

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Anti-LGBTIQA+ Hate Crimes in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 24 June 2026

MEMBERS

Joe McCracken – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Renee Heath

Ann-Marie Hermans

Rachel Payne

Lee Tarlamis

WITNESSES

Kath Brackett, Director, Community and Sector Development, Municipal Association of Victoria;

Dr Sean Mulcahy, Policy Adviser, and

Jan Farrell, Co-Lead, Rainbow Local Government, Victorian Pride Lobby; and

Tony Briffa (*via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I am Joe McCracken, the Chair of this inquiry, and I will go and introduce our committee members. I will go to my left and my right and then online, so I will go to you first, Ann-Marie.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Ann-Marie Hermans, Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Sean and I, just full disclosure, know each other from the Greens. Great to see you.

Michael GALEA: Michael Galea, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, Deputy Chair. I know a few of you in professional capacities as well.

The CHAIR: I will go to Anasina and then Sheena online as well.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Hi everyone. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro Region.

Sheena WATT: Hiya. Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thank you so much. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearings, but if you go elsewhere and say the same thing, you may not necessarily be protected by that same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript, but ultimately that will be public, because it will be going on the committee's website. You will not believe how many times I have had to recite that.

Just for the Hansard record, can you please say your name and any title that you have in the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of. I will go from my left to right, and then I will go to Tony online as well.

Jan FARRELL: Good afternoon. My name is Jan Farrell. I am the campaign Co-Lead for Rainbow Local Government, which is a campaign run by Victorian Pride Lobby.

Sean MULCAHY: I am Sean Mulcahy. I am a Policy Adviser at the Victorian Pride Lobby.

Kath BRACKETT: Kath Brackett, representing the Municipal Association of Victoria, where I am the Director of Community and Sector Development.

Tony BRIFFA: My name is Tony Briffa. I am here for speaking for myself, but I am a patron of Equality Australia and co-chair of InterAction for Health and Human Rights.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Now we will go to openings. I will put 6 minutes on the clock because I am being generous. We will go to Rainbow Local Government first, then we will go to MAV and then we will go to Tony online. Again, thanks very much for coming along. Welcome. We look forward to hearing what you have got to say, so over to you.

Sean MULCAHY: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. As I mentioned, I am Dr Sean Mulcahy, and I am a Policy Adviser at the Victorian Pride Lobby. We are a community-based

advocacy organisation representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and same-gender-attracted Victorians. I am here today with my colleague Ms Jan Farrell, who is Co-Lead of our Rainbow Local Government campaign. We are here because anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crime is real. It is persistent, but it is preventable. I want to begin by acknowledging the victims of these crimes, many of them gay and bisexual men, some of whom we just heard from. Their experience is what brings us here today. There have been 95 reported attacks on men and 42 offenders arrested, but this violence also affects others across our community. Our research shows that one in 10 trans people have experienced anti-trans violence and that 6 per cent of lesbian and bisexual women report having been bashed. This level of violence is unacceptable, and Victoria's legal and institutional response is unfortunately not keeping pace.

First, as you have heard, Victoria does not have standalone hate crime offences. This should be addressed by introducing aggravated hate-based offences into the *Crimes Act*. Second, as you have heard, policing must be strengthened. This includes establishing a dedicated hate crimes unit within Victoria Police alongside an independent hate crime scrutiny panel to provide oversight of investigations and responses based on the Queensland model. As well Victoria Police should develop guidance for officers on the criminal provisions of the new Health Safeguards Act in consultation with intersex people and organisations like InterAction. Third, legislative gaps must be addressed. The *Sentencing Act* should explicitly require courts to consider prejudice motivation where hostility is demonstrated on the basis of protected attributes, including LGBTIQ+ status. This is about ensuring that the law clearly denounces hate while respecting free speech.

But as we have heard, enforcement alone is not enough. Prevention must also be prioritised, and we recommend an enforceable duty in the *Equal Opportunity Act* to eliminate vilification before it escalates into violence. We also need to better understand and support victims. We encourage the committee to ask the Victims of Crime Commissioner, when it hears from her tomorrow, to undertake an inquiry into the experiences and needs of LGBTIQ+ victims, and this should be underpinned by an LGBTIQ+ hate crime prevention action plan developed by and with the Victorian government's LGBTIQ+ Taskforce. It has now been 20 years since the Joint Working Group of the Attorney-General's and Health Minister's Advisory Committees on GLBTI Issues landmark report *With Respect: A Strategy for Reducing Homophobic Harassment in Victoria*, and while many of that report's recommendations have been implemented, especially through new anti-vilification laws, its central recommendation of a whole-of-government policy against harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains unimplemented.

Finally, we cannot ignore the past. We recommend a board of inquiry into historical anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes and a redress scheme for those convicted under historical homosexual offences. I will now pass to Ms Farrell to speak to the role of local government.

Jan FARRELL: Thanks, Sean. Thank you to the committee for the chance to speak to you today. Addressing any LGBTIQ+ hate cannot sit with the Victorian government alone. Local government plays a critical role in prevention, response and community trust. Local laws and community safety initiatives can be used more effectively to protect LGBTIQ+ communities. This requires stronger partnerships between Local Government Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Victoria Police to train local laws officers and improve enforcement. We also recommend establishing local safety committees in partnership with councils and police, supported by dedicated funding for evidence-based initiatives that build social cohesion and inclusion.

Access to safe reporting is critical. Victoria Police should ensure that there is an LGBTIQ+ liaison officer at all regularly staffed stations, and councils should promote the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's community reporting tool. At a structural level, councils should establish LGBTIQ+ advisory committees and develop local action plans to address the needs of their communities. Finally, leadership matters. The positive duty on councillors to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation should be reinstated. A no-tolerance approach to hate must be led from the top. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their community, regardless of who they are and who they love.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now go to you, Kath.

Kath BRACKETT: Thank you. I am Kath Brackett, representing the Municipal Association of Victoria, which is the statutory peak for the 79 councils in Victoria. Our submission draws on local government's direct experience in strengthening inclusive communities, social cohesion and responding when hate and exclusion

undermine people's safety, wellbeing and participation. From local libraries and youth services to festivals, sporting clubs, public spaces, stakeholder partnerships and delivering a range of community and other social services, councils see both the harms caused by anti-LGBTIQ+ hate and the practical prevention work that can reduce it. This gives local government a front line, place-based perspective on what is happening in communities and also, importantly, what is needed to respond.

Our first message is that anti-LGBTIQ+ hate is not isolated. It does not begin with a single incident. It is often cultivated through hostile narratives, misinformation, dehumanising language and online content steeped in transphobia, homophobia, racism, religious intolerance, misogyny and other broader exclusions. By the time hate becomes visible as a crime or serious incident, harm has already been building for a long time and, as a result, can become normalised and amplified. Our second message is that councils are already part of both the prevention and response. Local government can help create conditions for safety and belonging through inclusive policies, community development, youth engagement, public events, service delivery and the design of welcoming public spaces. Councils also see the impacts when hate affects participation through mental health, lowering community trust and lack of confidence in public institutions. Our third message is these harms are intersectional and localised, and they require coordinated action. The impacts of anti-LGBTIQ+ hate are not experienced equally. They can be compounded for rainbow mob, multicultural, multi-faith communities, people with disability and people in regional and rural areas. A strong response must reflect this complexity and be grounded in local communities as well as system-wide reforms.

The MAV makes four practical points to support the committee's work and for your consideration and recommendations. One, Victoria should invest in place-based prevention and community cohesion. Prevention cannot be treated as secondary to crisis response. Councils and communities need sustained support for local initiatives to build inclusion, challenge harmful narratives early and strengthen belonging before hate escalates. Two, local government needs capability and funding to play its role effectively. Councils are doing significant work already, but this work is often fragmented and dependent on short-term resources. Sustainable investment, practical guidance and stronger capability support would help councils strengthen prevention, design and deliver inclusive services and improve their response when and if incidences occur. Three, stronger coordination is needed across government, police, digital platforms and community organisations. Councils cannot carry this work alone. We need a more joined-up approach that recognises how online hate can drive offline harm and that ensures local, state and sector responses reinforce one another rather than operating in isolation. Four, better data and reporting are essential. And five, stronger legal and regulatory protections are needed to address online hate and prevent vilification. Organisations should be required to take proactive steps to prevent vilification, consistent with existing positive duties under the *Equal Opportunity Act*.

In closing, every Victorian deserves to live with safety, dignity and belonging. Anti-LGBTIQ+ hate undermines not only individuals and community but the social fabric of our state. Local government stands ready to partner with the Victorian government, community organisations and this committee to strengthen prevention, improve accountability and help all LGBTIQ+ Victorians participate fully and safely in public life. We do not want this inquiry to be limited to identifying and exposing the serious anti-LGBTIQ+ hate occurring across Victoria. It must also lead to concrete action that prevents future harm and strengthens the services, systems and partnerships needed to respond effectively. The MAV submission sets out a clear series of practical recommendations, which align with the submissions you have received from the cities of Darebin, Merri-bek and Nillumbik and go to the heart of preventing and combating hate. We urge the committee to give these recommendations serious consideration so the inquiry delivers meaningful outcomes for LGBTIQ+ Victorians, local communities and broader public interest.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tony, over to you online. Welcome.

Tony BRIFFA: Lovely. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to appear today and provide you with my experience as a councillor and mayor in Victoria. My name is Tony Briffa and I am an openly queer woman, married to a woman and born with an intersex variation. I was raised as a girl from birth and have lived experience as a trans and gender-diverse person as well. I was first elected to the Hobsons Bay City Council in 2008 and re-elected in 2012, 2016 and 2020. I did not seek re-election in 2024. During my years on the council I served as deputy mayor three times and mayor twice.

Local government, as we know, is the level of government closest to communities. Councillors live, work, shop, raise children, walk dogs and volunteer amongst the community that we represent and serve. This also

makes us and our families vulnerable. I experienced many instances of anti-LGBTIQA+ actions over the years I was on the council. One resident repeatedly called council threatening to harm me, including wanting to kill me in front of the civic offices. He also used social media to publish homophobic and transphobic attacks on me and called me a paedophile and a mutilated freak and accused me of engaging in sexual conduct with animals – although in not so many words. Thankfully the Magistrates' Court provided me with a two-year intervention order against the resident, and when he appealed to the County Court, the County Court decided a five-year intervention order was more appropriate. The fear and stress during this process, and even after the intervention order was issued, was significant. I worried he would discover where I live and that my family would be in danger. I was concerned for my safety when I went to the local shops, when I went to civic events and council meetings and even on my way home from council meetings. I also experienced deliberate misgendering by some community members and councillors in person, with others and in public social media posts. They did this to undermine, belittle and attack me and attack LGBTIQA+ programs in the council. I also experienced numerous attacks against me based on my sexuality, gender and biological sex characteristics on social media. AI was even used to make artificial images of me, portraying me in very negative ways.

As a result of various threats and attacks, and in consultation with the police, council introduced some additional security and safety measures, and I also increased my security at home. The council experienced repeated damage to a council-painted rainbow with hate-filled tags. We had rainbow flags stolen from flagpoles in front of the council offices and we also had a community event disrupted by anti-trans protesters.

We experience so much more anti-LGBTIQA+ attacks on social media than we did 10 years ago or even five years ago. These attacks break down our inclusive communities and make people withdraw from public engagement. They decrease social cohesion and make people feel unsafe. This has a negative impact on LGBTIQA+ people's physical and mental wellbeing and their participation in our community. Communities are poorer for this reduction in community participation, and it makes council LGBTIQA+ advisory groups and programs more important than ever.

Sadly, I know these LGBTIQA+ attacks and smears on social media also put us – LGBTIQA+ people – off from standing as candidates in local government. I strongly believe in free speech, but with rights come responsibilities, and rights should not come at the expense of other rights. In my view the law should denounce hate speech while respecting free speech. I yearn for a more respectful and kind community and encourage the committee to consider the recommendations from the MAV, the Victorian Pride Lobby and Equality Australia. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Tony. Tony, I have got my first question for you, actually. You caught my ear there before when you said that AI was used in a negative way towards you. I do not want you to go into any details that might make it worse for you, but I am interested to understand the situation and what happened towards you. The heightened use of AI for sending around deepfake images of people and using them as a tool to extort is growing and is quite prevalent. Particularly in light of this inquiry, I am interested to understand the situation there that you experienced.

Tony BRIFFA: Thank you. I am glad I mentioned it. They used it in a way to – I mean, it is misgendering on quite a high level. It portrayed me as a male, as a boxer, topless and all that sort of thing – it was extraordinary. To some people it might seem nothing significant, but indeed it was significant. I also remember the image of me in a mankini, of all things. I am sure some people thought that that was really funny. But as a person with my lived experience, a local person, my family, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my nephews and nieces, my children, my adopted son and my grandchildren can potentially see all these things, as well as me. I definitely do not want to see that. I mean, it is a form of assault.

The CHAIR: Thank you for sharing that. I can imagine it was pretty awful. I certainly worry about how AI can be misconstrued to achieve certain outcomes. On the face of it people think, 'Oh, really? Is that Joe?' or 'Is that Tony?' or 'Is that me?'

Tony BRIFFA: Because they look so real, right?

The CHAIR: They do. They are done so convincingly.

Tony BRIFFA: Yes. You can make them talk these days and have videos. People tend to just swallow up what they see in social media and take it as fact when it is not.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. I am sure we might have more to say on that in the final report.

I want to go to – I will try both of you. One of the things that stuck out to me, and it might seem a bit random, but we all know Snap Send Solve. I think you guys put down that it should include tools for reporting harassment, discrimination, vilification et cetera. As you probably know, I have been in local government. I know that it is primarily used as a tool for reporting potholes. I am trying to understand the thinking behind that move. Is it a way to make reporting more accessible? Can you talk to me about that idea?

Jan FARRELL: You go first. I will follow.

Sean MULCAHY: Happily. Thank you, Chair. For those that are unfamiliar with it, Snap Send Solve is an application that people generally use to, as you mentioned, report things like potholes or raised footpaths. Recently Ballarat City Council funded a trial led by a local LGBTIQA+ organisation called Tiny Pride to enable Snap Send Solve to report discrimination or harassment or experiences of that within the community. The organisation Tiny Pride worked with Snap Send Solve to add these functionalities into the app, and we believe that that should now be available across all of its provisions. I think what I have heard quite commonly is that people are reluctant to report instances to police or other justice authorities for various reasons. If we can set up as many reporting pathways as we can, that will enable that information to be circulated, so it is just one way that we can improve reporting of these issues.

Jan FARRELL: I would just briefly add that councils collect a lot of data. We heard earlier today about the LGBTIQA+ community only this year being included in the census. Every year there is a council satisfaction survey, which you would be aware of, and councillors wait for the outcomes and debate whether they went well or better or worse or whatever. There could be questions in there simply about counting the numbers in LGBTIQA+ communities that live in council areas, which would provide data that would lead to better services.

The CHAIR: I just thought that Snap Send Solve one was interesting, because the question always in my mind is: is that solving the issue or is it putting a bandaid? There is no right or wrong answer, because you want to support the people that obviously are going through challenges, but you want the change to be systemic so it does not happen in the first place. So thank you for that one. My time is sadly up, and I could probably talk for another hour on this, but I will pass it over to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: If we are talking about any sort of council matter, I am sure you can talk for that long. Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for joining us. Kath, I might start with you. We have heard today about some of the geographic breakdown of where a lot of the app-based attacks have been occurring. And whilst it can occur everywhere, we have heard there has been a particular prominence or prevalence of these attacks in the outer north and outer south-east. I am curious to know what engagement you have had or what feedback you have heard from councils in these areas – so the Humes, Whittleseas, Caseys and Cardinias – of Melbourne and any particular supports that they need or any other things that you are hearing from those councils.

Kath BRACKETT: Thank you. I think the main issue is the councils being able to understand what is occurring. A few other witnesses have spoken about getting good data and good local intelligence. Most of the councils, not just the ones that you have mentioned, are happy to get – what is the word – proactive intelligence from Vic Police and others about instances of hate and crime that are occurring and would work collaboratively to address that. So if it is in public spaces and there is signage that needs to be included, to give an example, or better lighting or engagement with some of the local groups to alert them of the issues, councils would be very happy to do that. But the main issue is actually understanding the data and where councils can intervene.

Michael GALEA: The theme of today. Where do you think councils can be most beneficial in preventing and addressing this offending?

Kath BRACKETT: I think in both, but specifically in the prevention space. Obviously rapid response is really important, but councils have obligations under the health and wellbeing Act as well, which actually really shows that local communities are a health and wellbeing setting. As a number of other witnesses too have also talked about, wouldn't it be great if there had been more groups, or more engagement, or more youth programs, or more safe spaces to go, particularly in rural and regional municipalities. Councils could do a lot of work in the prevention space if funded and supported to do so, particularly engaging with young people as well – so giving information, education and also a place to go for a sense of belonging and connection.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I might go to you, Tony. You spoke about the role of participation in democracy and obviously how central that is. Are you seeing through your experiences, but also through others, people in the LGBTIQ+ community actively withholding themselves or stepping back from participating in running for office at a local level?

Tony BRIFFA: Yes, absolutely, both – both people running for office and also even participating in LGBTIQ+ and other community events as well, because it just seems to be the season to attack anything remotely queer, but in particular anything based on anything trans and gender identity.

We all know, I am sure, which community groups or what groups there are on social media that do a lot of the attacking in local governments in particular, and it does put people off, and in particular LGBTIQ+ people. I must admit, even for myself, when considering running in 2024 and before my wife was diagnosed with a brain tumour, I did hesitate. I was thinking: do I actually subject myself and my family to this again, or don't I? And I am a pretty strong person; I have got thick skin. But it is even to the extent now where it is literally unsafe and you have to increase the security around your home and have protection at community events. Is it worth it?

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Tony BRIFFA: As terrible as that is – and I can only imagine what it is like as a parliamentarian that is LGBTIQ+. But as I mentioned in my earlier words, just being so public, so present in the local community, going to the local shops, going to local community events – people know who you are before you know them, and with all that queer stuff against you, it is difficult.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Tony.

Tony BRIFFA: No worries.

Michael GALEA: Because I am out of time, I am going to ask for a very quick answer, and apologies for that. Sean and Jan, in the wake of very well publicised attacks on council-run LGBTIQ+ events around three years ago, have you seen a general uptick or decrease in the willingness of councils to lean in for LGBTIQ+ communities?

Jan FARRELL: I think there has been a very obvious drop. There are so many issues around that. We heard earlier that at high levels of policing in Victoria there is a stance to support these events that does not always roll out on the ground. We have seen evidence of that. There are OH&S issues with staff. There are an amazing group of people called Community Angels who go to events in council-run facilities and have these enormous great wings that they put out to protect the participants from protesters, and they do an amazing job. But I think, if you counted, it would be far less than it was three years ago.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: All right. Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. Understandably through this inquiry process we are hearing a lot about justice responses and, for understandable reasons, responses after hateful acts have been perpetrated against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and absolutely the committee will have to consider those recommendations and contributions to those areas. But we did hear from Switchboard earlier this morning, and one of the quotes that was given in the opening statement was that we cannot just police our way out of this. There are absolutely other parts to this conversation and how we address and particularly prevent this targeted hate that is being levelled against LGBTQIA+ people. Can I ask – and perhaps, Sean, you might want to speak to this as well as others: what is the role of coordinated anti-LGBTQIA+ hate campaigns? What is a feed-in impact, I guess, to this hate that someone can somehow feel that it is okay to, in the case of one of the tech-facilitated attacks that has occurred, go out and commit a violent act against a person because of who they are or because of who they love? What role do you see some of these anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns having in feeding this hate that is being spread online or throughout the community?

Sean MULCAHY: I think any such campaigns need to be targeted in order to be effective. You will hear this afternoon from a colleague, Dr Josh Roose at Deakin University, who has done some work for the Department of Justice and Community Safety's countering violent extremism unit that explores these issues

around radicalisation and particularly their impact on LGBTIQ+ communities. But I think there are a few key things that we can do, which is starting to look at getting to people at a young age before it escalates into violence, so establishing intervention or rehabilitation programs within the youth justice system. And also mobilising the recently established Violence Reduction Unit – I think it would be very useful for the committee to hear from their chair as well so we can address radicalisation and we can address at-risk youth.ⁱ

We have also heard from other speakers today about engaging with the Department of Education and mobilising some of its existing programs – Respectful Relationships would be an example there – to address anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudices and ideology before they manifest in violence. But overall, I think the most effective thing that we can do is charge the LGBTIQ+ Taskforce with developing an LGBTIQ+ hate crimes prevention action plan that would include engagement with local councils, which are often at the coalface of this, so that we can start to prevent these crimes from occurring in the first place. That could include campaigns and other publicly facing activations. I think, looking at the evidence, those are some key recommendations that we would have.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Tony, perhaps considering your opening remarks around some of the escalation of attacks and targeted hate that are being perpetrated online, do you have any further thoughts that you might want to add here?

Tony BRIFFA: It is important to have LGBTIQ+ people in positions of leadership, so reducing the potential for LGBTIQ+ people to become councillors is a concern – so I think that needs to be addressed. Also, particularly in the absence of having any LGBTIQ+ councillors championing our issues in local government, having an advisory group that is managed and led by a council officer specifically focusing on LGBTIQ+ issues and having an action plan et cetera are really important as well. So I highly encourage the recommendations around that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just on the events that have perhaps been less prevalent in recent times due to fear of what has happened in the past – where people have threatened or otherwise protested inclusive rainbow family events, for example, happening across local government areas – is the absence of some of those public events creating a vacuum that some of the hateful rhetoric is then filling? Is that something that we are seeing across parts of Melbourne?

Tony BRIFFA: Yes. They are winning. It is like they are winning and they have helped suppress – sorry, it is very emotional for me sometimes – our community. It is actually quite distressing, the lurch to the anti-trans stuff, in particular, and anti anything gender identity. It has almost become like a sport, where people just take delight in maligning and attacking trans and gender-diverse people, especially young people. Yes, it is a great concern, and there is definitely a vacuum. I have seen councils step away from LGBTIQ+ programs and services, and that includes in Melbourne's west where I am from.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mrs Hermans, over to you.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you. Gosh, I have got so many, so many questions. First of all, thank you, all of you, for coming in. I honestly do not know where to start. I have to say again that I personally think that the Victorian Pride Lobby is probably one of the strongest, loudest and more competent lobbies that we have in this state. What I am hearing is that this is more than just bullying and that what is currently being done is not working.

Well, I just want to go back. The initiative of the Safe Schools program was born out of the 2014 Royal Commission into Family Violence, not anything, as I understand, to do with LGBTIQ. The pilot program started in 2014 to 2015. It was officially launched in schools in 2016 and mandated in that same year across all schools and very much was a push – and I know this from having been an educator myself – from the LGBTIQ community. They had a lot of say and a lot of input into the curriculum. We are hearing that that has not worked. Clearly these programs – Respectful Relationships, Safe Schools – are not the answer because they are not working. It is not solving the problem is what I am hearing. It has got worse is what I am hearing. Therefore there are major issues that need to be addressed at a much more specific level. That is what I am hearing in the inquiry. I cannot help but take it back to the education system, because that is my background.

I take on board the police stations. Of course, I personally think that rather than having a single person that is just an LLO, it may be the same as what you do with teachers, as someone suggested. You just have as many people qualified and trained that know how to be able to go about that so that there is a sensitivity there and an understanding of the dialogue and the language. Sean, you are nodding. Is there some agreement there in that?

Sean MULCAHY: Partial agreement. We do strongly believe that every regularly manned police station should have an LGBTIQ+ liaison officer that victims can go to if they want an LGBTIQ+ liaison officer to speak to. Following recommendations from a coronial inquest, Victoria Police is committed to training all of its officers on LGBTIQ+ awareness. That training is now rolling out. In my view every officer that a person goes to should be able to handle their complaint sensitively and sympathetically, but it is also important to have what I would regard as sort of a subject matter expert, in an LLO, at every regularly staffed police office.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Okay. That helps clarify that. In terms of councils, councils used to be rates, roads and rubbish. I do not know where they have gone to now. It is a bit hard to define at times. I personally do not understand the push for LGBTQ things, and I do not see it as hate speech to be able to talk about this. I do not think that I am a hateful person. I do not hate any one of you. In fact I am sure, given the opportunity to meet and talk with you, I would love every single one of you, and in terms of my own ideology, I love you anyway just because. All right. But the reality is I do not agree with LGBTQ taking over the space of local government. I do not. I do not see that as a discussion of hate speech or a thing that makes me a bad person. I have a difference of opinion. Where in the conversation of all of this is the space for people to have a different opinion and for that still to not be considered hate? People are diverse. I represent a very diverse community. I do not know how many religions are there. I do not know how many different types of worship places exist in my region. There are too many to count. I do not know how many different languages there are and community groups there are, but they are all diverse. I think when we push one over the other, I do not know, I feel like we are creating more tension. I guess my question is: is there an answer that we can come to where people can sit down at the table and everybody is represented?

The CHAIR: Your time is up, Mrs Hermans. But a quick response if you have got one.

Jan FARRELL: I will just make a very quick response. Councils have never been about rates, roads and rubbish. I am 72 years old, and all my memories of council are kinders, swimming pools, events and family picnics. It has never been about rates, roads and rubbish. I think we are in furious agreement that there should be opportunities to have these conversations. I do not think anybody at the table or in the room is saying that we should not have these conversations. I think it is the manner of the conversations – that where they create harm is what people are concerned about.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Yes. There is no argument with that.

The CHAIR: Tony.

Tony BRIFFA: Thank you. Yes, councils are about and always have been about so much more than roads, rates and rubbish, as you have just said – so even libraries, kindergartens, all sorts of different things, but also sporting clubs, the communication and programs that we do with the multicultural community, program support that we do with multi-faith communities. We do go out there, and we do so much work with all the different communities within our wider community, and that necessarily should include LGBTIQ+ people. Now, we are not suggesting for a moment that we should be the number one priority, but we are one of the priorities, just like everybody else. Working in this space for our part of the community is important, and we do deserve that support, just like all the other various communities that make up our wider community.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: No argument there.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Time is up. I am sorry, Mrs Hermans, but we might try and go to our members online. Anasina, are you there? I will hand over to you, Anasina.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, everyone, for being here. I really appreciate your time, expertise and lived experience as well. I might start with MAV. This is also open to everybody else to contribute, so feel free to jump in. I really hear the message that you are saying. The burden should not just fall on local council to carry programs, ensure that inclusion and address the drivers of hate and violence and societal norms towards our LGBTIQ+ community. I am wondering: are you hearing on the

ground how common of an issue it is for councils treading very lightly when it comes to certain LGBTQIA+ events? What kind of risk does this present in terms of addressing the actual drivers of hate crime, hate speech and violence against the community?

Kath BRACKETT: Thank you. Councils in the main have become more cautious about delivering and supporting many events that might be seen to be controversial in the community. That also includes First Nations events and similar sorts of events. The issue for councils is wanting to support members of their community but keep those members and their staff members safe as well. Some councils, often due to lack of resources and also not clear protocols and direction from state government, which is one of the recommendations that MAV has – a process that councils could work through to determine how they can support the event, how they can make sure that participants are safe and make sure that staff and staff members and broader community members are safe as well, does not exist. Councils, in an abundance of caution and fear about risk, have stepped away from providing some of those events.

Other councils, though, have taken an opposite approach and delivered events that have been more closed, which is not probably what they wanted to do, because they want to make the events open to all the community, but with a focus around particular community members. Or they have moved to ticketed events, which also raises issues about identity and anonymity, which some people wish to have, and it raises issues about increased costs of security as well. Many of the council events that I am familiar with have now very large security costs. There is also a pressure on Victoria Police, because the councils who are delivering those kinds of public-facing events have a lot of engagement and very positive engagement, in my experience, with Victoria Police, but it is a burden on them as well to have to provide some of the analysis about the safety of the event before it goes forward.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Would anybody else like to add to that? Can I just move on. Obviously prevention is really important as part of the recommendations and solutions that we have to consider. In both your submissions you spoke about introducing an enforceable positive duty for elimination of vilification. Can you speak more to that?

Sean MULCAHY: Happily. In our submission we recommend three key reforms. The first is to introduce in legislation an enforceable positive duty to eliminate vilification in the *Equal Opportunity Act*. Under the *Equal Opportunity Act*, as you may have heard before, there are existing positive duties to eliminate discrimination. This does not extend to vilification. Your sister committee at the Legislative Assembly had recommended this, and it is yet to be enacted. What this would essentially mean is that duty holders would have to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate vilification before it turns to violence. This could be things like putting in place a policy or training staff or people that are interacting with the community.

The second key point that we want to make is that we should reinstate the positive duty for councillors to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation in the Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Regulations. That was removed in reforms to those regulations in 2025. We believe that should be reinstated as well as a positive duty to eliminate vilification. Councillors as leaders of their community need to be setting the standard and doing what they can that is reasonable and proportionate to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and, importantly, vilification in their community.

And just lastly, we think there is a role for Local Government Victoria to play to partner with peak bodies like the MAV to develop professional development training for councillors on LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion. We can see the difference that that is making within Victoria Police. We think that there is benefit in councillors also undertaking that training.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Have I got time, Chair, or have I run out?

The CHAIR: No, I am sorry. We have run out. Apologies.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: No worries. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Watt, over to you.

Sheena WATT: Hi. Perhaps I will not go through all the time and there will be a little bit left at the end. My question: I want to start particularly – gosh, I do not know, actually, where to start, so I am just going to pick

the first one, and that is about libraries. Libraries are so vital and well loved in our community. I have seen here the MAV – in your submission you are proposing that libraries be utilised as prevention hubs for digital literacy. Can you talk to me a little bit about that? What does that look like? What role will that play, and who do you think will most benefit from this work?

Kath BRACKETT: Libraries are a fantastic community space, and pretty much all local councils around Victoria have one, or something similar. The idea would be to partner with the libraries – some provided through council, others in partnership – to upskill people with their own digital literacy to help them to understand how they can manage the online environment and how they can identify mis- and disinformation themselves. I mean, libraries in the main are very trusted places, providing really great information that is factual for people, so giving presumably easy access to people to learn how to manage their own experience online and recognise when things are not good, what the red flags might be, but particularly dis- and misinformation, explaining to community members what that is and how to recognise it and what to do about it if they experience it.

Sheena WATT: And what might that look like in the context of LGBTI hate crimes? Is there a particular role there relevant to our –

Kath BRACKETT: Yes. Libraries, or community centres for that matter, could actually provide specific information around hate crimes. They could actually provide specific groups for people from the community to feel safe, to understand the issues and ask questions and perhaps to share their experiences as well. That could also provide an opportunity for referral if required, so if people are feeling safe to talk about their experience or suddenly through the training recognise the experience they have had is in fact they have been a victim of hate crime – an opportunity for a pathway to address that as well.

Sheena WATT: Okay, lovely. Thank you for that one. I am interested – and perhaps this might be best placed for the Pride lobby – about local government's role in responding and preventing, and changes to attitudes to the LGBTIQA+ community, because local councils really are right there in very much the day-to-day lives of communities. Do you have a picture about how we could strengthen councils' leadership in responding to and changing attitudes with respect to the LGBTIQA+ community?

Sean MULCAHY: Thank you, Ms Watt. I would say that we do see local governments playing a strong role in supporting LGBTIQA+ communities. There is a role for local government on LGBTIQA+ work. We recommend two key actions that local councils can take, and it is really for us about hearing from the local community. Many councils have established advisory committees for LGBTIQA+ community members to have direct input into council on its decision-making, and many have also developed local action plans to address the needs of these communities. We could suggest a variety of ways in which local councils can act to improve safety for LGBTIQA+ people in their communities, but the real wisdom is held by local people in their local areas, and councils are always strengthened when they consult with their local LGBTIQA+ communities on issues that impact them.

Jan FARRELL: Also the councils celebrate particular events, such as the IDAHOBIT day. Two years ago our campaign had 79 councils in Victoria all fly the rainbow flag. To our knowledge that has not been done in any other jurisdiction in the world. When I leave here today I am heading back to Geelong, and we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of our queer young people's project, GASP. It has been running for 30 years today.

Sheena WATT: Any other additional comments from Tony online with that?

Tony BRIFFA: No. But just getting back to the libraries situation, I am really pleased to say that libraries – in Hobsons Bay at least – are just so much more than libraries these days. Even things like allowing parent groups and LGBTIQA groups to use meeting spaces in libraries in fact have been so much help to our community. I know of one group of parents of young trans people in Hobsons Bay. Just by bringing families together going through the same thing it has just provided so much support to those families. It is a thing that council does that we do not particularly advertise, because of safety and those sorts of things, but that we do.

Sheena WATT: Thank you so much. That was a point made by the previous witness: how we can support families more. Perhaps that is partnership work with local councils. I think my time is up, Chair, and I will return to you. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much, Sheena. That brings an end to this session. We are very grateful for your time, and to you, Tony, online as well. You will get a proof version of the transcript. But from us, thanks very much for your evidence.

Witnesses withdrew.