

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 21 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

Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Community Safety; and

Emma Cassar, Secretary,

Bill Kyriakopoulos, Deputy Secretary, Community Safety, Victims and Racing, and

Nicola Quin, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and 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, any comments you repeat 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 Community Safety the Honourable Anthony Carbines 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 the committee will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks very much, Chair and colleagues. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay my respects to their elders past and present, and I extend that acknowledgement to Aboriginal people with us today.

Visual presentation.

Anthony CARBINES: Community safety is a whole-of-government priority, delivering new solutions across multiple portfolios to make life safer for all Victorians. Boosting community safety requires effective crime prevention and early intervention programs alongside tough laws and serious consequences to hold perpetrators, particularly violent offenders, to account. Our government has a long record of significant investment in community safety across crime prevention, early intervention, policing, courts and corrections, all with the goal of keeping Victorians safe. The 2026–27 Victorian budget continues that record with targeted investment in programs that work. The community safety package provides over \$571 million for 2026–27 for initiatives like strengthening PSO capacity, court reforms and the Violence Reduction Unit. The package includes \$5.12 million for the youth crime prevention program. It also includes \$2.95 million for the youth crime prevention and early intervention program, a partnership between Victoria Police and Westjustice. The government is also providing \$15 million for new tech and more resources for Victoria Police and hospitality businesses to crack down on the organised crime network behind arson attacks. We are also delivering significant legislative reforms to ensure there are serious consequences for offending, to keep Victorians safe.

We know the most effective response to youth offending is to stop crime before it starts. That is why we are investing in programs that intervene early, such as the youth crime prevention program, which builds protective factors and connects young people to the supports they need to turn their lives around, and the youth crime prevention and early intervention program, which connects young people to social, psychological and legal supports. The Violence Reduction Unit is modelled on successful violence reduction programs in Glasgow and London, which have reduced violent crime over time by targeting problems early and responding to local needs. The Violence Reduction Unit is a core part of Victoria's dual approach to reducing violent youth crime which invests in early intervention while ensuring there are serious consequences for those who break the law.

The 2026–27 Victorian budget invests \$33.45 million in new VRU programs to disrupt youth crime patterns before they escalate. This includes \$3.7 million for a new, community-based gang violence intervention

program, modelled on a proven program operating in New York City. The youth crime prevention program is a statewide community safety program for young people operating in 14 regional and metropolitan locations across Victoria. It takes an early intervention prevention approach and provides flexible supports, including intensive case management and activity-based programs to steer young people away from violence. An evaluation of the YCPP found a 29 per cent reduction in overall offending and a 24 per cent reduction in severity of offending for program participants, including significant reductions in offences like break and enter, burglary, property damage and assault. The 2026–27 budget provides another \$5.12 million to continue YCPP until 2027.

Meanwhile, the youth crime prevention and early intervention program reduces contact with the justice system for young offenders 10 to 24 years of age through a partnership with Westjustice community legal centre. The program issues cautions, warnings and diversions and provides referrals to specialist support and legal services with partner organisations. The 2026–27 budget provides \$2.95 million over two years for Westjustice and Victoria Police to deliver the YCPEIP under the youth crime prevention package in more areas of Victoria, strengthening outcomes for young people.

Crime Stoppers Victoria and Neighbourhood Watch are two of our most trusted community safety partners. In 2025 Crime Stoppers received more than 142,000 contacts from the public, a record number. In 2024–25 contacts to Crime Stoppers led to almost a thousand arrests and more than 4000 charges being laid by police. Recent Crime Stoppers campaigns have focused on the issues that matter most to Victorians: motor vehicle theft, child abuse material and youth-related offending. Neighbourhood Watch continues to build strong connections to communities, supported by more than 200 local groups in 54 local government areas. The government is also investing in community safety through budget investments in infrastructure and public amenities in other portfolios. This includes CCTV and investment in safety upgrades across the public transport network and investments to remove graffiti across our road and rail networks. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going, for the first 8 minutes, to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I refer to budget paper 3, page 5, and community safety package output initiatives. What resources has the state government allocated to monitoring risk assessment and ongoing management of returning ISIS brides and their children within the Victorian community?

Anthony CARBINES: The government continues to provide Victoria Police with the resources it needs to keep the community safe, and that includes any obligations that it may have to address any other activity in the community. There is also ongoing work with our other jurisdictions, including the AFP, and other support providers in the community. We include several programs that the government runs that are voluntary programs for service providers to engage people who may need to be invested in those programs, particularly some of those to whom you refer.

Jade BENHAM: What is the cost of that, Minister?

Anthony CARBINES: There are a few different costs. We have a nearly \$4.5 million program in this year's budget, 'Protecting Victoria through preventing and countering violent extremism'. There is also funding from the Commonwealth for those programs. That funding supports initiatives to counter violent extremism over two years. Victoria Police's fixated threat assessment centre is funded through that program. There is the community integration support program, CISP, and the network of intervention and tailored engagement, or NITE, funding. These are not compulsory programs, but they are programs that support services target to people who use them, and there is also the northern community support program. The northern CSG does great work getting to people who need supports to make sure that we are keeping people safe.

Jade BENHAM: Minister, has the government undertaken any formal risk assessment of the potential impact on local communities where these so-called ISIS brides and their children are being resettled?

Anthony CARBINES: We take our advice from Victoria Police on keeping people safe and then making sure that the community organisations that we fund, particularly through our countering violent extremism initiatives –

Jade BENHAM: Has there been a risk assessment?

Anthony CARBINES: Those assessments are done by Victoria Police, and they are operational matters for them. But we do make sure as well that we are providing tailored supports, funded in this budget with over \$4.4 million, to make sure that they get the support that they need.

Jade BENHAM: Is the community not entitled to see the findings of those assessments, if in fact any have been done?

Anthony CARBINES: They are operational assessments that Victoria Police, the Australian Federal Police and other law enforcement agencies, including our security services, are engaged in. They do not share those matters with me, and I would not expect them to share them with the community more broadly.

Jade BENHAM: Has the department been provided with a list of suburbs or locations where the individuals will be residing?

Anthony CARBINES: They are not details which I have sought to have information about. The key aspect for us is to make sure that the programs that are available in the community where people are going to live and be involved and engaged support them, particularly in preventing and countering violent extremism. We have been very successful in that work, and there is also the appointment of the commissioner to prevent and counter violent extremism Dr Kelly Mischel, who does great leadership work and is world-renowned for her leadership in this space. And I am confident that the ongoing investments that we make –

Jade BENHAM: I would have thought as the Minister for Community Safety your first priority would be community safety in this case.

Anthony CARBINES: It is why we have provided \$4.4 million for our countering violent extremism programs, and also funding from the federal government –

Jade BENHAM: Is that what rehousing this cohort and resettling them in Victoria is going to cost the taxpayer?

Anthony CARBINES: There are a range of services, both Commonwealth and state, for housing, for health services and mental health services and the like for all individuals in the community. We make sure there are also programs around countering violent extremism to make sure that we stamp that out, we turn lives around and we make sure people get the support that they need.

Jade BENHAM: Minister, have any of these individuals been prioritised for social housing or other forms of government-supported accommodation ahead of those who have been on the waiting list for quite some time? Because we know the waiting lists are two years long.

Anthony CARBINES: They would be questions best put to the housing minister.

Jade BENHAM: So you have not got any oversight on the resettling of these individuals and their families. Any costs to the education department? There are children, obviously. What reintegration programs are being provided? You have illustrated the costs of the different programs, but what are the reintegration programs that are being provided by the Victorian government to these individuals? Instead of a shopping list of costs, what is the total anticipated cost?

Anthony CARBINES: Housing supports are provided by the housing minister. My task is to provide countering violent extremism supports to reintegrate people into the community by making sure that they get the right programs and support, funded by us and the Commonwealth.

Jade BENHAM: What are those programs?

Anthony CARBINES: I was just going through a couple of them: our community integration support program, and the Northern Community Support Group receives funding out in Broadmeadows to make sure –

Jade BENHAM: So they will be housed in the north?

Anthony CARBINES: These are funding programs for people that operate across the state, available to people in regional communities just as they are available to people in metropolitan communities. There is no

difference with our network of intervention and tailored engagement to make sure that families get the support they need. I can assure you that there are people who access these programs in the smallest communities in our state, not just in metropolitan Melbourne.

Jade BENHAM: Minister, can you guarantee Victorians that ISIS brides and their children pose no unacceptable risk to community safety?

Anthony CARBINES: My guarantee to Victorians is that Victoria Police, the Australian Federal Police, ASIO and our other security services continue to keep Victorians safe and monitor –

Jade BENHAM: I have no doubt in the ability and the dedication of Victoria Police members. I know that they are stretched at the moment. I am wondering if the Minister for Community Safety has done his due diligence.

Anthony CARBINES: I am confident that the community safety obligations of our security services and AFP and Victoria Police, working together, make sure that all people in our community are kept safe, particularly when it comes to countering violent extremism. We have very mature programs that continue to be funded in this budget that provide strong results and support for the community.

Jade BENHAM: What is the whole cost of those programs – the total cost?

Anthony CARBINES: There are some ongoing costs in the budget, but \$4.4 million over five years is our contribution in this budget. There is also Commonwealth funding that is regularly provided to make sure that we are able to provide support to our security agencies but also to the community service organisations that provide targeted support to high-risk individuals and families who have the potential to be a risk unless we can make sure they get the supports and the services that they need, and that is what we are able to do under these programs.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you, Minister. I want to go on to page 100 of the ‘Department Performance Statement’. Only 43 per cent of people feel safe walking in their local community, yet you have pulled PSOs from 119 train stations. How can you possibly expect people to feel safer when 50 more PSOs are not even enough to cover half the stations left without protection?

Anthony CARBINES: There were 50 additional PSOs funded by a \$44 million contribution in our budget, and there are well over 30 train stations in Victoria where Victoria Police are deploying protective services officers from 9 am until last train, rather than waiting until 6 o’clock at night. There are another 70, 80-odd stations, in rough terms, that continue to have no change to their arrangements – they operate from 5 or 6 pm to last train – and there are some 119 stations that will have a mobile presence. They will always be protected.

Jade BENHAM: So how many communities who should have –

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I want to ask you about Blue Light Victoria. We got to hear a little bit about them during a session at Parliament House when a very courageous young man spoke about his positive experience with them. I can see on page 5 of BP 3 there is funding there. Can you let us know how you are going to help early intervention and reducing crime through this funding?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Member for Yan Yean. Yes, it was it was a great event with Blue Light Victoria at Parliament. I am glad many colleagues were able to attend and hear some of the firsthand stories of the lived-experience mentors and those engaged in the program. Prevention and early intervention is critical in stopping crime before it starts – it is why we have invested \$9.5 million in Blue Light Victoria in this budget. Originally known for their Blue Light discos, Blue Light Victoria has evolved into a specialist youth organisation delivering structured early intervention and crime prevention programs for young people. Thanks to our investment, Blue Light Victoria is supported in delivering these essential programs in partnership with Victoria Police and other emergency service partners such as FRV – Fire Rescue Victoria – and Ambulance Victoria. This investment will directly support at-risk kids with one-on-one mentoring and allow Blue Light to continue working with Victoria Police, schools and community organisations to deliver these programs to strengthen community safety across Victoria. This additional funding will enable Blue Light Victoria to support

up to 500 young people annually through its one-on-one mentoring program, as well as support the establishment of a new police and community liaison officer – a PCLO – within Blue Light Victoria, acting as a conduit between Blue Light, Police Victoria, the Violence Reduction Unit and the community sector to enable the early identification of at-risk young people and to better support youth referral pathways.

A one-on-one mentoring program, also known as 1:1 Positive Pathways, is a program where dedicated police and emergency services role models actively support at-risk young people. Originally developed by police members in Bendigo, the program is designed for vulnerable and at-risk youth who may be at risk of involvement in the youth justice system. They may also have a disability or mental health issue that is adversely affecting their behaviour or be disengaged from school and exhibiting problematic behaviours. This is where our new funding for the new police and community liaison officer comes in, as they will be able to provide appropriate referrals from Victoria Police, the Violence Reduction Unit, schools and other community sector organisations to potentially refer at-risk youth into the program. From here, specialist youth workers carefully match each person with a positive role model, and together they take part in eight one-on-one fitness sessions with a qualified personal trainer which builds positive relationships, self-confidence and healthier habits. To keep the momentum going participants also receive 10 group gym sessions after the initial program completion. The program is currently being delivered in the Bendigo, Latrobe, Brimbank and Melton – and I was pleased to be at the launch of the Melton service there with the Member for Melton – regions. And with the new investment by our government, Blue Light Victoria will now be able to deliver the program to more places across the state.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you so much. I can see the description here on page 5 says that it also includes early intervention programs in schools and community settings. Can you explain a bit about what those are?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Member for Yan Yean. As referred to in my previous answer, the \$9.5 million in funding for Blue Light Victoria will allow the organisation to deliver both one-on-one mentoring for at-risk youth as well as targeted secondary school early intervention programs. Through the funding delivered by our government, Blue Light Victoria is expected to be able to slowly scale up its program delivery to reach some 3000 young people each year through its secondary school programs. These school programs are weekly sessions delivered by specialist Blue Light Victoria facilitators to boost resilience, encourage healthy, safe decision making and strengthen community connection. Run in partnership with police and emergency services, students work alongside positive role models in a safe, supportive space that builds trust and respect beyond the classroom. These programs help to build more engaged, confident students who feel connected, supported and ready to contribute to their school and community.

Blue Light Victoria has a statewide reach which ensures that these programs can be delivered where they are most needed, including in regional and rural communities. I can also confirm to the committee that Blue Light Victoria will be holding school programs across the state over the next couple of school terms, including but not limited to Featherbrook P-9 College in the Member for Point Cook's electorate, Hazel Glen College in the Member for Yan Yean's electorate and Berwick College and Cranbourne Secondary College in the Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region's electorate. To ensure that these school programs are delivered where they are most needed, Blue Light Victoria continues to work closely with partners such as Victoria Police and the Violence Reduction Unit to ensure the programs are targeted to locations where they will have the greatest effect and impact. This will be based on data and intelligence, including youth crime data, school incident reporting and other indicators of socio-economic disadvantage, including areas where there may be more limited youth services.

This investment builds on our previous investments in supporting at-risk youth through early intervention. Blue Light Victoria is now listed as a partner provider under the Victorian government's early intervention sports and activities menu, also known as the EISA menu. The EISA menu is another key VRU initiative, supported through a \$4.92 million investment by the Victorian government. The menu is delivered by my colleague the Minister for Education, helping Victorian government schools to link up with established programs to help students stay engaged, build positive social skills and find purpose and belonging at school. The EISA menu provides another avenue for schools to engage with Blue Light Victoria as the menu makes it easy to engage Blue Light Victoria to run programs for their students based on each individual school's needs.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you very much, Minister. Going on now to youth crime prevention, I can see there is new funding for the youth crime prevention package within the initiative. Can you let us know how this

continues the government's work to ensure that there are those early interventions in place so we can stop crime before it starts?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Member for Yan Yean. The youth crime prevention program, also known as YCPP, is a statewide community safety program for young people operating in 14 regional and metro locations across Victoria. In this year's budget our government is continuing to invest in this program as part of an \$8.1 million investment in our youth crime prevention package. YCPP invests in communities experiencing high rates of youth offending and crime, taking an early intervention and prevention approach by providing flexible supports, including intensive case management and activity-based programs to steer young people away from violence. The YCPP supports young people over the long term, fostering stronger connections to their local community to build protective factors against future offending. An evaluation of the YCPP found a 29 per cent reduction in overall offending and a 24 per cent reduction in the severity of offending for program participants, including significant reductions in offences like break and enter, burglary, property damage and assault.

To provide some more detail to the committee on how a program like YCPP can intervene early to support at-risk youth, I can provide an example to the committee which shows how these investments are critical to ensuring that youth can be supported to stay on the right track. John, whose name has been changed for privacy reasons, is a 17-year-old boy referred to the Centre for Participation's Youth Connection program at Horsham by his former school. John expressed that he was at a low point and needed assistance with his individual goals. John had a history of violence, family dysfunction, poor attendance at school and low self-esteem. Upon intake, John expressed he was struggling with his mental health, anger and unemployment. He spoke about his passion for cars and the bond he shares with his father around this common interest.

John's goals were to find a traineeship, improve his mental health, find healthy coping strategies, complete school and move to Shepparton with his father. Since working with John, the Youth Connection program was able to refer him to Headspace and allocate a worker who travelled to the school to meet with him. The Youth Connection program also applied for a free YMCA gym and pool membership for John, which assisted with his anger management and to increase his self-esteem. John has also started an apprenticeship with a mechanic where he completed his work experience. He has since exited the Youth Connection program due to meeting his long-term goals, including relocating to Shepparton to be with his father. This is critical to the success of the program, which is actually for youth to successfully complete and exit the program by achieving their individual goals.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. And I can see under the description for that line item there is a similar-sounding program. I am just wondering if you can explain how it is different? It is the 'Youth crime prevention and early intervention program'.

Anthony CARBINES: Certainly. That program originally began as a pilot founded by Westjustice and Victoria Police in 2021, and it has more recently expanded to a program which is co-led with Victoria Legal Aid and a range of other community services, including the Youth Support and Advocacy Service, YSAS, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and the Youth Junction. The original aim of the program was to divert young people aged 10 to 24 years away from the criminal justice system at the earliest opportunity and to keep the community safe by reducing rates of offending in Melbourne's western suburbs. The goal of the program was, and continues to be, to substantially reduce rates of re-offending in these young people through cautions, diversions and early referrals to both specialist legal and social supports.

For members of the committee who may be unfamiliar with the term, a caution is a formal alternative to charging an individual. The project has been operating in the Brimbank and Wyndham police service areas since 2021 through a phased rollout, and in this year's budget we are continuing to invest in this program as part of an \$8.1 million investment in our youth crime prevention package. The funding will allow for more young people who are taken into custody or cautioned out in the field to be offered an opportunity to engage with a legal representative. It is a process where there is a scheduled pre-court diversionary option for young people with specialised Victoria Police youth crime coordinators.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

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

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister and officials. Budget paper 3, pages 5 to 9, show the community safety package totalling \$517 million until 2029–30 – over half a billion dollars. Of the initiatives in that package, though, if you can help me out: from what I can see, I cannot see any of them directed to an Aboriginal community controlled organisation. Can you just confirm for me how much funding ACCOs will receive from that community safety package?

Anthony CARBINES: I will just have a bit of a check; otherwise I can take it on notice and provide you with that level of detail. The Secretary might want to add something there.

Emma CASSAR: I have got the entire line figure, but I will probably have to come back to you with what is specific for ACCOs. ‘Delivering serious consequences and keeping the community safe’ – over the five years it is \$304.9 million, so that captures that in. But unless Mr Kyriakopoulos can come back with the specifics –

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: I do not have the specifics.

Anthony CARBINES: We can get a further breakdown.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just so I have heard you correctly: ACCOs are receiving funding from that item. Is that what you are saying?

Emma CASSAR: It is VLA, and it addresses Aboriginal over-representation. I will have to just extract from that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Yes, if you can come back to us, that would be great. Just moving on, as you have been discussing and was mentioned in the slides, with the youth crime prevention program, what objective indicators or data does this portfolio use to measure progress, success or outcomes within that program?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: There are a couple of ways. There is a target for the amount of young people to go through each program, but we also do individual evaluations of each program, and they are published on our community crime prevention website as well over a period of time. But yes, they do individual evaluations as well as those targets for the amount of young people that go through each program.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: How have those evaluations been shaped over the course of the program being delivered? Has it changed over time?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: The evaluation will depend on the kind of program, where it is based and what the focus is, so it will vary from location to location and program to program and those delivering those programs.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In what ways does it vary, just so I understand you?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Again, it depends on both the type of program that they are and what they particularly focus on. Each program, depending on the area and depending on what their target and their work is, will focus on certain things. Therefore if you are focusing on youth crime in a particular area, their programs will vary to those working on engagement with Aboriginal communities or young people engaging with Aboriginal communities in particular areas. It just depends on the various programs.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Puglielli. Minister and officials, thank you for appearing before the committee today. 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 for health infrastructure at 4:55 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.