

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

The ministry

Premier	The Hon. DM Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health	The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Resources	The Hon. J Symes, MLC
Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop	The Hon. JM Allan, MP
Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education	The Hon. GA Tierney, MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial Relations	The Hon. TH Pallas, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety . .	The Hon. BA Carroll, MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D’Ambrosio, MP
Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers	The Hon. LA Donnellan, MP
Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality	The Hon. MP Foley, MP
Attorney-General	The Hon. J Hennessy, MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and Minister for Fishing and Boating	The Hon. MM Horne, MP
Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support	The Hon. NM Hutchins, MP
Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development and Minister for Veterans	The Hon. SL Leane, MLC
Minister for Water and Minister for Police and Emergency Services	The Hon. LM Neville, MP
Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and Minister for Racing	The Hon. MP Pakula, MP
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. DJ Pearson, MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, and Minister for Small Business	The Hon. JL Pulford, MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth	The Hon. RL Spence, MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood	The Hon. I Stitt, MLC
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing	The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms M Thomas, MP

**OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

Speaker

The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker

Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers

Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Mr Carbines, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McGuire, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JA MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. MA O'BRIEN

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party

The Hon. LG McLEISH

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals

Ms SM RYAN

Leader of the House

Ms JM ALLAN

Manager of Opposition Business

Mr KA WELLS

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Mr P Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick	Forest Hill	LP	McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP
Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brayne, Mr Chris	Nepean	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Ms Roma	South-West Coast	LP	Newbury, Mr James	Brighton	LP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Ind
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David	Gippsland South	Nats
Bull, Mr Timothy Owen	Gippsland East	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald	Hastings	LP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Keysborough	ALP
Carbines, Mr Anthony Richard	Ivanhoe	ALP	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Werribee	ALP
Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan	Niddrie	ALP	Pearson, Mr Daniel James	Essendon	ALP
Cheeseman, Mr Darren Leicester	South Barwon	ALP	Read, Dr Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Connolly, Ms Sarah	Tarneit	ALP	Richards, Ms Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Couzens, Ms Christine Anne	Geelong	ALP	Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel	Mordialloc	ALP
Crugnale, Ms Jordan Alessandra	Bass	ALP	Riordan, Mr Richard Vincent	Polwarth	LP
Cupper, Ms Ali	Mildura	Ind	Rowswell, Mr Brad	Sandringham	LP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Ryan, Stephanie Maureen	Euroa	Nats
Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ms Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Edbrooke, Mr Paul Andrew	Frankston	ALP	Settle, Ms Michaela	Buninyong	ALP
Edwards, Ms Janice Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Sheed, Ms Suzanna	Shepparton	Ind
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Foley, Mr Martin Peter	Albert Park	ALP	Smith, Mr Timothy Colin	Kew	LP
Fowles, Mr Will	Burwood	ALP	Southwick, Mr David James	Caulfield	LP
Fregon, Mr Matt	Mount Waverley	ALP	Spence, Ms Rosalind Louise	Yuroke	ALP
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Staikos, Mr Nicholas	Bentleigh	ALP
Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Bulleen	LP	Staley, Ms Louise Eileen	Ripon	LP
Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Suleyman, Ms Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Hall, Ms Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tak, Mr Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Halse, Mr Dustin	Ringwood	ALP	Taylor, Mr Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Hamer, Mr Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Theophanous, Ms Katerina	Northcote	ALP
Hennessy, Ms Jill	Altona	ALP	Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter	Prahran	Greens	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hodgett, Mr David John	Croydon	LP	Vallence, Ms Bridget	Evelyn	LP
Home, Ms Melissa Margaret	Williamstown	ALP	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes	Sydenham	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
Kennedy, Mr John Ormond	Hawthorn	ALP	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Connolly, Mr Eren, Mr Rowswell, Ms Ryan and Ms Theophanous.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Mr Morris and Mr T Smith.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Mr Newbury, Ms Settle, Mr Southwick, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

Privileges Committee

Ms Allan, Mr Guy, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee

The Speaker, Ms Allan, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Mikakos, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Guy, Ms Hall and Dr Read.

Council: Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

House Committee

Assembly: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.

Council: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr McGhie, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallence.

Council: Mr Limbrick.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.

Council: Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur and Ms Patten.

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Thursday, 10 December 2020

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (09:32): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Business of the house

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER (09:32): I wish to advise the house that general business, orders of the day 1 and 2, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

Documents

VICTORIA LAW FOUNDATION

Report 2019–20

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General) (09:33): By leave, I table the Victoria Law Foundation report for 2019–20.

SUSTAINABILITY FUND

Sustainability Fund Activities: Report 2019–20

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:33): By leave, I table the Sustainability Fund activities report 2019–20.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VICTORIA

Partnerships Victoria Mobile Data Network Contract Extension

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:33): By leave, I table the Mobile Data Network project summary.

VISIT VICTORIA

Report 2019–20

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (09:34): By leave, I table the Visit Victoria report 2019–20.

Committees

INTEGRITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Performance of Victorian Integrity Agencies 2017/18–2018/19

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (09:34): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Integrity and Oversight Committee on the inquiry into the performance of Victorian integrity agencies 2017/18–2018/19, together with an appendix and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendix be published.

Documents

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

- Accident Compensation Conciliation Service—Report 2019–20
- Adult Parole Board—Report 2019–20
- Agriculture Victoria Services Pty Ltd—Report 2019–20
- Albury Wodonga Health—Report 2019–20
- Alexandra Health Service—Report 2019–20
- Alfred Health—Report 2019–20
- Alpine Health—Report 2019–20
- Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council—Report 2019–20
- Ambulance Victoria—Report 2019–20
- Austin Health—Report 2019–20
- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission—Report 2019–20 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*
- Australian Grand Prix Corporation—Report 2019–20
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency—Report 2019–20
- Bairnsdale Regional Health Service—Report 2019–20
- Ballarat General Cemeteries Trust—Report 2019–20
- Ballarat Health Services—Report 2019–20
- Barwon Health—Report 2019–20
- Barwon Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
- Bass Coast Health—Report 2019–20
- Beaufort and Skipton Health Service—Report 2019–20
- Beechworth Health Service—Report 2019–20
- Benalla Health—Report 2019–20
- Bendigo Health—Report 2019–20
- Boort District Health—Report 2019–20
- Calvary Health Care Bethlehem Ltd—Report 2019–20
- Casterton Memorial Hospital—Report 2019–20
- Castlemaine Health—Report 2019–20
- Central Gippsland Health Service—Report 2019–20
- Central Gippsland Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
- Central Highlands Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
- Climate Change Act 2017*—Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2018
- Cohuna District Hospital—Report 2019–20
- Colac Area Health—Report 2019–20
- Coliban Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
- Commercial Passenger Vehicle Commission—Report 2019–20
- Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*:
 - Victorian Government response to the State of the Environment 2018 Report
 - Victorian Government response to the State of the Yarra and its Parklands 2018 Report

Commission for Children and Young People—Report 2019–20—Ordered to be published

Confiscation Act 1997—Asset Confiscation Operations Report 2019–20

Consumer Affairs Victoria—Report 2019–20—Ordered to be published

Consumer Policy Research Centre—Report 2019–20

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20

Coronial Council of Victoria—Report 2019–20

Corryong Health—Report 2019–20

Country Fire Authority (CFA)—Report 2019–20

Dairy Food Safety Victoria—Report 2019–20

Dental Health Services Victoria—Report 2019–20

Disability Services Commissioner—Report 2019–20

Djerriwarrh Health Services—Report 2019–20

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20

East Gippsland Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20

East Grampians Health Service—Report 2019–20

East Wimmera Health Service—Report 2019–20

Echuca Regional Health—Report 2019–20

Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital—Report 2019–20

Emerald Tourist Railway Board (Puffing Billy Railway)—Report 2019–20

Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA)—Report 2019–20

Energy Safe Victoria—Report 2019–20

Environment Protection Authority (EPA)—Report 2019–20

Essential Services Commission—Report 2019–20

Fed Square Pty Ltd—Report 2019–20

Financial Management Act 1994:

Reports from the Minister for Agriculture that she had received the reports 2019–20 of the:

Murray Valley Wine Grape Industry Development Committee

Phytogene Pty Ltd, together with an explanation for the delay

Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria

Victorian Strawberry Industry Development Committee

Reports from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change that she had received the reports 2019–20 of the:

Barwon South West Waste and Resource Recovery Group

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board

Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group

North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group

Reports from the Minister for Health that he had received the reports 2019–20 of the:

Bendigo Cemeteries Trust

Mildura Cemetery Trust, together with an explanation for the delay

Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority

Reports from the Minister for Planning that he had received the reports 2019–20 of the:

Architects Registration Board of Victoria

Heritage Council of Victoria

Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria

Forensic Leave Panel—Report 2019
Game Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Geelong Cemeteries Trust—Report 2019–20
Geelong Performing Arts Centre Trust—Report 2019–20
Geoffrey Gardiner Dairy Foundation Ltd—Report 2019–20
Gippsland and Southern Rural Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Gippsland Southern Health Service—Report 2019–20
Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Goulburn Valley Health (GV Health)—Report 2019–20
Goulburn Valley Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Great Ocean Road Health—Report 2019–20
Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust—Report 2019–20
Greyhound Racing Victoria—Report 2019–20
Harness Racing Victoria—Report 2019–20
Health Purchasing Victoria—Report 2019–20
Heathcote Health—Report 2019–20
Hesse Rural Health Service—Report 2019–20
Heywood Rural Health Service—Report 2019–20
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission—Report 2019–20 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*
Infrastructure Victoria—Report 2019–20
Inglewood and Districts Health Service—Report 2019–20
Kardinia Park Stadium Trust—Report 2019–20
Kerang District Health—Report 2019–20
Kilmore and District Hospital—Report 2019–20
Kooweerup Regional Health Service—Report 2019–20
Kyabram District Health Service—Report 2019–20
Labour Hire Licensing Authority—Report 2019–20
Latrobe Regional Hospital—Report 2019–20
Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner—Report 2019–20
Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee—Report 2019–20
Legal Services Council and Commissioner for Uniform Legal Services Regulation—Report 2019–20
Lower Murray Urban and Rural Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Maldon Hospital—Report 2019–20
Mallee Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Mallee Track Health and Community Service—Report 2019–20
Mansfield District Hospital—Report 2019–20
Maryborough District Health Service—Report 2019–20
Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust—Report 2019–20
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust—Report 2019–20
Melbourne Market Authority—Report 2019–20
Mental Health Complaints Commissioner—Report 2019–20
Mental Health Tribunal—Report 2019–20

Mercy Hospitals Victoria Ltd—Report 2019–20
Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board—Report 2019–20
Moyn Health Services—Report 2019–20
NCN Health (Nathalia Cobram Numurkah)—Report 2019–20
National Health Funding Pool—Victoria State Pool Account, Administrator—Report 2019–20
National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner—Report 2019–20
National Rail Safety Regulator, Office of—Report 2019–20
North Central Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
North East Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
North East Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Northeast Health Wangaratta—Report 2019–20
Northern Health—Report 2019–20
Omeo District Health—Report 2019–20
Orbost Regional Health—Report 2019–20
Parks Victoria—Report 2019–20
Peninsula Health—Report 2019–20
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre—Report 2019–20
Phillip Island Nature Parks—Report 2019–20
Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Portland District Health—Report 2019–20
Post Sentence Authority—Report 2019–20
PrimeSafe—Report 2019–20
Public Advocate, Office of the—Report 2019–20—Ordered to be published
Public Interest Monitor—Report 2019–20
Queen Elizabeth Centre—Report 2019–20
Residential Tenancies Bond Authority—Report 2019–20
Robinvale District Health Services—Report 2019–20
Rochester and Elmore District Health Service—Report 2019–20
Royal Botanical Gardens Board Victoria—Report 2019–20
Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital—Report 2019–20
Royal Women’s Hospital—Report 2019–20
Rural Northwest Health—Report 2019–20
Seymour Health—Report 2019–20
South Gippsland Hospital—Report 2019–20
South Gippsland Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
South West Healthcare—Report 2019–20
Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust—Report 2019–20
St Vincent’s Hospital (Melbourne) Ltd—Report 2019–20
State Electricity Commission of Victoria—Report 2019–20
State Sport Centres Trust—Report 2019–20
State Trustees Ltd—Report 2019–20
Stawell Regional Health—Report 2019–20
Sustainability Victoria—Report 2019–20
Swan Hill District Health—Report 2019–20
Tallangatta Health Service—Report 2019–20

Terang and Mortlake Health Service—Report 2019–20
Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003—Review of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*—Stage One Report
Timboon and District Healthcare Service—Report 2019–20
Tweddle Child and Family Health Service—Report 2019–20
V/Line Corporation—Report 2019–20
VicForests—Report 2019–20
Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal—Report 2019–20
Victims of Crime Commissioner—Report 2019–20
Victoria Legal Aid—Report 2019–20
Victoria Police—Report 2019–20 under s 20R of the *Witness Protection Act 1991*
Victoria State Emergency Service Authority—Report 2019–20
Victoria's Mental Health Services—Report 2019–20
Victorian Building Authority—Report 2019–20
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council—Report 2019–20
Victorian Environmental Water Holder—Report 2019–20
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission—Report 2019 on the operation of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities—Ordered to be published
Victorian Funds Management Corporation—Report 2019–20
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation—Report 2019–20
Victorian Inspectorate—Report 1 January to 30 June 2020 under s 30Q of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*
Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine—Report 2019–20
Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health (Forensicare)—Report 2019–20
Victorian Legal Services Board and the Victorian Legal Services Commissioner—Report 2019–20—Ordered to be published
Victorian Marine and Coastal Council—Report 2019–20
Victorian Pharmacy Authority—Report 2019–20
Victorian Planning Authority—Report 2019–20
Victorian Plantations Corporation—Report 2019–20
VITS LanguageLoop—Report 2019–20
Wannon Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
West Gippsland Healthcare Group—Report 2019–20
West Wimmera Health Service—Report 2019–20
Western District Health Service—Report 2019–20
Western Health—Report 2019–20
Western Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Westernport Region Water Corporation—Report 2019–20
Wimmera Catchment Management Authority—Report 2019–20
Wimmera Health Care Group—Report 2019–20
Yarram and District Health Service—Report 2019–20
Yarrawonga Health—Report 2019–20
Yea and District Memorial Hospital—Report 2019–20
Youth Parole Board—Report 2019–20
Zoological Parks and Gardens Board (Zoos Victoria)—Report 2019–20.

Bills

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT (QUARANTINE FEES) BILL 2020

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (09:35): I inform the house that yesterday the Governor gave royal assent to the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Quarantine Fees) Bill 2020.

Business of the house

ADJOURNMENT

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (09:36): I move:

That:

- (1) The house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 2 February 2021, or an earlier day and hour to be fixed by the Speaker.
- (2) If, in the opinion of the Speaker, the next scheduled sitting or a rescheduled sitting should not proceed on the basis of health advice, the Speaker will consult with the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business to delay the next meeting and set a future day and hour to meet.
- (3) The Speaker will notify members of any changes to the next sitting date.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

COVID-19

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:36): I wish to bring to the attention of all government ministers that swift and decisive action is needed to stop the use of COVID-19 as an excuse for departmental staff to shirk their day-to-day responsibilities with the general public. The number of calls and visits I am receiving in my electorate office is increasing, not decreasing, despite so many COVID restrictions being eased. I have an 80-year-old constituent in Kerang who has been trying unsuccessfully to raise something at the land titles office to make urgent and necessary changes to his property title certificates. An oversight omitted his wife's name on a title, and he is now rightly concerned in the event of his death that she will be left without her rights. My office has contacted that department, and finally it is my understanding that someone will make contact with my constituent, but it has taken far too long.

The ripple effect of this attitude has been felt in many corners of the community. From Kyabram I was contacted by a 26-year-old constituent, the mother of a six-month-old baby and a woman who is reliant on colostomy bags for her physical wellbeing. She receives monthly supplies of bags via Australia Post, but when they failed to deliver she discovered her Bendigo-based support system was practising COVID safety, and the staff point-blank refused to do anything to help her on the day they were closed for their own safety. While we were able to help this woman with the excellent support of the Echuca Regional Health chief executive, Nick Bush, it does not alter the fact that she was facing a genuine health risk which could have had the worst possible outcome and no-one in Bendigo wanted to help her at all. These issues are ongoing. I urge the government to actually get their bureaucrats to do—
(Time expired)

GORDON MCKERN

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:38): On Monday Bendigo farewelled the great Gordon McKern. Gordon passed away on 29 November 2020 after living a full and fabulous 85 years. I came to know Gordon following my election as the member for Bendigo East in 1999. It was hard not to get to know

him given he was a leader in our community across a range of fields: business, the arts, Rotary, education, local government, water, transport—the list could go on. Much of Gordon's work was centred on Eaglehawk, the community he and his family had moved to in 1976. I admired Gordon greatly. There was always much to talk about and much to learn during time spent with Gordon. He was thoughtful and firm in his views and he always had a way of making people feel special. He also knew how to get things done, and done in a way that brought great benefit to our local community. It was reflected on during Gordon's funeral service that his style in how he got things done was part of his great success. Gordon enjoyed his time as a cricket umpire perhaps because he liked being part of a committee of one of which he was the chairman.

Sadly, Gordon's wonderful wife Anita passed away eight years ago. I always looked forward to seeing Anita at functions and events because I always knew the conversation would flow easily and there would be more than a few laughs. Together Anita and Gordon were quite the team. They were, as Howard Nathan described them on Monday, a duet. My deepest sympathy to Gordon's large and loving family on his passing after a life well lived. I would finish with a farewell from Gordon's good friend Monsignor Frank Marriott at the end of Monday's service: Gordon, job well done.

JAMARRA UGLE-HAGAN

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:39): Congratulations to Jamarra Ugle-Hagan, who was drafted to the Western Bulldogs with the number one pick in the AFL national draft last night. Jamarra grew up in the Aboriginal community at Framlingham in the South-West Coast electorate, and I have known Jamarra since he was a baby from my time working at Kirrae Health Service in the community, where I worked with his mum, Alice Ugle, and with the late Violet Clark, his grandmother. Since then I have watched him grow up to become a fine young man, and I am so proud that all his hard work has paid off and he is now living his dream. In a recent ABC interview Jamarra is quoted as saying:

If I make it and get the career I want, hopefully it changes the opportunities for other boys and girls as well. And not just Indigenous boys, multicultural kids as well, to give them that freedom to have that belief they can make it to the main stage, even if it's not football, just life in general.

That sums up the young man Jamarra is and reflects the values that have been instilled in him by his beautiful family. I am so sad that Violet is no longer here with us to see her boy succeed. I know she would be incredibly proud of him. I know too that Pauline Delaney and Dr Phillip Hall, who I also worked with at Kirrae and who know Jamarra, will be thrilled he has been drafted to the Bulldogs, as mad Doggies fans. Congratulations to his mum, Alice; dad, Aaron; and his entire family, who have helped Jamarra on his path. I know they will be so proud and excited for what his future holds for him.

GREENBROOK SINGERS

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:41): I rise today to congratulate the Greenbrook Singers, a group of some very, very resilient and inspiring senior citizens in my electorate of Mill Park, and their community development officer, Liz Skitch. What brought this group together about 15 years ago was their love for music and singing, and what has kept them together to this day is the joy they feel while they are performing and the uplifting nature of being able to come together and lift everyone's spirits. I want to thank the Greenbrook Community House for the support that they have received. The Greenbrook Singers have been one of the most active choirs in the City of Whittlesea, performing in many arts festivals, nursing homes and retirement villages in the northern suburbs of Melbourne more broadly. During Melbourne's pandemic lockdown the singers had to overcome many technological challenges in order to stay connected, but they did that. Their love for singing and their need to reconnect with their audience has prevailed, and gradually they managed not only to Zoom each week with their singing leader, Margaret Crichton, but also to record *Pass Over*, a beautiful and inspiring song. Almost 1000 people viewed their production online via YouTube. I have seen it myself, and I can attest to its uplifting spirit. I congratulate them for their resilience, determination and spirit during these difficult times. I would also like to congratulate Liz Skitch, who helped this group put together this wonderful

song. Liz was recently employed by the City of Whittlesea under the Andrews government's Working for Victoria program as a community development officer at the Greenbrook Community House.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:42): The recent Victorian budget that was handed down has again short-changed regional and rural communities. We make up 25 per cent of Victoria's population, but we are recipients of only 7 per cent of state allocation funding. I note, with the Treasurer in the house today, that I am particularly concerned for leadership programs. There does not appear to be a line item or a definite funding stream. We have all done it tough this year, and the people in the Ovens Valley are certainly no different. The fires last summer brought the economic tourism boost that we would normally expect to a standstill.

The Alpine Valleys community leadership program is an important part of the whole north-east region. It helps to develop both leaders for higher office and, more importantly, local leaders. We need the AVCLP for our recovery and our resilience in these difficult times, and I implore the Victorian government to assure that our leadership programs will be funded into the future. Give them the security that in turn will help them to offer continuity and a path forward. Without good leadership our communities will struggle. Without leadership our towns and communities will vacillate. We need the government to commit, and to commit soon, so that the AVCLP and other regional leadership programs will continue. History will show that 2020 is not the time to play politics with local leadership.

WERRIBEE ELECTORATE FUNDING

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (09:44): I rise today to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering for my great electorate of Werribee. As we move towards COVID normal we are in a position to reopen, rebuild and grow our local economy. The 2020–21 budget will see the community of Wyndham, along with the rest of our state, recover from the impacts of the pandemic, creating new jobs and opportunities. For Werribee the budget will deliver \$272 million to build new law courts, \$84 million for the transformation of Werribee zoo and \$4.8 million to plan for the future expansion of the Werribee Mercy Hospital. We are also continuing to build our Education State by delivering the great local schools that families deserve. Through this budget land will be acquired to build two new primary schools in the Werribee electorate. This is in addition to the land acquired in Werribee's Harpley estate earlier this year for a new high school. So there is plenty more in the budget that delivers for the Wyndham community now and into the future.

Across the electorate, major works are also progressing to remove level crossings at Cherry Street, Werribee Street and Old Geelong Road, and I am pleased to say that the Werribee Street level crossing will be gone for good months ahead of schedule thanks to the great work of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and will be the 45th level crossing to be removed by the Andrews Labor government.

FELICITATIONS

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (09:45): With Christmas fast approaching I want to take this opportunity to wish all the residents of the Forest Hill district well for Christmas and the New Year. The year 2020 has been one that many of us would rather forget, so I trust that over the festive season people have the opportunity to catch up with family and friends and recharge their batteries after this very challenging year. I want to thank everyone who works at the Parliament for their efforts during the year. I also want to thank my regular volunteers and my electorate office staff—Tina, Anne, Anna and Peter—for all their efforts during what has been the most difficult year we have experienced, one which has included attending to record levels of constituent and other inquiries and correspondence about a wide range of matters.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr ANGUS: The loss of Victoria's prized AAA credit rating is a huge blow to all Victorians. It shows that financial experts have now looked at Labor's most recent budget and seen it for what it is—that is, an absolutely reckless spendathon, spending all of the next few generations' money over just the next four years. This reckless approach and financial mismanagement jeopardises the financial future of current Victorians and indeed all future Victorians. It is one thing to make sound, considered investment decisions backed by well-developed business cases, but it is another thing to make hasty, ill-thought-through, thought bubble decisions on the back of a serviette. The latest example of this is the revelation from earlier this week of the government paying \$3 million to not build an order of trams. This gross mismanagement just shows how reckless and careless this government is with other people's money. How on earth can this government be so disorganised and just so hopeless, given the record number of highly paid public servants they have working for them at great expense to taxpayers? It just proves once again the old adage that Labor cannot manage money.

SYDENHAM ELECTORATE

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (09:47): Ten years ago I had the privilege of being elected to the Victorian Parliament to represent the people of Keilor, now known as Sydenham. I would like to take the opportunity to thank my electorate for their ongoing support and trusting me to be their local representative. I thank the constituents particularly who have come to see me in my electorate office over the last 10 years and who have raised issues with me on street stalls and at community events to tell me about their needs and ideas. Together we have achieved a lot in the last 10 years: the removal of the Melton Highway level crossing and the construction of a bridge; the construction of Springside West Secondary College; the removal of the Taylors Road roundabout—a big issue in my electorate; money for the Fraser Rise community hub, the Morton Homestead play space and the Bloomsbury Drive play space, all through the Growing Suburbs Fund; \$500 000 for Mackellar Primary School's inclusive playground; money for the Gilson College early learning centre; \$2 million for Catholic Regional College North Keilor's multipurpose hall; and \$10 million for Copperfield College Delahey's maintenance, which they desperately needed. We have also in that time widened the M80 at a very important point of the freeway and created new widening and installed safety barriers on the EJ Whitten Bridge. We have updated the Sunshine emergency ward and mental health facilities, constructed the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital and planned and funded for the purchase of land at Melton.

VICROADS REGISTRATION

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (09:48): Mr Ted Beamish, who is a business owner in my electorate, is still awaiting an outcome from VicRoads regarding the re-registration of his modular low loader, which he uses to transport oversized loads—like earthmoving equipment such as bulldozers and scrapers—throughout Melbourne. Mr Beamish has been trying to get the trailer re-registered with VicRoads for over two and a half years, and the trailer is still not registered. This is significantly impacting on his business and his ability to cater for his customers, and I call on the government to work with Mr Beamish and VicRoads to have this matter resolved.

PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENTS

Mr WAKELING: Mr David Bramley has raised serious concerns with me about the government's recent amendments to planning schemes VC187 and VC190, which he believes are stripping away people's rights to oppose new developments in their neighbourhood. He firmly believes that the government needs to explain why this is occurring and why it is that Victorians are having their powers stripped away.

FELICITATIONS

Mr WAKELING: It has been a very challenging year for people in the Ferntree Gully electorate. Given the challenges they have faced and the way in which they have dealt with COVID, I congratulate them for their efforts. I wish that they will have a great break over the Christmas season and that 2021 is a better year for people in my electorate—with their families, with their businesses, for young people, for old people—and I hope that they can live a better life.

CASEY RAINBOW COMMUNITY

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:50): Casey Rainbow Community is an emerging group for LGBTIQ+ people in the City of Casey and surrounds. After only 12 months of operation, the group has made a significant connection into the community, establishing a much-needed voice for LGBTIQ+ community inclusion in the City of Casey. Notably the group provided input into the state government's LGBTIQ+ strategy consultation, advocated for council to raise the rainbow flag for the first time on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2020 and is planning multiple community events in 2021. I would particularly like to acknowledge Nick Grant-Collins for his passion and commitment to seeing the LGBTIQ+ community thrive in Cranbourne. Casey Rainbow is one of the many active and passionate LGBTIQ+ groups in Cranbourne, and I was delighted to see how many groups were at Pride last year. Yet again it proves Cranbourne to be one of the most diverse and engaged communities in Victoria, and that makes me particularly proud this week of all weeks.

I also welcome the conversations I have been having with local community groups, and I want to thank Reverend Ray McCluskey from the Cranbourne Regional Uniting Church for his steadfast support for the LGBTIQ+ community in Cranbourne. Reverend Ray is always on hand whenever there is a problem of any sort in the community, but I would especially like to thank him for the way he stepped forward at the time of the birth certificate reform legislation and provided pastoral care to people in the community who needed it most. Over the last couple of days I have been speaking to Acceptance Melbourne LGBTIQ+ Catholics and Australian Catholics for Equality. I want to thank them for their tenacity and hard work when it comes to advocating on important issues.

COVID-19

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (09:51): I rise to thank everyone in our community in the Prahran electorate for their efforts this year. Whether you have been essential workers on the front lines in health care and social services, our awesome teachers and childcare workers, delivery drivers and retail workers who have been serving us through the lockdown, traders who have been trying to find a way through or just people who have been getting by—you know, working from home, looking after the kids, taking on even more duties at home or people living alone in isolation—it was no easy task this year. I want to acknowledge that for many people who have become unemployed or who have lost hours it is still tough going. This pandemic will have long-lasting effects on people's economic security and their ability to get work, particularly for young people, with many people pushed to the margins.

As I have said, getting through this pandemic is only the first step, and we need to keep working to create jobs, to look after people most in need, to protect our planet for generations to come and to build back better. We are really pleased to see progress, and we will continue the work next year.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my electorate staff this year, who have worked really tirelessly to respond to the avalanche of inquiries, questions and issues that people had. It was incredibly difficult and challenging at times, but they really took it up and went the extra yard for our constituents in Prahran. Thank you for everything that you have done to support our community.

COVID-19

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) (09:53): The Melton and Brimbank local government areas were the hardest hit with a number of COVID-19 cases. The way we did things locally was different and

difficult. I know that everyone found this period extremely difficult, and so did I. I thank the Melton and Brimbank councils and every member of my electorate and surrounds for their extraordinary commitment and efforts over the past few months in supporting one another and heeding advice from the health experts and the chief health officer during this one-in-100-year pandemic. I thank all our health professionals, local police and frontline workers who helped to support my community. Thank you to all the teachers in government and non-government schools for their enormous efforts in coordinating homeschooling and to the parents whose efforts and patience were tested during this period. A big congratulations to every student, particularly the year 12 students, who have just completed their year 12 exams and are waiting to embark on the next phase of their lives.

I also thank the churches, temples, gurdwaras, mosques and other faith and community organisations that went to great lengths to provide free meals, care packs, financial support, masks, pastoral care, support and information during this period. I thank them for their leadership and support in helping share the advice they received from health experts to their respective communities. I acknowledge every small business in my electorate that faced a range of challenges and thank them for reaching out to me. I hope we were able to help in one way or another. Like every member in this place, I could not have done my job without the support and dedication of my electorate staff, so my biggest heartfelt thanks goes to them.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:54): This year Remembrance Day in my community was commemorated in a different way. I acknowledge the Beaumaris RSL Women's Auxiliary president, Mairi McIntosh, and her team of volunteers for coordinating the distribution of dozens of packed afternoon teas to RSL members and supporters alike on Remembrance Day this year.

I also commend the Sandy Street Art Project and volunteers, including former upper house member Margaret Fitzherbert and Rana Wilson, for their contribution to the 5000 Poppies project. Margaret, Rana and several community volunteers took the time to install hand-knitted and crocheted poppies at the Sandringham cenotaph and within the Sandringham village precinct. These community-driven initiatives were a fitting salute to the sacrifice of those 102 888 Australians who died in war and conflict. Lest we forget.

SANDRINGHAM COMMUNITY FORUM

Mr ROWSWELL: Last Friday I convened a meeting of the Sandringham community forum with leaders from more than 30 community clubs and organisations—from community health services, environmental and sporting clubs to Probus, Rotary and Lions clubs, seniors groups and everything in between. Our purpose was to propose what our community needs throughout 2021 as part of our COVID recovery. There were inspired ideas shared which I will follow up and advocate for in the months ahead. My sincere thanks to the Friends of Black Rock House president, Carolyn Brown, for hosting us and to Alan and Lynne from Gilano Coffee for helping to keep us caffeinated. Community just does not happen by accident.

ETHIOPIA CONFLICT

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (09:56): It is an honour to chair the Victorian African Communities Action Plan Implementation Committee on behalf of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the member for Yuroke, and with great support of course from the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, the member for Sunbury.

Can I say that I want to acknowledge the situation in Ethiopia, which will directly or indirectly be affecting many within our communities. We are watching with sadness as we see the escalating conflict, death and displacement. I am aware there will be some in our communities who have family and community in Ethiopia or in the Horn of Africa more broadly, and we are thinking of them at this time. I know several of our committee members were involved in meetings with the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in recent weeks. For those

not present, those discussions included how we can petition the commonwealth government to bring home Ethiopians with Australian citizenship and work with the global community to help support those who do not.

In 2016 I had the privilege to visit Ethiopia as a member of the Victorian parliamentary trade delegation. I met the then health minister, former foreign minister and now head of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. I also visited several regions, including the Tigray, Oromia and Somali regions and the capitals of Addis Ababa, Jijiga and Mek'ele. I have a significant community from the Horn of Africa in my electorate of Ivanhoe, through the West Heidelberg community in particular. Our thoughts are with their families, whether they are in Australia or back in Ethiopia, and we offer them every support and call on the commonwealth government to continue to advocate for their interests.

PRESTON HIGH SCHOOL

Mr SCOTT (Preston) (09:58): I rise here today to congratulate the High School for Preston group, who I was lucky enough to meet with this week. This is a group of people who fought hard to re-establish public education on what was the former Preston Girls Secondary College site and who have seen a wonderful school develop now, which has received \$18.93 million in the recent budget, allowing for the future of the school to be guaranteed to provide decades of wonderful education to kids in the area that I am lucky enough to serve. I would like to pay particular tribute to Anh Mai, Nanne Mitchelson, Nadya Tkachenko, Vair Buchanan, Danielle Parker, Warwick Anderson and Jane Melville amongst others. This is a group who upon the closure of the former Preston Girls Secondary College fought hard for public education to return at a secondary level within Preston—organised petitions and street stalls, lobbied assiduously not just myself but the minister, the minister's office, the department, the Victorian School Building Authority and other agencies within government, presented evidence and won the argument, creating a legacy which does credit to them and will serve the community for many years to come.

COVID-19

Mr SCOTT: In the brief time I have left I would also like to thank the community for their forbearance, hard work, dedication and sacrifice during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

2020

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (09:59): I rise to pay conscious homage to the year that was—2020 will go down in the annals of history for many reasons. But I would like to focus on the special moments that, whilst a reminder of the difficult times we were in, also managed to make us smile, shake our heads and say, 'That is peak 2020'.

Sky News erroneously reported that Brett Sutton resigned, resulting in millions of Victorians simultaneously coughing up their cornflakes and more than a few cushion cover manufacturers suffering heart palpitations—peak 2020.

On a Friday in late August, right the middle of lockdown, we discovered that storms had interrupted power, resulting in untreated water entering supply systems in the south-east, prompting residents to wonder what was next. Had the NBN followed water's lead, we would likely have had a civil uprising on our hands—peak 2020.

The mayor of Rockhampton tendered a shock resignation, and under new election rules there was no by-election. Instead, a countback determined that the Extinction Rebellion candidate, a barefooted neo-Marxist by the name of 'Pineapple' Hooper briefly became the mayor designate of Rockhampton. The rules were quickly rewritten—peak 2020.

The first US presidential debate set a new high-water mark for sheer unwatchability, while the vice-presidential debate had us enthralled not with the candidates but with a fly—peak 2020. Rudy Giuliani: the press conferences, the Borat film, the hair dye, the madness—peak 2020.

Finally, Victoria's biodiversity was threatened not just by bushfire. The member for Kew launched a two-person campaign against the fruit bat colonies of Melbourne, an intervention that can only be described as batshit crazy and most definitely peak 2020.

COVID-19

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:01): It has been a tough year for all of us, and I want to take the opportunity to reflect on the resilience and generosity of my community. The community of Ballarat is strong and kind. We are adaptable, innovative and have big hearts. There are so many stand-out efforts across Ballarat during 2020. I want to thank everyone for their efforts, particularly our essential workers, who carried our community during the most challenging times of the COVID pandemic. We rose to the challenge of COVID with resilience and optimism. It was wonderful to see so many houses with teddy bears in their windows and chalk rainbows on the footpaths.

Thank you to the Ballarat Foundation, who delivered hundreds of food parcels each fortnight, and the many other not-for-profits and philanthropic organisations who responded to support people in need.

Schools across Ballarat were extraordinary during 2020, especially how they transitioned to remote learning. Thank you to our principals and teachers for supporting our children's learning at home and keeping them engaged and connected. Thank you also to the parents who stepped in and stepped up to support our children's education.

We have outstanding healthcare workers, who cared for the 59 people in our community who had COVID and stopped the spread in our region. Our healthcare workers are truly world class and deserve the highest praise and recognition.

Now it is time to recover and reconnect. We need to back local business, support local jobs and help one another. I wish every person in Wendouree a very merry Christmas and all the best for the new year.

COVID-19

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (10:02): This is the last day of the parliamentary sitting calendar for this year. What a year it has been. It has been described as the hardest year that many people have ever lived through, but what it has demonstrated is the sheer grit and determination of Victorians, the stoicism of Victorians. It has shown how Victorians are different to other states, may I say, in the way that we have been able to come through and pull through together as a community. I want to thank the hundreds of thousands of health workers across our state who have put themselves selflessly on the front lines to keep us safe throughout the year. I want to thank my local community, who have done a great job—the schools, the community organisations who have represented those most vulnerable, those most at risk from this coronavirus crisis throughout the year in such a fine way.

GOVERNMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr HALSE: I want to highlight two reforms: \$5.3 million for social housing—hear, hear to the minister—and also today's Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, which is before the house.

FELICITATIONS

Mr HALSE: Can I thank the parliamentary staff and you, Speaker, for managing this place through a very difficult period, making sure that the wheels of democracy continue to turn. That is fitting in the great history of this state and the democracy in this state. Finally, I would like to thank my electorate office staff—and say happy birthday to Sharon.

PARLIAMENT PRIZE

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:04): I rise to thank three students in my electorate of Bass who entered this year's Parliament Prize—a 90-second statement and a message to their local MPs on what matters to them. They have shown an immense courage and risen to the challenge, and I am very proud of them. Charlotte Brewis from Newhaven College spoke to the issue of homelessness and rough sleepers in Victoria and the associated stigma. Anna Scott, also from Newhaven, put forth her ideas around forum-style learning, where teachers facilitate conversations around social justice that complement the curriculum being taught. Savannah Stud from Lakeside College in Pakenham, with a strong stance on environmental issues, in particular against single-use plastics, is already making a difference locally. Reignite that green team, please, Savannah. Your voices are heard. You have great ideas and a unique way of seeing the world.

DAVID RUSSELL-CLARKE

Ms CRUGNALE: We called him 'Pushbike' Dave. He was a local Wonthaggi treasure. Always cheerful and somewhat of a philosopher, he lived a wild life and his heart was huge. He went from child prodigy trumpeter to guest of Her Majesty to championing off-the-rails kids—all kids, actually—who needed someone on their side. A thrown-out bike left by the roadside would spontaneously disappear, making a Lazarus return, functioning and bright. Bike frames, wheels, seats and chains all adorned and saturated his house, even the kitchen. He was all heart, all bikes, all community. Vale, David Russell-Clarke.

Following statements incorporated in accordance with resolution of house of 8 December:

SOMERVILLE POLICE STATION

Mr BURGESS (Hastings)

In late October I again called on the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to provide the police officers needed to open the Somerville police station. On many occasions I have raised the disgraceful conduct of this government in its continued refusal to provide the purpose-built Somerville police station with the police it needs to open and protect its local community. It is behaviour that can only be described as sheer political bastardry. Denying a community the protection that it badly needs and campaigned for for over a decade to secure, simply out of political spite, because it was built by a Liberal government, is unfortunately the kind of conduct that has become an everyday occurrence in Victoria under the Premier and Labor.

In raising this matter on this most recent occasion, I encouraged the minister to at least try doing her job by seeking funding from the Treasurer in the government's recent budget.

In a recent and very disturbing event a young Pearcedale woman narrowly escaped serious harm when the car she was driving was forced off the road late at night and then blocked in by a car driven by two males. When these men left their car to try and force entry into the young woman's vehicle, she was able to escape by driving up over the curb and along the footpath.

This person saved herself through her own quick thinking.

Built by the coalition state government in 2014, the state-of-the-art Somerville police station still awaits its first local police officer; a six-year period throughout which crime in the local area has worsened.

The Somerville police station was built as a part of a Liberal government overhaul of local police resourcing, under which the Hastings police station would keep its complete current contingent of officers, while having the area it covers cut in half. Between the Hastings and Somerville police stations, the Western Port area would finally have had the level of police resourcing it needs and deserves.

The community deeply respects and appreciates the work our local police do. However, they are stretched further and more thinly every day.

My repeated requests to this government to open this important facility have fallen on deaf ears. Last week I received the latest dismissive response from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The minister's answer said that deployment of police is a matter for the Chief Commissioner, using the staffing allocation model (SAM) and that SAM had been developed by Victoria Police, in consultation with the Police Association of Victoria. The minister's response claimed that deployment of police resources is solely determined by evidence and in so doing it also safeguards the operational independence of Victoria Police.

Clearly the current Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Member for Bellarine has forgotten that in the 2015–16 state budget and again on 12 May 2015 at a PAEC inquiry into budget estimates 2015–16 her predecessor revealed that at the same time as the Andrews government was refusing to provide police to open the Somerville police station, \$7.8 million was allocated to provide 15 new sworn police officers in several Labor-held electorates.

The minister also failed to mention that the then secretary of the Police Association had attended a public rally in Somerville and called on the Andrews government to open the Somerville police station.

The Somerville community campaigned for more than a decade to secure its own police station and today, once again, as I have done repeatedly since 2015, I call on the minister for police to put aside petty politics and finally provide the police officers to open the badly needed Somerville police station to improve community safety and help reduce crime across the local region.

BITTERN TRAIN STATION

Mr BURGESS (Hastings)

I seek the assistance of the Minister for Public Transport to direct Metro Trains Melbourne to remove dumped rubbish around the four community charity bins located at the Bittern railway station on the Stony Point line.

It's a disgusting and shameful situation and this rubbish must be removed immediately. Metro Trains must also undertake serious prevention work to ensure this situation does not reoccur.

Bills

CHANGE OR SUPPRESSION (CONVERSION) PRACTICES PROHIBITION BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms HENNESSY:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Government amendments circulated by Mr PAKULA under standing orders.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:08): I rise today to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. This is a very important bill. It is something that certainly has received lots of attention. I must say lots of people through my electorate and others have made contact with me, and I wanted to begin by acknowledging those people that have made that important contact, knowing that this is something that goes to the core of a lot of things and certainly attracts a lot of passion in terms of many of our beliefs.

Could I begin by saying that certainly the Liberal-Nationals support outlawing harmful LGBTIQ conversion practices that have no basis in medical science and can certainly lead to long-term trauma. We know that, and I am sure many of us have spoken to people from the LGBTIQ community that have given firsthand experience of the trauma of certainly experiences that they have had to deal with during their lives and issues in terms of them being treated equally and in terms of them being able to identify who they are and being able to lead a life like all of us should be able to lead—in a free way, in a way that certainly supports the ability for you to practise your life and live your life in the way that you wish to live.

One thing that I as well as many others in the Liberal Party have had a very strong belief in is around freedoms—around freedoms of expression, around freedoms to live your life, around freedoms of speech and around freedoms of religion and being able to practise a religion. As someone who is of the Jewish faith and who has a core centre in terms of my belief, I know that it is very important to protect that freedom. In terms of this bill, we need to look at getting the balance right when it comes to those freedoms. There has been a lot of discussion about how we ensure the freedom of the individual and the freedom of the person who wants to identify being able to identify without fear or favour. There is no place for hatred in a general sense—I say that in a very broad sense—in a whole range of different ways. In the Parliament at the moment a committee of which I am a member is looking at hate laws more generally and at how we deal with that when it comes to disability, when it comes to anti-Semitism or racism and when it comes to hatred for those from the LGBTIQ community

when it comes to sexuality and identity. That is all really important, and we need to ensure that we, as a society, champion and support that.

The bill certainly does look at the issues, particularly around that of conversion. Fundamentally there is no place at all for conversion, as traumatic as we have seen it to be in the past. But the bill goes further and addresses the ramifications when it comes to conversations. I am not referring to the specifics of whether that conversation is about suppression or about conversion; I am talking about that conversation a young person who is at a questioning age is able to have with their family, with somebody of their faith or with somebody who can provide medical or psychological help. All those things are very, very important going forward. Therefore we must look at getting the balance right when it comes to ensuring that we have that conversation.

I have to say that when it comes to these issues, I have always been a very strong believer in having a conversation, because the only way we change things in our society is by having a conversation. In schools at the earliest possible age we need to have a conversation when we start to see bullying and when we start to see somebody being harassed because of their sexual preference. A lot of that is starting at very, very early ages at school and a lot of that is done because of those young people not having an understanding. Again, as somebody with a Jewish background I have seen anti-Semitism right at the heart. We have seen it happen in schools more recently, and I know the government has had reports and is looking at some of this. In those instances it is not about taking the hard line of the law to this; it should be only used as a last resort. What it is about is changing the systems, making sure people are properly educated and making sure that there is an appropriate support basis around those schools for those kids going forward. That, for me, is very, very important in ensuring that there is that conversation. But what does concern me is that the ability of a parent to work with their child and have that conversation may effectively be limited by this bill going forward in terms of what their rights and responsibilities are for that child. Now, we know there are certain circumstances where there are very, very unhealthy situations in families and we have got to respond to that accordingly. But we know, and even in the case of this government in many instances, the importance of keeping the family unit together. We know that. There are situations where, particularly with this bill, there is the opportunity for a child potentially becoming a ward of the state or a parent having legal action taken against them because a conversation may be questionable and that parent is trying to work through some of these issues with their child.

Again, in the briefings that we have had with the government certainly some of those questions were asked, and the government has responded in terms of the details of this bill around the specifics of when it refers to a child who is broken—and these are the words that are used in the bill—and needs to be fixed and that parent or that religious leader or that medical practitioner is espousing to fix the child, therefore that is where it crosses the boundary and potentially breaks the law. But a lot of this is without detail and subjective. What we might be talking about today might certainly differ tomorrow in terms of that interpretation. What concerns me is certainly not about an 18-year-old and certainly not about an adult but more about that child from the age of 10 that is questioning their sexuality and their identity, as many do and rightly so, where conversation is important, discussion is important, soul-searching is important, but medical intervention should in fact be the last resort after that conversation has taken place.

We know of many instances—we have had a number of people from a whole range of organisations who have contacted us to talk about it—of medical intervention. We know some of that medical intervention is obviously irreversible in nature and, particularly when we are talking about children, you do not get a second chance. That is why this is so important. That is why fundamentally the bill that is in front of us is so important—because these are our kids, these are our families and these are decisions that our kids and our families are making.

I absolutely get it. I absolutely get it from the aspect that we do not want to suppress somebody's sexuality. We do not want to be in a situation where a young person is living in a situation that harms them long term from a psychological perspective. But this has been a very, very interesting period in

terms of talking to a number of people about this bill—people from a wide spectrum, many people that have converted in their sexual identity and many that had initially gone down that path and decided to step back from that into where they originally had identified from. There is a whole range obviously of different emotions and feelings. What that says to me is that we need to be very careful as legislators that we do not overreach. We need to ensure that we do as legislators have the ability to protect people, have the ability to certainly ensure that there are boundaries on the basis of respect, of tolerance, of freedoms, and that those freedoms are protected at all lengths—the freedom of the parent, the freedom of the child, the freedom of the family, the freedom of the individual, the freedom to live the life you want to live. And certainly the freedom of religion, as I said, is very, very important. I have been talking to many people from different faiths and backgrounds and others, other stakeholders, through this. Even last night through Hanukkah we had rabbinical leaders here, and when I asked for their perspective on this, some of the details were lacking because they had not had the consultation about the bill and their obligations going forward. Some are dealing with these very issues right now in terms of their own people within their congregations and they do not have that information. So it is with that said that I move this amendment to the bill that is in front of us:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until urgent further consultation is undertaken with all stakeholders and inherent significant issues with the bill can be addressed and appropriate amendments made, including express clarification of the following specific concerns:

- (1) the rights of children and their parents, particularly in relation to seeking assistance with gender identity and sexual orientation issues including gender dysphoria;
- (2) the legal competence of children/adolescents (under 18) to provide informed consent for gender transitioning hormonal (puberty blocker) drug treatment;
- (3) the rights of individuals to voluntarily seek assistance for gender identity and sexual orientation issues including via pastoral care and faith organisation counselling services;
- (4) the rights of faith organisations to provide such pastoral care and counselling services to individuals who voluntarily seek assistance; and
- (5) the rights of healthcare professionals to provide assistance and care to individuals who seek help for gender identity or sexual orientation issues’.

Now, I say this consultation should be conducted as a matter of urgency over the summer break and an amended bill which details and which clarifies the points above should be reintroduced back to the Legislative Assembly no later than the end of February 2021. Can I ask for the amendment to be circulated.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines): The matters will be circulated to members.

Mr SOUTHWICK: This is absolutely important, and I want to say right off the cuff that this is not kicking the ball down the line. What this is doing is it is using the summer break to ensure that the government have the consultation which should have been done in the first place so that we have stakeholders properly consulted and have the ability to consult on the details that we now have before us in this bill.

I know the Minister for Health has said that this is something in terms of an election commitment, and I respect that. It was an election commitment of the Andrews Labor government to ban conversion therapy. I have no issue with that and the opposition have no issue with banning conversion therapy, but there is a lot more detail in this bill. There is a lot more detail, and we believe we owe it to every child, every man, every woman, every family—everybody in this state—to ensure that they have that consultation so we get it right.

Let us remember this is the last sitting day of Parliament for 2020. It is the last in 2020. We will go on a summer break. We will come back here in February. Let us use that time to consult and let us come back in February and make sure that we have had that opportunity. Then bring this bill before the house again and let us look at those details that need to be looked at, let us take it to the upper house

and then let us ensure that we have had that proper consultation and given people the ability to have the consultation that this deserves.

I remind the government we have had similar situations in the past in the Attorney-General's portfolio where bills have been taken through—and, again, I am not talking about top line; I am talking about detail. We have only seen this detail in the last week. We have only seen the detail of this bill in the last week—not in the last month, not in the last year; in the last week. We put questions to the government in our bill briefing last week. We got answers to those questions back yesterday afternoon. It is not enough. When we are dealing with a child having the potential to have medical intervention, we need to ensure that we get it right. It is simple. We need to ensure we get it right. We support the ban on conversion therapy; that is not the issue. The detail here is what we need to get right.

I remind the government that earlier this year we alerted the government to a bill that was rushed through in 2019, the Open Courts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2019, that was aimed at reducing the number of suppression orders issued by courts. The legislative change caused issues with the open courts act, which was chiefly aimed at reducing the number of suppression orders issued by the Victorian courts. We up until recently were the suppression capital of Australia when it came to victims of crime being able to speak. There were sexual assault victims and family violence victims not being able to speak—that were gagged. The government brought in a bill in 2019. We know in April they got it wrong. We know in April they got it wrong and it had to be brought back in here. It took from April to November to get it back in here. And we know that a number of sexual assault victims could not speak. The government redrafted the bill, again in a hurry, and we debated it in here and we found that those families of murdered victims—Jill Meagher's mum came out on that day and said that she was gagged and could not speak about her daughter's brutal attack and death. And what happened in that situation? We fought for amendments and the amendments came through, and it was all about consultation. And we spoke about consultation then—we spoke about the need for consultation. We had victims of crime come out publicly in the media. The Let Us Speak campaign came out in the media and spoke about being denied the opportunity to be consulted upon a bill that gagged them—a bill that gagged them from speaking. And it was only through the opposition—that moved amendments, that raised the issue and that, in line with victims of crime, ensured that those amendments happened—that the bill was changed, and that was in the 24th hour. We debated that a couple of weeks ago. Those changes were made a couple of weeks ago, and if there is any example of rushing something through in terms of detail, that should be one that all Victorians should think about today. We gagged victims of sexual assault, murder victims and rape victims. Mums and dads and families could not speak. We did that, and because we stood up, that changed.

Now what we are saying is very, very simple. This bill should be given the opportunity that it deserves because this is a big game, and what we need to do is we need to ensure that the consultation does take place. Now, again I remind the government: nothing will change. We are talking about a month at best over something in terms of years here. Nothing will change. The consultation would happen over summer. We will come back in February. This is not a never-ending opportunity. This is an opportunity to get it right. It is simple. This is not kicking the ball down the road until a time in the long-distant future. This is about bringing it back in February, having the consultation, talking to people and giving them the opportunity to express their views.

Only last week the High Court in the UK ruled on a case looking at children and children's rights when it comes to this issue, and what it says in terms of responsibilities with the law, what it says in terms of obligations, is that these are all issues that need to be considered properly. It has got nothing to do with the overall election commitment of this government, which we have said that we support and which the federal government has supported. I remind the government that at the last federal election the now Prime Minister himself made that comment in terms of the importance of supporting this. It is very, very important to do so.

Now, there has been lots of consultation, as I said, so far from some people to us—in the last 24 to 48 hours and last week—but many of those people that have spoken to us have not had that

consultation again with the government. I want to thank the Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar, Thorne Harbour Health, the Liberal Party Pride branch, the Australian Medical Association, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Equality Australia and Pride for their conversations.

Melinda Jones has been a very strong advocate in this area. She is the current president of the National Council of Jewish Women, a legal practitioner—a feminist human rights lawyer—a disability advocate and a Jewish educator with over 40 years of experience. She talks about a whole range of issues and a whole range of things that need to be explored going further—things like the importance of freedom of speech, the medical treatment of gender dysphoria, protecting the rights and integrity of children, the compliance of children to consent and the role of the court to intervene. Also Melinda Jones speaks about the UK's decision in the *Bell* case, a lot of which confirmed, with medical treatment being provided to children, the importance of understanding the age of children and understanding the issues around consent in terms of the age of the child. She raises a whole range of really, really important points, and I think Melinda is one of those people that would really benefit the government to talk with. Melinda talks a lot about the idea of conversation and the concern around medical intervention, specifically with young people at an early age of as young as 10, who do not necessarily have a formed ability to make many of those decisions. And again, that is really important going forward.

We know in other areas the government takes quite a different view in terms of the mental capacity of a young person to make a decision. In my police and corrections shadow portfolios we are looking at the issue around spent convictions, and I know there is discussion in terms of anyone under 18 having a conviction spent as an acknowledgement of children not having the capacity—reflecting the brash behaviour of a young person that makes these decisions when they commit a crime. So that is in the area particularly of the criminal justice system. We know that certainly Jesuit Social Services is looking at raising the age of criminal responsibility, and they refer to the fact that experts maintain that children between the ages of 10 and 14 are not developmentally mature enough to be fairly tried in the criminal justice system. The report that they released in 2019 talks about how research into brain development consistently shows that young people lack the ability to make comprehensive judgements and that the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which is responsible for impulse control, planning and decision-making, is not fully developed until roughly 25 years of age.

Now, that is specifically in the area of the criminal justice system. I make reference to that, and that is looking at lifting the age of consent but it does talk about young people. I think for me the biggest issue that I have is getting this right with a young person. This is not about suppressing a young person. This is not about not giving a young person an opportunity to have a conversation. It is absolutely not about any type of conversion, which we absolutely do not accept, but what this is about is giving a family member, giving those close, the ability to have a conversation—not the ability to tell you how to live your life but to have a conversation. Kids are questioning. There is no doubt at that age kids have the right to question, as they do. Kids go through many different changes within their life, and it is important that they have that support. I think one of the things in terms of looking at some of these amendments and looking at some of the things that we need to look at over summer is the ability to know when a parent, when a religious leader, when a psychologist, when a medical practitioner—they need to know on what basis they are able to have that conversation with a young person and on what basis they are able to provide that support. That is all we are asking. We are saying that it is really important that the details are the things that count here. It is the details that count. It is about getting this right. We are dealing with young people making decisions.

We know the government's view, and we know certainly the conversation that we have had around a lot of the stuff, particularly in the births, deaths and marriages part for people to change the identity on their birth certificates. We know we now have the ability to change that identity multiple times—on a yearly basis. We accept the fact of the government's definition of the ability to be gender fluid, to be able to make that decision, to be able to change your identity. What we have concern about here is the potential to lock that in without the consultation and without the ability of that young person to have

that conversation and most importantly to get it right. That is all—most importantly to get it right. I think we owe that to everybody. I think we owe that to the LGBTI community. I think we owe that to families. I think we owe that to everybody that has an important part to play in this bill.

This bill, as I say, has raised a lot of interest, as it should, and a lot of concern by a lot of people. I know, regardless, we have got to land somewhere that protects everybody going forward—that protects the child and that ensures that conversion therapy is banned, because that is something that none of us accept—but ultimately is something we can all live with going forward. These are important decisions that we all make. They are difficult decisions that we all make. I appreciate that for the government this is an election commitment, but I also appreciate we have had a week to look at the detail. We now need to give the community that same opportunity to look at some of this detail and to come back with their perspectives to ultimately ensure that we get the legislation right to protect everybody—to protect all children, all families, all Victorians.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (10:38): I rise to support this bill, which will help end practices that hurt people and deny the basic right to be recognised for who you are. It is a bill that will protect the rights of LGBTIQ Victorians from the still prevalent practices that seek to change or suppress people's sexual orientation or gender identity. It delivers on this while ensuring the protections of faith and other communities where evidence shows, sadly, some groups on the margins of these communities still perpetuate these activities. In doing so it deliberately and specifically avoids intrusions into doctrinal or other beliefs provided that they do not hurt or harm people in the manner in the way that is set out in the bill.

There is a very high bar of serious criminal harm and damage to establish this offence, and rightly so. Mainstream faith communities have nothing to fear from this bill. Moreover, LGBTIQ Victorians should take great heart that we are delivering on our election commitment and that these antediluvian practices will be both banned and called out as harmful. It rejects the idea that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender-diverse and queer Victorians are somehow broken and need to be fixed. It provides a mechanism for engagement, for change, for the conversations that have just been referred to, for recognition, I would hope for healing and for building from shared values of universal approaches to decency and compassion. Whilst I am not one to generally rely on Scripture for support, in this instance I make an exception as I think that Paul to the Galatians got a universal message of compassion right when he wrote:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Supporting this bill will provide the basis for change and constructive engagements based on rights and empowerment and the notion that we are all God's children. This bill is in the interests of not just LGBTIQ Victorians but all Victorians who see strength in our diversity. It is a bill that should unite us. That it comes from an extensive process of reporting, review, consultation and debate over a number of years should give this house every confidence that the issues have been thoroughly canvassed and considered. Last-minute calls for a pause should be seen as an attempt to delay and to re prosecute arguments—however deeply held—that have been addressed, considered and in many cases, under a proper reading of this bill, addressed.

I want to first address the amendment that will be made to the bill in this house. The amendment is to correct a minor typographical error in clause 59. Currently the bill reads:

“gender identity means a person's gender-related identity, which may or may not correspond with their designated sex at birth, and includes the personal sense of the body ... and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech, mannerisms, names and personal preferences;”

A ‘p’ slipped into ‘references’. The amendment seeks to alter it to the original intent of the bill: ‘personal references’. This is the way in which individuals speak about themselves and their pronouns, for example.

Change or suppression practices are also, I might say, wrongly known as ‘conversion practices’. They are specifically not referred to as ‘conversion’ in this bill or as an offence under that title because of the deep spiritual significance of that term to many faith communities. That is why the government uses ‘change or suppression’. Nobody should be in any doubt that these activities leave a trail of destruction in people’s lives. These practices often involve the subtle and repeated messaging that a person can change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

It is important for us to recognise that these practices occur in a range of settings and they can take many forms: counselling, psychotherapy and support groups. While there is a focus on fringe practices amongst some communities, survivors tell us that informal practices, such as rejection or exclusion from families and communities, can be amongst the most harmful consequences, indeed deadly. In any case, aside from being based on deeply wrong held beliefs, these practices have no evidence or basis in science. This bill has been inspired by and shaped by people who have experienced such practices firsthand. They are survivors in every sense. Given that their experiences are at the heart of the bill, it seems only right for me to focus on their experiences today.

Our government made a commitment to ban change or suppression practices following the last election and recommitted to that in February 2019 following an extensive investigation by the health complaints commissioner. She found that people subjected to these practices experience long-term psychological harm and distress. To support the development of this legislation we ran public consultations between October and December last year. This involved speaking to hundreds of people and organisations, including survivors, LGBTIQ+ support groups, advocacy organisations and all the established multifaith forums that consistently governments have consulted with. During this process many survivors shared their personal experience of change or suppression. A consultation report was produced dealing with some of these harrowing stories. To reflect on but one, a person commented:

I was ten years of age when I had my first crush on someone of the same gender. I was also heavily involved in a Christian community from a young age, until ... the age of 39 ... I grew up in a regional town in a community of people who had very conservative views of the Bible. I heard it preached in church, at school, Sunday school, kids club and youth groups. I listened to the adults talk. I knew to hide. By my mid teens I already understood that being queer was an abomination to God and I would need to be fixed. I believed the rhetoric of brokenness for enough years that I went to prayer therapy with a small group associated with a break away ... church in NSW who thought I needed to fix my “sexual deviance” by casting off demons that had been passed down family lines. I internalised my feelings of shame to such a degree that my mental, physical and spiritual health all suffered. Suicidal ideation was an ongoing lived reality in my life alongside two failed suicide attempts and a complete breakdown which required hospitalisation. ... It is a matter of life and death.

I end that quote. I would like to recognise the bravery of this survivor and many, many other survivors who have shared their stories to inform this bill and the groups who advocate for them. Their generosity will help us ensure that future generations are not subjected to the same shameful and damaging practices which told them they were broken.

This is a bill that points out the way ahead for how the system works. Survivors have helped us develop this bill in a way that I believe both denounces and prohibits change and has protections in it. The bill sets out the process and the definition of ‘change or suppression’ that requires three elements. Firstly, the conduct must be directed at an individual. This ensures that the conduct generally directed, such as sermons expressing a general statement or doctrinal belief, is not captured. Secondly, the conduct must be on the basis of the victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity; and thirdly, the purpose of the person engaging in the conduct must be to change or induce another person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This definition has been carefully crafted and is not designed to capture religious practices or teachings that do not meet these three criteria to prevent people seeking religious counsel. Our government recognises it is important for people of faith, including LGBTIQ people of faith, to be able to practise religion freely. While we need to ban change or suppression practices, it is essential that we protect,

as we do, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. This bill strikes the right balance between protecting LGBTIQ people and respecting these crucial freedoms.

The definition of ‘change or suppression’ does not allow an adult to consent to these practices, based on feedback from survivors about how insidious and coercive these practices are. The prohibition of change or suppression practices will be supported by a scheme which has been shaped by supporters and will continue to be influenced by them when it is implemented. This will be run through the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, who will be responsible for the civil response part of the system.

This bill places criminal sanctions on people who subject others to change or suppression that causes injury or serious injury. The bill will provide for an independent review of its effectiveness two years from the ban commencing. This will allow the impact of the bill to be assessed and potential improvements to be made. The bill will commence one year after royal assent and will allow enough time for us to establish the civil scheme to support it.

This government has made great strides towards achieving equality for Victorians through LGBTIQ+ communities in recent years. There is much to still do. We also know that the strength of Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ communities lies at the heart of their organisation—their capacity to be who they are. We cannot undo the damage of change or suppression activities that has already been done for many people, but we can help stem the trauma by supporting this important bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr D O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:48): When the government made its announcement ahead of the last election that it intended to outlaw conversion practices, personally I was opposed. I personally did not think it was good. I have a predisposition, I guess, that banning things is not the way to go, and if there is a situation where a person of their own free will wants to seek assistance, wants to seek guidance or wants to seek therapy, then they should be able to do so. I have had reason to change my view on that, and that has come about from a bloke I have had a fair bit to do with over the last few years. His name is Patrick McIver, and he was formerly my district council president for The Nationals. Patrick was—I believe still is—a very, very strong Christian. He led a campaign against same-sex marriage very strongly within our party and indeed within our branch. But Patrick left his church a couple of years ago, and about this time last year, from memory, he wrote his story—his experience of conversion therapy, if you want to call it that.

What Patrick’s story has told me is that if this legislation, if this decision that the government has taken, was about banning shopfronts that say, ‘Come here and pray the gay away’, and stopping that advertising and stopping those formally doing it or offering a service for money, it would be easy, it would be really easy, and I think everyone would support that we stopped that. But what Patrick’s story told me was the informal, nuanced nature of what goes on in many of these situations—and many of them, most of them, are within churches or faith groups—is not that simple.

I make a general comment, too, that when we are dealing with issues of sexuality, of people’s sense of self, there are no simple solutions or simple questions here, and I say that to people on both sides of this debate. It is not straightforward. I want to read a couple of lines from Patrick’s story, which is on his wife’s blog, kitkennedy.com, so you can search it. So I am not giving away any confidences here; this is a public story. Patrick says this:

Conversion therapy did indeed break me. But I also *thought* it was remaking me.

And after about 20 gruelling fortnightly sessions ... I was still attracted to men.

He goes on—he was using a process or a program called Living Waters:

In hindsight, my Living Waters guidebook was nothing short of a death manifesto, a long winded oxymoron to help me find God’s love through self-hatred. An instruction manual on ways to self-harm, but wrapped up as love and delivered with kindness.

And on that point I would like to say that I am sure that most if not all of those offering these sorts of therapies do so from a position of kindness and do so in the depth of a very deep, spiritually held belief

about what is right and wrong and what is simple and what is not. But I guess Patrick's story explained to me the harm that that brings to people—the absolute harm to young men and women who are already going through a difficult process. Patrick goes on to say:

Denying my sexuality hadn't changed it. Praying didn't fix it. I finally allowed space for the possibility that after 13 years of trying to be fixed, I might never have been broken to begin with.

I think that is the key point. The therapies that do go on in this informal manner that seek to fix someone because they are broken are wrong from the start. Again, I respect people's religious beliefs and I respect their teachings, and I do not believe this bill will necessarily change that. I acknowledge, too, that there will be some people who say they have been through these therapies and that it did fix them—that they have been able to pray the gay away or whatever particular situation for their circumstances. Whether that is accurate or not I do not know, but I am not here to judge people or to judge them on their experiences. What I would say, though, is that that informality, that nuance, that deeply complex situation that Patrick's story gave me enlightenment on is the same reason why putting this ban in legislation is fraught and is difficult—because there are grey areas.

I am sure all members of Parliament have received the emails. We have all received many emails about concerns about religious freedom, about concerns about schools being able to teach a particular faith-based position and indeed about parents being able to counsel their own children about their gender or their sexuality. I understand that there is a fine line, and it is absolutely important that we get this right through this legislation. I look at clause 5(3)(b) in particular, which includes the definition of what a 'change or suppression practice' is—5(3)(b) includes:

carrying out a religious practice, including but not limited to, a prayer based practice, a deliverance practice or an exorcism ...

Now, it is important to acknowledge that that definition is in respect of trying to change or suppress an individual—not about general preaching, not about general teaching of a particular point of faith, but about a particular individual.

So I personally do not think that there is a particular problem in suppressing religious freedom in that clause and in some of the other clauses that have been raised in the emails to me, but I do understand that there is a grey area there. And I think that is why I do support the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Caulfield—that we should pause on this. Literally we got this legislation 10 days ago. There had been, frankly, emails telling us to vote against it well before the legislation was even presented publicly, people saying that there were clauses that are an attack on religious freedom when we had not even seen the bill. Some of those you have to dismiss. But I also say to the government: if the government is genuine about its desire to end the harms associated with these practices, it needs to listen. The government is not the font of all wisdom on this or any other legislation—and I go to, I guess, a strange source. The *Age* editorial is not one I read a lot, and it is not one I often agree with, but in an editorial this week the *Age* said:

... addressing the concerns put forward by Archbishop Comensoli and other faith leaders regarding how the bill will work in practice can only strengthen the legislation in the final analysis, and avoid its use as a wedge issue between or within political parties.

It goes on to say:

Meanwhile, though it may be impossible for the government to satisfy the bill's opponents on every point, reaching out to them now will ensure that the government is able to proceed in good faith.

I think that is actually very, very important—that the government needs to listen to the advice, to proceed in good faith, to explain to the community more broadly all the clauses in this legislation and how religious freedom is protected. There are statements in the second-reading speech that I certainly take comfort from, noting that the second-reading speech does have some legal weight, but addressing some of those issues that people have raised with me and, I am sure, with all members of Parliament would be the right thing to do.

It is incumbent on the government to get that right, and in terms of timing it does not change anything. This bill will pass the Assembly this week, but it will not get to the Council until next year anyway, so it will not become law any faster or slower if the government accepts this reasoned amendment. I think the important thing is to get it right. We have got to get it right because religious freedom is critical. Patrick's wife, Clare, wrote an epilogue to his story just yesterday I believe, and in it she says:

We must realise that religious freedom is not the freedom to abuse.

And I agree with that too. But we must get this balance right. It is not the freedom to abuse, but also we cannot abuse religious freedom. And we have to get this right for Patrick's sake, for all the other Patricks out there and for the many Patricks to come. And so I urge the government to support our reasoned amendment and make sure we do get this legislation right.

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (10:58): I too rise to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. This bill is all about putting a stop to outdated, ineffective and, in some cases, truly barbaric practices that cause a lifetime of trauma and harm to LGBT Victorians. And I do want to start by saying to all LGBT Victorians: you are valid, you are loved and you cannot be fixed, because you were never broken; you are not broken to start with, and do not let anyone else tell you otherwise.

Now, it goes without saying that modern conversion and suppression practices today do not resemble the downright medieval practices of those in the 1950s. These days they are a lot more subtle but unfortunately no less damaging. They take the form of spiritual counselling and healing for sexual brokenness and are almost always hidden in the guise of religious and pastoral services. Now, in the extreme cases we know of it has also involved more abusive acts like beatings, electrocution and even rape, and I think it is obvious to all of us here today just how mentally scarring these practices really are and can be. It is definitely something that I have never had to worry about happening to me, but that does not mean that I do not know that these practices do not work; we all know they do not work. And it is not just us. Every credible medical authority in Australia, from the Australian Psychological Society to the Australian Medical Association, and even the United Nations, has condemned conversion therapy as lacking medical and scientific validity.

It is estimated that up to 10 per cent of LGBT Australians are vulnerable to conversion and suppression practices, and the long-term impacts, we know, are far worse. Just last year 16 per cent of LGBTI youth between the ages of 16 and 27 reported that they had attempted suicide. For bisexuals aged 18 and up, that number jumps up to 27.8 per cent. On top of this nearly 40 per cent of LGBT people aged 16 and over were diagnosed and treated for mental disorders in the last three years. These statistics are far, far too high, and these practices only add to these statistics. We need these numbers to come down, and we need to do that by making sure that LGBT Victorians have the right to feel safe, they have the right to feel valid and they most certainly have the right to feel loved, no matter who they are, where they go to school or, most importantly, what their family looks like.

I have had a lot of emails sent to me over the last week, and they have all raised very similar points. There are concerns that this bill aims to destroy freedom of religion in the family and that it stifles free speech, and there are concerns over gender identity and transgenderism. I thought it was appropriate to take this opportunity today when speaking on this bill to bust some of these myths, essentially, surrounding what this bill is truly about. It is important to start off by clarifying just exactly what conversion and suppression practices are defined as. The bill sets out three requirements. The conduct must be directed towards an individual, the conduct must be on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and the conduct must have the intention of changing their sexuality. What that means is that people can only engage in conversion practices if they single out an individual person on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and they seek to change them.

One of the biggest complaints that I have heard about this bill is that it is an infringement on religious freedom. You know, for the life of me I cannot see why banning conversion and suppression practices would necessarily stop someone from going to their local church or from holding their beliefs or their

values. I think we need to make this clear: freedom of religion also means freedom from religion. Just as you have the right to practise your faith, others also have the right to not practise your faith. That is why I think it is a right on the part of LGBT Victorians to be kept safe from religious practices that are designed specifically to fill them with feelings of shame and feelings of disgust over who they are. We know that is not okay. Your faith does not give you the right to determine that someone else's sexual orientation or gender identity is a problem that you can solve. Having interacted with a number of religious communities in my electorate, including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, I can assure the house that they have enough positive aspects of their faith to pray on and act out without engaging in conversion practices. But more to the point, the bill does not actually make it illegal for you to follow your faith's belief on sexuality, however much we may disagree. It does not ban statements, sermons or religious counselling in which one's views on sexuality are stated.

Some of the concerns I have also heard are that this bill seeks to stop religious schools from teaching and practising religion, and that could not be any further from the truth, because this bill does not stop religious education and it does not stop schools from teaching the values and teaching the beliefs of their religion. But what it does do is that it stops schools from promoting, from encouraging or forcing a child to undergo practices that seek to change their sexual orientation and gender identity, such as sending them to the school chaplain for religious counselling. I think this change is appropriate. I say this, and I know this, because my children go to a local Catholic primary school, and let me tell you I do not know any teacher in that school that would subject a child to those kinds of practices. Because as much as our local religious schools are religious institutions—we know that—they are schools first, and like any other school, they owe their kids a duty of care. They have a duty to keep them safe, and that includes LGBT Victorian students. Let us be clear. Most LGBT kids do not choose which school they go to, especially at such a young age. They should not be punished for who they are because the school happens to disagree, and that is exactly what this bill makes clear.

Now, another key issue I see raised with the bill revolves around gender identity and transgenderism. I most certainly accept this is something that not everyone in our local community fully understands. It is complicated. But I do think there is a lot of misinformation out there about transitioning treatments and gender dysphoria. Misinformation about puberty blockers, hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery that seems to have been circulated in relation to this bill all fail to consider that existing laws are in place right now here in Australia relating to gender dysphoria and these treatment procedures. So for starters, no child will be subject to gender reassignment therapy because it is an adult surgery, and you need to be 18 to have that. You cannot begin to undergo hormone therapy until you are at least 15 or 16 years of age and then only after consulting with a paediatric endocrinologist, a psychiatrist and another mental health professional—and even then you need to go to court to get court approval and test for competency before you can go ahead with transitioning. This is not something that you just decide to do and go ahead and do overnight.

Nothing in this bill changes those procedures. I want to assure people out there in my community who worry about gender identity and transitioning procedures: you do not have to worry. The laws that govern these procedures are not a question of facts or feelings. They are based on medical guidelines and surgical standards. They are matters of psychiatry as much as biology. But what this bill does make clear is this: what children with gender dysphoria need is to speak to trained psychiatrists and speak to trained medical experts who want to understand what they are feeling and what they are going through, rather than go to counselling to change it.

Now, this bill certainly ensures that LGBT Victorians are given the protections they deserve from ineffective and harmful practices predicated on the belief that who they are is wrong. So by making conversion and suppression practices an offence, our government is sending a clear and powerful message that LGBT people here in Victoria are valid and equal. And that is why I am proud to commend this bill to the house.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (11:08): I rise to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. Gay conversion, as it is understood in common usage, refers to discredited

practices, including by psychiatrists and by priests, to attempt to convert a person from same-sex attraction to heterosexuality. As the same-sex attraction is an innate and normal sexual orientation, such attempts were not only often barbaric, they were fundamentally useless. To put beyond doubt that Victoria rejects any attempt to change that which is not broken is to be applauded. I support that intent of the bill.

I now turn to the gender identity aspects of the bill. I stand with Ryland and I stand with Keira Belle. For several years I have taken a strong interest in the growing marginalisation of women's and girls' rights as subservient to gender identity activists. Let there be no doubt: for decades I have worked and continue to work for the emancipation of the female state. I support female adults—women—and female children—girls—participating fully, authentically and without fear of violence in all spheres of life. This bill is bad for women and particularly bad for girls. I look at the bill and what I see is the erasure of lesbianism as a protected ground in the Equal Opportunity Act. Under this bill, any mention of lesbianism is relegated to a footnote in that act. Instead, we are offered an amorphous blob of gender identity. Memo to the woke: whom a person is attracted to sexually is not the same as her gender. I look at the bill and what I see is the affirmation approach put forward as the only valid approach for trans people. Affirmation, as practised by the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) and at the Tavistock clinic in the UK on girls is too often a conveyor belt to puberty blockers, hormones and then later double mastectomy and hysterectomy.

I believe we will look back at this period of affirmation supremacy with regret. 'What were they thinking?', we will say to doctors who caused infertility, mutilation and lifelong drug dependency. And a parliament in the future will say sorry and will pay compensation. My concern is for all trans boys. What I see is a growing cohort of girls identifying as trans boys rather than as lesbians. I see a growing cohort—the RCH data suggests as high as 45 per cent—of girls on the autism spectrum identifying as trans boys. I see a cohort of girls with depression, anxiety and gender dysphoria having their dysphoria affirmed before or instead of treating their depression and anxiety.

The British High Court in *Bell v. Tavistock* characterised the treatment regime of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones as experimental, with very limited evidence as to its efficacy. The judgement noted that the research put forward by Tavistock in support of its claims found the treatments delivered:

... no overall improvement in mood or psychological wellbeing using standardized psychological measures.

The judgement was also scathing of the lack of curiosity and data collected by Tavistock. *Bell v. Tavistock* is seminal and directly related to this bill. The court was asked to determine a very narrow question: can a child or young person under 16 consent to puberty blockers for gender dysphoria? The court found one cannot. No child under 16, no matter how genuinely distressed at his or her biology, can understand what the lifelong consequences of changing identity and potentially giving up fertility and orgasm means. The Tavistock clinic has now suspended all puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for children under 16.

This bill in clause 5(1)(b) outlaws a change or suppression practice for the purpose of:

- (i) changing or suppressing the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person; or
- (ii) inducing the person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Clause 5(2) makes it clear that it is not a change or suppression practice if it:

- (a) is supportive of or affirms a person's gender identity ... for the purposes of—
 - (i) assisting a person who is undergoing a gender transition; or
 - (ii) assisting a person who is considering undergoing a gender transition ...

For the avoidance of doubt, let us be very clear here. Changing or suppressing gender identity means not assisting a gender transition when a female child, a girl, expresses gender dysphoria. In this bill it is a suppression or conversion practice to not affirm the child as a trans boy. In Queensland a 15-year-old female child who identifies as a trans boy was removed from his parents by police and put in state

care because his parents will not consent to testosterone treatment. Under *Bell v. Tavistock*, the child could not be found competent to receive those hormones. The bill before us would make it a suppression practice for the parents to refuse consent.

In September this year the RCH had 538 patients, of whom 68 per cent were female, yet historically transgenderism was predominantly male to female. Something has changed. The trans activists conveniently attribute the change to more girls realising they are trans boys, yet it is mainly trans women—that is, males—making that argument because it is mainly trans women who are active in the public debates. Those activists want us to go straight to self-affirmation rather than interrogating what is behind the onset of dysphoria. I know to even make that statement will unleash a torrent of abuse that I am transphobic because I have expressed concern about the increase in female children self-identifying as trans boys.

Dr Lawford-Smith unravels this argument as adopting one from the gay rights movement that there was no real explanation for why it should be objectionable that there are more gay people unless there is something wrong with being gay. As Dr Lawford-Smith explores, and I summarise and I hope I do her work justice, because there is no harm at all to affirming as gay people who are not gay—more gays, fewer gays; it does not matter—by contrast, affirming trans people is not as straightforward, particularly for children and young people. To begin with, if it is only affirming their trans identity instead of underlying issues, where is the support for autism, sexual abuse history, mental health problems or same-sex attraction? Secondly, being gay does not result in puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, double mastectomies and hysterectomies.

Feminists need to interrogate why there is an increase in girls feeling such intense dysphoria and taking such drastic measures to get away from being female. In an age where we have gay marriage and lesbian role models in politics, sport, business and the arts, why do we have girls concluding, if they are same-sex attracted, that it is not that at all and they must be trans? How have we let down girls that the pleasures and joy of being female, whether straight or gay, are not seen? How has society allowed womanhood to be so defined as feminine that butch women, non-gender-conforming women, do not think they are women at all?

I conclude by speaking in support of all females, particularly lesbians coming into puberty. You are valued, you are normal and you are beautiful. Whether you adopt feminine norms or masculine norms, I and the broader female sisterhood embrace you.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (11:16): I rise today to support the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, which outlaws a cruel and indecent practice known as conversion therapy, and I do it with great pride that this might be the last bill I speak on for 2020. I think that this is a bill that really matters in so many ways to the community that I represent. Although it is called ‘therapy’, that gives it far too much credibility, because these practices have no basis in medicine or any evidence for that matter. I thank the Attorney-General, her staff, the people of the department and the people who have been fighting for a long time for this important change. I also thank the Minister for Health, who is at the table here today, for the ongoing and many years of work to make sure that people can freely practise their sexuality and gender without guilt, shame and trauma.

I noted this week that there was commentary from Melbourne’s Archbishop Comensoli on this bill. I was looking forward to a thoughtful contribution from this very senior member of the Catholic Church, a church to which I belong. I was looking for an assurance that this is very specific legislation, that the conduct must be directed at an individual and that that ensures that conduct such as sermons and expressing general statements is not captured. I admit that I had arrogantly entered into discussions with Catholics in my life that this was not a practice in mainstream churches and certainly not in any Catholic church I had attended. I thought it was a bit of a fringe issue. But I paused and I reflected on a story from my childhood. It was the mid-1980s and I was at mass with my family. My father, who was chair of the parish council, was on duty that week as a lector. He was reading at mass, and he needed to read from the Bible and he also needed to be involved in the recession out. At some point

near the end of mass a parish priest during what would normally be the discussion about the casserole bank and the location of the parish picnic started on some sort of presentation that turned his face red like a beetroot. I cannot remember the content, but I remember that he was enraged at some new change and some new journey towards equality.

To my absolute teenage mortification my father made a huge scene and stormed out. He said that there was no place for that sort of ugly tone in a place of grace. He also left them without a person to perform a really important ritual. I was mortified. I do not remember my father speaking much about equality in the terms that we use today—his language might not have been particularly evolved—but he saw a mean-spirited attack on people and he thought that they were vulnerable. His language was probably the sort of language that was akin to what was used about racism. But I regret that sometimes I am not my father's daughter. In 2017 I was on duty as a lector in my own parish when a woman was invited to the altar to discuss the protection of marriage in light of the awful plebiscite being inflicted on this country. She was a woman I knew a little bit, but I was not alert to what was to come. Most weeks there was a presentation of some sort, again about fetes and raffles, but what came next was terrible, ostensibly in support of traditional family values. To my great shame I sat there.

I watched as grandmothers who were responsible for church flowers stormed out. Hell hath no fury like a grandmother in protective rage at attacks on her son and grandson. I sat and watched while others walked out—teachers at Catholic schools, many old people. I became aware though of the teenagers around me and realised none of them had walked out; none of them had a choice. And to my great shame, nor did I. The reason I did not walk out was because I felt that I had a job to do. I had to be part of the recession. I was not my father's daughter after all.

I questioned why I had sat there. I was shaking with anger, and I wrote a long email to the priest, a wonderful man I considered a good friend. He is not Father Bob, but his theology probably lines up with what a lot of us in this place might consider to be theology we see commonly distributed by Father Bob. I sent off that email a couple of days later after sitting on it, and my phone rang immediately. We had a great conversation and I reminded this friend that there were many families there who did not accept their children's sexuality. I told him about the shame that I felt in sitting there, and then we spoke about the consequences, the dire consequences: that many of the young people at mass had no choice and, more than that, that their identity is wrapped up in their faith. He told me he had not thought about it in those terms; he would never allow that woman to speak at mass again.

Today I am contributing to this bill as my father's daughter, a man who embarrassed his teenage daughter but stood up. He was also a man who loved Latin. I will not do him credit—he loved *Rerum Novarum*, a well-known papal encyclical on the rights and duties of capital and labour, and he saw it as a matter of great pride. He was a moderate man, but it was a matter of great pride as both a Catholic and a Labor man whenever there was legislation that was changed that absolutely made a difference to people's lives. It talks about, in slightly dense language, misery and wretchedness being inflicted on people.

When the Andrews Labor government announced workplace manslaughter legislation, I felt great pride too as my father's daughter. I looked to the Archbishop of Melbourne's Twitter account. I was quite enthusiastic to see what his response would be, but there was nothing there. So when we passed wage theft laws, I looked to the Archbishop of Melbourne's—Archbishop Comensoli's—Twitter page to see his response, and there was nothing there. I looked to the cathedral where my younger daughter was confirmed, where my daughter had been an altar server, and I saw nothing. When there were statements recently from the Vatican, as recently as 2015, about the care for the common home—I am going to butcher the Latin here: *Laudato si*—about the environmental degradation and global warming, and when this Labor government made incredible changes to the emissions that are going to be inflicted on people in this state, I looked to see what Archbishop Comensoli would say, but there was nothing. When we made a commitment to an extraordinary and unprecedented resource allocation to social housing, I looked to the cathedral to see where the support was from Archbishop Comensoli—the support that aligned with Catholic social teaching: preferential option for the poor.

Again, I saw nothing. So I ask the Archbishop: when all of these pressing issues of social urgency are on us, why has he waded into the public domain so enthusiastically to defend this abhorrent practice, to defend this practice that—while I did not like the sermons that were applied in the churches that I went to, both in 2017 and the one that I heard when I was a child—this legislation does not capture? Why, as a Catholic, am I watching the most senior Catholic in Victoria rally the faithful to this cause?

My grandfather had spent many years training to be a Jesuit before fortunately leaving to marry my grandmother, so I have a bit of an affection for Pope Francis. I did go back and check what he had to say:

Homosexual people have a right to be in a family.

They are children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out or made miserable ...

Indeed he has said, ‘Who am I to judge’ as one of the very early statements he made when asked about gay priests, and of course recently on camera he said people deserve respect—LGBT people deserve respect, including civil recognition of their relationships. It turns out that the Pope made those comments to a Mexican network, Televisa.

I also have an affection for another Jesuit, Father James Martin, the editor of *America* magazine and a person who has written a book called *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*. He has made some really interesting statements in the last couple of days, and I really want to acknowledge the good work of so many people looking to bring peace and harmony to what has been an incredibly difficult and hurtful period. He asked:

Why are so many of the most vociferous moral watchdogs revealed as less than moral in private?

This was only a couple of days ago. He talked about people who had interior feelings of shame, hatred and confusion about their sexuality.

So with regard to Archbishop Comensoli, I look forward to hearing from him as he enters into a different type of discourse—a different type of discourse that encourages us to look to the best way to support those members of our community who need the support. In the last couple of days I have been speaking to Catholics for Equality and to Acceptance Melbourne. They have been absolutely enthusiastic about their support, but they have also talked about how difficult it is to find a place where they can practise their faith.

This is about safety. I had a call from Reverend Ray McCluskey, the local Uniting Church minister yesterday, a lovely message. He had joined with us when we celebrated birth certificate reform and has always been at the forefront of this discussion. I thank him for the solidarity. I thank so many people who have suffered through an abhorrent practice for their solidarity, for sticking with their faith in what has been an incredibly difficult journey. Be assured, this is the right thing to do. The detail is there. This will not undermine practice. It will do what is right.

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (11:26): I rise today to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I want to say from the outset that I absolutely do not support the historic so-called gay conversion practices that have occurred in the past. Many of these practices occurred in the medical setting and not the faith setting. Most occurred many years ago, and I do not support them. I also note that in my view this bill goes way too far and restricts various important freedoms. Freedoms that are cornerstones of our society are overridden by this bill. Freedoms such as the freedom of speech and freedom of religion, as well as parental rights and responsibilities, are quashed by this bill. Sadly for Victorians, this is now a common approach for this extreme Labor government and is a complete overreach.

The front-page headline of the *Sunday Age* on 6 December summed it up well when it said, ‘Conversion laws “threat” to religious freedoms’. I totally agree with that headline. Consequently I support the reasoned amendment as proposed by the member for Caulfield, which states the following:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until urgent further consultation is undertaken with all stakeholders and inherent significant issues with the bill can be addressed and appropriate amendments made, including express clarification of the following specific concerns:

- (1) the rights of children and their parents, particularly in relation to seeking assistance with gender identity and sexual orientation issues including gender dysphoria;
- (2) the legal competence of children/adolescents (under 18) to provide informed consent for gender transitioning hormonal (puberty blocker) drug treatment;
- (3) the rights of individuals to voluntarily seek assistance for gender identity and sexual orientation issues including via pastoral care and faith organisation counselling services;
- (4) the rights of faith organisations to provide such pastoral care and counselling services to individuals who voluntarily seek assistance; and
- (5) the rights of healthcare professionals to provide assistance and care to individuals who seek help for gender identity or sexual orientation issues’.

This bill removes support for LGBTI people seeking it. Clause 5(1) states that:

In this Act, a *change or suppression practice* means a practice or conduct directed towards a person, whether with or without the person’s consent ...

This means that a person who is voluntarily seeking assistance is unable to receive it without criminalising those offering support. In my view this is a gross breach of an individual’s freedom to seek advice or assistance and places the person asked for advice or counsel in an invidious position. Do they speak when asked to do so and risk being jailed, or do they remain silent and ignore the request of the person asking? It is worth noting that this bill covers any person, not just people of faith, medical professionals and counsellors. The breach of various human rights appears clear, including the right of freedom of religion, especially when considered in light of clause 5(3)(b) of the bill.

In researching the issues in relation to this bill I have met with a number of people who have formerly identified as being LGBTI. I listened to the stories of these people, who each said words to the effect that they got to a stage in their life journey where they wanted to speak to somebody about these very personal and often complex issues, and they were able to do so. They found it very helpful and positive for them to have this input. This bill will remove that ability for any LGBTI person to receive that input even when they request it. I am also familiar with an organisation called the Coalition Against Unsafe Sexual Education (CAUSE), who conducted a survey of 70, and I quote, ‘self-proclaimed former LGBT participants who, at one time, lived with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria’. This survey found the following in relation to the respondents, and I quote:

1. They changed their sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. They did so by extensively accessing professional and/or religious counselling, which today is placed in the category of “conversion therapy”.
3. The majority reported that their change is long lasting, indicating the change is permanent.
4. The data reveals that the change in participants’ lives and/or the counselling they received is associated with extensive improvements in the quality of their lives.
5. It should be well noted that not one participant made any mention of the claimed abuses in the La Trobe *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice* paper. However, it should be well noted that a number claimed harm from counsellors who discounted their wishes and even berated them for wanting to change their lives.

Critically this study also found, and I quote, that:

75% of participants had a notable average baseline reduction in suicidal ideation of 40%.

I think a study like this provides some very important perspective on the potential consequences of this bill, and I thank Mr Ed Sparrius and his colleagues from CAUSE and the participants for their work on this very informative survey.

I note that the bill is actually based on a report entitled *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice*, which looked at the experiences of 15 LGBT people and was referred to at least six times by the minister in

her statement of compatibility. The minister's statement outlines various human rights and how this bill breaches these human rights and then concludes by saying that everything is fine—an absolutely extraordinary and illogical conclusion. I would encourage the minister to do some more work on this bill and consult more widely.

Additionally, the government's approach to this whole area appears completely inconsistent and confused. The minister in her second-reading speech said that change or suppression practices:

... are practices which have no basis in medicine; there is no evidence that sexual orientation or gender identity can be changed or suppressed.

However, her government legislated last year in the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2019 that an individual can change their gender on their birth certificate once every year. This is inconsistent with the provisions in the bill that criminalise conduct that induces a person to change gender identity. Similarly, the Labor government's radical Safe Schools program teaches that gender is fluid, yet in this bill it indicates that a person's gender cannot be changed. The government needs to explain these inconsistencies to all Victorians.

The Coalition of Activist Lesbians Australia Inc. wrote to me and noted its great concern with the bill and stated:

The proposed Bill is confused and internally inconsistent ...

And further:

We are extremely concerned about the proposed Bill ...

I share these sentiments. This bill also potentially criminalises parents who, for example, are seeking to guide their children away from radical gender changes, including the use of hormone replacement therapy. I know this is a real issue for many families, and to think that loving parents could face hefty fines, jail or even having their child removed by the state for trying to do the best for their children is unthinkable.

I have contacted numerous faith leaders both Christian and non-Christian about this bill, including many members of Victoria's multicultural community. Most of them expressed great surprise about its introduction, with many saying they were unaware of it and had not been consulted about it. Having subsequently looked at the bill and its implications, each faith leader was very concerned with the direct, adverse impact it would have on their ongoing work with both their faith community and the broader community. I urged them to contact the Premier, the Attorney-General and other MPs to express their concerns. I have been contacted by countless people, including experts in various fields such as psychology, education, law and religion, all expressing extremely serious concerns about the bill. I share their concerns and thank them for their input.

I have a range of other concerns about this bill, including that some of the sanctions include up to 10 years imprisonment and fines up to \$100 000, in clause 10. The increased role of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, as noted in part 3 of the bill, is extraordinary. I note that one of its roles will be to have a so-called educative function, as noted in clauses 18 and 20. Clause 40 notes that informants to the commission can be anonymous, which is hardly an ideal situation in my opinion. I have a range of other concerns, but I will not have time to go into them. I note that many issues were raised at the government briefing that we had recently. There were many questions and few answers, which I think is an unsatisfactory situation.

In conclusion, I have grave concerns regarding the bill, and in my view and the views of the hundreds of Victorians who have contacted me, the bill breaches several fundamental human rights and is deeply flawed in many areas. I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Caulfield and urge the government to withdraw the bill immediately and then for the government to consult more widely, especially amongst the faith communities and the multicultural communities, and to bring the bill back in a more suitable form.

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (11:35): I am so very proud to rise to speak in support of the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. Can I start my contribution by acknowledging the harm and hurt that has been caused to so many Victorians and to so many Victorian survivors of conversion practices. I want to thank all the people who have advocated for these changes. These are changes that should have been introduced years ago.

There are many things that young people need, but breaking them and making them feel broken because of their sexual or gender identity is not one of them. In fact it is inexcusable. Our young people deserve acceptance, support and love. To the young people who question their identities, suffer from bullying or struggle with what it means to come out, today is your day. Your voices have been heard. Today we will vote on a bill that will seek to end some of the intolerance, the oppression and the bullying. I call on all members to show leadership on this issue, do the right thing and support this bill.

Back on 24 May 2016 the Premier led the 58th Parliament in making a state apology for past laws that criminalised homosexual acts. Victoria became the first Australian state to do so. The apology was supported by all members of this house, including the then Leader of the Opposition, who said:

... we now as a Parliament apologise to the victims of policies of intolerance and repression that resulted in outcasting, depression and, sadly, even suicide.

To the member for Caulfield and to others who are trying to divert or pause this bill, please show some leadership and reassure your respective communities. This legislation does not stop parents having a conversation about sexual identity with their children. This legislation does not restrict people practising their religion. Things like giving a sermon, teaching a religious studies class or even a faith leader counselling a person on what their faith teaches about sexuality would not be a change or suppression practice under this bill. What this legislation will do is this: this legislation will prohibit harmful practices that attempt to change or suppress someone's sexuality or gender identity. These practices are opposed by the United Nations, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Medical Association and many numerous other professional health and human rights bodies in Australia and across the world. There is nothing confusing about this. No further consultation is needed; no pause is needed.

Back in February 2019 at the year's Pride March, the Premier made a promise to prohibit harmful conversion practices that target LGBTI people. This promise followed recommendations from the health complaints commissioner inquiry into conversion therapy in 2018. The report prepared by the commissioner found that not only were these suppression and change practices occurring in Victoria but they were also happening outside the medical field. These practices seek to change or suppress an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. They are sometimes referred to as gay conversion or conversion therapy. These practices are not therapy. These practices have no basis in medicine or scientific evidence, and they are based on an ideology—an ideology, according to one survivor, that teaches people that to be LGBTQI is to be broken, damaged, sick, perverted or even possessed. They are based on an ideology that manifests in beliefs and values that include this:

Through consistent long-term Christian discipleship; committed involvement in a 'Bible believing' faith community; spiritual mentoring; the avoidance and suppression of all lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer influences; connection to an ex-gay/ex-trans support group; and/or ongoing counselling, a person's sexual orientation and gender identity can be restored ...

No, they cannot, because there is nothing that needs restoring—there is nothing broken, there is nothing in need of fixing or saving or mending. These practices harm people. The inquiry heard that people who have undergone change or suppression practices experienced long-term psychological harm and distress, including increased incidence of suicide. We cannot—we must not—stand by and let this continue for one more day. It is incumbent upon us to stop the harm and to save lives.

To those opposite and to those in the community who either do not support this bill or want to delay this bill let me say this: it is time, and we are going to guide you through this and take you on this journey because we owe it to all Victorians, but especially LGBTIQ Victorians, to ban these unethical,

harmful, reckless and cruel practices. We are going to ban change and suppression practices in Victoria, and we are going to make it a criminal offence for any person to engage in change or suppression practices which cause injury to another, because these practices must stop; because every Victorian has the right to recognition and equality before the law; because every Victorian has the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhumane or degrading way; because every Victorian child has the right to be protected by society and the state; and because every Victorian has the right to personal dignity.

Change and suppression practices impinge upon these rights and undermine the dignity of those subjected to them. We know this because those who have been subjected to these practices have told us. In the consultation for this bill more than 600 submissions were made, and obviously and rightly it is the perspective of the survivors of these practices that is so important. It is the lived experiences that must be crucial in helping to shape this response. I want to acknowledge those victim-survivors who shared their stories. They have told of lifelong trauma, of shame, of guilt, of self-hatred and of self-loathing. They have told us that these messages have been ingrained from a young age, like for the person who shared this story:

In youth group we had regular sermons about sex and purity. It was made very clear that homosexuality was sinful and that it was perverted and unforgivable. By the time I reached adulthood that message was reiterated so regularly that I started to teach it to youth. "Love the sinner but hate the sin." Young people came to me questioning their sexuality and I would echo the words I heard: purity and celibacy are necessary for those perverted thoughts. I felt uncomfortable teaching it but I didn't know anything else. It took me a long time to reconcile my faith and sexuality because I didn't think I could be Christian and queer. I only knew that if I admitted my sexuality I was admitting that I was perverted and sinful ... Now, my mental health is shaky and I get overwhelmed at the thought of having a leadership position in church if I admit my sexuality. It has been and will continue to be a process to unlearn the theology which has damaged me and those I influenced.

Both the health complaints commission and the earlier work conducted by the Human Rights Law Centre have highlighted that many modern LGBTI conversion practices are religious rather than medical in nature in that they involve or consist entirely of pastoral and prayer activities. This prohibition must necessarily extend beyond health services and registered health practitioners to capture the wide and nuanced range of conversion practices that are still occurring within religious communities, because while the right to the freedom of religion protects religious beliefs through religious practice, this right is not absolute. Freedom of religion does not permit causing harm to others. Religious activities, behaviour and practices that infringe on the rights of others and cause harm, whether that is physical or psychological, cannot be permitted under the banner of freedom of religion. You can pray to whoever you like—that is an eternal right, and that is absolute—but there is no absolute right to manifest that belief where to do so causes harm to another. Harm is harm. Even under the guise of love, care or prayer, religious freedoms should not override the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

I wish to acknowledge all of the religious organisations and all of the people of faith who are supporting this bill. They are voicing their support. One religious organisation said in support of this bill:

we do not believe there are any ethical treatments or practices that are aligned with modifying, or attempting to modify, an individual's identity and/or expression ...

This is about human rights. This legislation prohibits conduct by anyone that specifically tries to suppress or change someone's sexuality and imposes civil and criminal responses. It is the right thing to do. It is the proper thing to do. It protects human rights. I commend this bill.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (11:45): I rise on behalf of the Victorian Greens to speak in support of the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I will start by acknowledging the survivors of this harmful, insidious practice and also those who did not survive this incredibly damaging practice and this ideology that at the heart of it believes there is something inherently wrong with people who are same-sex attracted or transgender and has the goal of changing or suppressing people's sexual orientation or having trans people identify with the sex that they were assigned with at birth. It is a practice

and an ideology that has caused incredible harm to so many people and that continues to this day. That is why it is so important that this bill has been brought before Parliament. I commend their advocacy, their research, their lobbying and their sharing of their stories, which have brought the issue to the fore and have resulted in this legislation—this strong legislation—that we commend.

We commend the government for listening to survivors and bringing forward this bill, which should be effective in helping stamp out this abhorrent process. They are the brave survivors of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts and the wider LGBTQI+ conversion movement. Certainly I feel that without their efforts there would have continued to be a misconception within the wider community that conversion practices were no longer occurring, that the practices of the past had disappeared and this was no longer an issue or that it could be addressed through the regulation of existing rules for psychologists and counsellors or the banning of advertising.

It was survivors that brought this issue to my attention shortly after I was elected. They told me that it was still happening and how it was occurring—the vast range of practices. In response to them I put a question on notice to the Minister for Equality back in 2015 about what the government was doing to stamp out gay conversion practices, and interestingly enough that was the first reference. I have looked up the first references to gay conversion on record in *Hansard* until the Health Complaints Bill 2016 was introduced sometime later, and that does show that this was not at the fore of our state's efforts and the wider efforts for LGBTI equality. So it is certainly testament to the survivors and advocates who put this at the fore and put this in front of MPs and the wider community.

I formed the view at that time that I felt a parliamentary inquiry was the best way to go to fully understand the extent of the practice and to look at how best to stamp it out, given the whole range of formal or informal practices and the range of ways it occurs, and importantly give survivors a chance to tell their stories if they so wish and also shine a light on the dark recesses of organisations where this was occurring—to have an open inquiry and hold them to account. While I appreciate—and I will talk about this a bit later—that the government went down a different route with the health services commissioner, I still think it may be necessary to keep that prospect of a parliamentary inquiry or a more open inquiry on the table, because they have dealt with similar sensitive issues in the past and we should feel with this issue that the light will always be shone where this is occurring.

I think another really substantial moment in the push or the campaign to outlaw gay conversion practices was the investigation by Farrah Tomazin of the then Fairfax papers on conversion therapy back in March 2018. This was a really important investigation. I commend Farrah and the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*—those newspapers—for investigating, for researching, for giving survivors, again, the chance to tell their stories and recount what had occurred to them and the effects that it had. It related to both same-sex attracted and transgender survivors, to young people. That article, again, made it clear that this practice, this ideology, was still occurring in Australia, and to quote from that investigation:

Australia had about 40 active ministries devoted to changing sexual orientation two decades ago. They were part of a broader global “ex-gay” movement, named after the evangelicals at the helm who often claimed their homosexuality had been “cured”.

While many ministries have officially disbanded, Fairfax Media has found about 10 groups that still operate, tapped into an informal network of churches and counsellors here and overseas.

In doing just a little bit of research online you will see that Courage International, who were named in that investigation, still have a website here in Australia, they still have contacts here for people in Melbourne, and they state that they offer:

... pastoral support to men and women experiencing same-sex attractions who have chosen to live a chaste life.

And their goal is:

To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality ...

They are actively looking to suppress people's sexuality under the guise of, 'Oh well, we're just assisting people to live in accordance with their faith'. But as Nathan Despott pointed out in that investigation:

The approach is totally grounded in the ideology that being same-sex attracted is problematic; that being gay is a form of brokenness needing God's attention and needs to be submitted to prayer.

It is incredibly damaging to those people. Listening to the member for Forest Hill, who appeared to indicate in his contribution that that is okay, it is just incredible to think that in the debate in this chamber people are thinking that that is somehow okay and not recognising the damage that it does to people. It is incredibly harmful.

That was a really important investigation, and I was really pleased that the government announced in May 2018 that they were instructing the health complaints commissioner to undertake an inquiry. I thought that was really good. It was two months after we called for an inquiry, so it was really good; I really supported that approach. While I feel it would have been good for a larger report rather than the essentially two-page summary of findings and recommendations, it was an important report from the health complaints commissioner. I will just read out some of the key findings and recommendations from that report:

- Survivors experience acute distress and/or ongoing mental health issues such as severe anxiety and depression;
- Survivors experience feelings of guilt and shame about their sexuality, reporting being "overwhelmed by guilt" and guilt that is "always there";
- Conversion therapy/practices reinforced homosexuality as a form of 'brokenness' ...

And the recommendations were:

... that a legislative response sends a very strong message to the community that conversion therapy/practices are unacceptable—

and—

Funding for counselling and psychological services, together with legislation, would provide a very clear message to the community that conversion therapy/practices are not condoned in Victoria.

So the evidence is there. The evidence has again shown just how damaging these practices are. I also want to acknowledge the subsequent work of La Trobe University, the Human Rights Law Centre and Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria for their really important report, *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice: Responding to LGBT Conversion Therapy in Australia*. Throughout their report they again shared the words and experiences of survivors and evidence that this is still occurring and there is a need to stamp it out.

Just going through this again, I read from these reports because this is the evidence that has been researched, coming from survivors themselves, with the terrible impacts of self-hatred and shame, of grief and loss, from people who have been separated from their family and their faith community. I really want to acknowledge all those LGBTI members of faith communities. Some of you have found fantastic faiths and fantastic communities that are supportive; others have gone through a very, very difficult and challenging time. Whilst there is no doubt that in many denominations acceptance is growing, there is still a long way to go in many faith communities.

That loss and separation I can imagine would just be incredibly difficult. The collateral damage to family and friends—people who might have pursued relationships, thinking that that might fix them, and the hurt that that would have done to those other people—the loss of intimacy and connection through not being able to form intimate relationships, mental health problems and self-harm are just devastating impacts affecting the very core of a person, the very being. These are just devastating impacts that the evidence has found and are all the more reason why we need strong and comprehensive laws to stamp this out. Again I quote from Nathan Despott and Chris Csabs:

Conversion practices tinker with LGBTQA+ people's minds, attachments, and their deepest sense of self, ruining family connections and causing suicidal ideation rates that are among some of the highest of any cohort of the population.

This bill provides for both criminal offences and civil processes and importantly covers the broad range of formal and informal practices. That broad definition is so important to capture the informal practices that occur, with both the threshold of causing injury and serious injury and then the civil scheme as well, with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission playing a strong role for those allegations that fall short of the criminal standard and being able to investigate serious and systemic change or suppression practices and enforce the outcome—two really important elements.

As I discussed with the Minister for Equality during recent estimates hearings, it would be good to see some funding allocated alongside this bill to support the reforms—to support the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to undertake their tasks in supporting these reforms but to provide counselling and support and redress for survivors as well, a really important element that needs to go along with this bill.

We are now with this bill—and I hope for its successful passage through Parliament—addressing and intervening in some of the conversion practices and conversion ideology. Where previously intervention had come at the pointier end—with therapy, with trained counsellors from churches or private practices—we are now seeing it come into this wider movement. Whilst the law will impact it at a certain level, I think it is now important, as I said before, that in denominations, faith-based organisations, religions and communities there is growing acceptance among people who are part of those communities and people in areas of hierarchy, but there is still more to go.

I think this bill sends a very clear message. The law will come into effect at a certain point, but there still needs to be a continuation of the cultural change that is going on in faith-based communities. I am really always very pleased when on occasion I am invited to attend a service at a church in the Prahran electorate. A lot of LGBTI members within the Prahran electorate attend services, and it is really pleasing to see how welcoming they are to LGBTI members of the community—that is something that is no doubt growing amongst faith-based communities. Again, I acknowledge all those LGBTI Victorians of faith and the challenges that they have often faced, and it is really good to see that so many of them can practise their faith without having this conversion or ex-gay ideology being imposed on them. They can safely practise their faith and be with their faith communities.

This bill also amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to modernise the definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity. It adds sex characteristics as a protected attribute from discrimination to better protect intersex Victorians. We really welcome this change. It is certainly something that the Greens have been calling for for some time—

Members interjecting.

Mr HIBBINS: Well, it is true. I literally produced a draft bill with similar changes. I am not—

Members interjecting.

Mr HIBBINS: All right—as part of broader reforms to the Equal Opportunity Act. On passing this bill we now look to move further reforms to protect LGBTI Victorians, and we do need to have broader reform to the Equal Opportunity Act to get rid of those exemptions allowed for faith-based or other organisations who are providing housing or health services or are running schools. Those exemptions, instead of protecting people from discrimination, actually legally allow discrimination. It relates, I think, very much to this particular bill because people, particularly young people, who have been discriminated against, with faith being the reason given, are then very much more reluctant to attend a housing service, a health service or another service if that is a faith-run service, because even if that service is welcoming and non-discriminatory—as many are, as most are—the insidious nature of that is that they are not going to go. If they fear that behind that door is discrimination, well, they are not

going to go to that housing service; they are not going to seek that help. That is why—and I note the Premier is in the chamber today—those laws need to be changed. I hope that that is the next reform, the next cab off the rank, in terms of LGBTI equality.

There was a debate around schools, around faith-based schools, and students and teachers. I know the government's position has been to wait for the federal government to act and then fill in the gaps. Well, the federal government ain't going to act. It was always going to be a bit of a stretch to wait for them to act to protect students and teachers at faith-based schools from discrimination. So now it is time for the government to step up to make those changes, to get rid of those exemptions from the Equal Opportunity Act and to protect our students and our teachers at faith-based schools but also at other faith-based organisations—our housing and our health services.

I know the Premier previously, when he spoke on that, said, 'Well, you can discriminate against the maths teacher but not the gardener'. Well, I think we all understand that that approach now is not the approach that we need to take. Now everyone, no matter what service or school you go to, needs to be protected by our Equal Opportunity Act.

So to conclude, we support this bill; the Greens strongly support this bill. The arguments against have been put forward by the Liberals—I mean, freedom of religion does not give you freedom to harm. The bar of injury or serious injury has been set in this law. If you feel your practices are causing injury or serious injury to LGBTI people, well, then you need to have a look at what you are doing, you need to have a look at your practices. So we support this bill. We commend the government for bringing forward these strong laws. We wish it a speedy passage.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:05): It is not often that I have the opportunity to speak in second-reading debates, but I am very pleased to have been able to find the time to speak on something that I think is a profound reform for our state. I will try not to take my full 10 minutes so as to allow others to make their contributions.

I wanted to approach this in a slightly different way by at the outset telling a story of only just a few months ago. Some months ago I had an online meeting with a group of frontline health workers, people who every hour of every day put themselves on the line to support others. It was a truly humbling thing. Of course at the heart of the discussion was the coronavirus, but like so much of 2020 it was a moment to reflect on other important things. We have been called to do that quite a lot throughout the course of this year like no other. I had cause to reflect, because as one nurse told me her story of being infected and inadvertently infecting her partner I could not help but notice something very personal. As she spoke of her partner she was noticeably careful—in speaking with the Premier of the state—not to mention that person's gender. She was in effect self-censoring—she was editing, she was omitting. Later that night I spoke with a senior member of my staff, and she confirmed for me that this is what you do. It is the product of a lifetime of prolonged silences, awkward stares and sometimes much worse, much worse indeed.

I left both these discussions with a real sense of sadness. Imagine not being able to tell your truth because so many had revealed theirs: prejudice, fear and judgement. No-one should have to hide who they are or who they love, let alone apologise for it. Stigma and prejudice are everywhere for our LGBTQI communities—sometimes subtle, always brutal. Sometimes it is about employment, sometimes it is about faith, sometimes it is about family. Sometimes it is in the glance or comment of a stranger, and sometimes it is in the rejection of those who ought love and care for you unconditionally. It is toxic, it is dangerous and it is deadly. Each of us deserves to be safe, valued and respected for being who we are—no more, no less. To be told you are broken, you are wrong, you are a sin, you are unwell—infected even—just for being who you are is deeply offensive. Most of all, it is cruel.

To wrap that bigotry in faith is an insult all of its own. I speak infrequently of my faith—it is personal and it is private—but in this debate some faith leaders have been critical of these provisions, critical of a law to ban the worst form of bigoted quackery imaginable. This is not kindness and love or the

protection of the vulnerable and persecuted. This is not something to be proud of. This is not what I pray for. Victoria is a secular state. If equality is difficult for you, then that is on you. That is your issue and your problem.

To suggest that the problem lies with those who simply want to be treated equally, fairly and decently is the very heart of this issue. That view is why we have conversion therapy. That view is essentially a message to every LGBTIQ Victorian that something is wrong with them. Well, there is nothing wrong with them. On the contrary, I would say those who struggle with equality are the Victorians who have the problem. After all, they are the ones who for the longest time have inflicted the pain, created the stigma and intruded through the worst kind of moralising, often with the clang of hypocrisy, on the basic human rights of so many.

This bill will change lives, and I am convinced this bill will save lives. It should have happened years ago, and it must happen now—not after the summer, it must happen now. Every person has the right to be proud of who they are and who they love and should never be required to hide away, let alone apologise for, their identity. You are not broken. You are not in need of treatment. You are you, and you are equal. I commend this bill to the house, and I commend both the concept and the practice of equality to all Victorians.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (12:11): This certainly is an extremely important piece of legislation because these so-called suppression practices and these so-called conversion practices are completely abhorrent, and the obvious outcome of this bill is a ban on those practices. The notion that anyone is broken because of their sexuality, the notion that anyone is broken because of the way they identify in terms of gender, is complete nonsense. But it is dangerous nonsense. It is nonsense that destroys lives, and it is nonsense that takes lives. Growing up is hard enough for anyone, but growing up with doubts about your sexuality or growing up with doubts about your gender identity must be that much harder. The last thing anyone, whether it is an adult, a young adult or a child, needs is pressure to be something that they are not.

When we look at the figures reported by the National LGBTI Health Alliance, LGBTI young people are 11 times more likely to attempt suicide than others. Almost half of transgender and gender-diverse people, adults and children attempt suicide. If you compare that almost 50 per cent figure with around about one in 30 for the rest of the population, I think those figures speak for themselves. If there is systemic change that the Parliament can make, then we should make the change. If there are outside influences contributing to the stress, to the sense of despair that drives people down the path to consider taking their own life, then we must address those issues. Certainly that I know is the intent of this bill, and I do welcome it.

As the member for Caulfield noted, the opposition believes the bill could be improved by encouraging greater input between now and the next parliamentary sitting, and that of course is the intent of the reasoned amendment. If time permits, I will return to that a little later. But I do need to say that, in my view, to present the bill in the way that the government has I think is a really wasted opportunity, because there was a real opportunity here in bringing forward the legislation to use that process, to use that occasion, to heal divisions in the community.

Unfortunately the government elected to let that opportunity pass. Wider consultation, as the member for Caulfield said, certainly was an election commitment. We understand the commitment, and we are keen to see the intent of the bill implemented. But the consultation, to be frank, has not been particularly wide. When you have that wider consultation and when you have that wider discussion, it does help to drive cultural change. It drives understanding, and that leads to cultural change. After all, that is what this process is about. There are not many pieces of legislation you see come through a parliament where the parliament is explicitly, in passing the legislation, committing to cultural change in the community, but this is one of them. As I said, it is certainly a good change.

If I go back to the early days of my time in this house, in 2008 the Brumby government proposed a bill that became the Relationships Act 2008. It was only 12 years ago, but in some ways it seems like a world away. But despite the fact that there were strong views on both sides, it was largely a respectful debate, and in my view it was a debate that broadened the understanding of the Victorian community on matters of sexuality. It did encourage that discussion, and certainly it encouraged a greater awareness of the issues. I have no doubt that debate and the conversation that ensued from that contributed to the outcome of the marriage law postal survey. Now, I understand there were issues with the mechanism, and I do not wish to enter into that debate today, but when you look at the outcome, the highest level of support for a yes vote was in the state of Victoria. The highest participation rate was in the state of Victoria, and that I think is the best possible outcome. That confirmed beyond all doubt that the overwhelming majority of Victorians prefer tolerance and inclusiveness to intolerance and division. In bringing forward this piece of legislation the government really had a similar opportunity to that that existed for the Brumby government in 2008. Unfortunately they have chosen to handle it quite differently.

I should also, however, say I do not for a moment doubt the genuine motivation of many members of the government and many who have spoken today. I am frankly rather cynical about the motivation of some who seem to be taking the opportunity to manufacture division where little exists. Instead of seeking to fan the flames, there was a real opportunity here to bridge that chasm. It is a shrinking chasm, thankfully, probably a rapidly shrinking chasm, but there was an opportunity here to bridge it, and I think it is deeply unfortunate that opportunity has not been taken.

I just want to comment on a couple of issues with regard to the commentary of the second-reading speech. The minister's second-reading speech talks about the definition of change or suppression practices being carefully crafted and not being designed to capture all religious practices or teachings. I am a little bit concerned that the speech then goes on to say the definition would likely not capture conduct where, for example, a person goes to a religious leader seeking advice on their feelings of same-sex and so on. The keywords there being 'likely not capture'. The speech goes on again to say they would likely not capture conduct where, for example, a person confides in a religious leader regarding their gender identity.

I think the fact that we have legislation in the house where even the minister's speech says 'will likely not capture' means that it is open to interpretation. I have been very clear for the whole of my time in this place that in my view it is up to the Parliament to make the rules, not the courts, and it does concern me that we have a situation where there is an opportunity for interpretation in an unintended way. That is the risk with that. I also note that the bill will not allow an adult to consent to change or suppression practices. I understand the reasoning for that, and I certainly support the intent; I do, however, remain uneasy about limiting the actions of an individual in this manner.

So despite the concerns about the process and the somewhat ambivalent language in the second-reading speech, I think this is an opportunity to achieve real and lasting reform. Whether we elect to deal with the issues of concern here or whether we leave it to the courts to interpret those issues, the legacy of this bill will be significant cultural change. This is a reform that I have no doubt aligns with the views of the overwhelming majority of Victorians, a reform that will outlaw an abhorrent practice, and while it could be improved and I hope it will be improved, it is a reform that must succeed.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (12:22): I thank the member for Mornington for his reasoned and sensible contribution around this bill. We have heard on both sides of the chamber some passionate and heartfelt contributions, and I think that is a very, very good thing. This legislation seeks to prohibit change or suppression practices, also known as conversion practices or conversion therapy—practices which attempt to change or suppress the sexual orientation or gender identity of a person—and it is an area in which I have significant personal experience.

The government committed to outlawing these practices in response to the health complaints commissioner's inquiry into these practices, which uncovered evidence of serious harm caused by

attempts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Change or suppression practices can occur in a variety of ways, from informal counselling to physically abusive methods, but let us be clear: irrespective of the method, these practices are harmful. At their core they contain an assumption that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender-diverse, intersex, queer and questioning people are broken and need to be fixed. This is not true, and it has never been true. The idea that LGBTIQ people are different or worse or defective is fundamentally at odds with an inclusive, fair and modern society. Nobody should be led to believe that something so innate to who they are is fundamentally wrong, no matter their age, no matter their background. Nobody should ever be led to believe that any practice could change their sexual orientation or gender identity. Sexuality and gender are simply part of who you are. That does not preclude, of course, a self-directed journey of discovery about those things.

The government has consulted widely on the development of this legislation and has heard from experts and the Victorian public, and additionally individual consultations have occurred between the Department of Justice and Community Safety and faith groups, LGBTIQ groups and survivors of change or suppression practices. So what does this legislation do? It creates a broad definition of what conversion practices are so as to capture the existing breadth of them and declares them unlawful. It creates a civil scheme to capture practices that do not cause injury, as determined by the Crimes Act 1958, and deals with that through voluntary facilitation between the parties and community education. It also empowers the VEOHRC, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, to investigate serious or ongoing activity, and it creates a criminal scheme to capture conduct that leads to serious injury. It prevents people from taking victims outside of Victoria and prevents the advertising of these practices.

But there are some important things this legislation does not do. It does not ban or affect prayer or religious teachings in schools, at home or in religious institutions unless that activity is directed at a specific individual with the intention of changing or suppressing their gender or sexuality. It does not penalise free speech. It does not penalise thoughts or ideas, nor does it place a prohibition on faith leaders informing people of their faith's view of sexuality or gender. And it does not penalise anyone explaining the tenets of their faith. It does not coerce people into transitioning; this bill in fact is directed at outlawing coercive behaviour.

I want to turn to some of the contributions that have been made from the other side of the chamber today. The reasoned amendment references a concern about the rights of individuals to voluntarily seek assistance for gender identity and sexual orientation issues, including via pastoral care and faith organisation counselling services. That assistance if given, if directed towards changing someone's sexuality or gender identity, is harmful. That is the reality. That is what we are seeking to preclude under this bill. Let us be clear: these are not just conversations; they are harmful conversations. In just the same way that we do not voluntarily let people use tanning beds or inject crystal methamphetamine, we should not be voluntarily letting them engage in this behaviour that is harmful to them.

The member for Ripon—well, talk about mischaracterisation of this bill—in her submission said that she was acting in support of all females, that there was some betrayal of the sisterhood by young girls who might seek to identify as male who become trans boys. And I say to the member for Ripon: it is just not the case that girls are becoming trans boys because it is easier than being a woman. They are not doing it as some sort of betrayal to the sisterhood. That is just rot. I say to the member for Ripon: do not pile the pressure on, do not be yet another voice condemning girls who feel like boys, do not take the easy way out, do not take the low road. These journeys are hard enough. They are hard enough without piling on yet more pressure to children dealing with the absolute existential trauma of having to come to terms with these matters. Do not be yet another voice added to the pile, to the sheer volume, of pressure that these kids are already going through. Do not become one of the many who, sadly, seek to ostracise or condemn those who are struggling with very, very real and very, very personal issues. Those journeys should only be undertaken in an environment of support, of full support—support like the magnificent support provided by the Royal Children's Hospital for families undergoing this journey. A practitioner

of the RCH told me a while ago that he wanted to express on behalf of the team at the gender service how grateful they were for the support of the Andrews government over the past five years:

The funding that has been made available ... by the Victorian government has been essential to allowing us to support hundreds of young people As you probably know—

he said—

Victoria has really led the way in Australia in providing specialist gender services to children and adolescents, and even now other states such as NSW are really struggling to provide any care whatsoever.

Well, what could be more important than providing care to these kids, to these families, dealing with a really, really complicated and difficult set of issues? Now, in my experience that journey has been undertaken with a breadth of support in my family, in my extended family, but that did not mean it was not challenging, it did not mean that we could have done it without the support networks that were there and it did not mean that I did not have to shield my child from some of the prejudice, some of the outrageous prejudice, that exists in relation to young trans people—outrageous prejudice. These are enormously confronting issues for any Victorian family who might be seeking to support a child through a journey that could not in many respects be any more difficult, a journey that starts in a way that it is uncertain and continues, I hope, for many families in a way that affirms that child's sense of self, affirms that child's sense of their place in their family and in their community and affirms that they are special and unique and loved, because nothing could be more important than that.

Nothing could be more important than making sure that young people are supported at every step of the way with all of the challenges that travel with being a young person in this day and age. The very least we can do is ensure that they are not subjected to this sort of prejudice, this sort of harm, these sorts of behaviours and the implicit criticism that comes with any view, faith-based or otherwise, that somehow there is something wrong with them. There is nothing wrong with them. There is nothing wrong with them at all.

I appreciate that many in our community have strong views on gender and sexuality and that in many cases those views are aligned with or derived from their faith. Whilst I might disagree with some of those views—perhaps many of them—I accept that they are genuine views, in many cases validly held. There is in my mind no question about Victorians being able to adopt a belief set consistent with their own values. The question for government, though, is different. The question for government is: should those views be imposed on another person? And to that question this government says no. And to that question I say no. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (12:32): From the very outset I acknowledge and respect the deeply held views and the stories that have been shared by many members in this place in relation to this bill and in the course of this debate this morning. I also want to be clear about my own position on this bill. It is my very strong view that cruel and inhuman practices have no place in any civilised society, and that includes so-called conversion practices. There should be laws in place to safeguard against such archaic and harmful practices ever being used, and on this point I believe that there is broad agreement. It is wrong to force upon another person a view of the world that seeks to undermine the very fundamentals of who they are. Other members in this place have said and said very eloquently that everyone has the right to be loved, to be valued and to be respected, and I could not agree more.

But equally one of the core purposes of any government should be to protect the right of every individual to exercise choice in their lives. This is not just a core value of any government but also a core belief of a democracy such as ours. In my reading of this bill in its current form it fails this test for me, and I would struggle to support the bill in its current form. But I do support the opposition's reasoned amendment for consideration of the bill to be paused for broader community consultation to take place and for the government to return to this place with a bill that gives greater certainty and protections to parents, medical professionals, teachers and religious communities.

In my reading of this bill the freedom of consenting adults to seek counsel, support and assistance with pursuing their freely made life choices are at risk of becoming illegal in Victoria. In practice this bill removes the freedom of parents, medical professionals, teachers and trusted adults to robustly and freely assist consenting individuals to navigate what may be considered as complex life circumstances. This bill seeks to remove certain freedoms both on the part of individuals and faith groups. One interpretation of this bill is that the state now seeks to dictate what a faith leader utters in their prayer. This is an extraordinary imposition by any government.

In Victoria under this bill, change or suppression practices or conduct for this purpose encompasses activities directed towards a person with or without that person's consent, whereas in Queensland and the ACT, where similar legislation exists, they only ban conversion therapy being directed to a child or a person with impaired decision-making capacity. In those jurisdictions adults with a capacity for legal decision-making are permitted to access treatment as they wish. This is a freedom that is extended to adults in those jurisdictions. Unlike those jurisdictions, in Victoria, in the current draft of this bill, the state is seeking to determine for adults what activities may be directed towards them or otherwise, therefore removing the freedom of those individuals to choose for themselves. Again, as I said at the very outset, it is my strong view that conversion practices should be banned in Victoria, but these are important matters that have been raised with me. They have been raised with me by individuals in my community—educators, faith leaders, medical professionals and members of the LGBTI+ community—some agreeing with the bill we are considering today and some expressing grave concern with the bill.

There are criminal liabilities in this bill for those found to have caused serious injury to others. There is up to 10 years imprisonment for individuals and a \$200 000-odd fine. For corporate entities the fines are much larger. There is also civil liability here. Where an individual engages in change or suppression practices but does not cause injury or serious injury, civil liability may still be incurred. This can be pursued through the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, so any person, not just those allegedly affected by a practice, may make a report to the commission, and that report can also be anonymous in relation to alleged change or suppression practices. The commission may then commence an investigation into and compile a report on this alleged conduct. The commissioner's broad powers to investigate reports of change or suppression practices can compel the production of documents and compel individuals to appear and give evidence.

Perhaps the greatest concern I have with the civil liability element of this bill is that there is no statute of limitations, and with the passing of time a conversation between two consenting adults could be reinterpreted or could be misinterpreted and cause injury to a person without due cause. It has been raised with me that there are already sufficient and existing legal protections in place. Torture, for example, is already an illegal practice. Electroconvulsive therapy, psychosocial treatments, surgery and other interventions which might be considered torture are limited to the practice of a medical professional. These practices are highly regulated under the Mental Health Act 2014. Section 4(2) specifically prevents such interventions on the basis of a person's sexuality. These are protections already in place. Under article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a signatory, cruel and unusual treatment is already forbidden.

As I said at the outset, I have received a number of points of advocacy from many members in my community—individuals, educators, faith leaders, medical professionals and members of the LGBTI+ community—some agreeing and some expressing grave concern. I have received a note from Mark Sneddon, a former Crown counsel to former attorneys-general Robert Clark and the member for Keysborough, who wrote to me, saying:

I have grave concerns about the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 which is being debated in the Assembly on 10 December. These concerns are not just about freedom of religion and of speech, issues which are very important and well ventilated. My concerns also extend to effects on families and counsellors and therapists and those people who wish to change their sexual orientation from gay to straight and those people who having transitioned gender, regret it and wish to de-transition.

In my view the Bill needs substantial restricting in scope to target only non-consensual aversion therapy or like the Queensland legislation only targeting the actions of registered health practitioners, not parents and friends and community and religious leaders.

Something for the Parliament and for members of this Parliament to consider.

I would like to conclude where I commenced and say that, as I said from the very outset, there should be laws in place to safeguard against harmful and archaic practices ever being used. There should be laws in place to ban conversion therapy. We should always seek the right for everyone to be loved, to be valued and to be respected for who they are, but my reading of this bill is that it goes far beyond that to restrict people's rights and freedoms.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (12:42): It gives me absolute pleasure to join the debate on this bill, and I want to begin firstly by acknowledging my dear friend—and usually my seat buddy, pre-COVID, when we are sitting where we are supposed to be sitting—the member for Burwood and offer him my profound thanks for him telling the personal story of his family, being the preceding government speaker to me. I just think it is telling these stories that actually conveys why we need to do this, and I want to thank him for sharing his family's journey.

I do not know how anyone could not be moved by hearing that story, so I have decided to tell a little bit of the story of my family. The member for Mornington, who I deeply respect—and I agreed with almost everything he had to say, the member on the other side—mentioned the Relationships Act that was passed in this Parliament during the Brumby government in 2008. My beautiful son Blake Rizzo-Green was sitting in the gallery. He was in tears, because he felt like he was respected. He heard some members on the other side, and he said, 'Mum, how can they say such hurtful things? How can they say such hurtful things?'. He is an adult now and he was an adult then, and he said, 'It really hurts. It really hurts'—and it does. I think we like to think that being gay is not a way that people are discriminated against. A lot of this bill talks about gender-diverse young people who have way more hurdles than simply being gay does, but my son Blake, when we had that very hurtful plebiscite on same-sex marriage which was initiated by the Turnbull government—and it should not have needed that; governments need to lead on these things because people do get fearful, a minority of people get fearful—said, 'Mum, during that debate I thought that I would be out there singing from the rooftops saying why we needed to do this', and he said, 'Mum, I was in a fetal position at home most of the time'. He said, 'I just couldn't cope' with the things that people were saying about him. You know, it cuts deeply. The member for Burwood talked about his young child, but for someone who is now 38 years old, it still cuts deeply.

I remember when he first came out—he was about 13 or 14—to me. He was very serious and he said, 'Mum, I need to have a talk to you. It's something really serious and I don't want you to be upset'. He was all concerned about my feelings, and I said, 'Come on, honey, spit it out, what's up?'. He said, 'Look, I know it could be a stage I'm going through. I've read it could be that, you know, but I think I might gay'. I have got to tell you I burst out laughing. He said, 'Why are you laughing?', and I said, 'I thought it was something serious'. And we just hugged and we talked and I just said, 'Darling, you don't need to put a label on yourself. You are you, and you will be loved by your parents and your family for who you are and whoever you love. Our love is not conditional'. He said, 'How do you feel, Mum?', and I said, 'Darling, I love you. There's no difference about that'.

The only thing I said to him was, 'Look, let's just leave it for a while with your brother', because his brother is seven years younger than him and hero-worships him. I said, 'Just like you have been able to go through your journey of discovering your sexuality and who you might love, you need to let your brother have that journey himself, so just be you, and let's respect his journey as well'. But I also said to him, 'The only thing I am concerned about is I wanted your life to be easier than what mine was'. Being a single parent, having had him when I was just 19, I suffered a lot of discrimination. I remember being stood over when I was largely pregnant on the train, when I had my ticket for ticket inspectors and handed over the ticket. I did not have a wedding ring, and so they were asking my name and they

kept asking loudly my marital status. I was 18 years old. It was horrible. So I said to him, 'I just want your life to be easier'.

At that time we lived in the inner city. I said, 'Not everyone will welcome this'. He went to Northcote High School. It is now a very, very supportive school, but it had transitioned from being a single-sex school to a co-ed school only about five years before Blake started there, so a lot of the classes were male only and so he did suffer bullying. He had long blond hair when he started high school. I said, 'Darling, you might want to get a haircut'. This was before he came out. He said, 'Why? You've always said I should express myself'. I said, 'Oh, sometimes high school kids can be a bit more judgemental. Have a think about it'. He said, 'Well, no, I'm not going to'. But within a week he had his hair cut because he was being bullied as a result of how he looked.

This still goes on, and governments need to show leadership, as the member for Burwood said, as the Premier said and as the Minister for Equality said. I am so proud that we are in a government that has a Minister for Equality. That sends a message. I want to say that I respect everyone who has emailed me with their concerns, people in my community, and I want to particularly give a shout-out to Reverend Richard Wilson from the Presbyterian Church in Doreen. He invited me to his home on Monday and expressed his concerns. He said to me, 'Danielle, I don't know anywhere, any church, that has these practices. But now, through reading about it, I've discovered that it does happen and I'm horrified, but obviously our teaching through our church does say that it is a sin'. We had a really good talk and I really respect his conversation about it.

I want to say to every parent in particular who has emailed me about this that the world is not going to fall in. Your kids are not going to be led astray. They are going to be loved, they are going to be supported. And that is what we all have to do.

I went to a Catholic school. The fundamental teaching of Jesus was not about judgement. It was about love. At the end of the Last Supper he said to his disciples, 'Love one another as I have loved you. You must love each other'. And everyone is in God's image. You are all children of God. That was the fundamental message of Jesus in the New Testament. I would say to people of faith: just return to that. As the member for Burwood said, being a teenager is hard enough. Do not be part of the pile on.

Honestly, if you are worried about your kids, lecturing people and giving them therapy and treating them like they are broken is going to drive your kids away. They are not going to love you. You cannot judge them; you have got to love them. And they will love you back.

I lost my dad at 19. He was a pretty strict disciplinarian. He was pretty unhappy with me being a sole parent. But, you know, I would have loved to have had conversations with Dad, now I am a parent, and I have parented differently to him. It did not mean that he did not love me, but Dad used to bang on about cigarettes. He banged on about cigarettes all the time. I was a swimmer; I do not think I ever would have touched cigarettes, but Dad kept banging on about it. Then he kept banging on about marijuana, and I thought, 'Gee, better try that too'. As a parent it is not your job to bang on about what is wrong with your kids or what they should and should not do. You have actually got to have a bit of trust and support and love around them.

I am proud of both my kids—absolutely both my kids—and the way Carlo, my second son, loves his brother unconditionally. His brother was his best man at his wedding. Paola and Carlo, at the start of their wedding, said they wanted everyone to be able to choose who they love and marry, and I was really proud of them saying that. Blake now has a loving partner in Glen Moore, and they are inviting us the weekend before Christmas to meet his parents—and I really hope that they might say they are going to get married. They love each other—

A member: No pressure!

Ms GREEN: Yes, that is the pressure of a parent. They love each other. We love them. Thank you to the Premier for this bill. It is necessary. Thank you to the Minister for Equality. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (12:52): I am pleased to rise to contribute to this debate on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. This is a bill that clearly is one that needs to be dealt with with a great level of sensitivity, and I am pleased to see that there has been a level of civility on both sides of the house on this important bill.

Can I start by saying that I denounce practices that seek to convert someone purely on the basis of their sexuality, and I think that is broadly supported across the Victorian and the Australian community. It is something that is clearly a position that has the support of the Liberal Party, and I know that Scott Morrison, the Prime Minister, has said that he does not support gay conversion therapy—does not recommend it, never has—but it is ultimately a matter for the states. It is also a position that has been further emphasised by the Liberal Party in terms of our clear position in this space. As the Prime Minister rightly pointed out, it is an issue for the states. Queensland and the ACT have created laws in regard to the specific issue, and the New South Wales government has indicated their preference for a national approach to be developed.

Can I say that whilst there is no reported evidence on studies of the prevalence of conversion therapies in Australia, a 2018 Human Rights Law Centre and La Trobe University report cites that the United Kingdom is a reasonable comparison. That report contends that the UK's 2018 national LGBT survey saw 2 per cent of respondents report that they had undergone conversion therapies, with a further 5 per cent reporting that they had been offered it.

So the starting position is that these practices are not supported, and the people that I have engaged with across my community have also broadly indicated their lack of support for specific practices. However, as has been mentioned by many of my colleagues, there have been concerns raised about the breadth of this bill before the house. The member for Caulfield has moved a reasoned amendment which seeks the debate on this bill to cease for the purposes of further consultation with the community, with faith sectors and with others within the community that have raised legitimate concerns about the practical application of this bill, particularly around the areas of the rights of children and parents; the legal competence of children under the age of 18 to provide informed consent for gender-transitioning hormonal drug treatment—namely, puberty blockers; the rights of individuals to voluntarily seek assistance for gender identity and sexual orientation issues, including via pastoral care and faith organisation counselling services; the rights of faith organisations to provide such care; and the rights of healthcare professionals to provide assistance and care to individuals who seek help for gender identity or sexual orientation issues.

I understand that this is a deeply personal issue for many within the state. Whether it is for those individuals within the LGBTI community, for their families or for their friends who support them, I deeply understand that. But I also understand that if the bill has unintended consequences to move into areas that go beyond the issue at hand of suppressing or changing practices such as these, it is imperative that it is properly and thoughtfully determined. That is why I believe it is imperative that the government undertakes that consultation.

During the briefing on the bill the department indicated that there had been consultation with stakeholders. But it was also clearly pointed out by the department that there is still a lack of understanding of the practicalities of this bill by many organisations in the community, and it was put to the opposition by the department that if the bill were to pass, then that consultation would need to occur with community stakeholders to determine and to understand how the bill would actually apply to them. For myself, I clearly think that provides the perfect opportunity for the government to say, 'We acknowledge that there are aspects of this bill that many in the community are concerned about'. It might be a genuine misunderstanding on their part, or it may be a differing of opinion as to what legislative reform they wish to put in place. But I think it is imperative on such an important issue like

this that the bill should be held over for the purposes of consultation and that that consultation should be undertaken to give all parties the opportunity to have their say.

On any critical piece of legislation that comes before the Parliament, it behoves the government, of any political persuasion, to ensure that it has adequately engaged with affected stakeholders. I understand that governments ultimately make decisions and will introduce legislation, and that is the will of the government of the day to do that. I am simply saying there is an opportunity here for the government to undertake the consultation, to engage with affected communities, to provide greater clarity as to the application of this bill and to directly address the concerns, the legitimate concerns, that have been raised regarding the rights of parents, the rights of faith-based organisations and others within the Victorian community who believe that they will be impacted indirectly as a consequence of this legislation.

I do not think that position is one in any way that casts any aspersions on the LGBTI community, because as I said from the outset, those practices are abhorrent, they should be denounced and they should be eliminated. But we cannot then in addition to that create a whole set of other legislative reforms that impact on the freedoms of families, of individuals, of communities and of organisations, particularly faith-based organisations, as a consequence. People's rights are precious, and it is a balancing act. It is difficult at all times to get it right. I call upon the government to undertake that consultation before this bill proceeds.

Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.01 pm.

Members

MINISTER FOR PORTS AND FREIGHT

MINISTER FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION

Absence

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:01): I will answer questions for the portfolios of consumer affairs, gaming and liquor regulation, ports and freight, and fishing and boating; multicultural affairs, community sport and youth; public transport and roads and road safety; and child protection and disability, ageing and carers for question time today.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

INDEPENDENT BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION FUNDING

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. Premier, you assert that you have not cut the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's funding this year. On page 384 of budget paper 3 the funding for IBAC in 2019–20 is \$46.6 million, yet the funding for IBAC in 2020–21 is \$42.2 million. How is this not a cut?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Health will come to order. The Leader of the House! Order! When the house comes to order.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:02): I am certain the Leader of the Opposition has asked this question before, and I could simply refer him to my earlier answer, but in so doing let me just make the point that there was a financial year when the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission did not spend all of their allocated money. The Treasurer would have been perfectly within his rights to recall that funding as an underspend—that is a feature of the Financial Management Act 1994, it is a feature of budgeting. It does not happen often, but it does happen. That did not occur.

That money was able to be retained and expended in a subsequent year. We have provided in this year's budget the funding that was sought by IBAC, and we have locked that funding in plus indexation, and the Leader of the Opposition is simply wrong.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the funding for this year is \$4.4 million less than last year. I am simply asking the Premier to admit the truth that there has been a cut.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr ANDREWS: I will not be waiting around and ever conceding that the Leader of the Opposition is the arbiter of the truth; let me be certain about that. The Leader of the Opposition is at best confused and at worst doing what he has done every day of this year—play politics with everything.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members not to shout across the chamber—on both sides.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): IBAC has an active investigation into branch-stacking activities in the Australian Labor Party. Former Labor minister Adem Somyurek told the Legislative Council this morning that the Premier was personally involved in ALP branch stacking. Premier, why should Victorians not see your funding cuts to IBAC as an attempt to ensure this investigation never gets to you?

The SPEAKER: Order! I just remind the Premier to answer the question as it relates to government business.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:04): If only I had perhaps more than 1 minute to answer this question. The first point I would make to the Leader of the Opposition is the honourable Attorney-General made the reference to IBAC, so that might well speak to the motivations of the government in getting to the bottom of what has occurred. Now, loath as I am to go into details of IBAC investigations, I do feel obliged as part of the second point I will make to say that is not the only investigation that IBAC is currently conducting. I am sure if there were 100 investigations—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not want to have to shout above the chamber so that I can ask people to be quiet to be able to hear the Premier. I know there are limited numbers in the chamber and I have tried not to remove members from the chamber while we are going through this period of social distancing, but I will remove members from the chamber—from any position in the chamber—if they continue to shout across the chamber at each other. I need to be able to hear the Premier's answer so that I can determine issues of points of order if they are raised.

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, if the Premier showed you the respect of actually facing you when he spoke instead of turning his back on you, you might be able to hear him.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr ANDREWS: So I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the answer to the substantive question. I would refer him to the point that I just made about the reference by the Attorney-General to IBAC in terms of the matters that the Leader of the Opposition raises. And the third point I would make is that it would not matter if there were 100 IBAC investigations—there is one that the Leader of the Opposition will never mention—will never mention—because it is into him and his colleagues.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:06): On this last day of Parliament I rise to thank the principals, teachers, education support staff and students and their families for all their hard work and perseverance during 2020, a year like no other. I pay particular tribute to our year 12 students in Victoria, a difficult year at the best of times made even tougher by a

global pandemic and, for some, bushfires at the start of the year as well. But the good news is exams are over, the general achievement test of over 85 000 VCE students went without a hitch, every single year 12 student will have any disadvantage they have faced taken into account in their results and they will get their results and their ATAR ranking on 30 December—no disadvantage whatsoever compared to year 12 students anywhere else in this country, a wonderful outcome.

For students still at school next year, we will support you like never before. There will be 4100 tutors to ensure those who have fallen behind get the support they need in 2021. We will complete the rollout of mental health practitioners in every single government secondary school across the state and deliver the mental health pilot in primary schools. There is the \$1.6 billion disability inclusion package, transforming the way we support kids with a disability, including over time lifting the number, doubling the number, to 55 000 students. There is more than \$3 billion for school capital, the biggest school capital investment in Victoria's history—buildings big and small in every corner of the state—and we will overhaul vocational education with a new single senior secondary certificate, ensuring every student has access to high-quality vocational pathways.

Finally, can I thank sincerely the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Independent Schools Victoria and everyone in the Department of Education and Training for working so effectively together in this very tough year. All the very best over Christmas and the new year.

ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Health. Daryl had a bowel operation in February 2019. He was readmitted to hospital because of severe post-operative complications which required extensive treatment for infection and wound breakdown. As a result, he requires further surgery for a 12-centimetre hernia, and he experiences severe pain when the cartilage between his ribs cracks. Daryl has been on a surgery waitlist for 20 months to have this large hernia repaired. Minister, how is it fair that Daryl has had to wait so long for this vital surgery?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:09): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As the Leader of the Opposition will be aware, in the budget that the honourable Treasurer recently handed down there was a significant contribution in that budget towards dealing with the deferred care issues that have resulted as a consequence of the global pandemic and its implications for our health system, which as part of the restricted activity directions from the chief health officer saw elective surgery in both the public and private sector put on hold for a period of time.

We know that that caused significant distress for a large number of people right across the state. We know that that is going to take a period of time and a concentrated effort by the public and private systems, working in close cooperation with our health professionals and with all of the groups involved in our health system, to address. This government is committed to addressing that issue. And in regard to particularly how the category 2 waitlist, which I am assuming is the reference in this particular case, is dealt with, that is a particular priority. I do note, however, that in regard to category 1 surgery waiting times, pre pandemic the average waiting time was 10 days. Today the average waiting time is 10 days, and I think that is a substantial record of achievement—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, my question asked the minister: how is it fair that Daryl, who has been waiting 20 months for his surgery—well before the pandemic—has had to wait so long? I would ask the minister to address that aspect of the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister has been relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: As I was indicating, this government's commitment to addressing category 1, category 2 and indeed category 3 waiting times is backed up by \$300 million of new investment, and that comes on top of billions of dollars of substantive investment into our public health system. We are working with all of the practitioners, all of the colleges and all of our health services, including the

private health services, to make sure that that substantial effort in addressing that backlog is dealt with as soon as possible, and that is the position that we will take into the coming months. I look forward to in the very near future releasing the details of how that blitz will apply in a really practical sense to make a direct impact on those category 2 and particularly category 3 waiting lists.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): Daryl received a letter from the Alfred on 6 November, at a time when Victorian COVID case numbers were zero, advising that only outpatient appointments were being taken and that he had been assessed as 'not requiring urgent care'. Notwithstanding the pain of a large hernia that he has been waiting for for 20 months, Minister, when will specialist—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Police and Emergency Services! The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

A member interjected.

Mr M O'BRIEN: 'Dr O'Brien'—is that what you have to say to Daryl? Twenty months on a waitlist, and you give me this snark of 'Dr O'Brien' across the chamber—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will ask his question.

Members interjecting.

Mr M O'BRIEN: Poor me? No, poor Daryl. Poor Daryl, Premier. That is what I am concerned about: poor Daryl. You could not give a rat's about Daryl. You could not give a rat's.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition on a question.

Mr M O'BRIEN: Minister, when will specialist outpatient appointments be available so that the tens of thousands of Victorians on those lists can be seen?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:14): These decisions—these very important decisions—are made by clinicians. They are not made by politicians. These decisions, at whatever time during the global pandemic in a year the likes of which our health systems have not seen in 100 years, are made by the people on the front line, the clinical experts who are dealing with the resources and the opportunities they have—and can I say \$300 million more resources than they had a few weeks ago—to deal precisely with these issues. My undertaking to everyone on those category 2 waitlists is that there will be an unprecedented blitz to address these issues, and all Victorians can have confidence that they are partners in the best health system in this country, headed by clinicians, not politicians.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: REGIONAL TOURISM PACKAGE

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (14:15): Earlier today I was pleased to launch the \$28 million regional travel voucher scheme. The scheme will give Victorians an added incentive to explore our state by providing up to 120 000 vouchers to Victorian residents. Those vouchers can be used for accommodation, tourism attractions or tours undertaken in regional Victoria, the Yarra Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula. Having had family holidays to Kyneton, to the King Valley and to the Mornington Peninsula just last week, I can say that all of this state is a magnificent place to visit. Victorians will be able to seek reimbursement of \$200 if they have spent at least \$400. The first round of vouchers will be available from 10.00 am tomorrow, with 40 000 released for travel between Saturday, 12 December, and Friday,

22 January. Additional lots of 40 000 vouchers will become available on 20 January for travel between 27 January and 1 April and on 30 March for travel between 6 April and 31 May, spreading the benefit for regional communities well into the year.

In 2019 Victorians spent \$28 billion on travel outside of Victoria. By comparison, only \$9 billion was spent on intrastate overnight travel in Victoria. Even a small conversion of some of that interstate and overseas travel would generate significant additional economic benefits for the state. The \$28 million regional travel voucher scheme is just part of a much bigger \$465 million tourism recovery package announced in the budget. The package includes almost \$300 million in infrastructure funding, including for flagship projects in iconic locations, including Gippsland, the Great Ocean Road, Wilsons Prom and the Grampians; and \$58 million in funding for Visit Victoria to drive demand in the three key markets—intrastate, interstate and international. That is significant investment in tourism in the budget, a near unprecedented commitment by our government to revitalise our visitor economy and position it for long-term sustainable growth.

ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Health. Seventy-eight-year-old Wilhelmina is living in agony with her deteriorated hip and knee joints. Already condemned to a walker and powerful steroid injections which are barely giving her relief, her only option is surgery at either Echuca or Bendigo hospital. At her November appointment her specialist told her she would be waiting at least another three to six months but warned unless these two hospitals received urgent funding she could be waiting a lot longer. How much longer will Wilhelmina have to wait in agony before you adequately fund these important regional hospitals so that she can get the operation she so desperately needs?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:18): In addressing the Leader of The Nationals' question I could say: a lot more than they ever received under the honourable Leader of the Opposition's time in government. But that would be gratuitous. What I would say, however, is that, particularly when it comes to the Bendigo Hospital—that brand new hospital delivered by a Labor government and funded to record levels in record amounts for record levels of service for the people of Bendigo and the wider community—that is an outstanding hospital—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, the minister has had time to set the scene, but this is very much about Wilhelmina and the agony that she is in, and I would ask you to get the minister to come back to addressing that important issue on her behalf rather than just rabbiting on.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to answering the question.

Mr FOLEY: In regard to both Echuca and Bendigo hospitals, which was at the heart of the honourable member's question, this government has funded those hospitals to record amounts. In regard to the broader issue of waitlists that the honourable member also refers to, I would refer the honourable member to my earlier response to the Leader of the Opposition. This is a government that has acted on the advice, on the restricted activities directions, from the chief health officer in regard to how elective surgeries are to be dealt with in the context of a global pandemic.

That was a very tough decision to have to make by the public health authorities and one that was supported by this government, knowing that the consequences would be that particularly the category 2 waitlist would be extended as a result. I want to thank all Victorians who have been part of that important decision, knowing that its consequences would mean an extension in the waitlist, particularly for category 2 surgeries. I can also thank the Treasurer in particular for the \$300 million that will be part of the blitz to deal with that increase in the waiting times. I know that the close work with—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, Wilhelmina is very interested in the answer the Minister for Health gives as to how much longer she will have to wait. I would ask you to bring the minister back to addressing that particular issue, please.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

Mr FOLEY: I know that the work that is now being done with the Bendigo Hospital, the relevant private hospitals in Bendigo—

A member interjected.

Mr FOLEY: St John of God indeed, the Echuca public health system and all public and private health providers around this state—with the AMA, with the various colleges, with the professional staff in both the public and private system, with the whole ecology of the public health and private health system—and the \$300 million extra contribution, coming on top of the \$9 billion investment in health in this budget to take that arrangement to record levels of spending, will as part of that address this issue. I look forward to the announcement in the not-too-distant future around that important blitz.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:22): Minister, how many people are waiting for surgery in the Echuca and Bendigo hospitals?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:22): In regard to the particular investments in both Bendigo and Echuca, these are important issues of how investment to make sure that whether it is how lists are dealt with on a regional session or indeed a wider session are dealt with—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, relating to relevance. This was a very, very distinct question: how many people are waiting for surgery at Bendigo and Echuca hospitals? Investment is not answering the question. The question is: how many people are there waiting for surgery at those two hospitals?

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Mr FOLEY: In regard to how on a regional level waiting lists are dealt with, I can share with the honourable member that the process of regionalising and clustering—the term that is now used by the sector—is dealt with across both public and private hospitals well beyond just the immediate arrangements that apply in—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance. I understand the minister may not have that number directly at hand in question time, but could he take it on notice and provide the house with an exact number, please, of how many people are waiting for surgery at the Bendigo and the Echuca hospitals?

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr FOLEY: As I was indicating, the cluster arrangements that deal in a wider geographic area than the important contributions of both Bendigo and Echuca make in this space are dealt with—

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the National Party has given the minister an out. If he has not got the number at hand, he can bring it to the chamber. It is not helpful in answering the question for the—

The SPEAKER: Order! The point of order is?

Mr R Smith: for the minister—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr FOLEY: So how the cluster arrangements operate and how that number varies every day as a result of this important matter is an issue that this government is strongly committed to and we will see \$300 million invested.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (14:24): I rise to update the house on the extensive work that our emergency services agencies have been doing in preparation for this summer. In September we started the process. I chaired the forums that are about summer preparedness with all our agencies, and it is about understanding where they are, what the challenges are and how they are ready to meet those challenges. These briefings included the CFA, Fire Rescue Victoria, Forest Fire Management, the SES, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA), Life Saving Victoria, the Bureau of Meteorology, Victoria Police, the emergency services commissioner and the inspector-general for emergency management. What we know about the summer ahead is that we are likely to see flooding and we are also likely to see what they call a 'normal' fire season. That actually still means we are likely to have quite a substantial number of fires, particularly grassfires. But depending on rainfall levels, particularly in the west of the state, we actually may see some more potential for more challenging fires. For example, in the far south-west, Mallee, Wimmera and the north-east it is drier than normal and we have already experienced a number of grassfires.

So our agencies are prepared. The SES are ready for floods. We gave them some extra money to get their communities ready for floods as well. Fire agencies are ready with the equipment and the firefighters that they need, working closely, hand in hand, together. We have invested again in a record amount of aircraft—51 with access to up to 100. We have got our night bombing program further extended this season. Our budget has seen improvements in the VicEmergency app communications and warnings, funding for ESTA and Life Saving Victoria capacity this summer and marine and rescue services. We have also invested in new stations and equipment for the CFA. In fact our emergency services budget is now at \$1.66 billion—a 58 per cent increase since we came to government. Our agencies are prepared. I want to thank each and every one of them for their efforts this year. They have had bushfires, it has been a tough year, they have done an extraordinary job, they have made us all proud and they are ready to protect Victoria this summer.

CROWN CASINO

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:26): My question is to the minister for gambling, but once again she is not in attendance in question time, so I will ask the Premier. Last month I asked the Premier why Crown still holds a casino licence in Victoria given evidence of its illegal behaviour revealed by the New South Wales inquiry. The Premier said these are just allegations, not findings or proof. However, since then Crown itself has admitted it very likely allowed money laundering to occur at its Melbourne and Perth casinos, and the New South Wales regulator considers this so serious it has refused to allow Crown a licence to operate in New South Wales. In light of this evidence and admissions by Crown itself I would like to ask the Premier again: does he believe Crown is still fit to hold a casino licence here in Victoria?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:27): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. At the outset can I indicate that the minister's title is the minister for gaming. I did not think we needed to play word games. We all know that the member for Melbourne and her political party are opposed to all gambling of any sort, any kind, anywhere. We all know that. We do not need to play those games. We know and understand that that is their view. That is not the view in broader policy terms of many, many Victorians, who regard it as a legitimate form of recreational activity. They also regard taking care of those who have a gambling problem as very serious work, and that is why this year's budget, like every budget that we have had the honour of presenting, provides additional supports to those for whom gambling is a powerful addiction, an evil thing. That is the first point I will make.

Given that the questioner has in effect acknowledged that this is not the first time she has asked this question, I will refer her again to my answer when last she inquired in almost precisely the same terms. Just beyond that, though, can I add to that by saying that the honourable member is right when she says—I do not have a time line in front of me, but I believe she is right—that since the last time she asked me this question not only have there been closing submissions by counsel assisting an inquiry in another state but also in the running of that inquiry evidence has been led where admissions have been made. Those admissions are well known and well understood to the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. They will be, I am very confident, assessed by our gaming and liquor control regulator here in Victoria. We do take these matters seriously, but at this stage we retain confidence in all licence-holders. Submissions and admissions are serious matters. We will wait and see what the inquiry says and we will wait and see what work our regulator brings forward in terms of findings of fact. They are serious matters; there is no debate about that—at least I would hope not.

The only debate that could possibly be had on the seriousness of these matters would be one to create mischief, because the fact of the matter is our regulators take these matters very seriously. Probity and integrity, not just in this market but in all markets where any players operate, any licence-holders operate, have always been important and they will always be important. I am not able to perhaps give the member for Melbourne what she really wants, and that is perhaps a declaration of a change in policy that there shall be no casino anywhere in Victoria ever. I cannot do that. But I can confirm for her that despite the word games as to the minister's title, we as a government and a public sector more broadly take the administration of the highest standards in these industries very, very seriously.

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:30): I thank the Premier for his answer. I note that he said, 'We will wait and see what the inquiry and the Victorian regulator say'. More than a year ago I asked the previous minister about Crown and allegations of money laundering, and she said there would be an urgent inquiry by the regulator into these allegations of illegal behaviour by Crown. That urgent inquiry never reported. I also asked the Premier about this last month. He said that he would follow it up, but we have heard nothing. Premier, what happened to the urgent inquiry from more than a year ago?

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:31): On form, I thought you might have been having a go—what an amazing conclusion for me to draw that the Leader of the Opposition might well have been negative. What an unfair conclusion for me to draw! What a terrible thing. Shame on me that I might have assumed that every day and twice on Sundays this one is all about the politics—and negative. But I digress.

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, we know the Premier has demonstrated over this year that he can be a little forgetful at times—'Why did I say "security guard" in my press conference?'—but we just talked about this yesterday. You must use titles and you must not use question time as an opportunity to attack the opposition; okay? We just talked about this yesterday.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrandyte will address his point of order to the Chair.

Ms Ryan: On a further point of order, Speaker, I think the member for Melbourne actually asked a very succinct question, and the Premier has used 40 seconds of 1 minute to simply delay making any kind of response to the member for Melbourne. On the issue of relevance, more than half of his allotted time has expired, and he is clearly using an attack on our side of the Parliament as a diversionary tactic because he does not want to answer the question from the member for Melbourne. I would ask you to bring him back to answering the member for Melbourne's question.

The SPEAKER: Order! There was a discussion over the table. I do now note the Premier will come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS: The member for Melbourne has asked me a question, and I am more than happy to refer to the minister for gaming to write to the member for Melbourne. I apologise if there has been

a commitment given to respond to you and that has not happened. It is my expectation that when a matter is referred that you would get a prompt and detailed response.

Ms McLeish interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, for those that have never been so much as an acting minister let alone a minister, let me explain how this works. I will take it, I will refer it and I will make sure the member for Melbourne gets an answer.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:33): On Monday trains went over the new Avon River bridge for the very first time in East Gippsland and at the other end of Gippsland cars crossed the new Cardinia Road rail bridge at Pakenham, which signalled the removal of the 44th level crossing as part of the Andrews Labor government's level crossing removal program. Of course the Cardinia Road level crossing makes not one, not two, not three but four level crossings that we are removing in Pakenham. Last week we also announced those remaining three will be fast-tracked. But like with many other aspects of our level crossing removal program, we are not just removing level crossings at Pakenham and we are not just going to deliver on the election commitment to build a new train station at Pakenham, we are going to go even further and extend the metropolitan train line 2 kilometres further out and build a new train station at Pakenham East as well.

We also announced last week that we would bring forward the removal of level crossings at Surrey Hills and Mont Albert. Of course we all remember a few years ago that tragic accident that occurred at Union Road, Surrey Hills. It was a really timely reminder that each and every level crossing is dangerous, and that is why it has only been the Andrews Labor government that has had the determination to remove level crossings as quickly as we can and made that commitment to get 75 level crossings removed.

Last week we announced we are going to be awarding \$1.5 billion worth of contracts for removing level crossings at Preston, Glenroy, Deer Park, Williamstown and Hallam—3200 jobs are going to be created as a result of this. We planned these projects during the period of pandemic, and now we are getting on and delivering and removing those level crossings. Since January 2016 one level crossing has been removed, on average, every six weeks. In 2021 we are going to go even faster, removing one on average every four weeks—a record that has not been seen ever in the history of the state. We are determined to get on and remove these level crossings as quickly as possible.

SCHOOL BUILDING CONTRACTORS

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (14:36): My question is to the Minister for Education. The government school building authority is using the impact of COVID worksite limitations to claim that private contractors are not meeting their deadlines for works to be completed. A number of contractors have been threatened with large financial penalties by the government. Will the minister rule out penalising small- and medium-sized contractors working on government school projects whose work has been delayed due to the COVID worksite limitations that your government imposed?

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:36): I thank the member for Croydon for his question and welcome him as the new shadow education minister. That is the fourth time I have had to do that. They roll them over every 18 months. I would say to my friend opposite that around July 2022 you will have different roles or responsibilities, and there will be a fifth shadow education minister.

Mr Walsh: And you won't be welcoming him, will you?

Mr MERLINO: Well, it will probably be the upper house member for Eastern Metro, who wants to sack teachers and describes the public school system as broken—but, you know, that is the track record of the Liberal Party and those opposite.

But I do thank the member for Croydon for his question about contracts, the accountability of those contracts and the timeliness of those contracts. The Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) works very, very closely with all of our contractors, all of our builders, all of our architects. We have high expectations of everyone involved in the biggest school-building program that this state has ever seen, including \$3 billion in the state budget that we delivered just a couple of weeks ago. So we do acknowledge—\$3 billion, \$1.9 billion of new and additional projects announced since—

Mr Hodgett: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister was asked about the COVID worksite limitations that the government imposed. Now, because of those, a number of contractors have been threatened with large financial penalties by the government. I asked the minister if he can rule out penalising those small to medium companies, and I would ask you to bring him back to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that points of order are not an opportunity to repeat the question, but I note the minister is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Mr MERLINO: The Victorian School Building Authority has high expectations of all of our contractors. Now, across the period of the pandemic, where we had different arrangements given the restrictions and the lockdowns at the time and how that impacted on large and small projects, I am not going to rule out anything, but what I will rule in is that we will deal appropriately with every single contractor, because I have high expectations of the school building authority and the VSBA has high expectations of its contractors, and we need that because our parents expect schools to be built on time. Our students need them, our teachers need them, and we are going to deliver that—the biggest school-building program the state has ever seen. I understand this is news to those opposite because they hardly built any schools. Their record is appalling.

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (14:39): Minister, how is it fair that small builders face financial ruin due to delays in school-building works caused by your government's COVID second wave?

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:40): Well, I reject the assertions in the honourable member's question. We work very closely with all of our contractors. And I tell you what, in the biggest school-building program the state has ever seen, every builder that I speak to, every architect, every project manager—they are delighted.

A member: Subbies?

Mr MERLINO: Every subbie. We have got 300 local contractors in Shepparton working on the Greater Shepparton Secondary College—300 local builders. We are delivering jobs right across the state. We have high expectations. We will deal with each and every contractor fairly. I mean, what a ridiculous question, the last question of the parliamentary year—not a wrap-up by the Leader of the Opposition, no questions from the member for Bulleen this week. Where has he been? Where has the member for Bulleen been all week?

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, I am having trouble hearing you because the minister is so loud, actually, but I would ask you: in the few seconds remaining could he please give an assurance to those small contractors that they will not face financial penalties? He has not done that either to the substantive or to the supplementary question, and they want the answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order, but I do ask the Deputy Premier to come back to answering the question.

Mr MERLINO: What I will say to the member for Croydon and every member is: we will treat every single contractor fairly. What a limp way for the opposition to finish the year.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: GOVERNMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:41): I am very pleased to deliver the fifth ministers statement today. This is very good. The Deputy Premier is a loud voice on behalf of students, parents and school communities, and it is not just talk. It is the biggest building program this state has ever seen, so I would invite those opposite to ask away. Ask as many questions as you like about education, because we are more than capable of demonstrating that we do not just think it and talk it; we are building it in the Education State.

At the end of a year like no other—which of course began with some of the worst bushfires our state has ever seen, with a massive impact on the High Country and East Gippsland, and only a short time later a global pandemic arrived here, a one-in-100-year event, something that there is no rule book for, something that no-one had ever experienced in living memory—despite the depth of the challenge, despite the difficulty of the circumstances that Victorians have faced this year, every day of this year, we finish this unprecedented 12-month period with a sense of optimism and confidence for 2021.

We will, as announced last Sunday, as Victorians are able to enjoy a COVID-safe summer, be cherishing those things we have missed the most: connection with those who we love the most, economic activity, jobs. The notion of not a normal but a COVID-safe summer, a COVID normal—that is not just within reach, that has been delivered by the sacrifice, the commitment, the courage and the absolute conviction of Victorians to see this virus off. We have also extended compassion to each other in so many ways. It is a point of pride for every Victorian that this summer will be a COVID-safe summer, and we will all be able to, because of our determination as a community, having shown our nation and the world what it is that we as Victorians are truly made of, enjoy that COVID-safe summer. And it is a merry Christmas and a happy new year I wish to all Victorians.

Ms Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I have a couple of outstanding answers to questions I would like you to follow up with the relevant ministers. They are question on notice 4495 to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and adjournment matter 4515 and constituency question 4584 to the Minister for Planning. If you could follow them up, I would really appreciate it, as my constituents would like a response on these matters and I would like to get back to them.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for raising that. I will follow that matter up.

Ms Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, I have eight outstanding questions that I would love to be followed up: 2575, 3526, 3530, 4523, 4626, 4627, 4709 and 4711.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for Melbourne. I will follow that matter up as well.

Constituency questions

EILDON ELECTORATE

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (14:45): (5347) My question is for the Minister for Education. Will the minister arrange for departmental staff to immediately visit Pantom Hill Primary School to understand and appreciate the rural nature of this school. Pantom Hill is in the heart of Melbourne's wonderful green wedge. This is a protected area, and the school's rural settings and nature will not change in the coming years. There will be no development. The local community pays rural council rates. Pantom Hill is a rural locality. A visit to the school by Department of Education and Training staff will clearly show why Pantom Hill Primary School must continue to receive rural funding. It will be very obvious because everything about the school is rural. They should not be classified as metropolitan, and they need their funding reinstated as soon as possible.

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:46): (5348) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. I rise to ask the minister what benefits my constituents of Bayswater will see locally from the recently announced \$1.6 billion classroom disability inclusion package. While I am absolutely proud of the work our educators, parents and caregivers put into remote and flexible learning this year, it has no doubt highlighted the difficulties and challenges that some students face, both in the classroom and when learning from home. I heard from parents and caregivers of students with disabilities who relayed to me firsthand the need to do more as we move back to the classrooms and onsite learning. As our state moves towards a strong recovery, it is vital that this recovery is inclusive for all as well. So I was absolutely stoked that the big state budget that was handed down delivers on this too, with extra support in the classroom going to 55 000 students statewide. I am proud this will be targeted support delivered to every single government school for students who in the past may have been overlooked, such as students with autism, dyslexia and complex behaviours. Not only that, it will create over 1 700 jobs. I am very proud of the minister's work. This government has supported students with disability. Thank you, Minister, for— *(Time expired)*

GIPPSLAND SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:47): (5349) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. When can businesses in my electorate expect the government to act to support them with seasonal labour issues? I know my colleague Melina Bath in the other place and the Leader of The Nationals here have been pursuing the government over how and when it will assist our agriculture and horticulture sectors with labour, given the usual sources such as backpackers and others are severely limited. GBP Australia at Poowong in my electorate is also waiting for these answers, as its usual supply of workers has been severely constrained and it has recently taken on workers under the Pacific Islander labour scheme. Despite its best efforts, the abattoir cannot attract enough local workers to meet its needs. It has arranged for further workers to come in from the Pacific, but they are unable to enter Victoria under the current quarantine arrangements. Minister, the abattoir at Poowong is having to throw product out, a situation that is criminal, because of the labour shortage. I urge the government to act immediately to address this labour shortage.

MACEDON ELECTORATE

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (14:47): (5350) My constituency question is for the Minister for Employment in the other place. Minister, how will the \$150 million in wage subsidy support announced in this year's budget help women in my electorate return to work? The Andrews Labor government's Jobs for Victoria investment is huge. The \$619 million funding boost will help people impacted by the pandemic get back to work. The budget announcement includes \$250 million to partner with employers to help cover the wages of at least 10 000 new workers, and of this amount at least \$150 million will go towards employing women. We know that the pandemic has directly impacted women and their work. Many of those industries hardest hit this year, such as hospitality, tourism and retail, are female dominated. I have heard from women across my electorate about how the pandemic has impacted them and their work through the virtual cuppas and phone calls that I have undertaken during the pandemic. Minister, I look forward to a response on the way in which this subsidy will help women in my electorate.

MORWELL ELECTORATE

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (14:49): (5351) My constituency question is to the Minister for Regional Development in the other place. Minister, I ask on behalf of the many constituents within my community who have an affiliation with the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program as to what the latest information is regarding ongoing funding of this terrific organisation. The Ladder program offers support for young people aged 16 to 25 through increased access to quality education, employment and training, and health and wellbeing outcomes. I am proud to say that I am one of the many local mentors and can personally attest firsthand to the benefits and outcomes experienced by participants

and everyone involved. As I understand, Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley is currently funded through the Latrobe Valley Authority, and unfortunately it seems no funding is being guaranteed beyond December 2020. As you can appreciate, trying to operate any organisation with such short funding tenures of approximately six-month blocks makes it very difficult to plan, maintain and improve services that are so important. Minister, given the matters raised, I ask: will you urgently meet with the Ladder team to discuss the future of this vital program they deliver in my electorate?

OAKLEIGH ELECTORATE

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (14:50): (5352) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health, and I ask the Minister for Health for information and an update on the construction of the new Victorian Heart Hospital in my electorate in Clayton and what benefits it will bring to my community, the electorate of Oakleigh. The Victorian Heart Hospital, the first of its kind in Australia, is being built right now. Anyone that has travelled down Blackburn Road will see the construction is proceeding at pace. It will be one of those transformative projects, the first ever heart hospital in the country right here on the grounds of Monash University, and it will have untold benefits in terms of research and clinical service. I thank the minister for his tireless work in this portfolio and would appreciate any information and update he can provide on this significant project and what it means for my local community.

FERNTREE GULLY ELECTORATE

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (14:50): (5353) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A number of residents have contacted me over the past few weeks to raise their concerns about the length of the grass growing along the median strips on arterial roads within my electorate. I am aware that VicRoads has a maintenance schedule; however, it is always around the same time every year—the end of spring, early summer—when the grass grows more quickly and the maintenance schedule seems to lag behind the growth of the grass. Residents are genuinely concerned about the long grass as it impedes driver vision and generally looks untidy, as Ferntree Gully is the gateway to the Dandenong Ranges. I recently joined with Cr Susan Laukens in calling on VicRoads to take action on this important issue. So on behalf of my constituents I ask: when will VicRoads mow the median strips on arterial roads within the Ferntree Gully electorate?

MOUNT WAVERLEY ELECTORATE

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (14:51): (5354) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Education, and my question is: what is the status of the inclusive outdoor accessible play space project at Mount Waverley North Primary School? This is a cracker of a school. In the last round of the Inclusive Schools Fund last year they got awarded \$200 000 for this inclusive play space, and we are very excited about it. We think it is coming up; we just want to know exactly what is coming up, because I noticed this week that the next round, round 6, of the Inclusive Schools Fund has just been opened this week. So for all the other schools in my area I want to say: if you have got projects at \$200 000 of an inclusive nature, because education is for everybody, get in there and get applying because they close on 19 February.

BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (14:52): (5355) My question is to the Minister for Housing, right here at the table. How will the electorate of Broadmeadows benefit from Australia's biggest ever investment in public and community housing? The Victorian budget will deliver the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build to construct more than 12 000 new homes, support about 10 000 jobs per year for the next four years and supercharge Victoria's comeback from the pandemic. This package aims to boost the state's social housing supply by 10 per cent in just four years, providing a stable foundation for thousands of Victorians to rebuild their lives. This is critical. I have long advocated for a mix of public-private social housing regeneration. Broadmeadows has a proof of this concept that I was delighted to work with the minister previously on, converting the Mews estate into Valley Park—and a great

outcome there. We want to keep the collaboration, and it is fitting and apt that I acknowledge the career-long commitment to these causes from the minister.

Following question incorporated in accordance with resolution of house of 8 December:

HASTINGS ELECTORATE

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (5356)

My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

I am seeking information on behalf of my Warneet and Blind Bight communities regarding the removal of overgrown bushland at the Warneet Nature Reserve situated between Blind Bight and Warneet.

On 31st January this year I wrote to the minister on behalf of the Warneet Association regarding its request for urgent assistance with clearing high fuel loads of vegetation at the Warneet Nature Reserve.

The minister responded saying that the Warneet Nature Reserve is managed by Parks Victoria and that it delivers the fuel management program with Forest Fire Management Victoria, which incorporates DELWP, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and VicForests. The Minister stated that the fuel management program also included an annual slashing program for establishing fuel breaks surrounding the reserve.

The minister also stated that Forest Fire Management Victoria was working with the Warneet Association to arrange a meeting for the last week of March 2020 between Forest Fire Management Victoria, the CFA, Victoria Police and City of Casey representatives to allow Warneet and Cannons Creek residents to raise fuel load concerns.

I am advised that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting did not proceed.

The coastal villages of Warneet, Blind Bight and Cannons Creek rely entirely on one road in and out to escape bushfires. Because of the local geography fires can sweep across the villages from several directions at the same time. A fire occurring while there is such a heavy fuel load surrounding these villages would have catastrophic potential.

On behalf of the coastal villages communities, I now seek urgent information from the minister regarding immediate and significant local fuel load reduction.

Bills

CHANGE OR SUPPRESSION (CONVERSION) PRACTICES PROHIBITION BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (14:53): I am delighted to speak today on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. In doing so I am reminded of the long journey that I have gone on with the LGBTIQ community over really 20 years of my service here in this Parliament, and I reflect back on our earliest days when I was working as the parliamentary secretary to the then Attorney-General, Rob Hulls—that great reforming Attorney-General—where one of our first bodies of work was to remove I think in the order of 36 pieces of legislation that discriminated against the LGBTIQ community. That was an extraordinary body of work which really set the foundation for so many other reforms that we have done in this area, because ultimately the motivation of not just the then Attorney-General and me but of this side of politics has always been about fairness and about equality.

I am just so thrilled today to have the opportunity to get up and make a contribution that continues in that really important pathway that was led all those years ago by the then Attorney-General, Rob Hulls. I have listened to many of the contributions that have been made across the chamber, and I have to say that when the chamber operates in the way that we have been able to tackle many of these social issues that have been the touchstone of community life, it is this chamber at its best. I have heard some really excellent contributions from the opposition benches and some excellent contributions from the government's side, and it is incumbent upon me to actually call out my dear friend and colleague the member for Burwood. Some members had the honour of either being in the chamber here today or listening to his contribution in their offices. I believe it was one of the finest contributions that I have

heard in this Parliament. Now, I know that is a big call. As you know, Speaker, I have been here quite a long time. But the contribution by the member for Burwood today, where he spoke to his lived experience and where he spoke from his heart about the struggles that a member of his family is going through and indeed his broader family is going through and the challenges that his family is confronting, was for me and I think for many people in this chamber a deeply moving experience. I say to my dear friend the member for Burwood, my heart goes out to you and my heart goes out to your family. I honour you. I honour your family, and I honour the challenge that you are working through at the moment.

I also know from conversation with you and recognise just how important the unit at the Royal Children's Hospital has been to your family in supporting you and understanding the pathway and the issues that have to be confronted. We thank sincerely the Royal Children's Hospital for the specialist care that they provide to so many families. I think in that context we are incredibly well served by this world-leading hospital in its very broadest offerings in terms of its support for our community going forward and indeed in the standing that our hospital, the Royal Children's Hospital, has got. We think about the Good Friday Appeal, where people just are so generous. But they are generous to an organisation like the Royal Children's Hospital because they understand absolutely the care that they give to our community.

Can I say in relation to the bill itself that the health complaints commissioner was asked to lead an inquiry into change or suppression—also known as conversion—practices in Victoria, and the commissioner recommended that the government legislate to prohibit these practices in all their forms. In 2019 I was at the Pride March, as I have been at any number of Pride marches, with the Premier and with the Minister for Equality when in fact the Premier announced that we would seek to legislate to condemn these practices. Of course it was very, very well supported by the broader community as well.

It is important to address why we have changed the language and why this has happened. Throughout the government's consultation on the development of this bill we heard that the term 'therapy' was seen as too legitimising of these practices when in fact they have no basis in medicine whatsoever. Similarly, we heard also from faith groups—and it is important to hear from the faith groups about what their views are about this—who were concerned that the term 'conversion' diminished a concept that holds great importance to some people of faith, and I absolutely understand that. 'Change or suppression practices' avoids both of those concerns and tackles what the issue is really about—attempts to make people alter or hide a fundamental part of who they are.

This bill recognises that these practices are based on a fundamentally flawed ideology that a person's sexuality or gender identity—somehow we can fix it, like we can fix a broken motor car. No, this is just absolutely abhorrent, and of course we know we cannot. There is no evidence at all—none, zero—that any person can have their sexuality or gender identity forcibly altered. Attempts to do so only cause massive harm and indeed sometimes lifelong harm or injury that survivors then must carry for the rest of their lives. Those are the people who managed to survive; there are so many people who could not cope with these conversion practices and tragically and sadly have taken their lives.

Here is the most fundamentally important part of the bill and indeed this debate: nobody is broken because of their sexuality or their gender identity. Nobody needs to be fixed. Nobody should ever be made to feel like they need to change such a fundamental part of who they are. LGBTQI Victorians deserve to live in a state which affirms their lives and ensures that they can live authentically as to their true selves. We have heard the stories of what happens when this is not the case, when people are fed an ideology which makes them believe they are broken, and that needs to stop.

This is a time for us as a Parliament to say, 'We stand with you. We absolutely stand with you. We absolutely repudiate this revolting conversion therapy'. It has done incredible harm to people, and we have heard some testimony, particularly from colleagues in the opposition, about what profound harm this has done to people who have had to go through these vile episodes in their lives. In fact it is contemporary practice, too. Let us be very clear about this. This is not something that happened 10,

15, 20 or 30 years ago; this is real today. I just think this is such an important bill for us and such an important opportunity for the Parliament to stand in unity and say, 'No, this is wrong. We are doing harm to people and we will not allow that to happen'.

I am thrilled to be a part of today's conversation. As I said at the start of my contribution, this has been a long journey for me, but it has been a journey of a government that is prepared to put at the forefront of all of its considerations three fundamental things: do no harm, fairness is at the heart of this bill and equality drives this government every day. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (15:03): I rise today to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. This bill does not exist in a vacuum. It did not arrive just to make life difficult for churches. It arrived because the abhorrent, dangerous, destructive and discredited practice of conversion still exists and is hurting people very badly. Its forms might be more subtle than they used to be, but in many ways that just makes them more insidious.

The church is indignant, and I have received lots of emails. They say it is a matter of religious freedom, but I say to the church: with all due respect, you are free to do a lot of things, but you are not free to hurt people. That is where broader society draws a line, and the fact you would attempt to claim that freedom is disturbing. Forgive the LGBTI community from being a little bit sceptical about your so-called genuine concern for their welfare when it is you that is teaching the shame. Teaching and reinforcing shame about being gay or trans, for example, is not an act of care but contempt—contempt that has been the cause of untold suffering for our LGBTI community through the generations.

When I think of that suffering and the depth of that shame I think of Alan Turing, the brilliant man who in the 1940s invented the world's first computer, broke the German Enigma code and helped the Allies win the war. This man literally saved the world, yet after the war he was targeted, bullied, charged, convicted and humiliated for his sexuality by his own country, and in 1954 he committed suicide. The man who literally saved the Western democratic world took his own life because of hate—because his country hated him. I think of the many young men who fell victim to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s who died alone in hospital because their families were too ashamed or appalled to visit them. As a mother of a young boy I cannot fathom a hate or a shame so strong it would override my instinct to be with my dying child. Hate is taught. Heterosexual people are not seeking help for their sexual preference. They do not feel inner turmoil. They do not feel a crushing sense of shame that necessitates professional or pastoral counselling, because shame is taught.

Churches have the potential to do much good in society—obviously they do—yet in too many cases and against all reason they persist with this baffling attachment to homophobia. I understand the Bible opposes homosexuality, but it also contains hundreds of other anachronisms that have been dropped from modern teachings—the promotion of slavery, the stigma of menstruation, the general submission of women, arbitrary cruelty to children, enthusiasm for public stoning. The church can adjust and evolve its teachings. It has done that many times. So why cling to this anachronism? Why cling to an anachronism that leads to bigotry, shame, hate, sadness, suicide and even murder? If only our church leaders saw fit to consign their anti-gay positions to that same dustbin of history, the world would be a much better place.

In one email to my office asking me to vote against this legislation it was suggested that the government is a poor parent. A quick glance at history suggests the church is not much better. Teaching kids they will perish in hell for their sexuality is no recipe for a healthy, happy, well-adjusted childhood and adolescence. Teaching children that their gender diversity is wrong, unnatural and something to be cured against all credible social and medical science is not good parenting. The facts are that these teachings are far more likely to cause kids to cut and kill themselves than change their sexuality or gender identity. That is not good parenting. It is appalling and it is abhorrent.

Take away the mechanisms that teach hate and shame and you take away the turmoil that you claim you want to fix. It is the bigotry that needs the therapy. It is the bigotry that is broken. Back in the

1950s the social machinery that promoted and perpetuated bigotry was everywhere; it was all pervasive. It was in schools, families, workplaces, sporting institutions and churches. It was inescapable. Society was incubated in the idea that homosexuality was inherently wrong and that heterosexuality was inherently right. This was an entirely artificial construct. It was totally unnecessary and it was highly destructive. For the most part most of those engine rooms for bigotry have undertaken a complete 180. Families, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, community groups and corporations widely promote inclusion in line with increasingly sophisticated evidence-based understandings of sexuality and gender identity.

The Mallee, a region once assumed to be conservative in every way, has largely embraced gender and sexual diversity as part of the infinite diversity of humanity. In 2016 the Mallee electorate voted yes to marriage equality. We have a thriving community of LGBTIQ people and allies, as expressed loudly and proudly through groups like Mallee Pride and Alphabet Soup. There are rainbow stickers all over our CBD and local schools have a strong record in validating and nurturing our LGBTIQ students. The message is very clear in our region: it is okay to be gay, trans, bi—whatever you want. There is nothing wrong with you.

It is time our churches got on board too. We need them to and we want them to. Religion can be an enormous source of comfort and support in a complicated and unpredictable world. It can be a force for good. I hope this bill today inspires some introspection. In the meantime I dedicate my speech today to Mallee Pride and Alphabet Soup. I see your diversity in all its forms. You are not just LGBTIQ but you are a million other things. You come from different cultures and backgrounds. You are brotherboys and sistergirls. You are strong, you are smart, you are resilient. You inspire me every day, and I hope this bill and hopefully this legislation one day gives you hope for a brighter, safer future.

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:09): Thank you very much, Acting Speaker Taylor. It is lovely to see you in the chair today. I think it is the first time I have spoken with you in the chair, so well done. You are doing a very good job. I have been watching. It is great.

Like so many of my colleagues and people on our side of the house, I am so proud to support this important legislation that will outlaw damaging LGBTIQ+ conversion practices, the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. Change or suppression practices, also known as conversion practices or conversion therapy—it is time for them to go. We need to ban these terrible, terrible practices that have such terrible outcomes for members of our community and for our fellow Victorians. I stand with the LGBTIQ+ community in support of this bill to ban such practices and recognise the decades of struggle, protest and campaigning to end discrimination, to end hate, to end bigotry and to fight for equality.

Like the Minister for Housing I too would like to recognise my dear friend the member for Burwood's contribution to this legislation today. To share his struggles and his personal story is truly admirable, and I send my absolute heartfelt love to all of the Fowles family. They are such a great family. There is so much love in that family, and I really hope that this journey is one that you feel very supported on, not only by all your friends and family but by the whole community.

This legislation is another step towards destigmatising issues of homosexuality and gender fluidity in Victoria. By introducing this bill, the Andrews Labor government is fulfilling our commitment to govern for all Victorians and to ensure equality for all Victorians. I believe that this legislation and others will reduce the suicides, family violence, depression, anxiety, relationship breakdowns and social isolation felt by many members of the LGBTIQ+ community by us showing through leadership that all Victorians deserve to be respected and valued for who they are. I wholeheartedly believe that everyone should be respected and accepted for who they are, be able to be true to themselves and be supported in how they identify.

The notion that someone can be or needs to be cured or fixed from being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer is wrong. I am blessed to have many friends who are LGBTIQ+. I have a dear aunt who is

LGBTIQ+. I have taught many students who are LGBTIQ+, and I have worked with many people who are LGBTIQ+. Both our daughters have been baptised in the Catholic Church, and both of their godfathers are gay. Stephen Dawson and David Imber are both wonderful men whom my husband, Mike, and I both admire. Being LGBTIQ+ is not a disease that needs to be cured, and people who are LGBTIQ+ are not broken and do not need to be fixed. I am supporting this legislation because by banning suppression we will protect people from harm and put an end to extreme practices that can be damaging, dangerous and dehumanising.

I thank the Attorney-General and the Minister for Equality for the work that has gone into this bill and welcome the opportunity for us to have this discussion. They are true champions of equality in this government and in the state alongside our Premier. It said so much when the Premier came into the chamber earlier today to talk about this issue that he says is so significant for our state, holding a mirror up to who we want to be and who we are and coming in and talking about his values and sharing them with us. That was very, very great to see. We are continuing to put laws in place that will protect vulnerable Victorians and to ensure everyone who lives in our great state can feel safe and supported in our community. And unlike the opposition, we are united on this issue. We do not need to delay the vote. For the Andrews Labor government, equality is not negotiable.

I have listened very hard to a lot of the contributions today from members of the Liberal Party, and I would particularly like to single out the member for Gippsland South for his contribution to this debate. Thank you for sharing Patrick's story and for your empathy and compassion. I was very moved by your contribution. It has also been great to hear from the member for Tarneit, who made a great contribution as well, as did the member for Carrum, and thank you to the member for Yan Yean for sharing her story about her son Blake coming out and how he has been loved and supported through his journey as well.

So there is no doubt that the Andrews Labor government is governing for all Victorians, and this can be seen in our strong support for the LGBTIQ+ community. We created the first equality portfolio, the first Minister for Equality, with a record resourcing of \$61 million. We know that equality is not negotiable, and we are living our politics. We are living our values. We appointed the first-ever gender and sexuality commissioner. We created a task force to advise the government on LGBTIQ+ issues. We have rolled out the first-ever LGBTIQ+ community grants program, supporting organisations right across Victoria to do important work. The Premier delivered a historic state apology to those convicted under prejudiced laws against homosexual acts. We now have adoption equality in Victoria. We are expanding our health system so that trans and gender-diverse Victorians and their families can get the timely support they need, and we certainly heard about this from the member for Burwood. We have passed legislation that allows transgender Victorians to change their birth certificates to reflect who they truly are. And we are investing in our next generation through the first-ever LGBTIQ+ leadership programs. All of this stuff matters. It matters because it says to people, 'We trust you, we value you, we love you and you are important Victorians'.

I would sincerely like to thank the people of Wendouree who have contacted me to express their views on this legislation, those for and against the bill. I genuinely welcome hearing from constituents on issues and encourage all constituents to engage with me about their viewpoints. I have received correspondence from supporters and opponents of this legislation and have taken the time to consider their arguments, their stories, their concerns and their opinion.

I note that our government has consulted widely on this legislation over many years. The Attorney-General and the Minister for Equality have worked closely with survivors, LGBTIQ organisations and religious organisations on the legislation to make sure that it is effective in stamping out offensive and repugnant change and suppression practices once and for all. I particularly want to thank the survivors who have shared their stories and their trauma to inform us in developing this legislation. Our government has considered the feedback and has now developed legislation that will ban these practices for good.

So what does this bill do? This bill will denounce and make change or suppression practices a crime by targeting anyone engaged in change or suppression practices which cause injury or serious injury. It will make it a crime to advertise change or suppression practices, and it will be illegal to remove someone from Victoria for the purpose of subjecting them to change or suppression practices which cause injury elsewhere, whether it is interstate or international. This bill will also establish a civil response scheme within the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to promote understanding and compliance and resolve allegations that fall short of the criminal standard through education.

I also support this bill because it is an issue of human rights. Under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 every person in Victoria has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination; they are equal before the law, they are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and they have the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This includes freedom from discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity. So this bill amends the Equal Opportunity Act to update definitions of 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' in line with the current usage and add sex characteristics as a protected attribute from discrimination to protect intersex Victorians.

So whilst there has been a lot of scaremongering on this, this bill is not going to ban or affect prayer or religious teachings in schools, homes or religious institutions unless that activity is directed at specific individuals with the intention of changing or suppressing someone's sexuality. I genuinely support this bill, and I commend it to the house.

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:20): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I want to start by saying directly to my community that I will stand up for your equality, even when it is difficult. When you strip away this bill to its core purpose, that is what this bill is about—extending the principle of equality. Victoria expects equality of all our people, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender-diverse, intersex, queer, asexual and questioning. This bill mandates that equality in law again. That is important because we must never forget that the LGBTIQ community has suffered historical discrimination, discrimination at law and daily discrimination through social norms. That discrimination ensured not only lesser rights but lesser treatment through shunning and through shaming. Sadly, discrimination based on sexuality is still a real part of the lives of the LGBTI community. This bill in principle seeks to address that. Put simply, the bill will make it unlawful to terrorise a person because of their sexuality. This bill will make it clear that our community does not condone using fear to repress a person's true self.

There should be no debate on whether a person should be judged based on who they love—no debate. I did not enter this place to oppose those principles in this bill. And frankly my community should not forgive me if I opposed those principles. In truth, these principles are at the core of what my party, the Liberal Party, stands for: deference to the individual over the collective and an unwavering commitment to an individual's rights and freedoms. It is because of those principles that I am on my feet today—because I want my community to know that I have an unwavering commitment to them and to their equality, regardless of their defining characteristics, be it gender, race, religion or sexuality.

There are some who are concerned that the Labor Party has politicised the bill by including other subject matter and that the bill is poorly drafted. Those two assessments are right. But when considering the bill in totality, we must weigh up whether those issues outweigh the principle and purpose. My community is contemporary, and it is modern. My community would expect the opposition to set out our concerns about the bill, which we have done, but my community would also expect me to recognise that the principle of equality outweighs those concerns and to ensure that the group of people in our community who suffer discrimination daily are provided protections at law.

I say to the religious community, as a person who has faith, I have profound respect for your place in our society. We in this chamber have all seen the transformative good and comfort that the faith community provides both through public works and programs and pastorally in private. I will always be a voice for the good work of our faith community and stand with you as you perform your good

deeds. At its core religion is about love—a love for your God, however you describe that God, and God’s love for all things, a love that does not discriminate. God’s love, like our love for our neighbour, is not conditional. My God would not tolerate his name being used to repress a person’s true self, nor should this Parliament.

You cannot pray gay away. Every individual must be supported in being who they are without question and without reservation. And though it has been argued that the law should accept the freedom to be a bigot, the law must never allow the freedom to discriminate or the freedom to coerce. Again, I say to my community, I stand here today for your equality, and I always will.

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (15:25): Can I first say that it is a pleasure to be speaking on this bill and to hear some of the best of this chamber to finish the parliamentary year. I congratulate the member for Brighton for his contribution just then and other members of the opposition who have made significant contributions this afternoon that have been profound and very moving. I am somewhat reluctant to go over the notes that I prepared earlier because we have had so many fine contributions in this place this afternoon. I want to reference some of those before I get to some points that I want to make briefly. I might make a truncated contribution to this bill.

I do want to reference the member for Cranbourne and her contribution and her deep sense of faith but her deep sense of social justice and the way in which that intersects with her faith and that has informed her faith over many years. I stood with the member for Cranbourne in the rain during the marriage equality debates with a number of other people from the eastern suburbs for weeks on end to campaign for marriage equality laws a number of years ago now. It was a delight to join with her on that occasion, and her values remain true to this day. I would also like to congratulate the member for Burwood for his deeply personal contribution to this debate. It is interesting what you learn about people when they make personal contributions in this chamber and the struggles and the way in which he and his family have managed those within the context of family. He has noted that nothing could be more important in supporting those around us, young people in particular, to demonstrate love to those people and to make it really plain to them that they are accepted for who they are. It was also a pleasure to hear the Premier in this chamber this afternoon deliver an eloquent and powerful speech on this issue and the importance of equality to this government and how it is the centrepiece to the work that we do. This is not an addendum for this Labor government; it serves a core function of who we are, what we believe and what we want to see for our progressive Victorian state. Can I congratulate also the member for Wendouree for her recent contribution as well.

I do not want to go into too much of the technical detail of the bill, but I did just want to talk about the faith-based community. I profess a faith myself. I am the son of two ministers. My mother has a doctorate in theology; my sister is a theologian, human rights lawyer and social worker; and my father is a minister and theologian. I have grown up in the church and I have been in and around the faith-based community and profess a faith myself. It is interesting that being in this role I have to a certain degree rediscovered a sense of faith which I did not expect to do, but there is something about the nature of politics that might make you do that. But I profess a faith, and the lessons that I have learned and the lessons that I take from that faith are those of love, acceptance, compassion, understanding and community—and in many respects that is what we are talking about here. I am interested that the title of the bill here is Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I think of faith in the context of love, solidarity and liberation. We should always seek to liberate people from those pains that they feel and those shackles that we as a community, that we as a society often impose upon people, often unfairly.

The damage that is done particularly to young people from the LGBTIQ community is really significant, and I have seen it firsthand. I have been to church camps as a 15- and 16-year-old, a 14-year-old. I shuffled off for a few days of Christian fellowship and sat within the tutelage of ministers and pastors who preached a particular brand of faith that alienates people, that makes people confused, that makes people feel belittled and that can cause—and causes—tremendous mental health and psychological stress to people. I have seen people in my own life, in my own journey, who have

grappled with this so significantly that it has taken them a decade or longer to get over that early imposition of a particular church-based teaching that they have been exposed to. So I want to send my solidarity to those people. There are countless people that I know who have been affected. There are countless people that have been spoken about in the context of this contribution—the member for Mildura had a wonderful contribution as well—who have been permanently scarred and damaged by this conversion therapy process.

But I do not want to focus so much on just the negative, because I know that there are some brilliant churches in my community that open their doors and accept people with love and acceptance, and they understand that people have different journeys in life and that their own identity and their own sexuality is for them to determine and decide. So I want to thank those church communities in my electorate who are very open and welcoming and supporting. They provide a place of community for people to find acceptance and belonging.

I did say I was going to truncate my comments a little bit, but I am going on. I often think of a passage of Scripture which is at the end of Matthew—I am reluctant to be too religious at this point, but it is a particular issue for the church community and they should be provided a sense of autonomy and freedom to practise their faith in a way which they feel is appropriate and to preach their universal truths—and for those of you who are not religious, you might not know it. But there is a passage where a figure is asked, ‘When I was sick, I was in prison, I was hungry and I was in need of comfort did you come and visit me? What did you do?’. And the response was, ‘When did we see you in these things? Lord, when did we see you in these situations?’. And the response from the historical figure of Jesus is, ‘Whenever you saw anyone in those positions, that was me; you saw me in that’. That is a very confounding and confusing, theologically, passage of Scripture. But if we extend that, we can extend that to the LGBTIQ community: ‘We saw you excluded; we saw you forgotten. We saw you in situations of tremendous hardship’ and, ‘You did it to them; you are doing it to me as well’. So I want to end on that and say that it was a pleasure to speak on this bill.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (15:35): It really has been an extraordinary day, listening to all the contributions. Of course I am very pleased to rise to speak as well in support of the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, but I would like to echo the opening lines of the member for Ringwood, that really I think we have seen some of the best of Parliament today. Certainly I was, along with many of us, very, very moved by the member for Gippsland South’s contribution; you could hear and see his own awakening and awareness, and it was quite moving to see. Also the member from Brighton strongly put forward his belief in equality. So it has been a fantastic day in this Parliament to see us all so united for equality. Of course from the contributions from my own side—again I echo the words of the member for Ringwood—I have learned a little bit more about all of my colleagues today in listening to this debate. Certainly, along with others, the member for Burwood gave an incredibly personal and moving account. I think all of us in this house have great love and affection for him and his family and that story.

It was interesting to hear the Minister for Housing talk about what a long journey it had been for him in terms of government to get to this point in equality. I know for myself that that is very, very true. In my opening speech, when I first started in Parliament, I talked about the years in the 1980s when I worked for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. I was a 25-year-old and working on their media. It was interesting at the time—and I am a straight woman—because people would say, ‘Why are you so committed to this cause, to the Mardi Gras cause?’. It was just so incredibly simple: it was the absolute right to love whoever you choose to love. To me it was just something that was absolutely worth fighting for.

Interestingly my story and relationship actually goes back much, much further. I do have permission to talk about this. When I was just 11 years old I moved to Castlemaine in Victoria, and I made an instant friend, Michael. I am delighted to say that now, some 40 or 50 years later, Michael and I are still bosom buddies. He lives around the corner from me and we see each other daily, virtually. So he is quite literally my best friend. This is not one of those, ‘I have a friend who is gay’; he is quite literally

my oldest and dearest friend. We grew up in the 1970s in Castlemaine. Of course Castlemaine today is a very different place to what it was in the 70s. At that stage it really was a small rural country town. Michael and I literally spent our weekends running from people who wanted to beat him up. I will use parliamentary privilege. There was a particular man called Michael Gwynne who used to spend his weekends trying to find Michael just to beat him up because he thought he was gay. At that stage Michael had not come out. We were very close, and we spent our days reading *Vogue* magazines and talking about how we were going to travel the world and ride through Paris in a sports car. I got to 19 or so and I did just that. I packed my bags and went off to Europe, and yes, I did do the Marianne Faithfull and drive through Paris in a sports car. Michael did not.

When I was in my mid-20s I used to think about it. I thought, ‘Why didn’t he do all of the things that we dreamed about doing?’, and I came to understand it. I hate this word ‘journey’, but we all have different journeys in our lives, and Michael’s journey was completely around his sexuality. He had been so traumatised by those years in Castlemaine that for him it was about a journey of accepting himself. I am really pleased to say that Michael met Greg, the gorgeous Greg, and they have been together for about 35 years now. That was Michael’s journey—to accept himself. He is completely estranged from his family. He stopped speaking to his father when he heard his father training his nephew to say the word ‘faggot’. That was the point that Michael walked out and never went back.

But the kind of brutalising experience that he went through is akin to what people are put through through conversion therapy. To be told by anyone that who you are at your very core is wrong or bad is just obscene. We need all of us to be able to love ourselves. It is a hard enough battle, I think, that we all go through to learn to love ourselves, and if you are faced with a community that condemns who you are at your very soul it is an incredibly difficult road to travel.

This bill for me is very important. As other people have said, what it does beyond the technical side of the bill is send that message loud and clear to everybody out there. I have got two teenage boys, and thankfully I am that household all of the friends come home to. I have listened to a lot of them talk about their sexuality and have watched them grow and watched them think about who they are. It is a beautiful, beautiful thing to see them blossom and become themselves. That anyone could be denied that is abhorrent.

Like others in the house I have received quite a bit of correspondence around this bill. Look, what I would say to people, a lot of whom have come from the faith-based organisations, is not to be fearful of this bill. I notice in the reasoned amendment from the other side that they discuss that you should be able to seek assistance. But it is very, very clear in this bill that you have to intend to change. There is not an issue with talking to someone about your faith’s position on sexuality; it is the intention to try and change someone. I think all of us in this house today have talked about how important it is that someone should not feel the need to change you. The member for Brighton talked about the importance for him of individualism, and that stands at the centre of that. What I would say very respectfully to people of faith is please have a look at this bill. Look at this bill closely. In no way is it intended to restrict your rights. It is restricting an intention to try and change someone, an intention in my opinion to belittle them, to break down their very spirit and their very core.

So I would, as I said, ask people of faith to look closely at the bill and understand what we are trying to do here. As quite a few on my side have said, this government has worked long and hard in the space of equality, and that makes me incredibly proud. On one of the Mardi Gras days I did deliver my inaugural speech. I think it was actually the Mardi Gras days that politicised me. That is the first time that I thought, ‘I’m going to get out there and I’m going to fight for something’. Really I am here today because of that, and I could not be prouder to be part of a government like this that has made such a deep commitment to equality. As the member for Wendouree said, to have the Premier in here to speak on this bill just shows the depth of commitment—and of course to have the Minister for Housing talk about the many, many years that he and Mr Hulls worked on policies to try and create an equal and fair society for us all. It is absolutely at the core of all of our Labor values—that sense of fairness and equality—and this bill is another step in that progression.

But in these last few minutes I guess what I would like to say to anybody out there is know that this government has your back; know that we support you, we see you and we believe in you. You are part of our community. The LGBTIQ community in Ballarat is incredibly strong, and I love them to bits. Reach out to people and never, ever, ever feel you need to change. We support you, and this bill supports you. No-one can ever make you change what you feel deep in your heart, and that is around who you love, who you want to spend your life with. That is your choice, nobody else's. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (15:45): I rise today to contribute to the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I want to thank the Attorney-General and her office for once again bringing legislation into this house that continues to make Victoria a more fair and equitable state for all citizens. During my short time as the member for Melton I have been truly touched by the many individuals, families and organisations that have sought me out to discuss with me their concerns around their experiences of LGBTIQ or supporting their loved ones. It still seems astonishing to me that so many people reach out to me, a stranger in their lives, to raise with me their experiences and concerns to seek assistance. In 2020 we should not have to give one second of a thought about anyone's identity or sexuality. People are who they are; it should not need justification or explanation. The need of so many of the individuals who reach out to me is an unfortunate testament that the LGBTIQ community still experiences unnecessary hurt and pain. All too frequently that hurt and pain comes from those who should be caring for and loving them.

Young people in particular are at risk of severe mental and physical harm as they develop through their formative years. It is a tragedy that often those who are closest to them are those causing that harm. It may be through good intentions; however, the pain and damage that can be caused is long term. We know all too well that the LGBTIQ community suffer higher levels of mental health concerns. The National LGBTI Health Alliance reports that LGBTIQ young people are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. Transgender people are 11 times more likely to attempt suicide. It is a tragedy. Almost 50 per cent of trans and gender diverse youth have attempted suicide.

Also, a study in the US indicates that suicide attempts for LGBTIQ individuals are higher again if they are members of a faith community. In particular, some faith practices have felt the need to fix something that is not broken. The risk to the LGBTIQ community in particular is high. A young person in their formative years often has no choice in where they live and how their family spends their time or what faith community they belong to. Sadly, to reject a faith community or their teachings might come with consequences, financially, physically and mentally. Sometimes an individual might not want to be involved with a faith community. Sometimes they desperately do. A basic human instinct is to be wanted and accepted, to find a place to belong. Faith communities can be a social and cultural connection for people just as much as a belief system.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge many faith communities and groups that have reached out to me in support of this bill. There are many welcoming and accepting faith communities ministering in an accepting and compassionate way. I would like to acknowledge and thank the 10 multifaith, multicultural LGBTIQ individuals who wrote to me in support of this bill, and I am sure everyone in this house received their letter. I would like to read to you, with their permission, some extracts from their letter. I think it is important to do so:

Many of our own have suffered in silence, unable to speak for fear of bringing shame to their families and communities, and still live with the life-long trauma and dislocation caused by people who believe them to be sick, diseased and in need of 'fixing', 'curing' or 'changing'.

...

We have heard and documented the accounts of people who have been taken to doctors and religious leaders to be 'cured'. Parents who have pulled their children out of school and taken them to places of worship, or even overseas, in search of change.

Religious leaders of different faiths that have told us that homosexuality is a 'disease' needing a 'cure' and that it is not indigenous to our communities and cultures. They have told us that they would refer people to

‘appropriate’ medical organisations to deal with their ‘problem’, and that they have had repeated contact with people whose ‘desires’ they have tried to change or suppress.

Community and welfare workers have reported to us families that have attempted to ‘fix’ such ‘problems’ within their families. And we’ve heard community leaders espouse violence, understood as the controlling of someone’s life, as a ‘way for correction’.

And it goes on:

But we have also heard accounts of people who have been walked into mosques after coming out to Sheikhs and Christian leaders who have opened their church doors to gays and lesbians, despite the personal repercussions to themselves.

It is beyond time for this senseless damage to people to stop. We need laws that build understanding through processes that bring people and communities together. This Bill overwhelmingly does that, criminalising the most egregious forms of conversion practices that cause injury while providing pathways for voluntary facilitation and investigations when conduct is serious or systematic.

This Bill provides an important foundation towards building understanding for LGBTIQ+ people from multicultural backgrounds with others within their communities, and sends an important message in protecting people from harm. It affirms that all people should be free to belong as members of their faith and multicultural communities, and as Victorians.

I also received a letter from Switchboard—Switchboard Victoria is an LGBTIQ community-controlled organisation that has been supporting the mental health of Victorians since 1991—and I dare say every other member received their letter. CEO Joe Ball wrote:

Every day in our services at Switchboard we talk to LGBTIQ+ Victorians who are struggling, regularly we hear about the effects when an individual is rejected by their family, community, or faith. We know that supportive families and communities will drive down the suicide and family violence rates for LGBTIQ+ individuals. Something that I know you are committed to addressing.

...

At Switchboard we know that many LGBTIQ+ individuals are practicing people of faith, and every day we talk to people in our services who want to find affirming churches and places of worship. We are pleased to say that every year we are hearing about more and more religious denominations, faiths and places of worship that have become safe and inclusive places for the LGBTIQ+ community. Conversion practices are only supported by a tiny, but vociferous, fraction of religious people in Victoria and by no LGBTIQ+ organisations or leaders.

I would like to thank all those who wrote in support of this bill. Victoria is an accepting and progressive state. This bill continues to send the message to everyone that there is nothing broken about LGBTIQ individuals that needs to be fixed. Practices that place Victorians in danger, trying to convert or suppress their fundamental nature, are not acceptable and need to cease.

I have of course received much correspondence from those against this bill. I do not wish to dwell too much on this, but I would like to make the following points: much of their correspondence has only confirmed to me the need for this bill. Many of the writers expressed to me that they should be permitted to manage these issues in their communities. I say to these writers: we are their community too. To any person struggling or in the LGBTIQ community, we are your community too. You are loved and we accept you. Victoria has no place for these practices and no place for discrimination.

This bill recognises that change or suppression practices are false and deceptive and are seriously harmful acts. This bill quite rightly aims to eliminate change or suppression practices in Victoria. The bill aims to clearly communicate that change or suppression practices are not tolerated or supported by the Victorian community in any form. Change or suppression practices do not work. It does not include supportive medical and psychological treatment that is in line with professional standards. It has no basis in medical or psychological principles. It is counterproductive, starting from a false start that there is something that is broken that needs to be fixed. There is nothing broken about someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. All that these practices do is lead to broken individuals, harmed by the communities and practices that claim to want to help them.

A minister of religion in my constituency mentioned to me that we are all made in the image of God; to seek to convert another's identity is to seek to suppress God in the other. I understand that in the consultation on this bill many survivors of harmful conversion practices contributed to this bill. I would like to thank them and their work to ensure that these harmful practices are consigned to history. I also would like to thank the many organisations that support LGBTIQ people and congratulate the many faith communities that have been inclusive and supportive of all Victorians. I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (15:54): I too rise to speak on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I would also like to start my contribution by acknowledging all of the members who have preceded my contribution today, from both sides. I think, as the member for Ringwood pointed out, it has probably shown one of the best days of the Parliament in my two years here, particularly with the personal stories that have been shared by members from both sides of the house.

As has been referred to previously, this bill in effect bans practices that seek to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. And it is sometimes and has previously been called 'conversion therapy', but such a description affords the practice far too much credibility. The conduct must be directed at an individual and directed on the basis of the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity, and a person engaging in the attempt must intend to change or suppress or induce that person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity. And in so doing the bill affirms that Victorians who are same-sex attracted or gender diverse have never been broken and do not need to be fixed.

The bill sets up a division within the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to support survivors and inform the public about the ban, and the commission will be empowered to undertake investigations where there is evidence that systemic conversion practices are taking place. This is an important function, no matter who is carrying out the practice, because any attempt to move these destructive practices underground must be addressed. The conduct that has been reported is deplorable, and the penalties for offending are significant for that reason.

As has been referenced by many members who have gone before me today, the presentation of this bill to Parliament has generated significant correspondence from the Victorian community, including those in my local electorate. I want to thank those who have taken the time to write to me personally, including those who do not support the bill, but I am particularly grateful to those who have reached out with their own personal experiences of suppression practices and know the harm that they cause and have voiced their support for the bill. The stories of those voices, in my view, significantly outweigh the concerns that this bill is somehow an affront to freedom of religion or freedom of speech. The stories that they share are of horror and tragedy; there is no other way to describe them. The practices have destroyed lives, changed lives for the worse and at times taken lives. Each and every one of these people deserved a chance to lead a successful, productive and meaningful life. In some cases they were cruelly robbed of that chance, in some cases by the people who are now the loudest voices against change.

I wanted to focus a bit on the element of freedom of speech that has attracted some of the attention. The protection of others from harm is widely accepted, and should be accepted, as a limitation of this right. There is no right to rob a person of their dignity by telling them that a part of who they are needs fixing when it was never broken. Those who purport to be able to fix same-sex attracted or gender-diverse people should not hide behind this important right to get away with conduct that, by any measure, destroys and sometimes ends life.

Obviously a very large focus of this bill and the correspondence relating to this bill is in relation to religious freedoms and what can and cannot occur both during prayer and at faith-based schools, and it should be made clear, as was made clear in the second-reading speech, that people of faith or people of no faith at all can continue to express their views on policy matters relating to same-sex attracted or

gender-diverse individuals. Whether they do so in a chapel, a church or a synagogue or on a street corner or in their private home is immaterial.

As I said at the outset, it is very specific in terms of what would constitute contravention of the bill. It is directing the practice for the purpose of changing or suppressing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. The bill specifically rules out what is not considered a suppression practice. This is about where you provide a supporting environment that provides acceptance, support or understanding of a person or that facilitates a person's coping skills, social support or identity exploration and development. This can be in circumstances where you are seeking pastoral care, even if the religious leader does not hold the same views but is still providing an accepting environment where that person can come to seek solace or guidance but is not specifically being directed to take a particular position or to adopt certain practices that we know will be harmful to that individual. When I think about prayer—and in my own case and my own religion—it is a deeply personal matter. It is a personal matter between the individual, particularly in monotheistic religions such as Judaism, and God. It is not between the individual and their spiritual leader; it is with the individual. It is not for that spiritual leader to be directing that individual to take on practices and direct practices that go to the harm of the individual who is seeking guidance or counselling.

I am also troubled by some of the claims that talk about the prevention of religious schools from teaching their faith. Faith-based schools play a special and important role in our community, and they will continue to do so. The teaching of religious history and the understanding and contemporary adoption of these religious precepts continue under this bill. They can continue to teach the beliefs of that faith and its contemporary adoption of present-day public policy matters. Parents who make the choice to send their kids to a faith-based school make that choice for a variety of reasons, and those who do so to instil in their children an understanding of a particular faith should have absolutely nothing to fear from this bill. This bill is not about putting a government monitor or a government assessor in a religious classroom, but it will give the students at every school the dignity that they deserve to lead a happy life. It will ban referrals to practices that only cause grief and harm to individuals, and those protections should be afforded to students at every school. It is silent on who is administratively responsible for a school—whether it is a church school, a state school or other religious school—because dignity ought not to stop at the door of a particular school because it is run by a particular organisation.

This bill is a very important bill, and my thoughts particularly go out to all of those individuals who have suffered so much at the hands of treatments and practices that have been shown not only to not work but to be truly harmful to those individuals. It has left them with a lifetime legacy, and sometimes, as has been said, it has created the situation where individuals have self-harmed and worse. My thoughts in this bill and in this contribution are with all those individuals, and it is because these practices are so harmful and destructive that this is a critical bill for this current Parliament. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (16:05): I make many contributions in this Parliament, and those contributions are guided by my values, my understanding, my community's views and the commitments of the government that I am a proud member of. I stand up for gender equality, I stand up for the rights of children, I stand up for the rights of people living with a disability and I stand up for people of all cultural and faith backgrounds, but when it comes to standing up for myself, I still find it difficult. I do it with some trepidation—me, someone who has an incredibly loving and supportive family and partner, someone who is a member of Parliament and a member of the government whose head has stood up for the LGBTIQ community in a way that is unprecedented, in a way that makes me enormously proud of him as a friend, a colleague and a leader. With that context, I still feel, speaking on bills like this, a rising sense of trepidation. Hence I am referring to notes heavily in this contribution.

This is not only because bills like this hit at the very core of my humanity but because gay men like me and all Victorians who identify with the queer community have been told for years, for most of

our lives, that there is something wrong and disgusting about our humanity—not part of our humanity, our entire humanity. You cannot remove someone’s sexuality and say it is wrong and preserve the integrity of the rest of that person’s humanity. It is all one. It is all an integral whole. It is this very experience and the manifestation of that experience that we are trying to protect Victorians from. You do not need a change or suppression practice when there is no case for change. By the time you have reached that stage of developing or suggesting a change or suppression, you have already caused damage to a person’s sense of being, their sense of integrity and their sense of self-respect. As the member for Burwood said, sexuality or gender identity is difficult enough to deal with as a young person or at any age, without the added pressure of the chorus of bigoted voices with gratuitous advice about those identities.

As the member for Mildura said, this bill did not arrive in a vacuum to hurt churches. It comes to the floor of this Parliament on the back of the pain, the suffering and the death through suicide of too many LGBTIQ Victorians, as many people on this side of the chamber have talked about, and the other. The argument about whether this is an appropriate balance between faith and protecting LGBTIQ Victorians is a false dichotomy. My understanding of faith is that it is about love and acceptance, not seeking to change anyone. But to church leaders who may feel that this is a restriction on their rights to teach their faith, do not fear; it is not. People who want to muddy the waters about what this is about are spreading fear about religious freedoms. This is not about faith. This is about protecting people from what is and what should always have been a criminal offence—the causing of serious injury. Faith leaders and parents can still teach their parishioners and children their faith teachings. What they cannot do is force or compel someone to undergo counselling or some therapy to change their sexuality or gender identity, and this is because it does untold damage. It causes untold and irreparable harm. I have never felt accepted at my church, but I have a fundamental respect for the good people across churches and places of worship everywhere and I respect and will fight for their rights—but this is not their right. Most good church people know that this is not their right.

Our sense of ourselves as children and adolescents is so fragile. One word in a group conversation not even directed at us can have lasting impacts, let alone change and suppression strategies directed at individuals—horrendous outcomes. I was going to make a bit of a different contribution on this bill today. I was going to come in and talk passionately about why it is important, but I was not going to share personal reflections. I have shared personal reflections before in this chamber on adoption equality, on expunging historical criminal convictions for gay men and on some other important reforms, but it always takes it out of you. After hearing the Premier’s contribution, I felt encouraged to share personal reflections, because those stories are the ones that do shift people.

The Premier sharing his conversation with a nurse that he met during the pandemic and the nurse self-censoring the gender of their partner—I felt he was talking directly to me. I could not count the number of Monday morning tearoom conversations in workplaces over the last 25 years when my answer to this simple question, ‘Did you get up to much on the weekend?’, would be ‘No, it was a quiet one’ or just ‘I caught up with a couple of friends’—using the plural ‘friends’ rather than ‘friend’, lest that invite questions about who this friend is. I became an expert at avoiding gender pronouns or avoiding those conversations altogether. I was self-censoring all right. But not sharing your weekend with your colleagues or being nervous about writing ‘partner’ next to the question at the doctor’s reception about the relationship between you and the person you have just identified as your next of kin or grimacing a little when ordering or glancing around the restaurant when the waiter opens a bottle of champagne for just the two of you and you sneak in a kiss across the table knowing that there may be judgements made by other patrons or staff—all that is not all there is to this. It is only the start.

It is the smallest messages you send yourself about who you are and how that is not okay. That is where the real damage happens—the damage to your confidence, the damage to your spirit and the damage to the relationships with the people you love, with those you have lied to, and the lost opportunity for the things you could have achieved had you felt stronger, more confident and more worthy. That is what it is at stake here. It is big.

I am a very different person to what I was 20 years and even five years ago. Confidence to be yourself is a muscle you build up over time—all of us, not just LGBTI people, everybody—a muscle that is exercised every time you reaffirm it in conversations, every time you hear friends reaffirm it or the head of the government reaffirm it in such a powerful and compelling way. In fact every time the Premier and Catherine Andrews and the Minister for Equality and many of you in this chamber march in pride and lead the Pride March, every time my colleagues get up to speak with such sincerity and passion on bills just like this one, that makes my muscle stronger. Every time the brave Ms Shing in the other place stands up for our community, every time friends of mine ask about Yanni, my partner, and our plans in life together in the exact same way they would ask that question with any of their other friends, every time my family embraces Yanni, that muscle grows.

I want to thank the Attorney-General for her stewardship of this legislation. There need not be any more delays. The call on the other side of the chamber for us to park this bill while we do more consultation is a fig leaf for, ‘We believe in this in principle, but we are conflicted in practice’. Well, the Australian Labor Party, the Andrews government, is not conflicted. It believes in this in principle and in practice. There is no place for suppression or change practices in Victoria—no place at all. To all LGBTIQ people I say: you are loved, you are complete exactly as you are. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (16:12): I rise to speak to the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, and I want to thank the member for Oakleigh for a very powerful contribution—personal. It is brave to reveal yourself—to take that mask off that you kind of wear for years and years and years. You are loved. Thank you very much for your contribution. The contributions for this whole debate have been really from the heart—from experiences. Everyone has a story to tell and an experience to bring to the chamber from all sides.

Try to imagine this: from your earliest memories you thought somehow you were different. You looked the same as everyone else on the outside, but somehow, somewhere, you felt different. Not a square peg in a round hole kind of different, just different. Your family loved you. You were happy at school, but this nagging inner voice never stopped. You reached adolescence, and while everyone else was talking about their latest love, you came to understand and hear what that voice had always been murmuring: ‘You’re attracted to someone of the same gender’. You trusted your family, so you finally told them what the voice was saying, and they were shocked. They did not know anyone else like this, and they were ashamed. They quietly sought counsel from people they trusted, and they learned about treatment that could help you. ‘No drugs’, they told you, ‘just talking to someone would cure you’. They knew someone who knew someone who had been cured. You loved your family. So despite desperately not wanting to go, you went to what they called conversion therapy. During the therapy you were told that you were broken, sinful, shameful and that you should feel guilty—guilty for what you felt, guilty for how you thought and guilty for the shame that you brought on your family. You felt guilty that your family had spent thousands of dollars to fix you, and that voice was still murmuring—and it did not stop no matter what you tried. Maybe you resorted to drugs, attempting to numb the memory of the photos that they made you look at. Maybe you tried to block out the pain of electric shocks with alcohol. Almost certainly you contemplated suicide.

You never forgot the feeling of the ice baths you endured; you never went swimming in cold water again, even on those stinking hot summer days when you went on a rare family outing to the beach. By the end of therapy, undoubtedly, you were broken. Maybe you walked away and never saw your family again. Maybe, just maybe, you found happiness with a partner who understood. If this was your story then I hope with all my heart that you did find peace and love.

Almost incomprehensibly, there are people who still believe that this torture has a place in our society. Despite the overwhelming evidence of significant and long-term harm, as reported by the Victorian health complaints commissioner, there are those who would see it continue. It was the commissioner’s recommendation that this government consider legislation to prohibit these practices, and I too want

to thank the then-Minister for Health and current Attorney-General for referring the matter to the health complaints commissioner in 2018, and I want to thank Commissioner Cusack for her findings.

Let us be clear about the truth. These practices have no basis in medicine. Even if there was a basis in medicine that sexual orientation or gender identity could be changed, why would anyone advocate for it? What would give anybody the right to think that it should be even attempted? Under what circumstances would anybody think they had the right to interfere with another person's sexuality? When the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 is enacted it will send a very clear message to all Victorians that they can live their lives with pride and that their sexual orientation and gender identity is not broken and that it does not need to be fixed.

I also want to thank all of those who contributed to the consultation process in 2019. Over 600 online survey responses and 82 written submissions were received. There is one group of people I particularly want to thank as well. While 6.2 per cent of participants were those with a lived experience of this practice, 7.6 per cent identified as a friend of someone who had been subjected to this treatment. So I say thank you to those friends who saw the pain and wanted to have their voices heard. They saw the problem and wanted to be part of the solution.

Preparation for this legislation included face-to-face consultations with survivors, LGBTIQ+ support and advocacy organisations and religious groups. While views on the detail varied, a clear majority supported a ban on these practices. The bill's wording acknowledges the feedback made during the consultation process. These practices are not therapeutic, and while 'conversion' may appear inappropriate, it is a term that people generally understand and hence appears in the title.

This bill is multifaceted as well, with civil and criminal components. Legislation will see a civil response scheme established within the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to support survivors and address the harm they have endured. Importantly, this response will be shaped by the views of survivors. The civil response scheme will focus on education and facilitation, providing community education while ensuring that survivors receive support. Criminal offences will reflect the harm caused by these practices. Survivors who have been the victim of a crime will, if they wish to proceed, have this reported to Victoria Police and penalties will be scaled according to the level of injury.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission will also be empowered to investigate reports of change or suppression practices. The commission will have the power to compel witnesses and the provision of documents. It will be able to issue compliance notices, and in the event of failure to comply it will be able to enforce compliance through VCAT and the courts.

The bill will create four criminal offences. The first two prohibit the engagement in change or suppression practice causing injury or serious injury to another person. The third prohibits taking someone from Victoria to subject them to this practice. The fourth is advertising change or suppression practice.

The bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. It also better protects our LGBTIQ+ Victorians from discrimination by amending the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to update the definitions of 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' in line with current usage. The term 'sex characteristics' will be added to better protect intersex Victorians.

This bill also amends the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010. This bill makes it very clear that change or suppression practices may qualify as family violence or harassment and that those affected will have access to legislative protection.

There are some wonderful words as well in this bill: to recognise and—

... denounce ... harm ...

...

... affirm ... orientation or ... identity—

and acknowledge the practices—

... are deceptive and harmful ...

These are words that hopefully help heal those living amongst us who have crumbled and been so hurt and traumatised by these barbaric practices. They are words that hopefully replace the words that survivors have used—words like ‘secrets’, ‘perverted’, ‘unforgivable’, ‘damaged’, ‘sin’, ‘hate’ and ‘hypocrisy’.

I want to finish by saying thank you again to the brave, brave people who have suffered or known and loved a victim, who were committed to bringing change and committed to ensuring that these practices are now outlawed and will not happen again in Victoria, and who were committed to a future and a society which embraces all of us and loves us for who we are. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (16:21): First of all I want to thank the member for Oakleigh for his incredibly heartfelt contribution today. It is fine for those of us who are not within the LGBTIQ community to stand up and support that community, but it is the powerfulness of that lived experience, of that real, honest story and of that bravery in sharing that story that means so much to us in this place. For that we are grateful, and we are very grateful to have you as part of our caucus, because you are a good man. We do love him.

There are a lot of people in our lives that we love, and I want to talk about a young person in my community who I know who is finding their place in the world. This is a young person who, because of the community in which I live and the community which we have helped construct in this state over some time—and it is not just this particular government that has created an environment of open-mindedness and inclusion in Victoria—is able to grow up in a community that is supportive of their journey in unravelling their identity. Their school is supportive, the friends around this person are supportive and their parents are supportive. This person has got enough on their plate in working through their place in the world and who they are in the world without somebody else eyeballing them and saying, ‘You’re not quite right; we need to change you. Don’t go down that path that you need to go down. Let me detour you’. To a degree—and it may not be intended—the real message is: ‘I am judging you and finding that you are failing, and I need to help you be someone better’.

To be your true self is the best that you can be—there is nothing better, and there is no way to make that better, because your true self is you. In the words of previous speakers, if you are somebody who believes in God, then you are created in God’s image and therefore you are the perfect self that you are supposed to be. There is no religion that really has the right or really has the freedom to tell you that you are wrong, and I am very glad that this government is stepping up and saying, ‘No, that is wrong’. That hurt that is created by putting somebody in a room, by praying over them, by counselling them, by exorcising them and by telling them that their true self is not the person that they can be, that they have to in fact manufacture themselves to be accepted, that they have to pretend to be somebody else in order to be, in the view of another person, perfect, is wrong. It does need to stop, and we do need to have laws in place that protect very vulnerable people like this young person in my community, who is going to have a positive journey towards realising their true self and who is going to be supported in that journey of realising their true self.

I had an email—I am sure we have all had plenty of emails, but one of them I found interesting—and this person wrote to me saying, ‘But you are a Catholic. You were baptised a Catholic. You must vote against this bill’. In my view being a Catholic is being taught how to be compassionate, how to be kind and how to be inclusive. Being a Catholic is not about judging another person, and it is certainly not about telling somebody else that they are not the person that they should be and that they are wrong because they are true to the gender that they recognise they are or the sexuality that they have.

Religion has so many beautiful components to it. There are so many beautiful things that come from religion and from celebrating the goodness within ourselves. I do recognise that there are people who approach this issue with good intentions. There are people who are not coming from an aspect of

judgement but coming from an aspect of compassion in wanting to help somebody else find the true path to God. I understand that. This bill does not stop somebody from saying, 'These are the teachings of our particular region'. It is not saying, 'If you want to adhere to the views of this religion, this is the way we teach it, this is way we describe it and this is the way we construct this religion and the values that we have'. This bill does not stop you from doing that. What this bill stops you from doing is trying to deliberately change that other person and causing harm and hurt. This is the fundamental crux of this bill. It is about preventing harm and hurt—because that is what these practices do.

I recognise the sensitivity of the government and of the Attorney-General in changing the language and in recognising that 'conversion' is a word that has many meanings within religion. The fact is that the body of the text within this bill reflects that and reflects the true purpose of the Attorney-General, which is not to limit the freedom of religion but to prevent the harm from others in trying to force another individual to subscribe to a world view that is not inherently true to them and their true self. These people are not broken. They are not broken at all.

I also received an email from a local resident who had received harm in having had people try to convert them from being their true self, try to stop them from being a gay man and try to encourage them to live another way, in a way that was not true to their natural and true self. That person is, years later, still hurt by that experience, still wounded by that experience and desperate for this legislation to go through so that they know that another person does not have to be subjected to this kind of treatment, to this kind of discrimination, because that is exactly what that practice is. It is discrimination. It is stopping somebody from being who they are.

One of my early experiences as an elected member of this place was to have a conversation with a few other MPs with a religious figure. One of the astonishing things that this religious figure told us was that in the teachings within their world men and women have different roles in society, and the reason that men and women have different roles in their society, or one at least, was the fact that women's brains are smaller. Now, I will paraphrase the member for Kew here. I do not often agree with the member for Kew on many things, but I certainly agree with some of the things that he has said this week in his references to, 'You are what you are. I prayed 20 years ago to be 6 foot 4 and instead I'm 5 foot 10'.

Mr Wynne: He's not 5 foot 10. I'll give you the drum. If he is 5 foot 10, I'm Andrew Bogut.

Ms WARD: Well, you are quite tall.

So women were better suited not necessarily to have a role in this place but to be homemakers because our brains are smaller. So I suggest I could probably pray all I like to make my brain bigger—so that I could be acceptable to this person, this religious figure—and actually have the roles in life that I would like to have, but my brain is not going to be bigger. It is not going to be bigger at all. It is not going to change, no matter how hard I pray. No matter how much God might think it would be great for me to have a bigger brain, it is not going to happen. It is the same when it comes to your sexuality and your gender identity. No matter how hard you pray, it is not going to change. It may force you to create a false persona, it may force you to live a life that you are imagining or to live a life that is not the life that really belongs to you—and that may work for you, but really is not your true self, because you cannot change who you inherently are.

We know through the people that have spoken here. They have been very clear, and I include the member for Oakleigh in this. He is who he is, and we love him for it. We do not want him to change, we do not want anyone else to think that he can change—because he is a beautiful, compassionate man who has a beautiful partner. We look forward to the day when they will be married—and thankfully in this country they now can get married because we have also removed that discrimination nationally. This is another discrimination that we need to remove. In removing this discrimination we are not preventing religious freedom, we are not preventing freedom of assembly; we are preventing hurt. You do not have the right as a religious person—

Mr Wynne: That's right—do no harm.

Ms WARD: Exactly, member for Richmond, as a religious person your role is to do no harm. It is not to tell people that who they are is wrong, that their sexuality is wrong, that their gender is wrong and that with a person's help they can change. That is not your role. Your role is to be accepting and to be loving and to be kind, and—again I will quote the member for Richmond—to do no harm. That is at the heart of this bill, which I support wholeheartedly.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (16:31): I am really pleased to rise to speak on this bill. This is an important and significant bill for the people of Victoria but in particular for my community of Geelong as well. I want to pass my thanks on to the Attorney-General for all the work that she has done in bringing this to this place today.

I speak to many people in my community, particularly within the LGBTQI community at the Pride rallies and the different events that occur in my community, and I listen to their stories and I understand just how important and significant this bill is that we are addressing today. There have been many contributions on this bill from this side of the house that I want to acknowledge—such passion and commitment to our community overall has been reflected in this debate today. I particularly want to acknowledge the member for Oakleigh and his contribution. The strength that the member for Oakleigh shows in standing up for the community, not just for the LGBTQI community but the community overall, is really significant and I want to acknowledge that.

This bill really is about preventing harm in our community. Who has the right to harm anyone in our community? We have a responsibility as a government to protect everyone in our community. I have received many emails, like many others in this place, on this particular issue, and I am pleased to say that I have received many emails from within my electorate from people who support this bill. Obviously there is opposition to it from within religious organisations; I get that, but I also do not agree or understand how they would be prepared to inflict harm on people—although if we look at what has happened in terms of child sexual abuse and those sorts of things, well, maybe I will not go into that.

I think for my community this is a very welcome bill. This legislation means a lot to those people in my community. As I said, I do talk to a lot of LGBTQI people in my community and I listen to what they say to me, and clearly they want to see this legislation pass. I want to read an email from a constituent in my electorate that I received the other day. I will not use her name because I have not asked her permission, but this email is in support of the bill and explains why:

... I am a bisexual woman who has grown up in the church.

I am writing to show my support for the proposed Bill to ban LGBTQ+ conversion practices.

I have grown up hearing the rhetoric that queer people are disgusting, broken, unholy. This has been extremely distressing for me to experience. If my experience has been awful, think how much worse it has been for LGBTQ+ people who experience conversion practices.

Everyone deserves to live with dignity and respect. LGBTQ+ are whole, valid and loved just the way they are. No practice that attempts to change or suppress a person's gender identity or sexual orientation is acceptable.

With this Bill we can ensure that LGBTQ+ people feel safe and supported in Victoria.

While no law can fix the complex social problem on its own, this Bill is a great step towards healing for many survivors and to preventing the harm that these damaging and unscientific practices cause to our young people.

Thank you for your time.

That is from Monica in Geelong. That is just one of many emails that I have received as the member for Geelong, and I am really pleased to represent my community overall. As I said, I cannot comprehend anyone that would want to cause harm to anyone, and I am particularly proud of this government for this sort of social reform that really reflects our values as a Labor government. It is really important not only to us but to our community, to my constituents, that we are doing this work and we are doing it in such a way that is preventing these sorts of harmful practices.

In 2018 the health complaints commissioner was asked to lead an inquiry into change or suppression, also known as ‘conversion’, practices in Victoria. The commissioner found that not only were these practices occurring here in Victoria but they were also happening outside the medical field. The commissioner recommended that the government legislate to prohibit these practices in all their forms. Then in 2019 at that year’s Pride March the Premier announced that he would denounce and prohibit conversion practices in Victoria, known also in the past as so-called ‘conversion therapy’, which I will now refer to as change or suppression practices. I can tell you the LGBTQ community in my electorate were over the moon with the Premier’s announcement that day. They welcomed it very much and were singing and dancing that night and having a great time but were—

Mr Wynne: You’d be into that.

Ms COUZENS: Yes, I was into that, Minister. I joined them in that celebration, because I certainly supported that announcement.

It is important to address why this change of language has happened. Throughout the government’s consultation on the development of the bill we heard that the term ‘therapy’ was seen as too legitimising of these practices when in fact they have no basis in medicine whatsoever. Similarly, we heard from faith groups who were concerned that the term ‘conversion’ diminished a concept that holds great importance to some people of faith. ‘Change or suppression practices’ avoids both of these concerns and tackles what this issue is really about: attempts to make people alter or hide a fundamental part of who they actually are.

This bill recognises that these practices are based on a flawed ideology that people’s sexuality or gender identity can be fixed, and we know they cannot. There is no evidence that any person can have their sexuality or gender identity forcibly altered. Attempts to do so only cause harm, as we know, and sometimes lifelong harm or injury that survivors then must carry for the rest of their lives. These are the issues that I have heard consistently in my electorate from constituents who have had these experiences and have expressed their concern about what has gone on but also their support for this bill.

But here is the most fundamentally important part of the bill and this debate: nobody is broken. Because of their sexuality or their gender identity nobody needs to be fixed. Nobody should ever be made to feel like they need to change such a fundamental part of who they are. LGBTQ Victorians deserve to live in a state which affirms their lives and ensures that they can live life authentically as their true selves. We have heard the stories of what happens when this is not the case, when people are fed an ideology which makes them believe they are broken, and it needs to stop.

Survivors have welcomed this bill. They have called it ‘the most comprehensive response to conversion practices in the world’, ‘vastly better than any bill developed in Australia to date’ and ‘deeply grounded in research’. They have said:

The Victorian Government has put forward a Bill that could genuinely make a big difference to the lives of ... Victorians who are vulnerable to conversion practices and ideology.

We have listened to survivors. I want to acknowledge their experiences, their voices, their advocacy and their hard work over so many years, and of course I want to include Geelong in that as well.

And I want to make reference to Thorne Harbour Health, who also sent an email to me and, I am sure, to other members and who regularly come to Geelong to provide support to their community. What they said is:

By passing this legislation, Victoria has a chance to lead the way globally in protecting the human rights of our sexually and gender diverse communities from incredibly harmful practices based on false and misleading claims.

This bill is informed by the lived experience of survivors of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts and seeks to end these practices, which are harmful and grounded in unscientific claims. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (16:41): I am very proud to rise this afternoon on the very last sitting day of Parliament for 2020 to talk on this very important bill, the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020, a bill which had its genesis in the policy work of so many on this side of the house. It was an election commitment of the Andrews Labor government, one that the Premier was able to make with the Minister for Equality at the Midsumma Pride March back in 2017, I believe—a very important election commitment and an important piece of legislation that has required, as one would expect, a great deal of work, including stakeholder consultation, to bring it to the house in the form that we now have. As the member for Geelong has just noted, we are delivering a bill that is being widely lauded as the best of its class, if you like, across Australia. So I am very proud to do that.

As members in this place know, as the member for Macedon I am very proud to represent a very active and celebratory LGBTI community. Daylesford of course is well known to many not just for its natural beauty but as the host of the ChillOut Festival, Australia's largest regional celebration of LGBTIQ pride. I am delighted to be able to stand here and let you all know that as of 2021 ChillOut will move from being a three-day celebration over the Labour Day weekend to being a week-long celebration. This is going to be incredible. It will bring even more visitors to our community and, I have no doubt, more tree changers to our community, all of which I embrace and our community embraces.

In speaking on such bills, particularly on our equality agenda and the way in which we have worked so hard to ensure the dignity of LGBTIQ members in our community, I always take the opportunity to reflect on how things have changed for the better over the years that I have had the good fortune to be on this earth. I think about my life experiences as a young person growing up in regional Victoria and contrast those with those of young people today. I think particularly about those students—you know, friends, classmates—at Tallangatta High and Wodonga High who were seen as a little bit different, a little bit odd, a little bit unusual and how their lives were essentially hell, actually. There was no-one there to provide support for kids who were struggling with their sexuality or gender identity. It was simply pushed under the carpet, or worse still these young people were made to feel that they were broken, damaged and in some way in need of fixing. Of course this is where the change and suppression acts that we have heard so much about come into play. Whilst I do not have firsthand knowledge of it, I have no doubt that many of the young people that I grew up with were potentially victims of some of these practices.

Thank goodness life has changed a lot, and I am so proud of the fact that Kyneton High, Daylesford Secondary and Gisborne Secondary all have active pride groups. As a community we come together to Wear it Purple and to raise the rainbow flag. The Bendigo electorate voted 68.7 per cent in favour of marriage equality back in 2017. The point I wanted to make is that life has really changed for the better for LGBTIQ Victorians in regional Victoria. We have come a long way, but we have still got a way to go, and this bill is about delivering on some of the changes that are still required to ensure that lesbians, gays, bisexual Victorians, transgender Victorians, intersex Victorians and queer and questioning Victorians can live a life that is purposeful, happy and full of dignity and confidence.

I wanted to also take the opportunity, being one of the last speakers on the bill, to congratulate my colleagues on their contributions today. I have been able to listen to a number of them but not all of the contributions. Of course the member for Burwood told his own very deeply personal story, and it was so affecting to listen to. I congratulate him for that, and I note the minister at the table, the member for Richmond, also took the opportunity to acknowledge the member for Burwood in his speech. Indeed the member for Buninyong got me thinking, because she was talking about her friends growing up as a teenager in regional Victoria.

I want to put on the record for the benefit of people in my community in particular that, look, I understand that campaigns can develop around things. Misinformation, as we have seen during the COVID pandemic, can spread like wildfire. So for the benefit of people in my community who have written to me opposing the bill I want to take the opportunity to put some of the facts of the bill on the record. We need to look at what the definition of 'change or suppression practices' is. The ban is based on a definition that has three elements. First, the conduct must be directed at an individual. So that

ensures that conduct that is generally directed, such as sermons expressing a general statement of belief, are not captured. Second, the conduct must be directed on the basis of the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity. Third, the person engaging in an attempt must intend to change or suppress or induce that person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

As we have already noted in the debate, this is a bill about equality for all Victorians. The notion that you would seek to change or suppress someone on the basis of their gender identity or sexuality is the opposite of equality because it actually suggests that this person is somehow less equal; that they are, as we have said, broken and in need of fixing; that they are not whole; and indeed that they should change. I am glad to see that this house this afternoon has said that we do not agree with that, and I extend that to those on the other side. People got up here and said, 'This house, the Victorian Parliament, believes in equality for all Victorians'. So that is a very important moment, and I just want to acknowledge that it is all sides of the house who have said that today.

So I have talked about suppression practices. Any scenario must meet all three parts of that definition—not one or two but all three—so things like giving a sermon, teaching a religious studies class or even a faith leader counselling a person on what their faith teaches about sexuality would not be a change or suppression practice. The bill ensures that a balance is met between protecting religious freedom while also protecting people from harm and injury. The definition does not allow an adult to consent to change or suppression practices for a number of reasons. Firstly and most importantly, there is no medical evidence of change or suppression practices working. They are based on the idea that a person's sexual orientation or gender identity is wrong—that is, that an innate part of a person is fundamentally wrong. As I have said, this house has today rejected that notion. Survivors have told us that messages about the brokenness of their identity is ingrained from a young age, so this makes any notion of consent to these practices difficult to determine.

In the few seconds that I have left I do want to say again to the people that have written to me opposing this bill: you do not have anything to be afraid of. Let us celebrate Victorians in all their diversity. And in faith groups let us work to celebrate our individuality, our differences, and celebrate the faith that people hold, not try to attack them as a person or change them as a person. Just wrap around the people that share your faith and support and celebrate them. That would seem to me to be an appropriate and indeed Christian response, and I say that on the basis that that is the majority faith practised in my electorate. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (16:51): I want to make a contribution on this very important piece of legislation before the house today, the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. I am very pleased to be able to do that even though it is the last speech on the last day of our sitting year. I had a lot of notes that I wrote in relation to this bill and I have sat and listened in the chair and in my office to many of the contributions today, and I just do not think I could do them justice, because they were so emotional, so progressive, so heartwarming. I want to pay tribute to everyone actually who has contributed today both on this side of the house and on the other side of the house. I asked myself after listening to many of the contributions today: why do some feel there is a need, a desire, to change someone else? Why does being LGBTIQ compel some to want to change them? I do not follow any religion. My faith comes from my ethics, my morals and my own personal views around social justice and treating others with respect and that everyone should have the opportunity to lead their best lives. I have heard today about the conflation of the objectives of this bill with the supposed restriction on religious freedoms, which seems to me to be a distraction from the purpose and desired outcomes of this bill.

Like many members, I have received many emails from those who object to the bill based basically on those religious freedoms and from many of course who have supported the bill, and I have a wonderful, wonderful LGBTIQ community in Bendigo—in fact right across my electorate. There was a lot of misinformation in those emails, a lot of information I am not sure where it actually came from. It was so outside of what this bill does that I fail to understand how that information could have actually been given to those people because it was so wrong. What it did say to me, though, is there is still a

lot of prejudice out there in our community. I read many of those emails. I saw a lot of prejudice and an attempt at changing the narrative around why this bill is so important. I listened to the member for Oakleigh talk about his experiences and the discrimination that he has felt throughout his life, when he came out and how now that has changed so much for him because of the acceptance of the LGBTIQ community in this community.

There is no need to delay this important legislation. Further consultation will not alter the fact that banning these harmful practices must occur. In fact all it will do is cause further harm to those who are relying and depending on us as legislators to pass this necessary measure. If those who put forward amendments claim they support the banning of change and suppression practices, then I compel them to reconsider why there is a need to delay. I have heard many of them speak today on supporting the banning of change and suppression practices.

Some time ago the Premier said that here in Victoria equality is not negotiable, and that is something that all members on this side live and breathe every day. For our LGBTIQ communities across the state we are tasked with and committed to ensuring your equality before the law and across our society. This bill is another step to having a Victoria that denounces discrimination in all its forms. There are too many lived experiences and stories of LGBTI discrimination. I say: let us always work towards ending that. Let this bill pass this Parliament without delay. Let us put an end now and for always to this harmful, shameful and disgraceful practice of change conversion and let people be who they want to be and live their best lives.

I am going to talk now about a family member of mine. I will not mention their name, but they are a close family member who over the last couple of years has changed their gender. When this first happened there was some concern because there was a sense of shock, I suppose, and for none more so than this person's mother. But I think the mother of this person was more concerned about what the family would think than about the fact that the child was changing their gender. Fortunately there was enormous support—enormous support—within the family, and even one of my aunties, who is a devout Catholic, said, 'So what? That's okay. Let them be who they want to be'. I was so proud of my family and the members of my extended family for embracing that person and their need, their desire, their want to change and be who they want to be without any discrimination, without any sense of having to be sent off to have some kind of psychotherapy to change who they really wanted to be. That person is now living their best life.

I say to the LGBTI communities across Victoria: we support you, we respect you and we want you to know that this legislation is just another measure along the path to ensuring your equality within our broader community. There is nothing more important than making sure that those who find themselves on the edges of society are brought into our mainstream, embraced and treated with the respect that they deserve.

It has been a pleasure to speak on this bill, but in the 1 minute that I have left remaining I want to diverge a little bit from the bill. I want to pay my thanks to you, Speaker, for your great work this year in our chair. You have been an outstanding Speaker. I also want to say thank you to the wonderful clerks, to Bridget and her team, to the maintenance staff and of course to our Hansard team and everyone who makes this Parliament—

A member: Catering.

Ms EDWARDS: Catering, of course! How could I forget Tim and the team and the wonderful coffees they make us every single day multiple times? I think that it is incumbent on all of us to show our appreciation to everyone who makes this Parliament work. This has been an extremely challenging year for the staff here, but they have made it work and I think we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. We look forward to coming back in February to no screens and no masks.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Change or

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020. The minister has moved that the bill be read a second time. The member for Caulfield has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words that have been circulated. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion.

Therefore those supporting the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Caulfield should vote no.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the bill be now read a second time, government amendment 1 be agreed to and the bill be now read a third time.

House proceeded to divide on question.

The SPEAKER: As there are 55 votes for the aye and no votes for the no, the division cannot proceed. I ask the member for South Barwon if he wishes his dissent recorded.

Mr CHEESEMAM: I am wishing my vote to be recorded as in favour of the bill.

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendment as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 59, line 15, omit "preferences" and insert "references".

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: I advise the house the bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek clarification because the member for South Barwon clearly said 'No' and called for a division. So how is it that he has now voted yes? I am just wondering whether he has changed his mind in between. How has that vote been recorded?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Barwon has complied with the standing orders in terms of his obligations in the voting procedures.

Mr Cheeseman: On the point of order, Speaker, it is quite appropriate that any MP can request to have their vote recorded and that is what I did. Under standing order 162 that is what I sought to do.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 8 December.

Announcements

FELICITATIONS

The SPEAKER (17:14): Before calling the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, I just want to echo the comments and the fine sentiments of the Deputy Speaker earlier in thanking in particular all of the parliamentary staff for their fantastic efforts this year. It has been a very challenging year for parliamentary staff to ensure that we have been able to continue operating the Parliament and our committees and acquitting the important work that the Parliament does.

Also I think all members would agree our electorate office staff this year have done a fantastic job right across the Parliament in serving our communities. I have been exposed to the amazing amount of work that members do across the chamber in supporting their communities. Regardless of people's political views and where they sit in this place, this year has seen members of Parliament working harder than I have ever seen them work before and their officers have been put under great pressure as well. I want to acknowledge that work of all of the members as well as the staff. I know that members will continue to work during the weeks before we come back in February, but I do hope that members and their staff get time for some downtime, that people acknowledge that this year has taken a toll on people and that they do get a chance for a break, hopefully in Victoria, supporting our regional tourism operators. But if you could, make sure that your staff get a decent break to recuperate as well.

I want to thank in particular the parliamentary management, the Clerk and the clerks at the table here, Department of Parliamentary Services management and the President and his team in the upper house as well for the cooperation we have had this year in really trying circumstances.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (17:16): Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the leave of the chamber to allow the Manager of Opposition Business and me the opportunity to echo those statements as we normally do at the end of a sitting year. We use this time as an opportunity to reflect on the year that has gone before us and to offer our thanks and appreciation to a range of people who have worked very hard over the course of the year.

Speaker, the sentiments that you have just conveyed to the house capture very well the year that we have had. It has been undoubtedly very difficult. I do not think we could have thought at the end of 2019, even though there were fires starting to really ravage the countryside in south-eastern Australia at the end of 2019, that at the end of 2020 we would have had to battle not only fires but obviously the enormous challenge of a one-in-100-year pandemic. And then as we heard the Minister for Police and Emergency Services remind us today, we are going into another summer with both flood and fire risk. So as you rightly point out, the work is not yet over, but this is an appropriate opportunity to place on record—and I am really honoured to have the privileged opportunity to place on record—on behalf of the government and my great colleagues in the Labor caucus our appreciation and give, as we used to say back in the day, the Christmas felicitations on behalf of the government.

I would like to start with my tremendous Labor MP colleagues and the Labor caucus in both the Assembly and the upper house, but particularly here in the Assembly. As I said, it is a great privilege to have the position of Leader of the House and to have such a tremendous caucus to work with, to support, to laugh with, to sometimes cry with and to work through the challenges with. So thank you for the terrific support from my Labor caucus, and I also thank them for the tremendous work they do representing their local communities.

Can I give a particular shout-out to the whips. Now, I have had a couple of whips this year. The member for Thomastown, who served in that role for a number of years, did a terrific job and has since become a parliamentary secretary. I thank her for her support. More recently the member for South Barwon and the member for Mount Waverley have taken on the role of whip and deputy whip, and I think we have all seen how much gusto they have taken to those tasks, learning very much on the job the parliamentary procedure and the work that needs to be done. Can I also by extension on behalf the Labor caucus thank our collective staff, as you said, Speaker, in our electorate offices, in our ministerial offices and in the Premier's office, who work really hard serving our community. I would like to thank them.

I also in turn thank all members of this chamber for their work and their roles. I know we all worked very hard during the period of the pandemic, but can I particularly acknowledge that there was a huge amount of work that went on behind the scenes, as you know well, Speaker, particularly in those weeks in March in those what now seem to be very early days of the pandemic, where collectively we had to grapple with how we ensured that Parliament could continue to sit, sit safely and perform all those really important legislative and scrutiny functions that the Parliament is responsible for.

I do particularly want to acknowledge the work with the Manager of Opposition Business. It may be revealing too much information to share that we got to know each other's exercise routines and when was a good time of day to ring each other, and we knew that there would be some time that we would catch each other at the start of the day, sometimes very early in the day.

A member: He doesn't have one. What are you talking about?

Ms ALLAN: Oh, was he telling fibs? Then you have got to take that up with the member for Warrandyte. Having served in the role of Manager of Opposition Business I know how challenging that role is, so I do appreciate the work that the Manager of Opposition Business did in working with me and also the crossbench members of the Parliament and you, Speaker—the Presiding Officers—to ensure that we did, by and large, have a fully functioning Parliament. That is something that is a great credit to all of us and particularly, as you have acknowledged, the parliamentary staff.

To our clerks, who have guided us carefully and considerately through this period with strong advice—we did establish some precedents along the way, and there will be an opportunity in the new year for us to reflect on some of the new practices that we have adopted that we may want to continue, but that perhaps is a conversation for the new year. But thanks to you, Speaker, to the clerks and to all the Department of Parliamentary Services staff—the wonderful staff—Hansard, the attendants and the dining room staff. I should give a particular shout-out to the dining room and the kitchen staff who made that wonderful contribution to the Victorian community by cooking meals and donating those meals through the Salvation Army. I think that made all of us very, very proud to be members of this Parliament, regardless of political colour. It was a tremendous contribution. Thanks to our wonderful library staff—I am going to run the risk of leaving people out—and to the wonderful gardening team. I hope I have not left anyone out, and if I have, I apologise, because we are well supported in this role.

I do wish everyone a very happy and safe festive season. I hope we do get the chance to cherish that time around Christmas with the 29 other people we are allowed to have at our Christmas table, if you have a family that large. But I do hope that everyone takes the opportunity to have a wonderful festive season, to have a safe festive season and to also hold close those we love. There has been great loss this year. There have been many milestones that family members and loved ones have missed celebrating with each other. So hold those loved ones close. We spend a lot of time away from our beautiful families. We should cherish the time we have with them over these coming weeks and come back with renewed vigour and refreshed for 2021, which will be a fabulous year, implementing the wonderful budget of the Andrews Labor government along the way. It will be a great year, and it will be because of the hard work that all Victorians have done to get us to this point. We have to keep at it, and we look forward to keeping at it in 2021.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (17:22): The year 2020 has been a difficult year for everyone, with COVID-19 hitting our state with such force—many deaths, small businesses that will never open and many, many jobs that have been lost. Everyone says COVID-19 is a one-in-100-year event, but I do not think so. I do not think it is going to be another hundred years before we see the next pandemic. I think the next one is just decades away, not 100 years away. I am not even sure I am going to be in Parliament when the next pandemic hits. I am just not sure I am going to be here if it is in 30 or 40 years time. So with that can I thank the incredible effort by many people to make the Victorian Parliament functional during these difficult times.

To you, Speaker, and your adviser, Jason McDonald: we have not always agreed, but I am grateful for your guidance sometimes—and at times in good humour—so can I sincerely thank you for the work that you have done. To the Leader of the House, I hope next year is an easier year. Patience has been tested—my patience has been tested to within an inch of its life. And, yes, you are right, there were those long, very detailed conversations we had, but in the end we got there. In the end we actually got there. So thank you.

To the clerks—to Bridget, Robert, Paul and Vaughn—we thank you for your guidance; even if you have to go back a couple of hundred years to get that precedent, we thank you for doing that.

The attendants, always cheerful and helpful, we thank you. The catering staff—a really big thanks to Paul, Jacquie and their team and to the many, many cleaners that we have had to have during COVID. A big thanks to the maintenance guys, and I hope that we can get things back to normal and they can have their general knowledge tests in the afternoon. The IT guys, they are just so good, their skills are so good, and we thank them.

Hansard, thank you for making us sound so good when we read back our speeches. To the library, thank you so much. To security and the PSOs, thanks for doing a good job keeping us safe. To the gardeners—John, Rachel and the team—it is always great to have fantastic-looking gardens when we do our walks around. Thanks to the parliamentary committees and the hardworking staff—I will give a big shout-out to the Integrity and Oversight Committee team. I know the Department of Parliamentary Services do not get much of a thanks, but thanks to Peter Lochert and Matt Smith, who have done an incredible job in impossible times. Matt Smith and I would talk two or three times a week going through issues. They look after the staff and manage budgets, security, IT, and they do a fantastic job.

In conclusion, can I thank the leaders of the parties on our side of the house, the Liberal and National parties. To the Leader of the Opposition, a great leader, who has been outstanding taking the fight up to the government all year in really difficult circumstances, thank you. To the Leader of The Nationals—again, a great leader and a deep thinker with great parliamentary judgement—thank you. To the whips, a special big thanks to the member for Benambra, who was ably covered by the member for Narracan and the member for Gippsland South from the National Party. I really appreciate, guys, the work that you have done. To all the coalition MPs, to your electorate officers and to your families, can I wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

GEMBROOK ELECTORATE ROADS

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (17:26): (5357) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to come down to the Gembrook electorate to come for a drive around some of the most dangerous intersections we have because of the length of the grass. We have actually got to a stage now that the grass has been so neglected through some parts of the area that it is dangerous. We understand there has been some growth, and Cardinia council and Casey council have been doing what they can to maintain all of the council roads; however, on the state government roads the level of the grass, at intersections in particular, is becoming quite dangerous. I would really enjoy it if the minister could come down. We will go for a tour. I will take him for a coffee and bring a bit of Christmas spirit. We will go down and have a coffee at a few of our coffee shops. But I think it is really important that he sees the risk that he is putting people and drivers at on the roads.

BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (17:27): (5358) My adjournment request is to the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is an update on the state budget's investments in the electorate of Broadmeadows for what has been defined as a shadow pandemic—mental health. This is in response to the broken system, to the royal commission and to a whole host of different initiatives in this outstanding budget.

One of the initiatives is called HOPE—hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement—and Broadmeadows will help to provide this. It is part of a statewide rollout of services for mental health

so individuals can rebuild their lives. This investment is \$20 million, but it will become part of a whole series of other investments as the Victorian government begins to rebuild our mental health system. Part of that is for the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing—a new centre dedicated to bringing together the experts in our entire system, from researchers to academics and those who have experienced mental health issues firsthand. There is another \$16 million to help Victorians with new training positions, education and opportunities for employment and even further funding to connect all of this up into better positions for graduate nurses, postgraduate mental health nursing scholarships and better rotations of junior medical officers and psychiatrists as well.

This is an incredible collaboration, and I would like to connect this up to what we are trying to do in Broadmeadows through the comeback strategy to coordinate world-leading practice with major institutions, to harness technology and to drive grassroots benefits. We are trying to anchor this on a new virtual hospital delivering health care at home atop a redeveloped Broadmeadows Hospital for acute care and then to have a collaboration with the Kangan Institute to get all the training and everything done as well.

What we are all looking for I guess is also the vaccine. CSL in Broadmeadows is working on that as we speak to produce that. It is the hope that we have to overcome this virus that has been virulent and grown into a pandemic, to get us to where I think we all want to be for a whole new year and to defeat the virus through the vaccine.

I want to leave this year using the words of William Butler Yeats:

Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph.

And I think that is where we want to be for next year. I wish everybody a happy new year and a great time—and see you next year.

TUTOR LEARNING INITIATIVE FUNDING

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:30): (5359) You are going to have to read that to me again, Frank. I missed it the first time round.

My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek from the minister is for him to reverse the decision that he has taken with respect to funding for schools for extra tutors next year. I have been contacted by one school in my electorate—and I will not say which one it is because I have not had the opportunity to alert them to the fact that I would be doing this publicly as yet—and it had been told that it would receive \$125 000 in tutor funding for 2021, for which it was very grateful. However, it subsequently discovered that because that school's budget was in surplus it would in fact not be receiving that much. The effect of this decision is that it will lose over \$32 000 from its budget surplus for the year. Given the timing of the arrangements, this school had already planned to use that money for next year's budget in other ways.

Now, the minister did answer this to me in a question in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week, where he said some \$30 million of the \$250 million may come from surpluses, but at the time I must say I did not fully appreciate what that meant. I think this is very unfair. I think it sends a very bad signal to our schools, the ones particularly that have managed their budgets well, that they are then ultimately penalised and therefore their students are penalised by this decision. So I ask the minister to ensure that schools that have managed their budgets well for the advantage of their schools and their students are not penalised, and I ask him to do so as quickly as possible so the school is aware going into the next year.

Could I also, on indulgence, Speaker, wish you a merry Christmas. Thank you for all the work that you have done. And indeed I extend my thanks as well to all members of the Parliament staff, who have done a great job in difficult circumstances. And I wish everyone a happy Christmas and a merry new year.

The SPEAKER: Thank you.

COBURG CITY OVAL REDEVELOPMENT

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (17:32): (5360) I appreciate the opportunity to raise an adjournment matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Sport. The action I seek is that the minister accompany me on a visit to the Coburg City Oval to see how construction is progressing on the new facilities as part of their redevelopment. It has certainly been a challenging year for community sport and for sport from the grassroots through to the elite. Clubs like Coburg Lions work with community groups, with the grassroots through to the more elite aspects of their club, and in particular they were very pleased to be participating in the new 2021 VFL and east coast second-tier competition. But it has been a challenging year for the Coburg Lions.

One of the exciting things that has progressed during this time is the redevelopment of the Coburg City Oval. It has just been fantastic to drive by and see the diggers and the construction workers hard at work making sure that this vision for the Coburg City Oval—which will provide more and better facilities for all of their teams, from their juniors through to their women's team and of course their VFL team—comes to life. I know that the minister has been eager to get down to the site, and I request that in the new year she accompany me to see the progress of this redevelopment.

BRIGHTON DEVELOPMENT

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (17:33): (5361) My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the state Labor government to stop encouraging inappropriate development and to start protecting the amenity of our unique community. Our home is our castle, and our suburbs are our villages. We should have the right to a quiet street, yet in our leafy suburbs our once-quiet streets are construction sites. Before the sun rises, trucks run idle, waiting for construction to begin, and as the sun goes down after the day's work is done, neighbouring walls are higher than they were the day before. Apartment blocks are springing up in places they have never been before, and for the streets at the edges of the business activity centre residential homes are toppling like dominoes. My community has had enough.

I recently joined the residents of Adamson, Black, Halifax and Well streets at a community meeting in Brighton. In their streets, home after home has been demolished and replaced by misshapen concrete eyesores. In many cases in these streets, overdevelopment has led to a doubling or a tripling of the street's occupancy in a few short years. There are similar concerns around Bleazby Avenue and Boxshall, Male and Rooding streets. Livability should underpin our planning scheme. It does not. The driving force for Labor's approach to planning is densification. Densification is another word for crowding, and that crowding is coming at the expense of our amenity.

The reality of the current planning scheme is that when one apartment block is approved it is the sign of further development. It encourages further development. The planning scheme does not give weight to how fast an area is being developed or how full a street has become, nor does it give any regard to the adequacy of infrastructure. In the case of my community, Labor has actively shut off infrastructure investment yet has encouraged developers to target our streets. Another deep flaw in the planning scheme is that it provides little protection for heritage. We are seeing that in Service Street, Hampton, where developers are targeting a quiet, leafy street filled with heritage homes because the current planning overlay is inadequate and the minister has turned his back on the street.

Our community has had a gutful. We are sick and tired of this Labor government pouring people into our community, encouraging inappropriate development and starving us of our fair share of infrastructure funding. Enough is enough.

BONBEACH PRE-SCHOOL

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (17:36): (5362) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Early Childhood. I would be delighted if the minister could join me to officially open the newly upgraded and rebuilt Bonbeach Pre-school, located at Bonbeach Primary School. What a fantastic project this has been for the local community, and I am so proud that the Andrews Labor government has funded

this \$2.6 million project. This is on top of the \$6.3 million in funding provided by this government to upgrade and modernise Bonbeach Primary, and I am delighted that stage 1 of the school upgrade has also just been finished.

Bonbeach Pre-school is a wonderful kindergarten with incredible teachers and educators and is lovingly supported by the broader community. Thanks to all who have contributed to and advocated for this important upgrade, particularly the preschool committee, the school council and in particular former school council president Anita McKenzie. Their tireless work was instrumental in securing the funding for this long-term solution and bringing the whole master plan to life.

Early childhood education is something so important and something I will fight for every day. The Andrews Labor government is making sure that all Victorian children will have access to not just one year of play-based learning before school but two. We have embarked on the biggest reform in early childhood education with the rollout of universal, subsidised three-year-old kindergarten, and we are leading the nation. Next year the Andrews Labor government will deliver free kinder for children enrolled in participating funded kinder programs, saving families around \$2000 for every child enrolled. This investment will make sure that more kids can access a great early childhood education. It will make it easier for parents, particularly women, to return to the workforce as we recover from the pandemic. I look forward to welcoming the minister next year to officially open Bonbeach Pre-school.

And can I just take the opportunity, Speaker, to wish you, every member in this place and all of the staff at Parliament a really happy and safe Christmas.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. Likewise.

MAROONDAH HIGHWAY, COLDSTREAM

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (17:38): (5363) I have a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to expedite the roadworks on the Maroondah Highway between Coldstream and Healesville and put the resources into the project to actually get it done. This has been a very hot issue in my electorate. The roadworks on the Maroondah Highway between Coldstream and Healesville have been an ongoing issue for almost a year. Locals and commuters are absolutely sick and tired of the delays, and rightly so.

The works started, stopped, were delayed further and are now at a go-slow. First of all we had a lack of community consultation when the roadworks first began and a change in speed limit was mooted, from 100 to 80 kilometres, absolutely infuriating the residents. This was hugely unpopular. There was no consultation, and this is a very long, straight stretch of road in many parts. Then the roadworks were halted during winter due to 'wet and cold weather conditions', which was on the website, yet other roadworks nearby in Lilydale and on Canterbury Road and the Melba Highway continued over the winter period. This left locals perplexed. Roadworks were supposed to resume at the start of spring. That did not happen. Traffic cones were there and 'Reduce speed' signs and equipment remained, but there were no workers. The forced travel delays were there for absolutely no reason for months. People were fined for dodgy signage. Then we received notification that the conditions of the road were not at an adequate moisture level to resume works, and further tests on the bitumen had to take place.

So things are now at a go-slow. People see workers on other projects, but they do not see them on this stretch of the road. It is time the government came clean with the people of Healesville, let them know exactly what is going on and put the resources into this road to get it completed sooner.

THOMASTOWN ELECTORATE SCHOOLS FUNDING

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (17:40): (5364) I would like to raise a matter with the Minister for Education regarding the exciting budget announcement to provide over \$50 million to upgrade, rebuild and improve schools in the safe seat of Thomastown. The action that I seek is that the minister comes out to visit some of the students, parents, teachers and principals that will benefit from this fantastic state budget announcement and to hear firsthand how much this news means and how much

it will transform learning environments. There are 19 government schools, plus two new ones getting built as we speak, in the electorate. There is always more to be done; however, this new announcement will mean that 13 of the 19 current schools will have had major investments from Labor, 10 schools just in the last six years of an Andrews Labor government.

AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (17:41): (5365) My adjournment is to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, and the action I seek is the minister's urgent intervention to rescue our vegetable season in the Lindenow Valley this year. The Lindenow Valley vegetable sector contributes over \$150 million to the Victorian economy and they are entering their peak harvesting period. Whilst they employ hundreds and hundreds of local pickers, they also have a deep reliance on overseas workers. One farmer, Kane Busch, who is a friend of mine, was in the office as I was in Parliament this week saying that he is waiting on 152 pickers to arrive from Vanuatu. The reason that they cannot come into Victoria at the moment is because the quarantine process and appropriate structures have not been set up here in Victoria as they have been in other states of Australia.

Now, what we need is these vegetables to be picked, and we need to have the appropriate processes put in place by the minister to enable these visitors to arrive, as they have done every year for a number of years, to complement our local workforce. So I would ask the minister to urgently put in place the appropriate measures to allow these pickers to take up their work, and perhaps one good start might be announcing what the Tasmanian government has announced—that they will cover the cost of the quarantining for these seasonal workers to come into the state. But before that we need the pathway cleared with a structure put in place to be able to allow these workers to quarantine. It is not there now, and we are getting very, very close to peak picking season and this work needs to be done urgently.

DISABILITY INCLUSION PACKAGE

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (17:42): (5366) The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister provide me with a briefing about how the Andrews Labor government's disability inclusion package will support students at every government school in my electorate. I was so proud to see the 2020–21 budget's unprecedented investment of nearly \$1.6 billion to make sure our students with a disability are supported at school. This crucial funding will double the number of students receiving extra support in the classroom to 55 000 students, and all of our schools will benefit from this change. It will enable our schools to better support students who may previously have been ineligible for that all-important targeted support, including children with autism, dyslexia and complex behaviours. As part of the disability inclusion package, more than \$19 million will be provided for the autism education strategy to better meet the educational needs and aspirations of autistic students in our government schools, supporting them, their families and our teachers.

The Andrews Labor government is shifting our approach. We are putting students at the very heart of our response and focusing on what children can achieve instead of what they cannot. Minister, I know that schools in my electorate were so excited to hear about this new package, and the families across my electorate were joyful when they heard about this unprecedented investment. I have heard feedback from the principals as well. The disability inclusion package is life changing, and I look forward to receiving this important briefing from the minister.

RESPONSES

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (17:44): Ten members raised matters for various ministers, and they will be referred to those ministers for action and response.

The SPEAKER: I wish everybody a very merry Christmas. The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 5.44 pm until Tuesday, 2 February 2021.