

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Tuesday 21 May 2024

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Police; and

Kate Houghton, Secretary, and

Bill Kyriakopoulos, Deputy Secretary, Police, Racing, Victims and Coordination, Department of Justice and Community Safety; and

Shane Patton, Chief Commissioner, and

Susan Middleditch, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services, Victoria Police.

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

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Police the Honourable Anthony Carbines – you are very much welcome here –

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: as well as Chief Commissioner Shane Patton from Victoria Police and officials from the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks very much, Chair and committee members. I am pleased to present to you today and would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders both past and present.

Visual presentation.

Anthony CARBINES: Since coming to office we have invested some \$4.5 billion to ensure Victoria Police has the resources, tools and technology it needs to keep Victorians safe and to remain an agile and responsive police service. In the 2024–25 budget we have provided a further \$6.63 million to support Victoria Police to continue and expand the youth crime prevention and early intervention project, which aims to increase the use of cautions and diversion for young offenders aged 10 to 24.

The 2024–25 budget also includes \$31 million for Victoria Police to deliver court programs such as the Drug Court and the Children's Court weekend online remand court and operationalise the new courts at Bendigo and Dandenong. Preventing crime through early intervention remains an absolute priority for the government so we can address the underlying causes of the behaviour and divert young people away from the justice system. We know more needs to be done. That is why, in addition to this year's investment in our youth crime prevention and early intervention project, the 2023–24 budget also provided some \$7 million over four years to expand the embedded youth outreach program, EYOP, and that has commenced at Werribee and Dandenong. EYOP aims to reduce long-term involvement in the justice system. It is now providing additional services at Brimbank, Melton and Shepparton.

The 2023–24 budget also allocated a further \$5 million over four years to our Aboriginal youth cautioning program, because we know that the vast majority of Aboriginal people have no contact with Victoria Police or the justice system. Our government also understands that investing in programs like AYCP is critical to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal young people coming into contact with police and to ensure that their first contact with police is their last.

Every day police officers are out on the beat patrolling at all hours in any weather, often putting themselves at risk to keep our communities safe, and to make sure we are keeping them safe too we have invested \$616 million in personal equipment and new technology, including CEDs, which the committee may know better as tasers, for all frontline police. We have also delivered mobile technology, body-worn cameras and new intelligence capabilities. Through this funding we are delivering tasers to more than 10,500 police and protective services officers, providing police with greater access to an important tactical option. Thanks to our government's investment, all frontline police will have another non-lethal tactical option in their toolkit to respond to violent and dangerous situations. That technology will also continue to reduce the risk of injury for police and PSOs who respond to dangerous and often unpredictable situations. It is just another example of how our government is working with Victoria Police to deliver the tools they need to keep our communities safe.

The Victorian budget in 2022–23 delivered \$342 million, an additional 502 police and 50 PSOs to meet the growing needs of the state. That takes us to a total of more than 3600 additional police delivered to the front line by our government, and I am pleased to confirm that those additional 502 police officers have been recruited and are being deployed to stations where they are needed most across the state as they graduate from the academy. The additional PSOs have been deployed across the public transport network and continue to support police, patrolling high-risk locations and public transport near public events in a flexible manner.

It is important to recognise the incredible work and significant contribution that our police deliver to the community. I would like to take the opportunity to thank each and every police member, PSO and their families for your service to the state. Our government knows that policing is often a difficult and thankless task. Police are often the first to respond to difficult and traumatic situations and help people who are at their most vulnerable, and of course we know that it can take a toll on police officers and PSOs. That is why our government are proud of our investments to ensure that police have access to tailored mental health and wellbeing supports, including our \$4 million investment to embed the BlueHub initiative.

Since 2016 our government has made record investments in Victoria Police to make a safer and stronger Victorian community. I have outlined the 3600 additional frontline police, 415 family violence specialists and 48 youth specialist officers; funding for a range of early intervention programs; and a statewide rollout of tasers, as I touched on. But that is not all, Chair. There is our \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police over the last decade. That has included \$257 million to deliver on election promises to free up police and \$685 million towards technology, equipment and capability uplifts across the force. They are some of the biggest investments that we have seen in law and order in our state's history and something that we as a government are extremely proud of. I look forward to our continued work and our continued investment with Victoria Police to keep the community safe and ensure that the police have every tool they need to do that work.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first 7 minutes is going to go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and team. Chief Commissioner, can I begin, you sent an email to your members that if the 9-hour shifts were rolled out to all members across the organisation the number of extra police required and associated costs would blow out to \$3.189 billion. Can you release the data that led you to that figure?

Shane PATTON: For clarity, that email was sent in December, I think –

Danny O'BRIEN: November.

Shane PATTON: November last year. I can see whether I have got the numbers for that, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: You can what, sorry?

Shane PATTON: I can check whether we have got that material. It is simply a costing number as to those shifts – I think it was 1885 shifts that I spoke of at the time – and that would have just simply been costed against those numbers, the raw numbers.

Danny O'BRIEN: So the cost is then across a year.

Shane PATTON: Yes, it would have been.

Danny O'BRIEN: How many stations would need to close if that was the case, if it was not funded by government?

Shane PATTON: Well, for context, just to give you an understanding of that email, that was at a time when we had not yet done any modelling. They were just straight numbers. With the police association we are trying to work through our enterprise bargaining agreement, and a suggestion of a 9-hour, nine by nine – a 9-hour day, nine-day fortnight – roster. They were just numbers, I think, up to and including senior sergeant, off the top of my head, and that was the cost it would have been to the organisation. There had not been any modelling done at that time as to what that might have meant, whether that would have meant any suspension of counter services or the like.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I understand you have sent an email very recently, the last 24 hours or so, to members saying that if the nine-by-nine deal is approved that would impact or would see community safety suffer. Can you explain why?

Shane PATTON: I do not think they were the words I used. If you could quote the actual words to me – because I do not think they were the actual words I used by any stage of the day.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Are you concerned then that the nine-by-nine deal would have an impact on community safety?

Shane PATTON: Within the last 24 hours I sent an email to the workforce outlining that we have been trying, along with the police association, through mediation – because that is where we were, in confidential mediation – to work through the issues to see whether we could get to a nine-by-nine solution. As a result of the – and I think this is contained in my email, the exact wording – recommendations made, I outlined that the recommendations fell short of what I and the executive command team could be comfortable with as it sat against the criteria that was outlined in the deed.

Danny O'BRIEN: So those criteria were no cost increases – or no significant cost increases – no extra police officers and no impact on community safety?

Shane PATTON: That is right.

Danny O'BRIEN: Are you saying that therefore the nine-by-nine deal cannot meet those three criteria?

Shane PATTON: No, that is not what I am saying. I am saying the recommendations made by the mediator fell short in respect to those, and so we are now in arbitration to try and get a determination in regard to those and at the same time still trying to work through whether what is being sought can be sought in a staggered way without negatively impacting any of those criteria.

Danny O'BRIEN: So those recommendations are from a mediator?

Shane PATTON: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, can those recommendations be released to the committee?

Anthony CARBINES: Well, what I would say is that I appreciate your efforts, Mr O'Brien, to negotiate the EBA at the estimates committee, but the matters are for the parties – the Police Association Victoria, Victoria Police and the mediator Julius Roe – and I will leave them to do their work.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, do you believe the recommendations of the mediator can be implemented without impacting on community safety?

Anthony CARBINES: What I believe is that the role of the mediator is independent, and I shall leave the mediator to conduct his work with the two parties.

Danny O'BRIEN: I understand that.

Anthony CARBINES: I do not want to put pressure on the mediator by speaking publicly about the negotiations that he has been asked to do as an independent officer.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is not about putting pressure on the mediator, it is about answering the question for the public.

Anthony CARBINES: Well, I am answering the question.

Danny O'BRIEN: As the government has signed up to a deal for a nine-by-nine arrangement with TPAV for no cost increases, no extra police officers and no impact on community safety, do you believe nine-by-nine can be delivered and not impact on community safety?

Anthony CARBINES: Well, the government has done two things. It has invested very significantly in Victoria Police – \$4.5 billion to fund 3600 additional police. What I would say to you is that the deed that has been agreed to by Victoria Police and the police association, which are the working parameters through which the mediator is operating, continues to this day and to this point, and it is appropriate to allow the independent mediator to continue his vital and important work without the interference of the minister or the government.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is not about interference from the government, Minister. We have got a situation where clearly, on the front page of the *Herald Sun* this morning, the Chief Commissioner is expressing a concern about whether this deal can be delivered and not impact on community safety. Do you share that concern, or are you sticking with the nine-by-nine deal?

Anthony CARBINES: No, that is not my reading of what has been –

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Minister, there has been a point of order. Mr O'Brien, we will come back to you. On a point of order, Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Mr O'Brien has had a terrific run so far, but I would like to actually bring this committee back to its work, which is the budget estimates.

Danny O'BRIEN: You do not think a \$3 billion increase in costs is relevant to the budget papers, Mr Hilakari?

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, I believe the minister has taken multiple opportunities to answer your question. I suggest you move forward.

Danny O'BRIEN: The question stands, Chair. Minister, this is a very serious issue. There is a potential \$3 billion cost to the budget or there is an impact on community safety if this deal goes ahead. Can you tell me if either of those are wrong?

Anthony CARBINES: All matters involving Victoria Police are serious matters; it is a very serious business. It is also important to allow the independent mediator to make his determinations and his negotiations with the parties without interference from the minister or the government, and that is the way in which these negotiations will be concluded.

Danny O'BRIEN: The government has already signed up to this deal in principle – is that not correct?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr O'Brien, I am sure we will come back to you. We are going to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister, Chief Commissioner and officials. Thank you for joining us today. Minister, I know that addressing youth crime has been a big focus of your portfolio – and doing so in a way that avoids recidivism and institutionalisation of young people as much as possible – so I would like to ask you about the youth crime prevention and early intervention project. Can you please talk to me a little bit about this project and what it has been achieving?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Galea. Can I start by saying that we know that young people who come into contact with the Victorian youth justice system are often among the state's most vulnerable. We know that contact with the youth justice system perpetuates impacts on individuals and their families, on communities and on the justice system. That is why we have provided some \$6.6 million to continue to expand the youth crime prevention and early intervention project, which examines the overarching issues that impact the wellbeing of young people in the justice system. The goal of the program is to substantially reduce rates of reoffending in young people aged 10 to 24, and we do that through increased cautions, diversions, early referrals to legal and social supports, and community legal education.

For members of the committee who may be unfamiliar with the term, a caution is a formal alternative to charging an individual, meaning that person is not required to attend court for their alleged offending. In partnership with Victoria Police, Victoria Legal Aid, Westjustice and other legal agencies this project has been operating in the Brimbank and Wyndham police service areas since 2021. Phase 1 of the rollout focused on the 10- to 17-year-old cohort, and phase 2 commenced in 2023 and expands the pilot to the 18- to 24-year-old cohort. The new funding delivered in this budget will allow the program to not only continue but expand further across the state. The program will now deliver services in a range of metropolitan and regional communities including the police service areas of Latrobe, Shepparton, Geelong, Mildura, Frankston and Dandenong.

The program also acknowledges that disproportionate and late intervention has increased the risk of young people becoming entrenched in our criminal justice system, with young people who receive a charge more likely to reoffend than those who receive a caution. In fact priority cohorts, including Aboriginal and linguistically diverse communities, are also over-represented in our youth justice system and are at greater risk of reoffending, demonstrating a need for these tailored and person-centred supports. Prior to the program's implementation, legal services referrals were largely limited to facilitating young persons' rights prior to conducting a record of interview. Outside of those written requests for disclosure there was no engagement between police and a young person's legal representatives prior to the first mention hearing at court.

Through education and oversight the program has implemented processes to ensure all young people taken into custody or cautioned in the field are offered the opportunity to engage with a legal representative. It is a process for a scheduled pre-court engagement between the sergeant and defence representatives. The program encourages police to identify opportunities to provide the young person with early access to relevant support services. Police can either refer the young person using the Victoria Police referral system or by directly referring them to localised service providers. I also understand that the program has been addressing the existing age limitation for child cautioning that is currently in place when police respond to young people, increasing the age bracket for children eligible to receive a caution to include young adults aged 18 to 24 years. So the \$6.63 million in this budget investment shows our continued commitment to community safety, ensuring young people and families and the communities receive the support that they need. Thanks, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Noting indeed the funding is expanding over the forward estimates, in what way have you measured the success of the project, and why has the government decided to expand it?

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you for that question. It is important to know that we are basing this work on evidence-based decisions, and I can confirm that the program's pilot in Brimbank and Wyndham was very successful, working for over two years to reduce crime, diverting eligible young people from the criminal justice system, reducing young people's contact with police and the courts. Since its introduction the rates of young people receiving cautions or warnings in Brimbank and Wyndham have increased substantially compared to other police service areas. That includes cautions provided to young people from priority cohorts that some members will be familiar with in their community, such as Aboriginal, African and Pasifika backgrounds. During the same period the rates of arrest and remand also significantly decreased. There was an evaluation of the project in March last year that noted that prior to the introduction, 50 per cent of young people processed in Brimbank PSA, the police service area, were remanded in custody. Post the program, remand rates fell to 11 per cent. Wyndham experienced similar results, with remand rates dropping from around a third of young people processed to just 12 per cent. So we know the impacts are very significant on communities and families, and the funding provided in the budget will ensure those results continue and that young people in these areas have a better chance to avoid entering our criminal justice system.

We know that there are other LGAs across our state that would benefit from tackling young people's involvement in crime, including through prevention and early intervention. That is why this funding also allows the service to expand and improve outcomes in the communities across the state. What I would say is that the program's expansion will help alleviate the current pressures on child protection and youth justice systems by diverting those young people from interactions with police and the courts. They do not happen in a vacuum, as the committee will know. Reducing contact with the criminal justice system and reducing the number of people in prison has been a key focus of this government in recent years. Over the past five years the government has invested some \$125 million in youth justice diversion. In addition to that, investment in crime prevention includes a range of early intervention programs to prevent young people's involvement with the justice system.

Since 2016 \$22 million has been invested through the youth crime prevention grants program, funding early and community-led intervention projects across the state to prevent youth offending. Now, those projects have been rigorously evaluated. We want to make sure that there is a significant reduction in the amount and severity of that offending by participants, and Victoria Police has also engaged with other government youth justice early intervention programs. The Better, Connected Care reform is an initiative that brings together departments across government agencies and the community sector to implement early intervention reforms focused on local area or place-based priorities and cohorts who access services across what we would consider to be multiple systems, because it is a system in which we operate.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, can I go back to this issue of the EBA deal with TPA? The Chief Commissioner's message to police was that he and executive command have real concerns in respect to meeting all the criteria that they outlined for the nine-by-nine deal and that his role requires him to put the safety of the Victorian community at the forefront of the decisions he makes. Do you agree with the Chief Commissioner?

Anthony CARBINES: I certainly agree that the Chief Commissioner at all times puts the safety and the care of the community at the forefront, as the number one priority, of what police do to protect the community, life and property. That is what Victoria Police do, and the Chief Commissioner leads an organisation that does that. But the substance of the key issues that you are raising in relation to the police association and Victoria Police will be resolved through the work of the independent mediator; it will not be resolved here.

Danny O'BRIEN: But did the government not sign up to an agreement on the nine-by-nine rostering arrangements?

Anthony CARBINES: I do not think you will find my signature on pieces of paper that relate to the parties, being Victoria Police and the police association. They are the parties to the deed and to an agreement to commit themselves to work on these matters with the assistance and the leadership of the mediator. That process continues, and while that process is underway it is not appropriate for the government or minister – me – to intervene or interfere.

Danny O'BRIEN: No, it is absolutely appropriate, Minister, because we have heard that this could be a \$3.1 billion cost to the taxpayer, or a significant reduction in community safety. So it absolutely is pertinent to these hearings. You said that your signature is not on it; was this deal done by the Treasurer and the TPA or the Premier and the TPA without your knowledge?

Anthony CARBINES: Community safety is the government's number one priority.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is not answering the question, Minister.

Anthony CARBINES: It is why we invested \$4.5 billion in Victoria Police. It is why our offence rate remains lower than pre-COVID levels in 2019.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is not answering the question.

Anthony CARBINES: So I am confident that at the core of everything we do as a government, that Victoria Police seeks to do and frankly the Victorian police association on behalf of its members, is to make sure that the

community is kept safe at all times. That drives all of our work, and I want to thank the work of Victoria Police and the police association –

Danny O'BRIEN: You are not answering the question, Minister.

Anthony CARBINES: and I am grateful for the fact that they are in negotiations. That work will continue, and all enterprise bargaining agreements get resolved. This one will also be resolved. It will not get resolved in estimates committee –

Danny O'BRIEN: That is the question, Minister.

Anthony CARBINES: but it will get resolved by the mediator.

Danny O'BRIEN: Will it be resolved at an additional cost, or will it be resolved at a cost to community safety? That is the question.

Anthony CARBINES: Community safety will always be a not-negotiable matter for Victoria Police, the police association and the government. That is just not negotiable. And it is not up for negotiation. But what is very clear is that an EBA is concluding, a new one needs to be concluded and the mediator will lead that process, and I am confident it will happen.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, despite your weasel words, there is clearly a conflict between –

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, I will remind you to be respectful of witnesses. That kind of language I will not tolerate in this room.

Danny O'BRIEN: Oh, seriously. I am allowed to use those words, Chair. You cannot stop me from using words.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien –

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, despite your words –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I ask a question, please? Minister, despite your words, there is clearly a conflict between the government and the police force. Do you have full confidence in the Chief Commissioner?

Anthony CARBINES: I reject any claims that there is conflict. The Chief Commissioner has always had and always will have the full support and confidence of me as the minister. We are a great team. We work very hard together to keep crime down and the community safe, and we have made sure as a government that we have provided every resource to Victoria Police: increased numbers of funded police officers and increased budgets year-on-year to resource their needs, and legislating in the Parliament to make sure that police have the powers they need to hold offenders to account. That will continue. It is in stark contrast to the \$100 million cut and the lack of funding of any additional police by your government when you were last in office.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, do I assume that you meet with the Chief Commissioner and police command very regularly?

Anthony CARBINES: I meet with the executive command and the Chief Commissioner every week in a formal sense, and we would speak most days.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. Budget paper 3, page 152 –

Anthony CARBINES: Sorry, could I just grab that one from you again?

Danny O'BRIEN: It is the budget paper 3, page 152, but it is the police line item. You committed in May 2022 to an additional 502 police officers, but the numbers are actually going backwards. As at 30 June last year there had been a decline of 317. Can you confirm that Labor will not achieve the additional police required to meet your own commitment?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks for the question. So the 502 police – that is a \$346 million election commitment made by the Labor government. We have delivered those 502 additional police. They are either in the academy now or they have been tasked to various stations for their training or for ongoing –

Danny O'BRIEN: I am talking in a net sense, which is what you said. You said 'additional police'.

Anthony CARBINES: Hang on. You have asked me whether the 502 police and 50 protective services officers have been delivered by the government. I can confirm for you that the \$346 million to fund them, the training for them in the academy and placing them, which is an operational decision of the Chief Commissioner, is underway, is happening. They are in the academy or they are at police stations now. They have certainly been funded.

Danny O'BRIEN: Minister, at the time of your commitment there were 16,159 police officers. As at 30 June last year the total was 15,842. You have not delivered an extra 502 as you committed.

Anthony CARBINES: We funded and delivered the 502 additional police, and we should also note that Victoria has the largest police service in the country – the largest police service in the country. And we will continue to work through our Made for More campaign, which is our recruitment campaign, to ask more Victorians to sign up and serve Victoria Police and serve their communities. I am at the police academy just about every fortnight, where we have seen double squads graduate from the academy because we are funding additional police.

Danny O'BRIEN: No. We are seeing more people coming in but there are more going out. There are more going out. At page 109 of the department's response to the PAEC questionnaire there is a forecast 3 per cent decline in police in the next 12 months but a 3 per cent increase in VPS positions. Why are you increasing public service and actually decreasing the number of frontline officers?

Anthony CARBINES: What I would say to you is that Victoria Police are no different to any other jurisdiction. There are a range of recruitment challenges that are faced by jurisdictions across the country. We see that in nursing, in other services –

Danny O'BRIEN: You are actually forecasting less police.

Anthony CARBINES: and in teachers. So what we are making very clear to you is that the funded number of police has not changed. We have increased the number of funded police under our government.

Danny O'BRIEN: But the actual number of police on the beat is going down.

Anthony CARBINES: But the committee will also be aware that the 502 additional police we said we would fund have been delivered. They are in the academy and they are in the police stations, and we will continue to fund additional police under our government.

Danny O'BRIEN: But there are less police on the beat.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. We may be coming back to you. We will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Minister, Commissioner, Secretary. With road safety – and I refer to the 'Department Performance Statement', page 96, and the performance measure titled 'Number of prohibited drug screening tests conducted' – Minister, are you able to expand on the outcome of these measures and how Victoria Police drug screening tests are making an impact?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Member for Clarinda. You will know that road trauma is a significant community safety issue. We saw some 295 lives lost on roads in Victoria in 2023, and this year over 100 lives have been lost already. My thoughts are with anyone who has been affected by road trauma. One life lost on our roads is one too many. Death and serious injury due to drug driving is not inevitable; it is preventable. Road trauma impacts the lives of collision victims, their families and the wider community. As the committee can see in the performance measure you mentioned on page 96 of the 'Department Performance Statement', Victoria Police exceeded their target of 150,000 roadside drug tests across 2022–23 and are currently on track to meet this target again for 2023–24. This work by Victoria Police is super important. Driving with impairing drugs, primarily methamphetamine and cannabis, has increased over the past decade. Drug driving has overtaken

drink driving as one of our state's leading causes of road trauma. The economic and social costs associated with road trauma make this a major concern for the community. Between 2019 and 2021 some 503 drivers lost their lives on our roads, and of those, 26 per cent – 132 – were found to have drugs in their system. So reversing this trend is key to achieving our toll reduction targets – lives lost on the road targets.

Victoria Police operates an extensive program of roadside testing with the dual aims of catching and deterring drug drivers. In 2022–23 the budget provided \$25.9 million in funding over four years, so that funding is continuing to provide an extra 50,000 roadside drug tests each year, in addition to the 100,000 already covered in Victoria Police's operating budget. Roadside drug testing has come a long way since the program was first rolled out in 2005 with funding for just 13,000 tests a year. Our continued funding for additional RDTs, as they are known, will help Victoria Police to prevent serious injuries and improve safety on the roads. Reducing the number of drug users who drive will create benefits for road users and contribute to the Victorian government vision of zero deaths on Victorian roads by 2050.

Our government also committed to the *Towards Zero* strategy of reducing the number of lives lost on Victorian roads and reducing the serious injuries by 15 per cent in five years, and released the new *Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030* in December 2020. That strategy further commits the government to halving road deaths by 2030 and eliminating deaths on Victorian roads, as I touched on, by 2050, reducing the incidence of serious injury resulting from road crashes.

The Monash University Accident Research Centre, MUARC, which you will be familiar with, committee members, continues to undertake evidence-based research that drives policy decisions that will help meet Victoria's road safety objectives. I want to take the opportunity to thank them for their very important work. MUARC has predicted that the impact of these additional 50,000 tests will result in 21 less fatal collisions and 52 less serious injuries each year, so a very important investment.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. Another performance measure on the following page outlines the numbers of drivers recorded by road safety cameras who were complying with the speed limits. Minister, can you explain what this shows us and how Victoria's speed cameras contribute to safety?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks again, Mr Tak. I am pleased to report that the performance measure shows that some 99.5 per cent of Victorian drivers are compliant when travelling past speed cameras. Road safety continues to be a major focus of the government, and we know it is as important as ever to continue to focus on getting dangerous and distracted drivers off our roads. Road safety enforcement has a huge role to play here. Recognising its importance, we have provided record investment over the years. There is \$120.6 million to boost mobile speed camera hours by 75 per cent and a progressive increase to full implementation of 16,300 hours per month as well as 96 new state-of-the-art cameras. So originally we expected it to be completed last year. Extra funding in the 2021–22 budget allowed us to provide those initiatives and deliver them two years early, by May 2021, and in 2021 we provided \$49.4 million over four years for 35 additional fixed road safety cameras installed at high-risk intersections and two new networks of cameras on freeways to deter dangerous driving, like speeding, which of course contributes some 30 per cent of fatal crashes on our roads.

I am pleased to report that 25 of those cameras are now in force and the remainder will be activated in the coming months. Many members will have made applications through that program that makes independent determinations of where those cameras are located. As you know, those sites are chosen through the independent committee of experts from Victoria Police, VicRoads and the department. Locations are chosen on a number of factors, including harm, crash history, reports of excessive speeding and the like. Every dollar raised from those speed cameras returns to the Better Roads Victoria Trust, which is used to improve road safety and infrastructure, to reduce transport costs for businesses and improve access for local communities. They are probably the few matters that I wanted to cover off.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. On cameras, the government recently rolled out new distracted driver and seatbelt cameras to address other dangerous behaviours in addition to speed. Minister, can you please tell us about this work also?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Tak. I was just making some statements yesterday on these matters. As part of the 2021–30 road safety strategy we have seen implementation of distracted driver technology, and I am

pleased to report that the cameras have been rolled out across the state. Using handheld mobile devices while driving at least doubles the crash risk. Drivers sending or reading a text message increases the risk of crash involvement by up to 10 times compared to an alert driver. \$33 million has been invested over five years to develop and implement that technology. We have seen already a distracted driver is estimated to be a contributing factor in 11 per cent of our road fatalities, and that is contributing to some 24 lives lost each year. I will have to come back to it sometime.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Minister. Mr Tak's time is up.

Meng Heang TAK: Thanks, Minister.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Tak.

The CHAIR: We are going to go to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you. Thank you, Minister and Commissioner. Chief Commissioner, forgive my ignorance, but there are around a thousand vacancies in the police force. When that money is not spent on those wages, are you able to reallocate or use that money?

Shane PATTON: 819 I think at 31 March were the under-attrition vacancies. That is utilised in our budget to offset other matters as well.

Nick McGOWAN: So it is reallocated while you are waiting to recruit? Is that –

Shane PATTON: Yes.

Nick McGOWAN: And can you tell us what it is reallocated to do?

Shane PATTON: I think – and I will defer in a moment to my Deputy Secretary with me – it is used in matters such as to offset issues like WorkCover and other structural deficits that we have had.

Nick McGOWAN: What sort of quantum are we talking about here, in terms of that?

Susan MIDDLEDITCH: Good morning.

Nick McGOWAN: Good morning.

Susan MIDDLEDITCH: I can add that the, if you say, savings that we get from under-attrition in police officer salaries, a lot of that actually goes to offsetting additional costs in terms of ensuring that the capacity that remains within Victoria Police is as full as we can. We do see an increase in overtime and recall rates during the year where we have large amounts of under-attrition, so a lot of that salary savings is offset by additional costs.

Nick McGOWAN: Just so I am clear, what are we talking? How many millions?

Susan MIDDLEDITCH: I have not got that figure with me. We can certainly get that for you.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, please. Are you able to provide a breakdown of what that pays for, like overtime I am guessing?

Susan MIDDLEDITCH: Yes.

Nick McGOWAN: Does it pay for things other than staff-related costs?

Susan MIDDLEDITCH: As the Chief Commissioner says, we obviously have a very large \$4 billion budget, so there are movements across a number of our cost centres where we ensure that savings in one area can offset additional costs in another, so it does move. Shane referred to our WorkCover premium, which is one of our largest categories in terms of a differential in funded and actual costs, so we do use any savings that we receive through the year to offset some of those costs. But yes, I can get you that breakdown.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much, that would be great. How much were you short in WorkCover funding versus your actual cost?

Susan MIDDLEITCH: Our WorkCover premium between last financial year and this financial year jumps \$80 million. Our total WorkCover premium is currently sitting at about \$260 million.

Nick McGOWAN: That is a lot of stations you could man or provide personnel to for those sorts of dollars, right?

Shane PATTON: It is a significant amount of staff absent due to mental health injuries, yes.

Nick McGOWAN: How many stations could you actually have for 24 hours, as opposed to limited times at the moment, with \$80 million?

Shane PATTON: It is not that simple. The reality is we have a number of members off from different locations, so it is not saying that any specific location is impacted. It impacts right across the organisation though because we do have a significant absence, which we have been quite open about and are trying to address through a range of such things as mental health hub initiatives, which we have rolled out already in the eastern region and the western region; injury management consultants; making sure that our supervisors are educated to try and prevent the mental health injuries – a whole range of things that we are doing. But yes, it is a significant impact to us, most certainly.

Nick McGOWAN: Chief Commissioner, perhaps this is one for yourself, following up from that: do you know how many stations are currently operating below the minimum station levels due to staffing?

Shane PATTON: No, off the top of my head I do not. I cannot give you that number. We have minimum station profiles, and we try and meet them. It is a challenging environment though, as we have said, when you have 819 people under your full-time equivalent. We are funded to recruit all of those. Since 10 April last year we were recruiting at double squads right up until around Christmas time and heavily invested in the market. Since then we have had challenges in recruiting. We are down to single squads at the moment, but we still have a lot of people in our pipeline, a lot of people wanting to join. It is not just a Victoria Police issue though, it is right across all Australian policing jurisdictions, right across the policing jurisdictions and defence and a whole range of areas.

Nick McGOWAN: To finish there, for the 43 communities that are impacted by the reduced hours, do you have some sort of target of when they might have their reception hours restored?

Shane PATTON: If you are referring to the 43 police stations where we suspended night shift counter hours and some other counter hours, I think we did that in November last year so that we could make sure our employees are out on the road. We continue to review them each quarter, so on a three-monthly basis, to see whether we can return those stations back to having those extended counter hours. But I do want to be clear: those steps were taken so that we could make sure the members are out on the road and are able to respond and be proactive in the vans. The stations are not closed. People are working from them; they are just deploying, and we have got reduced counter hours there. When that will come back, I do not know. That is why we are continuing to review it on a quarterly basis.

Nick McGOWAN: But you have got no specific target in terms of going back to what it was previously?

Shane PATTON: If those stations come back to the numbers that would allow us to do it, we would do that straightaway. That is why we are continuing to review it every three months – to see, as our staff are rolled out and as we get some people back from absences due to WorkCover, whether we are able to actually return them back to those. But I cannot give you an exact timeline because it is subject to very many nuances.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Chief Commissioner. Table 1.18 on page 66 of budget paper 3 details the ‘Youth crime prevention and early intervention project’ output initiative. Was the effectiveness of this project evaluated at any point before the extension of the funding?

Shane PATTON: That is the project that the minister spoke about at the outset, and we are advised that it has been a real success. I understand there was some evaluation that took place in regard to that. I am just referring to my notes as to whether they outline when that evaluation took place.

Anthony CARBINES: Perhaps I could also add that with the \$13 million in last year's budget for our youth crime prevention programs there is an additional \$6.6 million in this year's budget, which is in part added to build on that program work, and there is constant evaluation where we try to drive those programs.

Shane PATTON: Just for your information, it was evaluated by Swinburne University, and it was demonstrated a proven model to reduce offending, with a 9 per cent decrease in the offence rate.

Nick McGOWAN: Are we able to have a copy of that?

Shane PATTON: I cannot see why not.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Chief Commissioner.

The CHAIR: We will go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister, Commissioner and officials. Can I take you to the 'Department Performance Statement', page 96. It has there a measure relating to the number of family violence incidents reported, and certainly, Minister, when we were at Mernda police station we heard about the good work they are doing regarding family violence. There is certainly a national conversation that is happening now around what is a very important issue, so I would like to know what the government is doing to support the policing of gendered violence.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Member for Yan Yean. Can I say that I would like to acknowledge all members of our community who are affected by family violence. It remains one of Victoria's most pressing community safety issues, and tackling it is an important issue. It is one of the number one priorities of Victoria Police. Our state has led the nation. Of course, Member for Yan Yean, you would be well aware of the work in response to family violence from the royal commission, the first royal commission in the nation in relation to family violence. Victoria Police have completely overhauled how they police family violence incidents, developing a nation-leading policing model with some 415 specialist family violence police officers and establishing the first-ever family violence command and the family violence centre for learning at the police academy to ensure police are able to drive change in this offending. Victoria Police has also adopted the successful Operation Ribbon, which involves specialist detectives actively checking in on high-risk affected family members and working closely with partner services to monitor safety and compliance as standard practice.

The most recent data from the Crime Statistics Agency shows that family violence rates have remained relatively stable. In the year to 31 December 2023 Victoria recorded a 0.6 per cent decrease in the rate of family violence incidents per 100,000 people in the population. We have also seen an increase of 13 per cent in the rate of breaches of family violence orders. Many more offenders are being held to account than ever before; however, we know that still means there are some 95,000 Victorians, predominantly women and girls, affected by family violence every year, and so we know that there is significantly more to be done.

Earlier this month I met with my state and Commonwealth counterparts at the police ministers council meeting in Canberra to discuss improving police responses to high-risk and serial perpetrators of gender-based violence, and just last week we introduced legislation to Parliament that will allow the ongoing use of digitally recorded evidence-in-chief, or DREC as it is known, for victim-survivors to provide evidence in criminal family violence proceedings.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. A family violence learning centre that you mentioned – how does that impact policing? How does that impact how police go about their work?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Member for Yan Yean, and I am happy to expand on that. The Family Violence Centre of Learning was set up in response to the government's nation-leading Royal Commission into Family Violence, and I have certainly extended an invitation to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence to come and have a look at the work of the police academy in relation to this program. The centre, delivered by an \$11.5 million investment from our government, is located at Glen Waverley at the police academy grounds. It is the first scenario-based training facility dedicated to family violence in Australia. Officially opened in April 2019, it is a purpose-built training facility that provides police access to external academic governance to improve family violence education at all levels in the organisation. The centre aims to develop and to roll out

specialised education programs to police officers to support improved responses to family violence incidents. Victoria Police has also put together 21 family violence training officers to provide guidance to frontline officers and specialist investigators and advise the centre on priority training development opportunities. Police recruits now receive 30 per cent more training in family violence at the academy within six education sessions before undertaking their first training station placement to ensure they have a basis of the fundamentals of family violence from the outset.

The building itself accommodates a 60-seat auditorium, 15 syndicate rooms, training rooms, offices, separate staff and cadet mess, conference rooms and meeting rooms. The training space is fitted with state-of-the-art video technology that allows scenario training sessions to be live streamed to trainees on and off the campus. The space is adaptable to several scenarios using division curtains and adaptable entries to simulate different socio-economic domestic situations. The centre is used by trainees, including cadets; superintendents; commanders; lawyers; prosecutors; and investigators, and it is just one of the many examples of Victoria Police's ongoing commitment to improving their response to family violence incidents.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. The legislation you were mentioning earlier that was introduced into Parliament last week about digital something – can you explain what that is and how it is going to assist police and victim-survivors?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Member for Yan Yean. Yes, I can. That was just in our last sitting week of course, and we know that with those family violence incidents, when they proceed to court it can be a difficult and confronting experience for victim-survivors, so we – being the government of course – support Victoria Police to trial and use the use of digital recorded evidence-in-chief, or DREC, for victim-survivors of family violence as part of the government's response to recommendation 58 of the royal commission. DREC refers to victim statements that are recorded by police at a family violence incident. It is completed using a police-issue body-worn camera, and these digital statements are then used in court as evidence-in-chief. They replace all or part of a victim-survivor's formal written statement, providing victim-survivors with an option to give evidence without needing to attend court in person or confront the alleged perpetrator.

Last Wednesday I was pleased to introduce the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024 into Parliament, which will remove the sunset provisions in the *Criminal Procedure Act* and enable the ongoing use of DREC. So the legislation was developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including Victoria Police, as well as evaluation data from the trial period. I want to commend the Attorney and the work of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence for their collaboration in this work. It will ensure that victim-survivors of family violence continue to have a choice about how to provide evidence about their experiences in their own words, and as DREC has the potential to be more powerful than written statements, we believe this reform will also lead to early resolution of cases and reduce burden on frontline police and better hold perpetrators to account and will also be of significant assistance to the courts. The work is important and ensures that the voices of victim-survivors continue to be heard and are reflected in these reforms.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. G'day.

Anthony CARBINES: Mr Puglielli, good to see you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Commissioner, did Victoria Police commission an independent evaluation into the use of sniffer dogs as was recommended in the 2018 parliamentary inquiry?

Shane PATTON: I am not aware of any independent review of the sniffer dogs, no.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Will you commit to undertaking one?

Shane PATTON: No, I am not aware of any evidence or requirement for it.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. I am just referring to the 2018 parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform in the state of Victoria.

Shane PATTON: If there was a recommendation that came out of the drug law reform inquiry, we would have responded to that. That is now some six years ago, so I cannot tell you off the top of my head what our response was. I can undertake to look at what that response was and come back to you, which would inform whether we have accepted or rejected any recommendation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That would be great, thank you. The Yoorrook justice report made 46 recommendations for crucial change of the state's legal system, including the police internal complaints – that system is simply failing Indigenous people and the state needs an independent body for police complaints. Commissioner, when you were giving evidence before Yoorrook, Commissioner Lovett asked:

Do you think a police oversight system would be strengthened if we had an independent investigation of police complaints? You responded, 'I do now.' Minister, my question to you is: when are you going to establish an independent police oversight body such as an independent ombudsman, and can you maybe point me to a budget allocation for that undertaking either in this budget or in the estimates?

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Puglielli. Yes, I can expand a little bit on those matters. Firstly, can I say at the Yoorrook Justice Commission both the Chief Commissioner and I reaffirmed – I certainly did – statements that it would be most appropriate that there is greater independent oversight of police complaints, particularly almost exclusively as they relate to First Nations people. As you would be aware, the lead on police oversight work as it relates to IBAC, for example, is with the Attorney. But we work closely on those matters, and I remain very committed to work with the Attorney to bring legislative options to the cabinet in my work with the department so that that work can come to the Parliament. We made those commitments, the Attorney and the Minister for Youth Justice and I, reaffirming the need for a greater level of police oversight and independence, particularly as it relates to First Nations people. That work is happening. You may not see in the budget papers an allocation for those matters, because the work that we need to establish would also come with some funding requirements. I certainly acknowledge that, and if IBAC were the mechanism for that, there would need to be appropriate resources provided. What I would say is to watch that space. The government is committed to that work, and I would hope that we can share more details when cabinet has considered proposals from the Attorney.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Minister. The royal commission into deaths in custody reported in 1991, with a total of 339 recommendations. Too many of those recommendations, frankly, remain outstanding, and we still see more First Nations people dying in custody. Minister, in Victoria how many of those recommendations that pertain to people in police custody, rather than people in custody of corrections, are acquitted, how many are partially acquitted and how many remain outstanding?

Anthony CARBINES: With the Aboriginal Justice Caucus there is an independent review of the acquittal of those recommendations from the commission. But what I would also point to for the committee is the work the government has done in the decriminalisation of public drunkenness and the health responses that we have sought to invest in and the training that police have needed to do as an example around how we are trying to provide a health response instead of a justice response – a lot of criticism was made that the sky would fall in with that law reform – but also then the capacity to ask police to step back and health services to step up to support First Nations people, which was driving a lot of incarceration, as you have also seen in changes and other reforms the government has done. I draw that out as an example around real change in a law, to support First Nations people in particular, that had had very deleterious effects and caused deaths of Aboriginal people. But with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and their drive around the assessment of the acquittal of those royal commission recommendations, that work is continuing, and I am happy to provide an update to you on where that work is at.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That would be great, thank you. Commissioner Patton, have you been consulted on drug checking as a harm reduction measure in Victoria?

Shane PATTON: I cannot recall being consulted on that in recent times, no.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Is there a way for you to perhaps go over your diary to see if that happened in the past and update the committee?

Shane PATTON: No, sorry, I should have been more clear. I cannot recall it because it has not happened of recent years.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Right. Okay.

Shane PATTON: But that is not to say that Victoria Police has not been consulted on it. We have a range of policy officers who engage regularly with justice and the Attorney-General's office to work through and we are consulted on prospective legislative reforms. That often occurs on an everyday basis, and I am not consulted on every one of those things. If asked about matters like that, it would require responses to be signed off and they would go back. But I personally have not been consulted on it. That is not to say my organisation has not.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you. And what is your position on drug checking in Victoria?

Shane PATTON: Well, my position on drug checking is that Victoria Police will enforce the way the law is at the moment, and that is simply drugs that are illegal we will enforce. Matters of drug checking are matters for government.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Right. A further question: do we have an understanding of what proportion of police call-outs in Victoria are mental health related?

Shane PATTON: Yes, we do. I will just get those details for you. So we attended approximately 52,600 mental health call-outs in 2023, which equates to one every 10 minutes. Around 12,000 of those people were involved in taking into care and control.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. We will go straight to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister, Commissioner and departmental staff. Minister, I am going to take us to the embedded youth outreach program, which you mentioned in your presentation. I know you have spent some time talking about the youth crime prevention and early intervention funding in response to Mr Galea earlier. I am hoping you can explain the embedded youth outreach program and what other initiatives we might have to tackle youth crime.

Anthony CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Hilakari. The embedded youth outreach program is an intervention program that sees Victoria Police officers paired with trained youth workers to provide an after-hours response and referral service for young people who come into contact with police. The program was originally based in Werribee and Dandenong, covering the police service areas of Wyndham, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia, which would probably explain part of –

Mathew HILAKARI: I am pretty familiar with those areas.

Anthony CARBINES: You would be familiar with some of those; that is right.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is part of the reason the question is coming from me.

Anthony CARBINES: I thought it might have been. Thanks to the nearly \$7.5 million – \$7.37 million – in investment in the 2023–24 budget we have expanded EYOP, as it is known, to Brimbank, Melton and Shepparton police service areas, again driven by data that we understand shows that that is where we could have the greatest effect from additional funding. That program is targeted at young people aged between 10 and 24 years of age, and it is designed to respond some complex needs of young people at risk of long-term involvement with the criminal justice system. The EYOP can respond to any young person who comes to the attention of police, including first-time offenders, victims, missing persons and secondary offenders. The embedded youth outreach program refers vulnerable young offenders and victims to support services, including mental health, alcohol and drugs, education, employment, legal and housing services, so quite a suite of supports. The program ensures those young people are receiving face-to-face engagement during their most vulnerable moments. The program also engages the family of the young person to ensure people have the support they need at home and via some specialist services.

The program first rolled out in 2019, and as at 31 March this year 7834 engagements with young people and over 1000 referrals had been made for participants to support services. Further, an evaluation of the program undertaken in 2020 showed a 9 per cent decrease in the offence rate of those participants with a history of offending. So we know the program provides police with a unique opportunity to pair their skills and knowledge from the front line with the expertise of our youth support workers. As part of our record investment of more than \$4.5 billion in Victoria Police, the 3637 additional new police include 48 specialist youth officers

around the state. So programs like our embedded youth outreach are critical because our government is able to understand that tackling the root causes of youth offending cannot be solved through a police response alone or a justice response alone; it needs these other embedded supports that the EYOP provides.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am really pleased that that is the approach of government and the attitude of the minister as well. I am just hoping you can talk about some of those other challenges and measures that Victoria Police and the government undertake to deal with the challenge of youth crime and diversion out of the justice system.

Anthony CARBINES: Thank you. What we know is that early intervention and prevention is vital to combating youth offending. We also recognise it is important that we ensure Victoria Police have the resources they need to catch and deter and hold perpetrators to account. Victoria Police have strong powers to target brazen criminal activity, with new carjacking and home invasion offences, including statutory minimum sentencing for aggravated offences. As part of Operation Trinity we have seen police out every single night until dawn addressing property offending. That is reflected in the high arrest rate and vehicle recovery rates of Operation Trinity – 2800 arrests, an extraordinarily high car theft recovery rate of 94.2 per cent. As part of Operation Alliance, which targets youth gangs, police are undertaking a range of enforcement activities – community patrols, search warrants and bail compliance checks. As I touched on, our 48 youth specialist officers in local communities are steering young people away from crime and increasing their access to education, training and support. The *Control of Weapons Act 1990* allows Victoria Police to conduct planned and unplanned searches without a warrant for weapons for a period of time in a designated area. They are reforms that our government brought to bear, and operations of that nature occur infrequently at busy railway stations in the CBD and for critical events. We passed legislation in Parliament earlier this year that makes it clear that a machete is a weapon and not at all to be sold to a minor, reducing the risk of them ending up in the hands of someone aged under 18. The Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024 clarifies to traders that machetes are a control weapon and ensures proof of age must be checked before sale.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Anthony CARBINES: I am pleased that the opposition supported the Bill.

Nick McGowan interjected.

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, cease the interjections.

Anthony CARBINES: The penalty for carrying a controlled weapon with an unlawful excuse is more than \$23,000 or a jail term of one year. It is an offence for a person to sell a controlled weapon to any person they know to be a child under 18, with a fine of up to \$3846. It is also an offence for a child to purchase a controlled weapon, with a fine of up to \$2308.

While Victoria has one of the lowest rates of youth offending in Australia, Victoria Police has identified a small number of reoffenders who are driving an increase in serious offences committed by young people. Our upcoming youth justice Bill will address that recidivism, with plans to trial electronic monitoring and other diversion measures that we know will help keep young people away from the justice system. There is over \$30 million investment around that program in this budget alone, and of course, as I touched on, those 48 youth specialist officers that work in local communities. Those officers assist in steering young people away from crime, with a focus around training and support, housing, education and health services.

Mathew HILAKARI: I did note the mumblings from down the other end of the table, but certainly for those people who represent communities that do have farm workers and farms, it is an important farm tool, if we think about the broccoli and the cauliflower that needs to be harvested.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: However, I might move on, back to the question that I have got.

Anthony CARBINES: I would not want to criminalise farmers overnight, no.

Mathew HILAKARI: It would be a difficult thing for many people in the community. I am surprised Mr O'Brien does not talk more loudly about such things.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Order! Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Wow, it sounds like everyone needs a break.

Chief Commissioner, Minister and officials, our time together has come to an end for this portfolio. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is now going to take a short break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of racing at 12:15 pm.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.