

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION**

**TUESDAY, 8 MARCH 2022**

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## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

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FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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**Deputy Speaker**

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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. MJ GUY

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party**

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**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

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

*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Ms T Burrows

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
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**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 Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

### **Environment and Planning Standing Committee**

Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

### **Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**

Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

### **Privileges Committee**

Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley 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 Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

*Council:* Mr Erdogan, 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 Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

### **Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr J Bull, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

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

*Council:* Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

*Council:* Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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**Tuesday, 8 March 2022**

**The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 12.03 pm and read the prayer.**

**Announcements**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**The SPEAKER (12:03):** 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.

**Members**

**SHADOW MINISTRY**

**Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (12:04):** There are a number of changes to the Liberal and National parties front bench, and in the interests of brevity in the house I will make those available for people.

**Bills**

**VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (12:04):** I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 to address defects in relation to the appointment of police officers to act as assistant commissioners and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (12:04):** I just request a brief explanation of the bill.

**Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (12:05):** Yes, this bill is a very targeted piece of legislation that we have briefed the opposition and other parties on. It focuses on a change that was made in the legislation in 2013 that was different to what was previously in place in relation to the ability of deputy commissioners to appoint acting assistant commissioners. Unfortunately that was not delegated from the Chief Commissioner of Police through to deputy commissioners, but the practice continued. As a result of legal advice, that impacted on both some criminal matters but also, most importantly, the ability of those acting assistant commissioners to do the oath and affirmation for new police officers and affected about 1200. It is not changing the substance of the legislation but providing a retrospective capacity to make right those appointments and to render any as if they were correct as at the time of their oath and affirmation, thus impacting any future prosecutions; they can continue in good faith.

**Read first time.**

**Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (12:06):** Under standing order 61(3)(b) I advise the house that the other parties and independent members have been provided with a copy of the bill and a briefing in accordance with the standing order. I therefore move:

That the bill be read a second time immediately.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (12:08):** In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022.

### Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

### Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Victoria Police Act 2013* (the Act) to address defects in relation to the appointment of police officers to act as Assistant Commissioners and validate acts done, or omitted to be done, which may be invalid or unlawful by reason of certain defects in the appointment of those officers.

### Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the following human rights under the Charter:

- Property rights (section 20)
- The right to a fair trial (section 24)
- The right to no retrospective criminal laws (section 27).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### ***Retrospective validation of instruments of appointment of police officers to act as Assistant Commissioners and any actions or omissions by police officers purportedly appointed as Assistant Commissioners in the course of acting as an Assistant Commissioner pursuant to that instrument***

Clause 3 of the Bill inserts new section 276B(1) into the Victoria Police Act 2013, which retrospectively validates:

- purported appointments of police officers to act as Assistant Commissioners (the applicable officers) during the period beginning on 1 July 2014 and ending on 31 August 2021 (the relevant period) so that they are taken to have, and always to have had, the same force and effect as if they were made by the Chief Commissioner;
- acts and things done or omitted to be done during the relevant period by an applicable officer in the course of purportedly acting as an Assistant Commissioner pursuant to a purported appointment by a Deputy Commissioner; and
- acts and omissions that relied on evidence obtained, directly or indirectly, as a result of things done or omitted to be done by an applicable officers regardless of the acts and omissions relying on such evidence were done or omitted to be done under a power conferred under an enactment or otherwise and whether they occurred on or before the commencement of the Bill.

The purported appointments of applicable officers by Deputy Commissioners were unlawful because that power of appointment was only vested in the Chief Commissioner. That power of appointment was not properly delegated to Deputy Commissioners. The actions and authorisations of applicable officers included administering the oath or affirmation of office to police officers and protective services officers when they took the oath before commencing duty.

New section 276B(2) deems the purported appointments made by the Deputy Commissioners to applicable officers to be taken to have, and always to have had, the same force and effect as if they had been made by the Chief Commissioner. New section 276B(3) ensures that any act or thing done or omitted to be done by an applicable officer, is not invalid by reason only that but, for section 276B(2), the applicable officer was not validly and lawfully appointed to act as an Assistant Commissioner. New section 276B(4) ensures that any act or thing done:

- in reliance on evidence obtained, directly or indirectly, as a result of evidence obtained by an applicable officer; or
- whether done or omitted to be done under a power conferred under an enactment or otherwise

on or before the commencement of this Bill is not invalid by reason only that but, for section 276B(2), an applicable officer was not validly and lawfully appointed to act as an Assistant Commissioner. New section 276B(5) provides non-exclusive examples of acts or things done that will not be invalid by reason only of the applicable officer not being a validly appointed as Assistant Commissioner.

New section 276B(6) ensures that in determining the evidence to be admitted in a criminal or civil proceeding, the fact that an Assistant Commissioner was invalidly or unlawfully appointed is to be disregarded but, under

new section 276B(7), the discretion of the court to exclude evidence or stay a proceeding is otherwise unaffected. New section 276B(8) provides that a tribunal in determining whether to consider anything obtained directly or indirectly as the result of an applicable act or omission must disregard the invalid or unlawful appointment of the Assistant Commissioner. New Section 276B(9) clarifies that section 276B affects the rights of parties in civil or criminal proceedings before a court or proceedings before a tribunal. Section 276B(10) provides that section 276B does not apply to nominated cases where a court has found that an Assistant Commissioner was invalidly appointed and excluded evidence for that reason. Similarly, any other proceedings where a court has ruled on the validity of a purported appointment of an Assistant Commissioner are also excluded from the operation of section 276B.

*Property rights (s 20), a fair trial (s 24), and no retrospective criminal laws (s 27)*

The retrospective validation of appointments of applicable officers and acts or omissions consequent on the invalid and unlawful appointments extends to the exercise of powers under various legislation, and the administration and taking of the oath by police officers and protective officers. The provisions extend, therefore, to validating the administration of the oath or affirmation of office to police officers and protective services and the exercise of powers by those officers.

This validation in and of itself does not limit human rights. It does, however, have the result that interferences with human rights that may have otherwise been unlawful (due to being based on exercises of power not lawfully authorised) are now lawful in retrospect. The exercise of powers by police officers and protective services officers who were invalidly administered the oath or affirmation and are being validated potentially engages numerous Charter rights.

For example, the execution of a search warrant by a police officer may engage the rights to privacy and property, and the execution of an arrest warrant by an officer will engage the right to liberty. However, interferences with these rights only require justification in circumstances where the relevant interference is ‘unlawful’ or ‘other than in accordance with law’. The Charter rights are not prescriptive as to the content of the laws governing the administration of the oath or affirmation to those officers. However, the execution of a warrant that was based on a defective appointment is unlawful or invalid. The effect of the Bill is to remedy this situation by deeming the administration of the oath or affirmation effective and the resultant exercises of power valid so that no unlawfulness arises.

It should be emphasised that in rendering procedurally defective appointments and consequential exercises of power valid, it is not the intention of the Bill to extinguish any criminal offence or civil liability arising from the conduct of an applicable officer in the exercise of their powers. For example, the Bill will not extinguish any potential claim for false imprisonment or other tortious wrong that a person may have against a police officer that the officer may have carried out in reliance on powers resulting from their appointment or administration of the oath or affirmation of office.

The potential interferences with Charter rights include:

- property rights (s. 20) to the extent that the validation of the acts or omissions of applicable officers, police officers or protective services officers could affect an accrued right to bring legal action against unlawful acts by those officers,
- no retrospective criminal laws (s. 27) by validating any act or omission done or omitted to be done in a criminal proceeding, or in the evidence related to a criminal proceeding.

Section 20 of the charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law which authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

To the extent that this Bill may deprive a person of their property—that is, to the extent that a right to some cause of action against a police officer arising from their invalid appointment or the invalid administration of the oath or affirmation to them, during the relevant period may constitute property—that deprivation would be authorised by, and in accordance with, the amended legislation. The Bill therefore does not limit the property right protected by section 20 of the Charter.

Section 27 applies to changes in the law that create an offence for acts done before the legislation comes into force, or broadens an existing offence by altering the activities to which it applies or amends criminal procedure in a way that affects the fairness of trial procedures.

The extent to which this Bill operates retrospectively is to validate the appointment of applicable officers, the administration of the oath or affirmation to police officers and protective services officers and the actions they have taken pursuant to an applicable purported appointment or his or her duty. The Bill does not amend the criminal law or procedure in a way that limits the rights protected by section 27 of the Charter.

The Bill does not alter the nature or severity of any interferences with Charter rights that are provided by existing legislation. Instead, the Bill only affects a precondition for conducting these interferences with rights, which is that powers are exercised by a validly and lawfully appointed Assistant Commissioner and by validly appointed police officers and protective services officers.

In my opinion, clause 3 has a nominal effect on human rights. This is because the retrospective validation does not significantly affect the circumstances in which the powers of invalidly and unlawfully appointed Assistant Commissioners, and police officers and protective services officers who were invalidly administered the oath or affirmation, were exercised or the outcome of the exercise of those powers. Despite the invalid appointment of Assistant Commissioners, and the invalid administration of the oath or affirmation to police officers and protective services officers, these officers who possessed the requisite training and skills to carry out the powers and functions vested in them, and they acted in good faith that they were properly appointed and properly 'sworn in'. The Bill merely addresses the invalidity of the appointment of police officers to act as Assistant Commissioners and in turn the invalidity of the administration of the oath or affirmation to police officers and protective services officers. The Bill validates acts or omissions of these officers only to the extent of the invalidity created by the invalid appointment of police officers to act as Assistant Commissioners but not otherwise.

Even if the Bill was considered to limit human rights, I am of the view that such a limit will be reasonably and demonstrably justified under s 7(2) of the Charter. The Bill remedies an error of an administrative nature. However, despite the technical nature of the error, it has resulted in evidence being obtained unlawfully and act or omissions carried out by police officers and protective services officers in good faith in the course of their duties also being unlawful. There is a potential for a significant number of enforcement actions by police officers and protective services officers being compromised. This will have adverse resource implications for prosecutorial bodies and the court system as affected accused seek to mount legal challenges. I am satisfied that the limit is reasonable given the nominal interference with rights it constitutes balanced against the adverse consequences that may occur if this remedial legislation is not introduced.

#### ***Directions concerning admissibility of evidence***

Clause 3 inserts new subsection 276B(6) into the Act, which provides that for the prosecution of an offence, the fact that an applicable officer was not validly and lawfully appointed to act as an Assistant Commissioner is to be disregarded in determining whether evidence obtained by the applicable officer is to be admitted into evidence.

#### ***Right to fair trial (s 24)***

It is arguable that this clause deprives an accused of the ability to argue that evidence obtained as a result of an impropriety should not be admitted at trial, leading to a limit on the accused's right to a fair hearing under s 24 of the charter. However, I am of the opinion that the clause is not inconsistent with the right to a fair hearing. In *Rich v. R* (2014) 312 ALR 429, the Court of Appeal held that similar retrospective validation provision concerning unsworn affidavits were consistent with the right to a fair hearing. In that decision, the Court found that an applicant's inability to contest the admissibility of subject evidence is incapable of depriving the applicant of a fair trial, unless the admission of the subject evidence itself was productive of an unfair trial.

This Bill, while requiring a court to disregard the fact that an appointment of an applicable officer would have been invalid or unlawful but for this Bill, explicitly preserves the Court's discretion to exclude evidence in criminal proceedings or stay criminal proceedings in the interests of justice. The Bill will also not affect the rights of parties in any proceeding where a court has ruled on a matter of validity of the appointment of an applicable officer (or the swearing in of a police officer or protective services officer by an applicable officer) before the enactment of this Bill (new subsection 276B(9)).

In my view, the admission of the evidence obtained in reliance of actions conducted pursuant to invalid appointments is not productive of an unfair trial and will not lead to any unfairness to an accused.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that the Bill is consistent with the right to fair hearing in s 24 of the Charter.

**The Hon Lisa Neville MP—Minister for Police**

#### ***Second reading***

**Ms NEVILLE** (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (12:08): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Bill before the House introduces urgent amendments into the *Victoria Police Act 2013* (VPA) to address an administrative error with the appointment of Acting Assistant Commissioners (AACs).

Section 26 of the VPA authorises the Chief Commissioner to appoint a police officer to the role of AAC. Section 19 of the VPA allows the Chief Commissioner to delegate this power of appointment to Deputy Commissioners. Once appointed, AACs are authorised to exercise all powers of Assistant Commissioners.

The VPA commenced on 1 July 2014. Prior to its commencement, the *Police Regulation Act 1958* governed the operations of Victoria Police. Section 6(1) of that Act authorised Deputy Commissioners to exercise all powers of the Chief Commissioner, including appointment powers.

Between 1 July 2014 and August 2021, Deputy Commissioners appointed a number of police officers to the role of AACs, in an acting capacity, under the assumption that they had the power to do so based on the operation of the former Act. They were not aware that the Chief Commissioner was required to delegate his power of appointment to them under the new Act, or that the instrument of delegation had not been signed.

In August 2021, it was identified that the purported appointments of AACs by Deputy Commissioners were invalid. The Chief Commissioner then signed an instrument of delegation to effectively delegate the power to appoint AACs to Deputy Commissioners from August 2021.

As the appointments of AACs by Deputy Commissioners before September 2021 are not considered to be valid, all exercises of power by AACs during that time are considered invalid. This includes powers exercised relating to criminal matters which have the potential to affect the admissibility of evidence. Retrospective validating legislation is necessary to ensure that otherwise successful prosecutions will not be impacted by an administrative error.

Subsequent auditing by Victoria Police identified another power exercised by AACs between July 2014 and August 2021 is the power to 'swear in' new police officers and protective services officers (PSOs). Section 50 of the VPA provides that before a police officer or PSO performs any duties or exercises any powers that they have as a police officer or PSO, they must take an oath or make an affirmation and subscribe to it. Section 50 provides that the oath or affirmation is to be administered by a Magistrate, the Chief Commissioner, a Deputy Commissioner or an Assistant Commissioner. Once a police officer or PSO has taken and subscribed to the oath or affirmation under section 50 of the VPA, they receive the duties and powers of a police officer or PSO under section 51 of the VPA.

In mid-February Victoria Police identified that AACs whom had been invalidly appointed had administered the oath for a significant number of new sworn members. As a consequence, 1213 police officers and PSOs are not considered to have been validly sworn in as required by the VPA, and do not have the powers and duties of a police officer or PSO. There were also 29 police custody officers who were not sworn in.

Victoria Police has since taken urgent action to re-swear affected sworn officers at the commencement of their next shift. This action has ensured these officers are validly sworn and can continue to use their police powers to keep Victorians safe.

Victoria Police also wrote directly to each of the affected police officers and PSOs to assure them that it is recognised that they have acted in good faith in undertaking their duties in the belief they had been validly sworn. The Victorian Government has also given affected officers the assurance that all protections that are normally afforded to sworn members including entitlements like superannuation, will not be diminished by this issue.

The Bill will retrospectively validate the appointments of AACs by Deputy Commissioners from 1 July 2014 to 31 August 2021, and any acts or omissions performed by AACs during that time, pursuant to their invalid appointments. This includes the power to swear in police officers and PSOs and will have the retrospective effect of validating all appointments of police officers and PSOs sworn in by AACs during this time, and all police/PSO powers they have exercised to date. It also includes the power for AACs to authorise a person to act as a police custody officer.

The Bill will not limit judicial independence, including in relation to pending litigation, as the provision will retrospectively alter the substantive law and will not interfere with the judicial process. The new provisions will apply to pending litigation, so that any exercises of power or decisions made in reliance on evidence obtained as a result of an exercise of power by an AAC, before the Act commences, will not be invalid due to their invalid appointment.

For the purposes of the prosecution of an alleged offence, the fact that the appointment was invalid is to be disregarded in determining whether evidenced obtained as a result of an exercise of power by an invalidly appointed AAC should be admitted. The provisions will not cure other forms of invalidity and will ensure the

discretion of a court to exclude evidence in a criminal proceeding or stay a criminal proceeding in the interests of justice is retained.

The provisions will not apply to any proceedings that were already final before the commencement of the Act, where a court has made a ruling on the validity of an invalid appointment of an AAC.

The Bill will ensure the work of AACs and any police officers/PSOs sworn in by AACs during this time will not be affected by this administrative error.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (12:08): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

### PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**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) (12:08): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to establish the Puffing Billy Railway board, to provide for the objectives, functions and powers of the board, to provide for matters relating to the Puffing Billy Railway, to repeal the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:09): I request a brief explanation.

**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) (12:09): The Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 will repeal the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 and replace it with legislation to provide for the ongoing management and sustainability of Puffing Billy and to modernise provisions relating to governance practices and the operation of the railway, and those changes are of course in response to and consequent to the Ombudsman's report of 2018.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FINES REFORM AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2022

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:10): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Fines Reform Act 2014, the Infringements Act 2006, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Sentencing Act 1991, the Sheriff Act 2009, the EastLink Project Act 2004, the Melbourne City Link Act 1995, the North East Link Act 2020, the West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (12:11): I request a brief explanation of the bill.

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:11): The bill will amend the Fines Reform Act 2014, the Infringements Act 2006 and other relevant legislation to fully implement

recommendations 1, 5, 12, 18 and 20 of the board, in line with the government's response to the board's recommendations; further amend the Fines Reform Act 2014 and the Infringements Act 2006 to clarify the information that must be provided when fines and enforcement hearing orders are referred to the director; implement a recommendation of the Ombudsman clarifying that enforcement agencies cannot outsource the internal review of function; ensure the information-gathering powers of the director and the sheriff; create a legislative framework for electronic service of documents; and clarify that court fine collection statements should only include details of the court fine subject to the statement.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### **GAMBLING AND LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Ms HORNE** (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:12): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (12:12): I request a brief explanation of the bill.

**Ms HORNE** (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:12): The bill makes a range of miscellaneous amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Liquor Control Reform Amendment Act 2021 to clarify their operation and improve the regulatory framework of gambling and liquor in Victoria. It removes obsolete provisions, introduces a prohibition on online forms of community and charitable gaming, extends the time to pay unpaid winnings from 6 to 12 months and expands the existing state-of-emergency provisions to capture the new pandemic declaration.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

#### **Business of the house**

#### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**The SPEAKER** (12:13): I wish to advise the house that general business, order of the day 8, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 5.00 pm today.

#### **Petitions**

**Following petitions presented to house by Clerk:**

#### **SOUTH GIPPSLAND HIGHWAY INTERSECTION, LEONGATHA**

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the dangerous and confusing state of the main South Gippsland Highway intersection in Leongatha.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Andrew Labor Government to fund design and construction of stage two of the Leongatha Heavy Vehicle Alternative Route as soon as possible.

**By Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (503 signatures).**

**FORMER BEAUFORT PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the vandalism and neglect that has occurred on the former Beaufort Primary School site since it was left vacant at the end of 2014 when the school was re-located. The site was rezoned and a heritage overlay was placed on the three main school buildings on 18/11/2021. This site has existed within our community for over 150 years, that's five generations. It is now being prepared for sale but the Beaufort and greater Pyrenees community has an ongoing, strong, and special association with the site, seeing it as an important, valuable and irreplaceable community asset that it wishes to retain for a specific community use. A new fit-for-purpose Community Hub in the school buildings will serve many unmet needs in the community. Beaufort Community House and Learning Centre currently operate from premises that are not fit-for-purpose, hindering its ability to provide the same wide-ranging supports as other Neighbourhood Houses. Other community groups need permanent spaces. Beaufort desperately needs dedicated Youth Spaces to allow youth programs to be established and integrated within the Community Hub which will offer social, cultural, health, and educational opportunities for all.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly recommend to the State Government:

1. That the ownership of the school oval and green areas on the former Beaufort Primary School 60 site, 7–25 Hill Street Beaufort be transferred to Pyrenees Shire Council for community use, at no cost to the community, in line with a council decision on 10/12/2019.
2. That the remaining land and buildings on the former site be gifted to the community for a Community Hub in collaboration with Pyrenees Shire Council.
3. For a package of funding (\$3.5 million) for repurposing the buildings and surrounds (see point 2) enabling the development of a fully sustainable, fit-for-purpose, not-for-profit Community Hub.

**By Ms STALEY (Ripon) (508 signatures).**

**FORMER BEAUFORT PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE**

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria ask the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to recommend to the State Government:

1. That the ownership of the school oval and green areas on the former Beaufort Primary School site, 7–25 Hill Street Beaufort be transferred to Pyrenees Shire Council for community use, at no cost to the community, in line with a council decision made on 10/12/2019.
2. That the remaining land and buildings on the former site be gifted to the community for a Community Hub in collaboration with Pyrenees Shire Council.
3. For a package of funding (\$3.5 million) for repurposing the buildings and surrounds (see point 2), enabling the development of a fully sustainable, fit for purpose, not-for-profit Community Hub.

**By Ms STALEY (Ripon) (1775 signatures).**

**Tabled.**

**Ordered that petition lodged by member for Gippsland South be considered next day on motion of Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South).**

**Ordered that petitions lodged by member for Ripon be considered next day on motion of Ms STALEY (Ripon).**

**Committees****SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE***Alert Digest No. 3*

**Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:15):** I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 3 of 2022*, on the following bills:

Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022



Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022

Road Safety Amendment (Hoon Events) Bill 2021

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### Documents

## DOCUMENTS

### Incorporated list as follows:

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

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*—Order under s 17D granting a lease over Albert Park

*Financial Management Act 1994*—Report from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change that she had received the Report 2020–21 of the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board

*Gambling Regulation Act 2003*—Documents under s 6A.3.14 in relation to:

Keno (VIC) Pty Ltd—Keno licence and related agreement (two documents)

Lottoland Australia Pty Ltd—Keno licence and related agreement (two documents)

*Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*—Government responses to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Reports on the:

2021–22 Budget Estimates

Inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Officer

*Planning and Environment Act 1987*—Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Ballarat—C225

Benalla—C41

Boroondara—C353 Part 1

Cardinia—C240

Corangamite—C55

Darebin—C200

Gannawarra—C46

Greater Dandenong—C211

Greater Shepparton—C210, C238

Hobsons Bay—C131

Kingston—C197

Latrobe—C135

Mansfield—C47

Melbourne—C356

Moira—C95

Mornington Peninsula—C263, C281

Nillumbik—C129

Queenscliffe—C38

South Gippsland—C127

Stonnington—C315

Strathbogie—C84

Whittlesea—C226

Wodonga—C134, C136

*Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*—Documents under s 165AQ on the making of pandemic orders implemented on:

11 and 13 February 2022

18 and 20 February 2022

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Bus Safety Act 2009*—SR 17

*Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*—SR 16

*Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*—SR 15

*Road Safety Act 1986*—SR 19

*Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014*—SR 18

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*—Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 154, 177/2021, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16

*Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*—Notice of amendment to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council for an assessment of forest values in the Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North

*Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017*:

Notice of Approval of the Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo (Yarra Strategic Plan) (*Gazette G8, 24 February 2022*)

Yarra Strategic Plan.

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS**—Under standing orders the Clerk tabled the following document:

Government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee's Report on the inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability.

### Bills

#### **DOMESTIC ANIMALS AMENDMENT (REUNITING PETS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021**

#### **HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (QUALITY AND SAFETY) BILL 2021**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:17): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Bill 2021 and the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021.

#### **DOMESTIC ANIMALS AMENDMENT (REUNITING PETS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021**

#### **HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (QUALITY AND SAFETY) BILL 2021**

#### **MAJOR EVENTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (UNAUTHORISED TICKET PACKAGES AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021**

#### **SERVICE VICTORIA AMENDMENT BILL 2021**

#### **SEX WORK DECRIMINALISATION BILL 2021**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:17): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Bill 2021, the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021, the Major Events Legislation Amendment (Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters) Bill 2021, the Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2021 and the Sex Work Decriminalisation Bill 2021.

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (TRIAL BY JUDGE ALONE AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2022***Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:18): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022.

**Committees****ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE***Reference*

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:18): I move, by leave:

That this house refers an inquiry into how Victorian universities can play a greater role in directing their own investment to support the pipeline of skilled workers needed for government priorities to ensure a growing economy to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 1 September 2022, and the committee should consider:

- (1) future skills;
- (2) working towards a clean economy; and
- (3) regional skills analysis in health, agriculture and community services.

**Motion agreed to.****ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE***Reporting dates*

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:19): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the Environment and Planning Standing Committee's Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards be extended to no later than 31 August 2022.

**Motion agreed to.****Business of the house****STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS**

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (12:19): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 48 relating to the reintroduction of non-government business, to be moved immediately.

**Leave refused.****PROGRAM**

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:19): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 pm on Thursday, 10 March 2022:

Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022

Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022.

I will make only a few comments on the government business program. Whilst the motion refers only to two bills on the program for this week, the house is aware that the Minister for Police has just first and second read a police bill to deal with an urgent matter that has come through from the office of

the chief commissioner that the Parliament needs to very quickly rectify. Our intention is to put this bill through this place today and send it off to the Legislative Council in the hope that it can be dealt with immediately there as well. I would like to put on record the government's appreciation and acknowledgement of the way the house has facilitated this to happen in this way and particularly note the cooperation and the support of the opposition to move this matter through the Parliament as quickly as possible to address this issue. So that will take up much of the government's business today, and that bill, as I said—and I have discussed this with other members of the house—we would propose be concluded later this afternoon or this evening.

There are two other bills on the program, one of which is an important change to the justice system which will no doubt have a lot of interest from members, and that is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022. This is something that has been considered during this COVID period, and I am sure members will want to speak at some length on that bill, and no doubt on the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022 as well.

The government has also indicated that should there be time available over the course of the week we would like to go back—I know there are many members on our side; forgive me, I am not being partisan in any way, I am just not sure if there are members on the other side who want to speak—to the take-note motion on the mental health royal commission. It was just last week that was the first anniversary of the handing down of that critically important work by the royal commission, and a year of action and implementation from the government has followed. It is an opportunity for colleagues to talk to the important reform work that is contained in the royal commission's work. I note that there has also been some work across the Parliament on establishing a friends of mental health group, a cross-party group to address these issues. I think it is important that we all look at every way that we can support people with mental health issues but also make sure our workplaces are as supportive and as responsive as they can possibly be. With those few brief comments, I commend the government business motion to the house, and as I do every week, look forward to its unanimous support.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:22):** I rise to speak on the government business program. I would like to start by wishing the women of Victoria, particularly the women in this place, a happy International Women's Day.

On this occasion the Liberal-Nationals will not be opposing the government business program, but we do note that it is a particularly slim government business program, with only two bills on it, one of which is only six pages long and has one substantive clause. Now, of course as the Leader of the House has indicated, we will be assisting the facilitation of the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, and we have been happy to work with the government to see that first and second read today. Like the Leader of the House, we expect that it will pass through the Assembly later today. We have a number of people who want to speak on that bill. I am sure the government does as well. We would expect to see that bill in a situation where it can go to the Council later today.

But I return to the two bills that are on the government business program, and I note that the reason we only have two bills on the program is because the one that the government had foreshadowed that we would have on the program today, which was of course their big new housing tax that they were proposing to bring in to the Parliament for this sitting week, has in fact now been deferred. So we do not have it in the Parliament, and we will wait to see whether we will see this bill in this term. We know that it has been drafted. We know that it is sitting there waiting. What we do know is that the opposition from Victorians to this brand new housing tax was so vociferous that the government has chosen not to bring it forward today. But we do know that that bill is drafted and ready to go. We will see if the government's word is true and we will not see it in this term. Perhaps they will try next time, if the people of Victoria have not made a different decision in November this year. I would not put it past the government to have another crack if they retain that.

**Ms Allan:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Ripon has had a pretty good run-up on speaking on a bill that is not on the government business program, and I think it is a bit of a stretch.

We can all understand passing reference and all, but I do think it perhaps is time to focus the attention of the member for Ripon on the government business program that is before us, not whatever make-believe fiction land she thinks might happen in the future. Focus on the present and the government business program that is before us.

**The SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business is entitled to mention what is not on but should not dwell on it, so I ask the manager to come back to the business program in front of us.

**Ms STALEY:** I am happy to return to the paucity of bills on the government business program. There are only two bills on the government business program, and what it shows is that when their legislative agenda falls over there is nothing in reserve. They have got no ideas left, so there is nothing that they could have brought forward to fill the place of one that did not make it to the government business program this week. What this shows is this government really is very tired. It just does not have the ideas, the legislative agenda. That is why there are only two bills on this government business program. They do not have ideas for the future, they cannot recover and rebuild Victoria, they are not up for coming forward with what Victorians need to recover and rebuild, and that is why we have only got two bills on the government business program this week, one of which I continue to say only has one substantive clause. It is six pages long, and that includes the end notes. It is not a government with fresh ideas for Victoria; it is a tired and failing government that has nothing in reserve and no ideas. But with that, we will not be opposing this very skinny government business program, and we will, as we have indicated, facilitate the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022.

**Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (12:27):** I rise to join the government business program debate today and to acknowledge the strong legislative agenda that is before the house. I of course echo the sentiments expressed by the Leader of the House that what is before us today are three important bills, and I know many on this side of the house will want to contribute. I will be contributing to the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022, we have the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022 and we have heard from the Leader of the House of the importance of the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and the fact that that needs to be a matter that is dealt with urgently so that there can be a very quick and smooth resolution to this important bill that is before us.

Each and every day this government works very hard not only to deliver projects in local communities but to make sure that there are landmark reforms across Victoria. These reforms make a difference to the everyday life of many Victorians, and these bills this week will contribute towards these important reforms. Most importantly we have an agenda at the heart of this, and that is that these bills make a real difference in our community. The Andrews Labor government is following through what we have always committed to doing from day one, and that is to continue to work each and every day not only investing and building but bringing forward to this place important reforms—reforms that make a difference to the lives of Victorians. So it is a very big week.

Of course today being International Women's Day I also join with everybody in acknowledging the contribution of women in this place, and more importantly, we are part of a very strong government that is getting things done each and every day. I am looking forward to a very busy agenda and, most importantly, contributing towards the bills. I know that the government members are absolutely ecstatic and are looking forward to contributing towards these bills and many other matters that are outside these bills as well, so I will not hold up the brilliant government business programs any longer. I look forward to this program being debated, and I know that there is now a united consensus in relation to the opposition supporting the government business program.

**Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:30):** Look at the ecstasy over there. The government members are ecstatic about this government business program. It is a wonderful week that we have got here. I follow the previous member in saying this is a momentous occasion for the Leader of the House, because she loves it when the opposition does not oppose the government business program. There is not much to oppose this week, I have to say. But anyway, I am pleased to hear that government

members are ecstatic. The member for Hawthorn looks ecstatic. Look at him—he is very excited. The member for Cranbourne, they are ecstatic. I noticed the member for Cranbourne wearing purple, and I have to wish everybody a happy International Women's Day.

**Ms Allan:** Have to or want to? Come on.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I want to. I do want to. I do want to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day. I am actually a little bit embarrassed, because clearly I did not get the memo about purple, and not only that, I am wearing the colours of the patriarchy as well, with an all-blue suit and an all-blue tie. I do apologise, but genuinely, happy International Women's Day. I do wish everyone a happy International Women's Day, particularly the minister sitting at the table, the Minister for Women. I hope everyone enjoys the day. But as the member for Ripon indicated, this would be—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You are not the Minister for Women?

**Ms Allan** interjected.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Leader of the House, happy International Women's Day. We love debating the government business program with the Leader of the House. We do not often get this sort of interaction, so I am pleased to have it from her today.

It is also wonderful to be here in this chamber without masks—I have to add that. After the work that the Parliament and you, Speaker, have gone through through this pandemic, this is I think actually a significant advancement. I do note there are some members still wearing masks in the chamber, and that is absolutely fine. It is absolutely appropriate that people have the choice to do that. I myself am still in my 30-day period post a positive test, so I am still in that beautiful little—

**Ms Ward:** Bubble.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Bubble, thank you. That means that I cannot give it, I cannot get it—I am all good—but that runs out in a few days. But it is wonderful to be able to walk around this building without masks, and it is a further sign of us getting back to normal.

The member for Ripon did mention that it is a particularly light business program. I am looking forward, though, to the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022. This is legislation that has been some time in coming. Whilst we have some questions about how effective the bill will be, the intention of course is correct in that it hopefully will give us some certainty, particularly for our forest contractors in the timber industry, which is very important to my electorate. I know plenty of people who have been very frustrated at being locked out of their jobs, and so I look forward to the debate on that legislation. In addition, we have the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022, and that is it—except not on the government business program is the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 that we will be dealing with today. As has been mentioned, the opposition will be helping to facilitate its quick passage through here to address that issue.

But as the member for Ripon pointed out, what we also should have been debating this week is the housing tax. It just shows that when the government cannot tax it does not have any other ideas, and this is the outcome of that: we have got a very, very light government business program. We are well into the fourth quarter of the term now, and the government is running out of ideas like a car running out of fuel, slowing down with just these two bills this week. So for a government that prides itself on a progressive and full agenda, it is a pretty indicting government business program that indicates it is pretty light on. But anyway, as I said, there is nothing to necessarily oppose about the business program, so I look forward to debating it this week.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh) (12:35): It is indeed a pleasure to speak on the government business program, and what interesting contributions by some of them on the other side. The free

marketeers, the civil libertarians, the libertarians in general want much more legislation. Well, you could not achieve what we have achieved in seven years. You could not achieve it in 27 years.

**The SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** This government's reformist agenda: like the Premier says, if you do not have a reform agenda, you do not have an agenda at all. Specifically when you look at this government business program—not only the legislation but the take-note motion on mental health—that is one of the biggest reforms in social policy in Victoria's history, along with three-year-old kinder and along with the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Now, when we stand up and we talk about International Women's Day, like we all have in our contributions today, we do it on the back of an extraordinary achievement in that area. We have still got a long way to go—but extraordinary achievement. We have got half the Victorian cabinet—more than half—women. We have significant achievements in relation to the announcement today by Minister Pulford in the other place and many other announcements. So we do not just stand here in a perfunctory sense and say, 'Happy International Women's Day'. I take it in good faith on the other side, but just standing here right now I can count six or seven—in fact probably about 10—female Labor MPs in the chamber at this moment and I can count one Liberal MP on the other side. So when we talk about International Women's Day, we do not just talk about it in a perfunctory sense; we do things that make a material difference to women, leadership and power structures in every area of society. The Minister for Women, a good friend of mine and a champion and pioneer in this sense, is in the chamber, and she knows exactly what I mean.

On that point, when I, like all my colleagues, stand at many events and do the acknowledgement of country, I do it on the back of a government that is the first government in the country to actually start a treaty process with First Nations people. We are not perfunctory about that either: the first government in Australia's history to do that; the first government to start the Yoorrook commission, the truth and justice commission; the first government to provide traineeships and working opportunities for First Nations people in major Victorian projects.

So when we talk about reform, we do not talk about it in a perfunctory sense when it comes to women, First Nations people or anything else on the government business program. That is why every week this government is in this chamber, in this Parliament, is a good week for the Victorian community. I commend the government business program. It is a cracking government business program for a cracking government. Let us crack on.

**Mr ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:38): After that contribution I feel at liberty to speak about whatever the hell I like, really. I also rise to address the government business program this week and will do my level best to speak—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ROWSWELL:** Wow. I hope that is on your register of interest, member for Burwood. Of course, as previous speakers on this side have indicated, members on this side will not be opposing the government business program this week. We do, however, note that there are but two bills on the government business program. By agreement we have allowed for the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 to be first and second read today, and by agreement also we understand that that bill will occupy the business of this house until around 6 today, at which point we will return to the take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System—I look forward to hearing the member for Ripon's contribution at that time. Then we will adjourn later today.

As previous speakers have raised, yes, the housing tax is not mentioned on the government business program this week. I am not sure if you are familiar, Speaker, with the famous ABC character Mr Squiggle. As the child of the 1980s I am, I remember very fondly the blackboard that would say in a bit of a droning voice, 'Upside down, upside down'. I remember that fondly, and it sort of reminds me—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the House on a point of order.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** I have not got to my punchline.

**Ms Allan:** It is all in the delivery, member for Sandringham. On a point of order, Speaker, I am really struggling to see how Mr Squiggle has any relevance to the government business program. If he did, he would be telling the member for Sandringham to hurry up and get on with coming back to the government business program.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Oakleigh! It has been a wideranging debate, one of the widest ranging debates on the government business program that I can remember. Members, as I have indicated before, can go to what is not on the government business program very briefly, but then they need to come back to what is on the government business program. So I would encourage the member for Sandringham to complete his Mr Squiggle analogy and then come back to the government business program.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** Something for the annals of history. So there was that character, Blackboard—upside down, as I say. It reminds me of the government, whose only idea is to tax and spend, tax and spend, and that is something that is at the forefront of their agenda. Now, back to the government business program, Speaker, in accordance with your guidance: I look forward to hearing with great enthusiasm the member for Brighton, my colleague, who will address the—

**Ms Allan:** Why aren't you back on the front bench?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the House!

**Mr ROWSWELL:** Because I am here to serve. I am here to serve, and that is my motivation.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Without interjections. The Leader of the House and the member of Oakleigh!

**Mr ROWSWELL:** The member for Brighton will lead our contribution on the Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Bill 2022, and the member for Malvern will lead our contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Bill 2022. I also look forward with great vigour and enthusiasm to contributing to as many bills as I can this week, as it is a great joy for me to do so. In conclusion, we will not be opposing the government business program this week.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Members statements

#### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Ms WILLIAMS** (Dandenong—Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (12:41): On this International Women's Day I rise to knowledge every woman in this state and pay tribute in particular to the women of Dandenong who have done so much for my local community during the pandemic—women who have kept us together and kept us safe for the past two years.

I pay tribute to Selba Luka, the 2021 City of Greater Dandenong Citizen of the Year, for her work with Afri-Aus Care to create a safe place for women and families to share their stories, overcome trauma and build lasting relationships; to the leaders of our schools; to the parents who took on the load of homeschooling; and to the teachers who ensured that students were supported and kept school communities together and connected. I pay tribute to the leaders of local government—to Eden Foster, Angela Long, Sophie Tan, Lana Formoso and Rhonda Garad from the City of Greater Dandenong—



who stepped up when their communities needed them most; the leaders of business and industry that helped keep our communities working—women like Vonda Fenwick, a leading advocate for manufacturers and job creation in the south-east; the women volunteers who spent their time providing material aid to those in need, such as Zakia Baig of the Australian Hazara Women’s Friendship Network, and Ashvina De Zoysa, the founder of Cook4CALD, which provides nutritious and quality home-cooked meals; and the women who took on, more than ever before, the bulk of unpaid work in the home when they were already shouldering the burden of unpaid work. It is for these women and for every woman that the Andrews Labor government continues to drive the boldest social reform agenda in the nation—with gender equality at its very heart.

#### YARRUNGA COMMUNITY CENTRE

**Mr HODGETT** (Croydon) (12:43): Today I rise to talk about the Yarrunga Community Centre in Croydon Hills and the need for a bus stop outside of the centre. The centre services over 1000 people per week, ranging through young families, teens, seniors, Burmese migrants, refugees and adults with disabilities, but the centre is 500 metres from the nearest bus stop. While this might not seem far for many people, the journey can be unsafe and too far for older people, for people with mobility issues or for people attending evening classes. They are currently the only community centre in City of Maroondah without access to public transport. An e-petition with Parliament has been started to get a bus route down Croydon Hills Drive with a stop outside the centre, which I fully support.

#### AUSTRALIAN CHIN COMMUNITY

**Mr HODGETT**: Secondly, on another matter, I wish to talk about the wonderful work the Australian Chin Community provides. This community-based not-for-profit charity was established in 2007 and helps to represent and promote the interests of the local Chin community within eastern Melbourne. Located in Croydon, the eastern Melbourne branch supports refugees from Burma, or Myanmar, via Malaysia, India and Thailand. The organisation’s main objectives are to preserve and promote Chin culture and literature, to provide social supports and activities for the Chin community, to look after the social wellbeing of the Chin community and to run regular activities to empower the community. Recently I had the pleasure of attending the 74th Chin National Day on Sunday, 20 February. The event was a wonderful celebration of culture, dance, music, singing, food and fashion held in Main Street, Croydon.

#### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

**Ms HORNE** (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:44): We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and as the member for Williamstown reflecting on what International Women’s Day means to the women of the inner west, I am conscious that much of the progress we have made in equality comes from women who lived in Williamstown.

Let me start with the former member for Williamstown and our first female Premier, Joan Kirner, who never missed an opportunity to fight for equality and whose mentoring of young women was second to none. Lynne Kosky, former member for Altona and resident of Williamstown, was equally passionate, and having worked with Lynne when I was in the Department of Transport I know her commitment to changing the male paradigm of transport and to fostering an inclusive and equitable culture and workplace was palpable. And of course Australia’s first female Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, continues her advocacy for better conditions for women and better health care. I am proud to have established the Nicola Roxon Social Justice Award in my local schools so that every year I can recognise a kid who has contributed to improving social justice.

But the list of formidable activist women in Williamstown does not stop there. This year we sadly lost the passionate health advocate, trade unionist and campaigner against inappropriate urban development Rennis Witham. Williamstown will be forever in her debt for the Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park. Miley Nguyen works tirelessly as an advocate for the Vietnamese community,

Gill Gannon in the Newport Traders Association and not a week goes by where the formidable Carol Willis is not supporting families and those in need through Anglicare emergency relief.

### **BUSH NURSING HOSPITALS**

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (12:46): I rise again today to ask the government to urgently review support to bush nursing hospitals. I have two bush nursing hospitals in my electorate—Nagambie and Euroa—but the future of these services is at risk because the Andrews government refuses to provide them with adequate support. We once had 60 bush nursing hospitals in Victoria, but they are being treated as private providers by the government, which means essential services in my communities are being placed at risk. This situation needs to be resolved or regional Victorians' health will be placed at risk. These hospitals cannot be left to collapse.

### **COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY NAGAMBIE BRIGADE**

**Ms RYAN**: Last week I attended the opening of the new Nagambie CFA station. It is a great asset for our wonderful volunteers who do so much to protect and serve their community. I congratulate Nagambie's captain, Allen Treble, and the entire brigade who have worked for many years to see this goal achieved.

### **BENALLA INDOOR RECREATION CENTRE**

**Ms RYAN**: Last week I also had the pleasure of meeting with Benalla's mayor and some of the user groups at the Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre. That centre is drastically overdue for work and for a rebuild. It no longer meets the needs of the community. It is a very busy hub every day of the week and hosts indoor sports, including basketball, netball, badminton, table tennis, life ball and everything in between. An upgrade to those facilities is a top priority for Benalla Rural City Council, and I look forward to working with them to advocate for that very worthwhile project to ensure that the Benalla community stays fit, active and healthy.

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (12:47): I am really excited to rise to talk about the incredible event held in my electorate of Tarneit last week. It was the fourth annual International Women's Day event. This event was attended by some outstanding local women in my community, including Wyndham City Council female councillors, small business owners, some fantastic Tarneit locals that I have had the privilege of meeting during my Zoom coffee catch-ups over the past couple of years in this pandemic and also many, many female principals, teachers and incredible student leaders.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is 'Break the bias', and it was great to talk to so many incredible women about the way in which implicit bias or even outright sexism has affected them in their own lives, as it has my own. As someone who has worked in a professional environment for most of her career, particularly those which are predominately male, I have had more than my fair share of experiences with sexism, both casual and overt, in the workplace. For someone like me, International Women's Day is an opportunity to show others what they should not accept and to inspire young women to do the same. I was fortunate enough to be joined by my friend and outstanding fellow westie the honourable member for Altona, who I think inspired all of us there with her own experiences of fighting gender bias within our own party and this Parliament—something she should be commended for. I want to give a huge shout-out to Rashi and her team at the Little Growling Cafe for once again hosting an incredible event.

### **AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS**

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:49): I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to and congratulate a number of incredible people from my local community in the Evelyn electorate who received Yarra Ranges Council Australia Day awards. Keren Greenwood, Citizen of the Year, was instrumental in establishing a food bank in the Yarra Ranges, which in particular played a vital role over the last two years of the pandemic supporting families in need. David Ferrier was recognised for his extremely

valuable input after the devastation of the cyclonic storms in June last year, developing a database of high-value timber locally. Caladenia Dementia Care and Sarah Yeates, as Community Group of the Year, were nimble in delivering an innovative program to ensure high-quality support for families and clients with dementia throughout the pandemic. And of course Mount Evelyn RSL were recognised for their ongoing work supporting ex-service people and showcasing the rich history in our region. Congratulations to all award recipients.

#### TRISH ENZINGER

**Ms VALLENCE:** I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to and congratulate Trish Enzinger, principal at Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn, who has notched up an incredible 50 years of service in education, with the last 18 years locally at Birmingham Primary. Her passion for educating and supporting local children is inspiring, and I want to particularly point to the successful global studies program that she has implemented at the school. You are an inspiration, Trish. Congratulations.

#### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Ms VALLENCE:** Happy International Women's Day to all the women of Victoria.

#### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (12:51):** International Women's Day is a celebration for all women, and it is time to look to the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women right across the world. To our sisters in the Ukraine and Russia and to our sisters dealing with flood disaster in New South Wales and Queensland, our thoughts are with you as you deal with the many challenges ahead.

International Women's Day is also an important time for reflection, because it is clear that gender inequality persists across almost every aspect of a woman's life, particularly Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, women from multicultural communities and other vulnerable women. I want to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Women for her fantastic work for the women of Victoria. I am also proud to say that in Geelong there is a great deal of activity to promote and celebrate International Women's Day across this week. On Saturday I attended the Geelong Trades Hall women unionists International Women's Day breakfast to celebrate working women and discuss the impact of climate change on women.

On Sunday I attended Sweetfest, an opportunity to showcase the talent of young women in the Geelong region and get the arts and music scene back out there. What a great line-up of amazing, talented young women it was: students from Belmont High, Lara Secondary College and Surf Coast Secondary College; the Sweethearts, Libby Steel, Cry Baby, Ella Sweeney, Young Hearts and Sirens along with well-known artists Emma Donovan and Sarah Carroll; and many other young women performing. The Committee for Geelong breakfast, the City of Greater Geelong Women in Community Life Awards event— *(Time expired)*

#### QUEENSLAND AND NEW SOUTH WALES FLOODS

**Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:52):** Today my thoughts are with everyone in Queensland and New South Wales facing catastrophic floods. I can only imagine what you are going through. For years we have been listening to the dire warnings that if we do not take drastic action on climate change right now extreme weather events will come faster and hit harder, and now they are here. It is a horrible wake-up call that governments everywhere need to heed.

Two weeks ago the New South Wales government announced it will completely ban all new mining and drilling for coal, oil and gas off New South Wales coasts, yet meanwhile here in Victoria the Labor government is actually expanding drilling for gas along our coasts, including right next to the Twelve Apostles Marine National Park. I would have thought with all the fires and floods we have experienced

recently our government would not need much more of a wake-up call—that the world simply cannot afford to dig up and burn any fossil fuels anywhere.

Just last week the world's climate scientists warned us yet again that the window to save ourselves from climate change is rapidly closing. But here we are, with Victoria on the one hand doing some really good things when it comes to renewable energy but on the other hand allowing more fossil fuel drilling in our beautiful oceans. It just does not make sense. That is why the Greens and I this week have introduced a bill for Victoria to follow New South Wales and ban oil and gas drilling in our oceans too. I really hope that all MPs in this place on both sides heed the recent words of our climate scientists, look at the devastating images coming out of our northern neighbours and then get on board to support this bill.

### FRANCESCA CURTIS

**Ms CRUGNALE** (Bass) (12:54): On International Women's Day I honour Francesca Curtis, a fighter, an accelerator of social change, impactful with her stride—in presence and achievements—who died on 24 December at the magnificent age of 90 and was farewelled at the beautiful Rhyll cemetery in the midst of a spectacular storm, which seemed fitting to mark her life.

In 1960s Melbourne gays and lesbians were vilified, often bashed or fired for being gay. Most stayed in the closet; not Francesca—she lived openly as a lesbian. In 1970 she appeared on TV to talk about the Daughters of Bilitis, set up to improve the lot of the female homosexual and now considered to be Australia's first gay rights group:

Why have you been agreed to be interviewed full face... tonight?

... I have nothing to hide, I have nothing to be ashamed of ...

she replied.

A young Phyllis Papps contacted the group. Her connection with Francesca was immediate and so began a loving relationship. They appeared on *This Day Tonight*, leading to a flurry of complaints and an equal flurry of women contacting the group. Phyllis later wrote, 'Our lives have been about freedom, diversity, equal rights and a better future for everyone, devoid of bigotry, hate and discrimination'. In 2019 they received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the LGBTI awards in Sydney and last year were loudly cheered at the premiere of *Why Did She Have to Tell the World?*, a film of their lives. My heartfelt condolences to Phyllis and to all who loved Francesca, were encouraged by her and walked beside her. Thank you, Francesca, for being you. You have left an indelible imprint on the hearts of many and on our nation.

### RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

**Mr T SMITH** (Kew) (12:55): The flag of Ukraine flies proudly above this Parliament, and I pay tribute to you, Speaker, for that gesture of solidarity with the people of Ukraine, who are currently being butchered, murdered, assaulted and attacked in their homeland by a marauding invader, Putin's Russia. On this International Women's Day I pay tribute to the women of Ukraine. Twenty per cent of the Ukrainians who have taken up arms against the Russian invaders are women. Ukrainian women are fleeing with their children and their parents. They are hiding in shelters; some are being indiscriminately murdered by Russian soldiers. The Russians have gone there to 'denazify', according to Vladimir Putin, Ukraine. They forget that the president of Ukraine, Zelenskyy, that hero, is a Jew—a direct descendent of Holocaust survivors.

This crime against humanity must stop, and our country should provide as much support as humanly possible to the people of Ukraine. NATO must do more. The women and children of Ukraine must be defended. Ukraine's sovereignty must be respected. The fighting spirit of the Ukrainian people is an inspiration to me and to freedom-loving people all over the world. Slava Ukraini.

### VICTORIAN WOMEN'S PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

**Ms SETTLE** (Buninyong) (12:57): On International Women's Day I was absolutely delighted to be able to advise the Linton and District Historical Society that they had been successful in the Victorian women's public art program, which is a \$2 million program launched by the Minister for Women last year. I would like to acknowledge the importance of this program and thank the minister for her foresight. In Ballarat there are currently more statues of horses than there are of women.

Our region is teeming with extraordinary women, both contemporary and historical, and this artwork will celebrate the contribution of Linton-born war surgeon and director of infant and maternal health Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown OBE. Born in 1889, Vera paid her own way to London after a British call-out to Australian doctors to work in the Endell Street Military Hospital, an institution created and staffed by women doctors and nurses. She had to buy her own uniform and, unlike nurses, was never officially appointed by the Australian Army. Her contribution to the field of medicine was officially recognised with an OBE in 1938.

This sculpture will be created by Lucy Mceachern. Lucy is a renowned bronze sculptor who also lives in my electorate in the township of Inverleigh. So again I would like to thank the Minister for Women for this program. There is the old saying, 'You cannot be it if you cannot see it', and I think it is extraordinarily important that we continue to recognise women in public art.

### MORWELL ELECTORATE JUNIOR CRICKET

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (12:58): It has been a tumultuous couple of years for many community sports including the cricket fraternity due to COVID-19 restrictions, which have meant coaches, players, administrators and supporters all missed out on the game they love at various times. The sudden passing of Victorian cricket legend Shane Warne has also devastated the cricket community. Cricket is a great sport, and today I want to recognise the achievements of some of my local junior cricket teams.

In the Traralgon & District Cricket Association the under-12s grand final was played between two Ex Students Cricket Club teams, the Great Whites and the Hammerheads, with the Hammerheads taking out the Keith Brownbill Shield. The Hammerheads made 4 for 78 in their allotted overs, whilst the Great Whites fell just short by making 6 for 66 in return. Player of the match was awarded to Liam Bastin, who made 17 not out and then took 1 for 7 from his three overs. Jensen Hodson from Glengarry was player of the year for his batting exploits, whilst Jai Hazelman from Toongabbie took home the bowling aggregate and average awards.

In the under-15s it was Ex Students who won the grand final and the Brian Symons Shield, with victory over the Ex Students' Bullsharks. The Bullsharks made 125 whilst Ex Students only lost two wickets in reply, with player of the match being Joe Hare, who made a fabulous 62 not out. Logan Fernance from Ex Students not only won the under-15 batting aggregate award but also took out the player of the year title. Joel Thomson, also from Ex Students, won the batting average trophy whilst Tom Duncan from Glengarry took out the bowling average award. Congratulations and well done to all our junior cricketers.

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Ms WARD** (Eltham) (13:00): I rise to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day, but in particular congratulate Shahla Paynter from Eltham High School for being awarded my Pauline Toner Prize for 2022. Named in honour of Victoria's first female cabinet minister and the first woman to represent our community, this prize celebrates young women activists in the areas of social justice, the environment and gender equality. Shahla is passionate about jazz and is working to break the bias that women do not play jazz, including by being very active in the *Girls Do Jazz* series with the Melbourne Women's International Jazz Festival. This terrific young woman is also active in fighting for social justice through her work with Eltham High's LGBTQIA+ Stand Out group and the EHS harmony team.

We had an incredibly strong group of nominees this year: wonderful young women like Indi, a member of Nillumbik shire's youth council as well as an active participant and leader in her school community; like Cassie, an active member of the scouting community who stood up to be a jamboree unit leader and who has helped drive Eltham High's Do it in a Dress campaign; like Jeorgia, who has found incredible inner strength to be an advocate for others, channelling her energy into raising awareness for victims of sexual assault and the wellbeing of students; like Tahlia, who led her school's wellness week to help students re-engage with the school community post remote learning; like Kira, who advocated for meaningful reconciliation with Australia's Indigenous population in her school community, and she also volunteers with the Big Group Hug initiative, helping local families and children affected by family violence; like Ayelet, who has volunteered at Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation, building relationships with those in detention and advocating for people seeking asylum in Australia; like Lama, who has led her school's climate change group— (*Time expired*)

### BEN BUCKLEY

**Mr T BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:01): A massive crowd gathered at the Benambra recreation reserve on Friday to bid farewell to an East Gippsland legend in Ben Buckley. You could not get a car park around the footy oval, where Ben was part of the furniture for many, many years, in more recent years as a goal umpire. He had a career in local government that spanned over 40 years, but that was second to his aviation record and his aviation theatrics, which often got him into quite a bit of trouble. Ben used to say rules were to be used as a rough guide, not to be obeyed. He dropped the first phosphate on fires, and he flew under bridges and powerlines when he was not allowed. There was a time when two Irish tourists jumped from the Snowy River bridge after Ben made a beeline for them before ducking under the bridge at the last minute in his aircraft. When investigated he dismissed this with a wry smile, saying they must have had hallucinations from taking in the local trumpet lilies that grew in the area. He was really a character. He also fronted a hearing one time for allegedly flying under a bridge but got off when he showed the plane's wingspan was greater than the bridge pylon span, only to joke later after leaving the court that if you had the plane in a horizontal position, you could easily make it between the bridge pylons. He was a character, he was a man of integrity, he saved many lives by flying those who had medical emergencies when weather conditions prevented others. Vale, Ben Buckley.

### RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

**Ms THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (13:03): It is International Women's Day, and there are so many wonderful things I could speak about, from our work to get more women elected, to our inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women or all of the amazing women in my own community doing remarkable things, but today I want to use my voice in Parliament to elevate the voices of women and children currently facing harrowing experiences in Ukraine. Already we are seeing devastating scenes of civilians killed by Russian shelling and many more families torn apart as hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are displaced by the conflict, the majority of these women and children. Unfortunately we know that in crisis situations, particularly conflicts, women and children face a disproportionate risk of abuse, sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Right now Ukrainians, both men and women, are fighting for their very survival in terrifying circumstances against an aggressor who has no regard for the human suffering he is inflicting. The UN has already expressed grave concerns for women and children in this conflict. They have called for specific measures to ensure that women and girls are protected against the heightened risk of gender-based violence. Too many times we have seen the atrocities of war play out on the bodies of women and girls. We cannot stand silent on this, and it is worth noting that Ukrainian women are conspicuously absent from the negotiating table between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. I stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people at this time and the countless victims of this travesty that will have no voice in this senseless, unjust war.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Ms HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:04): I rise to wish all Victorian women all the very best for International Women's Day today and pay tribute to all the strong and committed women living in the electorate of Thomastown, the women that do so much to keep us all together. I would like to acknowledge the astounding work of a lot of women that head some amazing organisations. There is Nurcihan of the Turkish Women's Recreation Group; from the Whittlesea Persian-speaking women's group, Carmella; Tan from the Whittlesea Trung Vuong Vietnamese Women's Group; Perihan from the Whittlesea Turkish Women's Association; Nessie Sayar from the Whittlesea United Women's Group; Alita from Women of Whittlesea Embracing Diversity; Karinda Taylor, CEO of First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing; Athena Koeur, a community pharmacist and local activist; U3A committee members Cathy Lucio, Elaine Bateman, Natalie Lowe and Chris Churney; Alex Haines, who heads Whittlesea Community Connections; Leila Alloush from the Victorian Arabic Social Services; from the Society of Women Empowerment and Recognition Australia, Sar Nassia; Aseel Tayah, Collaborations Aseel; Association of Iraqi Women, a great woman, Abir; the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, Cam Nguyen; the Bint Al-Huda Iraqi Women Association, Ferial; the Community of Cypriots of the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne Women's Group, Elpidia; the Greek Cypriot Women's Group, Helen; Sarah from the Green Island Turkish Women's Group; the Greek Orthodox Community of Whittlesea Women's Group, Vera; the list goes on and on—and Ness from Gabriella— (*Time expired*)

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (13:06): I am very pleased to stand up on International Women's Day to share an ode to the women of Cranbourne, although I do see around me now the women in this place and wonder about the lengths that people have gone to and what has been achieved. In my own community I would like to name today some of the women who do extraordinary work, often unrecognised. I will begin by acknowledging and paying my greatest thanks and respects to Kim Hasan from the Turkish senior citizens; Valle Motta from the Italian senior citizens; Nyadol Nyuon from the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre; Marie Garcia, one of our great Filipino community leaders; Nancy Loomba, who is unstoppable; Mama Selba, who is irrepressible and full of energy and does nothing but energise us all; Norma Barnard, one of the great, hardworking women of the Lions Club of Cranbourne; Ravia Safa, Sadia Ali and Gula Bezhan, who are all Afghan women who are always supporting not just their own community but the children across Cranbourne; Yar Dell and of course Sukhwinder Kaur, who right now is in Lismore as part of the Sikh volunteers supporting the many community members who are desperately trying to recover from the awful floods. Today is a celebration of all of those women, and I am very grateful to them all.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Ms SULEYMAN** (St Albans) (13:08): I rise today to acknowledge and pay my respects to all women in St Albans on International Women's Day. I know that women in our community have contributed in so many ways, whether it is raising a family, in their workplace and indeed in every single corner of our community. They contribute not just today but every single day. Wherever you look, women are smashing the glass ceiling, but I do acknowledge there is more work to be done.

I want to give special thanks to incredible local women. Lidija Nezovski is a strong, proud mother and a very successful businesswoman in my local community and very much an active volunteer in her community. Each year Lidija hosts over 500 women, who unite together to celebrate the amazing achievements of women across the west. Lidija has smashed the glass ceiling, working in a male-dominated industry, and today I am celebrating the many, many more women like Lidija and other women throughout the multicultural sector as well, and importantly those who are inspiring and paving the way for strong women to come forward and be part of an even better and more vibrant society. So happy International Women's Day to all women.

**RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR**

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona) (13:09): I rise today to add my voice and solidarity in support of the women and children of Ukraine. On International Women's Day there can be no greater and no more egregious attack on the rights of women than for those women to be the subject of an illegal and unprovoked attack on their country. That their sovereignty has been imposed upon and that their safety and the wellbeing of their future and the future of that country is left in the hands of Russia is, I think, an incredibly important thing for us to focus on amidst the very important celebrations of other indicators of progress. War and war crimes always disproportionately impact upon women and children, and we are seeing that play out now before our very eyes. As I stand here today very humbled by the incredible advances and the opportunities that we have been provided, we must not forget what those people in Ukraine and those who have had to leave to seek refuge are experiencing.

**WOMEN'S ECONOMIC WELLBEING**

**Ms HENNESSY**: I would also like to use this opportunity to urge the federal government to better support the economic wellbeing of women in Australia. They can do that with more affordable child care and paying superannuation on maternity leave. We have got to make sure that we keep the focus on poorer women— (*Time expired*)

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (13:11): This International Women's Day I tuned in to a live event with Julia Gillard and Theresa May. It was part of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London, chaired by our own former PM, Julia Gillard. The discussion was informed by some key insights from a global survey looking at women's career progression, attitudes toward feminism, toxic online behaviour and violence against women and girls. Australia was singled out across a number of survey results, and not in a good way. In good news, a majority of people surveyed believe that gender inequality exists, and of course acknowledging it exists is an important precursor to action, progress and change. But the more challenging data revealed that in Australia half of men surveyed believe that we have gone far enough in gender equality. There is a perception that traditional masculinity is under threat. One in four surveyed believe feminism does more harm than good. We still have a long way to go. Victoria is leading the nation on ending gendered violence, but we need a national approach to this.

**Business of the house****NOTICES OF MOTION**

**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) (13:12): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

**Bills****VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ms NEVILLE:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (13:12): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, and first of all I acknowledge that obviously the opposition are willing to work with the government on this for a speedy passage through the Parliament. We understand the importance of that. We understand when you mention the words 'Victoria Police' throughout our community it is about pride, passion and people that serve the community, the men and women who have gone out and protected



us for many generations to ensure that we are safe on the street, safe at home and that you have got someone to call on.

I will speak a little bit about some of the time when I was in Victoria Police and some of the respect that you have from the community when you are in that role. Sometimes I wish some of that respect translated to my new role as a member of Parliament. It does not always translate that way. But it is a very important role in this state. Coming into this place one of our most important roles is about protecting the community, and that ensures that our Victorian police are protected.

We have been going through this legislation in the time we have had it. We had the bill sent through to us at 4.37 yesterday. The Minister for Police, who is at the table, approached me last sitting week and we had a discussion around what we assumed was going to be in the bill. And I will say thank you—that is what is in the bill, so we are very happy with that. Just the timing in that—4.37 for a briefing at 5.30—is the only thing I am going to say that was a concern. But my goal is not to go down the pathway of that. It is actually about how this Parliament can work together to ensure that we can protect Victoria Police as soon as possible, and that means ensuring that we will work with the government to get this through.

We have spoken with Police Association Victoria, and I spoke again with Wayne Gatt last night—the secretary of the Victorian police association—who has sent a quote. I asked him if it is something that he would like to put on the record, and it is:

... in the opinion of the Police Association the Bill addresses the issue brought to our attention by Victoria Police that made invalid the appointment of a significant number of our members purportedly appointed between 1 July 2014 and 31 August 2021. The Bill is essential to make good our members appointment, but in doing so also validates and bolsters their work performed in that same period protecting the community and holding criminals to account. It is our hope that this Bill passes quickly, so as to provide the community with every assurance, that all of our police and PSOs, have done in good faith over that time, will not be undone.

So that was Wayne Gatt, the secretary of the police association, and I thank Wayne for the discussions we have had in relation to this bill. One of the things raised by the police association when this originally happened was the lack of sleep that they were going to get over that period of time with the stress of what would happen should one of their members be put in a legal position where they could be sued for false arrest—obviously people were imprisoned. There is also the other element in relation to people who are currently in the prison system or the court system. We had a discussion with Shane Patton around that and obviously the proposal to adjourn any cases during that short period of time in between, and we supported the police's move on that.

I would also like to put on record my thanks to the chief commissioner, to the department staff who briefed us and to anyone in Victoria Police who I spoke to during that time. Going back in my memory it was Deputy Commissioner Paterson who I spoke to originally. I would like to thank him for his time—I think it was 8.15 in the morning a couple of weeks ago—and for making sure that we were aware of what was going on so that people could have the comfort that this was not going to be a political football played out in the community but it was going to be something on which we would work together to ensure that we could get this done.

When the Victoria Police Bill 2013 originally came into this place there were lots of changes happening within Victoria Police at the time. There were also some parts of the act which were just simply outdated and needed to be redone, so the new bill came in to replace the 1958 act. We were in government at the time. In 2010 the Baillieu government was elected, the Liberal-Nationals, and we had committed to putting PSOs out on platforms across Victoria. That was to put two PSOs between 6.00 pm and the last train, seven days a week, on platforms in metropolitan Melbourne and major regional stations. That policy is something I think we can stand today as Liberal-Nationals and say we are very proud of. They are still a very important part of the network. I would probably say that PSOs today are more important than we had even imagined at the time in 2010, because Victoria Police now have the opportunity to work with them, with the flexibility of the chief commissioner, to ensure that

they are in the best position to do what their goal is, which is delivering community safety. Now the chief commissioner can move and rotate them around. You can move them onto trains. I know there have been legislation changes, which I think everyone in here has supported along the way, around where PSOs can be put, what they can be used for, the extent of their powers and how they can ensure they protect the community.

I have this argument every so often with people—and I do not mind having an argument; it is always enjoyable. However, when people used to come to me in 2010, particularly people in my own party—as members, not members of the Parliament—and say, ‘Oh, we won on crime. We won on law and order. We won on this big fact that we were going to save the world’, I said, ‘No, no, no’. In that election I think one of the biggest issues was the PSOs. One of the biggest policies was not around law and order—locking them up and throwing away the key—it was around community safety. We actually painted the picture that if you got off at a train station you could get someone to escort you out to the car. We would make the train station safer, and we would make public transport safer. I think sometimes we get tied up in here—and yes, we have probably all been guilty of it in different portfolios, where you can get tied up on the side of what you think the community is thinking because there is the fear of it, the fear of crime—but when you turn that back around and actually say, ‘No, no, no’, and when you can offer solutions for safety, the outcome for people is going to be a lot better. And that is why we were very proud to deliver on the PSOs.

If you go back over the history of the act and the original 1958 act—and I think it is probably more relevant today, women within the police service—obviously we have seen major changes, and that is because of proactive action taken by various governments and various chief commissioners along the way to ensure that we can get greater diversity in Victoria Police. Now, the first female appointed to Victoria Police was in 1917, which was Madge Connor. Obviously you can imagine in the day it would have been a pretty daunting task, and that was in 1917. However, up until 2013 there were still parts of the act from 1958 that would almost prevent females coming into the police force, and that is why it needed to be changed. There were rules, legislation and regulation around how a female police officer had to operate compared to a male officer. My aunty was in Victoria Police, my uncle was in Victoria Police, and my aunty still recalls going to work and having to carry a firearm in her handbag. You could not carry it in a holster. The men could carry it however they wanted, but a female had to carry it in their handbag. You just think back, and if I was talking about 1917—not saying it was acceptable—you would probably go, ‘Okay, there was a whole different world then’. But we are talking 1970s. We are talking into the 1980s. You were talking parts of the legislation during that period of time where if a female joined the police force and got married, they would have to resign on the proviso they were probably going to have children. That obviously today is not acceptable, and that is why we have to update these acts. That is why bills of Parliament come through this place on a regular occasion, because we know, as members of Parliament listening to our community, things change in our community. It does not matter where you are in the community, things change and evolve—some good, some bad. We also know errors happen, and I think it is really important that when these mistakes happen they are picked up as soon as possible so we can make sure that we can get the protection out there for those that are doing what they believe is their job.

Now, I did read an article this morning—and I have to be honest, I have not got it right in front of me—around one of the cases in relation to this, where they are arguing a 14th-century piece of legislation, a 14th-century common law, where a person who is acting as a police officer in the role of a police officer, whether sworn or not, is a police officer. I have not followed it up. It is going to be a very interesting read. This will be actually part of history, when we go through this and have a look at what a court case can do in there. However, one thing I will say to people within the current system who are already going through the process: I, the Liberal-Nationals and I know the government—and I am going to assume the independents in here as well—when we get elected, our role is to ensure that legislation fits modern society and the community. That means when we go through and make these adjustments we have to (a) make sure the adjustments are correct, (b) make sure the impact is not removing someone’s human rights, (c) make sure it is going to be legal and held up within the courts,

because we cannot afford to not have that, and (d) ensure that it is designed to continue the protection of those that protect us and protect the community. I think that is the most relevant thing when we talk about this legislation today. We had 1200 total police, PSOs and custody officers who, not knowing it themselves, ended up in the position where they were potentially unsworn. This in good faith gives it back to them to say (a), 'The work that you have done to protect our community was legal' and (b), 'You've done the right thing; we're going to do the right thing to protect you as well'. I think that is really important as we move through with this legislation.

Crime in Victoria over time has seen fluctuations up and down. We have seen domestic violence go through stages. I have spoken about domestic violence in here before. When you are talking about reporting of domestic violence versus the actual actions of domestic violence you have got to be very cautious, because sometimes you can get tied up on the fact of an increase in domestic violence when at the same time there has been a period of time where there has been a positive of that increase, because it is actually creating an environment where it can be reported. Now, there also has to be a stage in time where we turn around and go, 'No, now we've really got to work out how we can start to reduce that domestic violence—not the reporting but the domestic violence outcomes', and we can identify we are hitting a peak of reporting. Now, there is always going to be an element of underreporting. There is always going to be that, and one of the things that can prevent people reporting is the fear from the victim of what is going to happen if the offender or perpetrator finds out, where they fear retribution for speaking up.

Just last week I was with the member for Euroa. We were in Euroa and we were talking about one of the police stations up there, which highlights some of the issues—and this is more probably regional than metro now—where you have got the police station and facilities not adequate to today's world of separating victims and offenders: very thin walls, a small station, probably a bit unsafe, and the community raising concerns about some of the things that are happening within that station.

We need to make sure that we can protect the victims when they get taken in to make a statement. If it is an uncomfortable environment, we are going back to yesteryear when victims would not report for fear of the retribution that would happen post that. I think it is really important that whilst we are updating the bill we also make sure we can keep up to date with what is happening in our actual stations.

I wanted to put on record very quickly some of the thanks to Victoria Police, PSOs, those that protect us throughout my community. I am very proudly a representative currently for the seat of Gembrook; I hope on 27 November I will be the representative for the city of Berwick. You are allowed to have a little smile there, Deputy Speaker. No—I thought I might have had a bit of support from the Deputy Speaker for coming back. It is a really important thing. I will say that in my area I know we have our disagreements and our discussions about some of the things throughout my community which we do not agree on, but the one thing that I think every member of Parliament representing our area agrees on is that our Victoria Police and PSOs do an amazing job.

We have one of the fastest growing areas in our community. And with the new electorate that I am going into, down in Clyde North, there is one thing I have noticed. I talk about growth, and sometimes you do not see that growth, but I did when I went out and did some letterbox drops. Google Maps said there were two streets when there were 15 streets. The changes through those areas are huge. With that rapid growth, we need to make sure that we have got the infrastructure available for them.

There was a report on Clyde North alone by the RACV that showed one in 19 properties had fallen victim to crime. Now, that is not all residential houses—they were houses, I should say, but they were houses under construction, and that is a big issue with crime down through that area. The one thing they have got an issue with is in relation to response down through Clyde North, and I think it is really important that as we update legislation we also start to have that infrastructure, because Clyde North needs to make sure it has got a police response zone available to it, to just that community. That means we have got currently a station at Narre Warren with, as I said, amazing staff that work there, and we have got staff at Cranbourne and staff at Pakenham. But with the growth down there now and with the

road infrastructure, with the changes through the community and with the traffic, it is a lot harder to get to some of these locations. That is making it more and more difficult for police to deliver on their duties of ensuring they are protecting people in their homes and on the street. Whilst you can have some extra resources, it is then a matter of where those resources are located to get to a place on time, to ensure that when they are called they do not get stuck in traffic, which happens at the moment if you are travelling down Clyde Road.

Whilst I acknowledge that they have obviously opened the Clyde Road underpass through there, Clyde Road itself is still a horrific road to drive along, and just because of the way the developments are happening, there is really no other way to get from the Berwick side to Clyde North without going down that road—or you can go down Soldiers Road, but Soldiers Road is a dirt road which is generally pretty badly corrugated and I would not want to be driving down there too fast in a police car. I think we need to also have that consideration of how we are going to be delivering those services through those areas in the future. As a representative down there it is something I will be continuing to raise to ensure that we have got people protected down there.

I said at the beginning that I had the pleasure of working at Dandenong and Prahran in my time in the Victoria Police. One of the reasons I think I was very passionate about ensuring the passage of this bill so quickly is that when you go out in a police vehicle and you get involved in any situation that can turn dangerous very quickly, you have to make a split-second decision. A lot of the time you do not have time to think about it. That includes members of Victoria Police, who have to use weapons that would be prohibited for anyone else, including sprays, batons, obviously handcuffs and firearms—force that could be above what you would regularly expect in the street, and up to lethal force. I think when we are talking about what they are doing out there in that split second, they need to have in their mind 100 per cent that they are protected when they are doing their duties and delivering those duties to protect the community. Now, we have seen case after case over time, and some of them frustrate me. We have had a case where a 15-year-old boy was shot by police a few years ago at a skate park. We have seen cases where police have used their firearms, their OC spray or their batons and have been judged later for the actions that have been taken.

There are some times which are sickening, like when we see a police officer act not in accordance with what the regulation would be around using force. But on many occasions we see reports come back from others, including the coroner's reports or other reports on the behaviour of Victoria Police and PSOs, where those making the decisions, those making the recommendations, have had two years to review what happened—two years to go over every possible scenario. A Victoria Police officer will do that in a second and then be judged by those after, and I think that is why this legislation is so important. They need to know they are protected when they make that decision.

I know the new world does not always like media, so we will go to the movie *Sully*—and if anyone has seen it or if you have not seen it, it is fantastic. It is about the aeroplane that landed in the Hudson River in New York. When they did the full report on that they did some trials of what would happen. One of the things that came out of that was that the pilots who were doing the simulation were told, 'Birds into engine one, birds into engine two', and they started to change where they were going to land—and they made it. On every occasion in the simulation they made it to landing. The captain came and said, 'Well, you're missing one thing; you're missing the human element', so they allowed 35 or 45 seconds for the human element. Now, I am not the best flyer, so when you hit turbulence I am not making a decision until about an hour after that—but pilots know how to control a plane. They are the best of the best and they go through checklists, but human element had to be taken into consideration. When it was put in, the plane never made it back to the airport on any of those simulations. Victoria Police are the same. They have a human element, and when they go out to circumstances they have fear. It crosses their mind, 'Will I or won't I go home?'. They know they have to protect somebody else.

Many times you will run into a situation where you do not fully understand what is behind that door—and in too many circumstances. Vehicles are the worst. When you hear of someone with a weapon in

a vehicle, the police approach that vehicle, in a normal circumstance, just the same as they have pulled over someone on every other day of the week. But when they then have to react, they have to react within an instant. They do not have a choice to go back to the books, check it out or find out what the training was back at the academy and whether it was or was not covered. They have to react on the spot. And I will tell you now, seeing many police forces around not just this country but the world, if I have got someone I want to come in and protect me in one of those positions, it is Victoria Police.

There is a reason that Queensland police advertise in the police association magazine in Victoria: because they want the best. These people have learned over their careers and their training how to best make those decisions, and that training has altered over time. That training has improved. The funding for the academy has changed so many different aspects of how they train—from 2000, when I went through, when a domestic violence situation was done in a hallway next to the classroom and that was the best simulation you could get, to now, when they have got a mock petrol station, they have got offices, they have got houses. They have got so much in there that they can go and do as the best—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr BATTIN:** The centre of excellence. Thank you, Minister—there you go. The Centre of Learning for Family Violence. That is all positive change. That gives police officers the best tools to make these decisions. And on the minister's point on domestic violence—if you want to talk about it—you have to make an instant decision. On domestic violence, you go into a house and you generally concentrate on the offender. However, injuries happen to the victim. When a reaction happens, they have the greatest fear, 'I am now the witness. I am now the victim in this, and they are going to take away my boyfriend, husband, partner'—whoever—'and I am worried about the repercussions', and they can jump in to defend. Again, you have to make split-second decisions.

So in closing on this bill, I will say the most important aspect of it is around ensuring, in my view, the protection of the police officers. It is to fix the admin error that occurred in 2013–14 and to make sure of it for Victoria Police, who are in good faith going out to protect the community. It is for those members who put on that uniform for the first time—the pride when you put on that uniform is huge; if you get the pleasure of working in Prahran after that, you can walk past the mirrors a lot more, and you do look really good in that uniform—to go out and protect our community. It is now our responsibility, without the politics, to protect them. I said it to Wayne Gatt, and I hope I send a clear message to every member of the Victorian police force, from the chief commissioner to the newest recruit: I do not care where you have come from or how you got there, I do not care about your political beliefs and I do not care about your religion; what I do care about is that you have taken the oath to go out there and protect us. I took an oath to come in here to protect you. Today we want to see this bill go through as soon as possible. We will work with the government to do that and to ensure for those men and women who have taken that oath for us that we live up to our oath to them.

**Mr EREN (Lara) (13:37):** I too would like to make a contribution on this very important bill today, the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. At the outset can I thank the opposition for their stance of not politicising this very important issue. It is great to see—it is refreshing to see—that we can all be on the one side when it comes to very important matters like this before us. I want to thank the minister at the table, the Minister for Police, who has done a tremendous job obviously over the past few years in terms of not only resourcing the police force but also being nimble and acting quickly when it comes to the matters that are before the house today. Obviously in association with Police Association Victoria there have been lots of discussions, and we have come up with this bill to protect our communities and importantly to protect our police force, who are doing a tremendous job under difficult circumstances out there.

I have said it on a number of occasions: you wish, in a perfect world, you did not need police. You wish, in a perfect world, you did not need hospitals. But unfortunately it is not a perfect world and we do need the services of police officers to protect the wider community—to protect us against people that are bad, people that are criminals that have intent to either hurt you or deprive you of your property.

Clearly when it comes to matters like this I want to thank my local stations in my electorate. The police station in Lara, a state-of-the-art police station that is brand new—well, it is not brand new now; it has been there for a few years—and the Corio police station but indeed the Geelong police force in its entirety I thank for protecting our region. And when it comes to that, I just think it needs to be put on the record that criminals are unfortunately getting clever. Maybe it is a bit of an oxymoron, but they are in terms of how they proceed with crime and how they make use of technology nowadays, and that is why it is important to have our police force armed accordingly to combat these people with bad intent. And clearly that is what we are doing as a government.

I would also like to give a shout-out to all of the PSOs. Obviously they protect our public transport users, which is very important. And when you consider that through COVID the police force have dealt with something that we have never dealt with before, a pandemic, that has brought challenges on a number of different fronts. It had its challenges in relation to dealing with a public that had never had the rights and freedoms they normally enjoy taken away from them, obviously for the safety of the wider community, to keep people in the safety of their homes, which caused a bit of stress at home. I do not think there is question when it comes to that, and I think there are some issues in relation to that that the police had to deal with, not to mention some of the extremely violent protests that happened. The police had to deal with that on a daily basis. Extremism increased to a certain extent. It is sad to see that our state, our nation can be influenced by overseas misinformation when it comes to it. And this is another very important matter about how people deal with information and where they get their information—through the internet. Obviously there are a lot of people out there that believe everything that they read on the internet, and they tend to become a bit more extreme, and the police have to deal with that. Of course when you consider all of those things combined—not to mention trying to deal with their own health and wellbeing and safety through COVID—it has been very challenging.

So from my perspective the bill before the house is a bill that introduces a new provision into the Victoria Police Act 2013 to retrospectively validate the appointment of police members invalidly appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner by deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021 and validate all exercises of power by police members invalidly appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner between July 2014 and August 2021, including the power to swear in police officer and protective services officer recruits. I could go on a bit later on about some of the investments that the government has made in relation to police, and I will do that a bit later on, which is I think very important under the circumstances as I have said.

This is a state that enjoys population growth. Prior to COVID we were growing at a rate of about 150 000 people per annum that wanted to call Victoria home, not to mention being the major events capital, the sporting capital. There are so many opportunities for our police officers and others to be engaged in some of those things—particularly with population growth—and accordingly we have increased the funding and the recruitment opportunities for police to increase their numbers so that they can protect the community the best way that they can.

This set of circumstances has now caused some angst to the 1200 officers that have been identified as potentially being recruited not in a legal way—to feel somehow that they have done something wrong. They have not done anything wrong. They went about their duties as per usual, and we thank them for all that they have done. As a government we will protect them all the way. It is not their fault. They were good enough to put their hands up to protect and serve our communities. Like many occupations, when you leave home you expect to come back safely, but there is always an element of doubt when you are serving the public in that way. Potentially there are some bad people out there that can cause some harm to our police officers. We have got to make sure that we have bills like this before the house to protect them in the best way that we can. This bill obviously will cure the period of time between 2014 and August 2021, meaning that actions and conduct by affected police and PSOs—approximately 1200—who acted in good faith will be considered lawful and authorised. It will provide certainty and clarity for the affected members and for the justice sector more broadly.

We have a pretty good justice system, and I am sure that there are some lawyers that will want to obviously take on some of these issues relating to why we are presenting this bill today. They will represent some of those people out there that have potentially done the wrong thing and committed crimes. Criminals are always looking for ways to get out of it, looking for a loophole to get out of the crime that they have committed, and I am sure that they will. This bill ensures that not only do we protect our police officers from any action but we also stop criminals using some loopholes to get out of the crimes that they have committed. So that is why this bill is needed. The introduction of the new Victoria Police Act changed the powers of deputy commissioners to appoint acting assistant commissioners. However, Victoria Police continued this practice. Legal advice sought by Victoria Police identified this as a potential issue in late 2020, but they believed it to be limited to a small number of powers used by acting assistant commissioners.

In the time that I have I want to just conclude with some remarks. Again I appreciate that the opposition is totally supporting this bill before the house and wishing it a speedy passage, like we are, but when this matter was brought to the attention of the Victorian government we acted to resolve it as quickly as possible. The impacted officers have always considered themselves to be sworn. They are well trained. They have kept the community safe. This is an administrative issue that is no fault of the officers impacted—no fault of the officers impacted. We have moved quickly to resolve the matter. Victoria Police moved to re-swear the vast bulk of the 1200 sworn officers so that they could continue their work. The government and Victoria Police have worked closely to draft the bill and correct the matter retrospectively as well, as we mentioned earlier. This administrative error should not have occurred, but it has, so we have to obviously deal with it accordingly. We cannot speak for the breakdown that occurred in 2013. The change in legislation created this issue, but we can fix it now, which is what this bill does.

Again I thank all of those PSOs and police officers for all that they do for our communities. This is highlighting to them that we do care about them, and we want this bill to have a speedy passage through this house.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:47): I rise to make some comments on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and at the outset will say that there are many times in this chamber when we have an opposite view on legislation and things before the house. On this particular occasion I am pleased to say that we are in unity in terms of the changes that are being proposed to ensure that Victoria Police have the powers necessary to swear many of the new police members into the job and that they are able to do what they have all signed up to do, and that is to ensure that Victorians are kept safe.

Community safety is absolutely paramount to any community, no matter where you live. I know it is something that is very important to many of my constituents in Caulfield, which I have spoken about on numerous occasions. Ensuring that we have police officers on the ground that are sworn in to respond when events occur is absolutely paramount.

In this term I had the good fortune of being the Shadow Minister for Police and had many opportunities to work with many of the men and women of Victoria Police and to see firsthand what an amazing job they do. It is a tough job. I cannot think of too many other jobs that are tougher than being a police officer. The things that they are confronted with on a daily basis just beggar belief in terms of how they have got to then go out there, do that, deal with situations that could spark in an instant and then hopefully come back to their families at the end of the working day.

We know particularly the last couple of years have been pretty tough for the men and women of Victoria Police. Again, I have had many of those officers contact me that may not have necessarily had the same view in terms of what their obligations have been, particularly during some of the lockdowns and in carrying out the rules that were in place as part of the lockdowns. In fact many really found it difficult to do the job that they had signed up to do, but they knew that they had a responsibility to do that. As torn as they were, they certainly carried out their duties in a tireless manner. Unfortunately in many instances they have been confronted with a lot of targeted attacks towards many

of those frontline officers that have just really been carrying out those orders and doing what they have been instructed to do. I have said on a number of occasions, and I know the current Chief Commissioner of Police has also said, that because of those enforcements of lockdowns—a lot of the reputational damage—Victoria Police has been set back quite a period of time, and there is a lot of rebuild work that is needed. We have seen it.

Certainly there were a number of times in Caulfield where there were potential threats of a protest in Caulfield Park. We had one occasion on which there was going to be, of all things, a musical protest, and we had thought that there was going to be a whole group. We were told that a whole group of musicians were going to come down to Caulfield Park and protest. One Sunday we ended up with about 300 police officers and the whole of Caulfield Park surrounded with vehicles and members of police, and I suppose thankfully it turned out to be a couple of acoustic guitar players that came on down and were playing and the protest was a bit of a fizzer. But the best thing about that is the police actually stayed, kicked the footy, interacted with many of the locals and did a lot of that repair work that has been needed as part of what they have had to do leading up to all of this. I spoke to a number of the police that were there on the day. Initially when a lot of constituents were quite concerned about the amount of police presence, the fact that that additional work was being done was actually important, and I think there is going to be a lot more of that work that is going to be needed to be done to ensure that people once again understand the integral role that Victoria Police plays and just how important the jobs of police are.

As I say, the last thing that we need is people having a different view about Victoria Police because of the work that they have had to do. Again I cite when particularly during some of the religious high holy days we had police enforcing a number of those lockdowns and curfews. We had through the streets of Caulfield and Balaclava and St Kilda police horses, cars, a very, very strong police presence, and when people were literally leaving their house to do exercise they were questioned as to why they were leaving their homes, the thinking that they might be going to pray in a synagogue. This is unfortunate, and I have been on the record talking about this. It is unfortunate that there were some people that were obviously doing the wrong thing. But the majority were not, and unfortunately the fallout of that is the distrust that follows where you see just a heavy-handed enforcement that many of those frontline police have had to do in terms of following those orders that were put upon them. So as I have said and as I have put on the record, it is very, very important to repair the reputational damage that has been done to Victoria Police because of those harsh lockdowns that we had imposed upon us by the Andrews Labor government.

Can I say also that I have been calling for a long time for just additional resources, and particularly I cite my Caulfield police station. Caulfield police station does a fantastic job. It responds to so many different things. We have had a number of effectively illegal rooming houses that have been operating and a number of police activities that have resulted as part of all that. We had one guy that in the middle of the night pulled out a machete and was walking the streets, threatening people with a machete in Caulfield. We have had a number of other threats. We had the traumatic situation of a woman that was sexually assaulted and held against her will for a number of days and ended up on the next-door neighbour's porch, fleeing the house that she was held in, and as a result of a lot of this activity we have held a number of forums to try and see what we can do about more police activity, more responses and better rules and regulations around particularly some of those illegal rooming houses. I just hope, now that we are talking about being able to fix the loopholes and ensuring that we have got more sworn officers in the force, that we take advantage of that and that in areas where we need police to be able to respond to situations as they arise, like in my electorate of Caulfield, we have those resources made available. It is very, very important.

I do also want to highlight that just in the last couple weeks we had the terrible situation—and it hit the news—at our 7-Eleven in Hawthorn Road of the traumatic death of a woman that had hot coffee spilled on her in an attack. It resulted in her death, and that further demonstrates again that in all areas you need to ensure that community safety is absolutely paramount.



I want to finish by paying tribute to the great work that the men and women of Victoria Police do each and every day. It is a tough job. It is a thankless job. I want to also put on record my thanks to Police Association Victoria and Wayne Gatt, who I had the good fortune of working with over a long time. The dedication that he has for his serving members again just demonstrates the fact that Victoria Police is a family. You see that a lot of people who actually sign up and graduate through the academy are not just family in the general sense but in the physical sense. You have got brothers, sisters and relatives that go through the force as well.

It is so important to the fabric of our society to have community safety paramount and to have Victoria Police there to respond as we need them. In my final words I would say, 'Let's get more police into my electorate of Caulfield'. We desperately need them. We desperately want them. And when we have situations where there is a need for police to respond to very significant incidents, as we have had in Caulfield, we have got to have enough police available to be able to respond when they are needed.

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (13:57): It is always a difficult gig to do the few minutes before question time starts, but I will do my best as I stand to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. I would really like to thank the Minister for Police; her ministerial office; her chief of staff, David Griffith; her chief legal adviser, Stacey Nguyen; and other advisers for the work they have done, as well as the department, on bringing this important piece of legislation to this house so quickly today.

Because it is International Women's Day I want to make a very special mention that the member for Bellarine was appointed to the position of Minister for Police in May 2016. She is the first woman in this state to ever hold the portfolio of Minister for Police, and what a great job she has done. I was doing a little bit of research, and she has certainly done more time in the role—that is an interesting way of referring to the police portfolio. She has had responsibility for police for five years and 285 days as of today, and that is longer than the seven previous police ministers. Our Minister for Police is a trailblazer. She is breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes for women not only in government but also in police and across the whole of Victoria. I have hosted the minister on numerous visits to Ballarat when we have visited police stations, fire stations and emergency services, and I can tell you firsthand the very high regard the Minister for Police is held in amongst my community and the people who serve our community so well. I really want to say thank you to the minister for the outstanding job that she has done and continues to do and for being an incredible role model for women and girls across Victoria.

It is because of this leadership by the Minister for Police that we are now introducing this bill to the house which will retrospectively validate appointments of Victoria Police acting assistant commissioners by deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021 and any powers exercised by them pursuant to the invalid appointments, including the swearing in of police and protective services.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

#### Members

#### MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE

#### *Absence*

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:01): I rise to inform the house that the Minister for Industry Support and Recovery will answer questions for the portfolios of regional development and agriculture all this week.

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**ELECTIVE SURGERY**

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Health. Melbourne lady Jeanne needs a knee replacement, but due to the blowout in elective surgery waiting lists she is yet to receive this vital procedure. Jeanne now cannot walk long distances and mostly relies on a walking frame; she is housebound and now totally reliant on her daughter-in-law to support her. Jeanne and her son Mitch are here in the Parliament today. Like many Victorians, she is a victim of the government’s blowout in elective surgery waiting times. What does the minister have to say to Jeanne, who now wants to know: will she ever get her vital surgery before she has a serious fall?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:02): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Can I say to Jeanne and to any other Victorian who is on the waiting list for elective surgery that with the significantly more stable position that we have with COVID-19 numbers in this state, and indeed in this country as a result of the outstanding efforts that so many thousands of Victorians have made by particularly going forward and getting record numbers of vaccines, particularly third-dose boosters, we are now seeing an easing but far from removal of the COVID-19 threat, and a removal to the point where there are no longer restrictions—be it in either the private sector, which returned some time ago to full elective surgery lists, or indeed the public sector, where there is significant effort being put into both the delivery for existing and indeed the so far 80 000, by the most recent figures, Victorians who are on that category 2 or that category 3 list.

My message to all of those Victorians is that nobody wanted to see these restrictions in place for a moment longer than they were needed, and they were not in place for a moment longer than was recommended by our public health officials. Now, in partnership with the commonwealth, in partnership with the private sector and the public sector, we will go through a process of seeking to bring those waiting lists down in a sustainable, enduring way to make sure that all those Victorians, based on clinical need and clinical priority, have their issues for elective surgery dealt with as soon as is both clinically and practically safe and sustainable.

**The SPEAKER:** I just remind members on both sides that it is not the custom and practice in this place to refer to members in the gallery.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Minister, Jeanne’s family are considering sending her to India to receive the medical and surgical treatment that she desperately needs. How is it acceptable that a family such as Jeanne’s is considering paying more than \$25 000 and sending her to India to receive vital surgery that the Andrews government’s health system, sadly, cannot provide?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:05): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. My understanding of the health system unfortunately does not extend to India, but in terms of whatever options individuals may seek to apply I would urge them to always take that advice as clinical priorities from those people they are getting their clinical information from—their surgeons, their doctors, their practitioners. In regard to particular arrangements, whether it be private in Victoria or indeed international or interstate, I know that for instance Victoria and indeed all the jurisdictions are working very closely with the commonwealth through the national partnership arrangement on private health partnerships through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic to deal precisely with these kinds of issues, which is why we have seen over 43 000 direct public patients in this space being dealt with in the private sector and I would urge—*(Time expired)*

**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY**

**Ms WILLIAMS** (Dandenong—Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (14:06): Today marks International Women’s Day, and while it is a time to celebrate the achievements women make in our community it is also a time to reflect on how

far we still have to go. Women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, but the fact is that the pandemic has not created these inequalities, it has merely magnified what was already there. We have a pay gap that widened last year for the first time in seven years. In 2021 only one of the 23 CEO appointments to ASX 300 companies was female. Women are over-represented in low-paid, insecure work. We are more likely to be unemployed and twice as likely to be underemployed. We retire with almost half the superannuation savings of men despite living longer on average. And the risk of gendered violence, as we all know, remains pervasive.

The theme for this International Women's Day is 'Break the bias', and I am very proud that this government started the important structural work to break the bias long before the pandemic hit. We are implementing Australia's first gender equality act with clear actions to address the gender pay gap and reduce workplace sexual harassment in the public sector. We have established a gender responsive budgeting unit to ensure that outcomes for women are embedded as part of our state budget process. This was made possible because of strong representation: 48 per cent of those on the government benches are women and we have a majority of women in cabinet. We have achieved gender parity on paid government boards too. From kinder to free TAFE we are removing barriers, getting more women into work and supporting the economic security that we need and that we deserve. I call on everyone in this chamber, in every chamber and in every room to stand up and call out gender bias at work, at home and in our community; to stand up and take action against bias embedded in our systems and structures. This International Women's Day and every single day we fight to break the bias and improve outcomes for all women.

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. In the last six months 12 Victorians have died waiting for ambulance dispatch to deliver an ambulance, one of them being a nine-month-old boy. What advice has the government received as to how many other tragic deaths over the past two years have been as a result of an inability for ambulance dispatch to be able to respond to these life-and-death telephone calls?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:08): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The system whereby calls to 000 come through ESTA, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, and then depending on how they get allocated from there to the relevant emergency service, in this case the ambulance service, has been the subject of significant and right public inquiries and reviews in recent times. The most recent iterations of those that we have seen in recent days are simply not acceptable, and I think all Victorians would accept that when it comes to the position of how those most recent examples point to the instances of breakdown in that system, that reform has to happen and the change has to happen. That is why I was particularly pleased to see yesterday the Minister for Emergency Services deliver a record package of over \$115.9 million of new funding to deliver substantial new and revised systems in ESTA to deal with precisely the issues that the honourable Leader of the Opposition raised.

In addition to that is the work being done by former Chief Commissioner of Police, Graham Ashton, in assisting ESTA and all the emergency services organisations that they deal with—Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, the CFA, the SES and a range of others. How all those first-responder, critical, time-sensitive matters get dealt with is a matter that is under active consideration by Graham Ashton. In addition again, the inspector-general for emergency management, a fine public servant, is well down the path of his particular aspect of how the system reviews on precisely the issues that the honourable Leader of the Opposition touches on.

This is a government that knows there are issues that have to be dealt with in this space. I think the efforts of the Minister for Emergency Services in terms of yesterday's new package in addition to the already 43 new call takers that she has funded through those arrangements late last year will start to see impact in this critical area. That is why it is so important that the issues that the honourable Leader

of the Opposition touched on have been recognised and taken up by this government. I look forward to that investment in ESTA, in our emergency services first responders who have dealt with an extraordinary workload increase over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, achieving the goals that I think all Victorians can come together and support.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): Noting again my substantive question being over the tragic death numbers that may have occurred over the last two years, I would like to supplementarily ask when the government will deliver to Victorians the five-second mandated call answer target for the ambulance dispatch system.

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:12): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Indeed it was this government that particularly funded the record amounts of funding after the war with our paramedics was ended in 2014 and saw the funding particularly delivered by the honourable member for Altona in her stint as health minister that saw the highest level of performance of ESTA and Ambulance Victoria in its history in the period immediately before the global pandemic. I look forward to those extraordinary levels of demand and workforce pressure that ESTA and the entire first-responder community has been subject to now that we are in a more stable but far from ended environment through this record amount of funding that the honourable Minister for Emergency Services delivered to fix this precise issue.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WOMEN IN RENEWABLE ENERGY

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:13): I rise on this International Women's Day to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's \$11 million investment in solar industry training, which is supporting more women than ever into the workforce to deliver this government's clean energy revolution. This past Sunday I was proud to announce the next phase of Solar Victoria's Growing Our Clean Energy Workforce, which will focus on lifting participation of women in the renewables industry.

Women make up less than 1 per cent of the solar workforce. This package will offer subsidised apprenticeships, professional mentoring and access to ongoing education for Victorian women entering the solar industry. On Sunday I met with Mel, an RACV solar apprentice who left a career in hospitality to join the rapidly growing renewable energy workforce. Our support is inspiring the next generation of women in renewables, and will help us deliver 770 000 solar systems, making a huge contribution to halving our emissions by 2030 and supporting 5500 jobs.

Women are taking charge in the solar industry. The members for Wendouree and Buninyong will be pleased to hear about Livewire Electrical, an all-female business run by Kylie Slade that is providing solar installation services to the Ballarat region. Of her all-female team, not unlike here, Kylie says that she is showing the rest of the industry that everyone is equal and that we can all learn and grow together to improve the future. This is just another example of how we are creating thousands of jobs in renewable energy, which stands in stark contrast to those opposite. The opposition are climate cowards who cannot even own up to their own terrible voting record, let alone compete with us. Jobs in clean energy are the jobs of the future, not just jobs for men. These are safe, clean jobs—good jobs for women that only Labor will deliver.

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Tragically, Swan Hill's David Edwards watched his father die because they were unable to get an ambulance to attend a 000 call. Mr Edwards's family have many questions they want answered by the government, but each request for an explanation goes unanswered. When will the government finally give an explanation to the family as to why an ambulance failed to attend this situation, and when will the government finally offer an unreserved apology to Mr Edwards's family after this situation ultimately cost him his life?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:16): Can I thank the member for Murray Plains for his question. All tragic circumstances, whether that particular example or any of the others that the government has recognised and acknowledged—and indeed ESTA, more importantly, has recognised and acknowledged—that have delayed the response from ESTA to ambulances are matters that clearly the government and all of the community regret. The government apologises for the pain of the families who have lost loved ones in those circumstances. I take this opportunity to pass on, I am sure, all the Parliament’s and all the communities’, including the honourable member’s community in Swan Hill’s, condolences to that particular family.

In regard to a particular inquiry as to how circumstances in particular cases are dealt with, in addition to my answer to the honourable Leader of the Opposition on the work through the inspector-general of emergency management; the work through Graham Ashton, former Chief Commissioner of Police; or indeed the recent package announced by the honourable Minister for Emergency Services, there are of course other processes whereby the coroner quite rightly gets involved in these processes. So it would not be appropriate for any member of the government or indeed any member of the community to pre-empt those processes. I would take this opportunity to once again reiterate on behalf of I am sure the government, the Parliament and the wider Victorian community our deep condolences to that family and indeed any family who have lost loved ones in what we recognise are unacceptable circumstances and which, more importantly, the government has responded to with its record package of investment announced yesterday by the Minister for Emergency Services.

Having said all of that, I also reiterate the comments I made earlier to the honourable Leader of the Opposition in regard to the critical investments that this government has historically made, is continuing to make and which immediately prior to the onset of the global pandemic saw the best ever rates of responses to our ESTA and ambulance services. It is this government’s commitment to revisit those issues and support our ambulance services and more importantly support ESTA and the wider Victorian community to return to if not to exceed those levels of performance—performances that I think we can take great certainty in knowing, having achieved them through this government’s partnership and investment, we will return to.

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:19): Minister, if Victorians are calling 000 in a life-and-death situation like the Edwards family did and the calls are going unanswered, what should Victorians do?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:19): I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. Victorians should follow the advice of the public health officials here. They should follow the advice, the entire advice, of those public health officials. They should phone 000, and in doing so they should make sure that in phoning 000—though somewhere between 20 and 25 per cent of those calls that go to 000 are not emergency calls, which are sadly taking up substantial amounts of public efforts and which can be on the phone for—

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, this is a life-and-death situation, and tragically we have seen lives lost. A genuine question I ask you to bring the minister back to answering is if people are ringing 000 in a life-and-death situation and it goes unanswered, what should they do? I ask you to bring the minister back to actually answering that question because it is just so important to Victorians.

**Mr FOLEY:** On the point of order, Speaker, no-one disputes the importance of the question the honourable member asked. I was asked a question about what people should do. I was being directly relevant. We have specific advice from health officials on the record publicly to call 000 and in so doing make sure that that is dealt with in an appropriate way.

**The SPEAKER:** I need to rule on that point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

**Mr FOLEY:** What we had, particularly over December and January, was a terrible coming together of circumstances in the context of the highest levels of demand on our emergency services, the telecommunications authority, the ambulance service and the whole health system in its history, and in that regard I urge everyone to follow the public health advice— *(Time expired)*

**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WOMEN IN SPORT**

**Ms SPENCE** (Yuroke—Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth) (14:22): On International Women’s Day it is a privilege to update the house on our work to elevate women and girls in community sport. In 2017 the Andrews Labor government established the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, an Australian first, and last year we invested \$11.6 million to provide more opportunities for women and girls on and off the field, from sports broadcasting and board training to scholarships and community activation grants to unleash their potential.

Cultural change does not happen overnight, and we know that you cannot be what you cannot see, which is why we committed to the world’s first 40 per cent women on boards quota for funded state sport associations. The days of girls getting changed into sports uniforms in the car or behind the canteen should be long behind us, which is why we have invested \$45 million over the past five years in the Female Friendly Facilities Fund to make sporting venues safe and suitable for women and girls.

Today I announced \$1 million for research to identify new ways of advancing gender equality in sport and recreation, and on Sunday I joined the Minister for Women to announce \$2.3 million for clubs to promote gender equality and to call out and prevent violence against women. This Labor government has never shied away from levelling the playing field for women and girls. We established the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation and we pioneered the Family Friendly Facilities Fund, and it is this government that can be trusted to continue to advance women in sport and at all levels.

**OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION**

**Mr HIBBINS** (Prahran) (14:23): My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, two weeks ago the New South Wales government announced that they will effectively ban offshore drilling for oil and gas. Will the Victorian government now do the same?

**Ms D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:24): I thank the member for Prahran for the question. There is a lot that can be said about this campaign that has been run by the member for Prahran and a number of others on this notion of drilling offshore for gas, and can I just say that it is easy to ban offshore gas drilling when there is no such gas offshore, as is the case in New South Wales, may I say.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members on my right!

**Ms D’AMBROSIO:** It is predicated on a scare campaign about offshore drilling, and it is something that, as I said, is really about fearmongering. I think it is really important that those opposite, the Greens, need to be very careful about the fearmongering that takes place instead of the facts. These are the facts: there is no-one that is proposing to drill under the Twelve Apostles, because that is exactly what this question is about. No-one is proposing to drill under the Twelve Apostles Marine National Park; no-one is proposing to do that. If you cannot win on your arguments, then you resort to scare campaigns and misinformation. Never have the Greens been less relevant to climate change and renewable energy than they are right now because they resort to scare campaigns and misinformation. We are getting on with it, delivering the biggest reform in climate change, climate action, with the biggest reforms in renewable energy. We will deliver it. Anything offshore—they might be on a raft, but they have got no paddle and they are not going anywhere very quickly.

**Mr HIBBINS** (Pahran) (14:26): Let us talk about the facts and let us talk about the fact that the state government has opened up vast new areas of Victoria's coastline for oil and gas exploration. That is the fact. Let us talk about the fact that the state government is now proposing—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr HIBBINS:** They do not want to hear the facts. They were all about the facts before; now they do not want to know about the facts.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Pahran has the call.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Well, the facts are that the state government are now supporting gas production next to the Twelve Apostles marine park. So will the state government reverse its decision, step in, stop new gas production next to the Twelve Apostles marine park and support the Greens bill to ban all future oil and gas drilling in Victoria's waters to protect our climate?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:27): Speaker, I will refrain from getting as frustrated as I was in the last sitting week.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will come to order.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr Hibbins:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister for industry just indicated that we wanted to ban oil and gas drilling so we could import more from Russia.

**A member:** No, he didn't.

**Mr Hibbins:** Well, I ask the minister to either withdraw that offensive remark or to state whether that is actually government policy now.

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

**Ms D'AMBROSIO:** The record speaks for itself. We set about reducing our emissions by between 15 and 20 per cent by 2020. We exceeded that two years earlier. We are sitting at nearly 25 per cent reduction. This is real action. Those others on the Greens bench might actually want to quibble with the particular parts of the equation that you need to respond to to get the outcomes. We are outcomes driven. That is what speaks for us. We are creating new jobs, we are reducing emissions and in fact we are actually reducing emissions the fastest of any state in this country.

**Ms Sandell:** On a point of order, Speaker, the supplementary was very clearly about oil and gas drilling, not about renewable energy and other forms of reducing emissions. We understand the government likes to get up and talk about renewables, but you cannot build renewables with one hand and drill for gas on the other and hope the climate crisis will go away.

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

**Ms D'AMBROSIO:** We are delivering real change. We are delivering the jobs. We are reducing emissions across the energy sector and across a range of other sectors. You cannot talk without actually having a plan and delivering. We have got the talk, we have got the ambition, we have got the legislation, we have got the plan—and we are delivering. The results speak for themselves, and that is the end of it.

**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION**

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:29): Today I am honoured to rise in the house to speak on the contribution that women are making to the government’s Big Build agenda and on our determination to continue to provide more opportunities for women across the construction and transport sectors. There are 165 Big Build transport projects going on right across the state, and as I visit many of these construction sites I am just thrilled to see the growing number of women participating on these worksites, many of them thanks to initiatives that have been driven through our Women in Transport program. I would like to acknowledge the terrific work of my parliamentary secretary, the member for Eltham, in driving this agenda.

There are more women on our worksites and there are more women working in the supply chain that supports this industry. We are increasing the number of women in leadership positions, and importantly, we are providing more opportunities for young women to start their careers in this vibrant sector. And thanks to some great leadership work undertaken by the Treasurer, there will be more of these opportunities into the future, thanks to the Australian-first *Building Equality Policy* that came into effect from 1 January, a policy that mandates—mandates—female representation across different trades and professions on all new government projects worth more than \$20 million. This is great leadership. I also want to thank our construction partners, who will be working with us to make sure that we do not just meet the mandates that have been set now, that we set new ones because they are exceeded so quickly.

The Andrews Labor government is taking this action to address that well-understood under-representation of women in these sectors. A transport network that is planned, built and operated by a diverse workforce drawn from the community will serve our community better. Stronger, more accessible road and rail means more equitable outcomes: access to jobs, education, hospital services. That helps push down barriers for women and gives greater participation in our economy and our community.

**EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY**

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (14:31): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Despite multiple warnings about Victoria’s ambulance dispatch not being able to meet demand, including reports by the State Coroner and the inspector-general for emergency management following the 2016 thunderstorm asthma event that left 10 Victorians dead, why after years of warnings has the government failed to prepare Victoria’s ambulance dispatch properly?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:32): Can I thank the member for Lowan for her question. I think she has got history a little bit skew-whiff there, and so I would challenge the premise of her question. Yes, in 2014 when the Auditor-General released an initial report on this, our ambulance service was in crisis. Our ambulance service was under deep cuts, deep impacts of those cuts. And then in the subsequent years there was a substantial series of engagements, of work-value arrangements that saw record pay increases to our ambulance service, record reallocations of the complex interchange between emergency departments, investments in ratios and making sure that that end of the ecology was being dealt with, and support through ESTA and the call dispatch areas to the point where, based on a variety of reports, in 2019 these services reached their highest level of performance in their history.

**Ms Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister is going through a lot of initiatives that have taken place over the eight years that this Labor government has been in place, but he has failed to address that there are a number of people who are dying while waiting for ESTA calls to be answered. That goes to why the government hasn’t prepared. Why are people still waiting on the phone after they have called 000 and they have yet to get someone just to answer it and dispatch an ambulance?



**The SPEAKER:** Order! I understand the point of order. I thank the member for the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked, which was a broad question.

**Mr FOLEY:** Thank you, Speaker. And then a global pandemic hit the entire globe and we saw record levels of demand, to the point where in the last quarter of last year we saw a 16.2 per cent increase in ambulance calls—91 397 code 1 calls, by a mile the busiest period that Ambulance Victoria and by extension ESTA had ever had in their history. At the same time, they were also being laid low by record levels of infections amongst their workforce. They were also seeing record levels of furloughing of staff. At the same time Ambulance Victoria were having to go through extraordinary infection prevention and control measures at the end and the start of every visit, of every call-out, in level 3 PPE. This is an extraordinary set of circumstances that a global pandemic has put in place.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those ESTA employees, those paramedics and the entire workforce for getting us through that busiest period in the history of these services. They are our true champions. In regard to the genuine issues about the tragedies of lives that have been lost, I again reiterate that the government apologises for the pain of the families of those who have lost loved ones. We will not leave any stone unturned until we return to those higher levels of performance.

**Ms KEALY (Lowan) (14:35):** A number of times today the minister has said the government knew there would be an increase in demand over the COVID pandemic. Why then were ESTA staff numbers cut rather than increased during that period, which meant that people were left hanging on the phone waiting for somebody to answer their urgent calls?

**Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:36):** Can I thank the member for Lowan for her question. The member for Lowan is simply wrong in her assertions. There have not been cuts to the ESTA services. We know which side of this chamber cuts emergency services. We know which side of politics in this state slashes critical services. I use this opportunity to again reiterate the measures that were announced yesterday by the honourable Minister for Emergency Services—\$115 million that will see over 100 new call takers—in addition to the significant investment already made.

**Ms Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance: the minister has questioned the validity and the authenticity of the numbers that were put forward. I have a document which I would like to make available to the house that clearly shows the number of staff at ESTA has been cut significantly by this government—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lowan, this is not a point of order. It may be a very valid point of debate but it is not a point of order.

**Mr FOLEY:** Can I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Emergency Services for her outstanding leadership. This side of the Parliament will back her in every effort to return our services to the level that we had them—this side of the government had them.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

**Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:37):** I was delighted this morning on this International Women's Day to make some announcements in—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** Everything is a joke, apparently, to some. International Women's Day is not a joke to everyone on this side of the house. That is why today, together with my honourable friend the Minister for Employment, Minister Pulford, I was able to make really significant announcements about supporting single parents, 80 per cent of whom are single mums, back into the workforce.

It was an honour and a privilege to meet with Chelsea from the Latrobe Valley, who in December 2020 was laid off in her third year of a carpentry apprenticeship. Because of Jobs Victoria and a subsidy of some \$20 000 paid to small and medium-sized employers, she has been able to not only

begin work to complete her carpentry apprenticeship but she is taking on a joinery apprenticeship as well and will be double qualified in just a couple of years time. Why is she able to do that? Because her employer has that \$20 000 grant from the Victorian government to promote women getting back into the workforce and having every opportunity that they are fundamentally entitled to. Particularly for single women, who often have that disproportionate burden of care, that extra money means that there can be more flexible work arrangements and there can be additional payments made in terms of gaps around child care.

Essentially this is a great story of women coming back into the workforce only because there is a government in place that has provided that targeted support. Why might our government provide those sorts of targeted supports? Could it maybe have something to do with the fact that more than half the cabinet are women? Could it maybe have something to do with the fact that nearly 50 per cent of all of our combined numbers are women? We are a better government because we represent the community we serve, unlike some other rabble outfits.

**Mr Wells:** Speaker, a number of unanswered questions are my point of order: 5885—can you believe that I asked that in June last year?—5945, 6000, 6100 and 6174, and I would appreciate if you were able to follow those up.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you. I will follow those matters up.

**Mr McCurdy:** On a point of order, Speaker, I can beat the member for Rowville there. I have got a question outstanding for 455 days for the Minister for Water; also questions 5843, 6110—and obviously that first one was 4649. I would like you to follow those up, please.

**The SPEAKER:** I will follow those matters up.

**Ms Sandell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have eight outstanding questions. I am happy to forward the numbers to your office, if that is easier.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Melbourne.

**Mr D O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have actually just got the one, constituency question 6136, to the Minister for Ambulance Services, which remains outstanding.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you. I will follow that matter up.

**Ms Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, constituency question 5994 to the Minister for Health was asked 180 days ago, on 9 September 2021, and I have raised this point of order five times before. This is the sixth time I am raising this point of order and still no response from the Minister for Health, which is completely unacceptable for the members of my constituency.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you to the member for raising that point of order.

### Constituency questions

#### BRIGHTON ELECTORATE

**Mr NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:41): (6236) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health, and I ask: what are the requirements for operating a rehabilitation program for alcohol and drug addiction treatment? Minister, for background, over the last three months the Brighton Savoy, a family-owned hotel, accommodation and wedding events venue has been utilised by a rehabilitation service. The program provided at the Savoy, operated by a private drug and alcohol lifestyle treatment and management provider, includes a base 28-day program, with group and behavioural therapy, stress and meditation training, all meals, group personal training and one-on-one counselling. A number of constituents are seeking to understand what the legal and regulatory requirements are for operating the rehabilitation service in the Brighton location and whether the local community has an opportunity to be advised of the program's operation. Most that have been in contact are simply seeking to understand

the rules around rehabilitation services, and the state government's prompt clarification on the requirements would be appreciated. I look forward to receiving the minister's response.

#### SUNBURY ELECTORATE

**Mr J BULL** (Sunbury) (14:42): (6237) My question is also to the Minister for Health. Minister, what is the latest information on design and planning for upgrades at Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health? As the minister will be well aware, it was this government, the Andrews Labor government, who committed \$3 million in last year's state budget for important upgrades of local health services. A terrific facility, located on Macedon Street in my electorate, Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health do a wonderful job in health services within my community and of course in the community north, within the Macedon Ranges. I would like to also take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the hardworking staff at our local, terrific health service, and once again I ask the minister for the latest information on design and planning for these critical upgrades at Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health.

#### EUROA ELECTORATE

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (14:43): (6238) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Colbinabbin Primary School is in real need of new flashing 40-kilometre speed reduction signs to warn motorists of school times and protective barriers to separate students and motorists. The Colbo primary school is located on the main road between Shepparton and Bendigo, which has a constant flow of traffic going through the school zone, and every day parents and teachers are seeing speeding cars and heavy trucks within 1 metre of where students walk to and from school. About four months ago a concerned parent contacted VicRoads directly to voice her concerns, as she was told this issue would be marked as urgent to fix. Since then she has been given no indication of when the work will take place or what will be done to fix the safety issue. The principal there is very concerned for the safety of his students. He has started using a line-marking machine to guide students away from the edge of the road and says he cannot believe something has not been done sooner. So will the government make this an urgent priority to ensure students at Colbo are safe?

#### BUNINYONG ELECTORATE

**Ms SETTLE** (Buninyong) (14:44): (6239) My constituency question is for the Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources. Last Friday I visited the beautiful township of Buninyong and spoke to many local businesses and community groups, including the Bendigo community bank and the Buninyong and District Community Association. I heard that broadband speeds in the town centre were holding back growth and making it harder to attract new business into Buninyong. Digital infrastructure and telecommunications are a commonwealth responsibility, but the federal Liberal government have failed us. The Andrews government's \$550 million Connecting Victoria program is designed to fill the gaps left by the commonwealth, which is ignoring the needs of regional and rural townships like Buninyong. The Andrews Labor government will help fill these gaps by investing in new infrastructure to deliver vital improvements. I ask the minister: when will more locations for connectivity upgrades be announced?

#### CROYDON ELECTORATE

**Mr HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:45): (6240) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I would like to ask the minister: when will work for the Dorset Road upgrade and Canterbury Road improvement be undertaken and completed by the state government? I am out and about regularly in my electorate, and one of the many areas of concern that is raised with me relates to traffic congestion. The federal government has funded \$50 million for Dorset Road, Croydon, to receive significant upgrades between Hull Road and Maroondah Highway, including road widening, reconfigured turning lanes, the removal of open drains and the reconstruction of footpaths. As well as Dorset Road, the federal government also secured \$44.5 million for a major upgrade to

Canterbury Road, which includes a third outbound lane along Canterbury Road to Montrose Road and a third inbound lane between Liverpool Road and Dorset Road. This funding has been available since 2016 and we are still waiting to see progress. The state government are responsible for the scoping, planning and timing on both major projects, so I would like to again ask: when will the minister get these much-needed Croydon road upgrades delivered?

#### NEPEAN ELECTORATE

**Mr BRAYNE** (Nepean) (14:46): (6241) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The Victorian government recently announced that a brand new \$4.5 million camping ground will be built at Point Nepean National Park. It is an exciting time to live on and visit the Mornington Peninsula. This new campground will provide yet another reason for people to come down and enjoy everything that the southern peninsula has to offer. With new facilities being built and pre-pitched tents being installed, I am sure that locals and tourists alike will be eager to hear more about how this new campground is preserving and enhancing the park's natural and cultural heritage. So my question to the minister is: how will this new campground benefit visitors, like the member for Melton, to Point Nepean National Park, and when are works expected to be completed?

#### PRAHRAN ELECTORATE

**Mr HIBBINS** (Prahran) (14:47): (6242) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: what is the latest information on the proposal for pop-up bike lanes within the Prahran electorate? In Prahran the lack of safe, separated cycling routes, particularly along Chapel Street, is regularly raised with me by residents as one of the key barriers to more people riding and one of the top issues overall they would like to see fixed to improve the livability of our community. With more people choosing to ride during the pandemic and cycling being so critical to reducing Victoria's transport emissions, I have been advocating strongly for the government to quickly install pop-up bike lanes like many other cities around the world have already done, so I welcome the government's initial proposals, particularly on Chapel Street but also along other main roads and local streets, and seek further information on behalf of our community on the types of bike lanes planned and the time lines for installation.

#### FOOTSCRAY ELECTORATE

**Ms HALL** (Footscray) (14:48): (6243) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. My electorate of Footscray is located between Australia's busiest container port, the port of Melbourne, and many warehouse and distribution centres in Melbourne's west. Much of the container movement happens through my electorate, and I am aware of both full and empty container congestion at the port, container parks and warehouses. I ask that the Minister for Ports and Freight provide an update on what the government is doing to mitigate the impact of shipping container build-up in our ports and storage yards.

#### ROWVILLE ELECTORATE

**Mr WELLS** (Rowville) (14:49): (6244) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Minister, when will the Department of Transport review and upgrade the bus routes in Knox, particularly the 757 and 758 routes through Scoresby and Knoxfield? The 757 and 758 routes, which run from Knox City shopping centre, are typical of the public transport options for Knox residents. These services run largely during the day but not in the early morning or evening. There are no services on weekends or public holidays. You cannot rely on a service being there when you need it when there is a gap of nearly 2 hours between buses. Both routes ramble around the suburban streets, so many journeys can take a long time to complete. The 757 bus ends a few streets away from the shops at Scoresby Village while the 758 actually passes the Knoxville shops, yet neither bus has a connection for passengers going further south on Stud Road or to the major shopping centres at Stud Park, where the library, major banks and supermarkets are.

**TARNEIT ELECTORATE**

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (14:50): (6245) My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and Minister for Solar Homes. Since 2018 our government's Solar Homes program has been absolutely life changing for so many households in Victoria who want to benefit from lower power bills. We know that by helping install solar panels Victorians can save thousands of dollars off their home energy bills each and every single year. Now, the idea that our outer suburbs do not care about investments in renewable energy is simply untrue. Because if you want to see what renewable energy power means for outer suburbs, you can look at my community in Tarneit, which pretty consistently tops the list of suburbs for uptake of this wonderful program. From the very beginning our postcodes were among the highest in the state, and thousands of homes in Tarneit, Truganina, Hoppers Crossing and Williams Landing have since benefited from having solar panels installed on their roofs with the help of this program. My question for the minister is this: how many households in Tarneit have taken part in the Solar Homes program since its beginning?

**Bills****VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT BILL 2022***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (14:51): I am delighted to continue speaking on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. Just prior to question time I was thanking the minister, who is now in the chamber, for the great work that she has done—as well as her office and her department—on bringing this bill to the house and also acknowledging the great role that she has played to date as Minister for Police since her appointment in May 2016. So thank you, Minister. We are always so happy to welcome you in Ballarat, and I look forward to hosting you in Ballarat at your earliest convenience.

It is because of the leadership of the Victorian police and the minister that this bill is before the house today, because on 23 February the minister advised the people of Victoria that urgent legislation was being drafted to fix an administrative error to ensure all police could continue to keep Victoria safe. This is very important, because it had become evident that between 1 July 2014 and August 2021 Victoria Police deputy commissioners had appointed a number of police officers to the role of assistant commissioner in an acting capacity, incorrectly assuming they had the power to do so. Deputy commissioners had the power to appoint acting assistant commissioners under the Police Regulation Act 1958 but not under the new act that had been introduced, the Victorian Police Act 2013, so on the commencement of the new act deputy commissioners no longer had the power to appoint police officers as AACs and could only appoint a police officer to the role of an AAC if the Chief Commissioner of Police delegated his appointment power to deputy commissioners. So Victoria Police fortunately identified this administrative error and the chief commissioner delegated his appointment power. The delegation could not resolve the historical invalid appointments or any powers exercised by the AACs pursuant to their appointment. Therefore this bill is necessary and important.

The Victoria Police Amendment Bill will retrospectively validate the appointments of police officers to the role of AAC by deputy commissioners so that AACs are taken to have always been validly appointed. This provision will have the effect that powers purportedly exercised by invalidly appointed AACs will not be invalid by reason of their invalid appointments. This includes the power to swear in police officers and PSOs. So I welcome that the provisions included in this bill will also remove the prospect that persons who were purportedly sworn in as police officers or PSOs by invalidly appointed AACs might be found not to have had the powers or duties of a police officer or PSO. I am sure this will provide comfort to officers, PSOs and their families after what might have been a worrying time for them.

Despite the urgency of the bill, I am very pleased that consultation for these reforms and the development of the bill were undertaken, obviously with the most primary stakeholder, that being

Victoria Police, but also with Police Association Victoria and the solicitor-general. These bodies have been advised of the invalid appointments of AACs and the invalid swearing in of police officers and PSOs. Importantly, legal advice has been sought from senior counsel to inform the development of these provisions. I note that Police Association Victoria, who represent the industrial, legal, professional and welfare interests of approximately 18 000 members of Victoria Police, have been consulted, and I have been advised that they acknowledge the unintended and highly technical nature of the error.

I wish to take the opportunity to look locally to my electorate of Wendouree and thank the members of the police across Ballarat who are protecting our community through this challenging time but always protecting our community. We have a very, very great police command in Ballarat. My electorate of Wendouree and the area of Ballarat fall under the western region division 3, which is Ballarat and Moorabool, and we have a very, very great police superintendent by the name of Frank Sells. Frank Sells is a terrific leader of our community, and I really thank him for his availability. When I ring him with any concerns he is always very pleased to talk issues through with me, and I really do appreciate that when issues are raised with my office. I would also like to acknowledge the great work of the previous superintendent, Jenny Wilson, who is a fantastic woman. We are talking about how great women are on International Women's Day. Jenny Wilson was an outstanding superintendent for Western Region 3 and had a positive influence on the Ballarat community.

I am very pleased that the Ballarat community are strong supporters of our police officers, and we have seen this during COVID. We have seen people reaching out to the police to talk about any issues they have about the chief health officer's orders or concerns. Even when a rally was going to be held in Ballarat opposed to vaccination and everything like that we had a very strong turnout by the police. They asked the people of Ballarat not to come to this rally, not to come down, not to take off their masks and not to disrespect the issues that had been raised and the orders of the chief health officer, and the Ballarat community responded really positively. They said, 'The police don't want us in the Bridge Mall on this day', and it was fantastic to see the community listening to the police.

We saw some great operational policing just on the last couple of weekends, with a number of young students in year 11 and year 12 wanting to have big parties across Ballarat. As a parent of a secondary school student, I got an email from the school principal. The police had contacted every single one of our schools to say, 'We do not need 500 or 600 students having a large outdoor party'. They worked very closely with our schools and with the community, and I am very pleased to say that no such event happened on the weekend. It was proactive policing. It was preventative, on the front foot, getting principals and getting families involved. We had no issues on the weekend, so I really commend the police for that.

Sadly we have got very high levels of family violence in my community of Ballarat. The work that the family violence team does to make sure that families and children are safe and the visits they provided during lockdown to check in on families are so welcomed and so well received. I know that they made a really significant difference for so many families. I have so many friends in the police force, and I would like to acknowledge and thank them for their great work.

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:58): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. The purpose of this bill, as we have heard, is to fix an administrative error. I think in opposition we know how important it is that police are able to do their job to the best of their ability and have all the resources and processes in place to do that. This error needs to be rectified. The second-reading speech gives quite a lot of detail about the extent of that and what it means, and that is very useful for people to refer to. This also needs to be done. We in the opposition know that this needs to be done, and we have worked and will continue to work very cooperatively with the government to make sure that this happens.

As I do this, I rise in support of Victoria Police. I have a lot of police stations in my electorate and know very many of the police, and many of them are just local community members who you see

around the traps in any case. Certainly the coalition stands in the front line with Victoria Police and protective services officers. As I have said, we will work cooperatively with the government to process this bill. Despite that I do note that we only received the bill from the government at 4.37 last night. It was just here for a short period of time before the bill briefing. That really did not give a lot of time, but we did know and understand the issue because it has been canvassed in the media quite extensively. We still would have liked a little bit of time to actually have a look at the bill itself before that briefing.

I want to acknowledge that many of our police officers put themselves in harm's way every day to do their role to protect us. It is easy to see them out in the streets and not remember that a lot of what they do can actually be very challenging and can have lasting impacts on what they say and what they have to do. The amendments before us are in fact urgent amendments to the Victoria Police Act 2013. As I said, they address an error, and the error is around the appointment of acting assistant commissioners. Now, in many areas of the public service there are a lot of acting roles that are filled if somebody is on leave or for whatever reason, longer term or shorter term. They get filled by somebody else in that position who is appointed in an acting capacity. This was done just as part of the process on the assumption that the deputy commissioners who made the appointments actually had the appropriate authority to do so, and that was an assumption that they had made. This assumption had been made for some seven years, since 2014. So the very specific changes that we see today are there to protect liability and to ensure that police can go about doing their job.

There are quite a number of police and PSOs that were appointed to particular roles, to higher roles, without the knowledge of what we know now. Once this was realised there was fairly swift action to make sure that these people, these officers, were re-sworn. A majority of the officers were re-sworn by the government, and then there is this legislation that is before us now. I think the Minister for Police when she introduced the bill described it as a very targeted piece of legislation, and indeed it is, because this is retrospective legislation. It is to validate that the officers were and are able to do their roles. So we see that they have acted outside the legislation unknowingly as a result of that error, and certainly this is now to correct that. The retrospective nature of this bill will allow that to happen so that all of the work that they have done for this period of time is validated rather than it being not validated, which would leave us with gaping holes in our legal system and our justice system.

Now, there are a couple of areas that are actually carved out in the legislation, and I want to refer to those because Shane Patton, the Chief Commissioner of Police, referenced the issue of some drug investigations. That set off the chain of work that identified this issue regarding the sworn status of police officers for those that have been sworn by the acting assistant commissioners. Now, there are four cases that are cited in the legislation, and the courts had already noted that an authorisation had been given by a police officer invalidly appointed to act in that higher role and that the evidence obtained from that authorisation was not obtained legally. They thought it was not appropriate for the Parliament to require the court to reconsider the validity of that evidence that had already been ruled on. You can see the problem: without this change that is being introduced today we would have many more of these cases where the evidence that has been relied on is in fact considered to be invalid.

I have many, many police stations in my electorate, and the police do a fabulous job. They are very different. I have a one-man operation in Woods Point. If you think about it, Woods Point is in the High Country, and it is pretty remote and isolated—not in terms of outback Western Australia or something but in terms of Victoria. It is a considerable distance from Mansfield and on a gravel road. It is very difficult for the police to do their policing as one person. We have a lot of illegal deer hunting in that area, and it is challenging. When that person goes on leave—I can name him: Ken Dwight—he has to have people cover for him and learn and understand quickly the nature of policing in rural communities. When you are a one-man station, pretty well you are it. He does a fabulous job, because everybody in the town and the wider area knows him.

Also we have a police station at Mount Buller, and again the activities that are conducted up there are not what you would normally consider part of policing. They do a lot of work with lost persons—lost when hiking or caught in a blizzard—and the police officers require specific survival and tracking

skills and particular equipment so that they can do that hiking and those snow rescues for the lost and injured. This is quite different from somebody who is on the beat in the CBD, the skills that they would need. The weather conditions can change, and it can be very dangerous—those conditions can be quite extreme. I certainly want to give a shout-out to those officers that go and man that Mount Buller booth during the winter. This would be the same of course at all alpine resorts. You need to have very specific skills.

A lot of general policing does happen in my electorate: enforcing road safety, highway patrols and alcohol and drug tests. I can say that I was actually pulled up and had an alcohol and drug test in the Nillumbik shire not so long ago. I passed with flying colours, they said. They attend car accidents, and they certainly do a lot of advocacy around domestic violence, family violence and drugs. I see them turn up to forums that the community organises to be out there and to be present, to advocate and to try to help younger people understand their role in society and understand where the dangers are and where the predators are.

We have had a lot of farm crime in Yea. We have had to have farm crime specialists go to the saleyards and talk to people about how they can better protect themselves, because tractors go missing. We have a lot of things like chainsaws, and you have farm vehicles, which are what people need to do their jobs. There were thefts from the Kinglake Football Netball Club, and we had an extraordinary drug bust in Alexandra in 2013. It was some while ago, but it was a clandestine lab as well. We have detectives, we have the highway patrol and we have general policing. This is a pretty big deal. More recently, though, there was an enormous drug bust, and I commend the police on their role there. They found more than 8000 cannabis plants just out of Toolamba, just out of Shepparton, and five people were charged, so this is again a different element of policing to being in the cars doing the regular patrols.

I finally want to mention that there has been a new inspector installed at the Lilydale police station, Gerry McKenna, and she has only been there for a few weeks. The member for Evelyn and I had the pleasure of actually meeting with her the other day, and I congratulate her on her appointment to that role that she has in the broader Yarra Valley. In that area certainly that I have, we have Warburton, Yarra Junction, Yarra Glen and the Healesville station. I just finally want to mention the sudden loss of the sergeant at Yarra Junction police station, Kevin Largue, from a heart attack, which really threw everybody. His are very big boots to fill. He was a terrific character. I was unable to attend his funeral, but I am not sure that I had a Hawaiian shirt, which was required to get into the funeral. But I am certainly thinking of Ellen and the family in that situation because of their sudden loss and also the wider police force in the area, who really will notice Kev not being there.

**Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:08):** I had to check myself with you in the chair, member for Mornington. Thank you for giving me the call to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and follow speakers who have talked about the administrative change that needs to be made to support a number of Victorian police officers who, through administrative error, were sworn in incorrectly and to correct that record and provide that retrospective legislative amendment to validate their membership of Victoria Police. I stand and follow a number of members of Parliament who have placed their appreciation of and support for Victoria Police on the record in Parliament today.

When I first was elected as the member for Mordialloc in 2014, I had the opportunity and privilege to meet a number of our Victoria Police sworn officers to understand a day in the life of their work and the pressures they confront as they front up every single day to support others in our local community. It is a selfless job. It is one of community service and dedication of purpose where they are really the true heroes and legends of our local community. They walk amongst us each and every day and do incredibly brave things on behalf of all of us. During those times and over the years leading up to the pandemic it was quite telling to be brought into briefings where they shared some of their work day to day: the over-representation of family violence across our local communities that was stressing Victoria Police members administratively and emotionally day in, day out—in some areas 40 to 50 per cent of their work was in the prevention of family violence space and the mental health and wellbeing



impact on our community and the debilitating impacts on Victorians who are going through acute mental health challenges. That makes up such a significant portion of their policing and their work. So having that hand in glove with important reforms that go to the heart of dealing with the causes of family violence and mental ill health really has a broader benefit to our wider community and helps in their work and their policing and their support of our local community.

We have seen Victoria Police play such an important role in the work and research to understand the causes of family violence, to protect vulnerable people, to reform behaviour and change attitudes over time. Indeed, Victoria Police as an organisation has gone through a substantial amount of cultural change just over the last decade as it has become more inclusive and representative of our local communities. When we think of all the work that got us to that point—we have had the landmark reforms around prevention of family violence, we have had the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which is a little further back than some of those 227 recommendations on the prevention of family violence—and when we think then of a one-in-100-year pandemic, that greatly changes and greatly impacts on the way that police go about their business each and every day in supporting our community: the unprecedented workload, the challenges of securing Victoria's borders, where our states and territories went back to that insular protection of their people and exclusion of other Australian citizens. There was the ring of steel of course and the burden that that placed on members during that uncertain time; they were taken away from their families and their communities to ensure that we could protect our communities as best we could and make sure that we suppressed the virus as much as we could. It has been a tiring and challenging couple of years for them in addition to everything that they confront and do, and we place on record our great appreciation for the work that they do each and every day.

In the City of Kingston they do an extraordinary job. They are some of the more than 3000 members that we committed to funding and supporting. We have seen in recent reports, just late last year, that we have the strongest police service in the nation. When we go away from some of the rhetoric that we saw previously in a debate around law and order, we see funding based on growth, based on need and based on specialist services, particularly in my local community. The focus on the prevention of family violence out in the Moorabbin district, subdistrict 2, has been critical in saving families, protecting families from the harms and the scourge of family violence. That intervention and that work have been so critical. Operation Summersafe keeps hundreds of thousands of people safe along our coastal stretch in the City of Kingston and indeed all the way down the Mornington Peninsula. In terms of the work that is done to protect people while they are out there enjoying the summer in the local community, our Victoria Police members are out there visibly supporting our local community as well in keeping people safe as they flock to the wonderful resources that we have. They have just finished up Operation Summersafe, which was a strong initiative of Victoria Police that has been really championed out of the Moorabbin district that serves all the way from Bayside to Glen Eira and all the way through to Carrum.

When we see the investment that has been made by the Andrews government over that time, we would have found ourselves in a really difficult position going into the challenges that we faced with the COVID pandemic, with the challenges around the prevention of family violence, if we had not put in that extra resource. So we are in a position now where 22 000 members of Victoria Police are now supporting our communities each and every day. Obviously the protective services officers as well are a wonderful resource along the Frankston train line, from the communities that I represent from Chelsea through to Cheltenham, and that work continues to expand and grow, and indeed PSOs do eventually then find their way to becoming sworn Victoria Police officers as well.

On behalf of my local community, I too want to join with a number of members in paying tribute to our Victoria Police officers. The City of Kingston residents in particular owe them a great debt of gratitude for all the work that they have done and the service that they have provided over that time. So this legislation—and some of those members were in the Kingston region as well—makes sure that we retrospectively correct that administrative error, the incorrect delegation powers. It was for the

deputy commissioners that they tried to remedy it in the middle of last year, August 2021, but it still did not comply with some of those requirements.

It is worth noting the collaboration across the Parliament in the Legislative Assembly—the Minister for Police and the Shadow Minister for Police were collaborating—to make sure that we remedy this as soon as possible and that there is not any uncertainty, whether that is legal or a perception in the local community, and that there is, as best there can be, a bipartisan approach to that work and that collaboration to make sure this sails through the Parliament and we correct that. From time to time these things happen and bills are rushed into the Parliament and need that remedy to make sure that things can carry on as was intended. Obviously this was not an intended outcome, and that technicality is rightly corrected there as well. So it is fitting at this moment in time that we get collaboration across the Parliament like this. There should be more opportunities where coming together on the merits of issues sees us able to work collaboratively, and certainly some of the reflections from the minister and the shadow minister show that working together on these issues, whether they are urgent or whether they are key policy issues, should be a tone that we set going forward.

We will continue as a Victorian government to make sure that we are supporting Victoria Police and its members into the future. We have seen the challenges that they have faced over this time, the more than 3135 members that we have funded and supported who have given a significant benefit to the City of Kingston community, whether it is through Operation Summersafe or whether it is through the work to support mental health and wellbeing or the prevention of family violence; in some areas up to 70 or 80 per cent of the work that they confront can be in the prevention of family violence and mental health space. To all those members that serve their local communities, the 22 000 sworn officers, PSOs and also the police staff and the administrative staff that do a significant amount of work in stations and communities all across Victoria, we owe you a great debt of gratitude. We place on record our thanks during these unprecedented times, and we wish them all the very best into the future. They can be assured that we will continue to invest in technology and support for them going forward and to make sure that they have every necessary resource to keep our communities safe into the future as well. So on behalf of my local community I commend their work and appreciate the collaboration that has been had between members across the Parliament.

**Mr D O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:18): Thank you, Acting Speaker. It is a pleasure to see you in the chair today, and I am also happy to rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, which, as previous speakers have indicated, is an important bill to clear up an issue that has arisen within the Victoria Police Act 2013. It is an administrative error relating to the appointment of acting assistant commissioners that has actually flowed through the system and caused issues with respect to the swearing-in of officers right throughout the force, and as such the opposition is not opposing this legislation and is working with the government to facilitate its swift passage through the chamber today and hopefully through the other place as well to get this put to bed.

It is always a concern when the Parliament puts forward retrospective legislation. I think that is something that should be avoided as a principle, but in this circumstance it is, I think, literally unavoidable and one that I support on this particular occasion, because we must make sure that our police are operating properly and legally to ensure that the work they are doing and what subsequently flows through the courts as well are proper and legally valid, and that is indeed what this legislation is about.

It is important that we on this side and those in the government—and I would hope every member of this chamber—provide their support to our police. Sadly there are some that sit near me that sometimes do not provide their support to the police. They seem to think that it is better to support people who do the wrong things, but certainly I support our police very strongly for the work that they do throughout our state in the early hours of the morning through to late at night and in all locations around our state. It is a difficult job. I have a number of family members who are—and indeed one family could almost be a TV show because they are just about all, or their in-laws are—police officers, and I know the stress that that puts on that family, particularly in the last 12 months or so when there have been some significant security issues for that family. That is to be regretted, but when tensions are high it is often

the police that are sent in to deal with them. Sometimes it is both the officers and their families that cop the brunt of that, and that certainly is a concern. I will not name them, but I do pay my respects to those members of my extended family who have done such a great job over many years, but particularly in the last 12 or 18 months, in providing community safety at a time of significant community stress and tension.

I also note the work that the police do in engaging with the community and not simply tackling crime and dealing with the bad guys, as it were. Indeed this morning with Parliament sitting I have missed the International Women's Day breakfast that was put on at the Sale police station. I think my staff did go along to that event. The member for Burwood would be pleased to note that, speaking of International Women's Day, I now have my purple tie on, and I thank him for providing it. It is the sort of thing that our police do—putting on a day to recognise International Women's Day. In fact I think Acting Inspector Mel McLennan at Sale police station was the person inviting us to that. I saw Mel on Saturday night at the first deb ball that we have had in my electorate for a very, very long time due to the pandemic—that is another example of the work that the police do, being there after hours, being part of the community and accepting the debts—along with my federal colleague Darren Chester. We are indeed lucky in Sale to have the RAAF base, who were there as part of the official party as well, but it was great to see Mel there and to enjoy the community experience that it was.

Our police do a fantastic job, and as I said, in supporting this legislation we as a Parliament need to support them. But there are challenges right throughout our state. Despite the additions to police numbers under this government and indeed under the previous Liberal-Nationals government, there remain those challenges. I was not a member of the previous Liberal-Nationals government except at the very end of that government when I had a stint in the upper house, but I do know that at the time my predecessors committed to 1700 extra police and 940 PSOs. Indeed what they delivered in that four-year term was in fact 1900 extra police and over 1000 PSOs—so that was good—and the government has, through its community safety statement a couple of years ago, added additional numbers. My concern is that those numbers are not necessarily evenly spread around the state and in those areas that need them the most.

I am particularly concerned about South Gippsland, where the thin blue line is indeed very thin. Just last week while undertaking a listening post in one of the towns in South Gippsland I came across one of the local officers off duty, and he raised the concern again about numbers. What I often hear from my police officers is that the numbers they have across the region in each of the stations are probably about right in their formal allocations but that what happens in actual fact is that when staff go on leave, when they go on long service leave, when they are injured or otherwise off on WorkCover situations and when they are on secondment, which they are regularly are, those positions are never replaced. So while the official numbers on the roster list might be fine, the actual numbers that are there on any given occasion are not.

I know that particularly from Sunday night through to Thursday night in South Gippsland and across Bass Coast there is a very, very limited number of police cars on the road. I have stopped saying publicly what that number is because I am concerned that it highlights to potential criminals that we are fairly minimally protected. It is a concern of course when you are covering such a big geographic area. If you get a couple of minor or major incidents, whether it is a motor vehicle accident or a fire, that require police attendance, it is going to make it very difficult for police then to be able to report at another end of the district in the event of a callout. That is a concern, as I said, that a senior police officer as recently as Friday raised with me. The crime statistics continue to rise, particularly in South Gippsland shire. Wellington shire I think has in the last couple of years been relatively stable, but in South Gippsland shire the statistics since 2014 have risen inexorably, and I think that is genuinely a reflection of the change in policing availability.

The other thing that has caused that concern is the change to two-up policing, which is something that of course is supported by the vast majority of the force. They actually prefer to be working two up, and they are happy to have that security, but I remember talking to an officer at one of my stations a couple of

years ago shortly after that policy was introduced, and he indicated it had taken out about 30 per cent of their shifts because of the need to ensure that officers were always working with someone else. There are some exceptions for one-man stations, but even in that case more often than not my one-man stations in Gippsland South are required, if they are going out on jobs, to wait for someone to come from another station to join them, and that causes a significant resourcing issue. Again, I am not saying I am opposed to that, and certainly it is not the police who are opposed to the two-up rule, but it has had an impact on the level of policing that is actually available at any given time.

It is important that we act swiftly to address the issue that this bill is seeking to fix, and retrospectively so. We do need to ensure that our police have the support of this Parliament—that they have the support of the government, the opposition and all members of this Parliament—and that they have the resources they need as well as the legal certainty that they need to provide the service of security and peace to our community. So I look forward to this bill passing the chamber later this evening and proceeding through to the upper house, where it will give some security and certainty to our police force going forward.

**Ms HALL** (Footscray) (15:27): Acting Speaker Morris, it is very good to be seeing you in the chair and to be following the contribution from the member for Gippsland South. I am pleased to see that the member for Gippsland South has acquired an appropriate tie for the day, courtesy of the member for Burwood.

I am pleased to support the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. It has been lovely to hear the contributions of members from across the Parliament expressing our collective support for Victoria Police and all of the extraordinary work they do across Victoria.

The Andrews Labor government has always had a strong and clear stance on policing and community safety. Since being elected in 2014 the policing budget has increased 52 per cent, and nearly \$4 billion has been invested into new funding for police. The community safety statement that was released in December 2016 outlined the range of strategies and processes and approaches that were being brought in to keep Victorians safe. 3135 new police officers have been funded, including general duties officers and specialist officers—including family violence officers, which a number of people have spoken about today—and more PSOs and new stations for our growing force and state. We worked with the force command on developing this recruitment pipeline to ensure that the measures we have taken would be effective and relevant. Together we developed the staffing allocation model, a sophisticated allocation and forecasting model that accounts for population growth, geography, police activity and crime trends. This approach has seen a stabilisation of police resourcing, ending a boom-and-bust cycle. Policing should be determined by experts and need, not by election cycles. The police academy is now a bustling centre of excellence, and the strategy is already showing its worth.

As of September 2021 there were 3292 more police officers in stations and specialist units than there were in 2014, and I think that is something that we are all enormously proud of. That is a 25 per cent increase. We have 344 more PSOs across our public transport network, a 24 per cent increase. There are 276 police custody officers working across the state, freeing up other officers to be out in the community. We have 908 more Victorian public service staff, forensics staff, specialists and other support staff who assist police and the public every day, and those VPS staff play a very important role in our police force. I was very pleased to be employed in the Victoria Police media unit prior to my election to Parliament. Obviously being the member for Footscray is the best job in Victoria, but being employed at Victoria Police was also an absolute privilege and an honour. I will speak about that in a little bit.

When most people think of police, they think of the people in uniform who work so hard to serve us, but those people who work behind the scenes, especially the forensics staff, play an incredibly vital and specialised role in helping achieve justice. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the work that they do. As I mentioned, I worked for the Victoria Police media unit in 2010, and it was so great

to work amongst such an incredibly hardworking team of people, both sworn and unsworn staff, at Victoria Police.

I was reflecting on International Women's Day and I was thinking about all of the wonderful women officers that I worked with and the work that they did across Victoria Police. I went down a bit of a rabbit hole on International Women's Day reading up about the history of women in policing, and it is quite remarkable to think how far we have come. I read the story of a woman called Kath Mackay, who I think should get more acknowledgement in Victoria for her contribution to Victoria Police. Her story is quite remarkable. We had our first women police officers in 1917, and that took many years of campaigning, mostly by women who were leaders in the suffragette movement in Victoria. They then went on to campaign for women to be able to serve as police officers for Victoria Police—including Vida Goldstein, who many of us would be familiar with in this place.

**Ms Ryan:** An organiser for the Country Party.

**Ms HALL:** The member for Euroa loves to reference Vida Goldstein's political affiliations, but she was an amazing suffragette and activist and helped to lead the charge for women in the force as well. After many years of campaigning to have women police officers, in 1924 we had four women. Of course they were not provided with uniforms as the men were. They were paid £90 a year; they did not receive equal pay for equal work.

But Kath Mackay's story is fantastic. She joined the public service in 1922, and in 1930 she became one of eight serving policewomen, initially assigned to the plain-clothes branch. By 1935 she was attached to the criminal investigation branch at Russell Street. In 1943 she was promoted to senior constable and was in charge of the policewomen section, which operated out of Russell Street. Her role and function were largely restricted to welfare and domestic issues, but actually she was a formidable detective and she was regarded by her superiors as well conducted, efficient and reliable. Having passed all of the relevant exams, she was eligible for promotion to become a sergeant in 1953; however, Victoria Police hierarchy was unwilling to give a female authority over male colleagues at that time, and two men were promoted ahead of her. She appealed to the police classification board, and the case was dismissed. But the police association then took up her cause and campaigned for change. A reorganisation of the women's section of Victoria Police was considered overdue, and finally in 1956 she was appointed as the first female sergeant in Victoria Police. I just thought that that was a remarkable story on International Women's Day to note how far we have come in Victoria Police.

Of course the women police officers in my community do such a remarkable job, and I am so proud of the proactive policing that happens in Melbourne's inner west as well. Community works actively hand in hand with Victoria Police. You see Victoria Police at our local footy games, working with our CALD communities and just being out and about in Footscray and talking with people and making sure, especially during the pandemic, that people understood the restrictions. They did terrific work, so I would like to acknowledge that work as well.

With the limited time I have left I just want to say that it is really pleasing to see all sides of the Parliament supporting this bill to make sure that our police have the retrospective protections that they absolutely deserve. I commend their work and this bill to the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Before I call the member for Euroa, I am sure the member for Goldstein in the House of Representatives would be very upset with me if I did not say it is Goldstein, not Gold-steen, when it comes to Vida Goldstein.

**Ms RYAN (Euroa) (15:37):** Thank you so much, Acting Speaker. I think we all now stand corrected; thank you very much. It is very nice to see you in the chair.

It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and to make a few remarks about this important legislation, which comes before us today as an urgent bill to fix, as others have said, an administrative error. We have a situation where under the Victoria Police Act 2013 we

have seen deputy commissioners appointing police officers to act as assistant commissioners in situations where they do not actually have the delegated power to do so, and that has as a consequence flowed down, as other people have explained, resulting in acting commissioners swearing in graduating police officers. As I understand it, as a consequence we had 1076 police officers, 157 protective services officers and 29 police custody officers that were incorrectly sworn in. Of course when this error was realised late last month and a police officer told the public what had occurred, Victoria Police acted very swiftly to address the problem, and as a result we have the legislation here before us today to apply some retrospective powers to correct that mistake and to ensure that prosecutions—some that are currently before the courts, as I understand it—are not jeopardised.

We are certainly not opposed to this legislation coming forward. Even though we did see the bill only late yesterday, we understand the importance of this and we understand the importance of this to police, and therefore we are certainly not opposing the bill. I do note the comments from the secretary of Police Association Victoria, Wayne Gatt, who said:

The Bill is essential to make good our members appointment, but in doing so also validates and bolsters their work performed in that same period protecting the community and holding criminals to account. It is our hope that this Bill passes quickly, so as to provide the community with every assurance, that all of our police and PSOs, have done in good faith over that time, will not be undone.

We are certainly working with the government to facilitate that outcome and to ensure the speedy passage of this legislation.

It is probably worth mentioning that it is not the first time that an oversight such as this has actually occurred. There was a similar issue that arose in 2011, when police realised that they were not following proper procedure in obtaining search warrants. They were not swearing on the Bible or affirming in obtaining search warrants, and that forced the government at the time to bring similarly retrospective legislation to ensure that some 6000 prosecutions were not put in jeopardy. So it is not the first time that it has occurred, but thankfully the Parliament is able to act swiftly to address it and ensure the continued safety of the Victorian community.

I think it is worth mentioning that from our side of the house we have driven some really major reforms in policing and in community safety. In 2010 it was The Nationals and the Liberals who championed a dramatic expansion of the role of PSOs, to place them on all platforms in metropolitan Melbourne and on key regional stations. And I recall that quite well because it was Peter Ryan as the Leader of The Nationals, who was the shadow minister for police and then subsequently the Minister for Police, who implemented that policy. I will refrain, in the interests of the bipartisan nature of this debate, from mentioning how the Labor Party described PSOs at the time, but I would hope that all sides of the chamber—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr Rowswell:** How rude.

**Ms RYAN:** Thank you, member for Sandringham. I think it is too. All sides of the chamber now really, I would hope, recognise the great value that PSOs have brought and the way they have contributed to community safety and particularly safety on public transport, which we know is always an issue and, I might mention on International Women's Day, is particularly an issue often for women travelling at night and those perceptions of safety. PSOs have certainly gone a long way to contributing to that.

We also delivered significantly to actually boost the police workforce, and at the time we made a commitment to recruit and train an additional 1700 police officers. That target was not just met but exceeded, and over the term that we had in government 1900 new police members were recruited, trained and employed. And if memory serves me correctly, before the 2010 election Victoria under the Brumby government had the lowest number of police per capita of any state or territory in Australia, so it was a very significant issue to the Victorian community particularly at that time. But

as other people have mentioned in the course of this debate, our police do do wonderful work and work under the most trying and challenging of circumstances, and I think COVID has been very stretching not just for the community but also for the force.

Speaking to many frontline officers in recent times, I know they have felt and shared the community's frustration at restrictions and lockdowns, the changing nature of restrictions and the difficulty of interpreting a lot of the government's regulations. I think, particularly from the perspective of my community, of the impact of border closures and the difficulties that that presented for our police. Not only were they taken away from those frontline, core jobs of everything to do with things like family violence and violent assault, they were taken away from those jobs and were suddenly policing the state's borders. But we also had situations like at one point the Victorian government overnight basically took Benalla out of the border bubble, and what that meant was that we had people who were cancer patients in Benalla who were travelling to Albury for treatment and suddenly they were being turned back at the border and police were telling them that they required a border permit in order to be able to travel for and get cancer treatment at Albury Hospital, which of course services northern Victoria as well. I had a lot of people contacting me, seeking clarification, and in the end we finally managed to get clarification from the Victorian government that no border permit was required, but those things either were not thought about or were dealt with on the fly. It was not the police's fault; they were just doing the best job they could do interpreting the government's restrictions at the time. In the end we got clarification, and as a result police were able to let those people through. But that was not just distressing for the people who were endeavouring to travel for life-saving treatment, it was distressing for police as well, because these members of our police force are members of our community.

I think about many of the police that I interact with on a regular basis, people I know in our community, people like Pat Storer, who is a copper in a single station at Violet Town. You are just as likely to see Pat on the Rotary barbecue or on the gate at the Violet Town market as you are in uniform around the streets. He is such a big part of that community. He is at all the Violet Town Action Group meetings. He is Violet Town; he is part of Violet Town—just like Paul Maher, who has now been stationed to Northern Metro, which is a loss for our community. He is the president of the Kilmore football club. You have got people like Mick Layton, who has just been appointed to the Mitchell police service area—a wonderful fellow who is a big part of cricket in our region. Everywhere you go our police are not just police, they are also an integral part of our community and they are community members. So it has been incredibly challenging for them, as they have borne the brunt of the community's anger about restrictions when it has been the government that has been setting the rules and they have been left to enforce them. That is challenging because they also then have to turn up to the cricket or the footy, when it was running, and be part of the community—like we all are, but also they have the responsibility of enacting the regulations and the legislation that the government of the day sets.

I just quickly want to mention that since I was elected I have been working very closely with Benalla police, and I am delighted that the government has finally come on board to commit to rebuilding their police station. It has been at the top of Victoria Police's capital replacement list for many, many years, and I am very hopeful that we will start to see that work soon. I will be working with the Euroa community to advocate for their priorities around the Euroa police station as well.

**Mr McGuire** (Broadmeadows) (15:47): This is a narrow bill, but it has been a wideranging debate. I would like to make my contribution continue in that vein, because I think quite often these are of high value, where we hear from the different MPs right across the chamber their local perspectives and insights. I want to therefore acknowledge that this bill addresses an unintended consequence. The Minister for Police introduced the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 into this house as a matter of urgency today, and I want to acknowledge that the opposition has given its full cooperation to get this important and urgent bill through this house today so that it can go to the upper house and be passed into law as soon as possible.

Put simply, the bill itself will retrospectively validate appointments of Victoria Police acting assistant commissioners by deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021 and any powers

exercised by them pursuant to their invalid appointments, including the swearing-in of police officers and protective service officers—PSOs, as they are commonly known. The bill will ensure that Victoria Police officers and PSOs are empowered to maintain community safety and no otherwise successful prosecutions will be impacted by any internal administrative error in Victoria Police appointments.

Just to give the context, Victoria Police have been consulted as the primary stakeholder for these reforms. Police Association of Victoria has been advised of the invalid appointments and the necessary requirements to fix this unintended and highly technical error. Legal advice has been sought from senior counsel to inform the development of the provisions. The solicitor-general has also been consulted in the development of the bill, and the Victorian government and the minister, who I want to acknowledge and applaud, have acted urgently to fix this problem. It has been brought to public attention, the government has responded, the opposition has given its collaboration and cooperation, and I think that is a strong bipartisan response and support. That is the key proposition that we face.

But of course it opens up a broader debate about the role and significance of police, particularly with what has been happening in the community in a time of pandemic, where Victoria Police have had to play significant roles particularly with confrontation and make sure that the laws were applied. I know that they are sensitive to that, just from conversations that I have had, and they want to make sure that now that we are through to a different phase of managing the pandemic they are back in the community in a way that is more about taking care of the community rather than having to address the confrontational issues. I applaud that approach and that insight that they have—and I speak also as the Parliamentary Secretary for Crime Prevention—on how we look at these critical issues that we have known.

Poverty is the mother of crime, as the last great emperor of Rome, Marcus Aurelius, said. Not much changes, so we need to address how we fix causes and not just symptoms. I think that has been one of the big initiatives and shifts within the Andrews Labor government: to actually look at what the social determinants of life are and how we address them. Lifelong learning for skills, jobs and meaning and better health and wellness are critical, and then how do you connect the so-called disconnected to better opportunity? We have got technology now that is better than ever before, and we can harness that and make sure that that gives people greater information that is factually accurate and evidence based. We need that now more than ever in a time of counter-enlightenment. And as we have seen, where the politics of division is played, the chain reaction to divide communities on race, rights and taxes is too often still the undercurrent of politics. So how do you connect people in, make sure that they are getting a better opportunity in life and take care of these issues? We know where crime lives; it is the same place as poverty, so that is where we need to go. We actually need to target these communities, bring them back and give the people who live there a better opportunity.

As I say, the Victorian government is addressing this in a whole range of different initiatives. Some I did want to reference are the headlines on the achievements, the strategy and the vision. The government has a clear stance on policing and community safety. Since we were elected in 2014 the resources have been provided—the tools and the powers that police need to keep the community safe—and the investment in the policing budget is 52 per cent higher than it was in 2014. Now, that is an extraordinary investment to try and give police the resources, the staffing and the tools that they need. The government has invested nearly \$4 billion in new funding for police.

The government released a community safety statement in 2016, which outlined a range of strategies and approaches to keep Victorians safe. Just to hit some key notes here, the government has funded 3135 new police officers. One thing I really want to underscore is that one of the initiatives is the development of the staffing allocation model, referred to by my colleague the member for Footscray. This is a sophisticated allocation and forecasting model that accounts for population growth, geography, police activity and crime trends. Now, this is really important as we get more sophisticated in our approach to targeting the issues and trying to reduce crime and increase community safety. The model was developed by Victoria Police in consultation with Police Association Victoria and endorsed by the government. And I know speaking now as the member for Broadmeadows, which is a hotspot



for a whole range of different issues that have gone on, that this is intergenerational. How do you actually address the circumstances?

I have been to the Broadmeadows police station, I have spoken to the officers there and on their behalf I would like to suggest that under this model we actually look at how we can provide greater reward for effort in these particular police stations. Is it greater promotion or an acknowledgement of their high work rate, because as we know some police stations in different areas can have a much lower work rate than in these communities? I have had this discussion with the local police officer, and they were very happy for me to make this pitch to Police Association Victoria to make sure that their position was acknowledged. I am more than happy to do that because I think reward for effort is really important. Also, and I have long argued this in teaching and education, with policing as well you can get a better mix of experienced police officers with the younger recruits coming through and match them up, particularly in these communities that are vulnerable and have complex needs. We can see now we have a convergence of crises. We have got the pandemic, we have got unemployment, we have got inequality, but how do we actually make these systemic changes?

We have a really sophisticated approach from force command and the police association to try and do this, and I am more than happy to continue to pursue that as the member for Broadmeadows and to look at how we can turn this around and make this a prototype for the change that we are talking about. We have brought in the new industries and jobs—a billion dollars worth of new investment, 5000 new jobs at no cost to taxpayers. Then we have got the vaccines from CSL being made, saving lives at home and abroad. Then we can look at lifelong learning and what is going on there—the global learning village, the ideas lab, the multiversity. We have got the University of Melbourne. We are trying to get them over the line with a great model that will have benefit for 321 different postcodes. If you bring in the policing in this positive way—we have got the Field of Dreams for sport, so there is your sporting connection. I am working on the creative industries. I still want to see Broadywood done before I am done. We will see how we go. We will keep going. I would like to say that it is good to have these bipartisan debates where you can find out a little bit more about what is happening in every corner of the state. On that basis I want to commend the bill and the contributions to the house.

**Mr ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:57): I also rise to address the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 following the contribution from the member for Broadmeadows. Through you, Acting Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Broadmeadows for his measured contribution and his acknowledgement that in this place sometimes there is agreement amongst members and on this occasion in relation to these matters that we are discussing there is. I think that is also important to note from this side as well.

The first responsibility of every government, in my view, is or should be the safety of its citizens, the security of its citizens. What could be more important than for a national government or a state government to put at the forefront of its policy consideration and policy delivery the safety of its citizens. Critical to that is our police force, Victoria Police. As other speakers have alluded to, this legislation today was introduced at the start of the day, was first read and second read with the agreement of the opposition as a matter of urgency to fix an administrative error. Even in opposition, we know that our primary focus is to protect the community and to protect those who protect us, which is why we on this side of the chamber will not be opposing this bill.

Members of Victoria Police place themselves in harm's way, and every day they do that to keep us safe. They deserve that respect. They deserve the support that we as members of this place representing our communities give them, and that is what we intend to do through our position on this bill. The change brought about by this bill will protect from liability and ensure that Victoria Police members can go about their jobs, as they do so very well—but it is the government's responsibility to ensure police are protected. We will not oppose this legislation, although we only received this bill, I might say, from the government at 4.37 pm just yesterday, just hours before it entered this chamber. We have expeditiously worked as a coalition, as an opposition, together with key stakeholders to work through the matters in this bill and to bring about the position that we have arrived at.

I might say that there are a number of media articles in my research for this contribution that were of interest to me. I might just refer to a couple of them. In the Fairfax press on 26 February, from memory, it was reported that a former police prosecutor said that:

... Victoria Police knew seven years ago of the confusion over delegation powers—the very matter that this bill seeks to resolve—

which this week left ...

Victoria Police scrambling, in the view of Fairfax press,

... to swear in more than 1000 police officers who had been working without formal authority.

Former police prosecutor Justin Shaw said on Friday that drink-driving hearings were thrown into disarray in 2015 when it emerged lower-ranking commissioners were signing off on the credentials of breath-test operators without the authority to do so.

The article goes on to say that:

... the same issue was raised in court in 2015, when for about eight months the certificates issued to legalise the use of evidentiary draught breath-testing machines—inside booze buses and police stations—in prosecuting offenders was technically invalid.

...

He said—

that is, Mr Shaw said—

the police top brass were made aware, and retrospective legislation was eventually introduced to legalise the tests.

If this matter was first raised many years ago, in 2015, it is perhaps a legitimate question to ask why now in 2022, some seven years later, we are further addressing similar matters. Benita Kolovos of the *Guardian* also wrote about this matter, and she said that:

The state's chief commissioner, Shane Patton, on Thursday revealed between July 2014 and August 2021 1,076 police officers, 157 protective service officers and 29 police custody officers had been incorrectly sworn following the introduction of the Victoria Police Act.

She then went on to quote the police commissioner:

“The reality is that number of police officers and PSOs have been performing that role without having the actual powers validly to do so over that period of time,” he said.

I think it is important to commend Chief Commissioner Patton for his frankness in this particular matter. He saw that there was an issue to be raised, and he did so quite frankly and got to the point. We are now in a circumstance where this matter will shortly be resolved with the agreement of this house—I suspect later today.

I would like to address two other matters in my contribution. First is the work of my local police officers across not only the Bayside police station in Sandringham but also the Cheltenham police station on the Nepean Highway. In my conversations with local police since I was elected in 2018 I have been in admiration of the work that they do in our community. I try to keep in semiregular contact with them just to keep a handle on some of the issues that they face in their day-to-day work on the front line, seeking to keep our community safe. They have raised with me a number of times that the issues that they come up against time and time again relate to theft from motor vehicles, theft of motor vehicles, drug use and drug-related crime but sadly also issues relating to mental health and domestic violence. I give full credit to them. To be a Victoria Police officer at this time in our history, with the issues that our community faces, you need something special in you. It is not just a job that you get paid to do 9 to 5. There is a vocational element.

As my colleague the member for Euroa raised so eloquently, members of Victoria Police are not just those men and women in blue, they are members of our community. They themselves are driven to keep our community safe not just because they wear that uniform but because they are members of

our community who operate as members of our community within our community, not just as VicPol members but also as contributing members of local sporting clubs and service organisations as well.

Just finally I think it is also important to place on record the importance that the coalition has placed on keeping our community safe. Just recently we marked the 10-year anniversary of the introduction of protective services officers at train stations, and that was an achievement of the former coalition when we were last in government. At the 2010 state election the Liberal-National parties committed to placing PSOs on all platforms in metro Melbourne and at major regional stations. We committed to 1700 extra police and 940 PSOs, and in our short four years of governing this state—in that privileged time that we had—we in fact exceeded that commitment and delivered over 1000 PSOs and 1900 Victoria Police members, arguably making Victoria a safer place.

PSOs were introduced into the system in February 2012 and now a decade later continue to serve the community. I know anecdotally, having spoken to them, that members of my community do feel safer around train stations. Often on a winter's night in the darkness and the cold of winter, train stations can be an unwelcoming place, an unsafe place, but for members of my community to know that there are PSOs who are there to protect them at that time does make a difference. It makes a tangible and a real difference to members of my community, and I think that that is a wonderful policy legacy of the former coalition government and one that I know has been supported by the current government as well.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, we will not be opposing this bill, and we look forward to its passage through this chamber later today.

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (16:07): It is a great privilege that I am able to rise in support of the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, an incredibly important bill. I mean, as we have heard in this house, it is quite a simple bill to fix quite an important oversight from some years ago now, but of course it is wonderful straight off the bat to hear that it has the full support of this place, from what it sounds like. I wish it a very speedy passage in the other place.

As I always do—I will not say always, actually; it is quite definitive. As I normally do, I want to thank the minister for her work on this bill, an incredibly important bill, and of course give a shout-out to the staff over there—sorry you have to listen to all of this—and importantly to Victoria Police and to the department, which has conducted some very speedy and very handy work.

This bill, as we know, will retrospectively validate the appointments of Victoria Police acting assistant commissioners by a deputy commissioner between July 2014 and August 2021 and any powers exercised by them pursuant to their invalid appointments, including the swearing in of police officers and protective services officers. Now, when most people were reading the summary to this bill they were thinking, 'Oof, we've got to fix that one'. I thought, 'Wow, maybe I arrested a whole bunch of people without having the power to do so', because I was sworn in as a police constable, I reckon, around July or August 2014.

**Mr McGhie** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR**: Member for Melton, luckily that was Ken Lay. Ken Lay handed my badge to me. I do not remember everything he said, but it was very pleasant. He was very friendly and a nice bloke. It was a big day at the police academy for your graduation. It is the last time you are going to have to march, and then you only have to kind of half-do it for the rest of your career. It is the last hurrah before they kick you out to reality, so you kind of forget a few things along the way. Obviously I remember that Ken Lay handed me my badge. That was a really special moment, sharing the day and sharing the parade with my squad mates—squad 12, 2013–14, a good bunch of people—most of whom are still in the job, which does not surprise me. We were actually the highest performing squad academically—which is not everything—through the police academy at that time. I like to think it was because of me, but no, it was very much a joint effort.

**Mr McGhie**: And then you came into politics.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Yes, and then I came into politics—you poor buggers. But I remember that. This will probably speak volumes, and everyone will be like, ‘Oh, of course that happened’. I was only late to the academy on one day, and the day that I was late to the police academy—I cannot even remember why I was late—was the day that the squad, I did not know this, was going to be asked by our communication skills teacher who was going to deliver the valedictory speech. I would have loved to do it anyway, could you believe it, but in my absence and without me even flagging an interest or my squad mates even talking about it, I rock up an hour and a half later and they go, ‘By the way, you’re making the valedictory speech at our graduation’. I was like, ‘Well, if someone’s got to do it’. It was a great honour and privilege, and I must say doing that in front of half of police command was a little nerve-racking. But it was a great honour, and I got some really good footage of our whole graduation ceremony.

When I was looking at the bill today and hearing about the need for it, I was thinking there must have been a few police prosecutors as well—and prosecutors of all persuasions, whether police or otherwise—that have been thinking, ‘Man, this is going to be a lot of work’. But no, thankfully this place of legislating, of laws, is delivering again for Victoria Police. The Andrews Labor government is righting the wrongs of the past and making sure that our police officers’ delegations of power can be made appropriately to make sure officers are provided the appropriate protections, and retrospectively as well. We do know that between those dates Victoria Police deputy commissioners appointed a number of police officers to the role of assistant commissioner in an acting capacity, assuming, however incorrectly, they had the power to do so. Deputy commissioners had the power to appoint acting assistant commissioners under the former act, the Police Regulation Act 1958, and obviously we know that deputy commissioners appointed police officers to the role of AACs where they did not have the power to do so. Victoria Police identified this administrative error in August 2021. What a morning that would have been in the Chief Commissioner of Police’s household when they discovered that. Again, it would have been interesting: when the announcement was made, a lot of people who perhaps did the wrong thing over those years thought they were going to get given a free pass, but that is not to be the case, thankfully, with the work that has been done to this point.

As well, this bill will retrospectively validate the appointments of police officers to the role of AACs by deputy commissioners so that AACs are taken to have always been validly appointed, and these provisions will have the effect that powers purportedly exercised by invalidly appointed AACs will not be invalid by reason of their invalid appointments. This includes the power to swear in police officers and PSOs and will of course remove the prospect that persons who were purportedly sworn in as police officers or PSOs by invalidly appointed AACs might be found to have not had the powers and duties of a police officer or PSO. So although I feel like that has been said a few times today, or certain iterations, it is important to state what this bill proposes to do.

As others have done in this place, can I just simply reflect for a moment on the incredible job our police officers do, having had the privilege of being one for five years. As I say, generally in the police force if you serve less than 10 years your years are measured in seconds by leading senior constables and above, so I served for 5 seconds, traditionally speaking, although by the time I was going through, thanks to this Andrews Labor government’s commitment, 40442, my register number, did not seem so shabby after a couple of years. In fact I think most of my squad mates are sergeants, and some are even acting senior sergeants, which blows my mind. There are people rolling around, 30, 31, 32 years of age, a good head on their shoulders, who are now senior sergeants in our communities and in task forces across Victoria Police who were part of squad 12 of 2013–14, who were all lawfully sworn in then and are still now, which is great. But on a serious note, it was a great privilege and honour, and being in this place—obviously there are challenges to all jobs—I sometimes think life might have been simpler if I had stayed a police officer. But then I remember some of the jobs I attended as a police officer—I mean, wowee, just incredible.

I reflect on the last couple of years for our emergency services workers and for police officers and all the absolute crap that they have copped from a very, very select and small minority of people in our

community. I understand it has been a tough time. The pandemic has thrown up difficulties and challenges for many in our community; in fact we have all been touched by the pandemic in some way, shape or form. But there is never any excuse to assault or verbally abuse our police officers, who deserve to go home safe like anybody else. That our police officers had to cop all the nonsense they did during the pandemic in particular, on top of all their other duties of keeping our community safe, is a great shame. Traditionally the media will always focus on the negative aspects; there is a lot of good out there as well. Most people have the utmost respect for our police officers, and so they rightfully should. They do an incredible job.

Out my way we have got Boronia police station and the Knox police station. Knox is the headquarters for our area. There is a fantastic working relationship with local police command. They have done a fantastic job in looking after my part of the world. It goes right across our state in Victoria. I know that there would be nobody in this place who would say anything different about police in their local community. They deserve every bit of support from this government, and certainly that is what they have got from this government.

For me, one of the proudest pieces of work that this government has delivered is that we have now finally delivered 3135 extra police officers. That is not just counting for attrition, that is on top of attrition—so 2700 new frontline police members. That is more police in my community, more police in the member for Croydon's community, more police in the member for Oakleigh's community, more police in the member for Eltham's community, more police in the member for Mount Waverley's community—it is more police in every single corner of this state. That is exactly what we promised to do, and we have delivered it. Like all things, when we say we will do something, we get it done. There are few things, if any at all, that are more important than making sure that members of our community feel safe. Of course you can never fully eliminate crime. It is a fantastic goal to have, perhaps, like zero harm. But we know providing police forces with the resources they need—not just more numbers but tasers, body-worn cameras, state-of-the-art equipment—

**A member:** Tanks!

**Mr TAYLOR:** No. You know, it is all of those resources that are helping to keep them safe, to keep the emergency services safe more broadly but also to keep our communities safe. So we are delivering for our police community, we are delivering for the emergency services community and we are delivering this legislation to make sure that we correct an oversight and make sure that they have the protections that they absolutely should have and fully expect, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr McGHIE (Melton) (16:17):** It is my pleasure to rise today to contribute to the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. Look, I always feel honoured to follow the superb member for Bayswater, who served the Victorian community as a police officer. We just heard his recount of that. He continues that service in this place. It is always a pleasure hearing his contributions. They are quite amusing at times. He is a great member of this government and works extremely hard for his constituents in the Bayswater electorate. I commend him for his efforts. He has got that much energy; I do not know where he gets it from. I thank him for his service to Victorians both now as a politician but also back in his police days.

I will go on to thank all of our police members and PSOs, especially for the last two years. It has been a very difficult two years for all of us across this state. But the police have borne the brunt of a lot of angst at different times dealing with this difficult task, and they are often faced with abuse and intimidation from those in their communities who have fallen victim to manipulation and conspiracy theories. We all owe our appreciation to the police and the PSOs right across the state of Victoria. I especially want to acknowledge the VicPol members in the Melton electorate, led by Lisa Prentice-Evans, who have kept us safe and worked extremely hard within our communities, and also the Bacchus Marsh police, around the Bacchus Marsh township and district, for their great efforts right across that district. In particular, on International Women's Day I especially extend my gratitude to women serving within VicPol in their many different roles and varied roles.

This bill introduces a new provision into the Victoria Police Act 2013. It retrospectively validates the appointment of police members invalidly appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner by deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021. It also validates all exercises of power by police members invalidly appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner between July 2014 and August 2021, including the power to swear in police officers and protective services officer recruits. This amendment will cure the period of time between July 2014 and August 2021 and mean that actions and conduct by affected police and PSOs—and there are around about 1200 of them who are affected, who acted in good faith—will be considered lawful and authorised. It will also provide certainty and clarity for the affected members and for the justice sector more broadly. The introduction of the new Victoria Police Act changed the powers of deputy commissioners to appoint acting assistant commissioners; however, in practice Victoria Police continued this practice, and that is why we are here today talking about this amendment to the bill.

Legal advice sought by Victoria Police identified this as a potential issue in late 2020, but they believed that it was only limited to a very small number of powers used by acting assistant commissioners. But further auditing and legal advice sought by Victoria Police and finalised in February 2022 identified that this issue is related to the swearing in of officers by acting assistant commissioners. So from that audit it appears that 1076 police officers and 157 protective services officers were sworn in by invalidly appointed acting assistant commissioners. There were also 29 police custody officers that were affected. So through actions taken by Victoria Police, they have corrected this issue prospectively, with the vast majority of affected officers re-sworn—and I know that they were hurriedly doing that over the last couple of weeks—and this bill will fix the issue retrospectively by making valid all the lawful conduct and use of powers by these officers for the period between July 2014 and August 2021.

Retrospective action is required to ensure that evidence gathered and enforcement outcomes from this period are not compromised by technical or administrative error. All the sworn officers affected by this matter are well-trained officers who have exercised their powers in good faith. If we know police officers through family or through acquaintances or have ever worked with police officers, we know they do their job diligently and in good faith. In my experiences over many years I actually worked with many police officers on the front line when I was a paramedic, and then as the secretary of the ambulance union worked with Police Association Victoria very closely. I know a lot of police officers. I know they love their job. It is a very difficult job at times, but they do it well and they do it always in good faith to protect the community.

The bill will provide certainty and clarity for all of the affected officers and for the broader justice sector. Of course the police association have been engaged and involved in this issue over the last few weeks, and they support the actions of the government to provide certainty and clarity for all of their members caught up in this matter. The government and Victoria Police have worked closely with the police association to assure members that their legal, industrial and even importantly their superannuation protections and entitlements are not diminished by this administrative error. So when the matter was brought to the attention of the Victorian government, we acted to resolve it very quickly. The impacted officers have always considered themselves to be sworn in. They are well trained. They have kept the community safe. This is just an administrative issue that is no fault of the officers impacted. We have moved quickly to resolve it. Victoria Police moved to re-swear the vast bulk of the 1200 affected officers, and the government and Victoria Police have worked closely to draft the bill and correct the matter retrospectively as well. The administrative error should not have occurred, but it did, so we have to deal with it, and we are. We cannot speak for the breakdown that occurred in 2013 when the change in legislation created this issue, but we can fix it now, and that is what we are debating here today.

We know that the key to our community safety strategy is police resourcing. A number of members have spoken about the numbers, and I will just reiterate some of those numbers. We have funded 3135 new police officers. This has included general duties police working in local communities but

also in specialist officer areas. It includes hundreds of family violence police officers, and we all know how that is important in our local communities at the moment with the family violence rates. It is more PSOs for mobile patrols and new stations for our growing force. Of course we have worked closely with force command on developing a new recruitment pipeline, and that includes the development of a staffing allocation model. Rather than just plucking numbers out of the air—I was nearly going to say something else then—there is a sophisticated model that allocates staffing to particular locations around the metropolitan and regional and rural areas that will deal with the population growth, the geography, the police activity and the crime trends. That model was developed by Victoria Police in consultation with the police association and certainly endorsed by the government.

As of September 2021 there are 3292 more police officers in stations and in specialist units than there were back in November 2014. That is a great 25 per cent increase. And we have 344 more PSOs across our public transport network—again, another 24 per cent increase. There are 376 police custody officers working across the state in stations, freeing up police to be out in the community, where we need our police officers to be seen. Under our watch the force has grown by 4936 police staff. That includes sworn officers, PCOs and Victorian public service staff, and that amounts to a 28 per cent increase in staffing numbers since we have been in office.

So we are delivering not just new resources but also specialist technology, equipment and capability—again, things such as body-worn cameras—and we have moved them out of the analogue technology and also out of the fax machine age. We have also delivered on the Royal Commission into Family Violence’s recommendations, and that has led to improving the experience of and impact on victims and VicPol officers being trained up in that area.

This is an important bill and an important amendment. I want to extend my thanks to the Minister for Police and her staff, who acted quickly on this bill and put the bill before the house. I think we can all acknowledge that the error should not have occurred. But these amendments will seek to resolve the administrative error, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (16:28): I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to add my contribution on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and say how delighted I am to, like others have done, take the opportunity to recognise that this is the chamber acting in a bipartisan way, recognising together that when there is a need to take action for the safety of our community we do put the community first. It always gives me pleasure and in fact the opportunity even in other contexts and other places to talk about the way that the Parliament works and the opportunities that members of Parliament take to serve the community in a way that I think does represent the best of us in so many ways.

This bill is the key to retrospectively validating the appointment of police members. As has been articulated by others before us, it is something that we had to take really quick action on, and I commend the Minister for Police on the way that she responded to this once the revelation landed on her desk that this was something that did need really quick and decisive action. I also pay credit to the minister’s office and the officials that are involved and particularly police command. In the context of my role as the member for Cranbourne—something I have had for just over three years—working with the local police in Cranbourne and the police command as well has been something that has provided me with a great deal of insight, that opportunity to have those conversations about what is important. But I also pay credit to Police Association Victoria and Wayne Gatt on the way that they have taken a very constructive approach to responding to this and making sure that our community is safe but also that we put the members, our sworn police and PSOs, at the centre of our response.

The bill in front of us responds to an error wherein Victoria Police deputy commissioners appointed some police officers to the role of acting assistant commissioner without the formal power to do so in the Police Act 2013. This power had previously been granted in the legislation before the 2013 amendment, and this bill will validate these appointments. These officers were taken off duty so that they could be sworn in again during their next shift—those officers that were affected—so they could

continue to serve the community and maintain community safety. Victoria Police of course addressed this error. It was investigated—they investigated the scope and the extent of the issue—and then they did act. It is true that retrospective legislation should be a last resort, and I do want to emphasise that this was a technical error and that before the 2013 amendment to this legislation the appointment of AACs did allow them to exercise these powers. This is an error, if not corrected by a bill such as the one in front of us, that has the potential to prejudice enforcement actions, so that is why it was decided that such swift action was necessary. We did take swift and urgent action to also make sure that affected police officers and PSOs would be immediately identified as part of that.

This government has a really important track record when it comes to action and making sure that the modern Victorian police and PSOs really do reflect the best of us and the best that this country has to offer, and it is something I am incredibly proud of. We have already heard today that recognition that 3135 new police officers have been funded. Sometimes we refer to police officers as the men and women in blue, but I do want to again recognise that police officers are in fact our neighbours and our family and friends. Like many people—probably most here today—I count them with great affection, but also I am incredibly grateful to the police officers that I know, because I have seen the way that they approach the community. Often—in fact I would say universally—the police officers I know do seem to have a really deeply embedded role in the community. Whether it is being involved in sporting clubs or other activities, they often recognise the importance of community and being embedded in the community and that that is what has led them to that vocation, to being police officers. So I do acknowledge that the work that they do really does have them very much embedded in the community, in the very life of the community, and I would say I see that as a universal trait in my experience.

The government is committed to the safety and the security of the Victorian community, and this is made clear with this government's track record of providing the resources, tools and powers that police need to keep the community safe. This legislation is a continuation of this commitment, and that is ensuring that there is appropriate legislation that does give Victoria Police the power they need. The complexities of the task before Victoria Police mean that there needs to be close development of what is called a staffing allocation model of Victoria Police, which does account not only for the funds available but also for population growth—and that is something that is obviously very important in the context of Cranbourne and the outer south-east as well as, I am aware, some of the northern and western suburbs as well—geography, police activity and crime trends. So we can applaud the work of those responsible for what we know now is a much more cost effective and efficient model than the boom-and-bust cycle of police resourcing that has been at the centre of our response.

I do want to spend some time recognising of course that family violence is the greatest law and order challenge that this state has faced and the work of Victoria Police, much of it recognised by and enacted as a result of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. So much of the work that is done by Victoria Police really does acknowledge the research that came out of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. My mother was a family violence worker. I often speak of that. She does not mind me telling people that she is 90. I know that she always counsels people and asks people to refer any matters to Victoria Police because she has faith that the modern police force have the tools and the training that they need to respond in a really coherent way.

I would like to just spend a couple of minutes particularly recognising Operation Ribbon. Whenever I have the opportunity and I am in the company of police I do thank the police for the work that they undertook as part of Operation Ribbon. It was a really important way that specialist detectives from VicPol's family violence investigation unit reached out to Victorians who were at great risk during the necessary restrictions that were implemented as part of Victoria's response to the global pandemic. I know that Operation Ribbon was a really strong commitment to community policing. It resulted in 100 people being remanded, 53 people being bailed, 45 people being summonsed, three people being issued a penalty and 467 people being investigated. It has been described as an essential part of preventing and responding to family violence, especially during a time when there was a concern about escalating violent behaviours and concern about the risk of increased frequency in violence. We know



infamously that there can be outcomes of sports matches and economic fluctuations and the like that can influence criminal behaviour of all kinds, but it is often behind closed doors that the greatest harm is done. So I do particularly recognise Operation Ribbon and the work that was done by Victoria Police, who did continue to work and to really put the community first.

I wanted to also acknowledge the member for Bayswater and say how proud I am to serve alongside somebody who has had, at such a young age, such a role in Victoria Police. I think having the member for Bayswater, the member for Melton and the member for Frankston in this chamber does elevate us and our understanding of emergency services and what can be experienced by so many of our police. This legislation does acknowledge that we do have humans and there is a toll that can often be taken on police. Having the people that we have alongside us, I do, as I said, acknowledge in this context the member for Bayswater for his insights.

But on International Women's Day I want to also particularly thank the women of Victoria Police. Locally we have terrific women who are undertaking a role that is profoundly important. I commend this bill. I thank the minister. Thank you very much.

**Mr TAK (Clarinda) (16:38):** I am glad to join the member for Cranbourne, and it is always good to follow the member for Cranbourne and also listen to her contribution here once again. I am pleased to speak on this Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. Like other members have already done I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Victoria Police across the state and in my electorate at the Springvale police station and also at the Clayton police station.

For the last three years also we have been keeping all Victorians safe, especially in the last two years during the global pandemic, and our police and emergency services workers have been in overdrive working tirelessly to keep every single Victorian safe. Like our frontline healthcare workers, police and PSOs have also been right there on the front line for the state's response to COVID-19, and a huge thankyou to all the police and PSOs and emergency workers once again. They are protecting us and supporting our community each and every day, so I am glad to be part of a government that recognises the true value of and supports investment in these important institutions.

The Andrews Labor government has a very proud track record of supporting our police and emergency services workers. In fact under the Andrews Labor government Victoria has more police than ever in the state's history, and we have invested more than \$3 billion in Victoria Police. That investment really shows on the ground in my electorate, and during the pandemic it was more relevant and more important than ever. Therefore I am extremely proud to be part of this government, which truly recognises and respects the value of our police and our emergency services workers.

This is another bill here to support Victoria Police and to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of operations of the police force. This is an important and necessary bill that will retrospectively validate the appointment of Victoria Police acting assistant commissioners (AACs) by deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021 and any powers exercised by them pursuant to their invalid appointment, including the swearing in of police officers and protective services officers, PSOs. So in essence the bill will correct an administrative error. It happens from time to time where these errors are picked up and amended in a timely manner.

Therefore I will just go through two main sections of this bill. It is section 26 of the Victoria Police Act 2013 that authorises the chief commissioner to appoint police officers to the role of acting assistant commissioner, and also section 19 of the act authorises the chief commissioner to delegate these powers of appointment so once appointed acting assistant commissioners are authorised to exercise all powers of assisting commissioners. It is clear, however, the issue arose in the changeover from the regulation to the act. The Victorian Police Act was amended in July 2014, and prior to July 2014 the administrations of Victoria Police were governed by the Police Regulation Act 1958. Under the former act deputy commissioners were authorised to exercise all powers of the chief commissioner, including the power to appoint acting assistant commissioners. This provision was not carried over to the new

act, and that is why we are here today. Therefore between July 2014 and August 2021 the deputy commissioners appointed a number of police officers to the role of acting assistant commissioner under the presumption that they had the power to do so. We already heard the member for Bayswater about his own experience during the swearing in during that time.

It is very important to fix the error, and I am glad to see that happening here in this bill. I am also glad to see the crime statistics continue to fall across the state in the local government areas that make up the Clarinda electorate and near me in the neighbouring electorates. Comparing 2020 and 2021, the total criminal incidents were down across all our local government areas, and that is of course a very positive point. May I add, during the election campaign of 2018 I was in Springvale with the neighbouring member—at the time we both were candidates—and we were very proud that we could already see in the statistics the numbers were already going down, which is the right direction, at that time.

It would seem it is due to many of the historic investments—the nearly \$4 billion investment into the police force. Once again, some 3135 new police officers are working in our community and also specialist officers, including hundreds of family violence police officers. That is including the multicultural unit in terms of our police force. I also have the honour of receiving and working with that important unit with the multicultural community. These are extremely important investments for our community, and they are very much needed and appreciated in the Clarinda district.

Lastly, just in terms of the consultation around these amendments, Victoria Police have been consulted as the primary stakeholder for the reform. Police Association of Victoria has also been advised of the invalid appointments of the AACs and the invalid swearing-in of police officers and PSOs. Police association acknowledges the unintended and highly technical nature of the error. So the bill has support there, so I am very happy to support this amendment to address the defect in relation to the appointments of police officers to act as assistant commissioners and for other purposes. It is an important adjustment that will make sure that the negative impact of the error is mitigated and ensure that our justice system can continue to operate effectively and efficiently.

Finally, once again I would like to pay tribute to and say thank you to all our frontline workers, including police, emergency services workers, healthcare workers and everyone that has been protecting us every day during the global pandemic and who have been right there on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19. We are extremely grateful to every one of you who keeps our community safe and keeps our family safe, and therefore I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr FREGON** (Mount Waverley) (16:46): It is my absolute delight to rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. I thank the minister for her incredible contribution not just on this bill but also since 2016 in the role. We are very well served by our Minister for Police.

I think today with a bill like this we really see Parliament working at its best. There is an obvious flaw in the law—unintentional. Both sides of the house and I would assume the independents and the Greens all agree that this needs to be rectified, and we are in agreement. So I think, if it says nothing else, it says that we all respect, value and honour every one of our police officers, PSOs, staff and support staff. They have done not only an amazing job for the almost 170 years that Victoria Police had existed—which I believe comes up next year, so those of us lucky enough to be in this house next year will have to have some celebrations in regard to that—but especially over the last couple of years, which have been difficult for all. Our men and women in blue have served us very, very well. And it has been tough. I mean, the last two years have been tough on everybody, but they have gone above and beyond. So I know we all thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their service. So today is really, hopefully, making it known even more clearly that we back them in and we support them. They obviously need the confidence to do their jobs, knowing that the Victorian community is behind them, so today we rectify an error and we say, ‘Yes, we’re behind you’.

The introduction of the bill today is vital because it allows our police officers and PSOs to be legally effective in carrying out their role, given the error that we have all been talking about. The act changed

the role back in 2013. The act changed the role and scope of deputy commissioners, which is the foundational issue at the heart of this matter, so having that rectified today is necessary. And again, without labouring the point, we are all one on this.

I am just looking up at the clock and I notice that there is almost 6 minutes left in my speech, and it brings me to the fact that in my area we have the police academy. All of our police are trained in our police academy. A couple of years ago the Minister for Police opened up the family violence centre at the academy. We have just passed the 6 minutes left mark. Around 40 to 60 per cent of police time is taken up with responding to family violence, and as we can see from crime stats, family violence continues to be the biggest law and order challenge in our community. To put this in context, this means an officer attends a family violence incident about every 6 minutes. Statistically, an officer has, in the last 6 minutes while I have been standing here, attended a family violence incident, and they come into contact with someone who has been the victim of physical or sexual assault, manipulation, abuse of power or control by someone who they trust, often in their very home. That is why we made sure as a government that as part of the increase in police numbers—and I think I lost count of the amount of times that I said the number 3135 in the election campaign back in 2018—within that 3135 we funded 415 specialist family violence investigators, 31 family investigation units, Australia's first family violence command and, as I mentioned, a new family violence centre of learning at the police academy in my very electorate to ensure the police are driving change in offending.

Victoria Police have implemented all 27 of the recommendations that they were responsible for, leading and co-leading from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. My district of Mount Waverley is obviously proud to play a role in being home to that first dedicated centre of learning for family violence, an \$11.7 million state-of-the-art facility located at the Victoria Police Academy in Glen Waverley, which I have the utter privilege to represent. It is the first scenario training facility dedicated to family violence in Australia. It is the best you can get and demonstrates the 100 per cent commitment that this government has to eradicating—one would hope—family violence and providing support for victims while holding perpetrators to account.

As a key foundation of our reform and one of Victoria Police's main priorities in implementing the Royal Commission into Family Violence's recommendations, four separate education and training packages have been developed and undertaken by 14 000 employees. Our government built this facility within a year of recommendations from the royal commission. Family violence teams are dedicated to dealing with family violence, repeat offenders and recidivist offenders in our community. It would be wonderful if they were not needed, but they are. This government's commitment to appropriately funding every recommendation and implementing every recommendation from the royal commission is something that I am very proud to stand on this side of the benches with.

Back to the measure at hand: when this matter was brought to the attention of the Victorian government, it proactively moved to resolve it. We do need to be careful as a house in regard to retrospective law. In general, I would say the laws of the land we are expected to follow are the ones that we understand exist today. Retrospectivity can play against that, and therefore, as I said, we must be careful. But in this situation it is entirely appropriate, and we have expeditiously moved to correct the wrong—the mistake, the error—that was in play. Our officers have done their best, their utmost, and have done us all proud over the last two years. This is one small way that this house sends its thanks. To Senior Sergeant Greg Dean at the Glen Waverley police station and Senior Sergeant Mark Standish and their teams, thank you on behalf of my constituents, me and my family and our community. You have done us all proud, and we are going to sort this one out. I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (16:56):** I rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. As we have heard today, this is a very important bill for our Victoria Police force and the hardworking officers that are on our streets each and every day. In particular I would like to thank all of the officers at Keilor Downs police station and also at Sunshine police station who continue to work

in the last two years in particular, where situations have been extremely challenging. They have done an extraordinary job in making sure that safety is absolutely paramount for my electorate of St Albans.

Let us make it clear: our government has a very strong stance on policing and community safety, and since we were elected in 2014 we have provided the resources, tools and powers that police need to keep communities safe. We have turned around the level of police investment, with the policing budget 52 per cent higher than it was previously in 2014. We have invested nearly \$4 billion in new funding for police, and we also released a community safety statement in December 2016 which outlined a range of strategies and approaches to keep Victorians safe, in particular crime prevention initiatives not only in my electorate of St Albans but across the state.

The bill introduces a new provision to the Victoria Police Act 2013. This will validate the appointment of police members who were unfortunately appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner by the deputy commissioners between July 2014 and August 2021. We have heard a lot of commentary and contributions from members of this house in relation to the specifics of this particular bill. It will also validate all exercises of power by police members who were invalidly appointed to the role of acting assistant commissioner between July 2014 and August 2021 and includes the power to swear in police officers and protective services officer recruits. This will cover the period of time between July 2014 and August 2021 and mean that the actions and conduct by affected police officers and PSOs who have acted in good faith will be considered lawful and authorised, and that is really important. It will provide certainty and clarity for affected members and for the justice sector more broadly.

As I previously said in my introduction, our government has been absolutely committed in relation to community safety and making sure that all Victorians—our loved ones and all local communities across Victoria—remain safe and that police have the resources that they need to perform these important roles. We funded over 3135 new police officers. This includes general duties police officers working in local communities but also specialist officers, including hundreds of family violence police officers, more PSOs for mobile patrols and new stations for our growing force.

Just to note that in my electorate of St Albans I see on a regular basis the foot patrols in St Albans and also the Sunshine town centre. They continue after hours, at all times patrolling our neighbourhoods and making sure that our local precincts remain safe. That includes PSOs that are allocated to St Albans station and also Sunshine station, and I would say throughout the Sunbury line. We are making sure that we are working closely with force command and developing a pipeline for recruitment. This includes the development of a staffing allocation model. This is a sophisticated allocation and forecasting model that accounts for and considers population growth, geography, police activity and of course crime trends. The model was developed by Victoria Police, but importantly in consultation with Police Association Victoria and supported and endorsed by our government. This approach has seen the end of the boom-and-bust cycle of police resourcing. It has seen police resourcing determined by experts and by need rather than by election cycles. It has also changed the police academy into the very busy centre of excellence that it is today.

This strategy is delivering results, and as of September 2021 there are 3292 more police officers in stations and in specialist units than back in November 2014. That is a 25 per cent increase in the police force. We have also seen 344 more PSOs across the public transport network, and that is a 24 per cent increase. There are over 370 police custody officers working across the state in stations, freeing up police to be in the community. It is really important that we do have police officers doing their jobs and not being buckled down somewhere else when someone else can do that job, such as a police custody officer. We have over 900 more Victorian public service staff, from forensics staff to specialists and other support staff, who assist police every day, and they are also very important roles, as they make sure that police officers are able to deliver and have the appropriate support. Under our watch the force has grown by over 4900 police staff, and that is a 28 per cent increase.

We have heard about this bill and how important it is. I do want to also mention briefly that we have also rolled out body-worn cameras for all frontline police. They have been really important in

capturing live moments of incidents. I think it speaks for itself why it is so important to have our frontline officers with the appropriate devices, and that includes body-worn cameras.

We have heard a lot about and, most importantly, we have delivered on the family violence royal commission recommendations. That has led to the commencement of evidence and statements being taken at the scenes of family violence, looking at the culture and improving the experience for victims so they can actually come forward and be able to receive the support that they need from the force. This has been a really critical interaction between members, family violence victims and also police officers. That has been extremely important. There is so much more that we have done in this space to improve the safety of the community, and I could go on far more about this.

But when it does matter, this government acts on what it needs to resolve, and we see it here today. We have got an issue and we are resolving it, and it is wonderful to see the opposition working closely with government to be able to resolve this issue. We have seen our police force working very hard and keeping our community safe. This has been an administrative issue—it is no fault of any particular person or officer—and today we are making sure that the government, in working together closely, is able to draft the bill and correct the matters that are before it in a very swift manner and this will be dealt with once and for all. I also want to talk in relation to making sure that this bill is a bill that corrects unfortunate wrongs. It will be fixed now, and it is wonderful also to see the opposition joining forces to make sure that we correct this bill. I recommend the bill to the house.

**Mr DONNELLAN** (Narre Warren North) (17:06): It is a pleasure today to get up and speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022, and I was just broadly keen to speak about the great work in my local area that police do. I was thinking of a couple of officers who I saw recently, including Inspector Graeme Stanley, who is an inspector in the eastern suburbs now but for many years had been a senior person in the south-east of Melbourne, based in Dandenong. Graeme had previously worked in justice, youth justice and other parts of justice outside of the police field and I will say has got an incredible vision of the importance of therapeutic justice and things like that but also early intervention and so forth in terms of trying very much to divert people away from prisons, away from incarceration, and ensuring that we maximise the potential of everybody. That is always a very difficult balance for both police and a society to actually get right; it is never easy. But the importance of minimising those you may have to put in jail and maximising the opportunities for them to become full taxpayers, contribute to the society around them and actually feel part of the society is just so vital, and that is something that Inspector Graeme Stanley very much understands. The reason I saw him this week—and this is sort of going a little bit off track—was that he was the master of ceremonies for, let us be blunt, his brother-in-law's memorial service. Jack Diamond was a long-time director of various entities in state government and a fine individual who contributed greatly to Box Hill TAFE. I had better get back to the police, because that is a little bit away from the work, but I just want to acknowledge the fine work that Graeme Stanley has done over many, many years in my local area in the south-east.

Another person I want to acknowledge is Senior Sergeant Alan Dew, who is the head of the Endeavour Hills police station. Prior to that he worked extensively in Springvale and Noble Park and did marvellous work with, I guess, many of the issues which were developing in those areas, like some of the gang issues and so forth. People like Alan who very much has that wider vision understand the importance of things like sport and the like to actually keep young people occupied, to keep them happy, to give them structure in their lives, to give them routine and very much to keep them at school. I know he is very much what you would call an imposing character, Alan Dew. As he would attest, he has got the largest physical head in the police force, so he has to have the biggest cap. He is also passionate about gridiron, and if you saw how imposing Alan is, you would understand why he and his sons have had a long-time passion for gridiron and why you would very much want to get out of their way if they were on a gridiron field. But apart from his great love of that sport, I just want to acknowledge that he has got an enormous heart and the marvellous work he has done throughout the south-east over many years but more recently obviously in the Endeavour Hills police station, which has gone through some pretty difficult challenges over the years, including the incident of the young

man who tried to attack a police officer there and the like. I know that the officers in the police force there were very much shaken by that, as they would be, but the work they continued doing in that area was excellent. More than anything else it was very much about recognising that more as a sign of mental illness than as a sign that it was a characteristic of the whole community, because it was nothing like that. It was just a small individual incident which unfortunately had major impacts on the wellbeing of everybody involved.

But this bill is essential, because obviously we have had to retrospectively give the powers for deputy commissioners to appoint acting assistant commissioners to ensure that justice and the courts and so forth can continue doing their work. Obviously this was an oversight that was available to assistant commissioners many years ago, but in the upgrade of the Victoria Police Act in 2013 that power to appoint an acting assistant commissioner was maybe potentially overlooked, to be honest, because I do not think it was a deliberate exercise of actually taking it out. It was just overlooked. So it is important. As the member for Mount Waverley was saying, we do not necessarily always like to undertake retrospective legislation, because there are consequences in relation to that, but unfortunately in this instance if we do not undertake that we will be severely hampered in the work we are doing each day. I note also that it is being supported by the opposition, which is great, and obviously Police Association Victoria have spoken to various stakeholders to indicate very much their support to get this up and done to ensure that we can have all these acting assistant commissioners' roles validated appropriately under the law. I guess in many ways this bill has been supported by all and sundry because it is just so absolutely necessary.

And whether it be resources—as we know, Victoria Police have had substantial resources and the minister has done a marvellous job of supporting Victoria Police, whether it be through technology, police numbers or also police allocation based on need across Victoria. If you look at my particular area, there has been a substantial increase in the last 20 years very much reflecting the growth of Casey, whether it be through the Endeavour Hills police station, Narre Warren police station or Cranbourne police station. The old Doveton police station disappeared pretty quickly. As I think one of the senior sergeants there told me, the criminals in Doveton at the time, which was many years ago, are too old to commit crimes now, and their tattoos are worn out and they are no longer. So there was not really a great demand at that time, they were saying, particularly because of the ageing of Doveton at the time.

Now Doveton is changing all over again with new migrants moving in. It is a revitalised suburb, but it is just interesting that I think at the time I was wondering why there was not an outcry that the Doveton police station was shut down. And that is very much why, because it was a particularly calm area, it was an ageing area, and there was not a particular need for as many officers there as there was up in Endeavour Hills. I will go on to point out that Endeavour Hills is an ageing electorate as well, and my suspicion is over time there will be greater pressures maybe down at Clyde and other areas for further police numbers or potentially down in areas like Pakenham and the like, where you are seeing that monstrous growth that is occurring in Cardinia and down the bottom end of Casey, as I was previously mentioning.

But I do think it is necessary that this bill goes through quickly, and I know it will go through very quickly in the upper house. I do not think there is any query as to why it has been much needed, and I will just re-emphasise the point I started with, which is to very much thank the officers in my area for the fine work they do. And I will say that I have met many, and I will not remember names but I will say that they have been incredibly good people to work with. But specifically someone like Graeme Stanley, who I have got enormous admiration for and I was with this week as he was going through I guess a very difficult period of his life to see his brother or brother-in-law, I guess—it felt like a brother—and have to be the MC at his memorial service. I would also like to thank Alan Dew for the leadership he provides up at Endeavour Hills. He is a fine policeman. He is an imposing presence, I might add, as I was pointing a little bit earlier, but he has a great love for the community and a great love for the people and an enormous vision of what he wants to do to support better outcomes for young people and to support a safer society that we live in.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh) (17:15): I also want to make a contribution to the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. As other speakers and the minister in the second-reading speech said, it is an important bill in that it ensures that police officers and PSOs are empowered to maintain community safety and that no otherwise successful prosecutions will be impacted by what is effectively an internal administrative error at Victoria Police in terms of the appointment process. That is what it is in terms of the nuts and bolts, but it is actually more important than that in terms of this government's narrative.

If you think about this government, we are entirely committed to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous community. We know that means that we have to invest in the workers that keep us safe—in this case police, but equally ambulance paramedics and firefighters. We have to invest in the workers that keep us healthy—nurses and doctors and other allied health professions. We have to invest in those who educate us and train us. So this is what we are doing here. We are creating a safe, healthy and prosperous community. That is why we are so focused on increasing the supply of schools, training pathways, teachers, hospitals, nurses, the mental health workforce, police stations, specialist officers and PSOs. In fact when we came to government every single one of those areas of service in Victoria was underfunded. There was a critical undersupply in all those sectors.

We came to government, we acted fast, we identified the issues and the gaps and we responded. We do not run, we do not hide, we do not defer responsibility and we do not deflect. We find the answers and we execute, unlike some people in this chamber on the other side who consistently say either 'We oppose' or 'We're not opposed'. How about just actually saying 'We support the bill' or 'We support the government business program'? How does it feel sitting on the fence on almost everything that you are moderate about or lukewarm about? That is not our policy. That is not our approach. That is not our narrative. We invest in those areas we know are critical. We invest in those areas we know are important. We are a reformist government, and this is part of those reforms.

Another example of that is that when the Victorian community told us that the mental health system was in crisis and was not working we took the same approach we are taking with this bill. We legislated and we provided a funding source to fix the mental health system—a funding source that the opposition chose not to support. That is on them in terms of the continued funding of mental health over generations. Equally with the level crossings—we identified a problem across Victoria, and we set a path to fixing that problem. We are up to the high 50s in terms of the number of level crossings removed. We took the same approach to family violence reform. We identified a problem, a significant problem, through thousands of Victorians' lived experiences with family violence and the perception of women in society. We took the same approach: we identified the issues in a significant way through a royal commission and we started addressing them one by one. In fact the police have, I understand, already implemented 27 of the recommendations for which they have an implementation arrangement. This is a hallmark of our government. We identify not just market failure but gaps in service. We identify opportunities for improvement to create a prosperous community, a healthy community and a safe community, and this is no different here today.

When we came to government TAFE was absolutely the second choice for most families. Now it is on par with university and other training pathways. It is the same with a bunch of other areas in terms of traineeships and things that we invest in across government. That is a recipe for good government: identifying problems and fixing them either through the power of this Parliament through legislation or through budget investments. In the case of this amendment bill it is through the power of the Parliament to make amends for an administrative error. Good government is not about the theatre of politics. It is not about obstruction. It is not about the headlines. It is not about reshuffling your shadow cabinet every 5 minutes. It is actually about responding to issues and addressing the disadvantaged, creating opportunities and building a healthy, prosperous and safe community. That is the hallmark of this government. That is a reformist agenda. As the Premier says, if you do not have a reform agenda, you do not have an agenda at all.

When you talk about reform and you talk about police, again, there is another government initiative. In terms of police this government not only has a far better relationship with police than previous

governments but also has a funding arrangement that actually works in favour of community safety and in favour of police operations—a funding model that works across areas of Victoria, regions and Melbourne and across functional areas where citizens live and work and play and recreate, from PSOs on train stations and around train precincts through to police at your door, as the member for Mount Waverley talked about, when it comes to issues of family violence or safety in the CBD at night. That is the funding model that applies across all those settings where Victorians feel safe in their community, but much more than that it is a system which has delved deep into the work of police and understood that police have been burdened by, for want of a better term, administrative burdens. We have assisted in lifting some of that through non-uniformed staff and embellishing those arrangements that support Victoria Police but also through technology, as the member for Bayswater said—technology through the use of iPads and other arrangements that make police work better and easier. It will never be easy. Being a police officer will never be easy. I have heard some of the stories that my good friend the member for Bayswater has told me.

Interestingly, my understanding is that five police officers contested the last state election for the Victorian Parliament—four for the Liberal-Nationals and one for the Australian Labor Party. I have no firsthand knowledge of those other candidates, but none of them succeeded. I do have firsthand knowledge of the member for Bayswater—what an outstanding human being, what an outstanding representative and an outstanding police officer. He was elected, which is maybe a bit emblematic of the Andrews Labor government's commitment to police reform in terms of how the funding model works and how the resources work. It was quite a sweet victory in Bayswater but also one for a serving police officer entering this place.

I want to join, as other colleagues have, in thanking my local police and all the police in Victoria for their work during the pandemic. It was difficult work, and you had idiots like Avi Yemini and others who just teased police and tried to get a bit of fame by leeching and being parasitic, with that parasitic behaviour. Police did an extraordinary job under difficult circumstances through the pandemic, enforcing what were legitimate government and public health directions.

More locally for me, I want to thank Senior Sergeant Wayne Elston and his team at Oakleigh police. I want to thank all the police, uniformed and non-uniformed Victoria Police staff, who work across both the Monash local government area and the Glen Eira local government area—those two areas that cover the electorate that I have the pleasure of representing in this Parliament—and keep our communities safe. I say to them: you and your families and the work you do matter to us, and we will never politicise you or victims of crime, like others have. We will never politicise that. That is too important for politicisation. What we will do is get about doing the work required to fix anything that needs to be fixed to provide for a safe, prosperous and thriving community. That is what we do, and that is part of what this bill does.

**Ms HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (17:25): I also rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. I have a few comments first about the actual legislation itself, just talking about the issue that this amendment is here to address, and then of course I will go into some of the broader issues around this government and its reform agenda that includes the legal system as well as the police force.

The Victoria Police Act 2013 commenced in July 2014. This was legislation that was introduced and passed by the former Napthine Liberal-Nationals government. This legislation came into effect in July and it was to basically amend a number of things from the Police Regulation Act 1958 in terms of updating it. Originally, in the old legislation, a deputy commissioner was authorised to exercise all powers of the chief commissioner, including the power to appoint acting assistant commissioners, and it was assumed that the deputy commissioners had this same power under the Victoria Police Act. However, that was not the case, and it took a number of years before this problem was identified.

The problem was identified in the County Court in a particular case where the powers of deputy commissioners were raised and brought into question, and from that a number of things happened which then led to the discovery that the deputy commissioners did not have the power to appoint acting



assistant commissioners, and therefore some of the things that acting assistant commissioners have done through the delegation power of the deputy commissioner were deemed to be invalid. Hence we need this legislation to rectify that problem, because of course it meant that there were a number of legal cases where it could be found that assistant acting commissioners were not legally or rightfully appointed and therefore certain actions, including the action of appointing police over time, were seen to be questionable.

So we need to put in this legislation. It needed to be urgently done, and it was also deemed that there was a requirement to include retrospectivity. Now, most legislation that is passed by Parliament is not retrospective. It is considered difficult to do that, because the idea is that the rights of people ought to stand and that retrospectivity should not take away the rights that people thought that they had prior to that change of legislation, but in this case it is an administrative error. It is something that was considered to be part of the original legislation, and therefore the advice is that it ought to be made retrospective because the actions of the assistant acting commissioners were done in a way that was believed to be valid and therefore those actions should be made valid now. That is what we are doing today to fix up, really, an error that was created by the Naphthine Liberal-Nationals coalition at the time, in 2014. Now we are fixing up that mess.

These things do happen from time to time where legislation is not bulletproof or not completely watertight. Often things come up that have to be dealt with at a later time because someone finds a loophole, or it may well be just that systems change, which then leads individuals or organisations or whatever to use legislation in a different way, and therefore changes have to be made. In terms of this legislation we are talking about today, the laws are living, breathing things really and communities and societies change, and with them the laws have to change to accommodate whether it is community attitudes or standards that need to change.

I think a good example of that is, thankfully, around family violence. We have had a Royal Commission into Family Violence. That was one of the first things that the Andrews Labor government committed to and introduced in its first term after the 2014 election, and those recommendations were groundbreaking in trying to change the system for how victim-survivors of family violence are treated and also provide resources to better support those families, and women and children in particular, who are overwhelmingly the ones that are subjected to family violence. And through that royal commission there were a number of pieces of legislation changed, even small things such as the ability for different bureaucracies and organisations to exchange information, for example. That is a thing that would be considered normally a fairly simple thing, and most members of the general public would think that it was something that happened as a matter of course, but it was found that various organisations and agencies could not share information. Therefore they could not share information around issues of family violence and they were making decisions without knowing the background to some of these issues and therefore the decisions were not in the best interests of those women and children. So again, we are looking at where laws have to change to keep up with attitudes, community expectations and the views as to who in society we ought to be protecting, and in these cases it is victim-survivors.

This legislation that we are talking about today ought not be something that is seen to be changing anything. It is really validation after omissions were previously made and were thought to be contained. The police were able to notify the government that these issues had come up around the validation of appointments and decisions made by acting assistant commissioners, and that is exactly what we are doing today: making sure that those decisions are validated both in the past and into the future, because the power to delegate duties needs to be there. Of course the police commissioner cannot do everything and act on all administrative decisions; therefore a number of other appointments need to be made to put individuals in those capacities to make those decisions to ensure that we have proper, efficient police legislation and that all the duties and requirements are being fulfilled.

I think this is an example of the Andrews Labor government: we do understand that things happen and we have to make changes when required, and if there have been omissions in the past they need to be

rectified and remedied. We do not make a big carry-on about it; we just get on with the job of doing it. I think that is the tone, and that is the way our government has continued to act. If it is level crossing removals, we just get on with it. If things need to be done, we do them. We make commitments and promises, and we make sure that those commitments and promises to the Victorian public, to the Victorian people, are fulfilled and honoured.

I know, for example, that in the electorate of Thomastown we are actually getting our first level crossing removal, which is very exciting. There will be the new Keon Park railway station there, and the Mahoneys Road/Keon Parade level crossing is going to be removed. So we are really excited that that is going to happen. We are going to lose a lot of congestion because that is a terribly congested area. It will also be a very good thing for jobs because as I understand it the crews from up the Mernda line, which have been removing the Cramer Street level crossing, the Bell Street level crossing and the Oakover level crossing, will then come down the line to remove the Keon Park level crossing. I am sure there is going to be some fantastic use of space underneath that crossing for the residents to enjoy, whether it is dog parks or skate parks. These things have to undergo the consultation process, but we are looking forward to a great space.

**Mr BRAYNE** (Nepean) (17:35): I also rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022. Obviously it is great to follow many of my colleagues who have also spoken on this bill, including my good friend the member for Bayswater, himself a former police officer, someone who served his community, our community and our state with distinction and someone who continues to serve his community with distinction but will always have his Victoria Police service. I will also use the start of my speech on this bill to thank all the serving officers on the Mornington Peninsula, all the officers who are based at Rosebud, who serve our community each and every day. I have gotten to know a few of the officers in my time in this role. These are so often people born and bred in our peninsula community who now serve that same community in this capacity, so we thank them and acknowledge them for their ongoing service to our peninsula community.

This government is of course committed to supporting our police and keeping our community safe. Since being elected in 2014 this government has demonstrated this time after time, with police being provided with the resources, tools and powers that they need to keep the community safe. From a policing budget that is 52 per cent higher than it was in 2014 to nearly \$4 billion in new funding for our police, it is clear that community safety is at the heart of this government's priorities. So while the discovery that some police officers have been invalidly sworn in is unfortunate, it does not change this government's stance on the importance of policing and community safety.

Recent auditing and legal advice sought by Victoria Police identified that over 1000 police officers, 157 protective services officers and 29 custody officers had been sworn in by invalidly appointed acting assistant commissioners. This came as a result of the new Victoria Police Act 2013 changing the powers of deputy commissioners to appoint acting assistant commissioners. However, Victoria Police continued this practice, and as such subsequent swearing-in of officers by acting assistant commissioners was deemed to be invalid. This was an unfortunate administrative mistake, and action has been taken to correct this issue, with Victoria Police swearing in a vast majority of the affected officers. This government is doing its part to resolve this issue through introducing this bill.

I will turn to the specifics of this legislation. This bill will introduce a new provision to the Victoria Police Act 2013 to retrospectively validate the appointment of police officers who were invalidly appointed between July 2014 and August 2021. The bill will also validate all exercises of power by these police members between July 2014 and August 2021, including the power to swear in police officers and protective services officer recruits. Now, there may be some concern from some members of the community about retrospectively validating these appointments and actions; however, it is important that this retrospective action is taken. It is important that retrospective action take place in order to ensure that any evidence gathered or enforcement outcomes from this period are not compromised by this error. All police officers who were affected by this administrative error acted in good faith, and any relevant procedures were not impacted by the invalid appointments.

Secondly, it is important that we recognise that all the sworn officers who were affected by this error are trained officers who have done their part to keep our community safe. The affected officers are at no fault in any way, shape or form, and retrospectively validating their actions is a reflection of the community service that they have all provided us. This bill will help to provide certainty and clarity for all of the affected officers and for the judicial system at large. It will help to restore any faith lost through this administrative error and reinforces the commitment of this government to our police officers, who put their lives on the line every day to keep our community safe.

This government will always support our police and do everything it can to keep our community safe. That is why Police Association Victoria has been consulted since this error came to light. The police association supports the retrospective action that is being taken in this bill and supports the government providing clarity and certainty for all their members who were affected by this error. Victoria Police officers themselves have also been extensively consulted, and this bill has been drafted in collaboration with them. While this administrative error should never have occurred, this government is acting to resolve it as quickly as possible, and that is what this bill does. The speed with which this issue was addressed is a reflection of the other actions that this government has taken to support our police and keep our communities safe. For example, 3135 new police officers have been funded, with this including general duties police officers and specialist officers. Hundreds of family violence police officers and more PSOs for mobile patrols have also been funded, alongside new stations for the growing police force.

This government values the expertise of Victoria Police, and that is why this government has endorsed the staffing allocation model that was developed by Victoria Police in consultation with Police Association Victoria. This sophisticated model has seen the end of boom-and-bust cycles of police resourcing, and we are now seeing a constant stream of funding for our police which helps them keep our community safe. This increase in the number of police officers has been bolstered by further investment into Victoria Police's technical capabilities. For example, every frontline officer has access to mobile devices, which better connects them to intelligence and communications. Body-worn cameras are also worn now by all frontline police, with this being delivered based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. These cameras not only provide crucial pieces of objective evidence about complaints and accusations but also help to improve the relationship between police officers and the general public. These investments are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this government's support of our police, with new intelligence systems and the establishment of the police assistance line being yet more examples of what sustained support of our police can achieve.

It is so important that community safety is always front and centre when considering any bill. That is why police officers have been given various new powers to tackle serious offenders that threaten our communities. These range from new sentencing provisions for offenders who injure police officers and PSOs to new firearm prohibition orders to tackle criminals who use illegal firearms. The role and powers of PSOs have also been expanded, with the implementation of the night network and more mobility seeing PSOs no longer being locked to train station platforms. All of these changes have been made to help police keep our community safe. The latest crime statistics show that the offence rate per 100 000 in Victoria has decreased by 9.8 per cent, the alleged offender rate has decreased by 10.4 per cent and the overall victimisation rate has decreased by 6.8 per cent. This shows that when you invest in our police, you get results—community safety as well. However, transparency and accountability are also key to policing and community safety, and that is why there are strong oversight systems to prevent misconduct. Victoria Police's professional standards command plays an important role in this oversight, as does the IBAC, because our justice system is underpinned by community faith and community faith in our police service. That is why the actions taken in this bill to retrospectively validate the actions of sworn officers will help to restore community faith in our justice system, following this unfortunate administrative error.

As I said, this situation was caused by an unfortunate administrative error, but when an error does occur good governments act quickly to fix it and ensure that it does not happen again. That is exactly what this bill does. On top of this government's continued support for our police and commitment to keeping our community safe, this bill provides clarity and certainty for the affected officers as well as our justice system at large. I commend this bill to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time; by leave, proceeded to third reading.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Suleyman):** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

#### **ALPINE RESORTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

*Council's agreement*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Suleyman) (17:46):** I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 without amendment.

#### **Business of the house**

#### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:46):** I move:

That government business, order of the day 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Motions**

#### **ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VICTORIA'S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM**

**Debate resumed on motion of Mr MERLINO:**

That this house takes note of the addresses given at the special sitting at the Royal Exhibition Building on 2 March 2021 for the presentation of the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

**Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (17:46):** I was hopeful I might be able to get another full 10 minutes in, because it is such an important report. I was just reflecting on how it is almost a year to the day since we had that joint sitting of the Parliament in the Royal Exhibition Building not only to hear from the experts but particularly to hear from the sufferers and the people who have really been through hell and back in terms of their mental health experience. All the people who came forward for that royal commission and for the findings gave their time and particularly gave their stories with such raw honesty. I think it is to their absolute credit that they were able to do that. The work of the commission was then able to pull away the curtain on some of the mental health issues that our state is facing. Obviously there has been a lot of talk about what the mental health impact has been throughout the pandemic.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (17:48):** I rise to speak on the take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. I also recollect the powerful nature of the joint sitting that we undertook at the Royal Exhibition Building and the sense of hope that so many had that the royal commission and its findings would make substantive change but also quite immediate change. I think

it is appropriate to ask, ‘Where are we now, one year in?’. Unfortunately, Professor Patrick McGorry’s—who of course was intimately involved with the royal commission—assessment of the mental health waitlists is:

We know people have died on the waiting lists ...

Data released quite recently last week shows that thousands of vulnerable young people are at a crisis point because they are sitting on a waiting list that has now blown out to more than 60 days before they can even get a mental health appointment. At every point we have seen that the rhetoric of the government has not matched the outcomes. No matter how much money you spend on something, no matter how much you talk about it, no matter how many inquiries you have, in the end we have to look at the outcomes, and the outcomes we see for young people is this waiting list of more than 60 days. There are 139 people on the waiting list for just one specialist youth mental health facility. At the start of 2021, 12- to 25-year-olds at Victorian Headspace centres were waiting 40 days for urgent psychological interventions. That is the list that is now over 60 days. The outcomes are just not good, and people do not have time to wait.

We have announced that if we are given the great privilege of forming government in November we have a plan to fix this mental health crisis. I am going to step through it in some detail because there are things happening in my electorate of Ripon that speak to this, that show that there are localised solutions to workforce, and because I know the government immediately came out and pooh-poohed our response because we are concentrating on workforce development. We will launch the nation’s largest ever recruitment drive to revive Victoria’s fatigued and under-resourced mental health workforce, and we have got a number of ways in which we know the workforce needs to be augmented. There just are not enough people in the mental health workforce, so we have said that we will provide financial support to attain an undergraduate mental health qualification, financial support for tertiary qualified Victorians to enter our mental health workforce and more training places for psychiatrists and psychologists so they can work sooner.

I particularly want to pick up on that point, because just in the last sitting week in the Parliament I raised a constituency question around asking for funding for One Red Tree Resource Centre. Now, what One Red Tree Resource Centre has is a master psychologist who can supervise psychology masters students as they do their placements. These people are as rare as hen’s teeth, and we are very fortunate to have one in Ripon—in Ararat, my home town. What One Red Tree Resource Centre does is it provides the placements for people in the final year of their master of psychology; they go into schools. They provide psychological assessment and assistance in schools, and they are supervised. Now, it is models like this that will allow us to implement our policy of expanding the mental health workforce. It is not a one size fits all, it is not the big existing providers, it is actually looking at local solutions like we have in Ararat. They have already got people in local schools. It is great. In fact I think all the primary schools in Ararat now have somebody working with them.

We have also said that what we will do is enable counsellors—these are already degree-qualified counsellors—to go into schools and that that will immediately add another thousand people into the mental health workforce working with young people, and that is a crisis point for our state. It is certainly a crisis point locally. I have and I am sure every other MP in this place will have heard tragic stories—and I am not going to use people’s names; I think in this circumstance it is not appropriate. But I think of one family who two years ago had a happy, resourceful, delightful nine-year-old and now have an anxious, cannot-leave-the-house, terrified 11-year-old. That family could not get a psychologist or a psychiatrist for months, and their daughter is suffering because of that. They now, thankfully, do have a psychiatrist, but it took them a long time to get there. And it is not just one story; that is a Ballarat family, and I can think of others in Maryborough and in Avoca.

I will move beyond talking about children. I have quite a lot of veterans in my community, as I am sure many others do, and many of them deal with PTSD and anxiety. The changes caused by the lockdowns and the pandemic more generally have in many cases triggered their PTSD, and yet the

availability of workforce in country Victoria in terms of mental health practitioners is such that people are just not able to access the help that they need at the right time. So while I understand that the government had the royal commission—and it had many recommendations, and I will come to one of those at the end of my remarks—we have to look at the outcomes. It is not enough to say, ‘But there’s been a pandemic’. That cannot be the answer to everything. It cannot be, ‘Oh, well, that explains everything’ in the sense that it does not have to be fixed. We need to rebuild and recover this state, and there is no place that it has to start more than with our mental health workforce to deliver the services that Victorians need.

The final point that I want to cover is how this government are funding their mental health reforms. It is of course another tax. Now, I have previously spoken about why I think this tax is wrong, and there are two ways in which it is wrong. The first is of course that it is a tax on jobs. Now, every time you tax jobs, you end up with fewer jobs, and having a job is one of the greatest ways for people to have good mental health. They have a purpose, they have income, they can provide for themselves and they can afford housing and all the other things that those of us who are employed enjoy. But the other reason that having this payroll tax addition is not right, although it seems to be an increasing pattern of this government, is that this is a tax for a specific thing that should be funded by general government revenue—that is, the government living within its means with the taxation it has and then the expenditure. There should not be a special tax. You do not have a special tax for health. Why do we have one for mental health? It ghettoises mental health. I believe it is profoundly wrong to say, ‘We will fund mental health services differently to how we fund the police or health or education’. It should be the same.

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarnait) (17:58): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak on this very important motion this evening. We have just clocked over a year since we were all there sitting at Melbourne exhibition centre listening to our Premier hand down the final report for the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, and I clearly remember sitting there and feeling the gravity of the moment. Both sides of this chamber had come together to acknowledge the shared failure essentially of our mental health system. We acknowledged that the system was broken long before COVID-19 and that we would endeavour to fix it, and I knew then that no matter how hard the work would be, our government was determined to put that work in and fix the system—to rebuild it from the ground up.

Even before the final report we knew that this royal commission was unlike any other we had undertaken. There has always been a large degree of public interest in royal commissions, especially those enacted by the federal government. We have seen at that level how the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has impacted conversations, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, and like aged care mental health has also become one of the most serious topics talked about around dinner tables right across Victoria and in the community due to COVID-19. But even prior to COVID it was easy to see that mental health was something that my community in Melbourne’s outer west was particularly interested in seeing addressed and fixed.

I remember in the middle of 2019 I was approached at an event by a young man. He would have been probably in his mid to late 20s, and he was at the event with his mum. I remember him coming up to me and telling me just how grateful he was that we were undertaking this royal commission. He told me and shared a little bit about his personal mental health issues, including his struggle with depression. He wanted to know how he could take part in this royal commission, how he could tell his story and where he could attend a hearing. Was there a way he could make a submission? This was really personal for him. It struck me then that this was unlike anything our government had done before, and we had of course done remarkable work when it came to royal commissions, especially when it came to dealing with family violence. But there was something about this conversation for me that said we were doing really important work. I had beside me a young man in his late 20s who had probably never paid attention to politics. He would rather be out at the pub with his mates after work

than at home watching the news or writing to an MP like me, but he was paying attention to a royal commission that our government had established.

Now, if that taught me anything it was how universally important mental health is for every single Victorian. They say one in five people will suffer from a mental illness in their lifetime, and this of course affects more than 20 per cent of people; it affects families, friends, workplaces and the wider community. What that means is that by resolving to fix the system, as we have done, we are committing to improving the lives of hundreds of thousands if not millions of Victorians. In the wake of COVID-19 this has never been more important, because we are not denying that the last two years have been difficult for many people in our community. We all know they have been really difficult. Like many others in this place I too have taken so many phone calls and I have spoken to so many people in my community about them struggling with their mental health over the past couple of years, whether it was mums at the end of their tether doing remote learning at home with their kids while trying to work or people in the community who had in fact lost their job as a result of the pandemic. People were really struggling.

My community was one of the hardest hit by COVID. In the second wave Tarneit and Truganina, postcode 3029, was the epicentre in Australia of COVID-19 cases. Mine are a community that already struggled with insecure work, and they could not work from home. They were on the front line. My community is home to young families and people working in retail, in hospitality and in child care. We have small business owners in their thousands and warehouse workers, and the pandemic affected all of them. My electorate has nearly 30 schools—that is a lot of schools to visit—with staggering numbers of schoolkids. It is a community where there are, I think the number is now, about 110 babies being born each and every week. The last two years were not easy for them. Mental health has absolutely been a key issue for families right across the Tarneit electorate and indeed the whole of Victoria.

The royal commission has made 74 recommendations for our government—and not just our government but future governments—to act on, which will take steps forward to fixing our broken mental health system. Like the Premier said just over a year ago, no matter how hard it is, we are determined to implement each and every one of these recommendations in some form or another. That is a huge commitment to Victorians. We have already seen action being taken in the last year alone with over \$3.8 billion invested into mental health services in last year's budget. This is the biggest spend on mental health in any Australian jurisdiction—any Australian jurisdiction—and I think that reflects just how serious this work is and the need to get it right. With these investments we have made progress on more than 85 per cent of the recommendations. We are trying to roll this out quickly. More than a third of this reform package will be delivered by the end of this year. It will not happen overnight but change is coming, and I feel really proud to be part of a government that is willing to go ahead and make it and invest in the change that Victorians are desperate to see in this state. It is a very, very extensive program, I have to say.

We are making sure that every secondary school and specialist school in the state has a mental health practitioner to help young Victorians. We did that last year, an entire year ahead of schedule. Like so many colleagues here in this place, I have been out and about at local schools lately, and I have met lots of those mental health practitioners. They have been doing an incredible amount of work with our secondary school students.

We have started building six new local adult and older adult mental health and wellbeing services in six LGAs, including in my community in Wyndham, and we are building on this by opening another 21 right across Victoria. I was very pleased to hear that in our patch in Wyndham we are not only going to be getting one, we are actually going to be getting two of these new mental health hubs. There is going to be one in my patch, in Truganina, and there is going to be one in the member for Werribee's electorate, in the heart of Werribee. I know that the member for Werribee does share my excitement that these vital services will be operating in our communities and delivering the mental health services that we need. In addition to this we are also opening another 25 mental health and wellbeing hubs across the state in each and every region, so anyone can get the quality support that they need

regardless of their postcode, meaning all Victorians will benefit from an additional 93 000 hours of mental health support.

There is so much that is being done—too much to go ahead and list in the 90 seconds that I have got left—but these investments are not just good for our mental health system, they are really good for the Victorian economy as well. They are going to be creating jobs and skilling up people to go ahead and work in our mental health services. Ensuring a strong mental health system is not only good for Victorian workers and their employees, but these investments we are making into the system are going to create thousands of jobs and create opportunities for Victorians of all ages to pursue a career in mental health.

It does give me a great deal of pride to stand here and acknowledge the tremendous work that our government has done in addressing Victoria's mental health needs a year on from handing down the report into Victoria's mental health system. It will of course take time, but the failures of the system are too grave and too serious to ignore. The impacts of our actions to fix the system will be felt right across Victoria, including in my own community in Wyndham, in Melbourne's outer west, and we are also going to share in the benefits of a stronger, more effective mental health system. With a third of these recommendations to be fully ticked off before the end of the year, I look forward to returning to Parliament next year, if re-elected, to continue our government's great work on rebuilding Victoria's mental health system.

**Ms WARD (Eltham) (18:08):** Now, the member for Ripon raised a few points in her contribution to this debate, and again I find it quite astonishing that there are those opposite who like to pretend that there is actually nothing happening by this government. We know that this is a government that does make things happen. This is a government that says something and then does it. One of the things I do want to highlight and take a moment to discuss from the contribution by the member for Ripon is her point that, firstly, this government is stigmatising mental health issues through how we want to pay for all of our mental health reforms. There is not a government in the country that has shone a light on the challenges facing people with mental health issues as this government has. There is no other government that has shone a light on the failures, and the needs of people with mental health challenges, as this government has done. So to try to pretend—and it is a pretence—that this is a government who wants to stigmatise people with mental health issues is nothing short of ludicrous, because the actions speak much louder than any of the words the member for Ripon could come up with. This is a government that says something and then acts on it and makes it happen, and that is exactly what we have done in responding to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Like the member for Tarneit, I do remember that day at the Royal Exhibition Building. It was quite amazing. It was really quite amazing. And again I think that this highlights the inaccuracy of much of the member for Ripon's contribution. A government that wants to stigmatise mental health does not create a parliamentary session in the Royal Exhibition Building with people making contributions, talking about their experience with mental health challenges, talking about what this means to them. This was one of the biggest days in our parliamentary history. This is a government that is shining a light on this issue; this is not a government that is stigmatising it. So I would urge the member for Ripon to actually be accurate with the language that she uses in this place and talk about what this government is doing rather than her misleading way of suggesting that we are behaving in a way that we are not, because it is completely inaccurate to say that we are stigmatising mental health.

So the member for Ripon is avoiding the reality of what is happening around us. This is a government that is absolutely getting things done, and this includes in our response to the challenges that people in our community are experiencing with mental health issues. Those opposite can pretend that nothing is getting done, and we know it is a pretence. It is not the reality. We know that this will take time. We have got generational mental health challenges that this government is working towards addressing. We have got our stolen generations, and we are making determined steps to help them address not just their mental health challenges that have come from being dispossessed and removed from their families. We are embarking on a treaty process with our Indigenous people. We are compensating



them for the loss, the grief and the challenges that they have experienced. This is intergenerational mental health challenges that people can experience. So yes, the last two years have been incredibly difficult for people and the mental health challenges that people have faced have been absolutely traumatic, but this government is looking across the board. As I say, it is those people who are experiencing mental health challenges today, but it is also people who have experienced intergenerational mental health challenges, like our Indigenous peoples.

So with this report what we are going to see is 10 years worth of reforms, but we are already acting on it. In a year we are already acting on it. We are already underway on acting on 85 per cent of the commission's recommendations, and in the budget we delivered last year we have committed \$3.8 billion towards rebuilding our mental health system. That is not stigmatising mental health. That is actually saying, 'This is a serious issue that we need to put serious money behind'. We need to support these people, and that is exactly what this government is doing.

Let me just go through a little bit of a shopping list of the things that we have undertaken. We have started the process of the new mental health and wellbeing act. We have released a new strategy aimed at increasing our mental health workforce, and so far we have created more than 350 positions, with thousands more to come. And let me just do a little bit of a sidestep here, because do you know what else this government has been doing? Creating free TAFE. And what are the courses that you can study at free TAFE? There are a lot of courses that this government is supporting with free TAFE, and that includes mental health, that includes mental health peer work, that includes alcohol and other drug certificates and it includes youth work. So, again, to say that we are stigmatising, that we are not doing anything, is not correct. It is not correct. Across departments, across portfolios, this government is putting things in place that will help people address the mental health challenges that they face.

We have opened 25 mental health and wellbeing hubs across the state, providing an additional 93 000 hours of support. We are working to establish six local adult and older adult mental health and wellbeing services, and once they are open in the second half of the year we will bring the support that people need much closer to their families and community. We are working with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. We have started a new scholarship program, and the new Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing centre of excellence is being established. We have passed legislation to establish the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. This centre will be the engine room for the transformed mental health and wellbeing system, bringing together people with lived experience, researchers and completion. We have also completed the statewide expansion of the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement, or HOPE, service from 12 to 21 Victorian locations.

That is just a brief snapshot of all the things that this government is doing, so again for those opposite to pretend that nothing is happening, that this is an empty space and that this government is stigmatising people with mental health issues, is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. This is a government that is going about on the front foot to put serious money behind these serious problems.

There is no doubt in the last two years people have had traumas that they have never experienced before, and this is one of the reasons why we are investing so heavily in support services, why we are training people. You cannot actually deliver services if you do not have people with the qualifications to help them with their challenges. We need free TAFE, but we also need our federal government to step up and stop making university so expensive so we can have even more trained people. So let us stop importing labour; let us actually train and educate people locally so that they can help address these challenges. We are creating the workforce that will be able to respond to these needs, something those opposite find quite foreign—actually creating work. Government intervening and creating opportunities—who would have thought?

I do want with the little time I have got left to talk about a recent announcement in the north-east which is just fabulous. It is just fabulous. The Premier came out to Macleod last week and announced that a statewide child and family centre will be built in Grieve Street, Macleod. One of the really lovely

things about this announcement is that it is embedded in community, that it is embedded with other neighbourhood homes. It is a part of a suburb. It is a part of a community, again refuting the member for Ripon's claim that we are stigmatising people with mental health. We have created a home for families who are experiencing mental health challenges that they can go to amidst neighbours, in a neighbourhood. This will be the first of three new facilities to be built in Victoria as recommended in the royal commission into the mental health system. This site allows it to blend in with the neighbourhood, and it also allows for a greater sense of privacy. And it has great access to public transport. Macleod is a lovely suburb; it is a contained suburb. It has a beautiful village feel. It is an excellent place to locate this facility. It will have 12 beds over three residential facilities, housing a maximum of three families at any one time. It will be staffed 24/7, and children and families who stay at the centre will be able to attend day programs and receive outreach support. Staff will be able to support those staying at the centre during typical family routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes.

This is important support, this is real support and this is long-term support. This is the kind of support that helps families transform themselves and change their experiences, change how they go about life, change how they live. This is a really, really important facility and should not be undermined by petty political game playing by those opposite, who want to actually add to people's trauma, who want to make them unhappy, who want them to feel that they are not supported, when the truth is they are deeply supported. There are so many platforms that this government has put into place to support people experiencing mental health challenges, and it is wrong for those opposite to trivialise it with their pointless political games.

**Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (18:18):** I am pleased to rise to speak on this take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and can I start by thanking and congratulating the previous Minister for Health and the current Minister for Health and of course the Premier, who initiated the royal commission into mental health. I am really proud to be part of a government that has put these significant reforms in place. As the member for Eltham has just said, we are the first and only government to have done this in this country. We all know that our mental health system was broken, but the challenge was and always has been: how do we fix it?

The royal commission has listened to people with mental health issues, their families and the experts and has come back with the 74 recommendations that we had presented to us in March 2021 at the Exhibition Building. I think everybody on this side of the house most certainly was so proud of that moment because we knew exactly what that meant. We knew what it meant for Victorians, but we all knew what it meant for our own electorates as well. It has now been 12 months since the royal commission handed down its final report and clearly indicated that the system was completely broken. So we know that. You have just got to look at the report to understand what has happened throughout Victoria.

Prior to the outcome of the royal commission I often met with people with mental health issues and their families and heard shocking stories, as I think many of us did—stories of how they felt so left behind in every aspect of their life. It was a great privilege for me to hear those stories, and then once the royal commission started people were coming to me more and more and telling me about their stories. We of course encouraged them to submit to the royal commission inquiry. I remember one young woman who was at the time in the Swanston Centre mental health unit. She was very young—she was 18 or 19—and had an eating disorder, and she wanted to tell me of her experience. I was allowed to go into the mental health unit to meet her and have a chat to her about her experience. She made it very clear that obviously the system was broken, that there was nothing for her and that the culture within the mental health system was a part of the problem and that had to change. I always remember that young woman and what she said to me because it was just so relevant when we look at what came out during the course of the royal commission.

That royal commission undertook community consultations and public hearings. That included 1600 people, 61 sessions at 21 different locations, 3267 submissions, 19 days of hearings and 3000 respondents to the community survey. So people certainly stepped up in this state to put their

views forward and to also share what they thought was wrong with the system and how it needed to be fixed. As I mentioned earlier, the report was handed down in February 2021, and there were 74 recommendations in some key areas. The final report recommended a new approach to mental health and wellbeing. Well, we knew that that is what needed to happen. It recommended a collaboration to support good mental health and wellbeing, promoting inclusion and addressing inequalities. It outlined the fundamentals for enduring reform and transforming the system with innovation and implementation. It also set out a 10-year vision for a rebalanced system where mental health and wellbeing treatment, care and support are provided in community hospital and other residential settings, and it sought to rebuild the system from the ground up with communities at the centre. That was really clear to all of us on this side of the house.

As a result of the royal commission report, I have to say the work that has been undertaken in my electorate of Geelong is absolutely incredible. People are really surprised in the community by the work that is being done. We know that the workforce is a huge issue and we need to grow that. Over the past two years we have committed \$269 million to increase that workforce. As the member for Eltham said, our free TAFE courses are contributing to that. It is going to take time, but we are building up that workforce. We did a major upgrade to the Swanston Centre inpatient unit, that very place where I went and sat with that young woman with the eating disorder. Now that is far better than it was before and there has been an expansion of different services. We have the mental health Hospital in the Home care. We have a purpose-built mental health and drug and alcohol hub currently underway, being built in central Geelong, in Moorabool Street. What that will mean for people with mental health issues is that they will be able to walk in there at any time and get the support they need, and that is one of the things we heard during the royal commission. But I heard that as a local member. People said to me, 'We didn't know where to go. You would go to the hospital, go to accident and emergency and wouldn't get the services that you needed'. Now, once that opens, which will be a bit later this year, people will be able to walk in off the street and get exactly what they need. This is a huge development. People are just over the moon in Geelong about the fact that there will be somewhere you can just walk in and get the support that you need. We also have expanded HOPE, the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement program. It started off as a bit of a pilot and has grown, and we have now expanded that in Geelong and I believe in other areas because it works and it works so well.

The Strong Brother Strong Sister support for Aboriginal young people was something that we really needed in our community. Back about 18 months ago we know that there were a number of young Aboriginal people who took their own lives. The great thing was that we stepped up and put something in place, and that Strong Brother Strong Sister service is now providing that and has been funded since then to continue to do that work. We have also funded the Aboriginal-controlled organisations, and in my electorate Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative have been funded to deliver mental health support. It has been amazing support for Aboriginal people in my community. We have a large population of Aboriginal people in the Geelong region. In fact it has grown more than Melbourne's population has, so we know it is a growing population.

We have funded the mental health support through Ermha, which is based in northern Geelong. We have supported Haven mental health accommodation in Geelong. Youth beds will provide that inpatient mental health support that young people need and that we do not have at the moment, and they are actually being built as we speak. The other big one for us is the early parenting centre. Parents who are struggling with their new babies, for example, will have an inpatient service that will provide all the support that they need, and that is currently under construction.

So we know what the issues are; we know the work that has to be done. Around 85 per cent of those recommendations have been rolled out across Victoria. This has been huge. Other states, Labor states, are now looking at what Victoria has done and looking at doing similar sorts of things, because we know it works. The consultation with people with mental health issues has been extraordinary, and it is because of them we have got such amazing facilities being built. At the moment we have got the acute mental health facility that is being built, which came as one of the interim recommendations.

That is currently being built. It is almost completed. It is going to be amazing for those people, and it was done through consultation with people with mental health issues to make sure we got it right, because the important thing is that we do get this right. I am so proud of this government. I am so proud of what we have done and continue to do. I commend this.

**Mr TAK (Clarinda) (18:28):** It is always a pleasure to speak after the hardworking member for Geelong. Having had the benefit of working with the member for Geelong in other committees, I know that she fights very hard for especially regional mental health issues in her community. And it is special also to follow the member for Eltham with her compassionate and passionate contribution. It is a very important motion here today, because mental health is challenging for all of us and almost half of the Victorian population will experience mental ill health over their lifetime. For the 50 per cent that are lucky enough to escape mental illness, they will almost certainly have a loved one, a family member or close friend that is affected, so this affects us all in very real and very meaningful ways.

We know that the current mental health system has failed to support those that turn to it—a broken system—and we know that we have to do better. So the government took action and committed to establishing a royal commission into Victoria's mental health system as an election commitment prior to the 2018 state election. The response from the Victorian community was immense, with the commission receiving more than 12 000 contributions. I think it is a testament to just how much of an effect mental health issues have on our community, and I thank each and every contributor for sharing their experience and knowledge.

Like the member for Geelong, I have mentioned that there was an outpouring of emotion across the community. The royal commission received some 3267 submissions and was conducted over 19 days of hearings with almost 100 witnesses. Outstanding—3267 submissions is immense. Again I would like to thank everyone for bravely sharing their experiences and personal stories. Sometimes it is very difficult. I would like to take this opportunity to share a few of those stories to try and amplify them in some small way.

Rafi was 17 years old living in Melbourne when he told his family overseas that he was gay. In Rafi's words:

I was battling with my depression, and then I came out with my sexuality. I was born into a Muslim family, I left the religion, and I came out with my sexuality. So these two things turned everything upside down for me. My family disowned me, threatening to kill me.

Rafi's family stopped supporting him financially, and he became homeless. The threats intensified, and he said he felt helpless. Rafi experienced trauma and mental health challenges from an early age. When Rafi was admitted to an emergency department after attempting suicide in Melbourne he said that the staff did not believe what he was saying about his family, the threats and the punishment he would experience in his home country. He also reflected on the cultural difficulties he faced while he was receiving treatment, care and support. He recalled:

Doctors used to talk in front of me as if I don't know any English. I'm not good at English, but still, they used to talk in front of me as if I don't know any English.

I did not eat hospital food because I didn't grow up eating pork and things like that. I had a different food.

Rafi said that the doctors contacted his family overseas against his wishes and told them about his mental health challenges. He also said that staff planned to return him to his family until the Department of Home Affairs and a psychiatrist intervened. Rafi described the importance of that intervention:

If that senior psychiatrist had not trusted me, I would be dead today.

So this is very powerful, and imagine how many thousands of similar experiences there are. I wish I could revisit them all, because they are so compelling. In my personal life I know a few of my friends that have grown up and did not know until we all became adults, and then things started to open up.

Another example: Katerina Kouselas. I may have pronounced her name incorrectly. Let us call her Katerina. Katerina's husband, Bill, died by suicide in 2016, and she believes that the mental health system failed him. Katerina recalled:

Bill had depression for nine to ten years prior to his death, but we had no experience of the mental health system until the six months before he died.

Katerina described how Bill had been receiving treatment at an adult prevention and recovery care service but how he really struggled when he was released. Before his death Katerina took him to an emergency department. She recounted:

In all our years of marriage I had never seen him like that.

...

People who are suicidal should not be in emergency with all the people with broken legs, you should be in a specialised area.

Katerina also described the loss of her husband as isolating, but she said that by contributing to the royal commission she hoped to make a difference to someone else in the future. She stated bravely:

We had been married for 32 years when Bill passed away. I will never come to terms with it ...

...

I just hope that by talking about Bill, and by talking about suicide, it might help even just one other person. I hope that it helps to fix the system that let Bill down, a system that is letting other people down too.

Therefore it was a long two years for the inquiry, and as you can see, the royal commission engaged extensively in gathering evidence to inform both its interim and final reports. The final report delivered 65 recommendations for an accountable and effective system that supports the mental health of our community and individuals. The recommendations delivered some strong messages, such as the need to redesign services and move from a crisis-driven model to a community-based one that delivers a better outcome, focusing on ensuring that treatment, care and support is available and accessible to all Victorians, no matter their background or their need. I think the two personal stories that we just heard and shared touched on this recommendation: moving away from the crisis-driven model and ensuring accessibility for all.

So as a government we will continue to do everything in our power to address the seriousness and the wide spread of the mental health challenges that we face here in Victoria and across the country. Therefore we saw in the last budget a once-in-a-generation investment to rebuild our mental health system from the ground up—some \$3.8 billion to transform the way mental health support is offered in Victoria for all Victorians, with early intervention, dedicated streams of care for kids and the recruitment of thousands of new workers and another investment of \$954 million to deliver 22 reformed areas of mental health and wellbeing services to replace the current services.

We have done a lot, but we can do this, and we can do it together. We can rebuild our mental health system, changing the way that we view and respond to one of the greatest challenges in our time, protecting and promoting mental health for all Victorians, which is very important. I am very pleased to have been able to stand here once again to speak on this motion.

**Mr RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (18:38): It is a real privilege to rise to speak on the take-note motion. Can I first acknowledge my good friend and parliamentary colleague, the member for Clarinda, for that moving contribution. It means different things to different people, this important take-note motion, and I think that contribution was absolutely outstanding—well done.

I want to go down a pathway on two things. One is, I guess, the personal experience of mental health and wellbeing and then the prevention and investment space, which I think has been caught up in the taxation discussion that we have seen—and the member for Ripon probably erred in the description of where the mental health and wellbeing reforms take themselves. I want to bring this analogy to the attention of the house, and maybe we can have a little more compassionate debate around mental health and wellbeing and how this is funded over the next decade. In the last decade we have lost

2627 Victorians to road trauma. In that same time frame we have lost 6320 Victorians to suicide. The registration charge in Victoria has a clear delineated charge across all Victorians who drive that underpins an insurance scheme, the TAC, something that has become the bedrock of a no-fault scheme that has underpinned the health and wellbeing or recovery, or in tragic circumstances the loss of life, that we experience in road trauma. It has underpinned the support for families or those recovering in the years to come. I see this levy as no different to that: an investment in trying to deal with such a devastating trauma—to think that 718 Victorians have lost their lives in the recent figures reported in the fact sheets of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. So where you see a broken system, as has been acknowledged and as is underpinned by the 85 recommendations and the subparts that underpin the learnings and the investment that needs to be made, the levy makes sense, because more of the same will lead to more trauma. It will lead to more Victorians losing their lives, and indeed these are preventable deaths.

We think of mental ill health as a tragedy, but it is a preventable tragedy. We need to do more as a community. We are not stigmatising mental health. Like dealing with road trauma and like pushing forward to try to eradicate the devastating challenges and impacts of losing lives suddenly on our roads, we are actually bringing the investment into sharp focus for all Victorians. We are actually saying that this government, your government, is committed to making generational change to make sure that if even one person is supported and saved, then that is a really important outcome. I am sure that the coalition would not suggest that we would eradicate the TAC charge. It has underpinned insurance schemes, it has underpinned health and wellbeing and recovery, and in the devastating trauma of losing someone on our roads that no-fault insurance scheme has been a bedrock of Victoria's system for some time. This levy, I see, is no different. It is an investment in the future, in mental health and wellbeing and to lower the devastating mental health toll that hurts and impacts so many.

If I cannot convince the coalition on that frame to be more compassionate and think of this as a long-term, year-on-year investment, then let us look at the economics. In the prevention space a dollar spent on mental health and wellbeing, according to the evidence taken by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, could be a \$9.29 investment. Universal primary prevention programs targeted at parents could generate that kind of return, a one-to-nine return, because we know the acute stage is where a lot of the investment is channelled. We need to be starting from when kids experience mental health and wellbeing challenges in our kinders and through our schools and making sure that they are equipped and empowered in their mental health and wellbeing journey and that they can get the support early on to make sure that more do not end up in the acute phase.

The economics of this as well makes sense. We have an extraordinary number of Victorians providing care and support for families, for loved ones and for friends. Sixty thousand Victorians care for an adult living with mental ill health and around 9000 of those are young carers. I have had the chance to meet some of those remarkable young Victorians in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Schools. You see these people putting their ambitions and their aspirations on hold to provide that care, love and support for someone close to them. It was estimated by the commission that \$3.7 billion of unpaid care is provided in Victoria. When you see this through the prism of compassion and you make the analogy with the impacts of the road toll and when you look at this from an economic standpoint, it makes sense.

But then we think that one in two people will experience mental ill health. We have all been touched by tragedy or known someone who has been impacted, or maybe we have experienced our own mental health and wellbeing journey for whatever reason—whether it is ongoing or a long journey. As someone living with anxiety, that is my journey, living with that each and every day and being aware to be present. And to do the best you can each and every day—it goes up and down depending on circumstances—is to understand your journey and your place. I have been empowered to be able to do that; I have the resources available. But if you are struggling to make ends meet, if you are a single-parent household, if you can barely clothe your children or you can barely put food on the table, you will not be able to access that support, whether it is private or whether it is public.

That gets to the nub of prevention. We need to be able to support and empower every Victorian on that journey. I am a big believer in positive psychology and that we are all on a spectrum from negative 10, which is really at the debilitating end, through to 10 if you are up and about and doing really well in your mental health and wellbeing. We move along the spectrum throughout our lives. Some will be in that acute phase for an extended period of time. We have all got an investment in our own mental health and wellbeing, and we need in our education system to empower that thinking. The investments that have been made by the Premier and Deputy Premier in the education space, the mental health and wellbeing practitioners in our secondary and primary schools and in our specialist schools, really are cutting-edge policies in that space, because what we are doing is breaking down the barriers. We are destigmatising mental health and wellbeing and knowing that every single person, every single Victorian, indeed every Australian, has a role to play in supporting their own mental health and wellbeing—and a community that supports all those around them as well.

So that is the really critical element. The prevention space is where we get the biggest benefit, where we empower Victorians to get that care. Just like the prevention of family violence space, we then see the ‘now’ and the acute phase, where we have got people who are living in really debilitating circumstances and who need that care and support now, and devastatingly they are falling through the cracks day in, day out as we get on with this big repair agenda and build a system that takes time to get to that stage.

But we are on that journey of reform and empowerment, and that is something that we can all be very proud of. This does not have to be a partisan thing. We have started the prevention of family violence journey. It will be decades in the making. It is the same with the mental health and wellbeing journey. Hopefully, as with levies like the TAC charge, we will look back in time and see a lowering of the road toll. One life lost is too many, but we see the benefit in road safety and prevention and the awareness in the community that has been built, and we have got to a point where all Victorians have an understanding of road safety and risk and the impacts of trauma. I do not think we can say the same thing about mental health and wellbeing, despite nearly triple the toll and despite all the impacts that we have.

So the notion that this is not an investment in Victorians, the notion that the levy is something that should be found in existing revenue, goes to perpetuating the same problems that we have experienced already. That has already been tried. The former mental health minister, the member for Albert Park, led hundreds of million dollars worth of investment, and it did not change the dial. We did not see any outcomes. It was not a lack of effort. It was not a lack of will and determination from the Andrews Labor government. It was because there was a fundamentally broken system that needed substantial reform to get it right and get it right now for generations to come. When the levy is attacked and then diminished into an infrastructure-type cost discussion, it diminishes the mental health and wellbeing reform agenda, it diminishes the work of the royal commission and it cheapens this Parliament.

Everyone sat down the road and acknowledged that this was a really powerful and impactful moment, so let us embrace it as that. Let us not make it partisan, because governments change over time, as we know, and throughout history. This will be an obligation that all governments in the future must prioritise at their epicentre because there are over 6000 Victorians that we have lost this decade and that toll has not reduced anywhere near what we would have expected. Every single mental health and wellbeing life lost is preventable. When we look at it like that and we fund it accordingly, we will save more Victorian lives. I am glad to be in a Parliament and in a government that is making those landmark reforms to save Victorians into the future.

**Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (18:48):** Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the take-note motion on Victoria’s mental health system. Of course it was the Andrews Labor government that promised Victorians it would hold a royal commission into Victoria’s mental health system, and it is this government that has promised and committed to implement every single one of its recommendations. It is this government that is delivering the biggest social reform in our state’s history by investing in the mental health system that Victorians need and deserve.

All of us know someone who has struggled with mental health, and yet we know that unlike other health issues, whether it is cancer or cardiovascular disease, mental health illness often does not get the research or investment that is deserved or warranted. All jurisdictions now have a role to play. As the member for Mordialloc highlighted, this has significant flow-on impact socially and economically. It cuts across every single aspect of our lives.

I recall last year that the federal government finally committed to some investment in mental health and suicide prevention, and of course we all welcomed that announcement and that commitment. But what we really need is a national approach to tackling this issue. We are forging ahead here in Victoria, and we are forging ahead because we are absolutely committed to fixing what we now know is a broken system. The royal commission delivered its report to us, and, as I said, we have committed to implementing those recommendations.

I remember back in 2018—it was election day—I was at a polling booth at my secondary college, Carrum Downs Secondary College, and a mum actually stopped me at the polling booth and wanted to pull me aside to talk about mental health. It was the mental health of her young daughter—10 years old. I will never forget it. She told me that she felt like a failure as a mother because she could not help her 10-year-old. She did not know how to help her 10-year-old. She did not know how to access the services to help her 10-year-old. She knew that her 10-year-old was failing, and she was watching her 10-year-old get worse and worse and worse. I remember making the promise to her at the time that we were going to do everything to fix the system, to help her daughter, to help other children—other 10-year-old children as well—to help those families who felt like they were being failed, to help those families who did not know where to turn and to help those families because helping those families helps us all. When someone is suffering from a mental illness, it impacts not just those people. It is a collective responsibility—a shared responsibility—and when people get better we all benefit from that.

The next year was 2019. I hold an annual writing competition, and one of the entrants was a year 6 student who wrote really passionately about mental health and the need for better mental health services close to home and ones that included her family. I remember reading it thinking, ‘This is so insightful for a year 6 student’. I did not know it then, but she herself was suffering from mental health issues, and it turned out the following year she was actually admitted for really intensive treatment. I had a very long conversation with her mother about it. But what was really important was that this year 6 student—she was only 11 years old at the time—was speaking from lived experience, and what became really, really important then was the voice of those with lived experience in helping reform our mental health system. That is something that the royal commission has recommended, and it is something that this government is absolutely delivering on. It is why this government is now building Victoria’s new mental health system, and we are building it from the ground up.

As we have heard, it was just over a year ago that the royal commission delivered its report, and it did so at a very historic joint sitting at the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton. It feels like a lifetime ago, I have got to say. I cannot believe it is only a year ago. It was certainly a very powerful moment, it was a moving moment, and frankly it should have been a moment above politics. We heard from the royal commission chair, Penny Armytage; Professor Pat McGorry; and some really inspirational people with lived experience. I think none of us were left with any doubt whatsoever that the inescapable truth is that Victoria’s mental health system is failing. It is failing Victorians, and it is costing lives.

I want to acknowledge the work of the commission. I want to acknowledge all of the ordinary Victorians who contributed to the process, whether it was in written submissions or as witnesses at forums, community sessions and round tables. All of them have contributed to making this system better, and all of them have helped inform the commission’s report. That report is visionary. It is a 10-year blueprint that is really going to set the framework for rebuilding our mental health system, where we want to make sure that every Victorian gets the mental health support they need when they need it and where they need it—close to home. But it needs to be tailored support as well, whether that is early intervention, whether that is through the middle stages or of course whether that is at the acute end.



As we know, the Victorian budget last year included an absolutely historic \$3.8 billion investment to start rebuilding our mental health system from the ground up. We are going to deliver more community-based services, more help for those with acute needs, as I said, more early intervention, and importantly a really new, dedicated service to support our kids and our young people. All of this has to be underpinned by a massive boost to our mental health workforce, because they are our most valuable assets in all of this. We will not be able to deliver this reform, these services, if we do not have the people to deliver it. Part of the recommendations and the strategy is of course delivering on that workforce for the future.

But we need to protect it. We need to protect the mental health reform, which is why we introduced a levy late last year. We introduced a levy by legislation to apply to businesses with more than \$10 million in wages nationally. This is I believe about the top 5 per cent of businesses. We did this because it is absolutely critical that that funding is protected to enable us to deliver this massive reform. But let us not forget that it was those opposite that opposed this levy. They opposed the protection of this funding for our future mental health system, and frankly that does say something about their commitment to mental health reform in this state. It says something about their commitment to the mental health of all Victorians. It says something about their priorities. And I certainly will continue to remind my community that the coalition opposed the long-term protection to help us rebuild Victoria's mental health system. I will remind the mum who stopped to talk to me at the Carrum Downs polling booth. I will remind the now probably year 9 student about what those opposite are planning to do.

We know if they had the chance, they would cut mental health funding. That is why they do not support the levy. We know that they will cut it. They do not want to see it protected. And this is despite the unambiguous finding of the royal commission that the mental health system is absolutely broken and that people are suffering because of this—particularly including our young people. It is shameful that those opposite could even for a moment consider cutting this absolutely critical funding that is going to change lives and save lives, so I will remind my community about that. I will also remind my community about this government's priorities—about wanting to change lives, to fix lives and to save lives. Only Labor will deliver on all of the interim and final recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and only Labor will ensure that Victorians have the mental health support they all need to continue living important lives.

**Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (18:58):** It is indeed a pleasure to make a brief contribution on this take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. I know as members of Parliament, as local MPs, we often get many different people visit our electorate offices on many different issues, and for me every time I have had a visit from a constituent on a mental health care issue it has stopped me in my tracks. I have met parents of children who have, sadly, suicided. I have met parents who just want their children who have some mental health care issues that they are dealing with to have the best possible care they can and have been often frustrated by some of the roadblocks that have been in place.

I know that before the 2018 election, when our Premier announced that a re-elected Andrews government would establish an Australian first in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, I thought of all of those parents that I had met over the years, because I knew that this was one announcement that would change lives. I also know that over the years the stigma around mental health has started to recede, and may it continue to do so.

Recently I was at the opening of a health and wellbeing facility in the Bentleigh electorate carrying the name of Danny Frawley. Our government funded that facility—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue his speech when the matter is next before the house.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### Adjournment

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

#### EVELYN ELECTORATE ROADS

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:00): (6246) The matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to explain to my community why the Andrews Labor government has so far failed to fix dangerous and congested roads through the Evelyn electorate; once and for all commit to road safety upgrades through the Yarra Valley, including in particular the Maroondah Highway in Coldstream, especially at the Killara Road and Station Street intersection, and Warburton Highway in Seville East, especially between Peters and Douthie roads; and explain if there is any strategy for road upgrades in Lilydale after congestion along Main Street has significantly worsened as a result of the government's rail Level Crossing Removal Project.

The Coldstream community—the residents, the traders and the CFA firefighters—are all sick and tired and fed up with the Andrews Labor government dragging its chain on duplicating the Maroondah Highway and on fixing the dangerous intersection where Killara Road and Station Street cross the Maroondah Highway. This issue has been dragging on for years and years. The Andrews Labor government simply has no excuse, because working together with the federal Liberal MP we have secured \$20 million in commonwealth funding, which Premier Andrews, the roads minister and his transport department are now unacceptably sitting on. When will this road be duplicated? It needs to be confirmed as a project in the upcoming state budget and progressed beyond the seemingly never-ending planning phase. We need a start date for the works. We just need the government to get on with the job.

In Seville and Seville East the residents and local emergency services first responders—the Yarra Ranges police and the Seville and Wandin CFA brigades—are frustrated and fed up with being ignored on the urgent need to fix the Warburton Highway between Peters and Douthie roads in Seville East. It is incredibly disappointing that the Andrews Labor government still fails to listen to these communities, who are still unable to cross the road safely to get to and from their homes. The school students have no way to cross safely at this dangerous crest from the bus stops. The visibility is extremely poor, and it is just not good enough that the Andrews Labor government's response so far has been just putting in a few flimsy reflector poles and reducing the speed limit to 80 kilometres per hour. This has not worked, and the action I seek is for this dangerous road to be fixed and adequate funding to be put into the budget.

In Lilydale the Labor government removed the rail boom gates and replaced them with traffic lights, only making traffic congestion worse on Main Street and making Main Street less safe. Locals and commuters are completely frustrated. Minister, what is the roads strategy through Lilydale? When will you fix the mess this government has made with Main Street, Lilydale, and will this include a plan to build the Lilydale bypass? After eight long years this Labor government has a history of neglect of roads through the Evelyn electorate. It is not fair, it is not good enough, and my community will await a response.

#### VICTORIAN HOMEBUYER FUND

**Mr MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (19:03): (6247) The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Treasurer and concerns the Andrews Labor government's Victorian Homebuyer Fund. The action that I seek is for the Treasurer to provide more information on how the fund will benefit homebuyers in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

As we know, buying a home is out of reach for so many first home buyers. Just coming up with the normal 20 per cent deposit is a struggle, and anything lower will incur the burden of lenders mortgage insurance. If you take a look at the federal government's policy settings, what we have happening at

the federal government level is actually wage suppression for these first home buyers—wage suppression policy through its industrial relations framework. We have also got policies which see the prioritisation of housing as an investment vehicle rather than for accommodation purposes, and we are also seeing many young Australians starting out with a six-figure education debt in terms of their tertiary education. All of this is going on of course while there is no investment in renewables and the promotion of coal and fossil fuels still carries on.

But I am absolutely thrilled to see that the state government is taking the initiative to set up a homebuyer fund to help reduce the barriers to home ownership. The fund reduces the required deposit for homebuyers to 5 per cent and contributes up to 25 per cent towards the purchase price in exchange for an equivalent share in the property. This fund will assist so many low-income earners and socially disadvantaged people to become home owners for the first time. Home ownership is usually the biggest purchase that anyone will make in their lives. It is an investment that provides shelter and warmth for families and is what many rely on in the future for a sustainable retirement. Like the Grattan Institute, I would like this initiative to be rolled out across Australia as a national scheme, but yet again it comes down to the states doing the heavy lifting. Narre Warren South is a growing community, and owning a home should be an attainable goal, not an unachievable dream. I would appreciate it if the Treasurer could provide an update on how the Victorian Homebuyer Fund will benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

#### GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE ROADS

**Mr T BULL** (Gippsland East) (19:05): (6248) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to please come up and travel with me the East Gippsland roads. Now, this comes off the back of what I thought was perhaps a bit of a comedy routine when the minister made his ministers statement last sitting week. The minister stood up and said that our roads are smoother and safer. This is not true. They are the worst they have been for many, many years. It is not just me saying this; local motorists, visiting motorists, truck drivers, freight drivers and bus drivers are all saying they have never seen the roads so bad.

Last week I did a bit of travel around my electorate. I went to Bonang, which is right up at the top, halfway along the Black-Allan Line on the Victorian border. I went to Tamboon, Orbost, Benambra and Omeo; I went to Maffra and various other locations, and the roads are a disaster. They have got absolutely massive holes that are not fit for driving. For the minister to say that they are safer and smoother is an absolute joke. They are more dangerous than they have been for years, and they are crumbling like never before.

Now, I will give the minister a bit of credit. The last time I asked him to come up and have a look at an issue, he did. Unfortunately our diaries did not correspond and I was in Canberra at the time—but he came up to have a look, and I appreciate it. But if he thinks our roads are safer and smoother under his watch, he is just not right. He needs to talk to his advisers, who are filling him up with just rubbish if that is what they think is the case, and he needs to come out and have a look. There are two reasons for this: the first is we have got roads not being built to the right standard, and the proof of that is that they are crumbling within weeks of having been laid down; and the second issue is the lack of maintenance. We have got potholes that have had paint painted around them on the road surface that are still there six and eight weeks later, and we have had signs up for two to three months saying, 'Caution: traffic hazard ahead'. What needs to happen is they need to get in and fix these roads, and when we are building new roads, build them to a higher standard. I ask the minister to please come up and I will show him firsthand that our roads are not smoother and our roads are not safer.

#### FAIRHILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (19:08): (6249) I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Education. The action that I seek is that the minister provide my community with an update on the latest on the nearly \$500 000 upgrade of facilities at Fairhills Primary School. Of course this is one of our great

local schools in our community. It has done an amazing job in ensuring kids get the very best education and has continued to do so right throughout the last couple of years as well, which we know have been particularly challenging. In 2020 Fairhills Primary was awarded a grant of \$496 125 from the Andrews Labor government's Minor Capital Works Fund to install a new full-sized basketball/multipurpose court with a shade structure to provide a shaded outdoor sports area at the school. This is going to be a great all-inclusive and accessible play space for kids to play, connect and grow, all while being sun smart—incredibly important.

The minor capital works program has been a great program enabling schools to do minor works to improve and upgrade their schools to ensure they have the best facilities to learn and play in. Locally I am proud that we have delivered works via this fund to not only this school but Great Ryrie Primary, Bayswater South Primary and Regency Park Primary. I cannot wait to see this take shape, and I look forward to getting out there and kicking off construction with principal Moi Beaurain and leading teacher Stuart Beever, who have done a great job building this project from the ground up. They should be incredibly proud of their work to see this become a reality, as it will no doubt be a great space that kids of today and for years to come will be able to enjoy. I thank the minister for his consideration of my request and for the work he and his team continue to do to support our great local schools.

And just very quickly: a very happy 60th wedding anniversary to my grandparents Ray Pearson and Nedra Pearson. I have been waiting to say this for weeks in Parliament. I never get a chance. I never go to 3 minutes in my adjournment matter. My grandparents are like my parents to me. I love them very much. They are the greatest people I know. Sixty years—my God, I do not know how they have done it. My nanna, she is beautiful, but she is irritating at the best of times. I will show her this video. I love her. They should be incredibly proud of all the years they have spent together, and here's to many more, with my grandfather coming out of hospital after months this year. He is doing incredibly well again. I wish them a very happy anniversary.

### GREAT OCEAN ROAD TOURISM

**Mr RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:10): (6250) My adjournment debate matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. I will again invite the minister to come down to the Great Ocean Road region and to talk to communities in Port Campbell, Peterborough, Princetown, Hordern Vale, Apollo Bay, Wye River, Kennett River, Lorne, Aireys Inlet, Anglesea and Torquay at the end of the Great Ocean Road. I will plead with the minister to come and talk to these communities and tell them what she is doing such that after two years so much has not happened with the Great Ocean Road Authority.

The minister last week brought in the alpine legislation to help make the alpine regions work better. They referenced the Great Ocean Road model, but, Minister, there is so much that is not happening on the Great Ocean Road. I reference two particularly egregious breakdowns in good governance and management of what can only be described as one of the most important tourist assets in the state of Victoria. You have the Cape Otway lighthouse, which on 30 June will close. \$6 million worth of important infrastructure will be carted away on the backs of trucks, 45 people will lose their jobs and a whole community will be without something that has sustained tourism, employment and the reason for that community to be there. It is in a most beautiful part of the state, and in two months time it is gone and there is nothing to replace it. These wonderful assets that have been there since the 1850s will be left abandoned and unloved again. And that is not the only one.

We have got Skenes Creek caravan park, a favourite holiday destination for thousands of families for years and years and years on the Great Ocean Road. It is sitting there closed—a dirty big 'Closed' sign—and the bit that the community is really upset about is that the new Great Ocean Road Authority and the government found money to fund consultants to design the new logos, banners and posters for the Skenes Creek caravan park only to slap a dirty great 'Closed' sign on it. And not only that, people cannot stay there at this time of the year. I was down there on Friday. The gate is locked. Granted they are still mowing the grass there and emptying the bins that have got no rubbish in them, but it is sitting

there closed. At this time of year it should be full of grey nomads and there should be people getting excited about their holidays at Easter. But if you are going to leave it closed and not available for the visitors and tourists, at least let local people stay there who are desperate for accommodation. I mean, this is a piece of public land that could be used for the minister's social housing gains. It could be a place that people could stay in to take up some of the employment opportunities. So, Minister, please come down and talk to my communities and tell them why it is all so bad.

### MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

**Mr HAMER** (Box Hill) (19:13): (6251) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide my community with an update on the mental health investments that the Andrews government has made to service the needs of residents in the Box Hill electorate.

It was just over one year ago that this Parliament had a historic joint sitting in the Royal Exhibition Building, at which the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System report was tabled. Establishing the royal commission into mental health was a key commitment of the Andrews government leading into the 2018 election and was the first of its kind nationwide, and I want to pay tribute to the minister at the table at the moment, the Minister for Health, the former Minister for Mental Health, who oversaw this royal commission through to its end point. The royal commission undertook a forensic examination of the existing system and the support networks in place. For far too long this broken system had been lamented but overlooked, with the tough decisions and investments not made. I am proud to be part of a government that has committed \$3.8 billion in this year's budget to implement every single recommendation outlined in the royal commission's report. This transformational investment will deliver Victorians the mental health system and support that they need at a time when the challenges of managing COVID-19 have brought more pressure to bear on the mental health and wellbeing of Victorians than perhaps ever before. But it is not just the dollar amount that counts; it is the impact that this funding has at a local level in improving the lives of local residents. I look forward to the minister's response.

### SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE PLANNING

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (19:15): (6252) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that he visit the Shepparton district to meet with local government and developers to discuss the current crisis in land availability for future housing and industrial needs. We have a land supply crisis in the Shepparton district, particularly in Shepparton and Tatura. The shortage of land for housing and industrial purposes is creating inflated prices for housing stock. People are being forced to look to existing properties in residential areas to refurbish them, leading to less investment properties, fewer rentals and therefore an increasing demand on social housing.

Our community is missing out on opportunities to grow, to recruit professionals and other workers and to increase economic development in our region. In what should be a time for opportunity for our region we are now faced with the challenge of a lack of availability of land. There has been significant government investment in our region in recent years—almost \$800 million invested in the regional rail project that will connect Shepparton to Melbourne with nine VLocity trains a day. Major works on stage 1 of Goulburn Valley Health are nearing completion at a cost of \$230 million, and it is providing the infrastructure that we need to have a fit-for-purpose health service. The investment of \$120 million in the build of the new Greater Shepparton Secondary College—just opened this year—means that we have the breadth and depth of education opportunities that we have not previously had in our state education system. The \$20.5 million integrated early learning centre at Mooroopna is a strong investment in early childhood education, and the recent opening of the Shepparton Art Museum, a \$50 million state-of-the-art gallery, is an outstanding opportunity for the cultural development of our community, with a strong emphasis on Indigenous art.

People are looking to the regions as a place to live and work, experimenting with new ways of doing so, but in looking to the regions the major issues that people identify are supply of housing, education

and health services. So while we are addressing the latter two, we have a real problem in relation to housing supply and it has been identified as one of our major challenges. So in seeking that the minister visits Shepparton district the agenda will be very much to highlight the much-needed government support necessary to ensure that all parties, including local government and our land developers, can find a way forward, whether it be through rezoning, change planning or assistance from the government with planners and the resources that we need to really ensure that we can get the subdivisions and land supply that we need.

### MORNINGTON PENINSULA PLANNING

**Mr BRAYNE** (Nepean) (19:18): (6253) The action I seek is for the Minister for Planning to update my community on how our green wedge is being protected on the Mornington Peninsula. The Mornington Peninsula shire has been included in the Melbourne metropolitan area for many years, since the 1960s. In the 1970s planning minister Alan Hunt helped to establish the green wedge, which sought to protect our green spaces within the entirety of the Melbourne area to ensure the Melbourne areas remained livable, and the creation of the green wedge as part of an intrinsic aspect to the metropolitan Melbourne area was a key vital planning decision that has seen the protection of the Mornington Peninsula from becoming overdeveloped for literally decades. It is the last line of defence for our peninsula against becoming an overdeveloped suburbia.

At this critical juncture we are seeing for the first time in a long time the greatest threat to the green wedge on the Mornington Peninsula. There is a big business lobby group called the Committee for Mornington Peninsula, which is actively pursuing the regionalisation of the Mornington Peninsula. All candidates for the Liberal Party on the Mornington Peninsula are standing with the aim of making the Mornington Peninsula regional. Since I began to get the word out about the necessity of preserving the metropolitan status of the Mornington Peninsula in order to preserve for the long term the character and livability of the peninsula, some of these candidates have now started changing their language. The line they now use is, 'We will make the Mornington Peninsula regional while maintaining green wedge protections'. This is sort of like saying, 'We want to get rid of the monarchy whilst also we want to keep the Queen'. It does not work. Long term, actively pursuing a regional status—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr BRAYNE:** And they are getting frustrated by it right now. Long term, actively pursuing a regional status and rescinding our metropolitan status would see the loss of the green wedge and an increasingly developed and unrecognisable Mornington Peninsula. This push has been opportunistically made by the Committee for Mornington Peninsula. But even their own report on the benefits of the peninsula becoming regional states that the green wedges an acceptable casualty of us becoming regional. I will not stand by and let this business lobby group, which counts ExxonMobil and Hillview Quarries among its members, and some political candidates sacrifice our green wedge.

We should fight for better metropolitan services, though. We deserve a better public transport system, which we are getting now: the 788 running every half an hour, the 887 express bus now running. We deserve rebuilds of our schools, like what is happening at Rosebud Primary School, Dromana Primary School and Rosebud Secondary. We deserve better sports facilities, like the new lights in all the tennis clubs, the new cricket nets at Rosebud Cricket Club, Main Ridge and the ones we are fighting for at Dromana Cricket Club. When it comes to the green wedge, though, there is no room for movement. It is important that our green spaces are protected, and I look forward to hearing how the government is supporting our sacred green wedge on the Mornington Peninsula.

### MORWELL ELECTORATE ASBESTOS CONTAMINATION

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (19:21): (6254) My adjournment debate is directed to the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister and the government to find appropriate financial support for one of my constituents who has endured a horrible experience and significant financial hardship due to a situation that was completely out of his control.

By way of background, my constituent Matt Phelan owns a property in Hazelwood North. In the June 2021 floods a spillway on Mr Phelan's property was damaged, and in a further rain event in late September further damage to the spillway unearthed buried asbestos on the property, which Mr Phelan and his family had absolutely no knowledge of. What transpired next was a nightmare for Matt and his family. Asbestos was subsequently dispersed into neighbouring properties. The EPA rightly became involved, and a clean-up notice was issued. Of course Mr Phelan and his family were absolutely distraught at the impact these storm and rain events had on his property and those of his neighbours. Mr Phelan then determined that he wanted to do the right thing for his community and his neighbours, so he proceeded with the clean-up works, which subsequently left him hundreds of thousands of dollars out of pocket.

Despite ongoing pleas to the EPA and Bushfire Recovery Victoria, no financial support has been offered or was forthcoming to Mr Phelan, despite the fact that he was completely unaware that any asbestos was previously buried on his property and despite the fact that this incident came as a result of an emergency flood and storm event. I mean, I just cannot fathom that one of our citizens has been treated in such a dreadful way. How can a person be left holding the bag in such a monumental way for an event that was entirely not of their doing nor their fault? To rub salt into the wound, we understand that if it were for example a shed on his property that contained asbestos building material and that same shed was damaged by a storm event that saw fragments of asbestos accidentally strewn across neighbouring properties, then he would have received state government support. So it seems that if one had knowingly had asbestos building materials in an existing shed on your land then support may well be forthcoming, but if you had no idea that asbestos was buried on your property, then you receive no assistance. I ask: how is this fair?

It seems New South Wales may have a program in place to deal with such circumstances, yet Victoria does not. On the New South Wales EPA website it states in part:

Immediate assistance is available under NSW Disaster Assistance Guidelines where asbestos at multiple damaged residential properties poses an unacceptable risk.

And that:

... specific authorisation by the NSW Government, NSW Public Works is funded to clean up and remove the material.

I plead with the Minister for Emergency Services to find a way to support my constituent who is dealing with not only the financial pain associated with this incident but the emotional trauma as well, which is primarily due to a circumstance and event he had no knowledge of and no responsibility for.

#### **SOMERTON INTERMODAL RAIL HUB AND FREIGHT PROJECT**

**Mr McGUIRE** (Broadmeadows) (19:24): (6255) My request is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. The action I seek is an update on the landmark Somerton intermodal freight rail hub. This is vital for economic development, it is a project of national significance and it is important to the state of Victoria, because what it does is connect this terminal in Somerton, in the state district of Broadmeadows, to the docks as part of the port of Melbourne's \$125 million project.

I had the pleasure of being with the minister in the greenfield site at Somerton when this announcement was made in December 2020. It is part of the Victorian and Australian governments' attempts to make rail freight cheaper for businesses and take trucks off suburban roads through a \$16.2 million investment in direct rail freight between the port of Melbourne and Somerton. This is important to my role as chair of the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board 4.0. We are trying to fast-track through deindustrialisation to advanced manufacturing to create new industries, jobs and export opportunities. This upgrade is part of the Victorian government's work to continue supporting the port of Melbourne, and here is the kicker: the port of Melbourne contributes \$6 billion to the Victorian economy. Now, the further opportunity we have is to make this part of the proposed city deal, which has been hard

fought and I have pursued for a number of years—and this came out of the strategy *Building Smarter Cities: Stronger Communities* in 2018—and then to get this done.

There is a contest between the federal government and the Victorian government on where the next major intermodal hub should be—whether it should be in the north at Beveridge or whether it should be at Truganina, or perhaps we can do both. This is, as I say, of state and national significance. The other thing that it would do is it would be incredibly helpful for the national food plan, because we have been able to relocate the Melbourne wholesale markets to Epping. There is a lot of land next door to that—there is 51 hectares of state-owned land that could also be used—and there is a wonderful project of international significance I think for Australia that La Trobe University and the CSIRO are looking at for a major food development proposal on the campus at La Trobe University. So this is the re-visioning of Melbourne's north. This is how we can actually bring these key pieces together and deliver economic prosperity.

### RESPONSES

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (19:27): The honourable members for Evelyn and Gippsland East have raised matters for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I will ensure that they are referred to the minister. The honourable member for Narre Warren South has raised a matter for the Treasurer. The honourable member for Polwarth has raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The honourable member for Box Hill has raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health. The honourable members for Shepparton and Nepean have raised matters for the Minister for Planning. The honourable member for Morwell has raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the honourable member for Broadmeadows has raised a matter for the Minister for Ports and Freight.

The honourable member for Bayswater has raised an issue for the Minister for Education, but in his eloquent contribution he also gave a shout-out to Ray and Nedra Pearson, who are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. I am sure all honourable members will not just join with the member for Bayswater in recognising the important role that Ray and Nedra have played in the honourable member for Bayswater's life but take this opportunity to send their best wishes to Ray and Nedra and through them to all of our grandparents. We wish Ray and Nedra further years of happiness and good health and congratulate them on the fine young grandson they have, the member for Bayswater.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7.28 pm.**