The member for Lowan made the point about ensuring that there are more disciplines represented in the panels, and I think that is a sound and worthy amendment that I hope the government takes on. I think the idea of including in the panels paediatric and adolescent endocrinology, urology, gynaecology and psychology is a worthy addition and will only improve the operation of such panels. I do not know why that would not be agreed to. It does not defeat or in any way frustrate, in my view and in the view of my colleagues, the worthy aims and objectives of this bill, so I hope that the government takes on those amendments in the spirit in which they have been offered.

I also think there is merit in the amendments that the member for Lowan moved in relation to ensuring that all decision-makers can be better consulted on the way through these decisions. Again, it is not a case of amendments that will frustrate the purposes of the bill. I think in an area like this, where it is an important reform, the reforms will be better and more effective in achieving their aims if the panels are opened up to the kinds of interaction which will enable all decision-makers to feel like they have discharged their responsibilities to ensure that the very best decisions are made. After all, that is what we want in the case of this bill. I think we all recognise in this house that for far too long decisions were made that led to enormous trauma and lasting injury, hurt and physical pain for so many people. But the amendments that we are moving, I stress, are not aimed at frustrating the purposes of the bill.

I think in cases like this and reforms like this, which are long overdue, there is something to be said for a collaborative approach that ensures that when the bill finally passes, everybody has had a stake in the delivery of that reform and all issues have been considered and taken into account. As the member for Lowan said, do you want a reform to go through and pass both houses when professional bodies like the AMA have raised some important and salient points, which again, do not frustrate the ultimate purposes of the bill and need not delay the passage of the bill, given that there is a long lead time before commencement. Commencement is December 2028, so there is plenty of time to ensure that all stakeholders have had the input they want to, that issues that may not have been identified or appreciated fully by the government can be weighed in the balance and that by the time the bill passes, the contributions of us as an opposition, on my side of the house, but perhaps more importantly, the professional bodies whose medical practitioners exercise their skills and knowledge in this field, have been taken into account. I would simply say to the government that there is a lot to be said for taking the opportunity, perhaps between its passage through this house and its entry into the other place, to take on board the very considered and meritorious issues that have been raised, which in no way will frustrate the government's aims, so that we can end up with a bill that passes the other place and comes

back here with those amendments and we can ensure a bill that achieves important reforms off the back of some great champions, some of whom are in the gallery today, for the benefit of all in our community.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (11:22): I rise today to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025 and in doing so say that Labor will always stand up for every member of our community, and that includes people in our intersex community. This bill will see Victoria become the first state and second jurisdiction to enshrine in law the right for intersex people to make decisions about their own bodies. We all have a right to be free in our own bodies. People with variations in sex characteristics are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions or understandings of male or female bodies. This can include a person's physical traits, such as their reproductive organs, chromosomes or hormones.

A protection system for people born with variations in sex characteristics has been under careful development since 2021. Consultation has been extensive. Extensive consultation with people born with variations in sex characteristics, experts, parents, the medical profession and clinicians has made clear the need for better medical treatment decision-making. Existing laws have caused some intersex people tremendous trauma, as they have allowed for permanent changes to be made to their bodies, often as children when they could not consent. And these changes and procedures are not trivial; the consequences and implications are long-lasting, just as they are traumatic. This bill is about ensuring every person has the right to make decisions about their own body and to be free within their own body.

The bill enables better and clearer medical treatment decision-making for people born with variations in sex characteristics. It also aims to better support parents to understand and explore treatment options for their children, as well as provide doctors and clinicians with clearer guidelines and protections. The bill provides for the deferral of permanent or difficult-to-reverse treatment until the person with variations can give informed consent. The primary features of the bill are strengthened processes for obtaining informed consent, the establishment of an independent expert oversight panel and improved reporting requirements.

It is a really important bill. Infants and young children born with variations in sex characteristics historically undergo cosmetic procedures so their body can appear more typically male or female. Intersex people have told us that often the consequences of these procedures can include infertility, impaired sexual functioning, scarring, pain and trauma. Imagine finding out you are infertile, which is always tragic for someone who wants children, and then learning that the reason is due to decisions that were made outside of your control as a child. It is shattering, and this is just one of the stories to come out of the consultation reporting which has led to this bill, both by Equality Australia and in the *(i) Am Equal* report, which was developed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group. It is past time for our intersex community. They deserve to determine what actions are taken and to exercise informed consent on decisions involving their own bodies.

This bill will stop decisions being made when they can be safely deferred. This bill will give intersex people autonomy over their own bodies. A choice can then be made at an age when they, as a person, understand what is happening to their body. Informed consent is required before a person receives any medical treatment. If someone is under 18, it is up to the treating doctor to determine their capacity to give consent. For a person under 18, a parent or guardian is usually the decision-maker, unless the child is assessed as capable of giving informed consent for themselves. When decisions must be made for intersex children before they are able to give their own informed consent, parents will still be required to provide that consent. Such decisions could be surgical or include other treatments, such as hormones, which when administered early in life can be permanent or very difficult to reverse. The bill will assist parents by giving them more knowledge, better understanding and more support than has been the case in the past. They will no longer face these decisions alone.

The independent expert oversight panel will assess and approve proposals for permanent or difficult-to-reverse treatments for people who cannot give consent. In what would be a difficult and unexpected time for parents, the panel will provide reassurance to parents that their child is receiving the necessary treatment in line with recognised best practice. The panel will also support doctors to provide best practice care by protecting them from some decision-making risks and providing clearer guidance. This bill also will not stop doctors from providing treatment in emergency situations. The bill helps ensure dignity, it helps ensure safety and it helps ensure respect. It makes sure that these three core values are at the heart of the care that an intersex person will receive. In the 21st century, when we recognise the impacts and the consequences on mental health and our preparedness, I guess, to speak up and to talk more readily, this bill goes a very long way to reducing the short- and long-term mental health impacts on those who are facing these extraordinarily difficult decisions.

It has to be said that Victorians do not need an opposition that is not fully supportive of our LGBTQIA+ communities. It needs government that is committed to protecting all citizens. I still believe the opposition is deeply confused and deeply in disarray. Some of their members attend Pride marches; others attend anti-trans rallies. It shows in their position even on this bill. They are not opposing the bill, but they are moving a reasoned amendment for longer periods of consultation. Really? Come on. You do not know what you stand for. There are no values attached to their party anymore. The opposition's federal colleagues have even tried to introduce wording into legislation to restore the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to the position it was in back in 2013.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is a narrow bill, and I would ask the member to come back to the debate. The point of order is relevancy.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): On the point of order, I believe the member was being relevant to the bill, and I ask the member to continue speaking to the bill.

Gary MAAS: You want to take the position back to 2013, when there were definitions of 'man' and 'woman'. Why would you do that? Where would that leave our intersex community? There has been much rhetoric from some of those opposite about our LGBTQIA+ community, and it certainly is not indicative of the acceptance, respect and inclusivity that every single Victorian deserves no matter how they identify.

This legislation will ensure that intersex people are not erased, that our intersex community are recognised, that they are accepted for who they are and that they are in charge of the decisions that affect them across their lifetime. Everyone should have the right to determine what happens to their own body and to be free within their own body. I recognise the advocacy and I recognise the activism that has occurred by those in the intersex community over so many years that has informed this incredibly important bill. This is so much more than just a policy update; it is recognition of the rights that intersex people have to bodily autonomy, decision-making and consent. I commend the bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:32): I rise to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I have just been toying with whether we share a family story, because I know that we have got some incredibly powerful advocates in the gallery today, and I want to just start by thanking them for championing such a difficult and personal fight for such a long time and sharing so bravely the change that needs to occur. I have already heard interjections. It is such a sensitive matter, so I am going to still process whether I share what our family went through, and it is very, very mild compared to some of the heroic stories that we have heard today as well.

I think that it is fair to say that everyone that has spoken understands that at the heart of this bill are children, and children before they have a voice. The hope of everyone in this place is to protect children and to care for them, and I think I can speak confidently that everyone is here for that intention. I think also from my experience as a mother and a parent I want to be a part of this contribution because we just want to make sure things are right for children born with innate variations in sex characteristics. I

could not imagine being a parent to a newborn and trying to make decisions that would impact a child for the rest of their life. I am certainly not trying to relate at all.

My son was born with hypospadias, which is a very common abnormality. Sorry, Arthur, I hope you consent to this. At 24 hours old we had to make a decision about his future. We were weighing up things, and I have got to say that, as a mother, I was full of hormones. He was my first baby and, golly, you are just overwhelmed with love and care and you have got to make some pretty profound decisions. You are taking on all of this information, and you just pray that you make the right decision, I think. You are taking it all on and you are trying to process it. You are not a medical expert; you are taking on expert advice, and you are just loving a child. All of that muddles where you are at and whether you are able to process academic and professional advice and make decisions about this tiny 3.5-kilogram child that will impact the rest of their life. We are allowed to have nuances in this debate. We are allowed to come with our personal experience, with our community's experience, with the advocates' experience, and try and make the best decisions possible.

I will go back to my speaking lines because this is hard. You have heard the conversations today that the intention is to make sure that we all make the right decision. I know that there has been some criticism about the amendments, but for something of this significance, I think that a lot of them come with good meaning. I think that we want to see fair contributions that ultimately we think will make it better for that child. We are talking about decisions in the first hours of a child's life, and maternal and paternal love and protection deserve a say in that. It is something incredibly innate and animalistic when a child is taken from you and someone else makes a decision for you. That is really hard, because as a mother you have grown this baby. I digress, but you are powerful, and I am incredibly grateful for you listening to these conversations. I hope they have been respectful, and we are incredibly grateful for everything that you have done.

I do want to acknowledge – I have spent half my contribution already, pardon – the intersex Victorians and families who so powerfully have contributed to this. Some stories are hard to hear. They have stood up and fought when they themselves did not have the voice to do so: people who have lived with lifelong complications, fertility challenges – that was the fear for my son – chronic pain, psychological trauma. Just on a side note, I hope my son does not listen to this, but he now looks at everyone's willy and says, 'Mum, what's wrong with their willy?' So I have given him confidence that things are going to be okay. You just try and manage emotions, and you try and manage decisions, and you try and do the best for your children. That is all I want to say. I think that no-one in this place wants to do anything except the best for the kids of Victoria. I certainly want to make sure that all of this is very respectful. I think that we all see that the intention of this bill is strengthening safeguards and just making sure that those irreversible decisions are not made too early or without proper consent. That is something that I absolutely genuinely support, and we have had a mild case, but we have felt like we have been there.

Vulnerable children should never be controversial. That is where we wrap our arms around it; that is where we have respectful conversations without interjections. We just listen, and we hear from our community and we hear from the people that we are representing across Victoria. We ensure we protect families without creating new risks, and that is always really hard I think in this place. We come through with an enormous amount of new laws and legislation, and we move at pace with multiple a week, and we have to sit and make sure that we are doing it with the right consultation. This is critical, because they always have lifelong consequences for people. Unintended consequences can be significant.

I reflected on when my son was born. I had not slept for I think up to two days, and we had to make some significant decisions. I just thought, 'I'm not fit or well to necessarily do this, but I want to be informed. Give me all the information, give me an amount of time so I can process this without harming my child.' I think that when you are exhausted or you are scared and you are looking to doctors for guidance, it is really critical that all of that is easy to digest, is not clinical, is not in a language that you do not understand, and that you still get to be that primary carer of your child with

informed decisions. I think that this bill has got so much goodness to it, but we do need some refinement. The role of parents – I could not imagine not being at that table for decisions for my son. We came to the party, absolutely. We understood that the professionals were always going to have the best intentions, but they also had to consider how we lived. We lived hours away from a hospital. Complications had to be taken into consideration. It was not just a report on the desk about this little baby. It was certainly: how long can you travel to hospital? What is the level of care if there are complications? If he needs psychological support, where can you get it? Can you get it?

It is about so much more than just the potential surgery, I think. I do hope that we see that parents can become a part of that primary decision-making process. Clinicians have raised some concerns about unintentionally capturing more common or straightforward conditions with well-established treatments, and if paediatric care is drawn into a lengthy approval process, we risk delays that are not in the best interest of children. One thing we all know is that when it comes to health, timing matters incredibly; it can change the outcome significantly.

We also want to raise some feedback about the composition of the panel. If the panel is going to hold significant authority over treatment, I really hope that it sees important stakeholders and experts in paediatric endocrinology, urology, gynaecology and psychology. We need it to be that holistic safety net, with experts in mental, physical and family health as well. All of these specialists understand the complexity, the risks and the real-world consequences of delays.

I have absolutely gone rogue on my contribution. I understand the legislation, and we are largely in support of it. I hope that our recommendations and our amendments can be considered, because we certainly come from a place of wanting to protect children – I think that everyone here does. There are concerns around current safeguards, whether the criminality extension is a bit too far and ensuring the panel includes appropriate specialists. But we just want to make sure that it is practical and grounded in good medicine, and that is the balance that we are seeking.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:42): I certainly am very pleased to speak to the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025, emphasising that element of health safeguards in particular, when we are talking about how these very important reforms are being handled. Ahead of going into the particulars of the bill, I did just want to address some of the concerns raised in the chamber, noting that the Victorian government did commit to introducing an intersex protection system in 2021 as part of the *(i) Am Equal* report, which was developed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group, backed in by more than 20 years of campaigning and advocacy for people with variations in sex characteristics to have the same body autonomy as everyone else. When we talk about that issue of equality not being negotiable, we mean for all Victorians, not least those with variations in sex characteristics.

I think it is fair enough, and I hope it will not be received in a negative manner necessarily, that we are querying the reasoned amendment, because we all know that a reasoned amendment kills a bill. At the end of the day, it is quite a significant, blunt exercise that will stall a bill proceeding. My concern is that it is perhaps raising unnecessary doubt about the rigour that has been applied in the development of this bill, noting that clinicians have had significant involvement in the design of the bill.

The other issue, and I raise this with absolute sensitivity, is that what has been raised, quite rightly, is some of the almost impossible pressure that parents, over time, have had in having to make decisions which we know, historically, for some may have worked out in a reasonable way but for others have had absolutely devastating consequences, and those have been raised in the chamber, such as sterilisation, trauma and medicalisation, the net effect of which ended up being a violation of those children's rights to body autonomy. It is not about passing blame, because we are not here to presuppose the intention of those previously, and it has been going on for decades.

Nonetheless, the parents who had to make seemingly impossible decisions under pressure certainly had very sound intent, and what the bill should deliver is actually an element to reduce that pressure

so that with the building of empowerment, in terms of information for the parents, they can be better informed ahead of having to be part of making decisions on this, but also to include the voice of the children, because we know they are the ones that ultimately have to live with, or who have had to live with, some pretty fundamental, irreversible medical interventions that have taken away some of the most precious experiences that others in the community are able to have.

I should say that these variations in sex characteristics are natural and occur in up to 1.7 per cent of all births in Victoria. Most people will not require medical treatment, but we know infants and children born with variations in sex characteristics have undergone primarily cosmetic procedures so their body can appear more typically male or female. As I was stating from the outset, this has occurred for decades in Australia and overseas, and these interventions, including surgical or hormonal treatments, were often not medically urgent or necessary, irreversible and performed well before the person was able to consent. As I was saying from the outset also, whilst these treatments often came from a benign place, the consequences can be lifelong: pain, sexual dysfunction, psychological trauma, a deep sense of violation and, as has been stated to the chamber, sterilisation, which would be absolutely devastating. The effect of these treatments was made clear in Equality Australia's *The Missing Voice* report, which was released in December last year. The report is publicly available and certainly well worth a perusal to really understand the imperative – the absolute imperative – for pushing these reforms forward through the Parliament, noting that there has been deep and profound and careful consideration ahead of these reforms being brought before the Parliament. As I was saying before, the reasoned amendment, I would suggest, may be unnecessarily querying the rigour that underpins the legislation we have before us.

The bill provides for the deferral of permanent or difficult-to-reverse treatment until the person with variations can give informed consent. The primary features of the bill are strengthened processes for obtaining informed consent, the establishment of an independent expert oversight panel and improved reporting requirements, noting urgent treatment required to save a person's life or prevent serious damage to their health will not be delayed. So when we are talking about the underlying theme here – and that is health safeguards – of course the best interests of the child must be prioritised, and if urgent medical treatment is required then the bill certainly will not stand in the way of that treatment being delivered. Additional oversight will only apply if the treatment is not urgent and the person is unable to give informed consent, for example, because they are an infant or a child. Medical care for people born with variations, I should say also, has come a long way, and thank goodness for that. It is true that some people with variations are happy with the outcome of their treatment, and I think that is important to note here. I believe overall this has been a very nuanced and sensitive discussion in the chamber, as it should, but I do not want to disregard the spectrum of experiences of the intersex community.

Nevertheless, there are complex and consequential medical procedures, and it is important that these reforms encompass all care and are backed up by the simple right of people being able to make decisions about what happens to their own bodies. This will be done through four mechanisms: informed consent safeguards, an independent oversight panel, the development of treatment plans and consequences for knowing, and reckless breaches of the law. Proceeding with treatment for variations in sex characteristics can be complex and consequential. The informed consent safeguards enshrine best practice for obtaining consent. Some doctors are already practising this way. These safeguards will ensure that this is the standard approach.

In the time that I have available I do want to speak a little bit further to the clinician element. We know that clinicians in our children's hospitals are some of the best in the world, and the care given to people born with variations, as I was saying, has come a long way. Clinicians have been significantly involved in the design of the bill. I want to reiterate that point, seeking to allay some of the concerns that have been raised by the opposition. Certainly that has been fundamental to the development of the bill. I understand clinicians will be central to the work of implementing this bill, including in the development of what is or is not eligible for a preapproved treatment plan, among other important

components of implementing these changes. The legislation will assist doctors to provide best practice care. It will ensure that doctors are more protected from some decision-making risks by providing clearer guidelines and independent oversight. Importantly, specialist clinical expertise must be on the independent oversight panel. Doctors acting in good faith have nothing to fear from this legislation. The offence is carefully worded so only the most serious, knowing and reckless breaches are captured by this offence. Again, with the hope of allaying some of the concerns of those opposite, I note that Victoria is the first state or jurisdiction in Australia to enshrine these safeguards into law.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (11:52): It is my pleasure to make a contribution today around the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I want to begin by calling out the fantastic work of so many people in getting this bill all the way from its genesis, which I guess was many, many, many years ago, but particularly from 2021 onwards. Whilst I am at times a critic of the Allan Labor government, I absolutely do not offer them any criticism; I only offer them praise around the equality agenda. The work they have done has been absolutely outstanding, but it is work that has been ultimately supported by a number of people in the community. I want to thank all of the team at InterAction for Health and Human Rights, Tony Briffa, who is the co-chair of InterAction, Paul Byrne-Moroney, Emiliana Soulio, Joe Ball, Professor Adam Bourne, Alex Potter, Janet Jukes and Sean Mulcahy, and of course Morgan Carpenter has written to me on this matter. Also, I want to thank the fantastic team at Equality Australia, including my old university mate Anna Brown but also Heather Corkhill, Emily Mulligan, Tara Ravens, Dale Dawson, Teddy Cook, Sanjay Alapakkam, Amber Wright, Kristie Baker, Mike Hitch, Hanna Yorth and Max Pick, as well as Fiona McLeay and all of her board. These are extremely hardworking people. They are passionate advocates for their community. They do outstanding work each and every day. I think too often they are representing a cohort that does not obtain sufficient recognition not just in this place but more broadly out there in the wider world. I want to thank each and every one of them for the magnificent work that they do. So thank you all for being here. For those following along at home, thank you as well.

This is an important matter, and I want to thank the member for Euroa for her contribution particularly. I have always been a fan of the member for Euroa, but that fandom has gone up a couple of notches in recent times, not just around the bushfires and her work in the community in which so many of my family live, in that seat, but also for her fantastic contribution today. It takes courage to talk about your own kids in this place. It takes a special kind of strength to do so without crying. She was amazing in getting through that. I think her honesty and her ability to bring to the table her lived experience demonstrate the Parliament doing its very best work.

It is the case that the coalition have moved a reasoned amendment to this bill, which is, as the member for Albert Park has correctly pointed out, a stalling or delaying procedural motion, and I will not be supporting that reasoned amendment. The coalition have also shared with me – and I thank the member for Lowan for the briefing – some textual amendments which they will be seeking to move in the other place. I have some difficulties with those textual amendments as well, and I will go to those in a moment.

I want to start with the Equality Australia position on some of this and make very clear that, by way of background, people with innate variations in sex characteristics, also known as intersex people, have a range of physical traits that differ from the medical and social norms for male and female bodies. Up to 1.7 per cent of the population have those traits. Fundamentally, what sits at the heart of the report that EA put together, *The Missing Voice*, is the importance of delay. We actually speak a lot about frustrations with delays in this place. This is one part of the universe where I think delay is a very, very positive thing. What we do not want to see is, as Morgan, I think, put it in his letter to me, the psychosocial element of parental distress guiding decision-making that might have very real, very permanent and ultimately potentially very harmful effects on people with intersex variations. We just need to hold off. Let us of course give due consideration to parental feelings about it, but as the member for Euroa has herself flagged, there is a lot going on when you have just brought a new human into the world. There is a lot of input, there are hormones running wild, there is fatigue, there is the

management of all sorts of emotions and all that sort of stuff going on. It is a very, very difficult time to be making massive, massive calls about the future of your child.

What we are seeing in the evolution of the medicine around these things is that immediate action is not necessarily the right course of action. In fact there are very few genuinely urgent medical interventions that are performed on intersex children. If it can be delayed, essentially it ought to be delayed. Thanks to the work of some of the great people sitting in the gallery and following along at home, we no longer conceptualise our humanity as being binary – one or the other – or as being normal or abnormal in that way. There might have been some of that language, perhaps hurtful language, used sometimes in the contemplation of these matters. Rather, we think about the ability of people to be able to live fulfilled and fulfilling lives with, hopefully, the ability to have sex, the ability to procreate, the ability to engage with a loving partner or whatever – to be able to do all of those things and not to unnecessarily cut off the ability to have those experiences and do those things later in life due to an unnecessary and premature intervention at the time of birth. This is ultimately about putting the rights of the child first and giving them primacy – but giving them primacy by means of deferring decision-making to allow that child to take the frontrunning on it.

A member in this place shared with me a news article that was published on the day that he was born. It was an article about a child with an intersex variation. Oddly, it was the front page of the *Sun*, as it was, and it was perhaps an unusual decision for this particular parent to take their issue to the front page. But in that case a child was born with a penis that was not entirely functional. The parent took the decision to effectively have a penectomy, I guess it is called, and to create, somewhat artificially, a vagina. They were then having an issue with getting that change in sex registered and that was the reason they went to the media about it. This was 40-odd years ago. Make no mistake, we have moved on, happily, from those sorts of circumstances, but it highlights that there has been – and I suspect to some degree there still is – a view in our society where people want to see conformity to a norm and conformity to a binary view of sex and gender that is not supported by science and not even supported by biology.

That is why we are talking here today about intersex variations, which perhaps as many as nearly 2 per cent of the population have, and by deed of the wonders of genetics they have ended up with a variation that means that they do not neatly land in one of the two boxes that some in our society would say that everyone should land in. This is not a discussion about gender – my views on all that are well known – but it is a discussion about those intersex variations and the importance of making sure that those interventions, if they are urgent, are addressed in an appropriate way or, if they are not urgent, are deferred. That is the better model of care.

The coalition's textual amendments seek to remove the criminal element of this, and I want to briefly address that in what is regrettably the only 90 seconds I have left. That is not something that I would support. We understand that when we criminalise assault people are going to commit assaults and we are going to have to prosecute them for that. This is one of those circumstances where I hope there is never the need to bring a prosecution. I hope it is a crime that never needs to be enlivened, to be taken off the statute books and actually brought into the real world, because people accept it for what it is, which is a very strong and substantial piece of deterrence. We know that there are crimes on the books where we have to provide a punishment as well as deterrence. This is one that I hope only lives to provide deterrence, to provide that very, very strong message from this place as legislators, as representatives of Victorians, that you simply should not do these interventions, proceed with interventions like the ones we seek to criminalise in this bill. You should not do that unless you have ticked every appropriate box that all the safeguards have been exercised.

The consequences are substantial. We know the rates of suicidal ideation and self-harm are much, much larger amongst this community than they are with the general population. So the importance of this cannot be overstated, and it is importance that does need to be met with the weight of a potential criminal sanction. That is why, were I to be casting a vote in the other place, I would not be supporting those textual amendments. I do commend the bill to the house.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (12:02): I rise to give my contribution on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025, which will cement our government's support for and commitment to protecting the health and wellbeing of people born with variations in sex characteristics, with a focus on the most vulnerable – that is, infants and young children. Before I go into the substance of my debate, I do want to thank the member for Euroa for her very personal contribution. I listened carefully and I also watched. I thought the contribution and what she said was fantastic, but more important was the struggle we could see that she had as a mother and as a parent and dealing with something so beautiful and precious and so new and wanting to do the absolute best and hoping that was the case but also, I guess, being frightened and vulnerable in that moment in knowing what she should do. I have three children. I can completely understand that very frightening intersection of trying to do the best for something you have grown, you love and you want to do the best for. So I thank her for that contribution, because I thought she captured that for us wonderfully.

In regard to the reasoned amendment, it is always a shame really, isn't it, when we are in this place and everyone agrees that the bill is great and we should move forward and there are a few issues here and there but then there is a reasoned amendment, which pretty much means you do not really agree with the bill and you want to throw it out and start again. That is how it is in this place, and that is really all I will say about that part of it.

This bill is about care, about compassion and about making sure our health system always puts people first, especially our youngest Victorians. People born with undefined or atypical sex characteristics are generally described as intersex. I was not quite sure what that meant. I would have asked my daughter what that meant, but I looked it up and I guess – I hope I do not offend anyone – but in the old language they were known as hermaphrodites. I went, 'Okay, I kind of get it now.' I hope that is not offensive or upsetting, but it gave me an understanding of what 'intersex' actually means. It is an umbrella term for natural innate variations in human biology, including chromosomes, genitals, hormones or reproductive organs, that do not fit the typical binary definitions of male or female bodies. Being born with varied sex characteristics is distinct from being transgender or gender-diverse. Very generally, gender-diverse identity refers to a person's internal sense of self, while intersex refers to biological characteristics.

People born with variations in sex characteristics are born with bodies that do not fit typical ideas of male or female. These variations are natural, and they occur in up to 1.7 per cent of births. For most people no medical treatment is ever needed, but for decades, both here in Australia and overseas, some infants and young children with variations in sex characteristics have undergone medical procedures that were not urgent or medically necessary. Often these were cosmetic interventions done before a child was old enough to have a say. While those decisions were often made with good intentions, we now know the lifelong harm they can cause. People with lived experience have told us about pain, trauma, loss of fertility and the deep distress of having irreversible decisions made about their bodies without consent, irreversible decisions made about children and infants who we do not yet know, irreversible decisions made about people who do not understand or know themselves as yet – and yet their lives can be and have been affected quite dramatically, and probably tragically, through these consequences. This bill responds directly to those people and those voices. It reflects more than 20 years of advocacy by people born with variations in sex characteristics, supported by human rights organisations and medical experts and backed by extensive consultation. It builds on the Victorian government's commitment made in 2021 through the *(i) Am Equal* report, and it positions Victoria as a natural leader in this space.

At its heart this bill is very simple: every person deserves the right to make the decisions about their own body. What this legislation does is establish clear safeguards to protect that right while still ensuring people get the health care they need. First, it strengthens informed consent to ensure that people with variations and the parents of infants and children receive clear, tailored information about their condition, treatment options and the consequences of both proceeding with or deferring

treatment. Families will also have access to peer and psychosocial supports so they are not navigating complex decisions alone or in the fog of birth and early parenting.

Second, the bill introduces an independent expert oversight panel. This panel is not about delaying care or second-guessing clinicians. It exists to ensure that permanent or difficult-to-reverse treatments for people who cannot consent are carefully considered, evidence-based and truly in the child's best interests. For parents facing an unexpected and overwhelming situation, this provides reassurance. For clinicians, it provides clarity and shared responsibility.

Third, the bill introduces treatment plans both general and individual. General treatment plans will streamline approvals for common variations where there is a strong evidence base, reducing duplication and red tape. Individual treatment plans will apply in more complex or less common cases and be considered on their own merits.

Finally, there are consequences for serious, knowing or reckless breaches of the law. Doctors acting in good faith have nothing to fear. This offence provision is carefully drafted and exists because a scheme like this would not be trusted by people with lived experience without meaningful accountability.

Nothing in this bill delays urgent or life-saving treatment. If care is needed to save a life or prevent serious harm, it will proceed immediately, just as it does now. This bill does not remove parents from decision-making. Parents must still give consent for treatment to proceed. What it does is ensure that they are properly supported, informed and reassured that decisions align with best practice and their child's long-term wellbeing. It also supports clinicians. Our doctors are among the best in the world, and many are already practising in line with these principles. This legislation gives them clearer guidance, stronger frameworks and protection from some of the risks that come with making complex decisions in isolation.

This bill is ultimately about getting the balance right. It recognises that when it comes to healthcare decisions, especially for infants and young children, there are multiple responsibilities at play: the responsibility of parents to care for and protect their child, the responsibility of clinicians to provide the best possible medical advice and the responsibility of government to ensure our systems do no harm.

Some people may ask why legislation is needed at all. They may say that these decisions are best left to families and doctors alone. But the reality, made clear through decades of lived experience, is that without clear safeguards irreversible decisions have too often been made too early and without the person most affected having any say at all. Importantly, this bill does not remove parents and guardians from decision-making. Parents must still give consent for treatment to proceed on their child in line with an approved treatment plan. What changes is the level of support around those decisions. Families will have access to clearer information, more time to consider options and reassurance that decisions are being made carefully based on evidence and best practice.

This legislation is about respect. It is about respect for families facing difficult and unexpected circumstances, respect for clinicians providing specialised care and, most importantly, respect for people born with variations in sex characteristics and their right to make decisions about their own body when they can do so. There is more I could say, but I just want to recognise the courage of people born with variations in sex characteristics who shared their stories to bring us to this point. We cannot undo the harm of the past, but we can do better moving forward. I commend the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:12): I rise to make a contribution to what I think is a particularly important issue and topic, the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I guess underlying this bill, as we have heard, is really the provision of care and support for those who have these variations, for them as individuals and certainly for their families. We need to make sure that any decisions that are made are made at the right time and that there is a framework around this. It is really important to listen to the intersex community – absolutely. It is

important to understand things from their point of view, from their lived experience, because they have experience that we do not. We heard the member for Euroa, who has experience that I do not know that anybody else in this chamber has had, talk about what it is like from a parental perspective, and I think it is so important that we do that. I want to begin with a quote from the *(i) Am Equal* report:

Having an intersex variation is not a sexual or gender identity, it's having variations of physical or biological traits. People with an intersex variation are as sexually and gender diverse as other people.

I thought that was a nice quote in that report and a good framework for what we are talking about today. These variations are innate, and they do not actually fit with what we see as very clearly defined sexual characteristics of male and female. People born with intersex variations have different combinations of a number of things: chromosomes, hormones and genitalia that is typically seen. There may be deficiencies in enzymes that convert hormones. Some of these traits are present at birth and others can occur at any level of development. As we have heard, these can be very, very broad. Some of them are quite simple, minor and treatable quickly and more easily, and some of them are much more complicated. As we have heard, if somebody has their urethra in the wrong spot, which brings about a curved penis which could cause issues, that is at one end of the scale, but where we have somebody who may have internal testes and female genitalia, that is really, really complicated. It is so important that the decisions that are made are the right decisions made at the right time.

Again, I just want to mention the experience of the member for Euroa, who with her experience talked about the level of trauma and uncertainty of what to do in that situation when you have just had a child. You cannot imagine really what you have to deal with. She outlined all of these things – and that was not at the exceptionally complex end, but it still was so difficult for her as a parent to grapple with what information was out there: ‘What do we do with it? How do we make decisions? Oh, gosh, I’m exhausted! I’ve just had a baby. This is all very new.’ Sometimes we need to make decisions quickly, but we do not want irreversible decisions made quickly. I think it is talking about the consequences of the delays, working through the options and understanding the issues and what is available to people, so that, for families and practitioners, more informed decisions can be made. That is really, I think, at the crux of this bill here.

We know that there are physical and psychological consequences. We know that, and particularly it has been brought to light much more over the last decade or so than it had been for a long period beforehand. People being born with variations in sex characteristics would have been happening probably for centuries. These things have been there, and probably in the 1950s and 60s different treatments were undertaken. Some of those may not have been urgent. They may have been cosmetic, and tragically they may have been irreversible, which brings us to where we are today. I do not think any parent would want to intentionally bring about pain and trauma for their child and intentionally bring about lifelong harm. But what we have found with some decisions that have been made is that this is indeed what has happened. So the lived experience and understanding of informed consent, so that people are not sterilised without realising and then find out a bit later. I cannot imagine how difficult that would be.

I do want to touch a couple of things with the *(i) Am Equal: Future Directions for Victoria's Intersex Community* report that was done in 2021. We are now in 2026. I had a look and read that report, and it was really quite short. I was shocked actually at how short it was. It was padded out, but there were only three pages that were particularly important, and they were around the resourcing, the health and wellbeing of people, improving future treatment – really important areas – and the next steps. One of the areas that I do want to look at is improving future treatment and developing an intersex protection system inclusive of a mechanism to prohibit deferrable medical interventions – modifying a person's sex characteristics – without personal consent. This is one of the issues that we are dealing with today, and I thought that was a pretty powerful statement in that report.

It has been noted that the opposition do have some concerns, and these concerns are not something that we have just whipped up out of the blue. There has been consultation in this area. The composition

of the panel is one of the ones that I do want to talk about. It does not specify the fields of expertise of the medical specialists that must be represented on the panel. The Departments of Health's information pack lists specialist areas that may include endocrinology, gynaecology, obstetrics, urology, paediatrics and clinical genetics. However, within that there are some specific areas of expertise that we think should be included in those areas, particular specialists. The AMA had concerns about insufficient medical representation on the panel, especially a lack of subspecialist paediatric expertise to reflect the specific complexity, risks and timing constraints of paediatric care. They were also very much concerned about the criminal penalty component. The inclusion of specific paediatric expertise I think would strengthen this bill considerably.

I notice also that there are not a lot of other jurisdictions that have worked in this field for a long period of time for us to have any learnings from there. This is expanding what is in the ACT's legislation, but those in Germany, Spain, Portugal, Iceland and Malta have not been in place for long enough to really learn from them.

The other thing that I want to raise is the fact that this bill comes into place on 1 December 2028, virtually in three years. The explanatory memorandum talks about allowing a staged implementation of the scheme and establishing the panel. I would not have thought establishing the panel would take some three years. The development of guidance materials has been on the table since 2021, and I cannot understand why the development of guidance materials has not been undertaken already. The education for health services and practitioners work can be done in the background so it is ready to roll out, not 'Let's do this and now we'll start that work.' I was actually quite disappointed to see what is being started now rather than having been worked on since 2021. We are now in 2026; that is quite a number of years that have been lost, I guess, where this process should and could have been sped up, and I am a little bit disappointed with that. But the issue that we are dealing with is exceptionally important, and for those who have spoken out about their lived experience, we do definitely need to listen and understand things from their point of view. Listening to the member for Euroa, we know the role of a parent in understanding the issues and the future and not making the wrong decision, because the right decisions must be made at the right time.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:22): I rise today in strong support of the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. This bill not only represents a long-awaited reform but is a profound and necessary affirmation of dignity, autonomy and human rights for Victorians who have for too long lived without the protections they deserve and need. It is a bill that speaks to the very heart of what it means to live freely, to have control over one's own body, to make informed decisions about one's own future and to be supported rather than harmed by systems designed to care for one. It is a bill that reflects decades of advocacy, courage, research and tireless community leadership by people born with variations in sex characteristics. As legislators, I am pretty sure I can say and those with me here in the chamber will agree that we often stand on the shoulders of those who have fought relentlessly, not for privilege but for recognition, for humanity and for safety. Today we honour the people born with variations in sex characteristics who have shared their lived experience and their trauma, resilience and courage. Their stories have brought us here to this moment. I am so proud that this legislation is here before the house.

We committed in 2021 to developing an intersex protection system in response to the *(i) Am Equal* report – for anyone who has not read it, I highly recommend doing so – and that commitment is fulfilled today. It has been shaped by more than two decades of advocacy from the intersex community, supported by human rights organisations and substantiated by national and international research. Every Victorian deserves the same right – the right to this autonomy. Yet people born with variations in sex characteristics have historically been denied this right, often in the earliest days and years of their lives, through unnecessary irreversible medical interventions performed without their consent.

Nearly three decades ago, when I was living in Manchester, I had a friend. We were having a chat about what we were doing and our plans for the future and talked about our families. We were learning

about each other, as people who meet someone for the first time do. This friend told me that her parent was actually a paediatric urologist. I said, 'Okay, what does that mean?' I was young and did not know much. It turned out that part of her parent's function in the hospital as a surgeon was performing the surgeries that we are talking about today. I did not even know back then, despite the fact 1.7 per cent of people will be born with variations in sex characteristics, that it was something that existed – pretty young, had no idea. Then when I learned that these operations were happening and I was told by this friend, I said, 'Oh, how does that all happen and what occurs?' She explained to me that there was a time when the parents were not even told. There was a time when there was a lot of mystery, it was shrouded in secrecy, and one of the key reasons was shame.

I am so glad that we have evolved to a point now where that need not exist. It should never have existed, but it did, because as a society we had this desire for homogeneity across everything: across cultures and race and across anything where we might see differentials. Societies wanted everyone to be typical or, for use of a terrible term, normal – to all conform and sit within categories which we felt comfortable with. I think one of the reasons this was driven in the past was because of this deep sense that that is what you needed to do. You had to fit in; you could not be a bit different. Well, I think difference is something that should be celebrated and championed and enjoyed wherever possible, and I think this is another step forward. I heard the member for Hawthorn talk about our maturation as a society. I think this is another example. We have come so far in learning that it is actually quite beautiful to be different, and this is where I think I would really like to praise and commend the work done by people born with variations in sex characteristics, because that is what they are telling us. They are also saying that in the past this drive for conforming to what we consider to be typical led to harm – real, deep, irreversible harms. So I am really delighted, and that is why I really wanted to speak on this bill today. I think we have listened, which is something that I am proud that we tend to really do incredibly well here. We have turned these much-needed reforms into legislation, because most people with variations will never require medical treatment, yet for decades, these little babies, these newborns and children, were subjected to surgeries and hormonal interventions that were primarily cosmetic, intended not necessarily to preserve health but to make their bodies conform, as I said before, to what was considered a social norm.

This bill does not stop anything which is medically required where it is important – this bill will not stop that. I know there are concerns from those opposite about aspects of the criminal charges in this, but the reason they are there is that they send a really clear signal out there that this is the line in the sand. Any doctor or any clinician working in good faith need not fear those charges; it is simply there to make sure that if there is knowing or reckless disregard of the safeguards here, that is when they will be enacted. I sincerely hope we never, ever see that occur, but sometimes legislation has to really produce a very strong signal about what is considered incredibly important, and that is what this aspect does within the legislation.

I know that there has been much discussion about what the bill does, and instead I wanted to try and give a bit of voice to those who have been so courageous. I would like to just share some of the experiences and put them onto the record of *Hansard*, which I think is an incredibly potent ability we have as legislators, to actually record in the annals of history the experiences of those who have pioneered and led the legislative reforms that we have introduced into this place. So I just wanted to mention Tony Briffa, who talked about her experience. She was started on hormone treatment in 1981 at the age of 11 because her internal testes, when she was seven, had been removed. During her childhood she had frequent genital examinations by numerous doctors and medical students, but she was never told the truth about the way she was born and what medical interventions had been performed on her. Imagine that – having surgeries on you and not being told why, not being given that truth, and yet somehow intrinsically you know and feel what is going on but no-one confirms it for you. She said:

The surgical removal of someone's healthy gonads without their consent is a huge violation. It wouldn't be legally done to anyone else but done to people like me just because we're different and not to help us in any way. I wish doctors left me alone.

And:

It's a nonsense saying I should have been born a boy. I am not a failed boy. I was born a girl with an innate variation of sex characteristics. Who are doctors to say what and who I should have been. I am proudly me.

They are profound, beautiful words. It is the courage of people like Tony. As I say, please read this report; read these individual stories. It is the courage of Margie, Michelle, Jade, Stephanie, Mimi, Max, Sarah, David, Agli and Eli. It is the courage of people such as those who have come out and shared their stories that we really have to thank, acknowledge and admire, because that is what we do, all of us, when we enter here and represent the people in our constituencies and broadly across Victoria: we come in and we create changes in legislation to make this a better place for everyone – not just for those who, as I said at the beginning of my contribution, conform to society's norms but for everyone, in all their difference, in all their beauty and in everything that they bring with them as humans.

That is the importance of legislation like this. It makes me incredibly proud that it is here today. I know so much work and advocacy have gone into this. It has been developed over several years to make sure that we get it right, and I am incredibly pleased to speak on it today. I know that it will make a profound difference to that 1.7 per cent of children who are born in the future with variations in sex characteristics. I know it will give assurance to clinicians in the field. I know it has been welcomed by many because it is giving them that assurance and structure. I am really pleased that the way forward is much brighter for all of those born with variations in sex characteristics. I give my thanks to all those pioneers with courage who have shared their stories and to everyone involved in developing this legislation. I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (12:32): I rise to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I want to affirm the Liberal and National coalition's support for the intent of this bill: to protect children and individuals with intersex traits from non-consensual and potentially harmful procedures. This legislation aims to ensure that deferrable, irreversible medical interventions on infants and children born with innate variations in sex characteristics are postponed until the person can provide informed consent. Urgent interventions needed to save a life or prevent serious harm will still proceed without delay, but all other non-essential treatments will require oversight by a new independent panel. The fundamental purpose of the bill is safeguarding vulnerable children's bodily integrity and future autonomy, and that is one that we on this side wholeheartedly endorse.

I also want to acknowledge the intersex community's advocacy and lived experience. In supporting these reforms we must acknowledge the longstanding advocacy of the intersex community. This legislation is, in many ways, the culmination of years of advocacy, consultation and reflection by people born with variations in sex characteristics. Brave Australians with intersex variations have spoken out about the trauma of unnecessary medical interventions carried out without their consent. Their stories have brought us to this historic moment – stories of surgeries resulting in infertility, loss of sensation, psychological distress and a profound violation of autonomy. I want to pay tribute to the individuals and the advocacy groups who have shown leadership and courage. We recognise that for too long their rights were not adequately or properly protected. This bill responds directly to their call that unnecessary medical interventions on infants and young children with variations must end. Wherever possible, decisions about a child's sex characteristics should be deferred until the child can participate and give informed consent, because these decisions are deeply personal and lifelong and should centre on the person most affected.

In fact this is not a new conversation. In the week that I was born, in August 1983, my parents kept a copy of a newspaper clipping from that week of a front page to put in my baby book. I managed to get my wife to find it last night amongst our treasure trove in our library. The front page carried the story of a mother with a child with variations in sex characteristics speaking publicly about the profound complexities, uncertainties and lifelong consequences they were confronting on behalf of their baby. In that case doctors recommended irreversible decisions about that child's body before that child could

speak, understand or consent. Medical practitioners concluded that the child's sex characteristics did not fit neatly within existing norms, and surgical intervention was undertaken in infancy to assign a sex that was thought at the time to offer the most normal future.

I want to quote from this article. I do not want to name the people because it may be that the person named as a baby back nearly 43 years ago may not want their story to be brought up again, so I will change the names. It talks about a 15-month-old baby, who I will call Kirsty, who was officially born a male and named Tom, as I will call them. This is a situation where this 15-month-old, Kirsty, was born a male without a functional penis but on the advice of doctors this baby's mother decided on sex change surgery despite them having 99 per cent male chromosomes. The mother said the decision to bring up the baby as a girl was not easy. The article said:

'Bringing her up as a girl gives her the chance of being able to have sex,' she said.

'As a male sexual experiences would have had to be homosexual.'

We probably realise today that that would not actually have necessarily been the case, but those were the thoughts at the time. Doctors told the mother that her baby would be best brought up as a girl. When the baby was eight months old the doctors recommended lifelong interventions to that baby. That was the first stage of sex change surgery which would take place, and then there would be another stage, when the child was eight or 10, to construct a vagina. Although that baby would never be able to have babies themselves, it was thought that that person could lead a sexual life as a female rather than as a male. The article says:

Often in cases where there is ambiguous genitalia no sex is given until the parents and doctors have an opportunity to think about it, and a considered decision is made about the sex of rearing which is in the best interests of the child.

In this child's case it was evident that there would be problems with the penis later on, and they had recommended a change from male across to female. These decisions were not made maliciously at the time. They were made within the limits of the medical knowledge, social attitudes and legal frameworks of the era, but the consequences made are lifelong. This child will have grown up carrying decisions made by others about their body, identity and future – decisions that cannot be undone. More than four decades on, their story reminds us of these challenges that have existed for generations and that too often decisions were made without the voice of the person most affected.

I will note as well that this situation reflects a historical case and is an example of intersex management and early sex assignment surgery, which predate many modern discussions about consent and gender identity. In the early 1980s doctors sometimes made decisions for infants with ambiguous genitalia based on what they believed would provide the most normal life outcome, a practice that later became subject to ethical debate. It underscores why this Parliament now has the responsibility today to ensure that children born with variations in sex characteristics are protected, supported and given the time and autonomy to make informed choices about their own bodies when they are able to do so.

There are of course some key concerns and consequences with respect to this bill, though, because with any change you also have to consider things that might not fit in the norm into the future. One is with respect to a potentially overbroad definition of 'innate variations in sex characteristics'. The bill defines an innate variation in sex characteristics very broadly: essentially any congenital condition involving atypical development of sex characteristics. Even common conditions could be captured. Hypospadias, for example, a condition affecting about one in 150 to 300 baby boys where the urethral opening is not at the tip of the penis, appears to fall under the bill's scope. Surgical experts have pointed out that conditions like this or other conditions like epispadias or bladder exstrophy – I am sorry if I pronounced those incorrectly – medically need to be corrected due to the potential for lower urinary tract and renal damage and should not need approval by an oversight committee since they do not involve any ambiguity about sex or gender identity. By casting the net so wide there could be unintended consequences.

Another aspect is ensuring parental rights and input. Protecting children's rights does not necessarily mean excluding parents from the process. On the contrary, parents are almost always striving to do what is best for their child's health and happiness. Under the bill's current framework, once the child is deemed a protected person incapable of informed consent, decisions about any restricted treatment will go before the oversight panel and its committees, effectively taking ultimate decision-making authority out of parents' hands.

Another aspect is the composition of the independent oversight panel in clause 15. We support the concept of a restricted medical treatment oversight panel bringing multidisciplinary scrutiny to proposed treatments. But our concern is that there is no explicit paediatric requirement. Many decisions will involve infants and children, but the bill does not guarantee paediatric subspecialist expertise. So our proposed fix is to amend clause 15 and/or clause 19 to require paediatric subspecialty expertise on the panel. Another concern as well is the criminal offence for practitioners under clause 7, which again could have unintended consequences.

Talking about these points, we have put together amendments. We support the bill, but at the same time we need to have amendments to address some of these concerns. Some of the amendments we are putting forward include (1) removing the new criminal offence under clause 7, (2) explicitly mandating paediatric medical expertise on the panel by amending clause 15 and/or clause 19, (3) increasing parental involvement in the panel process by amending clause 15 and (4) conducting a statutory review after three years by amending clause 56. Ultimately I reiterate that the coalition supports the core intent of this bill, which constitutes an important step towards affirming the rights of individuals who have historically been unseen and unheard. At the same time our duty as legislators is to ensure that a well-intentioned law works in practice, and we must be vigilant against unintended consequences. I do urge that these amendments be supported along with the bill.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:42): It is a real privilege to rise in this place and make a contribution on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025, and I say it is a privilege because it is a first for states; it is not a first for every jurisdiction in Australia. But it is a real privilege to stand here and stand amongst people who have been fighting for these changes for so long. *Primum non nocere*: first, do no harm. This is a central aspect of this bill. It puts it into practice.

I want to thank, firstly, those people who shared their stories in the Parliament last year in a session coordinated by the minister Mary-Anne Thomas. Like the member for Monbulk, I would like to read some of those stories into this house, because I think it really brings home the reasons why we are considering this bill in front of us today, and I hope for its speedy passage in the other place. Stephanie was there, and she talked about her experience. She was born in Queensland in 1995, and it was not possible for doctors to determine her sex at the time. I encourage members of the Parliament to look at the book called *The Missing Voice*, which is distributed by Equality Australia. It is an extraordinary piece of work and tells the stories and the reasons why this legislation is here. Before her mother could hold her Stephanie was taken away for a raft of tests, and when the doctors returned, her parents were told their baby had both male and female anatomy and chromosomes. They were also told they could not take Stephanie home until she had feminising surgery to normalise her sex characteristics. Stephanie said:

My parents faced the worst moment any parent could have – being told their child needed to be fixed and corrected instead of celebrating their newborn.

How true is that. Stephanie, you came with such great courage that day. Stephanie had had, by the age of three, two invasive surgeries and various tests, including the removal of internal testes, after doctors told her parents they could become cancerous later in life. This was a commonality of what members of Parliament and ministers heard that day. After an incorrect diagnosis at birth Stephanie was finally found to have an incredibly rare intersex variation. Later on she went to see an endocrinologist for hormone treatments because her body does not produce oestrogen. During one of these visits she was

given the devastating news that she might have been able to conceive a child if she had not had surgery as a baby. Stephanie had been, in her words:

... sterilised due to a decision made by clinical specialists, and I will have to live with the consequences of that for my entire life. An intersex person should never be made to feel ashamed of their body, and parents should never be told that they should be embarrassed for having an intersex child. We are beautiful.

Stephanie, thank you so much for what you gave to inform us that day. I often think us MPs have a mile wide of knowledge, an inch deep, and you just improve that depth by being here in the Parliament, alongside others.

The member for Monbulk stole my thunder – and I am just talking generally, not to the gallery directly, Acting Speaker – because I wanted to read some of your words, Tony Briffa, into the Parliament as well. I have known Tony for a long time now through political associations, firstly – we did not always agree, but there are lots of things we agree on – and also as a local councillor and mayor of the community I represent in Hobsons Bay. It is great to see you in a prominent position of leadership in the community, and I am so thankful for that leadership. The quotes that Tony has in this book, and that the member for Monbulk has read out, are very appropriate. I thank you for putting these into writing so they are part of the record, and I thank the member for Monbulk for putting those words on the record. A few moments ago I was talking to Tony about her advocacy in this space. It has lasted since – she was mentioning the health minister at the time – Minister Thwaites, so it goes back a long period of time. People have been working so hard on this for such a period of time, so it is a great day to see the legislation in this house today, and that is why I am so hopeful for its speedy passage over in the chamber next door. ‘Speedy passage,’ the member for Eildon said, and she is right. It is exceptionally important to listen. This is an exceptionally important issue; that is what she said. But it is also exceptionally important – and I use a quote from Thwaites’s time of government: ‘Bracks listens and acts.’ It is the ‘acts’ part which is just as important as listening. I do not want to see this bill delayed any longer. I know that we will have legislation that comes back before our houses from time to time, because we have not got it perfect, but we should never let perfect be the enemy of the good, and this is a good bill. It does good things.

I thank everyone particularly who shared their stories on that day. I want to thank Sean Mulcahy, a person known to me for a long time through Monash University, and also Anna Brown, who has done such important work at Equality Australia in fighting against inequality. I want to thank Mary-Anne Thomas’s office and her staff and those people within the department who have helped to draft this bill and bring it forward, because it has been a long time coming. We certainly had the 2021 *(i) Am Equal* report, which was developed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group. I want to thank them for their work, and at the time the Victorian government committed to introducing legislation like this. This commitment is on the back of more than 20 years campaigning and advocacy for people with variations in sex characteristics to have their bodily autonomy recognised as anybody else’s is. This has been backed by human rights organisations of course and numerous national and international reports. Thank you to everyone who has been part of that campaign and those bodies.

Everybody’s body is different. People with variations in sex characteristics are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions or understanding of male or female bodies. This can include a person’s physical traits, their reproductive organs, chromosomes or hormones. When we talk about variations in sex characteristics, they are not a minuscule part of our community; it is 1.7 per cent of our population. The Minister for Emergency Services earlier in the day mentioned that is about similar and in line with those people with red hair in our community. In a Parliament where we have more than 128 members, on average that should mean there are two and a little bit members of Parliament who share variations in sex characteristics. This is not an unusual thing in our community; it is actually quite normal.

It is not unreasonable for people with variations in sex characteristics to expect to make an informed choice and an informed choice by them about their future. I know I have discussed with my colleagues,

earlier this week and today, what we want as parents when our children are born. Of course we want our children to have the easiest life possible – any variation. We worry about our children’s future, and we want our children’s future to be great. It is a normal thing for parents to be concerned about that, but we also want our children to have a great life now and into adulthood. When people can make their own considerations about their future, that is the point in time that non-necessary medical interventions should be made or not be made. It is about people having autonomy over their lives. I understand of course that there are medical interventions needed for emergencies. Everyone accepts that. Everyone accepts that those healthcare decisions should be made. I do really understand the importance of this in a one-inch way, but I am so glad that those people close to me have deepened that understanding.

A lot of people have brought this bill to this place, and we should be thankful for their efforts, because it is not easy to open up your life and your experiences in places like this, in public forums and in advocacy across all parts of our community and lives. With that, I hope that it has a speedy passage through both this chamber and the next chamber. I thank particularly the ministerial advisers, who I know do so much work in this space and who help to guide these things through the Parliament. I commend this bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:52): It is a pleasure to rise and make some comments on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I acknowledge the many contributions that are being made in this chamber and the important contributions that have been made and the sensitivity around this very, very important bill that we are discussing. I also want to particularly put on record the longstanding advocacy from the intersex community and what they have been doing in their fight and in their struggle – those with lived experience, such as Joe Ball, the commissioner for LGBTIQ+ plus communities; Anna Brown from Equality Australia; and Tony Briffa, who I am going to get to shortly, a tireless campaigner and fighter for these rights and also for broader issues. These changes that we are talking about today really deal with unnecessary medical interventions on children at a time when these medical interventions cannot be reversed and cannot be changed, and the trauma that causes for many of these kids is trauma that is left with them forever. But also the issues around fertility are things that, because of the irreversibility of these medical interventions, cannot be changed. So it is very, very important that we talk about that, and it is very important that we look at how we can improve the legislation that we have before us.

The legislation deals with people with innate variations in sex characteristics, also referred to as intersex, who do not fit within the typical definitions of having male or female bodies. There are 40 known different variations, and these can occur in genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormone levels and body responses to hormones. Intersex traits are natural biological variations. As we have heard, they can occur in about 1.7 per cent of births, affecting up to 1000 babies born in Victoria each year. Again, not all variations are identified in birth, and these can sometimes be identified a lot later on in puberty or adulthood. The vast majority are relatively minor and do not require immediate medical treatment, while some do. When they are life threatening they certainly do, and that is something that must continue. But that is not what this bill deals with at the moment. This bill is intended to provide greater clarity for practitioners and parents regarding the resolution of common issues, and the cases that we are talking about are somewhere between 60 and 120 cases a year.

As I said, while some medical intervention is indicated for some intersex variations, some people have experienced lifelong physical and psychological consequences from deferrable medical interventions performed when they were infants or children. These consequences may relate to issues such as fertility, poor sexual health, urinary issues or needing further treatments or surgeries. The bill tends to look at clarifying that and look at ways of ensuring that those with lived experience have the opportunity to be part of the process and that we resolve these matters to ensure that we do not have unintended consequences as a result of medical interventions.

I know that we have heard already from those opposite about the need to move hastily – the member for Point Cook raised that. I note that the bill only comes into play three years from now in December 2028. So although we are debating it now, there are still a number of years before these matters are actually changed. I do want to put that on record, because it is one thing to try and make a political point about this – we have seen that a lot of people have not done that, and we should all be trying to work together on this – but the point of the matter is that we still have until 2028 until we see any changes at all in the bill that we are talking about right now. Also, in that time, in this, as part of clause 2 of the bill, there are items like development of guidelines and materials, education for health services practitioners and affected communities. That should happen now. That stuff can be happening now, and it should be happening now.

I also again want to commend the advocates of the intersex community that are doing that and have been doing that for years, because without education, without understanding, unfortunately we see decisions that are made without informed choice. People have made decisions and have had years of neglect because they have not had the education and the understanding, which I want to get to right now.

I want to put on record the tireless work of Tony Briffa and what Tony has done in tackling this issue. I met Tony 20 years ago, but as Antoinette. I know Tony still likes me to call her Antoinette, and I do, because that is how we know one another. We went to uni together. We campaigned back at that stage, and we took over the student union at Footscray Institute, with me as president and Antoinette as vice-president. We sought to trailblaze back then. I have watched the journey, but I did lose contact. I know in the meantime Antoinette had a terrible motorbike accident. It was two years, and she almost lost her life and could not walk. At that time she decided to live life, tell people who she was and to come out and talk proudly as an intersex person. It was that campaign that has ended in where we are now with all of this. I say well done to you because you have fought that fight and you have been out there living who you are, and that is what we should be doing. They are absolutely the kinds of things that we are talking about right now. I think it is really important. Also, I just put on record that you have been a mayor twice and a deputy mayor, and not just on issues around being intersex but on advocating for people in the west. So thank you for what you have done.

We do have a long way to go. This is a very, very important bill. We do need to ensure that we protect children. We talk a lot about children as an important point, particularly when these kinds of things are irreversible. I know the coalition has amendments which we have put forward, and we will go through those in the process. But we must do what we can to make all people's lives better. We must do that, and our jobs in this Parliament are about doing that. We may not always agree on everything, and we certainly have different ways of being able to fight for things in terms of the changes that we all make, but at the end of the day we are talking about people, we are talking about people's lives and we are talking about ensuring that they can live their lives equally and fairly like everybody else. That is why these kinds of changes are important, and that is why we must be debating these kinds of bills that we have before the house today.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Integrity agencies

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. This week the Premier has claimed statements by the Auditor-General to be misinformation, dismissed the Parliamentary Budget Office's confirmation of cuts to the CFA as a case of the opposition soliciting false information and argued factual data released by the Productivity Commission to not be correct. When will you start behaving like a Premier and treat integrity agencies with the respect they deserve and give them the funding they need?

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Brighton to direct his comments through the Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I thank sincerely the member for Brighton for this question. I thank him sincerely because his characterisation of what I have said this week regarding the Auditor-General, the Parliamentary Budget Office and the Productivity Commission is wrong. For the benefit of the member for Brighton, he is wrong. I will go to the second part of his question. The second part of his question was about leadership. Victorians know where I stand when it comes to backing our emergency services and funding them when they need it the most. Multicultural and multifaith communities know where my government stands, because we back them by backing the anti-hate laws that make hate a crime in this state. We heard –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Laverton is warned. The member for Mulgrave is warned. The member for Geelong is warned.

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

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The Premier was very clear in her response that she was addressing the question of leadership. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and let the Premier continue to answer the question and demonstrate what leadership really looks like.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: Leadership matters not just in words but in your actions. You cannot stand out on the main streets of maybe Kew or Bendigo or anywhere in this state and say one thing about wanting to get millennials into a home and vote against the planning laws –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, without repeating the question, this question related to integrity agencies.

A member interjected.

James Newbury: Actually it did, and therefore the Premier is debating the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, again, on the point of order, as I raised in the first point of order that you ruled out of order, the Premier is outlining what it takes to be a leader of this state. She was asked about being a leader, and she is answering that question.

The SPEAKER: I have the question in front of me. I understand that the Premier addressed the question at the outset. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question, but she is being relevant in that there was a section in that question about behaving like a Premier.

Jacinta ALLAN: People will think the member for Brighton and I caucused on these questions, seriously. I tender as my final point on this question that you cannot write articles about how climate change is real and action needs to be taken on climate change and then at the first instinct say yes to attending a misinformation convention against renewable energy.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed from the chamber without warning, member for Werribee.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier sledging the Leader of the Opposition certainly must be debating the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: The points I have made are that Victorians know where my government stands on renewable energy, on backing multifaith and multicultural communities, on helping young people get into a home and on backing the emergency services. What they also are seeing is an opposition that are divided, extreme and do not trust one another and whose deputy leader is cutting and running.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:08): There are plenty of things the government and the opposition will disagree on this year, but surely the Premier can agree that undermining our integrity agencies should be off limits.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. I am struggling to hear the question. Repeat the question, member for Brighton.

James NEWBURY: Surely the Premier will agree that undermining our integrity agencies should be off limits.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): Let me reiterate for the member for Brighton what I said earlier: we back the work of our integrity agencies and we fund the work of our integrity agencies. What Victorians would be keen to know is: where is the integrity? What secret deal is being done by the Leader of the Opposition to see the member for Brighton go quietly?

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, we will continue to support the work of our integrity agencies. The member for Brighton is particularly concerned about misrepresentation of integrity agencies. Perhaps he could go and do some work with the member for Gippsland South and remind the member for Gippsland South that the inspector-general for emergency management is indeed an independent agency, as has been claimed otherwise by the member for Gippsland South.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:11): Tennis is a wonderful sport played in schools and enjoyed right across our state. Like many, I did follow every game of the Australian Open last month, but like all Victorians I think the game should stay at Rod Laver Arena. Rather than being played in the opposition party room, we want the game staying at Rod Laver Arena. 2026 is barely in full swing, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has already stormed out with his racquet and ball. While Labor is serving up ace after ace – new schools, new hospitals, a new transport system and new cost-of-living measures – those opposite are serving up chaos and division every day. We are not just investing in new schools, we are also opening up new school facilities, like tennis courts, for community use because we want to help every young person to reach their dreams. Every young person can be a world-class tennis player with perhaps the best serve ever, but they might not just make it to the top of the Liberal Party.

While Labor is like Carlos Alcaraz – when everything is on the line, we will always deliver – we always know that when it comes to doing everything for the state the Liberals will always take their

eye off the ball. I do feel for the former member for Nepean. As he said, it is very hard to win a doubles match when your own side, your own party, is playing against you. But the people of Nepean need not worry. Under the Allan Labor government we have invested \$66 million in schools right across the Nepean electorate, while those opposite are ripping \$2 million out of the pockets of Nepean locals for an unwanted, unneeded by-election. It is game, set and match for the Victorian Liberal Party. Victorians know when the ball is in the Liberal Party's court they will turn up like a bunch of amateurs to play the game of tennis and play the game of Parliament in Spring Street.

Political donations

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. I refer to today's report in the *Australian* that Victorian Labor has received at least \$67,000 in donations from 23 businesses awarded more than \$421 million in government contracts. Ministerial diaries reveal that Allan government ministers, including the Premier herself, have personally met on at least 50 occasions with these donors in the space of just two years. Will the Premier show leadership and refer these matters to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, or will the Premier simply dismiss today's news as more misinformation?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I am going to go to subject matter that the member for Brighton is always keen to make very clear to me that he is across: electoral matters and donation reform and legislation in this regard. I might use this opportunity to explain to the member for Brighton that political donations are a matter for political parties, and I want to make this absolutely clear because it might be different in the Liberal Party than it is in the Labor Party: they have no influence over government-awarded contracts. I want to make that absolutely clear for the benefit of the member for Brighton.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went to the multimillion-dollar government contracts the government awarded after these donations were made to the Labor Party – dodgy donations.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, I ask you to make your points of order succinctly.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, in the 30 seconds the Premier has been on her feet she has been entirely relevant. She was just pointing out that the Liberal Party also fall under the laws of the donations that were passed by the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. The Premier to continue.

Jacinta ALLAN: I also want to make it absolutely clear for the benefit of the member for Brighton that Victorian government procurement decisions are made independently through robust tender processes and procurement processes. I know they are surprised, because in government they did things very differently. Just ask the member for Bulleen.

Members interjecting.

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

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Make that an hour and a half.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is important to be absolutely clear on this point and not have these matters undermined by the misinformation that is being presented by the member for Brighton. Tender decisions are made and procurement decisions are made independently by the public service. There are probity advisers that sit over these decisions and strict rules. Under these strict rules, transparency is a point with these strict rules, which means the information that the member for Brighton is referring to is on the public record. Transparency is important when we are ensuring the integrity of probity

processes. Transparency is also important when it comes to political donations, which is why when we reformed the donations regime in this state we required this level of transparency. That means the member for Brighton can now ask these questions, because this information is on the public record. To then conflate, as the member for Brighton has done, does a great disservice to him and does nothing to support the good, strong work that we have done as a Parliament to bring integrity and transparency into political donations and procurement decisions. We will continue to stand by the highest levels of integrity and standards when it comes to these decisions.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. Will she refer it to IBAC?

The SPEAKER: The Premier is not debating the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:18): Aren't these dodgy deals evidence that the Premier is presiding over a rotten and corrupt government?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I am going to ask that you rule that question out of order on the basis that it did nothing other than offer argument and the opinion of the member for Brighton and had no basis in fact.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, there have been public reports in the paper today that suggest that hundreds of thousands –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: It is not argument; it is public fact, as the Premier agreed to in her previous answer.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): I absolutely reject that false, wrong, misleading claim that the member for Brighton has made. He has no evidence and no basis of fact to make these sorts of claims. He would only make them in this place, wouldn't he? Make those claims outside. The member has no evidence to back in that claim and assertion.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, if it assists the Premier, I said it out the front of the building this morning.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: It might disappoint the member for Brighton; I do not follow his Instagram account. We are focused on delivering for Victorians and what is important to Victorians, and this question says a lot more about the Victorian Liberal Party, their extremism, their division and their desire to divert Victorians' attention from those facts.

Ministers statements: residential tenancies

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:20): I am pleased to inform the house that the Allan Labor government is further boosting support for Victorian renters by doubling its investment in programs that protect renters rights. The new renters rights program will receive \$98 million over five years, greatly expanding the number of renters assisted to around 25,500 per year. Importantly, this program will establish a new central Victorian renter helpline. The helpline will provide a single point of entry for all renters who need advice and support, and in addition there will be a renter central service to support the frontline workers with advice services as well as specialist legal support for complex issues, community education and support for multicultural communities.

One of the major investments in this package will be a new older persons housing rights service, available for all renters over 55 years. I spent last year visiting residential parks in the member for Laverton's electorate, the member for Preston's electorate, the member for Ripon's electorate and the

member for Berwick's electorate and also visited retirement villages, and what we heard time and time again was that older people want a dedicated service specialising in the issues they face. They want information, advice and advocacy, and that is what they will get from the Allan Labor government.

We know that more older Victorians are renting and living in retirement villages or lifestyle residential parks. These unique tenancy arrangements have required reform, and that is why the government have overhauled the Retirement Villages Act 1986 and we will shortly introduce reforms in relation to residential parks. This comes off the back of our 150 rental reforms, including Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, and soon we will be launching Victoria's portable rental bond scheme. Renters deserve to have the security that comes with a home, particularly in their later years. Victoria remains the best place in Australia to rent.

Country Fire Authority

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. The proposed CFA mobile data capability and short status messaging project was due to be delivered by June 2021 yet has been delayed until June 2027. Why has the government compromised the safety of CFA volunteers, including in her electorate of Eltham, by delaying this critical infrastructure upgrade?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Berwick can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:23): I welcome this opportunity to talk about the extraordinary work of our CFA and the extraordinary support this government gives to our CFA. We have had over 200 bushfires –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister has picked up the wrong PPQ.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. I ask the member for Brighton to not raise frivolous points of order.

Vicki WARD: The behaviour that we are witnessing is quite extraordinary.

We have seen over 200 fires burn across our landscape in the last month alone, and the response that our CFA has given and the leadership that has been shown have been nothing short of extraordinary. I imagine that every person in this place is very grateful for the work that they do. This government has continued to increase funding to CFA in a variety of ways, covering a variety of purposes. We have seen in the annual report that grants funding has increased by over \$21 million –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this was a very specific question. I am happy to table the tender document if it assists the minister, but it was a specific question and the minister is responding generally rather than to the specific question.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: Relevance.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister on her feet is being entirely relevant to the question. Of course the preamble to any question forms part of the question, and the minister was asked directly about our government's support for CFA. The minister is addressing that element of the question.

Danny O'Brien: On the point of order, Speaker, we cannot have a situation in here where a question about the CFA is answered generally when this is –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Danny O'Brien: On relevance.

The SPEAKER: I have already heard that point of order. Do you have a different view on this point of order?

Danny O'Brien: The question was about why this project has been delayed six years.

The SPEAKER: I have the question in front of me. I will give the minister an opportunity to come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: Total income has increased by \$26 million to \$477 million. We have funded new fleet, we have funded new radios, we have –

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

The SPEAKER: I ask you to resume your seat unless you have a point of order.

James Newbury: I have a point of order.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: The minister is taking a word from the question and responding –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: I am entitled to ask for your advice.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: My point of order is: how can we have a circumstance where relevance means that a minister can simply pick any word from a question and respond to that rather than to the substance of the question? This is farcical.

The SPEAKER: I do not make the rules, member for Brighton, I enforce the rules. The standing orders are very clear. A minister can answer a question in any way they choose. A minister may also use the preamble of a question as part of an answer. The minister has an opportunity now to answer the question. I ask the minister to answer the question.

Vicki WARD: In travelling around the state I have spoken with a number of CFA volunteers who have all spoken about their gratitude for the new Motorola radios that they have received and the increased ability that they give. What the Leader of the Opposition refers to is ongoing work that is happening with the CFA, as well as its integration with the computer-aided dispatch system, which this government has invested in and which this government is boosting for Triple Zero to ensure that this state has the strongest response system available. The new CAD system, which will be integrated with services like the one the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, is ongoing work, and they know full well that this is underway right now. This undermining of trust in institutions as important as the CFA in the middle of the fire season is disgraceful.

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

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:29): Minister, isn't it the case that this government's reductions in funding to the CFA for three years in a row mean that the CFA has not been able to afford the upgrade to this communication system?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:29): This goes to a fundamental issue the opposition have. While I reject the premise of their question, there is a real challenge here where the leadership of the CFA – the chief officer, the board and the CEO – are being undermined by those opposite, who refuse to accept the statement that there have been year-on-year funding increases with the CFA.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Vicki WARD: In the middle of a fire season, when trust in our services should be paramount and when support for our services should be paramount, to undermine the leadership –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be truthful in her response, and she has just misled the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: circus arts

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:30): Our creative sector in Victoria is as diverse as it is strong. I am pleased to advise the house that the world-famous Flying Fruit Fly Circus – I got that out – the Fruities, are now operating out of Circus Centre Melbourne in Collingwood, along with their original home in Albury–Wodonga. This is a great win for this demanding physical art form for both Melbourne and Victoria. Circus arts is one of the many art forms we support as a government. We are proud to back Na Djinang, a First Peoples–led circus arts organisation, and through our creative enterprises program, which we announced funding for at the end of last year, we are funding Women's Circus, based in Melbourne's west, and we are funding Circus Nexus, a great organisation in Melbourne's north. These organisations provide opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to get involved in this great physical and social activity. These are well-run organisations that celebrate this great art form.

But there is one dysfunctional circus in town that there is actually no reason to celebrate. It is a circus that has had six ringmasters in seven years – one of those ringmasters is still swinging from the trapeze – where senior performers are leaving because of the infighting within the troupe. No-one runs away to join this circus; they run away to avoid it. Some want to go to Barnaby's big top; others do not.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer you to Speaker Brooks's ruling that ministers statements should not be misused as a way to attack the opposition.

Colin BROOKS: On the point of order, Speaker, I have not mentioned the opposition, as the member referred to.

The SPEAKER: The minister to continue his ministers statement.

Colin BROOKS: As I said, some want to go to Barnaby's big top; others do not. It is a circus where the clowns are in charge, and the ringmaster just cannot hold the show together.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is an abuse, pointing at people and –

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, as I said earlier, I enforce the rules. The minister has not mentioned the opposition. In his inference he has not mentioned the opposition. Pointing could be anything, member for Brighton. There is no point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Pointing, member for Brighton, is not in the standing orders.

Colin BROOKS: I was just about to mention the opposition, so I will not continue.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for an hour. The remainder of question time will be done with a degree of decorum, members.

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

Country Fire Authority

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:34): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. The minister was asked in a question on notice to provide the age breakdown of the CFA fire truck fleet. That was on 17 June last year. The answer was due 202 days ago but has not yet been provided. What has the minister got to hide about the age of the CFA fleet?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, on 57(1)(a), once again I ask that you consider ruling this question out of order on the basis that it offers an opinion on the matter rather than giving facts. I ask that you rule it out of order.

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

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:36): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for the opportunity to talk about the extraordinary investment this government is putting into our CFA – a CFA that we will never undermine, a CFA that we will always support and continue to support, a CFA leadership that we will always support. In the earlier answer I gave I did thank CFA volunteers, so I will not upset the opposition by thanking CFA volunteers again.

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Vicki WARD: But I agree with the Premier that they should be thanked every day and twice on Sundays. We have invested \$1.5 billion in CFA in the past four years, and that has meant more trucks. It has also meant more stations and has meant more support. In this latest budget we invested \$40 million for a rolling replacement fleet program. There is also of course the \$62 million, which is a doubling of the volunteer emergency services equipment program grants – which they will slash – which also helps support the purchase of appliances for the CFA. In fact a record amount, \$22 million, in VESEP grants was awarded to the CFA last year. We have invested \$21 million in the last budget for seven new CFA stations and two satellite stations. Do you know what they have housed? Stations across the state have been housing 89 new trucks.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question was clearly about the age of the CFA fleet, which the minister has not yet gone near.

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

Vicki WARD: As I said, 89 new CFA trucks in 2025, and 167 new vehicles are on order or in production. Again we see this persistent behaviour by those opposite to undermine an agency, the integrity of an agency –

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

The SPEAKER: Minister, come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: In the context of the question, it is really important to understand contrast. The contrast is that on this side of the chamber we are always there supporting our CFA. We are investing

in new appliances, we are investing in new stations and we are investing in new equipment. We are there supporting them. We have been down in communities. We have been speaking with CFAs. We have not been spreading misinformation. We have not been creating division. We have not been undermining the leadership of the CFA, which is the contrasting behaviour that we see with those opposite. We have increased investment in CFA year on year, as evidenced by the CFA themselves. For those opposite to continue to ignore or disrespect the statement that was made by the CFA regarding the investment in CFA is disgraceful.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:39): Data provided in 2023 showed 230 trucks were over 30 years old. How many are there today?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:40): I really do again thank the 1200 brigades that we have across this state of CFA, and I really want to thank them for the work that they do. I know that they appreciate the new trucks, the new appliances, the new equipment and the increased investment –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can I refer you to Speaker Maddigan's ruling of 26 August 2003:

When responding to a question a minister must address the question rather than responding generally.

I understand that you cannot direct relevance. However, the minister is not dealing with the substance of the actual question.

The SPEAKER: The minister has been on her feet for 20 seconds. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: The answer to the question is really, really simple, which is that we continue to invest in new appliances, which continue to be turned over at CFA.

Ministers statements: crime prevention

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:41): I rise today to thank Victoria Police for the work they do each and every day to keep Victorians safe. Our police are working hard in all weather, all hours, 24/7 to keep Victorians safe and make a record number of arrests, some 78,000 up to the last quarter. As we all know, 24/7 an emergency response is available to all Victorians. Just call 000. But you cannot catch crooks without a visible police presence. Operation Pulse at Fountain Gate shopping centre, at Northland, at Eastland and of course at Highpoint has been welcomed by businesses and welcomed by shoppers. We have seen PSOs and police out there in force across the summer at our shopping centres.

We have also been able to welcome new recruits to the police academy, with a record number of applications, the highest number in the past five years, which has seen a record number of recruits apply to join the academy every fortnight and to graduate. These are not star recruits. These are everyday Victorians, people who are prepared to step up and step in to support and serve the Victorian community. Just like people on this side of the house, they come from all walks of life but are prepared to step up and step in. They are not quitters. They do not walk away. They are stepping up to support Victorians and uphold the law.

Can I say also that our laws have changed here in Victoria. We have responded and have seen youth remand rates up some 40 per cent and up 26 per cent for adults, which is a demonstration that consequences matter in the community. We will back our police and back our courts and make sure that consequences are delivered for those who thumb their nose at the law. We are also about turning around lives and young people who make mistakes by investing in the opportunities to make sure they can make a better contribution to Victorians with great new programs such as our violence reduction unit. Our commitment is that the Allan government is on your side. We will not walk away. We will not quit.

Country Fire Authority

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:43): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Yeodene CFA brigade has been on the ground fighting fires in Skipton, Carlisle River and Gellibrand, yet in 2025 it received the minister's extraordinary support of just \$381 for the entire year. Why is the government spending 500 times more on pot plants in the Suburban Rail Loop than on CFA brigades protecting Victorians from deadly fires?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:44): At the risk of sounding repetitive, I could refer the member to just see above when he reads *Hansard* next, because this government continues to invest year on year – increased investment – in our CFA. To belittle the CFA the way that those opposite continue to do by talking about pot plants is quite insulting. Yeodene CFA, along with every CFA who has responded to the fires that we have seen this year, deserve to be congratulated, as do SES, as do FRV, as do FFMV. This government have doubled the funding in emergency services since we came to government. This includes the nearly \$2 billion invested in the current budget in emergency services. No other government has invested like this government has in emergency services. While the facts are there, the misinformation by those opposite continues to be touted, because what they want to do –

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

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: The question, despite the childish way in which it was worded, was about funding for CFA, and essentially that is at the core here. We continue to try to help those opposite understand the extent of the funding that this government continues to invest in CFA.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Broadmeadows can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Broadmeadows withdrew from chamber.

Vicki WARD: However, in order to deflect attention away from their own division, from their own challenges, they instead would rather undermine the CFA.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order: relevance, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:46): An extraordinary \$5.6 million in additional emergency services tax will be collected from the Colac Otway shire, yet the Kennedys Creek, Irrewillipe and Yeodene CFA brigades are still driving and will continue to drive around in 30-year-old tankers. Why are Victorians being taxed an extraordinary amount extra while our CFA brigades get less?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you rule this supplementary question out of order on the basis that is an entirely different question to the first question. This question talks about tax policy and, one might argue, should be better directed to another minister.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. It refers to the CFA. The emergency services minister to answer the question.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:47): To reflect on what the Leader of the House said, yes, questions about the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund are something for the Treasurer. However, what I will do is highlight that those opposite have no capacity or ability and have not verbalised any single way in which they would replace the funding that they will withdraw from emergency services.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I do not know what that was, but it certainly was not an answer to that question.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, that is not an appropriate way to raise a point of order. The minister to come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: We just see that behaviour continue. What we have seen is a government here that continues to recognise the challenges that our weather patterns are creating. We have seen it in the last few weeks with the fires that we have seen and the flash flooding. While those opposite continue to engage in culture wars, arguing about this and trying to create distractions, it is this government that is going to ensure that there is always funding for our emergency services.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Warrandyte can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Warrandyte withdrew from chamber.

Vicki WARD: We are not slashing it like those opposite will do.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:49): Victorians know where our Labor government stands when it comes to protecting their right to work from home. We back it and we will legislate to protect people’s right to work from home. We are doing this because we have listened to working people and families. We have heard how it saves them time and it saves them money. We have heard from the workers themselves how they say it means they are more productive and they can give more back to their employer. And we have heard from businesses as well – many are doing it – about how it also means that their workforce is more productive. It is a meaningful difference for families. It means for families they are saving money, it means more time with the kids at home and it takes stress out of their lives.

We have well and truly seen, though, how not everyone agrees with my government’s move to make working from home a right that we will legislate and protect. Indeed I can reveal to the house today that there are some who recently came together in this very building and held a secret meeting behind closed doors with business leaders from across Victoria, and what was on the agenda? Forcing workers to return to the office. I would be happy to make available to the house the Melbourne economic revitalisation forum agenda, hosted by the Leader of the Opposition behind closed doors in this building – forcing workers to return to the office. Victorians know where my government stands in backing them every day.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, on Tuesday you requested a written apology from every single member on the government benches for what had just happened, which was their appalling behaviour, and you wanted that in your office after question time. Would you please take the opportunity to update the house on whether that occurred?

The SPEAKER: I received apologies from every member who was present at the time on the government benches.

Cindy McLeish: On another point of order, Speaker, at the start of question time today and just now we witnessed exactly the same behaviour by the government members. Will you again read those apologies to see whether or not they committed to not doing that again, because what we saw today from the government was appalling.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Constituency questions

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:52): (1488) Yarra Ranges police are amazing and for years have operated a fire patrol unit from the Mount Evelyn police station in the fire danger period, doing

important work and supporting our CFA firefighters. Whether that is monitoring known arson offenders ahead of an extreme fire danger day or responding to illegal burn-offs on total fire ban days, these police officers have been integral to managing the fire risk across our region. Yet under the Labor government's cuts to the Victoria Police budget, this fire patrol unit has been disbanded, cut without notice, despite feedback from the Country Fire Authority about the value of the resource, and in the middle of a fire season when grass and debris is nearly 100 per cent cured – it is cooked. So my question to the Minister for Police is: why has the Yarra Ranges fire patrol unit been cut at all and especially during this dangerous fire season? It is crazy. There is now no guarantee of police support for illegal fire activity or support in a bushfire under this Labor government.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:53): (1489) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. Why is the Victorian Labor government continuing to invest to support schools across the Pascoe Vale electorate, including Coburg High School? Following extensive advocacy and engagement with the Minister for Education, the Victorian School Building Authority and the Coburg High community, I am very pleased to share some good news regarding the delivery of the school's technology hub. The VSBA has now announced Devco Project & Construction Management as the new head building contractor to recommence and complete the \$17.8 million tech hub project. Work will be recommencing soon, so Coburg High teachers, staff, students and families can expect to see construction again very soon. I genuinely acknowledge and appreciate the patience of the entire school community over recent months and thank them for their ongoing support. The delivery of this important and game-changing project will create capacity for an additional 250 students and deliver a world-class immersive learning environment, purpose-built specialist spaces for woodwork, design, textiles, food tech and media studies and a central spine featuring an iconic Melbourne-style laneway connecting the learning spaces together. I am very proud to be continuing to work with the Coburg High community to progress the delivery of this landmark upgrade.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:54): (1490) My constituency question is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place, and my question is: when will Tobacco Licensing Victoria inspectors visit the Latrobe Valley? The Allan Labor government has announced that just 14 inspectors will police over 1000 tobacco shops, although this may be unrealistic and inadequate, and Victorians are right to doubt whether the scheme will deliver any meaningful change. Last year the tobacco shop in Morwell was firebombed, and a few weeks ago there was a ram raid on a shop in Newborough. I visited to speak with the neighbouring businesses recently, and the owners told me they are scared. Their own operations are under threat because this form of organised crime has been allowed to continue unabated. Minister, when will tobacco licensing inspectors visit the Latrobe Valley?

Footscray electorate

Katie HALL (Footscray) (14:55): (1491) Footscray is well known for being a place of great food and multicultural businesses. My question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment. With our emerging African small business precinct, we have access to the best injera bakeries, places for African food and coffee and beautiful fabrics and clothing. Little Africa is a growing precinct, and I want to support the business owners through collaboration. So my constituency question to the minister for small business is: what can we do as a government to support this growing multicultural business precinct in Footscray to grow, to evolve and to succeed?

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:56): (1492) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the state Labor government deal with the squatter at the taxpayer-funded public housing property at 43 Keith Street in Hampton East? Last year the government-managed property was vacated by its

previous tenant. Despite the historically long public housing waiting list, the property has sat vacant. Because the site has been mismanaged, a dangerous squatter has taken self-appointed ownership of the property. The squatter is dangerous and well known to police. Many in the neighbourhood have experienced extremely violent behaviour from the squatter. Over the weekend the squatter threatened to kill a nearby neighbour. The squatter has been arrested numerous times, and the local community is forced to constantly call the police because of dangerous behaviour, which many fear is escalating. Despite Victorians paying for the property, the department has shown no interest in the squatter or the physical damage she is causing to the home. Not only has this government failed to keep our community safe, but we are also paying for the site to be trashed because this government does not care about taxpayers money.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:57): (1493) My constituency question is to the Minister for Small Business and Employment. What programs is the Allan Labor government delivering to support multicultural small businesses and to celebrate culture and diversity? In January Minister Suleyman and I visited the vibrant Lalor shopping centre precinct in the Thomastown electorate. This is a thriving multicultural hub with a range of wonderful family-owned businesses, from bakeries to delis, butchers, fresh produce, cakes and cafes. It is a meeting place not just to shop but for community connection. Business and residents would love to see more work done to make it even better for residents to gather and to enjoy.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:57): (1494) My constituency question is for the Premier. Earlier this week I asked my community what they would like me to raise in this place this year. Well, the answers have been resounding. Ann said that roads should be on top of the list, if not number one. Stephen said that the roads need to be better maintained. Lisa wanted me to ask why her brother was stuck in a train for 3 hours on the Pakenham line. Amanda wants to see better bus services on the Nepean Highway. Importantly, Melinda would like to know when the government will finalise a new EBA for the education sector. I therefore ask the Premier: when will her Labor government make the much-needed investment in my community that my community both need and deserve?

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:58): (1495) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and concerns the Metro Tunnel big switch to the new timetable. Minister, how will the Metro Tunnel's big switch benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South? I recently visited train stations that service my electorate, where I heard about the anticipation for the more frequent timetable, which will see the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines going through the incredible new Metro Tunnel. The growth in the south-east has seen an exponential need for these improved services, which the Allan Labor government is delivering. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (14:59): (1496) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. What is the government doing to tackle the homelessness crisis on the Mornington Peninsula, particularly with so many people rough sleeping on our foreshore and elsewhere? The Mornington Peninsula now has the highest level of rough sleeping out of any LGA in the whole state of Victoria, including the City of Melbourne. Despite this, this Labor government has done little to nothing to tackle this crisis. We have one crisis accommodation service for the whole Mornington Peninsula and a list for public housing that is a mile long. DJ is one individual who I have been trying to help for months, who is sleeping on the foreshore near Mills Beach in Mornington. We have helped him try to get a new tent, food for his dog, who has since passed, and a power bank. I am going to

collect a new bed for him tonight. But he is not getting helped by this government. He is being helped by people like Andee, Emile, me and others, and this government needs to take action.

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:00): (1497) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. A petition with over 4000 signatures, the Save Our MotoGP campaign, championed by local legend Rosa Scarlato of Pino's Trattoria, calls for securing this major event at Phillip Island beyond its current contract, which is due to expire at the end of this year. The community and Bass Coast council have been super active, and my office has been inundated with supportive emails. We do not want to lose it. The 2025 event saw record attendance. MotoGP injects over \$60 million into our local economy, supporting small businesses and tourism jobs and drawing visitors from near and far, backdropped by a spectacular coastline beamed worldwide. Understanding negotiations are still underway and remain commercial in confidence and our government has stated its clear support for keeping the event here in my electorate, Minister, what can our community do to help secure the event?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to a number of matters that you have already raised in terms of outstanding matters: adjournment matter 1049 and constituency questions 1299, 1359, 1393, 1408 and 1450, all to the Premier. I do note that all of those you have already written to the Premier about and none of those have been responded to. I would seek your guidance as to what we can do if your letters are being ignored by the Premier.

The SPEAKER: Give your list to the Clerk, please.

Martin Cameron: On a point of order, Speaker, I also have some overdue questions for the Minister for Education, the Minister for Regional Development, the Premier, the Minister for Police, the Minister for the State Electricity Commission and the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and particularly question 1985 to the Minister for Mental Health. It is well and truly over a year since it was asked.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to pass your list to the Clerk, please.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, in consultation with a number of my colleagues, they have raised with me concerns that though you are reading in a list of outstanding questions sporadically to the chamber, unfortunately the ministers are ignoring those requests from the Speaker to respond to them. I am seeking your guidance as to what we can do to hurry along or even receive responses. Many of them are well over a year –

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I am happy to have a conversation with you about this matter in my office.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, I am entitled to raise this in the chamber, and I –

The SPEAKER: I never said you were not, member for Brighton. I asked you to come and see me in my office to have a conversation about it.

Bills

Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:03): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. The bill represents a profound step forward in how we uphold dignity, fairness and bodily autonomy for some of the most overlooked people in our community. This is legislation that has been needed for a long time, shaped by courage,

lived experience and an unwavering push for recognition and respect. At its essence this bill is guided by a simple but powerful principle: every person deserves the right to make decisions about their own body.

People born with variations in sex characteristics, variations in chromosomes, hormones or physical traits, are part of the natural diversity of human biology. These variations occur in up to 1.7 per cent of births. Most are not harmful and do not require any urgent medical intervention, yet for decades children with these variations were subjected to irreversible medical procedures long before they could meaningfully understand or express an opinion about what was being done to them. These were not medically urgent decisions. These were decisions often driven by discomfort with difference, a desire to fit a child into a binary that did not belong to them or a belief, now long debunked, that conformity would ease the child's future. Many clinicians acted with care and good intentions. Many parents were trying to do what they thought was right. But the impact of these interventions is not abstract; it is deeply personal and often lifelong.

The Victorian government committed to reform following the *(i) Am Equal* report in 2021, which was informed directly by people's lived experience. That report and the decades of work that preceded it make clear what the consequences have been. People live with chronic physical pain, infertility, loss of sexual function, psychological trauma and an enduring sense that their autonomy was taken from them. The *Missing Voice* report reinforced these stories, revealing pain that is real, documented and impossible to ignore. As advocates like Anna Brown have said so clearly, too many people are still dealing with the outcomes of decisions made without their involvement, decisions that did not need to be made at all in childhood. This bill responds to those voices and, importantly, honours them.

This bill does not ban treatment, it does not impede urgent care and it does not deny parents their role or diminish the expertise of clinicians. Instead it establishes a thoughtful, balanced framework that ensures major decisions that are irreversible and not medically necessary are treated with the seriousness they deserve. It introduces strengthened informed consent safeguards, treatment plans that reflect best practice, an independent expert panel to review cases that raise significant ethical complexity and clear consequences for knowing or reckless breaches. It is a system shaped alongside the very people it is intended to protect: intersex advocates, clinicians, families, psychologists and human rights experts. It balances transparency and protection with the real-world needs of families and practitioners.

Urgent life-saving treatment is unaffected by these reforms. If intervention is needed to prevent serious harm, it can and will proceed. Where treatment is not urgent and the person cannot provide informed consent because they are an infant or a young child, this bill ensures decisions are made carefully with independent oversight, accurate information and support for parents navigating a complex and often unexpected situation. The strengthened informed consent requirements ensure families receive clear explanations of risks, benefits and alternatives, including the option to defer treatment. They require clinicians to use consistent criteria to assess capacity to consent, and they guarantee access to support services so families are not left navigating uncertainty alone.

People with lived experience told us how isolating and overwhelming this time can be, and this bill responds by building supports around them. Victoria will become only the second jurisdiction in Australia to enshrine protections like these in law, placing us at the forefront of national reform. Advocates like Morgan Carpenter have described these protections as vital, overdue and a reflection of genuine support for intersex people, and they are right. For parents, this bill does not take away their role. Parents remain crucial decision-makers. If treatment is proposed through an approved plan, parents still provide consent. What this bill ensures is that parents are no longer left making decisions in the dark, pressured, misinformed or without awareness of long-term consequences. It provides clear pathways for review, internal and external, when disagreements arise, ensuring fairness and accessibility.

For clinicians this bill offers clarity and safeguards. Many clinicians already practise in ways that align with the principles set out in this legislation. They want a system that offers certainty, ethical structure and independent support in difficult cases. The oversight panel made up of specialised experts will review proposals for irreversible or significant interventions where the patient cannot consent. This reduces the burden on clinicians, ensures consistency and reinforces the highest ethical standards. Treatment plans, whether general or case specific, will streamline best practice. General plans apply to common variations with established guidance. Individual plans apply to less common or more complex cases, and together they ensure quality, safety and transparency. The offence provisions in the bill are narrow, carefully drafted and essential. Those with lived experience have been clear: a system without accountability is a system that risks repeating past harm. Good faith clinicians have nothing to fear, of course. The offence applies only to knowing or reckless breaches.

Some people ask whether it is better to make irreversible decisions earlier in childhood, when the child is too young to remember, but memory is not the measure of harm. Many people grow up to experience physical and psychological impacts that last for decades. What matters is consent – meaningful, informed consent – and that is what this bill protects. This bill does not restrict people who can consent from accessing any treatment they choose, and it does not stop or delay necessary medical care. It ensures that only non-urgent, primary, cosmetic or binary motivated interventions are deferred until the person most affected can understand the risks and benefits and make the decisions themselves.

We have reached this point because of the extraordinary advocacy of people like Tony Briffa, a proud intersex person who was in the gallery earlier and an elected representative, who have worked for decades so that children will grow up with the right to make decisions about their bodies when they are ready. Tony has said that this legislation protects a child's right to make deeply personal decisions themselves when they are mature enough. These reforms honour that vision.

This is a bill built on listening – listening to those who have lived through damaging practices, listening to clinicians who want clearer guidance and listening to families who want support. It reflects compassion, human rights and a belief that equality must be lived in practice, not just in principle. Respect our bodies, trust our voices, give us the same right as anyone else to decide what happens to us. I commend the bill to the house.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:11): I rise today to contribute to the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. This bill is about children and their health and welfare, and of course this is not about blaming anyone. This is about greater protection for children, and certainly greater protection for their parents and support of the parents and support of the medicos that have to make these difficult decisions or give this difficult advice on decisions in supporting the parents and the children.

Firstly, I would like to start by thanking the lived experience advocates from InterAction and Equality Australia who came to speak to us last year in this place towards the end of the year. I really appreciated the opportunity to learn a lot more from those members of the intersex community and to be far more educated about the history of intersex advocacy and the unique challenges that this diverse community faces and the complexities in regard to this particular issue, and hearing some of the contributions today and some members making references to, I think, *Herald Sun* front page stories back in 1983. It does not seem that long ago, but it seems like it was the Dark Ages with those stories of what was referred to. I am pleased that we have moved along, even though it has taken some time.

I also wish to acknowledge the decades of advocacy that have led us to this moment of bringing this bill into the house and debating this bill and the needless hurt and trauma that those have experienced in the intersex community over many, many years – in some cases lifelong trauma for some individuals. I just want to extend my admiration for the courage that the intersex community have shown by coming forward and advocating strongly over many, many decades. It is amazing, and again, it is not only the advocacy but the education that they have imparted on those in the community that are ill informed and ignorant of the circumstances that have affected our intersex community.

About 1.7 per cent of people are born with red hair. I do not know if you know, but just as many people are born with variations in sex characteristics. I think someone quoted before that about 1500 people a year may be born with variations in sex characteristics, and they are also known as being intersex. Just like how all redheads are different, it is important to remember that there are at least 40 –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Steve McGhie: Are you all right, member for Mordialloc? I think you actually might have dyed your hair, have you? It does not look as red over here. It is important to remember that there are at least 40 known innate variations in sex characteristics that fall under the umbrella term of intersex. These variations are natural, and most people will not require medical treatment or surgeries. But unfortunately, many people with innate variations in sex characteristics have been subjected to needless cosmetic surgeries to fit a binary and medicalised view of how the body should look. Again, it is life-changing and traumatic for many, many of our members of the intersex community. Lived experience advocates have told us that these surgeries were often unnecessary. We know that through some of the contributions today and the advocacy over many years. They were certainly deferrable, and of course some of them are irreversible.

It is supposed to be that medicine does no harm. It is meant to be about making a person's health and welfare better. I suppose in one way what we would say is that some of these surgeries have destroyed some individuals' lives through these traumatic changes and experiences. It has caused much harm to many in our intersex community and certainly affected their health in many, many different ways. Many of those surgeries are deferrable. They often do not need to be performed on a newborn. They can be deferred to when the child is growing or when the person can make an informed choice about their own body as an adult, so you give them the opportunity. It is their body, and they should be the ones that make those decisions with the proper level of information and education about their situation.

As I said before, these surgeries are irreversible. Once the surgery is done, it cannot be undone, unfortunately. As detailed in Equality Australia's *The Missing Voice* report – and I know some members have referred to that and that it is a must-read – many intersex people who have undergone these surgeries and treatments have experienced lasting impacts of negative self-image, lifelong pain, the need for further surgeries, the loss of reproductive function and just the ongoing trauma, let alone the mental health trauma and the mental health outcomes for many, many of these individuals. For our intersex people who have not undergone surgeries or medical interventions, these people and their loved ones are often left in the dark with misinformation or even a lack of education or a lack of information and minimal to no psychological and peer support. It is crucial that they should have access to that psychological assistance.

People born with innate variations in sex characteristics have told us that they want to make their own choices – and they should have the right to do that – about what happens to their bodies. It is their bodies, and everyone should be able to make the choice of what happens to their bodies, including being able to give informed consent to medical treatments that will impact them for the rest of their lives. This bill ensures that people born with innate variations in sex characteristics will be protected from unnecessary medical treatment and harm by introducing informed consent safeguards.

The introduction of an independent oversight panel is important, and the introduction of individual and general treatment plans is really important. The consequences for noncompliance with these measures go a long way to protect individuals and support them in their situation. It means that people with innate variations in sex characteristics will be able to have autonomy over their bodies. It means that parents and guardians of children born with variations in sex characteristics will have access to information and support, and that is crucial. It will mean that doctors will be supported, with clearer guidelines to ensure they are delivering best practice care. Of course we cannot just assume that doctors are well informed and well educated in regard to this type of situation. We know we have the greatest medicos within our fantastic hospitals here treating our children, but not everyone is an expert in this area.

The other thing is about the informed consent. Those measures are outlined in the criteria that a person must meet when a doctor considers whether they have the ability to give consent. The person and their parent or guardian must be provided with specific information about the particular variation in sex characteristics, what treatment is available, the advantages and the disadvantages and the complications of that, what treatment may be required into the future, and again, the advantages and disadvantages of deferring or not receiving treatment. But also, along with that, and we made reference to it before, is the mental health support in regard to all of these aspects of this type of consideration and surgery, if required. The doctor must also consider the individual's capacity, which is really important.

I know there have been some great contributions. I just want to go to the recent amendments from the opposition; I do not think they are necessary. Clinicians have been involved all the way through the process of formulating this bill. This is a really important bill, and I am pleased that it has been brought to the house this week. I am totally supportive of it, and I commend the bill to the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:21): I too rise to speak on the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025. I will start by telling a quick story, because I love telling stories here, and I have got many to tell today. I am just a bit disappointed that my great friend Tony Briffa is no longer in the gallery to hear this contribution, because she was a mayor in my electorate of Laverton, mayor of Hobsons Bay, and did a tremendous job. Tony is a tremendous person, so I hope, Tony, that you are listening to this, because this one is for you. What I am going to tell you about this story, just quickly, is that the young man who wrote my speech and contribution this afternoon said, 'You need to speak on this bill.' It is not usually the kind of bill I speak about. I speak about lots of energy bills, transport bills, other sorts of legislative reform. And he said, 'This is a really important bill, and it is really important to people like Tony. It's about Tony.' I have not spoken to Tony for ages. I have not seen Tony for a long time. And I said, 'Tony?' And he said, 'Tony Briffa. She made history.' I am going to talk a bit about Tony in just a moment.

I do want to go to the member for Lowan's amendments – the Shadow Minister for Mental Health, I believe – that were put forward in this place by those opposite. The only time I feel like intersex Victorians have been mentioned in this Parliament – and this will be my eighth year – by those opposite, has never been through advocacy. It has never been through the advocacy of people like Tony. It has never been through their understanding. It has never been through their leadership. It has been reduced to things like footnotes and clauses and legal technicalities that are just read out during the passage of government bills, like the member for Lowan has read out here today. The only time the Liberal–One Nation misinformation coalition – and I am going to say that all year, all the way to the election, because it is a misinformation coalition – have ever chosen to go further was when the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council used intersex people as part of a broader culture war argument, and that was not to support them, that was not to listen to them but to dismiss them.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would suggest that the member on her feet at the moment is impugning a colleague in the other place. My understanding is that that must only be done by substantive motion. I would ask you to counsel the member on her feet accordingly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): On the point of order, I did not hear a member's name. I ask the member to come back and, with reference to the point of order, to not impugn members.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Intersex people, when they are talked about in this place by those opposite, have been described as a factional minority, which is an advanced, rigid, chromosome-based definition of womanhood that simply does not reflect the biological reality. It erases the lived experiences of people like Tony, a tremendous local westie who has fought her whole life to have a bill like this come before this place. Those opposite have a message with the amendments that the member for Lowan has just put forward. That message to intersex people is 'You can exist but you should not count.' It says to people like Tony 'You should not count' – not in our public language, not in health and pregnancy care, and not in who is recognised as a woman or who is recognised as a mother. That is

not respect, that is exclusion. And it deeply concerns me that members here in this place and in the other have gone on to suggest that a government advertising campaign – and we all remember that – encouraging applications from women, Aboriginal Victorians, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ people and intersex Victorians was somehow discriminatory against the broader community. Encouraging inclusion is not discrimination. Do you know what it is? This is why it is foreign to those opposite: it is leadership. It is leadership, and by God that is what this state needs. That is what the intersex community needs. That is what Tony needs – Tony and the many, many friends that Tony has and the people that Tony speaks for.

But this is not a new pattern. We know this is not a new pattern. When those opposite were given the opportunity to support a simple, practical reform that would have allowed intersex Victorians to amend the sex marker assigned to them at birth – a change about dignity, accuracy and, by God, personal autonomy – what did the Liberal–One Nation misinformation coalition do? They opposed it. That tells us everything that we need to know, that tells Victorians everything that they need to know on 28 November this year. On this side of the house, every single one of us believes intersex Victorians deserve more than to be spoken about when it suits them in an argument. We know they deserve to be respected, they deserve to be recognised, and by God they deserve to be protected – protected from some people, like those opposite. They deserve to be protected in our laws, in our language and in our community. This is the very stark difference between a government that governs for everyone and an opposition that chooses division over dignity.

For once in this place I would welcome a discussion on the LGBTIQ+ community – including our intersex community, with wonderful people like Tony here in this room – that does not come from the gutter with the gutter lines and the gutter ideology that come from those opposite. That is all I am going to say about the member for Lowan. I am totally shocked that she is the Shadow Minister for Mental Health. I thought a bill like this would improve the mental health of great westies like Tony and many, many others. Now, we talk about Tony and the intersex community making up a small part of our population. I think that is a no-brainer. I have got notes here; it is 1.7 per cent. Now, when the young kid in my office was like ‘You need to speak about this and stand up for Tony,’ I said to him ‘1.7 per cent of the population’. And he said, ‘Well, do you know’ – and I do not think folks here know – ‘there are more intersex folks in the world than there are people with red hair?’ I thought that was an incredible fact, and I said to him, ‘You know what, let’s go ahead and speak on this bill.’

I do want to talk in the short time that I have left about Tony. Tony Briffa is a former mayor of Hobsons Bay – a great mayor. We had lots of great conversations. I remember when Tony came up here to speak with the then Minister for Equality we had a great conversation about rights, about Tony’s rights and the importance of continuing to push forward and break down barriers. As I said, as the member for Laverton, I had the pleasure of meeting with Tony on many occasions, as have my colleagues, I am sure, the member for Point Cook and the member for Williamstown. Tony has always been outspoken and so public about her lived experience, as she is an intersex person. Tony was born with a rare condition called partial androgen insensitivity syndrome. This condition is one of those 70 possible sex variations that we have been talking about here today and that this bill is about.

I cannot stop smiling when I say this. Tony is a really proud advocate for our LGBTI community and intersex people across Melbourne’s west but also here in Victoria. Tony has spent decades campaigning for visibility and for acceptance for intersex Australians. Visibility and acceptance – that says it all. We understand that on this side of the house. We stand for visibility and acceptance, regardless of who you are and regardless of your gender, your sex or your intersex. We understand that everyone deserves to be included, and that is leadership. That is having a truly fair and dignified state. That is about improving Victoria, which is already a great state. But it is reminding people to have tolerance and to treat people with fairness and dignity, because at the end of the day we are all people and we are all here for the same reason. People like Tony just want to be seen, and they want to be accepted. This bill is about making things a whole lot fairer, and I commend it to the house.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:32): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:32): I do wish to speak to this motion, and I would like to draw to the house's attention that the opposition has just been advised that the government intends to move away from this bill to debate a sledge motion in this chamber and to spend an hour and a half of this Parliament's time dealing with a sledge motion. We have just been formally advised. What a pack of grubs they are.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, there are a number of points there, but the point of order that I raise, Acting Speaker, is that we are not yet on the question that the member is debating, we are simply debating the adjournment of this particular item.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): There is no point of order.

James NEWBURY: There is no point of order, that is right, because the coalition has been advised of the reason why the government wants to adjourn off this bill. Can you believe they want to adjourn off this bill so they can move to a sledge motion? Doesn't that say everything about the values of this government, to move to a sledge motion? I look forward to debating the government's sledge motion, because if the government wants to come back from summer and switch on the nasty switch, I tell you what, I am going to be the first speaker on that motion and I am going to go very, very, very hard, because this government has switched on the nasty switch. The Premier has exposed herself completely. The Premier has shown who she is. It was hidden. We knew it was there. She has come back from summer, and here she is for all to see.

We oppose moving from this bill because we know, as the government have formally advised us, they intend to move to a sledge motion. They have formally advised us. I am not making it up. They have advised us they want to spend an hour and a half of their time. You can understand why government members are excited about it. What more could they want than to go straight into the mud, the pack of grubs they are?

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is disorderly to reflect on other members.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is disorderly to reflect on other members. We are on an adjournment debate. I am very happy to be here, and I am very happy to hear the member for Brighton continue.

James NEWBURY: It is the nicest thing anyone has said to me today, Deputy Speaker. To catch you up, so to speak, on what has just occurred, the government, as you rightly said, has just moved an adjournment motion after formally advising the opposition they intend to spend an hour and a half of this great Parliament's time on a sledge motion. To bookend the week, we start on a motion at the start of the week that shows the best of this Parliament, and then to end the week, what does this government do? Attempt to move an adjournment –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is shouting across the table. Members have microphones in this place. We do not –

James Newbury interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order, although – and I am not making rulings here – I am just here, and I would appreciate that.

James NEWBURY: I will use my voice. I will not be shut down in using my voice by the government. The government should not be reflecting on how I use my voice. I will use my voice, and I know they are embarrassed about being called out for what they are about to do. I know why they are embarrassed, because we have gone from what is best about this place to start the week – and by the way, the lead speaker on this motion listed on the notice paper is the Attorney-General. I tell you

what, when it goes bazooka to bazooka, I am the first speaker. I am going to be here for the Attorney, and I am going to be watching, and I am going to be rating, and I am going to be ready to speak straight thereafter. I am going to be looking forward to this one. But I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, it appals me that we start the week with something so good about this Parliament that shows the best side of this Parliament, and then we end the week with the government moving to the most grubby, slanderous behaviour. It says everything about this government. I am absolutely sure the previous speaker is ashamed to have to be moving the motion because the Leader of the House is too gutless to move it herself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage members not to impugn other members.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:37): Can I start by thanking the member for Brighton for acknowledging how important it was that we started the week acknowledging the suffering of Victorians, because at the start of the week he did refer to it as a mismanagement of time. So I am glad that he has had time to reflect and to recognise that that was incredibly inappropriate. Why I think it is so important for us to move to this motion is we have to counteract the anger and the extremism that we are seeing coming from those opposite.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the government claim that they were not moving to a sledge motion. I do appreciate the member now confirming the government does intend to move to a sledge motion. Thank you, member.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order, because I do not think it was a point of order. The member for Yan Yean is giving context to the adjournment.

Lauren KATHAGE: I think question time today really confirmed how important it is that we spend time calling out those people who continue to peddle misinformation, who continue to amplify extremism and who continue to push to the side the vulnerable people of Victoria who deserve our voice, who deserve our respect and deserve our protection. That is why it is so important that we adjourn to come to this motion, because those opposite need to own up to the impact of their language. Frighteningly for Victorians, they need to own up to what the policy impacts will be if they carry through with their threats.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural motion, which I spoke to quite tightly. This is not a debate on what the government intends to try and sledge later today.

Colin Brooks: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton just belled the cat. He has referred to and described the motion that he does not want to go to in his contribution and then again in that point of order. The member for Yan Yean is entitled to counter that view in her contribution.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On an adjournment debate, members are allowed to give context of why they agree or disagree with the adjournment without going into the detail of the motion that we have not got to. I have not heard that yet. I do not uphold the point of order.

Lauren KATHAGE: For members of my community, they want us to be focused on their priorities, not spending time on fringe issues. That is why it is so important that we ensure that we pull the opposition back to thinking about Victorians and to being focused on the priorities of our communities and not those of the fringe. My concern is that in moving to the fringe we are going to see from those opposite a power policy that hurts my community.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Yan Yean was straying into the debate on the motion, I believe. Could she come back to the adjournment, or reasons for there to be or not to be.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you for your guidance, Deputy Speaker. I am impelled by the urgency of my community's desire for cheaper power prices, open and free education and accessible health

services – all the things that this government is working towards. We need to take the time now to adjourn so that we can discuss the motion and hear from those opposite that they care about those priorities as well, because all we are hearing from them at the moment is that they want to stand up next to extremists and continue to put at risk the cheaper power that we are producing through renewable energy and that they will put at risk the safety of our kids at school by having members openly talk against having safe libraries for kids at school. That is why it is so important that we adjourn and speak about this motion.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance. You are saying you do not want to talk about that anymore.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Continue on the adjournment.

Lauren KATHAGE: This is an opportunity for those opposite to say clearly to the Victorian people that they will not stand with extremists.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (15:42): I rise to speak on this very narrow debate with, as you can probably tell by the tone of my voice, some disappointment, really. It is the first sitting week of the year. It is the final year of this term of Parliament. It is the Thursday of the first sitting week, and here we are with a few hours to go and the opportunity to be speaking about the things that matter to our community, our Victorian community – the things that we could be working towards and building towards to build a better community and to build cohesion in our community. But no, the government have on this occasion, and many other occasions during the course of this sitting week, resorted to the lowest common denominator, in my view, as they are doing now, by seeking to adjourn this debate and to move to what the member for Brighton has referred to as a sledge motion, and I agree with him – the lowest common denominator.

You wonder why members of the Victorian community look to the vocation of politics, they look to people in this place, they look to politicians, and sometimes they shake their heads. When politicians act in the way that the government intends to act, by adjourning this debate and going on a full-frontal attack on the opposition – I am sure that the attack it intends to launch on the opposition will be delivered in varying degrees, with varying rates of success, and there will be a sharp blow here and a wet paper bag over there and everything in between – how does that build confidence in our democracy? How does that build confidence in the impression that Victorians have of the people in this place? My view is that everyone, every member of this house, has an obligation to do what we can to elevate within the Victorian community the impression that the people of Victoria have of who we are and what we do. I just think, as I am seeking to articulate now, that by adjourning this debate and by going to one of the government's notices – and there are a number of them here – all sledge motions, all motions that I am sure will frankly bring out the worst, not just from the government side but from the opposition side in reply.

This does not do us, as community leaders and as community representatives, good. This does not seek to build trust in the Victorian community within the political class; no, it further denigrates it, it further destroys it. The opportunity that the government has – I take that back. It is not just the opportunity. The obligation that this government has is to do better and to do what the Victorian people want us to do for them, and that is to focus on the things that matter to them, not that seem to matter to us in this moment, at this time or in this place, but to focus on the things that actually matter to Victorians outside of this chamber and to seek to reflect in here what matters to Victorians outside this chamber. The conversations that are happening around kitchen tables, the conversations that are happening in the car on the way to school or from school pick-up, the conversations that are happening between husband and wife or within families, within communities or in sporting clubs or having a beer on a Friday night at the local bowlo – these are the things that matter to Victorians, not the grubbiness that we are seeing here, seeking to adjourn debate so we can go to a sledge motion.

My goodness, credit to the government – they have got a few of them, and they are all here. No doubt during the course of this year, an election year, on a number of occasions the government will seek to do exactly what they are doing now. I do not think we should adjourn debate; I think we should do what is right by Victorians. I think we should listen to Victorians' needs and respond to them. I think we should be better than the position that I am sure the government will have some success in in just a few moments time. I think that is an obligation which not just government members and not just opposition members or crossbench members but every member of this chamber has, and anything less than that is a bloody disgrace.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:47): I think something that is really important to consider in this situation, when we are wanting to foster unity and to surmount division, is that when they have members of the opposition who are peddling conspiracies, this is not good for democracy. That is why it is really important to be able to debate these important issues for the benefit of good and decent Victorians who want to make sure that children and future generations can feel safe and supported in our wonderful state of Victoria and not have, for instance – and I will pay respect to members of the opposition who on the one hand will march at Pride and truly honour that event, but on the other hand we have other members of the opposition who will be quite overt in terms of their anti-trans position. We know also there was a petition against the rainbow libraries toolkit.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, that is a disgraceful slur on the opposition – absolutely disgraceful. Name them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, that was not a point of order.

Nina TAYLOR: The point that I am making is that if there are those who are wishing to perpetuate what are actually very unhealthy, unsound, ungrounded and what we might otherwise term extreme positions, which can be extremely harmful –

James Newbury: On a point of order, this is an adjournment motion, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is a point of order. I bring the member for Albert Park back to the adjournment motion.

Nina TAYLOR: Duly noted. I am simply substantiating the reason as to why, further to the procedural element of this motion, it is important that we adjourn debate due to the substance of the matters which we are seeking to debate for the betterment of Victorians, not only current but future generations. As I stated from the outset, we have seen some particularly disturbing episodes in our state. We have seen some behaviours which have been particularly untoward. We see – I am not accusing the opposition of this per se, so let me be very clear about this – sovereign citizens and otherwise, people who fundamentally do not appreciate or respect the premise of democracy. So it is upon us to utilise our roles as representatives to affirm what is sound, reasonable and rational and therefore to be very clear with the broader community as to what is fundamentally supporting our democracy and, by contrast, what would be termed extreme behaviour. For instance, seeking and publicly saying that to attend a One Nation rally –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member was starting to go into one of the motions on the notice paper, but that is not the question before the house. The question before the house is to adjourn or not to adjourn. That is the question.

Nina TAYLOR: Duly noted, and I respect your ruling, Deputy Speaker. I am simply explaining and validating the purpose for adjourning debate, because you cannot say we want to adjourn debate for the sake of it. You have to of course validate the purpose that underpins it, and we are extremely concerned on this side of the house to see a perpetual narrative by certain members of the opposition which undermines the premise of our democracy.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is now the third time I have been forced to take a relevance point of order. The member should be sat down.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will not be sitting the member down. The member was actually giving context at that point, and I encourage her to continue in regard to the adjournment debate.

Nina TAYLOR: Thank you very much. Duly noted, Deputy Speaker. I note that in this house we have a unique and privileged opportunity whereby to be able to debate for the betterment of the community matters which are also of importance to them. For good and decent Victorians I think you will find that, for instance, they unequivocally voted for the SEC, so to continually have renewables undermined by those opposite is not helpful.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:52): I note the mirth on your face, Deputy Speaker, as the last contributor finished her regular sort of boring diatribe. I too note with the same amount of mirth that the contributions and excuses proffered by the government on why we should stop their very, very, very thin legislative agenda this week to adjourn what should have been still nearly another hour and a half of sensible debate on policies and legislation going forward that would make Victoria strong and could potentially help repair the failing budget. We could even actually be having a debate here today about how we might in fact solve the housing crisis, for example, or the crime crisis, or we could talk about the crisis on country roads. We could be having a legislative agenda that could provide to Victorians some hope for this failing state that we all sadly live in now, where debt is worse than in Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland combined – all of those things.

But, no, we have not got that. This government is so light on. They have had, what, two months off. They have had holidays, and they have turned up with two pieces of legislation to talk about in a week, and they have decided they want to adjourn. The question is they want to adjourn, and perhaps they want to adjourn because they want to rush something through that could make Victoria a better place. It could be a rush through so that we can figure out what we can do with all these leftover machete bins. Or we could sort of go, well, how can we get some more train carriages on the Warrnambool line, for example, where this government in the last couple of years has halved the amount of seats. It is pretty extraordinary to spend \$485 million fixing a train line to end up with half as many seats. I mean, that is a conundrum that we could be debating today. How could we solve that quite bizarre problem of this government's own making? That could have been a useful piece of legislation –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: Or the police shortages. I actually have an electorate that is about half the size of Belgium – can you believe that? – and we have no 24-hour police station. It might have some fires and floods, but we have no police station open outside of business hours. Can you imagine that? We do not have enough police in Victoria to maintain the police presence that we have had for the best part of 150 years. In fact Colac is the oldest inland settled town. I know there might be a Ballarat member arguing that Buninyong is, but that is a fight we can have another day. We might be talking a day here or a day there.

A member interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: We can have that debate – that might be more useful. We have had a police presence since 1842 in the electorate of Polwarth, yet this government is not coming with a solution. How on earth have they managed to unwind the best part of 170 years worth of police presence?

Roma Britnell interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: No, there are no solutions there. They want to adjourn their Legislative Assembly agenda so that they can go and have a discussion that is just focused on sledging. It is a word that the member for Brighton often uses, and I think it is a word that is very apt for today's attempt by the government to pad out that –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: Nasty. It is nasty. It is nasty that you would want to take away the focus from the good people of Victoria and take away from the issues in Victoria to focus on a nasty, cheap little debate – or a series of debates, because they have got quite a few here – of no value to Victorians whatsoever. We would not, after this adjourned debate, end up with a better Victoria. No, we will end up with a nastier Victoria if we adjourn this debate. If we adjourn this debate to go on to the government’s filibustering sledge motion, we will be left a poorer state than we are already. It is pretty hard to imagine that we could sink to lower depths. We have seen the calibre of the Premier’s tenor this week, where she has regularly spoken of misinformation. The only misinformation is coming from this government. Obviously the two months over Christmas were not used to create a good legislative agenda. They were used for focus groups. They were used for focus groups to come up with words like ‘misinformation’, and we do not need to talk about that this afternoon.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, 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, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, 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, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keefe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

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

Council’s agreement

The SPEAKER (16:03): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025 without amendment.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (16:04): I move:

That the consideration of government business, order of the day 3, be postponed until later this day.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the government moved from the previous item, which automatically moves it to the next item, and we had the call.

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that the item on the agenda be postponed, not considered. Therefore nobody has the call.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:05): We will have a 30-minute debate on this, won’t we, a second 30-minute speech, because –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: The Leader of the House, embarrassed – twice procedurally you have failed, Leader of the House. Twice you have failed today, Leader of the House. You have lost on one 30-minute debate –

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you will address your comments through the Chair and cease yelling.

James NEWBURY: I am not yelling.

The SPEAKER: I ask you not to reflect on the Chair, member for Brighton. Through the Chair, not across the table.

James NEWBURY: Speaker, may I seek your guidance?

The SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order, member for Brighton?

James NEWBURY: I do. On a point of order, Speaker, are there any standing orders that relate to how I speak?

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you to address your comments through the Chair.

James NEWBURY: Fine, of course. I would say, to update the house, what has happened this afternoon is the government said to us they wanted to come in here and move to a sledge motion, and they did not realise that we could debate that. So we have just had a 30-minute debate on whether or not we go to a sledge motion. How embarrassing for the government. And weren't they shocked? I tell you what, the quality of their speakers is not very good at the best of times, but on that debate it was really, really bad. What they also did not realise when the Leader of the House just got up again to move to the sledge motion is we can debate that one too. So we are going to have a 30-minute debate about whether or not this house should move to a sledge motion again.

Do you know what, at the start of this week this Parliament did what it does best. What this Parliament did is deal with two condolence motions where members from across this place spoke from their hearts. They spoke in support of issues that were so incredibly important to Victorians: the horrific events at Bondi and the bushfires that have occurred over summer and are still going. It was the best of what this Parliament does. And how has the government instead bookended this week? They want to go from what this government does best to what Labor does worst – grubby politics. That is what this government has done, and we will spend an hour debating it. We will not even get to the motion. We will briefly get to the motion. And guess who is there first – the Attorney-General. I tell you what, we are worried. We are so worried about being hit by this wet lettuce leaf of an Attorney in her attack to end the week. I tell you what, we are sitting here quaking in our boots.

But I tell you, the Premier and the Leader of the House will be sitting in their offices right now saying, 'How the hell did we get done over twice?' Well, it is because you do not know the game. That is what you do not understand. The Leader of the House got rolled not once but twice – how embarrassing. And for the backbench who are sitting there: this is the tactical genius that is taking you to an election, backbench. This is the tactical genius that is taking you to an election. Can you believe it? A Premier who has come back from summer and said, 'Switch on the nasty. Let's switch on the nasty.' Well, they came into this chamber and tried to be clever and tried to be tactical to position themselves for the end of the week, and they got rolled. Getting rolled once is embarrassing, but when you have 50 people in the chamber – how do you get rolled when you have got 50 people in the chamber? I would say to the backbench: go and knock on the door of the Leader of the House and say, 'How did we get rolled twice?'

Pauline Richards interjected.

James NEWBURY: My gosh, that is right: you got 50 votes, Government Whip, and you could not even control the chamber. How could you not control the chamber?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): Member for Brighton, direct your comments through the Chair.

James NEWBURY: I am just so surprised at seeing how poorly run this chamber is. I appreciate every opportunity to speak on a procedural debate, but to rub salt in the Leader of the House's failure today has been quite sweet. I have to admit it is quite sweet to know that the Premier and the Leader of the House are sitting in there going, 'We got rolled twice. How did it happen?' Because you are not good enough, that is why. And that is the team that is taking Labor to an election. Well, we are going to beat you.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): Before I call the member for Albert Park, I remind members to address their comments through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:10): I think we can agree on something: that there have been some very considered debates and discussions and condolence motions in the chamber that had heartfelt expressions from many in the chamber. Certainly there have been ample opportunities, particularly if we give the example of the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, for all in the chamber who wished to speak on that bill to speak to it, noting the very important and sensitive subject matter that was transacted through the many debates in the chamber. I would not contend that this particular debate that we are having on this particular procedural motion in any way resiles from the sensitivity, maturity and conviction that have been displayed in the chamber with regard to the various legislative reforms that have been put forward with good intentions to the betterment of Victorians in terms of driving important reforms for the benefit of Victorians across all our communities.

Further to that note, it is a deep concern to those on this side of the house that we have been witness to a number of extremist positions, noting that now more than ever it is important to clamp down on extremism. As leaders of our respective communities, we have the privilege of being able to prosecute and transact matters in a way that helps to embed the very best values and the very best position when it comes to matters of, for instance, how we treat members of the LGBTIQ+ community and making sure that equality is genuinely non-negotiable.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this motion is whether item 3 be delayed till later this day – relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): On the point of order of relevance, the member was addressing the remarks by the opposition's opening speaker, but I do ask her to ensure that she stays relevant to the subject matter at hand.

Nina TAYLOR: Duly noted. Certainly this is a procedural motion, but of course in order to be able to adjourn specific debates, you do have to go some way to validate the purpose that we are seeking here, at least on this side of the house, in order to adjourn debate on the matter at hand, and therefore to not go to any rationale whatsoever would not do justice to members of the chamber and the debate that we have before us. I am fully informed and in fact have witnessed many of the debates this week, many that I think do pay heed to some of the most serious matters that we have had to transact in this chamber on behalf of our communities. I think that it can rightly be said that most members of the chamber have indeed sought to honour those matters and have done so in a heartfelt and considered way. I also note that there has been ample opportunity offered to those opposite to transact these matters, hence the justice legislation bill that I was referring to before. No-one on this side of the chamber has in any way sought to reduce in any way the opportunity or capacity of those opposite to participate freely within the rules of the chamber, and obviously honouring and respecting parliamentary processes.

I am simply clarifying that there should be no rational impediment to proceeding as the government is seeking to do. I would not proffer that the opposition have put up a valid rebuttal other than consternation, huff and puff and quite an elevation of noise in the chamber, but I did not actually hear a resounding and well-transacted rebuttal that would in any way seek to go counter to what the government is seeking to do in this moment. Forgive me for a slightly laborious process in terms of being able to validate the position that I am seeking to put before the chamber, but I hope that the position of the government is well understood.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (16:15): We are here today debating this situation that the government have found themselves in – a predicament in fact that they have found themselves in – because they think that it is fit to spend this time in our Parliament, whilst we are representing 7 million Victorians, when we could be debating important bills, use this time when we could be representing our communities, use this time when we could be actually doing things that matter to Victorians, to use and abuse the time in Parliament to sledge the opposition. Well, tell me that we are not living rent-free in their heads when we are over here standing up for our communities, standing up for the things that matter, fighting for our communities, whether it is CFA issues, whether it is local issues, whether it is local roads that we are defending and we are advocating for on behalf of our communities.

Instead they want to abuse the use of this chamber to sledge the opposition. That is incredible to me because this week we were meant to actually speak about and debate the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025. That was something that were meant to speak about this week for children in child protection, vulnerable children across our state, foster care families, children that desperately need their government to work on their behalf, who desperately need the government to actually do what they are meant to do in keeping children safe. But no, instead, in the last hour of the first sitting week back in Victorian Parliament, the government has chosen to go down the nasty route and spend the last hour debating something that does not even matter to Victorians: sledging the opposition.

Instead of talking about Victorians, what matters to them, fighting for their communities and those important things that we are here to do as parliamentarians, that we are here to do on behalf of the 7 million Victorians that we represent, they think that it is the right thing to do, the right thing to spend Parliament's time doing, to sledge the opposition. Well, tell me there is not an election coming up. Tell me that they are not worried. Tell me that they are not concerned. That speaks to me of some desperation from the government.

Sitting suspended 4:18 pm until 4:38 pm.

Nicole WERNER: Well, that was definitely not on the bingo card for today. Resuming on –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Nicole WERNER: Anything to stop me. That is right, Leader of the Nationals. Getting back to the procedural motion at hand before we had to vacate for a fire drill – I am not sure if it was a drill or an actual evacuation, but never mind – we are here talking about this procedural motion on moving to the motion that the government want to talk about and that they think is worth speaking about in the first week back in Parliament for 2026. In a crucial year for Victorians when they have a choice between this tired, stale, corrupt government and a fresh start for Victorians, they think that it is befitting to use this time in Parliament to sledge the opposition, to occupy their minds and talk day in, day out about all of the things they want to direct Victorians to believe about the opposition and the Liberals and the Nationals. It just beggars belief that that is the way they think their time is best spent here in this house, where we have been mandated by the people, where we have been voted in by our electorates and where we have been entrusted by our communities to represent them here in Parliament to fight for them, to fight for better cost-of-living relief for them, to fight for a better way of life for them and to fight for the things that matter to them in their communities. That is what we should be spending our time on here in Parliament.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:40): I first just want to thank the staff of the Parliament, the clerks and everyone that helped evacuate us in such an orderly manner. Certainly we did that in an orderly manner. We all stood together down in the garden there, and that is the first time since the start of the Pesutto court case that I have seen all the Liberals stand together.

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

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): Member for Frankston, I uphold the point of order. Can you return to the subject that is relevant.

Paul EDBROOKE: I take your advice on that of course. I think the member for Warrandyte is wrong. The member for Warrandyte said that we want to speak on something that Victorians are not interested in. I think especially in light of this week, when we have had condolence motions on the Bondi massacre and also the fires that are still going on in Victoria, that people want to know about times when people are radicalised. People want to know what is going on with people who push conspiracy theories, because that is often connected to radicalisation. That is often connected to some pretty deep and dark things in our community. I disagree with the member for Warrandyte in the notion that this is something that our community are not interested in. Speaking as the member for Frankston, I can say our community is very interested in this. They want to know why people in this chamber would be the ones to actually allow people the opportunity to spew vile hate, to influence people with lies.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a motion to adjourn item 3. I do not know what the member is speaking on, but this is an adjournment motion for item 3.

Paul EDBROOKE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been entirely consistent with the opposition speakers on this, so if I am being called out of order in any way, they have been out of order the whole time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I do not uphold the point of order. Debates about the relative interest or urgency of matters on the notice paper are a common part of these procedural debates.

Paul EDBROOKE: I understand the opposition are very sensitive. They have had an incident in their party room that is a workplace incident. In any other workplace the Leader of the Opposition would be in a tribunal answering for why she could not keep a member of her party safe and that family safe from Liberals.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is an abuse. Firstly, the member is casting aspersions on another member. But on relevance to the motion, clearly there is no question that the member is using this procedural motion as an opportunity to sledge, and it is outrageous.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I ruled, as you know, member for Brighton, on a point of order about 20 seconds ago. I trust that the member will return to the subject matter at hand shortly.

Paul EDBROOKE: On this motion we have had the member for Warrandyte talk about how we should not move forward to a different motion and how that would be insignificant to Victorians. Unbelievably, I sit here and must confess that the only thing that is insignificant to Victorians is those opposite. To even stand there and think they know what Victorians think, to stand there and tell us what they think Victorians care about and tell us what they think this gallery should hear – what the people of Victoria should hear this Legislative Assembly talk about – is unbelievable and it is unbecoming. This chamber has certainly – I agree with those opposite and MPs on this side that have spoken – seen the best of this Parliament. We have seen in the last couple of years some bills and legislation come through this place where we have had some of the best debates and some of the most heartfelt contributions.

But today we are at the end of the week. I think some people on the opposite side of the chamber are a little bit tired. I think it is time to have a Bonox and a bit of a lie-down. They are very stirred up about this. It is not something to get upset about. The people of Victoria are concerned about conspiracy theorists. They are concerned about the radicalisation of certain groups in our community, and they are concerned because it affects them entirely.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:45): The member for Frankston just talked about it being 'unbelievable and unbecoming' from the opposition. How unbecoming of the government of the state of Victoria that we are having this mess this week. A government that cannot control its own legislative program had to withdraw a very good, important piece of legislation about child protection.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Leader of the House is now saying, 'We had to do that to accommodate other things,' yet they have moved motions at 3:30 on Thursday to move on to a sledge motion about the opposition. And it is not just this one, it has been the case all week. If you look at what the government of Victoria and the Premier of Victoria have been doing this week, it is not about the people of Victoria, it is not about the people of regional Victoria; it is all about what the opposition is up to. We have seen more effort from the so-called leadership of this state this week about looking at the diary of the Leader of the Opposition than we have about looking after Victorians. This motion is a continuation of that: desperation to get to a motion that, I might add, is from August last year and refers to the previous Leader of the Opposition – it is not even about the current Leader of the Opposition – and talks about personally appointed representatives. Who are they? What is that? I almost want to bring on the debate, because I do not think they would even know who they are talking about now. They have forgotten it in the annals of history. They want to go on to this debate at a time when we have a state that is nearly \$200 billion in debt, that will be facing \$29 billion of interest every day in a couple of years. We have got a crime crisis, with crime through the roof, up 29 per cent since this Premier came to office. We have got a housing crisis. We have got rent spiralling because under this government we have had 60-odd new taxes –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we are on a procedural motion. I ask that you call the Leader of the Nationals back to this narrow debate. He is quite frankly exploiting the goodwill of people in this chamber on his feet, and his contributions today have been far from relevant.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I ask the member for Gippsland South, who had been speaking on the subject matter at hand, to ensure he continues to do so.

Danny O'BRIEN: In defence of the Leader of the House, she was not here for much of the member for Frankston's contribution, which did not go anywhere near the procedural debate either. But I might say that to decide whether we move on or not I have to talk about the context. We hear that a lot from those on the other side when we ask questions in question time: it is all about providing context. The context is this is a government that wants to move on to a debate about the opposition, not about the people of Victoria, who are facing a crime crisis and a housing crisis. They are seeing rents spiralling through the roof. They have got 60-odd new or increased taxes, 30 of them on property, sending every single Victorian who wants to get into a home into difficulty because they cannot afford it. We have got a CFA that is underfunded. We have got a CFA with 230 31-year-old vehicles. And what does the government want to do? It wants to move the Parliament's time on to a debate about not even the current opposition leader but the former opposition leader. That sums up what is happening in this state, that they simply do not –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Leader of the Nationals keeps referring to notice of motion 4, and he cannot even get that right. I might remind him that the matter that we do want to get on to is actually about the personally appointed representatives that are appointed by the opposition and their promotion of conspiracy theories. If he is going to reference the motion that we are going to move on to, then I suggest that he takes the time to get it right.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I do not uphold the point of order.

Danny O'BRIEN: I will not continue on the point of order, but for the benefit of the Leader of the House, she just said I am erroneously speaking about notice of motion 4. That is the one you just read from. It is notice of motion 4 that you want to get to.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is exactly what I just said, Leader of the House. You do not seem to recall what you are actually doing. It talks about the opposition leader's personally appointed representatives, and I challenge you to say who they are.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, 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, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, 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, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Leader of the Opposition

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (16:56): I move:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition's personally appointed representatives for recklessly promoting conspiracy theories and sowing division at a time when Victorians want to be coming together.

Being a leader is about being your authentic, true self; it is not about sometimes being left, sometimes being moderate and sometimes being right-wing.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, this motion is in the member for Carrum's name, but the member for Bentleigh is now speaking to it. That seems odd. Why is that? Is there a procedural requirement for the member for Carrum to speak to this as it is in the name of the member for Carrum?

The SPEAKER: Ministers are interchangeable, member for Sandringham.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you to leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Brighton withdrew from chamber.

Nick STAIKOS: Being a leader is about meeting the Victorian people where they are. The Victorian people are moderate people. The Victorian people are not extremists. You cannot pretend you are moderate when you march at Pride and then cosy up to One Nation. You cannot pretend you are moderate when fending off a teal challenge in your electorate of Kew and then cosy up to One

Nation, knowing that your leadership is propped up by the most extreme elements of your party. Being a leader is about being authentic. While those opposite dance with extremists, the Allan Labor government is enshrining the right to work from home into law. While those opposite dance with extremists, the Allan Labor government is –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Rowville, it is not too late to remove you from the chamber.

Kim Wells interjected.

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

Member for Rowville withdrew from chamber.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I understand that this is the member for Carrum's motion and the member for Bentleigh is now speaking to it –

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

Brad Rowswell: I wonder if the member for Bentleigh has actually read it, because, on relevance, what the member for Bentleigh is speaking to at the minute has nothing to do with notice of motion 4, as I read it.

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

Nick STAIKOS: While those opposite continuously dance with extremists, it is the Allan Labor government that has introduced 150 rental reforms that have ensured that Victoria is the fairest place in which to rent. While those opposite dance with extremists, it is the Allan Labor government that has built the Metro Tunnel, the biggest transport project since the city loop. While those opposite dance with extremists, it is the Allan Labor government that is funding our schools, funding our hospitals and making Victoria a fairer place to live. While those opposite dance with extremists, it is the Allan Labor government that is addressing the cost of living by introducing free TAFE and by introducing free kinder. The people of Victoria are moderate people; they are not extremists like those in the Liberal Party. Those in the Liberal Party –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The member will have the call when the house returns to this debate.

Bills

Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Emma Kealy's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to reflect further consultation with the medical sector.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Lowan has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. She has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words that have been circulated. The question is:

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

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Lowan should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (54): 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, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): 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, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.**Motion agreed to.****Read second time.**

Third reading

Motion agreed to.**Read third time.**

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time, government amendments 1 to 3 inclusive be agreed to and the bill be now read a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (77): 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, Emma Vulin, 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

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 31 insert –
 - “(iii) 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) of that Act (incitement on ground of protected attribute) or section 195O(1) of that Act (threaten physical harm or property damage on ground of protected attribute) unless the accused is under the age of 18 years; and”.
2. Page 57, after line 18 insert the following heading –
 - “**Part 8A – Anti-vilification and social cohesion**”.
3. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 76 and the heading proposed by amendment 2 –
 - ‘**76A Section 195Q substituted**
 - For section 195Q of the **Crimes Act 1958** substitute –
 - “**195Q Prosecution of offences**
 - A prosecution for an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) –
 - (a) may only be commenced by the Director of Public Prosecutions or a police officer; and
 - (b) if the prosecution is of a person under the age of 18 years, may only be commenced by a police officer with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions.”.
 - 76B New section 640C inserted**
 - After section 640B of the **Crimes Act 1958** insert –
 - “**640C Transitional provision – Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Act 2025**
 - Section 195Q as substituted by Part 8A of the **Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Act 2025** applies in relation to an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) irrespective of when the offence is alleged to have been committed.”.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Boroondara police station

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:10): (1509) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I am seeking is for the Premier to provide the funding and resources required for Boroondara police station to remain open 24 hours a day. Last month reception hours at Boroondara police station were quietly reduced to 10 am to 6 pm. Residents of Kew, like all Victorians, should feel safe in their homes and communities all hours of the day and night, yet that

basic expectation is being undermined by police stations that are no longer funded to operate on a 24-hour basis. Under the Allan Labor government dozens of police stations across the state have had their operating hours reduced. The hardworking men and women of Victoria Police are being asked to do more with less. Closing police stations overnight sends the wrong message to both the community and those who work hard to actually protect our community.

Police stations are more than bricks and mortar; they are visible symbols of safety, reassurance and accountability. When a station is open 24 hours, it provides a place of refuge for people in crisis and a point of contact for urgent in-person assistance. The pressure on Victoria Police is already immense. Officers are dealing with increasingly complex and demanding workloads. They are responding to home invasions and robberies. There are family violence and mental health callouts. They are dealing with retail theft, knife crime and serious assaults. Crime rates continue to spike in Victoria, including in the electorate of Kew. Yet despite this, Victoria Police's own data shows that there are now 367 fewer full-time police officers than when the Premier came to office. More crime, fewer police – that is Victoria under the Premier and Labor.

In Boroondara total offences increased by 20 per cent in the year to September 2025. This included a 26 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft, a 10 per cent increase in home invasions, a 34 per cent increase in residential non-aggravated burglary, a 10 per cent increase in serious assault, an 11 per cent increase in prohibited weapon offences and an 18 per cent increase in retail offences. Expecting police to maintain community safety without adequately funding around-the-clock police stations to operate only compounds these challenges and places further strain on an already stretched police force. We saw the horrible incident in Reservoir earlier this year where a woman sought refuge at a police station only to find it closed under the Labor government in this state. She was pursued to the police station. She was slashed in the arm, and she was refused any assistance at that police station. I ask the Premier to provide the funding required to reopen Boroondara police station 24 hours.

Werribee electorate infrastructure projects

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:13): (1510) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate to see the different projects that we have funded through the Growing Suburbs Fund. The Werribee electorate is not just growing, it is thriving. Partnering with Wyndham City Council, the Allan Labor government has supported dozens of projects across Wyndham to build community facilities to bring us together. I am particularly looking forward to seeing the work on the new Presidents Park events access and facilities. This park is at the heart of our community and is the site of many amazing Holi and Diwali festivals. The Labor government is on the side of my growing and thriving community, providing these spaces which help us connect and come together in a positive way. I look forward to welcoming the minister to my electorate.

Bairnsdale hospital

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (17:14): (1511) My adjournment is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to expedite the master planning process for the Bairnsdale hospital this financial year. As a bit of background, in 2022 the board did undertake a master planning process and developed a comprehensive future development plan. But I am advised that the plan that was actually completed back then was done without the approved entity service plan, so it did not have the support of the Victorian Health Building Authority. The Department of Health's health planning unit and the Bairnsdale Regional Health Service have now completed and endorsed that entity service plan. This plan confirmed what we are already very, very aware of in this community, and that is that we have a big, pronounced deficiency in points of care in the emergency department. We need additional treatment spaces in our ED and resuscitation spaces, as well as some purpose-built treatment spaces. Presently the situation is we have a nine-cubicle emergency department. That not only does not meet the needs of our growing community, but when we have a

large holiday influx into our area, it really exacerbates the problem. The hospital needs to meet our future population growth demands as well as our increased tourism visitations at that time of the year.

Our community does deserve a hospital that meets not only our future demands but our current demands, and it is not even meeting our current demands. The minister might also recall that I stood in this place not long ago and spoke about the lift that has malfunctioned, necessitating unsafe stair transfer for elderly patients and also women in the maternity ward having to come downstairs if they need a caesarean – totally inappropriate in this day and age. I seek the minister's assistance to expedite the master planning process, which will avoid compromised health outcomes for not only our local community in East Gippsland but visitors to the area. We need a new hospital, and we need this plan done to start the process.

Community safety

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:16): (1512) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education. I ask the minister to provide me with an update on what the Allan Labor government is doing to combat antisemitism through the education system. This week we rose to express our deep condolences to the victims of the antisemitic attack in Bondi, to their families and to the Jewish community across Australia who carry the weight of that evil crime. Two gunmen with hatred in their hearts turned what should have been a joy-filled celebration of Hanukkah into a deadly massacre. Fifteen innocent lives were lost, among them young Matilda, just 10 years old. It is impossible to say her name without feeling the enormity of what has been taken. Something shattered that day in Bondi. This beach which is so symbolic of our carefree, fun-loving, peaceful nation was suddenly the scene of violence and hatred beyond belief. But I want to be clear: this was not random violence. This was antisemitism in its most brutal form, and we must be honest about the context.

Antisemitism is not new. It is an ancient hatred that has endured for centuries, mutating, resurfacing and finding new language and new platforms. Sometimes it is subtle; increasingly it is overt, and it has permeated our society in ways that Jewish Australians have been warning about for years – rising hatred and vitriol against peaceful Jewish Australians simply going about their lives, alarmingly spreading far beyond the usual suspects of far right wing Nazi idolisers. Extreme views are increasingly platformed and normalised. Even in my own electorate I have seen it firsthand: antisemitic graffiti scrawled across buildings. I cannot even repeat the phrases; they are too disturbing. On my own office and other buildings, businesses are marked with symbols used by the terrorist organisation Hamas. Jewish businesses, creatives and families are quietly relocating because they no longer feel safe where they once called home. These are not abstract incidents. These are real people, real communities, living in real fear. And it is shameful, the irresponsible behaviour of the Greens and socialists in this. They should be unequivocally condemning antisemitic behaviour. Instead they contort in any way possible to deflect from it. Fifteen Australians were murdered in cold blood, and we see threats against Jews scrawled on our streets still.

Australia's special envoy to combat antisemitism spoke to the need to better embed education about the Holocaust and modern antisemitism in schools to grow the crucial understanding that we need to counter prejudice. It is something Victoria has already been leading on, making it mandatory curriculum in high schools in our state. Education is a powerful tool. It dispels the false choice between caring for one community and caring for another. It replaces fear with knowledge, and it teaches that racism, bigotry and violence have no place here. May the memories of those lost in Bondi be a blessing, and may our response be worthy of them.

Bus services

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:19): (1513) My matter tonight is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and my action I am seeking is to conduct an immediate audit of the Melbourne bus operators to ascertain how many buses are at capacity and are thus leaving children on the side of the road during school pick-up and drop-off hours. It has come to my attention from a number of schools, particularly in growth areas and in the outer north-east of Melbourne, that in this school year, as schools have

returned for the last week and a half, many buses are now at absolute capacity – these are buses on regular bus routes, not school buses – and as a consequence bus drivers are not able to take the children who are seeking to take the bus to school because of kids now catching the bus and the capacity issues being so great that kids are being left on the side of the road. I understand there are at least half-a-dozen schools, large schools, in active discussion with the Department of Transport and Planning seeking to rectify this circumstance due to the safety concerns you would expect, particularly for younger kids, let us say, in high school, in year 7, year 8, and girls schools in particular, where kids are being left on the side of the road because capacity issues are seeing those children unable to board. If the buses are at crush capacity, the drivers are not going to take more people on them quite obviously. They have a responsibility and a duty of care, and they certainly would not break that.

What we do need to know is how many of these routes are at capacity and how many school students are suffering as a result. Parents, quite obviously, me included, drop their children off at a bus stop in the morning expecting not only that the bus will turn up but that they will be able to get on it, and that is a reasonable expectation from every parent across the metropolitan area and I understand in some regional areas. So I am asking the minister, through her department, to conduct this audit for the sake of the safety and security of all children who take buses to school and for the obvious wellbeing of all children and the bus drivers involved.

Women's health

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:21): (1514) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Health and concerns the findings of the inquiry into women's pain. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on the Allan Labor government's response to the inquiry's findings in the *Bridging the Gender Pain Gap* report for women in my electorate of Narre Warren South. In 2024 I facilitated a women's pain forum, which was attended by the minister and was led by the wonderful Kit McMahon and Zoe Francis from Women's Health in the South East. Representatives from local organisations in my community came together to share their stories and to help form WHISE's submission to the inquiry. It was a powerful event, and I deeply appreciate all of those who contributed on that day. Within this setting women voiced their concerns, validating the experience of others within our current health system. We were so grateful for the minister's attendance to personally digest the genuine grievances of many women attempting to traverse an often flawed and dismissive health system for women.

By supporting the request for this inquiry the Allan Labor government has led the way in driving lasting systemic change for generations to come. It recognises that women's health was previously trivialised, misinterpreted and underserved in medical systems designed by and for men. Thanks to the 13,000 contributors statewide who shared their stories and experiences. The landmark report into women's pain confirms something women already know all too well: that their pain is real and the system needs to be better. Plans are now underway for another local women's pain forum in my electorate through WHISE, with topics including the government's response to findings in the *Bridging the Gender Pain Gap* report. I look forward to sharing the minister's response at the upcoming forum.

Merri-bek North education plan

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:23): (1515) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is an update on the implementation of the Merri-bek North education plan. The member for Pascoe Vale and I were proud to secure this education plan for our local high schools, and we have seen it deliver more subject choice, closer collaboration between schools, partnerships with universities and a master plan for the Glenroy College, which has been completed and includes a leading-edge science, technology, engineering, arts and maths hub. I know the Deputy Premier is proud of our Labor government's record \$18 billion investment in building, upgrading and modernising Victoria's schools. Certainly one of my proudest achievements was securing \$14.5 million for the new science and visual arts building and food technology hub at John

Fawkner College, something I have been advocating for since discussions back in 2018 with the school council reps, including current mayor Nat Abboud. We were all very disappointed with the building delays but pleased that a new builder has now been appointed and work has recommenced. This building will be transformative for the school and for the Fawkner community. Changes are already happening at John Fawkner, with some impressive VCE results and recent growth in NAPLAN, thanks to the dedication of the wonderful teachers, leadership and staff.

It is also wonderful to see the community getting behind the school. We saw the big impact that this had at Coburg High some years ago, and I thank Cate Hall for her leadership. I will be attending the community-led forum next Thursday, and I am looking forward to hearing ideas on how we can all work together to best support growing enrolments in the coming years. I have also committed to ongoing meetings with the forum organisers and the school and would welcome close involvement from the department to ensure we have the resourcing, support and programs needed to further increase subject choice, enrolments and outcomes.

I have always believed that every child deserves access to a quality public school close to home, and my commitment to our community is lifelong. During my time on council I was able to secure joint local and state funding for the performing arts centre at Glenroy College, and we delivered the fabulous shared sports facilities at John Fawkner. They have just recently received another state government grant through active schools, and in partnership with Merri-bek council we have also upgraded the sports fields at Glenroy College.

Equality starts with education. It is our most powerful tool to improve lives, lift society and give everyone the opportunity of a life of dignity and purpose. This is why Labor governments invest so heavily in education and early years. I have also been proud to deliver the new government run and owned Wimbi early years centre at Moomba Park and major upgrades of Fawkner Primary, and Labor has also recently launched the Broadmeadows university campus hub led by La Trobe. I have delivered the \$60 million health and community care centre of excellence at Kangan Institute, and our new Broadmeadows tech school is fast approaching completion. Education has been my number one priority since I was first elected as the member for Broadmeadows three years ago, and it will remain so for the entire time I have the privilege of representing my community.

Clyde North police station

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:26): (1516) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police, and my action I ask of him is to enter into his diary a time that he can come out to open the Clyde North police station. The Clyde North police station seems to have fallen out of the diary, and I have no doubt I know why. It has fallen out because of the fact that they did not actually put Victoria Police officers in the Clyde North police station. I note the member for Werribee said it is not up to the government because what happens with Victoria Police is an operational decision. But he has not been here long enough to have history with the member for Bellarine, and the member for Bellarine stated in this place that they directed the Chief Commissioner of Police to put police into their electorate. When those police went down to that electorate, it was not done by the commissioner and it was not done by the staff allocation model, which is used to try and decide where Victoria Police go; it was a direct decision by the police minister. So I have to ask: why is it okay for a Labor minister to appoint Victoria Police officers to protect their own community but not to put them into a \$30 million station in Clyde North, where crime is going up at such a substantial rate that people feel unsafe?

But the real reason I really want the minister to come out there to open up the station is because I want to highlight to every victim out there that they have been misled by every single member, including the member for Cranbourne, the member for Bass, the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Narre Warren South, who were all happy to stand there with the sign saying 'We're building this station'. But they all lied, because they all said that they were going to have new police at that station. They misled the community.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will call you out, member for Berwick, on unparliamentary language.

Brad BATTIN: They did tell an untruth. They misled their community by saying that they were going to put Victoria Police officers out there to respond to crimes. I know if I ring 000 and no-one from the station is there available to turn up, that is a real problem. But despite this, I am going to be nice to Labor for a minute. To give credit to the government, they are upgrading Narre Warren police station. But whilst they are doing that, they have put them all into a place that they have got to rent around the corner in Narre Warren. Yet just down the road in Clyde North they have got an empty police station. Why couldn't they have just relocated the police from Narre Warren down to Clyde North during the time of the reconstruction and then brought them back, possibly saving \$200,000 or more in what it is costing them to do it? This is how Labor wastes money. This is how Labor absolutely wastes money. The reality is that what we should have been doing is making sure that Victoria Police officers are available to respond to emergencies, because people in Clyde, Clyde North, Cranbourne North and those areas have been ripped off by Labor again, and they are no safer because of mistakes from the Allan Labor government.

Metro Tunnel

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:29): (1517) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister meet with students from Cranbourne to discuss and hear about how their journey to university is going to be so much shorter now. Cranbourne is an aspirational community. We have got some amazing schools. Cranbourne West Secondary College of course has just been featured in the *Age* for its results – a school that is only a few years old and is already getting the type of ATAR results that absolutely demonstrate the best of our educators and the best of our students. Cranbourne Secondary College, obviously so ably led by David Coy, has some topnotch students doing amazing things at university. Both campuses at St Peters – the east and west campus – have students who are aspiring to go to universities, and many have been at St Peter's, including so many of our wonderful students who finished VCE last year. Cranbourne East is another extraordinary school with the sorts of results and the sort of environment that make my heart sing. And of course Lighthouse Christian College have had, like so many of the other schools, an amazing year of results.

So where will they go to university? Many of them are looking forward to going to RMIT, to the University of Melbourne or to TAFE. Many of them are going to be doing health sciences. For nurses getting into Parkville, their train trip, their commute, will be so much shorter. I am looking forward to the minister meeting with these students, hearing about how important it is and fully enjoying the celebration of what Melbourne Metro means for Cranbourne.

Wicklow Avenue–Devon Street, Croydon

David HODGETT (Croydon) (17:31): (1518) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to investigate the safety and operational performance of the intersection at 59 Wicklow Avenue and Devon Street in Croydon. The intersection was created as part of the Coolstore Road level crossing removal project to link Devon Street with Wicklow Avenue. The creation of this new intersection places the driveway of Divine Dental Care, at 59 Wicklow Avenue, in the centre of the intersection, directly facing Devon Street. The intersection configuration has seen the dental clinic witness many near-misses when their patients try to exit from the car park driveway. Cars travelling along Wicklow Avenue from Mount Dandenong Road approach the dental clinic from around the bend, which makes it nearly impossible for drivers to see cars exiting from the clinic driveway until it is too late. The traffic light signal timings also give little time for cars to exit from the clinic driveway without the next light sequence starting, which allows the cars from Devon Street to flow into the intersection, blocking the availability for patients to exit safely from the clinic. The dental clinic have previously raised their concerns with Maroondah City Council, the Level Crossing Removal Project, VicRoads and the Ombudsman. My office also wrote to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; however, it was advised responsibilities fall under the transport infrastructure portfolio, referring the matter for consideration. With multiple near-misses occurring since the creation of the intersection, action must be taken before a tragedy occurs again.

The action I am seeking is to investigate the safety and operational performance of the intersection at 59 Wicklow Avenue and Devon Street, Croydon.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:33): It is a great pleasure to be able to respond to the member for Narre Warren South and his question regarding the outcomes of the nation-leading pain inquiry that was conducted here in Victoria by the Allan Labor government. As I know the member knows, 13,000 women and girls responded to that inquiry. We were really overcome by the number of responses, and reading the direct experience of so many women has been extraordinarily powerful. Of course we are a government that is committed to taking action on the outcomes of the pain inquiry, so it was fantastic to be able to join with the Premier and indeed the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health the member for Northcote and other government members at the women's health clinic in Epping in November to release the report and announce three immediate actions that the government would take. But before I talk you through those actions, let me tell you a little bit more about what our report found.

From the respondents, 90 per cent told us that they had experienced pain and they were living with pain for longer than a year. Of that cohort, 54 per cent were living with that pain daily. Eighty-nine per cent told us that their pain impacted their mental health. For me, one of the most powerful outcomes of the inquiry was the experience of women telling us that they had been prescribed antidepressants to deal with their poor mental health but that was very frustrating because their poor mental health was in large part caused by living with pain. So there was no real attempt to address the root cause of their poor health. What we also found is the most common causes of the pain that women were living with included menstrual and hormonal pain; endometriosis, which we have at last spoken a lot about in this place; and – they are hard words in health – musculoskeletal pain. Of course arthritis is an autoimmune condition which impacts women at a much higher proportion than it impacts men.

Women told us that their key barrier to care was not actually being believed or having their concerns dismissed. On the one hand women are either not believed when they present with pain or, as we have heard, particularly with regard to menstrual pain, told that it is normal – 'Get on with it, have a Panadol, just keep going.' So it is really important that the three responses that we announced on the day include the establishment of an adolescent and children's clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital that will target in particular adolescent girls who are experiencing significant period pain and indeed pelvic pain. Again, many of us have been told through our lives that period pain is normal. This causes great alarm to experts in this area, because women then no longer seek the help that they should be getting. They normalise this pain, and yet we know that it can often be a symptom of things like endometriosis.

The short answer to the question is this clinic is going to be an absolute game changer, and we anticipate that the clinic will enable the treatment of a range of conditions, including endometriosis, a lot earlier. Of course many women do not actually get a diagnosis of endometriosis until the time when they try to have a baby and they have challenges with their fertility. That is when they find out that they have got endo.

One of the second responses to the pain inquiry was to ensure that we provide our 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs that our Labor government has established right across Victoria with the green whistle as an option for women who are seeking the insertion of an IUD. The IUD is a very effective form of contraception, but some women experience pain with the insertion of an IUD, and to date there has not been any real attention to pain relief. The green whistle means that women are in control of this procedure and it will enable, we think and we hope to see, a greater take-up of the IUD, which, as I said, is a very effective, long lasting form of contraception. Certainly there are many gynaecologists who would recommend it above other types of contraception as meeting the needs of many more women.

Thirdly, we will work to develop a women's pain standard. This is about working with our clinicians, who, again, I want to say, really want to do the right thing but often have felt that they have not got the knowledge to treat the concerns of women. With a women's pain standard we want to give women an assurance that they can expect a certain level of care when it comes to dealing with pain and indeed access to pain relief. I should point out too that some of the research that we have at our disposal indicates that men are much more likely to be offered pain relief, and indeed the pain relief that they are offered is much more effective than that that is offered to women. For reasons that have no basis in fact, women are expected to have a higher pain threshold. We have got to bust these myths, because we deserve pain relief too. To the member, I hope that that goes some of the way to outlining some of the findings in the report and the action that our government is taking. Again, I congratulate you and indeed I congratulate all Labor members who have taken the opportunity to host these important events in their electorates.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and I might take the opportunity to remind the member for Kew that it is in fact police command that make the decisions about the deployment of police officers. Nonetheless, I will ensure that the Premier receives that request. The member for Werribee raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and I am sure the minister would be absolutely delighted to come out to Werribee and see how the Growing Suburbs Fund is being put to great use in his electorate to meet the needs of his fantastic and growing community. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the attention of the Minister of Health Infrastructure, and the action he seeks is that the minister expedite a master plan for Bairnsdale hospital. It is a beautiful hospital. I visited that hospital of course. Please pass on my regards to the hardworking staff there at Bairnsdale.

The member for Northcote raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action that she seeks is an update on the work that we are doing to ensure that we are tackling antisemitism in our schools through the curriculum and indeed building on our commitment to ensure that Holocaust education is in fact compulsory in the school system. The member for Bulleen, who has left the premises, raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. Again it was great to hear the member for Broadmeadows talk about her hard work securing so many investments for her electorate. The action she seeks is that the minister provide an update on the Merri-bek North education plan. Of course in the year that we are celebrating 100 brand new schools being opened in our state, built by our government, I am sure the minister cannot wait to come out and meet with you.

The member for Berwick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action that he seeks is that Clyde North police station be staffed with police. Again, as a former police officer I would have thought the member for Berwick would also know that visible policing is about actually having police on the street, and our new Chief Commissioner of Police has made this an absolute priority of his. Nonetheless, I imagine the Minister for Police looks forward to answering that question.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick, the house is still in session. I ask you to refer to members by their correct titles or leave the chamber.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Berwick.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: And in your seat.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick!

Brad Battin interjected.

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

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Once again I expect that the minister will be delighted to take up the opportunity to meet with students and talk through the way in which Melbourne Metro is just opening up so many more opportunities for the students in her electorate to access a world-class education so much more easily and speedily with the investment of our government. The member for Croydon raised a matter also for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that he is seeking is work on an intersection at Devon Street and Wicklow Avenue in Croydon that he has some significant concerns about.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Can I once again, as always, thank our clerks and hardworking parliamentary staff. The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 5:44 pm.