

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2025-26 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne – Wednesday 4 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**

Enver Erdogan MLC, Minister for Youth Justice; and

Kate Houghton, Secretary,

Jodi Henderson, Deputy Secretary, Youth Justice,

Andrea Davidson, Commissioner, Youth Justice,

Nicola Brown, Deputy Secretary, People, Safety, Culture and Communications, 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 this hearing 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 hearings and anything said may be picked up and captioned, even if said 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 Youth Justice the Honourable Enver Erdogan as well as officers from DJCS. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Thank you, Chair. It is a privilege to be at PAEC again. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging.

**Visual presentation.**

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I might go over to give a system overview in terms of our youth justice system. Our goal is to be a leading system that reduces offending, tackles the causes of offending behaviour and keeps our community safe. The government has invested over \$2 billion since coming into office in 2014 to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose youth justice system, and we continue to have one of the lowest rates of young people in custody and one of the lowest rates of Aboriginal young people under supervision in the nation. We know, based on expert evidence, that the best outcome is to divert young people away from the criminal justice system and antisocial behaviours in the main instance, and that approach is working for the vast majority of young people. But for those who keep engaging in harmful, dangerous behaviour we have delivered modern, fit-for-purpose infrastructure that allows our custodial system to respond to demand, and we are making the investments necessary to keep our community safe.

This year's budget builds on the momentum created by previous investments, investing a further \$727 million as part of a broader community safety package. That funding helps increase capacity across both adult and our youth justice system to support the new bail laws and the higher remand numbers. We are investing over \$106 million directly into youth justice to support staff with training and resources for safe and stable operations; continue early intervention and diversion programs, including the South Sudanese expert working

group; provide culturally safe and specialist rehabilitation programs; and implement the new *Youth Justice Act 2024*, the first comprehensive refresh of the legislation in over 30 years.

Earlier this year we made tough new bail laws, especially for people charged with serious crime, and this budget and the community safety package are behind this. In youth justice that means 320 additional frontline staff and a further 88 rooms across Cherry Creek and Parkville being operationalised; more rehabilitation healthcare services in custody, which also help break the cycle of offending; and more support to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal young people, including through *Wirkara Kulpa*, our first ever Aboriginal youth justice strategy.

We are working to strengthen and improve the youth justice system. Although there is more work to do, there are signs the system is delivering good results. We have had a reduction in recidivism rates, and the youth justice team hit every one of its 14 key targets this year. Some highlights are that 95 per cent of young people on community orders have a case plan within six weeks, 80 per cent of young people in custody take part in reintegration activities and 90 per cent of community-based orders are completed successfully. In addition, there are low numbers for vulnerable groups, there are only five children under the age of 14 in custody and around 12 young Aboriginal people in custody, which is much below the national average.

In terms of our *Youth Justice Act*, I might talk to that on the next slide. Last September the new *Youth Justice Act* became the law. It was the first comprehensive update of youth justice legislation in over 30 years. It is a major milestone to improve safety, rehabilitation, accountability and outcomes for young people. The Act is underpinned by a goal to support more young people to get back on the right path, which will mean our communities are safer into the long term, and also to put victims' voices into the decision-making. We have prioritised changes to the system that make the community and youth justice system safer. This includes a trial of electronic monitoring and better bail supervision, as well as early access to treatment for remanded youth.

The government changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility will come into effect this year, on 30 September 2025, and 30 September 2026 will mark the full implementation of the Act. That is the timeframe – if you can look at the slide, it just sets out what we have already achieved and where we are going in terms of the remaining youth justice reforms. I might just leave it there, and I look forward to your questions.

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

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Actually, the first question is to the Secretary. Secretary, how many youths are currently in correctional facilities for violent crimes such as murder, manslaughter and serious assault?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** I do not have the breakdown based on their offending, and I do not think I can give you that based on offending, but we have 154 young people in our custody across Parkville and Cherry Creek today.

**Richard WELCH:** Why can't you give it by offending?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Just on that point, Mr Welch, because the numbers are low for young people and we only have two facilities, it would be very easy to identify who is in the system if we explained the offending. There are privacy laws, especially with minors, around the reporting.

**Richard WELCH:** The court record, Minister, would show what they were charged with.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** But when you work out where they are in terms of the two site facilities – between the offending and the reporting I think it would be very easy to work out who is in custody where, so we are concerned about the privacy of the young people.

**Richard WELCH:** Secretary, what is the contrast then between now and 12 months ago and, if you have it, 10 years ago?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** I do not have it for 10 years ago, but I can provide that data to you.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** A year ago – I might just hand to Andrea Davidson, who is our Commissioner for Youth Justice. There has been an increase, and the specifics Andrea can talk to. Thanks, Andrea.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Thank you for your question. Across the course of the last 12 months, if we were looking at a daily average custodial population, we have shifted from 93 young people to 124.

**Richard WELCH:** And the current total is, sorry?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** 154.

**Richard WELCH:** So the average is 124, but the current total is 154.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** It is going up – there is an increase in the remand proportion.

**Richard WELCH:** That includes remand?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** That includes remand, yes. I can give that breakdown if that helps the committee. We have 61 sentenced and 93 on remand as of last week.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Secretary. Minister, according to budget paper 3, none of the \$700,000 allocated for youth justice initiatives in 2024–25 appears to have been utilised. Given the 4.9 per cent rise in repeat youth offending, does the government acknowledge that failing to deploy these funds may have contributed to the worsening outcomes for vulnerable young people?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Mr Welch, which page and budget paper?

**Richard WELCH:** That will be budget paper 3, page 71.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Sorry, Mr Welch, can you – just so we are clear and understand where you are getting the \$700,000 figure from?

**Richard WELCH:** I will have to refer to it.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Perhaps while Mr Welch looks for that I will just ask: of the figure you have given in terms of 93 average daily, now up to 124 at the moment, how many of those 124 currently are on remand?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** That is 154. Sorry to correct you there.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Oh, 154. Sorry, yes.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** The average is 124, the rolling average, but there is actually 154. So the average continues to go up. Of that, 93 are on remand. So of the 154, 93 are on remand, just the breakdown. The remaining 61 are sentenced, so the majority is remanded.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Sixty-one have been sentenced and are serving their sentences, and the other 93 are on remand currently?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And there is remand capability both at Cherry Creek and at Parkville?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Yes, that is correct.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And is there any differential between the two as to why a certain individual would go to one versus the other, or that is just random?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Cherry Creek is a facility that is specifically designed for young men from the age of 15 to 18 who are either sentenced or on remand. Parkville is the facility that is established for our whole-of-system intake, so all young people in the system come through Parkville, which supports their attendance at court and all of our administrative processes associated with admissions, as well as our cohort of girls and young women at Parkville and our dual-track cohort and under-15s.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you. Minister, I will come back to that once we have got the reference sorted out. How many young people reoffended while on bail during the 2024–25 period, and how does that compare to the previous year?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** We – well, you, as the Parliament – passed legislation last year for us to get a better understanding of bail and bail trends. That information will come to the crime stats authority starting in May, and they will then report on bail and reoffending while on bail. The justice system at the moment does not provide us that information, but the legislation enables us to have a better understanding of bail and bail trends, and that will come later this year.

**Richard WELCH:** Do you think in retrospect that was a very sizeable gap in information and data?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Yes, it is. The data is held by court, and courts are independent.

**Richard WELCH:** Secretary, has KPMG been engaged to conduct a review of youth justice services in Victoria, and if so, what is the scope of this review and how will its findings inform future policy or funding decisions?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Thank you. We are doing recommissioning and looking at and evaluating our youth justice services. It is a really important time to do that. I do not know if it is that particular consultant, but I can go to Jodi. Yes, it is KPMG. But for more about the purpose and the why, Jodi or Andrea, do you want to talk to that?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** The program recommissioning work is really looking at all of our programs across particularly the community services space. Those are the many organisations that support young people from the diversion and prediversion – so early intervention – space, all the way through to young people who require more structured –

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Davidson. We are going straight to Ms Kathage.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. The community safety initiatives that have been funded recently build on a history of supporting community safety, but I want to look at the particular ones for this year. BP3 page 163 is my reference, and it sets out some of the investments there. How are these investments supporting the youth justice portfolio to implement the new bail laws that we have been discussing today?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Thank you, Ms Kathage, for providing me the opportunity to build on what Victorians want to see: a safe and effective youth justice system that ensures that community safety is paramount and that it is effective. In this budget the community safety package, which I have already had a chance to talk a bit about during my appearance in relation to my corrections portfolio, a significant amount of those resources is for youth justice also. A further 88 beds across the system operationalise the system to manage the increase in population. As our Commissioner has kindly shared with the committee today, we have seen an increase. We were averaging just under 100. Now we have got 154 – 150 males and four girls – in the youth justice system, and that trend is increasing with our tough new bail laws. So we are going to equip the system and make sure those beds are available.

But we have also provided additional tools. I think a key part of the *Youth Justice Act*, which I talked about in my presentation, was the electronic monitoring trial. That is about making sure that people on bail comply with the orders. That is operationalised now; since late April that is an option available to decision-makers, to the independent courts. Obviously youth justice has a role to play, once those orders are placed on a young person, to make sure they comply. I think compliance is key, because I think bail conditions are not an option; they must be complied with. I think also in the context of young people, we know that these young people have other challenges in making sure they get the help they need, those wraparounds. And a lot of the funds were not just for the digital electronic devices; I mean, that obviously gets a lot of attention, and I appreciate that they are important to be able to track these young people to see that they are complying with their orders, but it is about making sure we can respond to a more complex and high-risk cohort in a timely fashion. I think that was an important part of those changes, and the budget builds on the funding we have provided in the previous year's

budget to roll electronic monitoring out and give the courts more tools to be able to monitor and to make sure these young people comply with their orders.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** So that electronic monitoring that the government is rolling out, and you mentioned that the pilot is operational – I guess complying with bail is good for the young person, because it keeps them out of the other path, and it is also good for community safety. So can you talk a bit about how that trial is going to sort of benefit both in that way?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes. I think, like I said, it was meant to be a tool to assist the court to make sure these young people comply with their orders. So it is community safety and making sure those orders are not optional and they are followed. It provides a GPS tracking ability. I have had an opportunity to see our staff in the justice system do that work. They are based out of the west, and they do that important work, making sure that curfews and exclusion zones are complied with and that we can promptly respond when there is a breach – I mean, that is what the community expects and that is what we are doing. But a key part of that funding – and, to be frank, most of that funding – was towards supervision but wraparound support, making sure these young people have got close case management. These kids clearly have issues in terms of offending behaviour but probably have other troubles at home as well, so providing that support to them and their families is key; education and engagement are a key part of that but also getting the healthcare needs that they may have missed. It means addressing drug and alcohol use. Family instability and disengagement – we know that is a big part of it; a protective factor, especially for young people, is that family engagement. With our youth justice team, and I know our Commissioner could probably talk more about that work that is being done out in communities, it is important that we do that work, and the funding that the budget provided last year and going forward allows us to do that work. There is obviously a lot more that needs to happen, but we want to reduce the likelihood that when people are out on bail they reoffend, and when there is a breach – a breach of curfew or exclusion zones are breached – there is timely intervention for youth justice on a case-by-case basis.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Did you want to add anything about the support services that are –

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Just, I guess, to highlight that it is the first time that youth justice has had FTE extended hours within its own staffing. So we have case officers that are out on the ground until 9 pm and across the course of the weekend to really be able to help young people from things like managing the technology within their household and ensuring that their batteries are charged through to getting them to school or attending appointments. In addition to our own staff, we also have funded services that are able to take young people out, to engage them in recreation, to ensure that they are, again, attending appointments or to engage them in interventions, as well as our statewide rehabilitation service, which under the new Act we are now able to deliver those rehabilitation services at the earliest possible instance. That is a provision within the Act which has already been brought forward and introduced, and therefore we are able to ensure that they are getting not only the wraparound practical supports but also the therapeutic supports that they need to be able to get their lives back on track.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** So you see that early intervention aspect is leading to better outcomes. Is that the idea?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Absolutely. We are able to support young people at that point in time when they are arguably most vulnerable, when they are first coming out of custody onto bail, ensuring that they get back into a really positive structure and routine, getting them back engaged in education, training, employment or whatever it might be that is that positive course that is able to sustain them into the future.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Ms Kathage, I think that is an important point that the Commissioner has made. This is not about a punitive measure; it is about ensuring that there is early intervention where young people are straying from, I guess, the path that the courts have thought is in their best interests as well as those of the community. What we see is that some young people – it could be because of a lack of a supportive environment – will not turn up at the appointments they need, and a lot of them are medical in nature. Obviously we are careful how we discuss these issues, with the social stigma attached to a lot of the young people in contact with the criminal justice system.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Kathage. We are going to go straight to Ms Benham.

**Jade BENHAM:** Thank you, Chair. Secretary, we will come back to the KPMG review. How much has been budgeted for that review?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** I am sorry, I will have to ask Andrea and/or Jodi. Apologies.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I do not actually have that, but I can take it on notice.

**Jade BENHAM:** Yes, that would be handy. I can imagine it is not cheap for a consultancy of that size. What exactly is KPMG's expertise in that field?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** KPMG have extensive expertise in the youth justice space. They have actually delivered reviews across a number of jurisdictions. Most recently they delivered a review in Tasmania and supported the re-establishment and re-envisioning of that system. They have a number of consultants who have themselves previously worked in the justice system as well as deep expertise in research. A major component of the KPMG review is a deep-dive literature review to consider not just what is working in Australia but what is working around the world.

**Jade BENHAM:** With that cross-jurisdiction and wide knowledge, they will be able to advise on new programs – they are also looking at new programs. Is that part of the scope of the review?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** The scope of the review considers our current programs and what is available. For example, MST is a world-renowned, highly evidence-based program, as is functional family therapy. On the other hand, we have a number of very longstanding programs in youth justice, like our community support service program, where we have seen great outcomes, but there may not be the deep-dive, evidence-based review that there is as compared to those other two examples I gave. KPMG will be really comprehensively considering all of the elements of those programs and their evidence base and then also looking at the potential there to expand out programs to other evidence bases.

**Jade BENHAM:** I am just curious. The Treasurer has expressed an interest in reducing the amounts of consultants being used. I would think the expertise needed here would be within the department, and yet we are again paying a lot of money, one would imagine, to a consultant. Is it because the government has run out of ideas?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** The government has absolutely not run out of ideas. We have lots of ideas. I think it is really important for us to be able to take stock and understand those ideas in the context of the broader understanding of what is happening in other jurisdictions.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Ms Benham, I think you would appreciate it is always good to have an external review as well because obviously internally you can be trapped in groupthink. Obviously we have got the people at the table who are well-read, but it is always good to have an outside perspective. I think it is valuable. There is a role for people externally to look in. We have strong oversight. We already have existing mechanisms where oversight bodies give us feedback all the time, and we welcome that – you know, we have independent commissioners in the youth space, we have ombudsmen, we have VAGO and we have WorkSafe. As minister, I welcome that. As a government, we take that on board. It would be no different in this example, where you have got programs and you have got, clearly, a consultant that, as the Commissioner has outlined, has expertise in doing this in other jurisdictions. I think it is a positive that we are open as a government and open as a department and that we welcome people to come and have a look and give us honest feedback.

**Jade BENHAM:** It is just interesting, and you can see my curiosity. The Treasurer has recently said she wants to reduce the use of consultants, and here we are.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Just on the use of consultants, the department has each and every year over the last three years reduced the amount on consultants. We are hearing what the Treasurer is saying, but as the minister has just said, this expertise is vitally important, particularly now.

**Jade BENHAM:** Is this the only review done by an external consultant this year by your department?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** There are many reviews. In terms of which ones are done internally and externally, we might maybe take that on notice.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Yes, we can take that on notice. But it is a very small amount of the \$4 billion under my department.

**Richard WELCH:** You do not know how much it costs, though, so how can you?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** We are going to provide that on notice I think, Mr Welch.

**Jade BENHAM:** How many external reviews? Forget about the internal ones. How many external reviews will be done this year into youth justice?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** In youth justice, specifically? I think we can provide that on notice. I think we are very open in providing that, and we can provide the dollar amount as well. I do not see any issue with that. I think, like I said, a lot of the work with reviews is done internally. Ironically, when we do them internally we get sometimes criticised by the opposition, with them saying, 'Oh, that's an internal review.' But there are times when external expertise, I think, plays an important role.

**Jade BENHAM:** How many within the department are looking at youth justice specifically?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I think we can take that on notice. It is a very specific question – how many external reviews in terms of contractors.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Another important element to the KPMG review, which really arguably we cannot do ourselves, is the independent research piece that they are doing as a dedicated piece of ethically endorsed research to consult both with our staff but also with young people to be able to get their feedback in relation to the programs, how they are working for them and their perspectives on them as well as the program providers themselves. There is also an element to it that that independence is really critical for that to be a formal research project.

**Jade BENHAM:** There have been some cuts to certain early intervention programs, though, in the regions as well, and I have firsthand knowledge of a few. Empower is one that comes to mind with proven outcomes. There is another one, the embedded youth outreach program, which was previously funded at 7.37 over four years. Given the program's proven 9 per cent reduction in reoffending, why is the government not significantly funding this program and others that already have outcomes?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes, I know the program you are mentioning, Ms Benham. I do note some of that falls to the Minister for Police because it is crime prevention and community safety. Youth justice is when people are already under a youth justice order or in a custodial setting, and we do that work. The program you are specifically referring to is probably one for the Minister for Police.

**Jade BENHAM:** The embedded youth outreach program – okay.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** You will have an opportunity to ask him –

**Jade BENHAM:** So those sorts of early intervention programs do not fall –

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I think all these programs are important, and across government we do. But I have said it before, early intervention starts before for young people. We do not want to see them in contact with the criminal justice system. Some of this work is being done in schools, and there are a number of trials and work that are being done led by the Minister for Education. There is a lot of work happening in other fields as well that complements what I would view as early intervention. When we think of early intervention for young people, we should not just compartmentalise that as youth justice. We are usually at the end of the system, when something has gone wrong and there has been significant harm. We want to prevent young people getting to that point. I think it is a good point you make. I think that specific program probably should be addressed to the Minister for Police.

**Jade BENHAM:** Okay, but I was sure it was part of the youth justice program. Was it part of the youth program?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Youth. Crime prevention.

**Jade BENHAM:** Youth program, okay – and the same for Empower?

**Jodi HENDERSON:** Yes, and the referral pathways can come in that way.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, we are going to go straight to Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Good evening again, Minister and officials. Thank you for joining us. Minister, you have identified that there will be a need for additional capacity of some sorts in the youth justice system. Citing budget paper 3, page 163 and the outputs listed, can I ask: we do have the new Cherry Creek facility, but beyond that, how will you actually provide for that capacity without building any new prisons?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Mr Galea, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about how we are committed as a government to using existing resources as efficiently as possible, and that means making most use of our new investments. In particular Cherry Creek is a facility I had the honour of opening in 2023, and it has really gone from strength to strength. Our community safety package will allow us to open up all the beds. Previously, because we had a historically low youth incarceration rate, we did not need to operationalise all the units at that facility, but now we are making use of them progressively as we are seeing the increase in our custodial settings.

Cherry Creek in particular represents a new benchmark in youth justice infrastructure. I know the many requests that the department has received from other jurisdictions to visit, and members of this committee have had an opportunity to visit, I note, previously. I think that it is important that we do share our learnings from that process. The support is focused on supporting rehabilitation in a modern therapeutic environment. I think that is important. Again, with the young people that come into our system, we are at the end of the process. Clearly, a lot has happened. A lot of harm has been caused. The young people come to us – and our Commissioner could talk about it – with many of their health needs and educational needs, and there has clearly been a breakdown along the way in terms of family engagement and other areas. We have spaces, supports, staff and clinicians that support with psychological, physical, mental health and educational support.

But also, I would go beyond – about a modern system, about education, but cultural spaces and cultural connection, mental health support. We have faith engagement. That is a key part in the adults corrections system, but in the youth justice system we hear for a lot of young people that engagement with faith is part of their journey to living a more purposeful life and also to addressing their offending behaviour. But our world-class facilities in Victoria reflect evidence-based youth justice programs that focus on accountability, rehabilitation and long-term community wellbeing. Youth justice routinely engages in focusing on modelling so we can plan effectively for future demand. Clearly our tough new bail laws are having an effect. Rightfully so, I think the community has been very clear and our government has been clear that where people continue to cause a high level of harm, the custodial system is appropriate for many of them. That is why community safety is paramount. I am sure the Attorney-General could talk more about that and expand on that when she appears. But it is about ensuring that when they are with us, those precincts are used efficiently, that we have the right staffing and operational models in place and that our workforce is equipped to respond to an increasingly complex cohort. Like I said, with the high-level harm, there is clearly a complex cohort that we need to work with, and we will do that work. Thank you, Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. In a similar vein, budget paper 3, page 77 discusses in a bit more detail the DJCS outlook on youth justice custodial services. It touches on providing safe and stable custodial facilities. If I can ask, Minister, in relation to the safety of staff in facilities as well, how will the funding under this output support staff safety and what other measures are you putting in place to support that?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Thank you, Mr Galea. The safety of staff in youth justice is a priority for me and the government. Everyone has the right to not only be safe at work but also feel safe at work, and our hardworking youth justice team are no exception. I am always struck by how dedicated they are to keeping the community safe, but really in the youth justice setting many of the staff are really committed to seeing a difference in young people and they are really passionate about making and seeing that difference – and they do. There are some great positive results. I am sure our Commissioner will have a lot of anecdotes to share. There is one that I always like to share, because I was pleasantly surprised to see – the young people that come into our facilities, we have talked about how a lot are from difficult backgrounds with a lot of challenges. A lot of the challenges are in the learning space, but at Cherry Creek there are a number of young people that are now studying a

bachelor's degree. When you look at the life cycle of those young people, they would not be at university if they were out in the community. Theoretically, everyone has access to university in the community, but when you look at the life trajectory of those young people, I could not have seen them on that trajectory, reaching university or attaining a bachelor's degree. Now there are a number of young people in our youth justice facilities that are going down that path, and that is to the credit of the youth justice team, the staff, the leaders here, but also the people on the frontline, on the ground that are making a real difference. We have dedicated staff that are focused on seeing that change.

I have gone out and had many conversations with the staff and looked at the walks of life that have come into youth justice. The people that are attracted to youth justice may be, you know – youth justice has a different reputation I feel in the community, it is based on maybe some of the legacy from previous decades. But the staff that work in the system really have a proactive approach to trying to see a behavioural change in the young people. It really is great to see that some of the young people are taking that opportunity – not all of them are, and that is just a fact of the complex cohort we are dealing with. But our goal is obviously we do not give up on anyone. We try our best to use the time with us positively. We do not decide who enters into our custodial facilities, but when they are with us, we want them to use that time productively.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. And frankly, yes, remarkable results – to go from being into youth justice to coming out with a bachelor's degree is remarkable rehabilitation and indeed, as you say, a testament to the staff and the work that they do. If you can pass that along from the committee, Commissioner, I would appreciate that. But in terms of those higher difficulty cases, what sort of training do you specifically provide? And this may as well be for the Commissioner or yourself, Minister – what sort of training do you provide staff for those more difficult cases?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** It is definitely a very highly specialised field, and that is why the training is rightfully – you know, it is complex. Since getting into government, we have elevated the role of the new certificate IV in youth justice to acknowledge the kind of specialist skills you need. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister. We can come back to that. We are going to Mr McGowan.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Commissioner. Commissioner, just for my benefit, Parkville – how many young people are there at the moment?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** At Parkville today – just bear with me – we have 93 young people.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And a breakdown of the sexes?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** We have four girls; the remainder are boys.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And Cherry Creek?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** At Cherry Creek we have 61 young people.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And breakdown of sexes?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** All male.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Four male.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** All male.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Sorry, all male.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Yes.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And of those young people, how many of them are not engaged in educational programs? That is probably the simpler way to put it.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** All young people in our facilities are engaged in educational programs. Education is a part of a structured day, no matter whether a young person is coming to us at a younger age or is over 18. So

for example, through our dual-track system there is still equally an expectation that young people would be engaged in a fully structured day.

**Nick McGOWAN:** So 100 per cent of the 93 – let me go back a second. Ninety-three and 61 – so of the 93 in Parkville, how many of those are on remand?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I would have to come back to you with a breakdown of remand at Parkville specifically. For the whole system, there are 93 young people on remand.

**Nick McGOWAN:** So a very significant number of them are on remand?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Of 154.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Correct. So what is the average duration for those on remand?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I do not have an average duration. That is something I could come back to you on.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Please do. I am guessing because of the short custodial sentencing we have in this state, it is a very short period, but I could well be wrong.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Not necessarily, because some of them are waiting. They are there for high-level offending and there are core processes that proceed. For some of the remandees their remand may end up being longer than their sentence.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Sure; I appreciate that. So just to be clear, then, is education compulsory for all young people?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Yes. It is part of our fully structured day.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Mr McGowan, I think it is an important distinction to make here: because of the cohorts in our custody in youth justice, the levels at which young people come to us are very different, so the learning does need to be individually tailored to the young person.

**Nick McGOWAN:** How many young people are undertaking a bachelor's degree?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** We have a total of four young people that are enrolled in university.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And who pays for that degree?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** There are various arrangements in place, but our partners, particularly in Parkville College – they take care of all of our education. They work with young people through what is called an individualised education plan. So every young person that comes into youth justice is subject to an individualised education plan, and that plan is developed to really work with the young person where they are at in their education, because it can be greatly varied. Some young people will come to us having not engaged in school for quite some time, often years, whereas other young people will come to us having been engaged in school at that point in time when they come in. Those two responses are very different, so we take an individually tailored approach, as we do with much of our structured day program.

**Nick McGOWAN:** With the structured day program, if education is compulsory, how much education are they required to do per week in terms of hours or half-hours – whatever it is?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I would have to come back to you on the specifics around that, because one thing that is important to note about our system is that we also have an extended number of weeks of education; young people are able to access education throughout far more of the year, so it is important to understand that differentiation.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** It is six days a week, as well.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Six days a week.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you. You can come back to me on that. Spit hoods – are they still used in any of the youth offending institutions?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** They have never been used in youth justice in Victoria.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Strip searches – any of those over the past 12 months?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** We still engage in unclothed searches; however, in youth justice in Victoria we no longer have routine unclothed searches since we have had the introduction of body scanning technology. It is a risk-based approach. If there is concern around a young person having an item of contraband on them and it has not been detected or they have not surrendered that as part of the body scanning process, then there is a delegated escalation to progress to an unclothed search.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Can you come back to me on those numbers, then? I do not expect you to have them here necessarily.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I do actually have them.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** We provide regular reporting in youth justice, Mr McGowan. We are pretty open and transparent. I might take this opportunity to go some of the transparency measures. During our *Youth Justice Act* legislation Ms Copey was able to actually – we together worked on some amendments to make sure there was greater transparency. But I will hand back to the Commissioner to provide that information.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Yes, I am going to some of those – we are coming to those amendments. That brings me to isolation, Commissioner, just while you are looking for those figures. Do you have those figures handy?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I do have those figures. This is part of, as the minister indicated, our publicly available data. For the last reported period we had 23 unclothed searches. Just for comparison, Mr McGowan, because I think it is very important, we had 648 scanner searches. Before we introduced that scanner technology on admission those would have been routine unclothed searches, so our system in that period of time has obviously significantly reduced unclothed searches.

**Nick McGOWAN:** And isolations?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Isolation is also publicly available data. I am very happy to still provide it to you here. In the last reported period, in terms of isolation we had 1916 episodes of behaviour-based isolation and 8180 episodes of security-based isolation. The important thing to understand about that reporting when it comes to isolation is that those are episodes, so if a young person is, for example, placed in their room for 15 minutes for a behavioural reset in the morning and then 15 minutes for a behavioural reset in the evening, that counts as two episodes of isolation.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Thank you; I appreciate that. How many of the 154 in custody have reoffended – that is, they are not there for the first time?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** I do not have that specific statistic, but what I do have, which is the statistic provided by the report on government services, is the return to sentenced supervision rate, which I note has dropped by 17.6 per cent compared to the last reporting period and is now below the national average at 52 per cent.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Could you come back to me on the 154 and how many of them are there for the first time versus not?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I am not sure how much we are allowed to share.

**Nick McGOWAN:** To be clear, I am not looking for them to be identified in any way.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** We will take that on notice.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** We can take that on notice.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Ankle bracelets – have they been used?

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

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I am still interested in the investments made to improve staff safety. What are some of the practical on-the-ground improvements being made to help staff feel safer in their everyday role?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Thank you, Mr Tak, for that question. I think it is important, because in the end staff safety is fundamental for a successful system, and we have taken a number of practical steps to improve staff safety, especially during my tenure as minister. Like I said, my background is as a personal injury lawyer, so I have a big focus on these issues. It is fundamental that we get this right. That includes frontline staffing to improve supervision ratios and reduce the risks associated with managing larger cohorts of young people. We have also created specialist roles supporting safety culture and operational readiness, operational managers and practice leads. Technology is also playing a greater role, and the Commissioner just touched on that in terms of the searching. That is good, because we know that obviously strip searches for many people can be quite degrading. We want these young people to address their offending behaviour, so we need to build their confidence to make sure they are on the right track. I think technology has been a big player. Through the operational safety package we have been using virtual reality technology to help staff train for real-life scenarios, improving their ability to assess risk and respond early. I think that is key.

Physical improvements to precinct infrastructure are also crucial, and I think Cherry Creek gave us that opportunity. We had ageing infrastructure replaced with new infrastructure, Cherry Creek being a new state-of-the-art facility, and successive budgets about meeting contemporary safety standards, and Cherry Creek is no different in terms of the design and rehabilitation from the ground up. It was always embedded into what we are doing there from day one, and that is why it has had a lot of interest from interstate, I might add. I will not go into every state, but a number of other jurisdictions have come and had a look at the blueprint we have effectively created at Cherry Creek for a facility of this nature. I know there has been lot of positive feedback we have received about it. We are also embedding restorative practices across our precincts, with dedicated practitioners helping to resolve conflict and build positive staff-to-young-person relationships, which is key to maintaining day-to-day safety.

I think it is fair to say that – and the Commissioner would agree – our approach in youth justice is quite different from the adult system. It is very different, and I think the youth justice system is more about wraparound. Obviously it is about holding the young person to account, but we need to address the behaviour, make sure they are on a better path, understanding that they are so young. Even if it is a high level of offending, these young people are going to be back in our community some day, so it is about making sure they are equipped to make a positive contribution but also that the community is safe into the long term. I think that is the approach we take. It really is about that wraparound for the young person, so the ratios are higher in terms of the support we provide to young people. I am not sure if there is anything you want to add, Commissioner?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** The other thing I would just add is that we have seen and measured real change there in terms of staff safety and their ability to manage incidents. So for example, with our new analysis capacity we know that for the last two quarters over 80 per cent of our incidents in custody have been resolved without the need for physical intervention. That comes from the training that the minister has spoken to. That has uplifted staff capability in terms of their ability to use tactical options such as negotiation, de-escalation and restorative practice, which also of course under our behaviour change workforce model ensures that we are working with young people to be able to change their behaviours too.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you, Minister. Also in terms of continued improvement, are there mechanisms in place to review and improve safety practices within the prison? I understand that, with your background as a personal injury lawyer, how is staff feedback being incorporated into those practices?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Absolutely. We take that very seriously. Youth justice operates in a very dynamic environment, and continuous learning and adaptation is a critical part of keeping staff safe but also making sure the custodial facilities are secure, and every serious incident is subject to a structured debrief, where appropriate, and a root cause analysis. This allows us to understand what happened, what can be improved and how we can share those lessons across our system. It is important we do that work.

Also we have strong internal governance processes, including precinct level safety committees, and we review practice, flag risks and oversee local improvement initiatives. And importantly we value the insight of our staff. That is why we provide structured feedback channels, like regular engagement surveys and team reflection sessions to ensure that frontline voices are heard and acted on. The feedback informs everything from policy development to training design and helps to create a safer and more responsive system.

I think I touched on it earlier, but I think it is important to make the youth justice system – we pride ourselves on trying to be as open and transparent as possible without, obviously, compromising the privacy and other risks with minors to the public. And we have mechanisms. We have a dedicated commissioner that liaises with us on a regular basis. We have oversight bodies, we have independent visitors and we have dedicated liaison officers for young Aboriginal people. We have a range of supports in place that are focused on making sure the system is transparent and where there is an incident we learn from it.

Obviously if it is a serious incident, Victoria Police will be engaged and Victoria Police will undertake their own independent investigations. Where there is a more serious staff incident, WorkSafe will be engaged, so we try to keep it an open, transparent system where oversight bodies can be engaged, but we have internal processes that are all about learning lessons, making improvements and embedding them. I know the Commissioner is proud of that record, that we do focus on continual improvement.

Cherry Creek I feel did give us that opportunity, being a new facility, a new design, in many regards a new approach, and in youth justice we did have that comprehensive review of Armytage and Ogloff that kind of set the process, and some of those learnings that came out of that review in 2017 we embedded into the design of Cherry Creek. So from day one we had a more clinical approach and a targeted approach to these young people to keep the community safe but also help them onto a better pathway, understanding they are young and they are going to be out in our communities.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you.

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

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair. Good evening. Are there any young people that currently have ankle bracelets? Has that trial started?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes, Mr Puglielli. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about electronic monitoring. And yes, that trial has now begun. From the end of April we gave the opportunity – well, that tool – as an option for the courts. I can say that there have been quite a few assessments. The process is that youth justice will assess whether a young person is suitable for it in the first place as part of the court process, but then it will be up to the judicial decision-maker. It is my understanding that there have been already a couple of decisions, but there are many more that have been assessed by youth justice. They are going through the courts, so two already are in metro Melbourne.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Two already.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** That the courts have ordered, but there are many more assessments that youth justice have done.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Thank you. Just looking to budget paper 3, page 71, you have allocated \$43.4 million to ‘Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system’. Can I ask what proportion of that funding is for provision of staff and training?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Which budget paper is it, again?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** It is three, page 71.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** We can provide you with the breakdown for staff and training, but in response to the bail reforms, there are 320 additional youth justice custodial officers that will be put forward and we are recruiting now. That will fill both Parkville and Cherry Creek, the remaining 88 beds within those facilities.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Can I ask also what proportion of that funding is for the implementation of the *Youth Justice Act*?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes, I think we can provide that – how much investment we are making under the *Youth Justice Act*. Yes, we can take that.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. Looking at paper 3, page 158, the overall ‘Youth Justice Custodial Services’ budget line, which is for rehabilitation and community reintegration support for young people in custody, that is \$274.2 million this year, down from \$296.3 million last year, so it is a 7.5 per cent decline. Given the recent bail changes, though, shouldn’t we be substantially increasing that line item if you are going to be locking up more young people?

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Could I take it?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes, I think the Secretary will be able to speak to that.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** There has not been a drop. You are talking about the revised budget for 2024–25, so there were a number of additional allocations post the 2024–25 budget that were added into that line, such as starting on implementing the *Youth Justice Act*, and then in the 2024–25 budget we have actually had allocation from the community safety package into 2024–25. So it is not a jump, because you are comparing two different things.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** So we have brought some of the money forward already to start the work immediately. Treasury has released the funds so the department can get on and start, because you are right: we are seeing an increase in custodial settings, yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Given the increased number of young people entering custody, should we expect a negative impact on services?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** In what context, Mr Puglielli? Because we are going to be ramping up services in custody at the same time.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Right. But no strain on those services because you have got more young people entering custodial settings?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I think there is always high demand for services, especially because young people that enter into our system, as I said, are at the end of the process. Those young people that come to us have a range of issues. Some of them overlap with health and mental health and they overlap with a lack of educational need and support and obviously cultural disconnection as well, so of course there will be greater demand on those services. I will say we have done a great job in filling the roles in youth justice compared to maybe other frontline services, but there is a high demand for clinicians in this field. We have partnerships with Orygen as well in terms of mental health. Maybe the Secretary would like to add to that.

**Kate HOUGHTON:** Another really important part is that in youth justice, which Jodi and Andrea can talk to, the statewide rehabilitation service is an in-house service now, so we are not relying on an external service provider. It is an end-to-end system with the young people in custody. The ability to actually do offence-specific programs with the young people on remand is also a really big game changer from the *Youth Justice Act* that was passed, as you well know, in Parliament last year. The in-house service is going to be critical to meet demand.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Also, in addition to that – and the Secretary has probably touched on it a bit – there was a lot of, I will not say ‘prohibition’ but barriers for people that were on remand to access some of the programs because they involved an element of admission of guilt. We have removed those barriers as well, so from day one, for young people in our youth justice custodial facilities, we can provide the behavioural programs.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** In budget paper 3, page 158, looking at the ‘Youth Justice Community Based Services’ output: many frontline services are still waiting to hear if their funding will continue, which affects their programs’ effectiveness. Can I ask when these providers will know if their funding is secure?

**Jodi HENDERSON:** They should have been notified.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** By now they would have been advised, but I know with stakeholders and partners that is a constant. Obviously, with the way the budget process works, some of the agreements are annual, some are biannual and some are longer agreements, and there is always a point of contention. I recently had the pleasure of attending with the Member for Mulgrave one of our multisystemic therapy providers, OzChild, and they had similar issues that they raised with me, and I want to thank them for sharing those concerns. We are working through and we are notifying people as soon as the final decisions are made. Obviously these are Treasury decisions in many instances.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Are you aware of any programs lapsing or losing funding?

**Jodi HENDERSON:** No.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** No.

**Jodi HENDERSON:** Internally there has been a reduction in youth control order funding. Because there was a very low uptake of those orders we have absorbed that – so no loss of staff – into the broader community safety package now.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Minister, can I get an assessment from you. Of your overall youth justice budget, what proportion of that is for detention as opposed to diversion and prevention?

**Enver ERDOGAN:** I think I have answered this, Mr Puglielli, before. Diversion intervention is a whole-of-government effort. We do not want to see young people come into our custodial facilities in the first place. With custodial facilities in themselves it is important that they are well resourced, and there are economies of scale here. They are obviously a significant investment in community safety.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We are going to Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, department staff and Commissioner. I do appreciate the conversation so far about day one engagement. I think that is a really important element, to divert people away from the justice system and avoid reoffending later on. We do talk a lot about the root causes of offending, and I will reference ‘Service Delivery’, book 3, pages 71 and 77. There is certainly funding there and a description of some of those services, but I am really keen to understand the importance and what it means in practice in trying to address the root causes of crime, because often these sentences get thrown around but without the practical implications of what we are doing to achieve that.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Thank you, Mr Hilakari, for giving me the option to add some context to what we have been discussing here. These are significant investments. I talked about the examples of multisystemic therapy and functional family therapy, which are kind of global examples. I might pass to the Commissioner, who can talk about it a bit more anecdotally and also, in practical terms, what it means in terms of outcomes. But when I went there, what I learned from it was about really strong case management of young people and working with their families. What I heard was OzChild was about empowering parents, really, so this is about tooling parents up. We know that for young people that engage in the youth justice system it does not just impact them, it impacts their family. There is a social stigma around the criminal justice system. We all know that. Some of it is class based as well, as we would appreciate, but it clearly plays out in communities. Having this kind of systemic therapy is about equipping families as well to bring them along and the young person along with them. It is about tools and strategies for a young person in managing their behaviour and building more positive relationships with home, school and community environments. These programs are backed up not just because we say they work, these are backed up by global studies and research. Commissioner, you might want to talk a bit about multisystemic therapy as a good example, because OzChild has been very successful in the south-east.

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Yes. Multisystemic therapy is an intensive therapy. As the minister highlighted, it is a therapy that really focuses on empowering parents. It is also a therapy that is available to families 24/7. We know that often when crises occur they do not occur from 9 to 5. Multisystemic therapy is a modality that allows parents and young people to be able to reach out to practitioners any time of the day and night to be able to support them through crises when they occur but also really importantly for them to get that confidence in practising what are often safety plans developed in advance with those families. If it is, for example, a young person leaving home during a curfew, it is actually stepping that parent through how to respond to that

themselves. Providing that support in real time means that parents are able to practise those skills, gain confidence and then take on that responsibility themselves in the longer term.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** In terms of the therapeutic models, that is, I am guessing, one of those models that exists. Are there others that we have got operating?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** There are a number of different modalities of treatment. Functional family therapy is another modality. Functional family therapy is really focused on resolving some of those challenges that can occur within a family – so being able to sit down and engage in restorative practices and conversations within that familial setting, but again also to be able to give the young person and parents the space to be able to talk with someone around those issues or problems within the home and to come to a point.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Just to give the level of commitment it shows for the young person and their family but also the experts that are working with them, at 12 weeks intensive, that is quite a big commitment. We are talking three months almost, where most times, I have heard, they are speaking on a daily basis, engaging with the young person and their family. It is quite leading, and the cohort we are targeting are the more challenging ones out in the community. I have been really amazed. There is a cultural layer as well here. We are talking a lot of multicultural communities, a lot of young people of African background – many of the over-represented cohorts – and Aboriginal young people that are really engaged in this program. It is a model that is flexible, it is culturally responsive, and it is a good fit for Victoria as well. We have got to look at the best models internationally and what we can adapt to what we need here in Melbourne and Victoria. I think that is why it is really a shining example of what can be done.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Are there other organisations? I know of OzChild. Initially, when I was a lot younger, I did some volunteer work with them, so it is great to hear about OzChild again. Are there other organisations that we are working with across the state to help deliver these services?

**Andrea DAVIDSON:** Absolutely. We have a range of partners. I will not go into the detail of all of them, but some of the big ones are Jesuit Social Services and Anglicare Victoria, as well as, really importantly, a number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that implement our Aboriginal community-based programs as well.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Yes. I think the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are important. We have got other examples, not exactly in this field, but in a mentoring, lived-experience program we had an opportunity to also visit Afri-Aus Care, which has been really leading, with Mr Tak himself in Clarinda. We saw there is definitely a cultural overlay in this space, in youth justice, with certain groups being over-represented. We need to tackle the root causes, and that is our goal. Having it community-led, with mentors from their own community, is seeing a deeper impact. In the African community – and I want to thank Dr Selba for her warm hosting as well and showing us the work that is being done with African young people – it is having mentors from their own community as role models and people that have also experienced the youth justice system themselves but then changed their path. I think that is the key, I really do. We see that in the Aboriginal community, but I think it equally could be applicable to many of the other over-represented cohorts. We have done a bit of work with the South Sudanese working group, and I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr Deng for leading a lot of that work. He is a really passionate advocate for his community, but also for all youth communities. We have taken the South Sudanese working group, but I think with some of those examples we could easily pick them up for other over-represented cohorts in youth justice and possibly even in adult corrections. I think that they are models that could work. We have tested, and I think the South Sudanese working group is continuing. Thank you, Mr Hilakari, for your interest and support for that work.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee this evening. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be 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 also looked after all of us today. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2025–26 budget estimates tomorrow, Thursday, 5 June 2025, at 8:30 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned.**