

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2025-26 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 5 June 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Police;

Kate Houghton, Secretary,

Bill Kyriakopoulos, Deputy Secretary, Police, Racing, Victims and Coordination, and

Samuel Ho, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Justice and Community Safety;

Robert Hill, Acting Chief Commissioner of Police, and

David Butler, Acting Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services, Victoria Police.

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 2025–26 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 these hearings may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The broadcast includes automated captioning. Members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during the hearings and anything you say may be picked up and captioned, even if you say it quietly.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream and other committee members.

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 Police, the Honourable Anthony Carbines, as well as officials from DJCS. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks very much, Chair and committee members. 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. I would like to extend that acknowledgement to any Aboriginal people with us today.

Since coming to government we have invested more than \$4.5 billion in important initiatives to ensure Victoria Police has the resources it needs to be agile and responsive in keeping Victorians safe. The 2025–26 budget continues to invest in and strengthen programs with a proven track record of detecting, preventing and addressing crime.

Visual presentation.

Anthony CARBINES: I would like to direct the committee to the slides and note that further funding provided focuses on four key areas: ensuring that Victoria Police has the resources it needs to prevent, detect and address crime; preventing young people from entering the justice system; continuing programs to address those at risk of extremist behaviours; and taking targeted action to reduce the road toll.

As you are likely aware, machetes have already been banned from sale as of 28 May this year and will be classified as prohibited weapons from 1 September this year. As part of our community safety package \$13 million has been allocated to the machete surrender scheme. The funding will be used to install safe, secure drop-off boxes so that the community can surrender their machetes, accompanied by a public awareness

campaign to promote understanding of the ban. Banning the sale and possession of machetes will reduce violence on our streets and improve community safety.

The government is also taking steps to proactively address the rise in all weapons-related offending. This includes expanding police powers to ensure that the chief commissioner can declare additional precincts as designated areas for the purposes of random weapons searches, with those designations able to be in place for up to six months. This measure will allow police to proactively prevent the risk of violent offending, protect the community and reduce fear of these crimes occurring.

We know that early intervention is critical to keeping our young people on the right track, which is why this budget provides \$3.8 million over the next four years to continue the embedded youth outreach program, EYOP, in Werribee and Dandenong. The program is led by Victoria Police in partnership with youth workers, identifies vulnerable young people who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system and delivers targeted interventions to prevent future offending.

Addressing the threat of violent extremism in the community remains a key focus for the government. It is why we have provided \$5.7 million to Victoria Police for the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre to implement interventions to reduce instances of violent and extreme acts. FTAC delivers initiatives to prevent and counter threats posed by fixated individuals and lone actors through an effective combination of mental health and policing resources. This will be supplemented by community engagement initiatives that support early intervention at a local level where it is needed most, ensuring Victoria is a welcoming state for all.

Road trauma continues to be a serious issue in Victoria, with the rate of road fatalities increasing every year. We know that mobile phone use and failure to wear seatbelts are key drivers of these tragic outcomes. The 2025–26 budget provides \$156 million over four years to continue and expand Victoria's distracted driver and seatbelt camera network until 2029, which is estimated to prevent 95 casualty crashes per year. The DDS cameras can be deployed across more than 300 locations, ensuring drivers doing the wrong thing are caught anywhere, anytime.

As our state continues to grow, so too does our need for a well-resourced police force, which is why our government is investing \$7.2 million in Victoria Police recruitment programs over the next two years to attract high-quality candidates into policing careers. It includes \$4 million for the Made for More recruitment campaign. Between July 2024 and March 2025, 544 police and 171 PSOs commenced at the Victoria Police Academy, with 393 police and 168 PSOs having been sworn in. Victoria Police is also making internal changes to streamline its application and academy processes to get more boots on the ground sooner while prioritising practical and effective training. This will ensure that Victoria Police can continue to deliver the best possible service for our state now and into the future.

Police officers are also often exposed to traumatic events in the course of their work, which is why the government provided \$4 million in the 2023–24 budget to embed and expand the BlueHub police mental health initiative, providing expert psychological assessment, trauma and mental health treatment services for Vic police members who experience a mental health crisis. Members who have participated in BlueHub have shown a reduction in PTSD symptom severity, distress, anxiety and depression.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first 7 minutes are going to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Minister, with the police budget cut from \$4.55 billion to \$4.5 billion and with the related costs of recruiting more police, what has the police force been asked to cut?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Welch, for your question. I expect that you are taking me to budget paper 3, page 158 –

Richard WELCH: You are correct.

Anthony CARBINES: and table 2.19, and I will point out that there has been no reduction in the police budget. The 2024–25 police budget is \$4.49 billion, and the 2025–26 police budget is \$4.5 billion. That is actually an increase in the police budget.

Richard WELCH: But the expenditure from last year is falling, correct?

Anthony CARBINES: No, the revised budget that you are drawing on there, I suspect, is from the patience-in-bargaining allowance, which was paid to police members through the enterprise bargaining agreement. That is why there is a bump there in the revised budget. But then we resume a budget of \$4.5 billion, which is still greater than the 2024–25 budget of \$4.49 billion.

Richard WELCH: Does that budget allow for your increased costs around recruitment?

Anthony CARBINES: Well, the increased budget that we provided for the Made for More campaign is included in our police budget, which has increased from the 2024–25 to the 2025–26 budget. But I note your point about the revision in between there, but that is the patience-in-bargaining allowance that was paid to police members as part of the EBA.

Richard WELCH: Chief commissioner, what is the exact number of unfilled police officer roles at the moment? What is the vacancy?

Robert HILL: Victoria Police is funded for 17,022 sworn police officers. As of 31 March there were 1100 positions unfilled.

Richard WELCH: Could you advise, commissioner, what number of police officers are on workers compensation or extended sick leave at the moment?

Robert HILL: I can share with the committee that approximately 700 members of our workforce are on WorkCover. That consists of our sworn officers, our VPS and our protective services officers.

Richard WELCH: Are there any others on other forms of leave?

Robert HILL: Well, we always manage through any calendar year the provision of our recreational leave and also long-service leave entitlements to our members. Also members are able to take unplanned leave and other leave, including carer's leave, parental leave and so on.

Richard WELCH: Does that include extended sick leave in those numbers?

Robert HILL: No. The approximately 700 members of our workforce who are on WorkCover does not include those that are on extended leave. This is only the WorkCover entitlement.

Richard WELCH: So how many are on extended sick leave?

Robert HILL: I have not got that data in front of me, Member, I do apologise, but that would be able to be made available if required.

Richard WELCH: Could you provide that on notice? If you could, just say yes for the record.

Robert HILL: Yes, we can do that.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Commissioner. I do not mind if the minister or the commissioner answers this question, but what are the current projections for Victoria Police recruitment, and when is the force expected to return to full operational strength?

Anthony CARBINES: Sure. I might just start with a couple of comments on that, Mr Welch, and then the chief may like to add to my comments.

Richard WELCH: I am really just after a date, actually.

Anthony CARBINES: Obviously the work that we are doing at the academy in terms of streamlining the weeks at the academy to graduate, the application process that has been streamlined to –

Richard WELCH: Do you have a date when you will be back at full operational strength?

Anthony CARBINES: The chief commissioner might like to speak to a date, but we are working towards that as soon as we can.

Richard WELCH: That is all I am asking for.

Robert HILL: Thank you, Minister. In relation to a specific date, I cannot provide the committee that date. I can say that there are a number of variables that are at play here. I do commence by saying that Victoria Police is not unique in terms of our recruitment challenges; that is something that many professions and vocations face. I have already outlined the number of vacancies that we currently have in our organisation. But I can say, through the extensive reforms that we have delivered in terms of our recruitment process, the extensive reforms that we have delivered in our training program and with the number of applications that I am seeing in more recent times significantly increase, by the latest estimations that have been provisioned to me it is anything between three to five years that we can say, hand on heart, that we will have 17,022 police members providing service to the community of Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chief Commissioner. Has there been any modelling done of early retirement following changes to the police EBA?

Anthony CARBINES: Perhaps I could kick off on that. With regard to the EBA arrangements, I assume you are referring to what was clause 121, which is now clause 127, and the opportunity for police members in the agreement between Victoria Police and the police association, which has seen a pay rise to police members of 20 per cent for most members and 18 per cent for all members –

Richard WELCH: Have you done modelling?

Anthony CARBINES: There has been work done to make sure that as police members who may choose to exit through the arrangements of 121 –

Richard WELCH: No, no. I understand the scheme. I am just saying: have you done the modelling on how many you are going to lose?

Anthony CARBINES: We have made provision for the fact that we need to continue to boost our recruitment numbers but also provide the opportunity for those members who choose to do so to take –

Richard WELCH: So have you modelled that?

Anthony CARBINES: I will ask the chief to speak to those matters, because they are employment matters.

Richard WELCH: Let us get to that then.

Robert HILL: Thank you again for the question. Certainly, again, there are a number of variables at play here. As the minister said, clause 127 will provide an entitlement to our members prior to 31 December to leave our organisation with the provision of a payout relating to 12 months sick leave. We have continued to do modelling, and unfortunately it fluctuates. In the latest number that has been provisioned to me, there are approximately 300 members that we have identified that could possibly depart our organisation by the end of the year. But more recently, anecdotally I am told that may reduce, because our members are taking advice from financial advisers, and the advice is to some members that it might not be as viable as they first thought. So again, we continue to do the forecasting and we continue to do the modelling. Unfortunately there are a lot of variables in play here.

Richard WELCH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair. And thank you very much, Minister and officials. I wanted to refer now to your presentation where you spoke, Minister, about the investment in the machete ban. Minister, can you speak to how this ban will increase community safety?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Ms Kathage. I would like to go to those matters. Community safety is an Allan government top priority, and all Victorians have the right to be safe and to feel safe in their homes and

communities. We know that too many families have been affected by the devastating impact of knife crime, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge every Victorian who has been affected by this senseless violence but also to thank every police officer and PSO for the work they do every day, putting themselves in harm's way to keep the community safe. We are grateful for their service and dedication to our state.

The Allan government has listened to our experts, including Victoria Police, our retail partners and victims, and we are delivering Australia's first-ever machete ban. Under our changes, machetes will be classified as a prohibited weapon in Victoria from 1 September, and anyone caught with a machete after 1 September will face up to two years in jail or a fine of some \$47,000. Prohibited weapons are the most restricted weapons regulated in Victoria. They are not controlled weapons; they are banned weapons. The United Kingdom recently led a similar reform over an 18-month implementation timeframe. We have committed to implement that in half the time.

One critical component of implementing a safe and effective ban will be the machete surrender scheme. It is essentially an amnesty period which will run for three months, commencing on 1 September, to ensure Victorians are afforded the opportunity to surrender machetes safely without committing a crime. The amnesty scheme is critical to ensure that the community, law-abiding Victorians, are given an opportunity to comply with the ban. To facilitate the surrender scheme, secure disposal bins will be installed at more than forty 24-hour police stations. An extensive public and retail education campaign will also be rolled out to ensure our community understands the ban and can comply with it. The government has also been clear that there will be a need for some strict exemptions as part of the ban, and my department is consulting with industry and multicultural groups, and planning is underway to develop an exemption scheme that strikes the right balance between keeping our community safe and enabling those who have a legitimate need to continue to possess machetes to still be able to do so.

Last year alone, Victoria Police seized more than 14,700 edged weapons, getting them off our streets and out of the hands of offenders. But we know more work needs to be done to stop the supply of machetes and get these dangerous weapons off our streets. Consumer Affairs Victoria and my colleague Minister Staikos have implemented an interim sale ban, which came into effect from midday on Wednesday 28 May. The initiative will see a total ban on all sales of machetes in shops across Victoria, and it is an important initiative that complements the work my department is doing delivering Australia's first-ever machete ban. It also complements the efforts we have seen from major retailers who have stepped up and committed to removing machetes from their shelves, including prior to the government's interim sales ban. The machete ban will get as many machetes as possible out of our homes and off our streets. We want Victorians to surrender their knives as part of the amnesty process and encourage their families, neighbours and friends to do the same. Knife crime – in fact violence of any kind – has no place in our state. Community safety, Ms Kathage, is just not negotiable.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. What other policy work is being undertaken to target knife crime beyond that?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you. It is an interesting question, because our machete ban is just one aspect of the work to get knives out of the hands of criminals and off our streets. At the time when our nation-leading machete ban passed the Parliament, we also took steps to strengthen Victoria Police's ability to stop, search and seize knives and other weapons without a warrant. This ensures that Victoria Police continue to have the powers and flexibility that they need to respond to intelligence and get these dangerous weapons off our streets.

We have amended the *Control of Weapons Act* to do five major things: increase the period of time when a planned designation at an event can take place; reduce the time that Victoria Police need to wait before returning to an area to search for weapons; allow Victoria Police to declare an area based on intelligence; increase the length of time a search operation can take place from 12 to 24 hours; and modernise of course the way that search operations are communicated to the public. Our planned and unplanned designated area random weapons search scheme has been a key tool for Victoria Police for almost 15 years. They allow Victoria Police to combat the unlawful possession and use of weapons in public places by allowing them to conduct random weapons searches in designated areas. When an area is declared as a designated area, police and PSOs can stop and search any person or vehicle randomly in the area without a warrant. These powers have been used with positive results since 2009, but Victoria Police told us they need more flexibility in the way they operate, which is why we made further changes to the law this year. These enhanced search powers and the machete ban will work together to keep Victorians safe.

The government is also tightening our bail laws in relation to weapons-related offences, ensuring alleged offenders face stronger bail tests from their first offence. These are critical initiatives to deter and prevent knife crime and keep our community safe.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. Can you outline for the committee what else Victoria is doing to crack down on serious youth offending more broadly?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Ms Kathage. Victoria Police do an incredible job. They work to divert young people away from the justice system and keep the community safe while holding serious youth offenders to account and bringing them before the courts. We know there are a small number of repeat offenders who are driving increases in serious offending committed by young people. Victoria Police are making more arrests than ever before. Our laws need to strike the right balance between ensuring that a young person who makes a mistake has the opportunity to turn their life around while holding serious repeat offenders to account. Make no mistake that if you commit a serious violent offence, there are serious consequences for your actions.

Our changes to bail are already in place, and again, if you pose an unacceptable risk to the community and to community safety, you will be refused bail. Victoria Police continue to run dedicated operations, including Operation Trinity, which sees police out every single night until dawn, targeting those people who are committing aggravated burglaries and car thefts. It has been a very successful operation by Victoria Police.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. I am going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. Chair. Evening, Minister. Evening, Chief Commissioner. On the machete reforms, Minister, did the United Kingdom provide additional powers to police to search offenders and prevent them having knives and machetes when they made similar reforms, and are you considering these same reforms?

Anthony CARBINES: The ban that was put in place in the United Kingdom took clearly a significant period of time to implement – 18 months. We are bringing forward our arrangements in record time and will be the first jurisdiction in the country to do so. I did outline in my answer to Ms Kathage a range of programs and legislative initiatives that we have made around designated areas to expand the length of time that those areas can be designated by Victoria Police and how often they can return to those areas as designated areas and search people without a warrant for edged weapons or concealed weapons. Those changes have been effective and will assist with the reforms and the amnesty period and our machete implementation as a suite of services that respond to Victoria Police's requests. The \$13 million that we have outlined in the budget for the machete amnesty and the ban will be effective, I believe, in providing not just the direct needs for Victoria Police to implement the ban but also the programs that we need and the powers that police need around expanding designated areas, returning more often, staying for longer and being able to do that without advertising necessarily in newspapers, being able to do that online and bringing a more nimble effect into place that supports Victoria Police in taking it up to those who want to carry edged weapons in our community.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Minister. Chief Commissioner, has Victoria Police asked for any additional powers that have not been granted by the government – for example, the knife prevention orders that were also introduced in the UK?

Robert HILL: Can I start by saying that Victoria Police had dialogue via the police minister on a range of legislative reforms that the government may wish to consider. Victoria Police had those conversations in confidence. But be assured that Victoria Police provide frank and fearless advice to the police minister at our weekly meetings, and sometimes on other occasions, as it relates to a range of legislative options that the government can consider.

Jade BENHAM: So Victoria Police is satisfied with the reforms that have been made? You have not made any specific additional requests?

Robert HILL: Victoria Police is one stakeholder that the government consult in terms of different legislative interventions and reforms. Victoria Police is guided by the government. The government set policy, the government set legislation, and our service is to effect that legislation through the enforcement.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chief Commissioner. I want to talk about the capacity of Victoria Police Academy. What measures at the moment are being taken to expand intake to address the ongoing shortfall of frontline police officers? What is the total capacity right now of the academy?

Robert HILL: We have approximately 500 recruits in training at the moment, but we also provide specialist training and promotional courses to a range of police officers at a range of ranks. In terms of capacity, we have capacity to accommodate people within the academy in terms of a bedroom, so to speak, but of course a lot of our recruits are metropolitan based and they live offsite. The exact number in terms of beds, I look at the material in front of me and I have not got that available at this point in time. Suffice to say Victoria Police is committed to delivering double squads comprising 26 members in each squad – 52 members inducted every fortnight – trained and then deployed across the state post that 25-week program, and Victoria Police will accommodate those recruits going through. If we need to prioritise those recruits over and above our promotional programs that we can run offsite, if we can prioritise the recruits as opposed to the specialist courses we run onsite, that is what we will do. Our priority is to deliver the 17,022 police members to the community of Victoria as soon as we possibly can.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chief Commissioner. We are on budget paper 3, page 70. With recruitment, how much of the \$2.8 million is for training or increasing capacity at the academy?

Robert HILL: If I may refer that to the Deputy Secretary of Victoria Police, who is in charge of our finance and HR area.

David BUTLER: Thanks, Chief Commissioner. That full amount is for the media campaign. It is an extension of our Made for More advertising campaign.

Jade BENHAM: The full \$2.8 million is for the media recruitment campaign?

David BUTLER: That is correct.

Jade BENHAM: So, no scope in there to increase capacity at the academy to help fill the shortfall of frontline numbers?

David BUTLER: Not from within that.

Jade BENHAM: Not within that one. Where is the additional money to train additional police officers? Which line item would that sit in?

Robert HILL: Again, that is a question that I will, again, refer to my Deputy Secretary in terms of exactly where that sits. I cannot provide you with that advice, but I can assure you of this: Victoria Police is funded to train our police recruits to deliver against a complement of 17,022 police numbers, and that will be delivered, as I said earlier, within the next three to five years.

Jade BENHAM: Does the academy require more capacity and more funding?

Robert HILL: Certainly the police academy is funded to deliver against what we require in terms of our recruit training and is also funded in terms of delivering specialist courses and promotional programs. It has not been brought to my attention that the academy requires additional funding to deliver over and above that.

Jade BENHAM: So are you happy with the capacity at the moment and the training levels?

Robert HILL: Well, I am very comfortable with – if you think about upstream – our recruitment processes and the work we have done in terms of the application process to streamline that.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Chair. Good evening, Minister, Chief Commissioner and officials. Minister, I would like to start with road safety. Budget paper 3, page 70, for the road safety action plan outlines \$19.7 million in the upcoming budget year but also significant funding over the forward estimates for this initiative. Can you please talk to me about how this funding will be supporting improvement to Victoria's road safety?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks very much, Mr Galea, for the opportunity to speak to what is really a very serious issue. At the outset any life lost on our roads is one life too many, and the impact of road trauma is felt widely. From loved ones to victims and emergency services too, who respond to these tragedies, no-one is left unaffected. Road safety remains a key focus of our government, and we know it is more important than ever to hold dangerous, distracted drivers to account. Tragically, in 2024, 284 lives were lost on Victorian roads, and some 136 lives have been lost on our roads to date – that is many more than this time last year and many more than the five-year average. Every Victorian has a role to play in driving down the road trauma and ensuring that every road user gets home safely.

At the outset I urge all Victorians to make good road safety decisions: wear your seatbelt, stick to the speed limits, never drive under the influence and never check your mobile phone when you are driving. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister Horne, recently launched the second road safety action plan, and this plan will deliver life-saving road safety infrastructure and strengthen enforcement efforts over the next four years to reduce road trauma. It is a plan that provides over \$156 million to continue and expand our successful distracted driver camera network, ensuring that if you are doing the wrong thing and driving distracted or not wearing your seatbelt, you will be caught and you will be held to account. Distracted driving is a major cause of road trauma in this state, and we know that around one in four fatalities on our roads involves drivers or passengers not wearing a seatbelt. That is why we initially invested \$33.72 million to deliver a new generation of artificial intelligence-enabled cameras to detect illegal mobile phone use and seatbelt offences. These cameras have been out in force on Victorian roads for a year now, and data has shown us that there are still tens of thousands of people out there driving while distracted or not buckled up correctly. We know that cameras are only one of our most effective enforcement tools, driving down road trauma and saving lives.

Research conducted by the Monash University Accident Research Centre, MUARC, shows that over 99 per cent of drivers passing road safety cameras comply with the road rules by keeping to the posted speed limit and not running red lights. Where one of the cameras across our road safety network detects a possible offence, like someone using their mobile phone or not wearing a seatbelt, the offence is verified by Victoria Police and an infringement is issued. Where infringements are issued, the funds are allocated to the Better Roads Victoria Trust. Through the trust, the funding is reinvested in important Victorian road projects and road safety initiatives, including, but not limited to, road restoration, road infrastructure improvements and bridge strengthening. Our message is clear: if you are doing the wrong thing and driving distracted or not wearing your seatbelt, you will be caught and you will be held to account.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. On road safety cameras in particular, there has been a rollout of some new cameras recently with new technology. How are you using these cameras to change driver behaviour?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Mr Galea. As just touched on, this budget is providing \$156 million to continue and expand our distracted driver camera network. This will allow more of our DDS camera trailers to be on the road, catching Victorians doing the wrong thing. Last financial year, 109,343 drivers were caught by these cameras – over 50,000 of them or their passengers for failing to wear a seatbelt and over 59,000 for illegally holding a portable device. I note there have been some misconceptions in the media recently about the technology behind these cameras, and I would like to very quickly explain the process behind the issuing of fines to ensure that the committee understands how and why this \$156 million will be spent. Each camera trailer has two cameras and an infrared flash that are enabled with AI software. The cameras take high-resolution images at any time of day or night, and in all traffic and weather conditions. The two images taken by these cameras will be able to prove if a seatbelt is not being properly worn by the driver or passenger of the vehicle, or if the driver is holding a personal device like a mobile phone. The AI technology automatically reviews each image. If it does not see a potential offence, it will reject the image. If the AI detects a driver who may be using a portable device or not wearing their seatbelt, it flags the image for further review. Images where there might be a potential offence are then checked and verified by qualified independent officers. There are of course appropriate review provisions available to those fined by these cameras.

The other technology that I would like to briefly mention is our state's point-to-point camera network. These cameras currently operate on Peninsula Link, activated in 2013, and the Hume Freeway, activated in 2007 – with Ms Kathage nodding. The 2021–22 budget also provided funding for two new point-to-point camera systems, which will be enforcing soon. Point-to-point road safety cameras largely target risky camera-surfing behaviour, where road users speed in between the fixed road safety cameras thinking they can get away with

speeding and not get caught. The system knows how long it should take a vehicle that is not speeding to drive between the two points. If the time a vehicle takes is shorter than the time, the system calculates the average speed the vehicle was over the speed limit and it flags the incident for review and verification. We are constantly working with our road safety partners to develop and implement new technology to help change driver behaviour and save lives on our roads.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Beyond those initiatives, are there any other specific initiatives that you are pursuing to improve road safety?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Galea. Speed and red-light cameras will continue to play a key role in reducing speeding, which contributes to some 30 per cent of fatal crashes on Victorian roads. But the budget does provide over \$80 million for the continuation of our road safety camera network, which we know changes driver behaviour and saves lives. In the 2021–22 budget we allocated \$49.4 million for the installation of 35 new camera sites and two new point-to-point networks to support the commitment made under the road safety strategy action plan. I was pleased, just a couple of weeks ago, to announce that all of those 35 new sites are now operational, enforcing and ultimately helping to change driver behaviour and save lives on our roads.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Acting Chief Commissioner. Acting Chief Commissioner, just a couple of quick questions: have VicPol been asked to give any advice in respect to an intersection redesign at Heathmont village?

Robert HILL: Not that I am aware of.

Nick McGOWAN: Are you able to find out for me at some point?

Robert HILL: Yes, I can.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much. In respect to an earlier conversation, Mr Welch was referring to the number of officers that are on WorkCover, and then I think you took up on unplanned leave. Do you know what you are budgeting for in terms of how many days of unplanned leave for this coming financial year?

Robert HILL: Not off the top of my head. I will refer to the Deputy Secretary, if I may, who might be able to enlighten you.

David BUTLER: No, sorry, I do not have that at hand.

Nick McGOWAN: That is okay. Do you mind getting that for me? One of the most predominant issues I hear from those on the ground is unplanned leave is a very big problem for any workforce of course but particularly for police officers. If somebody does not rock up for their shift, it makes life difficult for everyone. So I would appreciate that.

Acting Chief Commissioner, the new commissioner – it may even be one for the minister – I understand will be ineligible for top secret national security briefings until such time as he receives clearance. Is that correct, Minister?

Anthony CARBINES: No. I might ask my Secretary to speak to those matters, but I can assure Victorians and the committee that Mr Mike Bush will begin his duties as Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police on 27 June. But specifically to that matter, I might just ask the Secretary to add some comments there.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

Kate HOUGHTON: Thank you. There would be processes for any new chief commissioner to get clearance. Given that he is a New Zealander, there are special provisions within that architecture for New Zealanders to be treated like Australians.

Nick McGOWAN: So he will be privy to top secret intelligence briefings? He will not have to go through a delegate?

Kate HOUGHTON: No, he will not have to go through delegations, but he will need to go through a process to get that, and all of those things we are working through now before he starts on 27 June.

Nick McGOWAN: So on the 27th he will have top secret security clearance?

Kate HOUGHTON: He will be able to do his job as expected on 27 June.

Nick McGOWAN: Are we saying something different, or are we saying the same thing?

Kate HOUGHTON: We are saying the same thing.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Thank you. FOIs, Acting Chief Commissioner, are one of my bugbears. Minister, it is just incomprehensible – the last FOI I put, in my response was 245 days, and of course the prescribed limit is 30 days. It seems to be out of control. Is anyone taking any measures to rectify that problem?

Robert HILL: It is very fortuitous that Deputy Secretary Butler is with us today, because he in fact is in charge of that area.

Nick McGOWAN: Line him up.

Robert HILL: So I will hand over to Mr Butler.

Nick McGOWAN: Mr Butler, what has gone wrong?

David BUTLER: Look, there have been a lot of challenges in that FOI space. We have had an ever increasing number and complexity of requests. The majority of Victoria Police FOI requests are from victims of crime. We have implemented a range of initiatives to try and speed up that process, but it does take time to work through a backlog.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much.

Anthony CARBINES: If you do not mind, just very quickly I will say that Victoria Police receives more FOI requests than any other agency across the government. It is a significant number.

Nick McGOWAN: I understand that some police stations – Wallan, Boronia, Belgrave, Rowville, Mooroolbark and Croydon – were reportedly closed Saturday nights to be used for soccer. Is that correct?

Robert HILL: Last Saturday evening we had the A-League grand final between Melbourne City and Melbourne Victory, and that, through a risk assessment process, warranted us bringing additional police into the city to ensure that event was conducted in the most safe and celebratory way. During the course of ensuring that we had sufficient police to maintain public order we suspended some counter services at nine police stations in the eastern region. Those counter services that were suspended did, again, at that station have the provision of uniformed police on the road responding to any calls for service. The service that was suspended merely related to the counter service. We communicated to the affected communities that the nearest police station that they could go and seek counter service from was in the vicinity of 5 to 15 minutes away at maximum, depending on which station that was.

Nick McGOWAN: I am told you had 900 police officers at the soccer. Is that correct?

Robert HILL: We do not share publicly the number of police resources that we deploy to maintain public order and community safety. Those are matters that would potentially compromise future operations, and that is not something we share.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Acting Chief Commissioner. Are you able to share with me how many sworn officers we have down at Box Hill, Forest Hill and Ringwood?

Robert HILL: At what particular time?

Nick McGOWAN: As of today, if we can, but the most recent you have for those three stations.

Robert HILL: Across our 333 police stations –

Nick McGOWAN: I am just interested in those three. I am being a little bit selfish, if you will forgive me.

Robert HILL: I could not give you an accurate number of police that were at those police stations today.

Nick McGOWAN: I mean the positions of sworn officers that have not been fulfilled.

Robert HILL: I can share with you that the vacancy rate across our metropolitan police stations ranges between 5 to 15 per cent, in some cases 20 per cent.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. I understand it is 15 at Box Hill. These are figures that are commonly known. I would appreciate to know how many in, as I said, Ringwood, Forest Hill and Box Hill – although I think I know Box Hill. Likewise, PSO hubs – why is there not a PSO hub at Heathmont train station?

Robert HILL: Infrastructure, you mean?

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Robert HILL: My understanding is that we have got infrastructure to provide the PSO deployment to the 219 police stations across metropolitan Melbourne and that four rural locations are in place.

Nick McGOWAN: There is nothing at Heathmont train station. Are you able to look into that for me?

Robert HILL: Well, my understanding is that there is a hub at that location.

Nick McGOWAN: I was there myself, Acting Chief Commissioner. There is no PSO hub there, I can assure you.

Robert HILL: Well, I will then take that on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much. In addition to that, the designated area for PSOs and where they can patrol – are you able to provide that for the stations?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McGowan. We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I am interested in police recruitment. I understand that you are a regular visitor to the police academy. I refer to budget paper 3, pages 70 and 74, and the investment in the Victoria Police recruitment program. Minister, can you outline how this investment is expected to increase application numbers?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks very much, Mr Tak. Our government supports our police officers. That is why we have made record investments to deliver a modern, innovative, world-class police service to keep members of the community safe. We understand policing is a unique and fulfilling career, and I know from my conversations with police officers across the state that they join Victoria Police because they have a passion for serving the community and keeping our state safe. We have delivered the single biggest uplift in police numbers in the state's history. Our government has continued to build on this uplift through our \$342 million investment to deliver 502 new police officers and 50 PSOs as part of our government's \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police in this budget. But we are also putting funds into our Made for More advertising campaign, which runs across all media platforms, including television, radio, social media and other digital platforms. We know that many industries across the country are facing workforce shortages. Policing is not immune to those pressures. Our Made for More campaign has been running successfully since 2022, and the data shows us that having the campaign in market across the state has a tangible impact on our application numbers.

One of the best parts of my role is attending graduation ceremonies at the police academy. I was there with the acting chief just the other week, and every fortnight there are recruits from different countries and different stages of life, different educational and working backgrounds. They parade out, ready to begin their career keeping Victorians safe. And I take the opportunity to say that Victoria Police is actively recruiting, with the

new EBA now agreed to, providing officers with a 4.5 per cent pay increase. There has never been a better time to consider applying to join the service, Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. And the follow-up question: can you provide the committee with an update on what other work Victoria Police is undertaking to streamline the recruitment process?

Anthony CARBINES: Sure. Thanks very much. The recruitment process to join Victoria Police is very thorough to make sure that we get the best people joining the organisation. Victoria Police prides itself on its high standards of integrity and professionalism, and that begins from day one. There are multiple steps in the Victoria Police recruitment pathway, and as with any workplace, it is important to review those steps regularly to make sure that they are fit for purpose and are not putting up barriers for great people to join the police service.

Earlier this year changes were made to the requirements to sit the entrance exam. Eligible applicants will not have to sit the entrance exam if they receive an ATAR over 65 and receive a study score of more than 25 in English. We have also made changes that recognise that people interested in a career in policing who come from other professional backgrounds improve the diversity and experience of our workforce. So the entry exam requirements are also waived if you have worked in emergency services in Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom within the past five years; if you have worked at grade 3 or higher in the Victorian public service; you are currently working in a non-sworn capacity for Victoria Police; or if you have successfully passed entry requirements for interstate police services. And university graduates with degrees in arts, science, humanities, business and law as well as current students in their final year of studying criminology will be exempt from the test. These changes are already seeing results, with over 160 applicants skipping the entrance test, getting them on their way to the front line sooner.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. And other work that is being undertaken to support police officers to keep our community safe – can you tell us more?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Tak. Police officers put themselves in dangerous situations every day to keep our community safe, often in the first-responder situations that many of us hope we will never have to see. We saw in South Melbourne only the other week how Victoria Police officers put themselves into dangerous situations every single day, and that work can take a toll. We know that critical work can have long-lasting, often hidden impacts on the mental health and the wellbeing of our police. We know it is vital that our police officers have access to appropriate support services when they need it most. Our government has invested \$4 million over four years to continue the work of the BlueHub initiative to ensure that members have access to targeted mental health support when they need it most. Police members continue to receive ongoing mental health support through unlimited therapy sessions at the 24/7 crisis support line and the police psychology unit.

We are not just providing police with the critical mental health and wellbeing support they need and deserve, we are also ensuring that we are providing them with the equipment and the infrastructure and the powers they need to keep the community safe. That includes \$214 million in funding to roll out tasers, or conducted energy devices, to all frontline police and PSOs. There is a billion dollars in new and upgraded police infrastructure, from new stations to police houses right across our state. We have also been making it easier for police to serve firearm prohibition orders, a game-changing tool to help Victoria Police disrupt and deter organised crime. We have banned the display of gang colours and strengthened our unlawful association scheme. We have introduced unexplained wealth orders. We have expanded Victoria Police's powers to stop, search and seize weapons, making it easier for them to get dangerous weapons out of the hands of criminals and off our streets. Our task here is to disrupt and dismantle organised crime at every opportunity.

We have rolled out our electronic penalty infringements, or ePIN technology, allowing police to create and issue electronic penalty notices. It has been a real game changer and really popular with frontline police members. I went to an induction, if you like, of the technology and to speak directly with members on the time it saves them, particularly on the roadside when they are issuing infringements. We want that done quickly, because it also is a dangerous place to be, and we do not want members out there any longer than they have to be and also those who are on the other end of those infringements. And in case people might be wondering, if you are going to give false information through the ePIN process, well, giving false information is also an offence, so there are a lot of reasons for people to comply. But also it is a great way to make sure that police members are able to do their jobs effectively and efficiently with new technology.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister and Mr Tak. We are going to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good evening. Can I ask: how many civil cases have been filed against Victoria Police in relation to police misconduct in the last five years?

Lauren KATHAGE: How is this related to the budget?

Anthony CARBINES: I am happy to proceed. Thanks, Mr Puglielli. I might just ask the chief to speak to those matters. They are not ones that particularly I would have the details for.

Robert HILL: Just to clarify the question, you wish to know how many civil cases have been filed against Victoria Police?

Jade BENHAM: On a point of order, Chair –

The CHAIR: Ms Benham on a point of order.

Jade BENHAM: I am just wondering how this relates to the budget. What budget paper is it referring to?

The CHAIR: Mr Puglielli, if you want to provide the budget paper preference –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. The relevant output would be budget paper 3, page 160.

The CHAIR: Please proceed.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I think the answer was coming. Thank you.

Robert HILL: I think I just asked to clarify the question.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It was in relation to police misconduct – civil cases.

Robert HILL: Again, that data is not provided to me, and I do not know those numbers off the top of my head. I would have to take that on notice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That would be appreciated. If you can, in that search, how much was paid in settlement for these cases – if that can be disclosed – and how much did it cost the state to provide the defence for those cases?

Anthony CARBINES: If I might, on the amounts, that is probably legally privileged, but in relation to the broader number, that is something that we could look to provide.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Just moving on, following some previous questions –

Anthony CARBINES: Sorry, I did not mean to cut across that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is all right. Staying in the same place, a previous answer was given of 700 staff currently out on WorkCover and an additional number on notice on extended sick leave. How many of those are experiencing mental health and related issues due to poor workforce culture, such as bullying or sexual harassment?

Anthony CARBINES: If I could kick off first, Chief, what is important to note is that of our WorkCover numbers the vast majority relate to mental health instances rather than physical injury. That is a large part I think, too, of the trauma that is associated with police work, and I am sure the chief can speak further to that. I understand the further point you are going to, but I would say that overwhelmingly for those who are interacting with our WorkCover programs it is mostly mental health related matters – and I think that is particularly a sign of the trauma and the difficult work that first responders do at Victoria Police – and it is a more limited number that relate to physical injury. But I will ask the chief if he would like to add further to my comments.

Robert HILL: Thank you, Minister. As of 31 March 2025 there were 727 employees absent from our workplace on WorkCover claims – 129 were due to physical injuries and 598 due to mental injuries. The large majority of those mental injuries related to causal factors of a personal nature; the minority were work-related claims.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Chief, on another matter, we know there are some versions of the pilot PACER program currently in place. Can I ask: what is the implementation status for that across Victoria?

Robert HILL: The PACER program has been operating in Victoria Police for some time. In terms of its broader application, again, it is a settled program; it is a program that is well embedded into our culture, practice and custom. In terms of further rollout, I am not privy to that being extended beyond our current model.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Do you know what LGAs that model is operating across?

Robert HILL: It is certainly operating in metropolitan Melbourne, and I think it is operating in some rural settings as well.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Are there any other different models being trialled at the moment?

Robert HILL: Not that I am aware of.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Just looking through the budgets, over the last decade funding to Victoria Police has almost doubled – it is now \$4.5 billion per year – but in the same decade, looking at the Victoria Police annual report, there has been a sharp decline in public trust in police. In 2014, 78 per cent of Victorians reported satisfaction with policing services; in 2024 it was 55 per cent. In 2014, 89 per cent believed that VicPol acted with integrity, and a decade later it is 62 per cent. It sounds like a broken system, doesn't it?

Anthony CARBINES: There are probably a couple of points I would make with regard to the statistics you have alluded to there. One of them would be that we know through the COVID period much was asked of Victoria Police in enforcing laws through that period in a very tough time, and we know that had an effect around public perception. No-one really liked the law being enforced on them in what were very trying times for all Victorians. That would be one element. I think also what I would point out through the EBA process – they are tough processes – is that we secured a strong outcome, an agreed outcome between Victoria Police and the association to see members get a 4.5 per cent pay rise, but I think the public perception of the argy-bargy of those things can have an effect on perception.

Lastly, I would say that Mr Mike Bush, who is coming as the new chief commissioner on the 27 June, has a very demonstrated track record of turning around public perceptions of the police service in New Zealand. Certainly a key part of our engagement with him and his appointment has been some clear KPIs around turning that around, improving that here in Victoria. He has got a track record of delivering that. I am sure that he will be able to deliver results here and bring in that fresh new mindset that he has delivered in organisations he has run before. We require him to do that here, and he has committed to leading that work. But the chief might like to add something further.

Robert HILL: I am conscious of the time, but the approach adopted by that survey has shifted significantly, and every police jurisdiction around Australia has experienced a similar decline. Historically, calls were made over hard-line phones to residents in Victoria. There has been a shift now where those phone calls are made to mobile phones and now social media. Online surveys are now the adopted practice, and we have seen in every jurisdiction in Australia a decline in the level of community confidence and trust in policing. Suffice to say it is pivotal for us to continue to commit to community engagement and building that trust beyond those numbers.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: So –

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Puglielli. We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister, Acting Chief Commissioner and officials. I do recognise that issue with polling matters. I think there have been some polling issues in relation to the recent federal election. I do not think anyone expected we would pick up Menzies or Melbourne, so those polling matters go across all of the community.

Minister, I would like to take you to budget paper 3, page 74, relating to the Victorian Fixated Threat Assessment Centre and initiatives to counter violent extremism. I am just hoping you could talk through that centre and also how that goes to improving community safety.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Hilakari. It is an incredibly interesting area of my portfolio and, as is so often the case, shows a strong collaboration between Victoria Police and other parts of government, in this case the Department of Health and Forensicare. The Victorian Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, or FTAC as it is commonly referred to, is a statewide service established in 2018 to provide a structured and coordinated approach to responding to serious threats of violence posed by individuals who often have complex needs that could result in acts of violent extremism. FTAC brings together police and forensic and mental health experts under one roof to better identify and mitigate the risk of fixated individuals engaging in violent acts, allowing for early intervention and treatment. The model was originally developed with input from leading forensic mental health specialists, including Forensicare, who remain a partner in the critical initiative we are discussing here.

Once FTAC receive a referral they will undertake an assessment of the individual of concern and develop a management plan to reduce the risk posed by that individual and ensure they are able to access the supports they may require, such as engaging or re-engaging with mental health services. The FTAC model is designed to be proactive, preventative and steered towards early intervention, and we know that services like FTAC are increasingly important, as we have seen some concerning increases in the number of threats made against public figures at a state level, a federal level and across the globe.

The funding will ensure that Victoria's response to these threats continues to reflect best practice and be nationally consistent. We have also seen the terrorism threat level raised from 'possible' to 'probable' by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation over the past 12 months, and we know that violent extremism is an ongoing threat to the safety of the community. In Victoria we saw that with the attack of the Adass Israel Synagogue. FTAC is only one important tool used by Victoria Police to identify and respond to the risk of violent extremism and keep the community safe.

Victoria Police's approach to tackling the threat of violent extremism is underpinned by the counterterrorism strategy. That strategy has provided a framework focusing the organisation's work to prevent acts of violent extremism around four key pillars: prevention, protection, disruption and response. Victoria Police also make a significant contribution to the Victorian Joint Counter Terrorism Team, an integrated investigative capability staffed by Victoria Police, Australian Federal Police and ASIO, as I mentioned earlier.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister. Within your presentation you mentioned the Northern Community Support Group. I am just hoping you can run me through that and what its aim is and what it seeks to achieve.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Hilakari. The Northern CSG, the community support group, perform a vital service in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, including for many in the community of West Heidelberg, which I represent, and I am pleased that the Northern CSG will continue to be funded as part of this budget – a true community-led program providing support to Muslim communities to promote social cohesion and belonging. The Northern CSG is a place-based initiative operating out of the Preston Mosque and the multicultural youth centre in Broadmeadows to deliver a suite of programs designed to build social cohesion, resilience and the social and cultural participation of its clients. The Northern CSG does this by working with the community to provide employment, education and training plus support services in a culturally sensitive environment. We know that building trust within community is vital to promoting social cohesion, and we know also from previous research that many members of the Muslim community are most likely to report concerns and fears of problematic, antisocial or potentially radical behaviour of a family member to a trusted community leader in the first instance. This highlights the need for community-based, culturally specific services for the Muslim community to help report and address problematic behaviour. The Northern CSG has been able to provide this service. The Northern CSG also has a demonstrated record of working with youth leaders, service providers, schools and religious leaders to provide quality and culturally specific services to prevent antisocial behaviour to reduce the risk of violent extremism.

One example of the important work undertaken by the Northern CSG is Rasheed, and Rasheed was referred to the NCSG in early 2020. He had previously been participating in a Victoria Police led community integration

program for those at risk of radicalisation and also had a relative who had been convicted and was in prison for terrorism-related charges. These are dual factors that indicate he is a risk of radicalisation. At the time of referral Rasheed was reported to have no ideological concerns but was considered to be vulnerable and likely to benefit from positive social influences and engagement with the community. The CSG works to provide early intervention before the need for police or justice involvement arises. They provided holistic case management to Rasheed, working both in person and using remote engagement to address education and financial risks, and that holistic approach in supporting the entire family has assisted in stabilising the family environment, which is a key protective factor of course in preventing young people from engaging in antisocial behaviours and addressing vulnerability to radicalisation. Over the course of his engagement Rasheed has not presented with any ideological concerns, nor has he engaged in antisocial activity. He is engaged with the homegrown imams, connecting with religious content from trusted sources. Rasheed has recently secured casual employment with the help and support of a case manager, and this has helped him develop a sense of pride, purpose and responsibility through meaningful contribution to society, making him less vulnerable to potentially negative influences. An independent evaluation found that the breadth of activities delivered through the Northern CSG has been valuable and contributed to the collective outcomes for young people and of course their families.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister and Mr Hilakari. Minister, department officials, Acting Chief Commissioner, thank you very much for appearing before the committee tonight. The committee will follow up on questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request. The committee is going to take a very brief break before beginning its consideration of the victims portfolio at 6:20 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.