

# **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 Community Safety; and

Kate Houghton, Secretary,

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

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

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 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 this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is recorded by Hansard and is 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 said 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 Community Safety 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. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, 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 this evening.

**Visual presentation.**

**Anthony CARBINES:** Community safety is not just the responsibility of one agency or one portfolio. It is achieved through collaboration across the whole of government, led by the justice department and delivered in partnership with every portfolio.

Our government has a long record of investing in crime prevention, early intervention, policing, courts and corrections, all with the goal of keeping Victorians safe. We have backed this with investment and reforms, including strengthening bail laws, supporting police and justice workforces, banning machetes and supporting local communities through targeted infrastructure improvements. Through the establishment of the Council on Bail, Rehabilitation and Accountability, COBRA, we are driving a coordinated whole-of-government response to youth crime and to protect the community. Together these actions form a coordinated, government-wide response to keeping Victorians safe.

We are backing our reforms with the people and resources needed to manage offenders safely and securely. Our \$727 million community safety package is strengthening Victoria's prison and youth justice systems to meet growing demand and support our bail reforms. We are creating 400 new frontline roles in adult corrections and 320 new roles in youth justice, providing more staff to manage offenders safely. We are expanding capacity, with nearly 1000 new beds in adult prisons and 88 new beds in youth justice to support our strengthened bail laws. We are improving rehabilitation and health services to help offenders turn their lives

around, reducing the risk of reoffending and making our community safer. We have banned machetes and invested in a machete disposal scheme to keep these dangerous weapons off our streets and out of our communities.

Community safety also means creating safe public spaces and empowering people to take action. It is why I have invested \$7.4 million to strengthen frontline police recruitment, to encourage more Victorians to take up a career in the police service. We have also invested nearly \$3 million in Crime Stoppers Victoria and Neighbourhood Watch.

These trusted programs empower communities to report crime, raise awareness and take part in crime prevention activities. We are investing \$3.5 million in new security cameras across Melbourne, helping to prevent, detect and respond to crime and supporting a safer city for everyone to enjoy. Safe environments are critical to community wellbeing, and these investments make a real difference to the safety of Victorians. I would like to share some examples of a couple of the campaigns delivered as part of the efforts of our community safety partners. The Great Safe Plate Blitz was a successful Neighbourhood Watch campaign supporting the community to prevent numberplate theft across metropolitan Victoria. The number one item stolen from vehicles in Victoria is numberplates. Stolen plates are then affixed to stolen cars, which are used to commit a wide range of crimes. Neighbourhood Watch fitted more than 3500 cars with anti-theft one-way numberplate screws at 30 high-profile locations where numberplate theft is a known issue. The campaign was an opportunity for Neighbourhood Watch to educate the community about motor vehicle crime prevention and to raise awareness of its work. The campaign saw strong community engagement, and the initiative also helped strengthen the partnership between Neighbourhood Watch and Victoria Police, working together to reduce crime and improve community safety.

The 'See It. Share It' campaign was a joint road safety initiative between Crime Stoppers Victoria and Victoria Police. The campaign called on members of the community to share recorded footage of high-risk driving with Crime Stoppers through an easy-to-use online platform. The campaign raised awareness of the dangers and consequences of high-risk driving and encouraged the community to report dangerous behaviour. It received strong media coverage, with the campaign seen around 5.4 million times across Victoria. Crime Stoppers engaged with local councils, industry and community partners to promote the campaign and hosted a series of in-person community events. Victoria Police has been able to use the footage submitted by the community to investigate, detect and prosecute dangerous drivers. Road safety is everyone's responsibility, and this campaign is a great example of how Crime Stoppers empowers Victorians to take action to prevent crime and improve community safety.

We know that effective responses to youth crime keep the community safe, and that starts with early intervention. Our youth crime prevention program has already supported more than 7500 young people since its commencement in 2016, connecting them to case management, coaching, mentoring and prosocial activities to reduce their risk of offending. As announced last week, at-risk young people in Mildura will receive more support with a new program to help them stay on track.

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

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you, Minister. On community crime prevention, I notice it has gone from \$12.4 million in 2024–25 to \$26.1 million as the revised envelope of funding down to \$15.7 million, so that is quite a significant reduction. What was the \$13.2 million extra used for in the revised figure of \$26.1 million?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Sure. There are a couple of accounting treatments there, Deputy Chair, which I will ask the justice Secretary to speak to.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Thank you. On the year on year – so the 2024–25 budget and then the 2025–26 budget – there is an increase, and you are talking about the expected outcome. We have had this conversation before about what is in this output group. I think it was a point of conversation at PAEC last year. There were some things that were in that variation from new things that have come into the output group, and there were also one-off payments within the 2024–25 year post that budget being settled. I am happy to take on notice what those specific things are. I do not have them in my notes.

**Nick McGOWAN:** If you can, that would be appreciated. Thank you very much. Minister – or perhaps Secretary, maybe you – can you provide a list of the budgeted crime prevention programs that will be funded by this year's budget?

**Anthony CARBINES:** There are probably just a couple of elements there. There are 13 programs that are currently operating across Victoria that are funded through our youth crime prevention program. Of course we evaluate our programs, and you can find them on our website. They are listed there, and the evaluations of that work are also listed there on [crimeprevention.vic.gov.au](http://crimeprevention.vic.gov.au), I think it is, and that is part of the \$13.64 million, of which the fourth year of that funding is in the new budget for the new financial year. We have also got a new program in Mildura and Mallee together supporting our young people that will be rolled out. There has also been an evaluation of that youth crime prevention program that has found a 29 per cent reduction in offending and a 24 per cent reduction in the severity of offending for participants. A recent review found that program guidelines that allow for flexibility and lower case loads for workers are getting results.

**Nick McGOWAN:** I appreciate that, Minister. You were ahead of where I was going to go, and that is that online it shows that there were no projects funded for community crime prevention in 2023–24 and the one project that you have just referred to in 2024–25. Is that correct, Secretary?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** So the \$13.64 million youth crime prevention program – that was in the 2023–24 budget year. That goes until the end of the next financial year. So there are programs in this financial year, 2025–26.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Would you mind providing that to us on notice, just so we know exactly what those programs are and where they are going?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Yes, sure.

**Anthony CARBINES:** There is also the \$3.8 million funded in this budget to continue the work at the pilot sites of Werribee and Dandenong. That is in budget paper 3, page 70. That is in addition to the \$7.3 million in the 2023–24 budget for the Brimbank, Melton and Greater Shepparton projects. And just that additional funding to continue Werribee and Dandenong takes us to an alignment of June 2027. It brings those programs together so we can run the evaluation across those programs and it just brings them into alignment, but it is additional funding.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Again, this might be for the Secretary, but how many machetes do you anticipate will be handed in under the amnesty program? Do you have a figure that you anticipate or are planning toward?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** We do not have a figure that we are planning towards, but we do know that Victoria Police in 2024 – did you want to –

**Anthony CARBINES:** Fourteen.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** 14,000 blades, knives and machetes within that 2024–25 year. But that is more of a broader range of edge weapons than machetes.

**Nick McGOWAN:** So how many? You do not have an estimate? There has been no forecast or modelling in terms of how many you expect will be handed in?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** No, we do not. But in the system of the amnesty surrender scheme there will be capacity for whatever we do have in terms of changing the bins over et cetera, depending on how many machetes are surrendered.

**Anthony CARBINES:** We are expecting to have at least 40 bins across the 24-hour police stations in Victoria, plus some mechanisms in rural and remote communities for not appointments but arrangements and protocols in place so individuals can drop into more remote locations to hand them over the counter. But they will be special arrangements for more remote communities. And we are confident that the bins that we have got and the locations will cater for any demand that comes in. But yes, it is difficult to predict just what is going to be surrendered.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Of the allocated \$13 million, Secretary, how much of that is going to be used on an awareness campaign or advertising?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** I do not have that split. Do you have that split, Bill?

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** It is a significant chunk of that funding. It is going to be a statewide education campaign.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Sure. How much?

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** I do not have that specific figure, but it is a fair chunk.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Can you provide that to us then?

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** That is still being used. So once it is once the campaign is up and all the advertising has been booked and the creative is completed, we will have a better picture of that.

**Nick McGOWAN:** So you do not know.

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** It might not be able to do that the in the time period allocated.

**Nick McGOWAN:** There must be a preliminary budget in terms of how much you anticipate you will spend on the boxes, the 40 boxes, versus the advertising. What is what is the advertising for?

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** It is significant. It is in the millions.

**Anthony CARBINES:** There is no there is no doubt we can provide the acquittal of the funding. \$13 million is allocated across the amnesty program; that is going to cater for the tender arrangements in relation to the construction of the boxes and all those elements. And then we will still be signing off on a communications plan that rolls out. And obviously there will be a cost for that, but it is all accounted for in that \$13 million in the new financial year budget. But there is not a problem in providing those allocations once they have firmed up.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Do you know how many machetes will fit in each bin, Minister, or what size they are? What do you expect a bin to hold? Obviously it is a secure bin.

**Anthony CARBINES:** Ah, specs –

**Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS:** There are specs. They are going to be large bins, but we have not released the details of the sizing and so on at this point. But construction is well underway, and it will be ready to go in time for the –

**Nick McGOWAN:** On a separate but related issue, with the reprioritisation of \$1.167 million for the tasers, do we know how many tasers have been lost in that program?

**Anthony CARBINES:** It probably more relates to our police portfolio than community safety. Police may report on those matters, but I do not have those resources. There would be none that we are aware of. That would be my –

**Nick McGOWAN:** No tasers were lost as a result?

**Anthony CARBINES:** None.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Again, in terms of community safety, the 43 police stations that have been on reduced counter hours – do we know when they will be fully open and accessible to the community as they are scheduled to be?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Well, determinations about operational matters like that are for the chief commissioner to determine.

**Nick McGOWAN:** You have an expectation, obviously, in terms of the basic service delivery for those communities. There are quite a lot of communities, obviously, with 43.

**Anthony CARBINES:** Where there are counter-hour suspensions, there are still police officers present providing a service to the community. It is just not a front-counter service that is provided. But it will be a determination and operational decision for the chief commissioner and the executive command about how they deploy those resources and what determinations they make. We do not give direction on those matters.

**Nick McGOWAN:** But there must be some sort of expected date. I mean, surely they are working towards that program this year, I would have thought.

**Anthony CARBINES:** I think what you will see is, as we continue our –

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you so much, Chair, Minister and officials. I wanted to ask about page 70 of BP3, and you referred to it in your presentation – that is the funding for CCTV in Melbourne city. Can you explain a bit about the importance of that sort of community safety infrastructure in Melbourne?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Thanks, Ms Kathage. It is an opportunity to speak about what is critical funding to support the Melbourne CBD. The city of Melbourne of course belongs to all Victorians. In the budget, on 13 May, it was announced that the City of Melbourne would invest \$2.1 million in upgrading and expanding the safe city camera program, activating more than 100 new CCTV cameras. In our budget we announced that the Allan Labor government would contribute \$3.5 million over two years to this critical initiative. Coverage will be monitored 24 hours a day from the control room, ensuring footage can be sent to Triple Zero Victoria when an incident is observed by operators as soon as it happens, helping our emergency services respond as quickly as possible. The footage can also be viewed by police, assisting them in investigations, including by making it easier to identify alleged offenders, potentially in circumstances where identification may not be possible without this technology. Safe environments are critical to supporting community safety and the community's enjoyment and use of public spaces and amenities. Communities have identified that safety infrastructure, including CCTV, is an important tool in deterring crime and anti-social behaviour. I look forward to continuing our strong partnership with the City of Melbourne to deliver this really important community safety initiative, and I commend the Lord Mayor of Melbourne Nicholas Reece for his advocacy and for working with us on this program.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you. So that new investment there, how does that sort of build on previous investment in the city, but also other LGAs beyond Melbourne city?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Thanks, Ms Kathage. I think criminal activity of any kind is driven by a complex number of factors, and the Allan government recognises that law enforcement alone does not prevent crime. That is why our government is investing in local communities to deliver innovative and local initiatives that help Victorians feel safer and be safer, by prioritising early intervention programs and social services which address the root causes of crime, as well as community safety infrastructure upgrades such as CCTV. Last year our government announced eight new CCTV cameras along Lygon Street as part of the safe city camera network expansion project. The project was jointly funded, with a \$260,000 contribution from both the government and the City of Melbourne. I regularly meet with local governments to ensure they feel supported by these government initiatives, like neighbourhood policing and our community safety forums, which are essential to ensuring communities feel listened to and that we are able to act and prioritise safety from both Victoria Police and the government.

Since 2019 over \$55 million has been invested in community safety initiatives to support safer communities. Those initiatives particularly include an investment of \$13.64 million in the 2023–24 budget to continue the youth crime prevention program, which is proven to reduce the incidence and severity of offending for participants; \$6.45 million in nine Empowering Communities partnerships; \$1.6 million in 34 youth engagement grants; \$2.8 million in 10 Creating Safer Places grants; and \$6.5 million in 24 Crime Prevention Innovation Fund grants. Some \$3.4 million of crime prevention funding has delivered CCTV cameras, often as part of large infrastructure projects. The government is committed to supporting local government and local communities in ensuring our communities feel safe.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you. I guess there is the deterrence element there, but in terms of early intervention itself, I can see the embedded youth outreach program has got the funding there in Werribee and Dandenong, I think. Are you able to provide information around how that is tackling youth crime or how it is preventing it or the early intervention of that?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Thanks, Ms Kathage. The embedded youth outreach program, or EYOP, as it is commonly known, provides a youth outreach service as part of a police response to young people at high risk of antisocial behaviour, criminal behaviour or victimisation. The budget saw \$3.8 million over two years for the continuation of this highly effective program in Werribee and Dandenong. The program aims to reduce long-term involvement in the criminal justice system by engaging with young people and their families, assessing their needs and referring them to youth-specific supports.

The program is targeted at young people aged between 10 and 24 years of age. It is designed to respond to the complex needs of young people who are at risk of long-term involvement with the criminal justice system. The EYOP can respond to any young person who comes to the attention of police, including first-time offenders, victims, missing persons and secondary offenders. The EYOP refers vulnerable young people, offenders and victims to support services, including mental health, alcohol and other drugs, education, employment, legal and housing services. It is a program that ensures young people are receiving face-to-face engagement during their most vulnerable moments. The program also engages the families of the young person to ensure people have the support they need at home and via specialised services. Between 1 July last year and 31 March this year there were over 1220 EYOP engagements with young people, which resulted in 703 referrals to support services and some 451 secondary consultations.

The funding provided in this budget will enable the program to continue in the original pilot sites in the Werribee and Dandenong local government areas. An evaluation of the program demonstrated it had a positive impact in reducing the offence rate of participants, showing a 9 per cent decrease in fact – an evaluation which supported a further investment in the 2023–24 budget to expand the program to additional locations, including Brimbank, Melton and the Greater Shepparton area.

It is a program that provides police with a unique opportunity to pair their skills and knowledge from the front line with the expertise of youth support workers. This continued partnership of police and youth workers working together to target the root cause of offending will contribute to an ongoing reduction in youth crime in Victoria and improved perceptions of community safety. The government understands the importance of continuing to invest in programs like EYOP which tackle the root causes of youth offending.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** It sounds like a real sliding doors moment for the young people at that time, so you hope they step in the right direction with a bit of support. There is another early intervention program, and there is some information in the performance statement around that on page 103. Can you provide an update on the work of that youth crime prevention program and how it is helping to address those rates of youth crime?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Thanks, Ms Kathage. The youth crime prevention program, YCPP, invests in communities experiencing high rates of youth offending and crime. It is a program that delivers place-based and targeted supports that are flexible and tailored to the needs of the young person and their family. The YCPP supports young people long term over different stages of their journey, fostering stronger connections to build protective factors against future offending. I would be very happy to provide some case studies to the committee. The Broadmeadows Community Youth Justice Alliance provides intensive case management to young people in the Banksia Gardens public housing estate and other areas in the City of Hume. The project provides family support, which extends to at-risk siblings, and since its commencement the project has supported 1556 young people.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Anything in Ringwood, Minister?

**Anthony CARBINES:** In Ballarat – I am working my way around the state here; I might get there – the Ballarat youth crime prevention project provides case coordination for young people through a well-established multi-agency partnership. The project addresses factors that contribute to youth offending, victimisation and exploitation through an individualised multi-agency support team – MAST – and since its commencement the project has supported 267 young people in the local government area of Ballarat.



The YCPP has been delivered in 15 areas across the state with high rates of youth offending, including Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank, Broadmeadows, Casey, Greater Dandenong, East Gippsland, Frankston, Greater Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Melton, Shepparton and Wyndham.

**Nick McGOWAN:** You are ignoring me, Minister.

**Anthony CARBINES:** They might be doing just a little bit better out there.

I was pleased to announce this week that a new Aboriginal YCPP would also be opening in Mildura. This program enables a targeted approach in Mildura to effectively respond to youth crime risks with adaptations to support Aboriginal self-determination. The Sunraysia Community Health Services in Mildura will receive \$350,000 to deliver Mallee Together: Supporting Our Young People, which will get young people engaged in school and help them gain employment and strengthen connections to their community. The program targets young people aged 10 to 24 years at risk of involvement or previously involved with the justice system through intensive case management, mentoring and social activities. Sunraysia Community Health Services will work with local partners to deliver the program, including Hands Up Mallee and the yarning group, to ensure programs are aligned with community need and are culturally safe. The government invested a further \$13.64 million in the 2023–24 state budget in the youth crime prevention program, bringing the total investment in the program to \$34 million since 2016–17, and to date the YCPP has supported more than 6000 young people through intensive case management, coaching, mentoring and pro-social activities that aim to build protective factors against offending, including positive peer interactions, connections to community and improved social skills. An evaluation completed in 2022 found that for young people who completed the program in YCPP the incidence of their offending dropped by 29 per cent –

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Minister. I just wanted to emphasise around the Neighbourhood Watch program that you fund, like the one established by Patrick, Wasif and others in Donnybrook, helping to build the local community sentiment –

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Kathage. I do not like to cut you off. I will go to Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair. Good evening. Minister, as you said in your introduction, crime prevention is a whole-of-government responsibility. Can you outline what budget lines in your portfolio in this year's budget contribute to the government's early intervention investment framework?

**Anthony CARBINES:** Well, there are a range of different elements that I think go to our youth crime prevention program. We have outlined, I think, some particular initiatives that I went to just before, with the fourth year of our funding, \$13.64 million, for our youth crime prevention program. There are just 13 programs already operating that are funded until the middle of next year. I outlined just before around our new funding for our Mallee Together: Supporting Our Young People program. I also want to go to the EYOP program; I touched on several million dollars that we have also provided for that program, which was the \$3.8 million to continue Werribee and Dandenong. Also, I think it is important to note more broadly, not just my portfolio, that community safety, as I said earlier, is a whole-of-government program, a whole-of-government initiative, and I would just draw your attention further to not just the justice portfolio but the \$106 million amount to the youth justice system, because that means for those who are in our custody can now, through legislative changes that many of us have been engaged in this room, we can provide services and support to those who are in the care and custodial settings for young people, and we are under obligation to provide those services, and they are early intervention services that were not previously available. There is also \$28 million to continue initiatives to combat violent extremism under our CVE program; that is very significant and has been outlined in the budget papers for my portfolio. And there is some \$19 million to continue employment hubs in our prisons through my colleague Mr Erdogan, and that is also another critical project that goes to early intervention and support programs. There are some new self-determination grants programs for First Nations people on bail and remand, and there is about \$22 million allocated to that program.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Minister, you just listed funding for custodial settings in part of your answer then. In your assessment, is incarceration a prevention strategy?

**Anthony CARBINES:** I think what is important in the work that we are doing around custodial settings is the legislative changes, in particular through the *Youth Justice Act* last year, that have required – and we have funded – support programs and services, whether they are clinical supports or other service education supports

for young people in youth justice settings. I think that means that unfortunately where incarceration as a last resort has to occur we have an obligation to make sure that we are providing services and supports to those who are in the state's care, and that has been outlined in the budget.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee.

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.

I would like to thank all ministers and officers who have given evidence to the committee today, as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and Parliamentary attendants. I would also like to thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff who have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2025–26 budget estimates on Friday 6 June 2025 at 8:30 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned.**