

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Friday 22 May 2026

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Paul Hamer MP, Minister for Youth Justice; and

Dr Emma Cassar, Secretary,

Jodi Henderson, Commissioner, Youth Justice,

Nicola Quin, Chief Operating Officer,

Emma Catford, Deputy Secretary, Justice Services and Regulation,

Monica Tulloch, Executive Director, Custodial Operations, and

Stephanie Ng, Executive Director, Policy, Strategy and Performance, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Youth Justice the Honourable Paul Hamer, as well as officials from DJCS. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Paul HAMER: Thank you, Chair. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging and any traditional owners who may be in the room today or watching online. I am joined today by Dr Emma Cassar, the Secretary of the department; Emma Catford, the Deputy Secretary for Justice Health; and Jodi Henderson, the Commissioner for Youth Justice.

Visual presentation.

Paul HAMER: Next page. The Allan Labor government's vision for youth justice is a nation-leading system that keeps Victorians safe by supervising children and young people that need it and giving these young people the structure and support they need to turn their lives around. This means early intervention before offending begins, it means supervising young people in the community where that is called for and, for the most serious and violent offences, it means custody that keeps them off our streets and gives them the structure and support they need to choose a better path, and all of this underpinned by programs that tackle the root causes of offending, backed by robust evidence, because real community safety requires tough consequences on serious offending, the right support to turn lives around and stopping offending before it starts.

The 2026–27 Victorian budget delivers targeted investment to strengthen the youth justice system and keep the community safe. This includes investing \$229 million as part of the government's community safety package to ramp up capacity across prisons and youth justice centres. We are investing \$8.6 million to make the system safer and more effective, including more lived experience mentoring and programs that work, and we are backing key recommendations of the South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group, because we know that we can deliver better outcomes when we invest in new solutions that are shaped by and delivered with the community.

The Allan Labor government has been very clear that community safety is a top priority. This is why we strengthened Victoria's bail laws. It is why we introduced adult time for violent crime to deliver serious consequences for violent offences, more likelihood of a sentence and longer sentences. The government has also been clear that we will make the investments necessary to back those reforms. This includes ramping up the youth justice system to meet the extra demand we are seeing. Building on previous investment, this budget funds more than 100 new custodial staff and more capacity at Malmsbury, including the services and supports to help young people address their behaviour. Specialist youth justice teams will also support attendance at the County Court for matters uplifted under the adult time for violent crime reforms. We are backing our community safety reforms with real investment.

Turning to performance, I am pleased to report that youth justice achieved 13 of 14 performance measures in 2024–25. Some of the key measures include 95 per cent of young people on supervised community-based orders having their case plan completed within six weeks and 95 per cent of those on custodial orders having a case plan within six weeks of the commencement of the order. As you can see on the slide, the majority of the 2025–26 measures are also expected to be achieved.

The government passed the landmark *Youth Justice Act* in 2024. Key parts of that Act have already commenced, including raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 and reforms to make youth justice staff safer. The remainder of the Act commences in September this year. The Act creates a standalone end-to-end framework for youth justice that responds to the evolving landscape of youth offending in Victoria. It creates the foundation for a safer youth justice system and a safer Victoria. It also supports our continued efforts to address over-representation in the youth justice system, with clear principles and better supports for Aboriginal children and young people.

In conclusion, the Allan Labor government is delivering a modern and effective youth justice system designed to keep Victorians safe with the legislation and the investment to back it up, because we know that an effective youth justice system is one that holds young people accountable in an age-appropriate way, addresses the root causes of offending and, most important of all, prevents offending behaviour before it starts. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to Mr Pesutto.

John PESUTTO: Minister, I have a range of questions. But before I do, can I just ask for the record: do you still believe that the age of criminal responsibility should be raised to the age of 14?

Paul HAMER: The government's position, and my position, is that we raised the age of criminal responsibility to 12, and that is where it should be.

John PESUTTO: You did advocate previously for it to be raised to 14. Have you changed your mind, your personal view?

Paul HAMER: Well, Mr Pesutto, I do not recall that that was actually part of anything that I have been advocating for, but my position is the same as the government's position – that the age of responsibility should have been raised to 12, and that outcome was done.

John PESUTTO: And it will not go any higher? It will never go any higher under your government?

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: Please let the minister answer.

Paul HAMER: The government's position, and my position, is that the age of criminal responsibility should be 12.

John PESUTTO: And just for the record, you are ruling out that it will go any higher?

Paul HAMER: I am not sure –

John PESUTTO: If you cannot, that is okay.

Paul HAMER: I do not know how many different ways I can say it: the age of responsibility has been set by this government and the age of responsibility has been lifted to 12, and there are no plans to change that.

John PESUTTO: Thank you, Minister. The departmental questionnaire, page 11 – can I ask you, Minister: the community safety package, youth justice components contain no specific performance measures. How can that be so when addressing the crime crisis is so important?

Paul HAMER: Sorry, can you –

John PESUTTO: Page 11, questionnaire.

Paul HAMER: Page 11 of the –

John PESUTTO: The questionnaire.

Paul HAMER: Questionnaire. If I can just go to it – if you bear with us one moment.

John PESUTTO: Perhaps I can ask just generally: amidst a crime crisis, and I think we all agree a youth crime crisis, isn't it important to have performance measures for every output, just as a general matter of policy? You would agree with that, wouldn't you, Minister?

Paul HAMER: There are a range of department performance statements which are related to the youth justice space.

John PESUTTO: But for that one in particular?

Paul HAMER: For which one in particular?

John PESUTTO: Community safety package, youth justice components.

Paul HAMER: Sorry, can I just ask you which particular package you are referring to?

John PESUTTO: Community safety package, youth justice components.

Paul HAMER: The community safety package – the activities undertaken under that package are talking about the operationalisation of 88 rooms across Parkville and Cherry Creek youth justice precincts. Now, the metric or the performance indicator of an activity such as that would be in the delivery of those facilities, and those facilities have been delivered.

John PESUTTO: We can take that then, that that will be the performance measure. I understand. Minister –

Paul HAMER: No, Mr Pesutto. That is not correct. What I said is, if you are looking at that particular measure, and if you look at the activity undertaken in the questionnaire relating to that community safety package, I am telling you that the bringing on of 88 rooms – they have been delivered. Whether there is a performance indicator or not a performance indicator, in terms of what has been delivered under the community safety package in relation to the provision of facilities, that is the activity that is related to that package, and that is what has been delivered.

John PESUTTO: All right. Minister, I will move on. Who are the funded partners for the community safety program, youth crime prevention program, and how were they chosen? So partners for the community safety program, youth crime prevention – how were they chosen, those partners?

Paul HAMER: Sorry, can you just repeat that question again?

John PESUTTO: Community safety program, youth crime prevention: who are the funded partners for that and how were they chosen? It is questionnaire page 57.

Paul HAMER: Okay. My apologies. We have –

John PESUTTO: We might come back to that if we have time, Minister, but your officials might continue with that. Can I move on to some other questions.

Paul HAMER: Sure.

John PESUTTO: Minister, it is reported in the department's questionnaire at question 3, page 31, that the youth crime prevention and early intervention project has seen its funding for 2025–26 drop by \$1.3 million and that funding has been rephased into 2028–29. Given there is a crime crisis now, why isn't the government spending that money now? Questionnaire, page 31, question 3.

Paul HAMER: Which one are you referring to? The youth crime prevention and early intervention project, is that the one?

John PESUTTO: Yes.

Paul HAMER: The advice that I am getting from the Secretary is that this program is not actually funded under the youth justice portfolio. It is funded under the Minister for Police.

John PESUTTO: So you cannot comment on it?

Paul HAMER: No. I would suggest you follow that up with the Minister for Police.

John PESUTTO: Is there a minister for youth crime prevention?

Paul HAMER: There is a minister for crime prevention. As the Minister for Youth Justice, my responsibilities are related to, particularly, after the individuals have gone through the police process and gone through the courts process, and then managing the offenders after they have been either on a community-based order or on a custodial order.

John PESUTTO: I am grateful for that, Minister. I will keep going. Similarly, the preventing youth offending through early intervention program is described as:

... meeting its objectives in addressing young people's risk factors that drive offending.

But its funding ceases in this budget. Why is that, Minister?

Paul HAMER: Sorry, where are you referring to?

John PESUTTO: Questionnaire, page 70: preventing youth offending through early intervention program.

Paul HAMER: I can talk generally about what our youth crime prevention program is trying to do.

John PESUTTO: I do not want you to – that is okay. If you cannot talk to that specific question –

Paul HAMER: I am just trying to understand. I mean, you are asking about a very specific question within the questionnaire.

John PESUTTO: But its funding ceases.

Paul HAMER: No, that is not correct, actually. If you look at –

John PESUTTO: Well, that is what I was after – an answer.

Paul HAMER: So here you can see in the expenditure there is a budget item in 2025–26. And then there is further continuing funding which was originally made available, I understand, in the 2025–26 budget, which was for two years.

John PESUTTO: How much?

Paul HAMER: Well, it says here, if I am reading the form that you are looking at, which is on page 70, there is \$4.62 million in 2025–26 and \$5.12 million in 2026–27.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you. Thank you, Minister and officials.

Jade BENHAM: Point of order.

John PESUTTO: Point of order. I have got 13 minutes.

The CHAIR: Apologies, that is my mistake.

Jade BENHAM: Did I just win a point of order?

The CHAIR: It does happen, but very rarely.

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: Minister, I will move to another question.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

John PESUTTO: Sorry, Chair, I am not clear on what we are doing. Am I free to proceed? If so, I have lost nearly a minute.

The CHAIR: Thank you for asking. Yes, you have got another 5 minutes.

John PESUTTO: Okay, thank you. Minister, do you want to conclude that answer, or had you concluded it?

Paul HAMER: The Secretary has provided me with advice that that program actually comes under the police and community safety portfolio. It is not actually delivered by the youth justice portfolio. However, if you are referring to that particular line item and program, it does show funding in 2025–26 and 2026–27.

John PESUTTO: Okay, so you are saying the funding does continue. It does not cease. That is your –

Paul HAMER: Well, if you are referring to the item that I think you are referring to, which I believe is page 70 on the questionnaire – ‘Preventing youth offending through early intervention’.

John PESUTTO: Yes, the preventing youth offending through early intervention program.

Paul HAMER: I am reading. It says ‘Expenditure in the financial years 2025–26 and 2026–27’ – I am reading just from that table – ‘\$4.62m’ and ‘\$5.12m’ from 2025–26 and 2026–27 respectively. But in terms of if you wanted to ask further questions about what is delivered under that program other than what is provided in that information, it would probably be best put to the Minister for Police.

John PESUTTO: That is fine, Minister. That is fine. We may have a similar situation with this next question, but Minister, according to page 230 of the questionnaire, ‘Strengthening of youth justice precincts’ spent less money than originally budgeted last year and is listed to spend less money next year than this year. In the midst of a youth crime crisis, how is that?

Paul HAMER: I am happy to talk about what we have been funding in our youth justice. We have been putting an enormous amount of money into our youth justice facilities and our corrections facilities. Last year the 2025–26 budget invested \$727 million to ramp up capacity across both the corrections and the youth justice systems. A component of that went to fund the 88 beds in the facilities at Cherry Creek and Parkville which you have already referred to in terms of one of the other items in the questionnaire. Subsequent to that we have also, through the budget update and particularly in this budget, invested a further \$229 million into capacity enhancements. These capacity enhancements are directly addressing the issues of increased remand numbers and increased custodial numbers as a result of our laws.

John PESUTTO: I am grateful for that, Minister. Can I move on. Minister, the youth crime prevention program is receiving \$19.9 million in next year’s budget, but it only expects to service 330 young people. That is over \$60,000 a person. Do you think that is going to achieve what it needs to? Is that value for money?

Paul HAMER: Sorry, what particular budget paper?

John PESUTTO: Performance statement, page 100.

Paul HAMER: Budget paper 6 you are talking about, the performance statement.

John PESUTTO: ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 100.

Paul HAMER: Yes, this one. And which performance measure are you referring to here?

John PESUTTO: It is the youth crime prevention program – \$19.9 million.

Paul HAMER: Are you able to give me a page reference?

John PESUTTO: I think in terms of finding, I mean, I think we are going to –

Paul HAMER: I can talk generally about the system.

John PESUTTO: Look, I want to get to where ultimately I was going to go. I think we are going to spend a lot of time on page references and such. Minister, as a matter of policy, are bail laws strong enough now, or does more need to be done for youth offending?

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: He is the youth justice minister.

Paul HAMER: I am very happy to be talking about our bail laws and what they have been doing. In particular –

John PESUTTO: Does more need to be done? I appreciate that there have been lots of legislative changes, Minister, but we have had the Attorney in here saying that more needs to be done and other ministers saying more needs to be done. Do you believe, in relation to the youth crime crisis, more needs to be done?

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: For the interjection, Deputy Chair, be very careful about paraphrasing conversations and sessions earlier today. It is misleading. You know it is misleading.

John PESUTTO: I do not believe it is, but to make it easy, ignore the references to other ministers.

The CHAIR: It is misleading, so if you want to rephrase –

John PESUTTO: I will rephrase. Minister, do you believe that more needs to be done in relation to bail and youth offending – yes or no?

Paul HAMER: As you mentioned, we have introduced a range of bail reforms.

The CHAIR: Apologies. Let me get this time right – 18 minutes to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: I think the ‘Department Performance Statement’ page number you were after was 108, if that helps you with your future questioning, Mr Pesutto. Minister, officials, thank you so much for your attendance this evening. I will take you to budget paper 3, page 5, and I hope I am on the right track in terms of making sure I keep to questions around the portfolio. Could you please explain how the community safety budget package is supporting the youth justice system, Minister?

Paul HAMER: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. As I noted in my presentation, the Allan Labor government has prioritised community safety. Throughout 2025 we introduced tough new bail laws and the adult time for violent crime reforms, because violent offending has to have consequences and Victorians expect their justice system to reflect that. We have backed that with real investment – as I mentioned, \$229 million – because the laws alone are not enough; we have to have the system that is supported to deliver them. We were under no illusions that the reforms were always going to increase demand on the youth justice system, with more young people denied bail and longer sentences, and that is what we are seeing, and that is the laws working as they should. We are investing in the capacity to manage this safely and responsibly so we can continue to provide a safe and effective system. That means comprehensive investment across capacity, staffing and services.

The community safety package has already funded an additional 88 rooms across Cherry Creek and Parkville, as I mentioned to Mr Pesutto, and these were progressively operationalised in 2025. It also has funded the recruitment of 320 additional frontline youth justice workers to staff those facilities safely and effectively. The 2026–27 budget adds to this by recommissioning 45 rooms at Malmsbury youth justice precinct, bringing its capacity to 75 rooms, with more than 100 new frontline custodial staff. It goes beyond building capacity alone. The package funds enhancements to rehabilitation and healthcare services in custody, because keeping the community safe is not only about what happens before someone enters custody, it is about what happens while they are in our system.

The community safety package also commits \$110 million this budget over five years to establish a specialised fast-track youth court list in the County Court to service the adult time reforms. That sits with the Attorney-General, but youth justice also has an important role to play to support young people's attendance at court. This means that these matters will be heard faster and more efficiently. These investments are just part of a broader package of reforms that the community safety package has funded to date, including additional court capacity to manage increased bail demand and strengthen prosecution and legal support services. Taken together, this is a whole of justice system investment. As I said in the budget media release, this budget is about tough consequences for serious crime and programs that stop reoffending, and that is exactly what the community safety package delivers.

Mathew HILAKARI: Minister, you mentioned in your response just then the 45 beds opening at Malmsbury. We have got Cherry Creek and Parkville as well. How does Malmsbury add to and operate within that ecosystem?

Paul HAMER: Thanks for the follow-up question. I think that it is really important for the committee to understand the full picture of how our custodial system now operates and how each facility contributes to the system as a whole. It is on the public record that the Malmsbury centre closed in June 2023. At the time the system was operating with historically low numbers. Cherry Creek had just opened, and the aim and objective was to consolidate operations into modern purpose-built facilities, which was the right decision at the time. The situation obviously over the last few years has changed, and as a direct result of the government's community safety reforms, our custody numbers have risen significantly. As of 18 May, so the start of this week, we had over 200 people in custody in our youth justice facilities. That is why we did scale up in 2025 and we are continuing to scale up in 2026 through the investments that we made in both the 2025–26 budget and again in the 2026–27 budget.

The important thing to note about Malmsbury is it is not returning as the facility it once was. It will be re-established consistent with the modern rehabilitation-focused model that now defines our entire system. Each facility serves a distinct and important function as part of the overall youth justice system. Parkville is the system's intake and reception facility, so all young people who enter custody come through Parkville first. It houses young women and girls, the under-15 cohort and the dual track program. Cherry Creek is the government's flagship rehabilitation project, purpose-built for males aged 15 to 18, whether on remand or sentenced. It embodies the Armytage–Ogloff review recommendations: smaller units, individualised support, education and vocational facilities, dedicated cultural and multifaith spaces and dedicated health care. Malmsbury will provide additional capacity, primarily for sentenced young men, taking pressure off Cherry Creek and allowing the overall system to manage different cohorts and deliver new programs that meet the individual needs of young people. This includes a new model focused on building essential skills, education and employment pathways for our lower risk cohort. It is a three-tiered, three-facility system with clear and distinct roles, planned carefully and funded by this budget.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you for that, Minister. The backbone of any part of government is the staff that work within it; people are our most valuable resource. You mentioned an increase in staff at Malmsbury in particular. For both there and beyond that, across the system, how are we supporting our frontline workers and workers across the whole system? Because often we have had a bit of commentary about frontline workers being basically the only workers that matter. The whole workforce matters.

Paul HAMER: Thank you for raising that question, Mr Hilakari. I think it is a really good opportunity to give a shout-out to all of our youth justice workers and also all the workers who are in the department who plan and manage the responses every day to ensure that our youth justice systems function appropriately. They are the ones who are working directly with the youth justice officers to ensure that the individuals in the corrections

facilities and on supervision orders are engaging in the education programs and engaging in potential employment pathways.

Our people are central to everything that we do in youth justice. The quality of care, rehabilitation and community safety outcomes that we deliver depends on the dedication, the professionalism and the wellbeing of the people who work in our facilities every day. I have had the privilege of visiting both Cherry Creek and Malmsbury in recent weeks and meeting quite a number of the staff across a range of disciplines and just having a chat to them about the wonderful work they do and how committed they are to the rehabilitation process and ensuring that there is a pathway for offenders. They are an extremely dedicated and committed group of people. The community safety package that has been announced has already funded the recruitment of 320 additional frontline staff across the youth justice system. That was announced as part of the 2025–26 community safety response. In this budget we build on that through additional funding for Malmsbury's reactivation, which means more than 100 new frontline youth justice workers to operate the facility safely and to the standard that Victorians expect.

What is equally important to convey is the quality of the workforce that we are continuing to build. The behaviour change workforce model that was introduced at Cherry Creek initially and has been extended to Parkville represents a genuine and sustained uplift in both the skills and the recognition of youth justice workers. Under this model, youth justice workers are now remunerated at a higher classification level. This reflects the greater responsibility and capability required. They are not just simply custodial officers; they are case managers, they are de-escalation specialists and they are rehabilitation practitioners, as I mentioned.

The budget also funds ongoing training and professional development, including the restorative practices model embedded across our precincts, with dedicated practitioners working alongside frontline staff to resolve conflict and build constructive relationships between staff and young people. Staff safety is a genuine priority. It is a really important priority, particularly for me as the responsible minister but for all of our government. Every serious incident triggers a structured debrief and a root cause analysis so that lessons are captured and shared across the system. We know that these are some very challenging environments, and we are committed to continuous improvement. Again, I want to thank all of our staff, particularly our frontline staff, for the incredibly hard work that they do every day.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate their professionalism as well, because it is important for our whole community in reducing recidivism and rehabilitating young people so they have a much better life and the community has a much better life. I also think there is some real importance to the built environment at our youth justice centres. I am hoping you can talk about some of the investment in our custodial facilities. You mentioned Cherry Creek is a relatively new facility, and Malmsbury is opening up. How does the built environment of these facilities support rehabilitation and the reintegration of young people and reduce the risk of recidivism?

Paul HAMER: Thank you for that. As I sort of alluded to, the model that we have in our youth justice facilities is about rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. It is really in those custodial facilities where this rehabilitation happens. It is where a young person who has disengaged with education gets a genuine opportunity to re-engage and get a qualification. It is where a young person, perhaps with an undiagnosed mental health condition, finally receives assessment and treatment. They are where someone who has never had a stable relationship with a trusted adult can start to build one. Sometimes these are the very first places where these individuals can access this form of assistance and be directed and moved onto the rehabilitation pathway.

Cherry Creek, you mentioned – that was designed from the ground up with rehabilitation at its core. As I mentioned earlier, that was in line with the findings and the recommendations from the Armytage–Ogloff review, with smaller residential units allowing staff to build meaningful relationships with young people and support them to choose a better path. The education and vocational skills centre means young people can gain qualifications that open real opportunities upon release. Dedicated cultural and multifaith facilities recognise that cultural connection is a genuine protective factor for many people. Primary healthcare mental health beds are onsite, supported by specialist mental health services. Critically, the system has an end-to-end statewide rehabilitation service delivered by trained youth justice staff, meaning we no longer rely on external providers to deliver core programs. That is a structural improvement because it ensures consistency and quality. Because of an important change made possible by the *Youth Justice Act*, young people on remand can now access offence-specific rehabilitation programs from day one of their time in custody. Since the majority of young

people in youth justice are on remand, this is a really vital change and it will make Victorians safer in the future. These results demonstrate that our facilities are doing exactly what they are designed to do, holding young people accountable while giving them a genuine chance to turn their lives around.

If I can just reflect a little bit on my visit, particularly to Cherry Creek, it was an amazing experience to actually not only meet with the staff but also have the opportunity to meet with some of the offenders who were on this pathway of rehabilitation and see firsthand the programs that that facility was running and the journey that these individuals had made and their ability and their willingness to engage with outsiders such as me and the journey that they had made into education and achieved education outcomes that they themselves probably would have never thought or their families would have never thought would have been possible when they first came into the system. It demonstrated to me the importance of the work that we are doing and the importance of the work that the staff and the department are doing in a facility such as Cherry Creek and obviously across the entire system.

Mathew HILAKARI: I thought that was a really important change made by this government around accessing those supports and services while on remand. I think that was really one of the fundamental changes that will lead to better outcomes over time. In terms of total capacity of the youth justice custodial system, from the investment that we have been making, I am just seeking that total capacity. And do we feel that we are going to be able to ensure that we have sufficient capacity in the near future as well?

Paul HAMER: Thank you. As I alluded to in a previous answer, we do have that three-facility system now operational at Parkville, Cherry Creek and Malmsbury, with the combined capacity designed to meet projected demand. This is a direct result of investments that we have made as a government in 2025–26 to operationalise more beds at Cherry Creek and Parkville and then the subsequent investments that we have made to recommence and operationalise those beds at Malmsbury. When fully operationalised, Cherry Creek will be able to accommodate a hundred young males aged 15 to 18, and Parkville provides capacity for the full reception cohort. As I mentioned before, that is the main reception where all young offenders first present, for young women, for under-15s and the dual-track program. Malmsbury will provide additional capacity for the sentenced young people aged 15 and over. As you may be aware, the ‘Department Performance Statement’, on page 108, sets our 2026–27 planning targets.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am familiar with that part of the ‘Department Performance Statement’.

Paul HAMER: Excellent, isn’t it? In terms of the capacity planning, we do take, obviously, capacity planning very seriously, and it is a whole journey that we need to go through. We knew that when we introduced the changes to bail and when we introduced the laws on adult time for violent crime we would see an increase in numbers presenting into our youth justice facilities, and we have invested accordingly. Now, the department routinely engages in demand modelling, so it is constantly reviewing those numbers and what we need to make sure that the system stands up to that capacity.

Mathew HILAKARI: Minister, in the limited time that we have got left I am just hoping to take you to the youth justice community-based services, both the South Sudanese Australian youth justice expert working group and ‘Supporting a safe and effective youth justice system’. It is budget paper 3, page 73. I am just hoping you can give a quick summary of some of those supports that we are providing as part of the youth justice portfolio.

Paul HAMER: Thanks, Mr Hilakari. I know there is only a short time left, but there are some really important early intervention, diversion and prevention programs that have been underpinning our action in youth justice. The South Sudanese Australian youth justice work is a really critical part of that. We know that there is an over-representation of the South Sudanese community in our youth justice facilities.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Apologies, Mr Hilakari. Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee tonight. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee’s request. The committee will take a short break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of local government at 6:30 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.