



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 26 August 2025**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,  
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,  
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

**Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition**

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

**Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>7</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>9</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>5,6</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>11</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>10</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Tuesday 26 August 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

***Bills***

**Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

***Introduction and first reading***

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:05): I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (12:05): I request a brief explanation of the bill, please.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:06): The bill amends the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to strengthen casino oversight and reform and update gambling regulation.

**Read first time.**

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

**Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025**

***Introduction and first reading***

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Worker Screening Act 2020 in relation to working with children and the time limit for prosecuting certain offences and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Sonya KILKENNY**: I move:

That this bill be read a second time immediately

I advise the house that in accordance with standing order 61(3)(b) the other parties have been provided with a copy of the bill and a briefing.

**Motion agreed to.**

***Statement of compatibility***

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:09): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025:

**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 Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, 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 Bill strengthens the operation of the Working with Children (WWC) check by implementing reforms to the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Act). The purpose of the Bill is to assist in the protection of children from harm by strengthening the screening processes of the WWC check, including the treatment of criminal history information and relevant regulatory and disciplinary findings of people who work with children. Screening is necessary to reduce the risk that persons who may harm children will be placed in positions of care and trust.

A key reform in the Bill is to implement mutual recognition of WWC exclusions. The Bill will amend the Act to provide that a WWC exclusion issued in another state or territory is to be treated as a WWC exclusion under the Act. This means that a person who is excluded from child-related work under a corresponding working with children law will be excluded from child-related work under the Act.

The Bill also contains reforms that were identified by government through an urgent review of Victoria's WWC check scheme. These reforms will:

- prohibit certain individuals from working with children pending assessment or re-assessment;
- extend time limits for the laying of charges related to the summary offence of providing false or misleading information; and
- cancel clearances previously given to a person who provided false or misleading information when making an application or during a re-assessment, or where the person was prohibited from applying for a WWC check under the Act.

### **Human Rights Issues**

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- right to privacy (section 13)
- protection of families and children (section 17)
- right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)
- right not to be punished more than once for the same offence (section 26)
- the protection against retrospective criminal laws (section 27)

Under the Charter, rights can be subject to limits that are reasonable and justifiable in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. Rights may be limited to protect other rights. As discussed below, I am satisfied that the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the Charter and, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

### **Right to recognition and equality before the law**

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to recognition as a person before the law and to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. It also protects the right for every person to be equal before the law and to be entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

### **Recognition of inter-jurisdictional WWC exclusions**

Legal recognition under the law (section 8(1) Charter) requires that persons enjoy equal rights under the law and receive the protection of Charter rights. In addition, section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. There is some uncertainty whether this right is intended to operate as a prohibition on unequal treatment by reference to discrimination based on a protected attribute as defined in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* or has a broader application beyond the protected attributes.

The right to recognition as a person before the law, and, assuming an application beyond protected attributes, affording equal protection of the law, may be limited by the provisions which recognise inter-jurisdictional WWC exclusions. By recognising WWC exclusions from other jurisdictions, through prohibiting a person who has been excluded in another jurisdiction, clause 16 of the Bill means that people may be treated differently under the Act depending on whether they have been excluded from a similar scheme in another jurisdiction or not. (The Bill also allows the Secretary to re-assess any previous WWC clearances that were



the result of interstate exclusions from child-related work, and provides that once these amendments commence, the person is to be assessed under the new requirements (clause 18).)

This is due to the differences in schemes across jurisdictions. Offence categorisation across states and territories for WWC assessments differ which means that a person excluded in another jurisdiction would be automatically excluded in Victoria, even if the matter that led to the exclusion may not have resulted in the same outcome in Victoria. In addition, most jurisdictions do not have legislated rights protections, which means the original decision-maker would not have been required to consider and act consistently with rights when making an exclusion decision.

However, I consider that these limitations on the right to equality are reasonable and justified. The purpose of these provisions is to implement a joint commitment made by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments for mutual recognition of WWC exclusions, which will ensure greater protection for children from harm. This commitment, which was agreed by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, will deliver greater consistency in WWC checks across Australia by ensuring that a person who is excluded in one jurisdiction is barred from working with children in all jurisdictions. This is a first step towards further national reforms including a National Continuous Checking Capability, which will be a secure system that continuously monitors WWC check holders against new criminal history information from national and state/territory datasets, which was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

There have been egregious examples of child abuse that have come to light recently that have demonstrated a need to ensure that WWC schemes across Australia are strong and effective.

While there are differences in the legal frameworks for WWC checks across jurisdictions, there are nationally agreed standards and general consistency in the way schemes operate. This means the number of matters where a person excluded in another jurisdiction would not have been subject to the same outcome in Victoria will be limited. In addition, all systems share a common objective: to prevent individuals who pose an unacceptable risk to children from gaining access to child-related employment or volunteer opportunities.

### **Right to privacy**

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

The right to privacy is very broad. The fundamental values which the right to privacy expresses are the physical and psychological integrity, individual and social identity, and autonomy and inherent dignity, of the person. The right protects the individual's interest in the freedom of their personal and social sphere. Relevantly, this encompasses a person's right to establish and develop meaningful social relations, and may also incorporate a right to work in some circumstances (to the extent that work is necessary to establish and develop social relations).

The Bill promotes the right to privacy by strengthening the WWC scheme, the purpose of which is to protect the right of children to bodily integrity, an aspect of the right to privacy. The Bill also includes reforms which may limit the right to privacy, however, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified.

### **Prohibiting certain individuals from working with children pending assessment or re-assessment**

Currently most applicants for a WWC check can work with children while their application is assessed, even if the Secretary proposes to refuse to give a WWC clearance on the basis of any charge, conviction or finding of guilt for an offence (except for serious sexual, violent or drug offences captured in clause 2 of Schedule 5 of the Act) or on the basis of disciplinary or regulatory findings.

Clause 12 of the Bill will introduce amendments that will make it an offence for a WWC applicant to work with children while waiting for a final outcome of an application if the Secretary proposes to refuse to give the person a WWC clearance. It will prevent an individual from working with children while waiting for the outcome of an application in a much broader range of circumstances, including where the Secretary is made aware of a relevant charge, conviction, finding of guilt or disciplinary or regulatory finding.

Clauses 13 and 14 will also make it an offence to engage another person in child-related work, or offer the services of another person for child-related work in these broader range of circumstances. These provisions engage the right to privacy, to the extent that it includes a right to work, as it will prevent a wider range of individuals from working or volunteering with children while waiting the outcome of the Secretary's decision.

Clause 8 of the Bill also introduces a requirement for the Secretary to suspend a person's WWC clearance if the Secretary proposes to revoke the person's clearance because they have become aware that the individual

has been charged with, convicted or found guilty of, a relevant offence or has become subject to a relevant disciplinary or regulatory finding. Currently, the Secretary can only suspend a WWC clearance before a re-assessment has been carried out in limited circumstances: if the person has become subject to reporting obligations under the *Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004* or a supervision or detention order; if the person has been charged with, or convicted or found guilty of, an offence specified in clause 2 of Schedule 5 to the Act; or the person has been given a WWC exclusion in another jurisdiction. A person who has their WWC clearance suspended is taken to not hold a WWC clearance for the period of the suspension. This amendment engages the right to privacy, as it will prohibit a person from engaging in work with children pending the completion of a re-assessment by the Secretary.

Aboriginal people are particularly at risk of being impacted and receiving a WWC suspension on the basis of having a criminal history as an overrepresented cohort in the justice system. This may also potentially deter Aboriginal people from applying for a WWC check due to confusion about the consequences of them having a criminal record. This can be mitigated by development of frameworks to guide decision making under the suspension power, which could include reference to contextual factors unique to First Nations peoples and other vulnerable groups to inform decision-making.

I do not consider that these amendments limit the right to privacy as they are lawful and not arbitrary. The interference will be lawful as it is authorised under legislation. The interference is not arbitrary, and any limitation is reasonable and justified as it seeks to minimise the risk of a person commencing or continuing to work with children while their application is being assessed or their eligibility to hold a WWC clearance is re-assessed in circumstances where the Secretary has proposed to refuse the application or revoke the clearance, and will therefore help protect children from harm. The Secretary can reinstate a person's WWC clearance after they have been issued a suspension in particular circumstances, for example, if the charge has been withdrawn or dismissed by a court or the person is acquitted of the offence by a court, or if a disciplinary or regulatory finding is quashed or set aside.

The Bill seeks to further protect children, which is a group with a heightened vulnerability to exploitative conduct which can in its nature be violent, sexual, abusive and neglectful. Screening is necessary to reduce the risk posed by persons who may harm children. While the Bill, and the Act more broadly, cannot entirely eliminate risk, clauses 8, 12, 13 and 14 provide a protective mechanism for preventing people who have been identified with criminal charges, criminal history or disciplinary or regulatory findings that indicate they should not be allowed to work with children from doing so until their eligibility to hold a WWC clearance is assessed.

#### Power to cancel WWC clearance if false and misleading information is provided on application

Currently there is no express power to cancel a WWC clearance where a WWC check application has been made in breach of, or contrary to, a provision of the Act, and a WWC clearance has been granted as a result.

Clause 9 of the Bill provides the Secretary with the power to cancel a WWC clearance if the person should not have been issued a clearance at the time of their initial or further application. This may occur, for example, where a person provided false or misleading information in relation to their application. Clause 18 applies this power retrospectively, so the Secretary will be able to cancel a WWC clearance that should not have been issued regardless of whether the relevant application or re-assessment occurred prior commencement of the Bill.

These clauses may engage the right to privacy, to the extent that it includes a right to work, as it will prevent these individuals from continuing to work with children, which may require them to leave their existing workplace, in circumstances where they had relied on the WWC clearance being granted.

However, I do not consider that these amendments limit the right to privacy as they are lawful and not arbitrary. The interference will be lawful as it is authorised under legislation. Further, the interference is not arbitrary, as it has the important purpose of protecting children from harm by cancelling WWC checks that should not have been issued. This power is intended to act as a safety net in exceptional circumstances, such as where a WWC clearance has been given based on information that is false or misleading and the WWC clearance may not have been given if the information available to the Secretary was correct.

Additionally, clause 9 of the Bill requires the Secretary, in the case that a WWC clearance is cancelled on the basis of false or misleading information, to give to the person the reasons for the cancellation, inform the person that they may apply for a WWC check and explain how that application can be made. To the extent that these laws may limit the right to privacy, I consider that any limitation is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### Recognition of inter-jurisdictional WWC exclusions

Currently the Act provides for consideration of interstate WWC exclusions or equivalent notices through the WWC check application and re-assessment provisions. A person who receives a WWC exclusion in another jurisdiction will either be a category A or category B application or reassessment which can result in the

giving of a WWC exclusion under the Act. However, in some cases, a person who has been issued an interstate WWC exclusion can be issued a WWC clearance in Victoria.

Clause 16 of the Bill amends the Act to provide that a person who is excluded from child-related work under a corresponding working with children law is prohibited from applying for a WWC check under the Act. Additionally, clauses 4 and 6 categorise an interstate WWC exclusion as a category A application and re-assessment and clauses 5 and 7 repeal the previous category B application and re-assessment provisions. These clauses together mean that a person who is excluded from child-related work under a corresponding working with children law will be excluded from child-related work under the Act. Clause 18 also introduces amendments to allow the Secretary to re-assess any previous WWC clearances that were the result of interstate exclusions from child-related work, and provides that once these amendments commence, the person is to be assessed under the new requirements.

These amendments engage the right to privacy, to the extent that it includes a right to work, as it will prevent people who have a WWC exclusion issued in another jurisdiction from obtaining a WWC clearance in Victoria. Without a clearance, a person will be unable to work or volunteer in certain positions which involve contact with children. Further, they will not be able to continue in child-related work where an existing WWC clearance is revoked. These provisions may have significant consequences for the person, as it may mean they are unable to pursue their choice of work, may have to leave their existing workplace, or cannot participate in certain volunteer activities.

However, I do not consider that these amendments limit the right to privacy as they are lawful and not arbitrary. The interference will be lawful as it is authorised under legislation. Further, the interference is not arbitrary, as it serves the important purpose of protecting children, who have a heightened vulnerability to harmful conduct. Additionally, through operation of the Act more broadly, if such a person was to have their interstate WWC exclusion lifted, they would be able to apply for a WWC check under section 77(2)(c) of the Act. To the extent that these laws may limit the right to privacy, I consider that any limitation is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### **Protection of families and children**

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child. This right recognises the special vulnerability of children because of their age and immaturity, conferring additional rights on them.

The Bill promotes the rights of the child by strengthening the operation of the WWC check, which is an important safeguarding tool that assists in protecting children from sexual and physical harm by screening people who work with or care for children.

#### **Right to a fair hearing**

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

The concept of a 'civil proceeding' in section 24 is not limited to judicial decision makers, but may also encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers. The right generally encompasses the established common law right of each individual to unimpeded access to the courts of the State, and may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court.

#### **Prohibiting certain individuals from working with children pending assessment or re-assessment**

Clauses 8 and 12 of the Bill may engage the right to a fair hearing as it does not provide an avenue for appeal for the amendments which prohibit a broader range of individuals from working with children while waiting for a final outcome of their WWC check application or a re-assessment of their WWC clearance in cases where the Secretary proposes to refuse a WWC clearance or where the Secretary suspends a person's WWC clearance if the Secretary proposes to revoke the clearance.

However, I do not consider that the amendments limit the right to a fair hearing, as these prohibitions and suspensions are temporary until the final outcome which will either be a WWC clearance or a WWC exclusion. A person who receives a WWC exclusion in these circumstances can appeal that decision to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

#### **Recognition of inter-jurisdictional WWC exclusions**

Clauses 10 and 11 of the Bill may limit the right to a fair hearing as it provides that a person who has been excluded from a WWC check in another jurisdiction will not have the right to apply to VCAT for a review of this decision. Instead, the person will only be able to appeal the decision in the jurisdiction where the original

exclusion was decided. Inconsistent offence categorisation across jurisdictions may also result in different appeal rights for persons excluded in another jurisdiction and those initially excluded in Victoria, even where the offence or disciplinary or regulatory finding may be identical. Clause 18 of the Bill applies this restriction retrospectively, so a person who has been excluded from a WWC check in another jurisdiction prior to the commencement of the Bill will not be able to apply to VCAT for a review of the Secretary's decision to issue an exclusion on this basis.

To the extent that this reform may limit the right to a fair hearing, I consider that any limitation is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. The purpose of this amendment to promote consistency across jurisdictions by ensuring that individuals who are excluded in one jurisdiction are not able to obtain a WWC check in another jurisdiction. This promotes the integrity of the WWC check system across jurisdictions and in turn, promotes the right of the child to protection from harm. While there are differences in the legal frameworks for WWC checks across jurisdictions, all systems share a common objective: to prevent individuals who pose an unacceptable risk to children from gaining access to child-related employment or volunteer opportunities. It is appropriate for the jurisdiction in which the original decision to exclude is made to consider any avenues for review of that decision. Additionally, if a person who holds an interstate WWC exclusion has that WWC exclusion lifted, they can apply for a WWC check under section 77(2)(c) of the Act.

#### Extending time limits for the laying of charges related to summary offences

Clause 15 of the Bill extends the limitation period for prosecuting the offence of providing false or misleading information in relation to NDIS or WWC checks in section 128 of the Act, including applications or re-assessments, from 12 months to 5 years and 6 months.

This is a summary offence, which generally have a 12-month limitation period. Extending the period for prosecuting this offence to 5 years and 6 months may engage and limit the right to a fair hearing, as it may affect the ability of the accused to respond to the charges and may affect the quality of evidence they can obtain to defend the charges.

However, I consider that any limitation is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. The implications of a person providing false or misleading information in relation to an NDIS check or WWC check can be significant. For example, an individual who provides false information about their international criminal history information may present a serious risk to people accessing the NDIS or children. In addition, it may be that an offence under this section may go unnoticed for a period greater than 12 months. In such circumstances, criminal proceedings cannot be commenced against that person as the limitation period has expired. A longer limitation period is intended to provide a greater deterrent against providing false or misleading information as there is a longer period within which a person could be charged. The period of 5 years and 6 months covers the duration of a clearance for both NDIS checks and WWC checks, as the checks last for a period of 5 years and an individual can apply up to 6 months (for WWC checks) before their current clearance expires.

#### **Rights in criminal proceedings**

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that all persons charged with a criminal offence have the right to the presumption of innocence. The right in section 25(1) is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

#### Prohibiting certain individuals from working with children pending assessment or re-assessment

Clauses 12, 13 and 14 amend sections 121–124 of the Act to make it an offence for a WWC applicant to work with children while waiting for a final outcome of an application if the Secretary proposes to refuse to give the person a WWC clearance and to make it an offence to engage another person in child-related work, or offer the services of another person for child-related work, in these broader range of circumstances.

These clauses may engage the right to presumption of innocence as sections 121–124 provide that a person 'is not guilty of certain offences' if certain matters apply.

These provisions create an evidentiary burden on the accused, in that they require the accused to raise evidence of certain matters. However, in doing so, they do not transfer the legal burden. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of those matters, which will generally be within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence.

I do not consider that an evidential onus of the kind in the above provisions limits the right to be presumed innocent, and courts in other jurisdictions have taken this approach. Accordingly, I am satisfied that these provisions are compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence.

**Right not to be punished more than once for the same offence**

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.

Recognition of inter-jurisdictional WWC exclusions

This right is engaged by the reforms in the Bill that provide that a person who has been excluded from a WWC check in another jurisdiction will be excluded under the Act. As a result of these amendments individuals may have WWC checks refused, and holders of WWC clearance may have their clearances revoked.

However, in my view the right against double punishment is not limited by the Bill, because the refusal or revocation has a protective purpose, rather than a punitive one. The aim of the provisions is clearly to protect children from harm, rather than to impose a punishment for an offence. As the refusal or revocation is not a punishment, it does not amount to double punishment for the purpose of section 26, and the right is therefore not limited.

**Protection against retrospective criminal laws**

Section 27 of the Charter that a person must not be found guilty of a criminal offence because of conduct that was not a criminal offence when it was engaged in.

Extending time limits for the laying of charges related to summary offences

Clause 15 of the Bill extends the limitation period for prosecuting the offence of providing false or misleading information in relation to NDIS or WWC checks, including applications or re-assessments, from 12 months to 5 years and 6 months. Clause 18 of the Bill applies this limitation period retrospectively, so it will apply to applications and re-assessments made within 5 years and 6 months prior to the date of commencement of the Bill.

This may limit the protection against retrospective criminal laws as it will mean that a person may face prosecution for this offence more than 12 months after they provided the information, if it was within 5 years and 6 months prior to commencement of the Bill. However, I consider that any limitation is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter as it is for the purpose of promoting the integrity of the worker screening test, which protects children and people who access the NDIS.

**The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP**  
**Attorney-General**  
**Minister for Planning**

*Second reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (12:09): 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 safety and wellbeing of our children is of paramount concern to the Victorian Government. The recent allegations of child abuse that have come to light demonstrate an urgent need to ensure that the systems in place to protect children in Victoria are robust and effective.

Today the government is introducing the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 which contains important reforms to strengthen Victoria's Working with Children check laws. The Working with Children check scheme in the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Act) seeks to support the protection of children by screening the criminal history information and relevant regulatory and disciplinary findings of people who work with children.

**National mutual recognition of Working with Children exclusions**

The Bill will amend the Act to recognise a Working with Children exclusion issued in another state or territory as an automatic exclusion under Victoria's scheme. This implements the agreement made by the Commonwealth, states and territories at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on 15 August 2025 to urgently work towards national mutual recognition, so that a person denied a clearance, or whose clearance has been revoked, in one jurisdiction cannot be granted or hold a Working with Children check in another jurisdiction. The Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, referred to this nationwide reform as 'banned in one, banned in all'.

This is a first step towards further national reforms including a National Continuous Checking Capability, which will be a secure system that continuously monitors Working with Children check holders against new criminal history information from national, state and territory datasets, which was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Act currently provides for consideration of interstate Working with Children exclusions or equivalent notices, including at the application and re-assessment stage. The Act deals with interstate exclusions differently depending on the type of matter that gave rise to the exclusion. This means that, currently, some people who have been excluded in other jurisdictions can be issued a Working with Children clearance in Victoria.

The Bill will change this, so that all interstate Working with Children exclusions will be automatically recognised as exclusions in Victoria, as is already the case under South Australia and Queensland's Working with Children check schemes. This will meet Victoria's commitment to facilitate national mutual recognition of Working with Children exclusions. While there are differences in the legal frameworks for Working with Children checks across jurisdictions, there are nationally agreed standards and general consistency in the way the schemes operate. All jurisdictions share a common objective of preventing individuals who pose an unacceptable risk from working or volunteering with children.

#### **Expanding Working with Children check suspension powers**

In April, the Premier announced an urgent review of Victoria's Working with Children check scheme. The review identified areas for reform, including expanding powers to suspend Working with Children checks on the basis of any assessment trigger, including any charge, conviction, finding of guilt or relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding.

Currently, Working with Children clearances can only be suspended before a re-assessment has been finalised in limited circumstances, including a person being charged with or convicted or found guilty of a sexual offence.

The Bill will expand the suspension powers in the Act to allow for the suspension of a person's Working with Children clearance in circumstances where the Secretary is made aware of a charge, conviction or finding of guilt for a less serious offence, or a relevant disciplinary or regulatory finding. This will ensure that people who have been charged with a criminal offence, have a criminal record or who have been subject to a relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding are not able to work with children until after their eligibility has been rigorously assessed.

Importantly, these reforms will work in parallel with amendments recently made to the Worker Screening Regulations 2021 that expanded the number of findings that trigger the assessment of a person's eligibility to have, or to hold, a Working with Children check, such as prohibition notices issued to early childhood staff by the Department of Education's Quality Assessment and Regulation Division as well as equivalent notices issued in other states and territories.

#### **Cancelling clearances granted in certain circumstances**

Currently, the Act does not provide an express power to immediately cancel a Working with Children clearance where a Working with Children check application is made in breach of the Act or where a person provided false or misleading information as part of their application for a check or re-assessment of their eligibility to hold a clearance. The Bill introduces a new power to cancel a Working with Children clearance in these circumstances

This power is intended to act as a safety net in exceptional circumstances by allowing the Secretary to act immediately where it becomes apparent that a person should not have been able to validly apply for a Working with Children check or should not have been given a clearance on application or been able to retain their clearance on re-assessment where they provided information that was false or misleading.

#### **Expanding the limitation period to prosecute the offence of providing false or misleading information**

It is an offence under the Act for a person to provide false or misleading information in relation to a worker screening application or re-assessment unless the person believed on reasonable grounds that the information was true or was not misleading. This is a summary offence which means that a prosecution must be commenced within 12 months after the false or misleading information was alleged to have been provided.

However, an offence of this kind may go unnoticed for a period greater than 12 months, which means that criminal proceedings cannot be commenced as the limitation period would have expired. Given the potential implications for child safety, we consider that such a short period for prosecutions is not justified. People that provide false or misleading information should be held accountable.

The Bill will extend the limitation period for commencing proceedings for an offence of providing false or misleading information from 12 months to 5 years and 6 months. This reflects the 5-year duration of Working

with Children checks, including the 6 months a person has following expiry to renew their Working with Children check, and will provide a greater deterrent for people who may provide false or misleading information as there is a higher chance that they will be caught and charged.

**Further reforms to improve child safety**

This Bill sends a clear message that any risk to child safety will not be tolerated.

The amendments in this Bill are the first step in strengthening the Working with Children check scheme to ensure that it remains an effective and rigorous government screening process.

It is our government's priority to progress additional reforms to implement the recommendations of the independent Rapid Child Safety Review as quickly as possible to minimise the risk of harm to children in Victoria. Further legislative reforms will be brought to Parliament later this year.

I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure that Victoria's Working with Children check system is robust, reliable and effectively prevents people who pose a risk to our children from working with them.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (12:10): Nothing this Parliament does is as important as protecting our children and keeping them safe. For that reason, while this bill is modest and this bill is timid, the opposition will be supporting this bill, because anything which makes even a small move towards making Victorian children safer is something which should have the support of this house. But our support for this bill should not be taken as an indication that we believe it goes nearly far enough.

Three years ago, in September 2022, the Victorian Ombudsman handed down a shocking report that exposed the failures of Victoria's working with children check regime, a report that demonstrated that somebody who had no right to have a working with children check nonetheless had one and used that working with children check to abuse a child. The Ombudsman made very clear recommendations to the Victorian government – recommendations to fix the loopholes, recommendations to strengthen the system and recommendations that would help keep Victorian children safe. And do you know what the response of the government was to those recommendations? Silence. The government did not even have the courtesy to respond to the Victorian Ombudsman's recommendations, and that is an absolute indictment on the government. What happened to that Attorney-General? The current Premier decided to promote her to Treasurer. She was rewarded for being asleep at the wheel when it came to protecting Victorian children.

What has happened since then? This bill before us today, and I acknowledge that we received an advance copy of the bill last night and a briefing last night and I do thank the Attorney-General's office facilitating that, does not even implement a single one of the Ombudsman's recommendations – not a single one. The Ombudsman's recommendations could not have been clearer or more simple or more powerful. The Ombudsman's recommendations were that the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety should have the power to take into account any information and to suspend anyone's working with children check if that person poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children. It was a very simple and very powerful proposition and one that this government does not have the courage to put into law in this bill.

I ask: why not? Why has the government squibbed it? Why has the government dodged the opportunity, three years late, to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations? We know the members of the parliamentary Labor Party blocked the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew and me when we sought to introduce a bill to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations a number of weeks ago. We know there is a mirror bill that is sitting in the other place introduced by the members of the Liberals and Nationals. This government has to be dragged kicking and screaming and still cannot bring itself to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations. We are not going to be opposing this bill, but this bill is modest and this bill is timid. This bill is unlikely to do much to keep Victorian kids safe, particularly not when compared with the opportunity to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations from three years ago. In fact this government has not even implemented the recommendations of its so-called rapid review commissioned by the Premier and

undertaken by former SA Labor Premier Jay Weatherill. The government has just missed these opportunities.

I know the government is desperate to be seen to be doing something when it comes to protecting kids and strengthening the working with children check system, but the government is not doing enough. Every day this government dithers, every day this government delays, is a day Victorian children are at risk. I give notice now that we will be seeking to amend this bill in the other place. We will be seeking to amend this bill to implement the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman from three years ago, because Victorian kids do not deserve any further delays and any further dithering. They deserve protection, and they deserve it now.

What does this bill do? The bill, as we were advised in the briefing, undertakes four fairly basic propositions. The bill provides or gives effect to the agreement that was reached at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General that where a person is banned from holding a working with children check in one jurisdiction, that ban will extend to all jurisdictions. This is common sense. This is actually something that was recommended by a federal royal commission years ago.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Ten years ago. Thank you, member for Kew. So 10 years later – from when this government was still in office, I note – they are finally getting around to implementing a pretty basic recommendation of a royal commission that, yes, if you are banned from holding a working with children check in New South Wales, Queensland or South Australia, you should be banned from holding it in Victoria. That is a pretty obvious proposition and one that we do not have any issue with. In fact we support it.

The government is also making changes where if somebody is charged with a category C offence – and I contrast that with category A or category B offences, where there can be an immediate suspension of a working with children check – instead of having 28 days of procedural fairness and natural justice, the secretary will now have the power to issue a suspension of that working with children check immediately. Again this is something which is hard to believe was not there in the first place. I said in the context of another debate a number of weeks ago in this place, when it comes to procedural fairness or protecting kids, this side of the house is on the side of protecting kids, and we make no apology for that.

The government also has changed the rules in relation to the ability to suspend somebody's working with children check where they have provided false or misleading information in relation to that application. We were advised in the briefing yesterday this was done out of an abundance of caution. It is quite likely in fact that that power exists already. If somebody obtains a working with children check or any administrative clearance effectively under fraud by providing false or misleading information, then I would have thought there is inherently a power for that to be revoked, cancelled or suspended. But the government wants to absolutely make clear of that in the legislation, and we do not object to that.

The fourth change is to extend the time for the prosecution of somebody who does provide false or misleading material in a working with children application from six months to five years and six months, and that is a reflection of the fact that a working with children check under this government can last for up to five years. So it provides that that summary offence may nonetheless be lodged or be pursued even if it is up to five years and six months after the provision of the false and misleading information.

The question is: is this really going to do enough to keep Victorian children safe? And our answer is no. No, it is not, because the Victorian Ombudsman said the government must go further. I will put onto the record some of the recommendations which again I remind the house this government did not even have the courtesy to respond to. They did not even respond to say they would consider them or reject them or accept them. They just ran a blank. I should say, on the very day this report was released



by the Ombudsman in September 2022, I and my then colleague Matt Bach issued a statement where we committed that a Liberals and Nationals government would implement these changes as a priority. We were, I am proud to say, conscious of this issue – on the ball – and I cannot understand why the government dropped the ball when it comes to something as important as child safety.

Here is what the recommendations from the Victorian Ombudsman were to the Victorian government:

Amend the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic) to allow the Secretary to the Department of Justice and Community Safety to:

- a. obtain and consider any information that may be relevant to an applicant's suitability to work with children

What is the problem that the government has with the idea of saying that the person who has to decide about giving somebody a working with children check or not should have access to any relevant information? Again, this would seem a no-brainer, and I cannot understand why the government is refusing to put this in this bill. It makes no sense at all. The recommendation continues:

- b. refuse an application for a Working with Children Check if reasonably satisfied the applicant poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children (including where no criminal or disciplinary history exists)

I think if the government walked out and spoke to any parent – any parent dropping their kids off to child care, to kinder or to school anywhere in this state – and asked them the question, 'Do you think somebody should be able to be refused a working with children check if the authorities thought they posed an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children?' the answer would be, 'Yes, of course. How can this not already be the case?' But it is not the case at the moment. The Ombudsman recommended it three years ago, and nothing has happened. This government still retains this fixation on saying there must be a criminal charge or there must be a criminal conviction or there must be a disciplinary finding; unless one of those triggers are met, somebody is allowed to keep a working with children check even if the government knows and has information that this person poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children.

I refer to the shocking example of Ronald Marks, operating in the Horsham area, where according to media reports police found thousands of images of child abuse material on this person's hard drive, yet he continued to have a working with children check and operated in schools and kindergartens right throughout the Horsham area for weeks and months, if not years. I understand that the police actually physically removed his working with children card as part of the investigation but he still had the digital one, so he was able to continue to access areas where young people were. This is why the Ombudsman's recommendation is so important, and this is why the government's bill is so weak. There is a problem that is there to be fixed, the Ombudsman has given the road map for how to fix it and the government refuses to take a step down that road, and that is to the government's eternal discredit.

The Ombudsman recommended that the secretary have the power to reassess a person's suitability to hold a working with children clearance on the secretary's own initiative and without need for notification of a criminal charge or disciplinary outcome. Again, we say: why not? Why shouldn't the safety of children come first? If the secretary is aware of information that somebody poses a real risk to the safety of kids, do we have to wait for a crime to be committed? Do we have to wait for a disciplinary finding to be made? Surely our children deserve the benefit of the doubt over anybody who might pose a risk to them, because this is what this is about: do you give the benefit of doubt to somebody who has a working with children check, or do you give the benefit of the doubt to the kids we are supposed to be protecting? That is what we want to do.

So this bill, as far as it goes, we do not object to. We will support it. It is modest, it is timid, it is weak. It will not protect kids in the way the kids deserve to be protected. We have already put forward our proposals for how we can do that. We want to do that through implementing every single one of the Victorian Ombudsman's recommendations from three years ago. We want to go further. We want to make sure that police and the LEAP database can record who has got a working with children check.

If police are investigating somebody and they find child abuse material on somebody's computer, they should be able to call up the secretary of the department that day and get that working with children certificate suspended that day. We should not have to wait for charges. We need to protect kids first. Protecting kids first – that is most important. This bill will pass this house and the other place with the support of the Liberals and the Nationals, but we do not think it goes far enough. We think Victorian kids deserve far better, and we give notice now we will be moving amendments in the other place to strengthen this bill, to make it live up to its potential to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations and to go further, because nothing is more important than protecting Victorian children, and the Liberals and Nationals will always stand up for that principle.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:24): I move:

That this debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

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

### *Petitions*

#### **Beaconsfield Reservoir**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) presented a petition bearing 3706 signatures:

The Petition of

The Officer and District Community Association, and the Save the Beaconsfield Reservoir Action Group, residents of Cardinia Shire, City of Casey, and surrounding communities

Draws to the attention of the House

That the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water have kept the Beaconsfield Reservoir locked away from public view for decades and they are now planning to **drain** most of the reservoir, **demolish** a substantial part of the dam wall, and continue keeping it **locked** up.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly ask the Victorian State Government, and Melbourne Water to undertake:**

- The Beaconsfield Reservoir's current water level of 8.85 metres is maintained,
- The historic dam wall at current height be retained,
- The surrounding parkland be opened to public access,
- The reserve be turned into a public park, with facilities provided to enhance the accessibility and useability.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### *Committees*

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

##### *Alert Digest No. 11*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:25): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 11 of 2025, on the following bills and subordinate legislation, together with their appendices:

Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025

Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025

Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administrative Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025

Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025

SR No. 9 – Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Amendment Regulations 2025

SR No. 26 – Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Amendment (Professional Indemnity Insurance) Regulations 2025.

### **Ordered to be published.**

#### ***Documents***

#### **Documents**

### **Incorporated list as follows:**

#### **DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Essential Services Commission – Accident Towing Fees Review 2025 – Final report and recommendations under s 212G of the *Accident Towing Services Act 2007*

*Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978* – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Assembly – Ordinary Returns 1 February to 30 June 2025 (two volumes) – Ordered to be published

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

Ballarat – C243 Part 1

Bass Coast – C169, GC189

Boroondara – C405

Greater Geelong – C432

Greater Shepparton – C243

Kingston – C228

Knox – GC189

Latrobe – GC189

Mitchell – C177, GC249

Queenscliffe – C41

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC279, VC290

Whittlesea – GC249

Wyndham – GC189

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Building Act 1993* – SR 76

*Local Government Act 1989* – SR 77

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 73, 74, 77

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* – Ministerial Order No 1478 – Order Amending Ministerial Order No 1228 – Victorian Institute of Teaching Registration Fees

#### **PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Bail Amendment Act 2025* – ss 11 and 12 – 26 August 2025 (*Gazette S436, 19 August 2025*)

*Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025* – s 54A – 1 September 2025 (*Gazette S436, 19 August 2025*).

***Bills*****Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025****Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025***Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:27): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025 and the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025.

**Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025****Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025****Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025****Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025****Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025***Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:27): I inform the house that on 19 August 2025 the Governor gave royal assent to the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025, the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 and the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

**Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025****Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025***Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:28): I have also received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025 and the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

***Motions*****Motions by leave**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (12:28): A question to the Minister for Health: last week the Minister for Health gave an answer that was subsequently contradicted by the Minister of Health –

**The SPEAKER**: Order! Member for Ringwood, is this a point of order or a motion by leave?

**Will FOWLES**: It is a motion by leave.

**The SPEAKER**: You need to say, 'I move, by leave'.

**Will FOWLES**: I move, by leave:

That I table the letter from the Minister for Health that corrects the record relative to the answer that was given in the chamber.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:29): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for ignoring the review of Victoria's reportable conduct scheme recommendations to urgently provide adequate resources and to reform the scheme to make sure abuse can be reported and investigated immediately and properly.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for ignoring the pleas of the children's commissioner two years ago, who warned children would be at risk if the government did not fund the reportable conduct scheme, leaving vulnerable children in reported abusive situations, resulting in hundreds of children being abused in our childcare system.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemn the Allan Labor government for allowing the children's commissioner position to remain vacant without leadership for months, even when this crisis was publicly exposed, leaving Victorian children at further risk of abuse.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for the high numbers of children and young people known to child protection continuing to die from lack of oversight and system failures.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for leaving the child protection workforce chronically understaffed, with a high turnover of workers who are inexperienced, underqualified and overburdened. At-risk children are having their cases closed prematurely and are not referred to services.

**Leave refused.**

**Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:31):** I move, by leave:

That this house directs the Minister for Health to correct the record in *Hansard*, which contradicts her public statements about the investigation into the incident at Maroondah Hospital.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:31):** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for thousands of reported incidents of children's abuse being ignored, mostly in residential care, where there were 5400 reported incidents of abuse between January 2020 and September 2024, including physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:31):** 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 pm on 28 August 2025:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025

Statute Law Revision Bill 2025

Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025.

We have a very important program ahead of us this week, and I might just begin by indicating that we will also of course, subject to the will of the house, continue to debate the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. I take this opportunity to

thank the Manager of Opposition Business for the way that she has worked with me to accommodate a first and second reading being brought on immediately today.

But to the government business program and the bills that are before us: the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill is a really important piece of legislation because it is about ensuring that the highest quality care is delivered, always, to people in residential aged care in this state. We know that older people are increasingly entering residential aged care later in life. The good news is we are all living longer, but we are living longer with some more complex health conditions that often mean that we will spend the last few years of our lives in residential aged care. I am really proud of the fact that here in Victoria we have a public residential aged care system that is second to none. I have got to tell you it is the envy of our health ministers right around the nation, and I will tell you why. In other jurisdictions we have hospitals that are full of older patients who actually are medically well but have nowhere to go to or are medically fit to be discharged but have nowhere to go to. Here in Victoria, because we have a public system, we are able to accommodate people who, quite frankly, the private sector is not interested in. It is why strong public services are always so vital for people who have very complex medical needs, people who have complex behavioural challenges and people who do not have family members who are able to advocate for them. Some of the most vulnerable older people will find a home and the very best care in public residential services here, led and supported by the Allan Labor government.

I suppose it is probably at this point that I should mention that it is only Labor governments that will protect public residential aged care, because we know that those on the other side of the chamber have not seen a care service they do not want to privatise. Nonetheless, what we are doing is ensuring, through this amendment bill, that as people are required to take perhaps multiple medications, which does indeed increase the risk of medicine-related problems, only nurses can administer medications in residential aged care facilities. This amendment complements reforms led by the Albanese Labor government which ensure that there are actually nursing staff in residential aged care, because we have got to hold the private sector to account here and make sure that they do deliver the care that Victorians expect. So this is an important bill, and I know that people on this side of the house welcome the opportunity to get up and talk about it and, for many of them, to talk about the fantastic residential aged care, including of course the public residential aged care, that is in their electorates delivering first-class care.

There is the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill. Of course we know the grand prix makes a huge contribution to the life and the economy of this state. The bill before us is about ensuring that we can continue to support the grand prix in a manner that balances the safe operation of the event with the needs of the community. Finally, we have got the Statute Law Revision Bill. As is the practice, this bill is a mechanism for reviewing Victoria's statute books and is required in order to ensure the Victorian statutes remain clear, relevant and accurate. So it is another full program from the Allan Labor government, one that is focused on the things that matter to the people of Victoria and one which I have great pleasure in commending to the house. I look forward to the opposition perhaps even supporting the government business program.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:37): I rise to contribute to the government business program debate today, and I note that already this morning the government have introduced and immediately second read the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. As the Leader of the House indicated, we have been working together over the last few days to be able to support introducing the bill swiftly to the house, because, as our Shadow Attorney-General has already indicated in his second-reading speech, whilst it is timid in its approach and it does not do everything that could possibly be done in a bill, it certainly goes some way to making children safer, and that should be an absolute priority. Certainly the Victorian Liberals and Nationals have a laser focus when it comes to putting the safety of our children first. The safety of Victorian children should be an absolute priority of this government.

But we all know that it has taken a very long time for this tired Labor government to come to the table to introduce this bill. We do not want to do anything that delays the progress of this bill through the Parliament today and this week, which is precisely why we will not be opposing the government business program – to enable this to have swift passage to the best extent possible. But we do remind the house and the Victorian people that it was the Victorian Ombudsman who identified significant risks to Victorian children three years ago. As the Shadow Attorney-General has said repeatedly, this Labor government not only did not act but did not have the decency or courtesy to even respond to the Victorian Ombudsman, who take pride in the work, research and investigations that they do. So three years ago this Labor government could have acted, could have introduced this legislation and other legislation to make Victorian children safer, but did not. The government did nothing.

And then even three weeks ago you will recall that the Victorian Liberals and Nationals proposed legislation that would implement all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman, yet this Labor government voted that down. We could have been doing this three weeks ago, but Labor voted that down. Now they have brought it – they have had a rapid review – and still this particular piece of legislation before the chamber today does not even implement all of the recommendations of this rapid review. So one has to wonder what on earth this Labor government is doing. Why are they delaying prioritising the safety of Victorian children? But slow to the piece, they are introducing – again not enough, but some – changes through this Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. We want to do everything that we can, whilst it is not enough and does not go far enough, to make sure that it has passage to the best extent possible through the chamber.

There are a couple of other bills that the government will seek to get to this week. There is the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025, and our shadow minister for sport will be able to come in and talk to that, and a number of other members on our side who have residents impacted by this will actually be able to come in and talk to that particular bill. The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 is another important piece of legislation that will be debated this week on the government business program. There is also the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, which is a bill that I understand seeks to amend something like 70 pieces of legislation. It looks like a sweep has been done on the government side to update even some syntax, grammar and punctuation – full stops and these kinds of things – in the various pieces of legislation that need revision to make sure that they are contemporary and up to date. And of course the government have also indicated that they may take some time to return to the budget take-note motion, and we hope they will, because it will give us another opportunity to say how bad the budget is.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (12:42): May I commence by saying it is really pleasing to hear that the opposition will not be opposing the government business program this week, and as the Leader of the House just indicated, it is nice to be able to thank the Manager of Opposition Business for the collaborative approach from those opposite, especially towards the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025.

The government business of this week covers some broad ground. As the Manager of Opposition Business was just talking about, the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, referred to by some as the ‘dots and dashes’ bill, sorts out a lot of grammatical errors and typos. Sometimes people may sort of think that is not that important, but it actually is. The Deputy Speaker and I were discussing this, and he indicated that it is the ‘We ate Grandma’ bill. Where you place the comma has a direct impact on how you understand that sentence – ‘We ate, Grandma’ or ‘We ate Grandma’. So where a comma is placed is incredibly important. While some may mock those bills, they are actually pretty pertinent to making sure that our legislation is accurate and the intention is reflected in what is actually written there.

More seriously, we are dealing with the Worker Screening Act 2020, and it is a very important bill that we bring into the chamber this week. I know that there will be really heartfelt contributions and discussions brought forth, because we all come in with our own stories to this chamber. We all represent our communities, and we try to do it to our very, very best ability, especially with legislation

which covers very sensitive issues. I know that it is deeply felt by everyone. So to those who will be contributing I will be listening very carefully, and I anticipate that there will be a lot of feeling behind the contributions towards that bill this week.

On a lighter note, we have the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025. I will be looking forward to speaking on this, actually. I was not really much of a fan of the Formula One – I know a lot of people who are – until I went, and then I thought, ‘Aha, now I understand.’ There is an energy there, I tell you what. Boy, is Melbourne the capital for events in Australasia, and this is one of them. Can I say people travel far and wide to come to the Melbourne grand prix. The amendments that we are putting forward will make it so much easier for operations to be as safe as possible and to ensure that it just runs even better than it already does. I have got to say that if anyone has not attended, and you are not much of a petrolhead, I guarantee that if you do go, you will find that it is a bit of a rush. You walk away thinking that we do events incredibly well here in Melbourne – so a bit of a shout-out to those involved.

The Minister for Health and Leader of the House discussed the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. She definitely made a good contribution; I do not want to traverse that too much. But I have to say that is an incredibly important bill as well. We are living longer, we have an ageing population and we need to ensure that those who do end up in care are taken care of with as much dignity, care and consideration as possible. I think it is really important that whenever we are looking at the entire care sector – be it children, be it the elderly or the aged, or be it people with disability – we always do so with their best interests first and foremost. This is another bill which actually goes to addressing that and ensuring that those who end up at that stage, who are in care, are treated with as much compassion and dignity as possible.

Every time I contribute on the government business program, which I quite enjoy doing, I do like to reflect on the fact that we all bring those stories in. I know I mentioned it just before, but it is really important when we stand in our place that we consider those we represent as well as our own experiences. I think it really provides a very rich tapestry in this chamber. I think it would surprise a lot of people who do not often watch Parliament if they could actually hear the contributions. Outside of the hustle and bustle of question time, there are some amazing contributions made here on a regular basis. I do enjoy listening to them all, and I commend the government business program.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (12:47): I think what the member for Monbulk meant when she said the antics of question time was the theatre sports, perhaps, of question time – which I know she and I are both fans of. As the Manager of Opposition Business stated, we will not be opposing the government business program today, which I am sure is a nice surprise. But given it has been three years since the Victorian Ombudsman’s report and three weeks since the member for Kew introduced a bill to tighten the Worker Screening Act 2020, it is time finally to act. As the Shadow Attorney-General has stated, it is a timid bill and it does not include any of those recommendations from the Ombudsman or from the rapid review. The most important thing that we do in this place is not only represent our communities but help protect them, and it is time that we got on with that. It is well and truly overdue. With that in mind, given this is such an important bill on the program today, I am actually going to cut this really short so we can get on with the business of the house.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (12:48): I am delighted to rise to speak on the government business program. This government has brought through an extraordinary amount of legislation, of which I am very proud. There is rarely a government business program that I do not wish I could speak on every time, because it is such a wonderful reflection of all that we are committed to on this side of the house.

I am delighted to hear that the program will be supported by those on the other side. Of course the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 is an incredibly important piece of legislation. I am delighted that those on the other side of the aisle will support us, because of course when we are at our best, we all work with one view, and that is to protect



the people of Victoria. I am delighted that there will be no political games about this, that those on the other side understand the importance of this bill and are happy to support the bill because of the very nature of the bill. With matters like these, there is no place for political games. I think it is important that we work together as one to get this through, rather than seek short-term political gain at the expense of people in our community.

The government business program of course also includes the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025, and again this bill speaks to this government's commitment to protecting and legislating for the most vulnerable in our communities. We have a very proud record in terms of the public aged care system, and this just strengthens that commitment that we have shown to date. I do remember during the awful times of COVID how well and extraordinarily our public aged care system held up and protected our older members of the community. This bill of course seeks to do the same, as our wonderful Minister for Health has already outlined. People are going into aged care a lot older, which is a wonderful thing, but they are also going in therefore with much more complex needs. So it is very important that we make sure that those needs are being met by people that are suitably qualified. Really ensuring that any medication that they receive is provided by registered nurses or appropriate people is very, very important. Some of those complex needs include medications that are very strong, so it is so important that people who are administering those really know the protocols around how that medication should be delivered. It is a very important bill. As I said, it speaks again to this government's determination at all points to stand by the side of the most vulnerable in our community, and it is only appropriate that we stand with the elder residents in our community.

The government business program today of course also covers the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025, and whilst this is not about the most vulnerable, it is about being progressive and acknowledging the need for change. The original bill from 1994 has been in force for over 30 years, and while it has stood us in good stead up until now, we need to move with the times. I know that those of us on this side of the house always have an eye to a progressive agenda and to making sure we are keeping legislation up to date with the needs of our communities. Of course that leads to the final bill, the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, and again I would say this bill is all about keeping up.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:53): Today I rise to speak on the government business program and reiterate that we will not be opposing this bill that the government is putting forward today, the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, which is not actually on the government business program but has been introduced because it is an incredibly important piece of legislation. None of us over on this side deny that. In fact we will not delay or oppose this bill. Anything that can be done to make Victorian children even slightly safer is worthwhile, but disappointingly that is exactly what this bill does – it only makes them slightly safer.

It is disappointing that the government blocked the bill we put forward three weeks ago, which would have implemented all the recommendations from the Victorian Ombudsman and gone even further than this bill, which we saw for the first time last night – much further than that goes. It is so disappointing that the government have had three years to respond to the Ombudsman's recommendations but they have absolutely ignored the recommendations. It is more disappointing as well to find that none of those recommendations are in this bill that we will be debating today. We should be dealing with the cost-of-living issues, roads or crime, but instead we are dealing with Labor's fallout from their inaction.

Roads are falling apart in regional Victoria, and this is despite the desperate pleas from our communities to fix them, particularly in South-West Coast. Experts are telling me that this neglect will cost billions to fix, and they actually are stating it is a legislative failure of government to perform its obligations under the legislation. When the Minister for Roads and Road Safety just recently insinuated that there are less cars being damaged on our roads, this went further to insulting my community. When they would not even release the data to support that, it just shows an arrogance –

an arrogance that we are seeing in this government business program, in which we are not dealing with some of the things that we need to, such as the cost of living.

We should be dealing with the fact that families are talking to me constantly about the challenges they have got. But in the government business program we are not seeing that, just like we did not see the working with children check bill in the program. Instead we have the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, which fixes up some errors in 70 pieces of legislation that are required to be fixed that this government has failed in. But I know the community in South-West Coast would much rather see, especially with their rates notices that are just hitting their mailboxes at the moment and those taxes that they are going to be absolutely –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member on her feet is failing to address the government business program. She is waxing far and wide on a range of topics, none of which are related to the government business program.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for South-West Coast to come back to the motion before the house, the government business program.

**Roma BRITNELL:** In the government business program, as I said, is the Statute Law Revision Bill, which will fix 70 pieces of legislation. I have no doubt one of those pieces of legislation refers to drugs and alcohol, and they are some of the things that we should be talking about today in this government business program and in the next few days, because we had the minister come down to our region and make out as though they were being very supportive of our community by supporting projects like the Lookout in South-West Coast when actually they are not – the government are not supporting our community. They have had years to support the Lookout. It is eight years that the community have been putting it forward, and the committee have done everything they need to do so they can get this Lookout drug and alcohol centre built. Instead we have got a minister procrastinating and putting \$100,000 on the table instead of actually dealing with this project that we need dealt with.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member on her feet is defying your ruling that she come back to debating the government business program. I ask you to bring her back to the program.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for South-West Coast, come back to the government business program.

**Roma BRITNELL:** As I said, with the government business program, we have many things that should have been on the table. Instead we have a government business program that is not dealing with the challenges in the electorates.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**Roma BRITNELL:** In response to the manager of government business, I think it is only appropriate that I get to speak, as I should do for the government business program, without interruption. I am speaking on the government business program. I am speaking to the Statute Law Revision Bill, I am speaking to the worker screening amendment bill and I am speaking about the fact that our communities are disappointed in the Labor government because they are not dealing with the challenges that we are seeing in South-West Coast with our roads and the taxes they are putting into the arena for our community to have to deal with.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Ashwood electorate**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (12:59): I would like to share some of the great things happening across the Ashwood district, which I am sure you will be enthralled about.

Earlier this month I joined my federal colleague the member for Chisholm Carina Garland to announce two exciting social housing projects right there in my patch. Through the latest round of the Housing Australia Future Fund the ageing estates on Alamein Avenue will be completely redeveloped. This is something my constituents and I have been asking for for a very long time. I thank the Minister for Housing and Building for making sure this got on the list. As well as that, there is a new low-rise project that will be built on Electra Avenue. These projects mean safer, more modern homes for local residents, support for construction jobs and greater housing choice for families in our district.

Back in July I had the pleasure of visiting Ashburton Primary School with the Deputy Premier to see the schoolwide positive behaviour program in action. I thank principal Justin Hone and his wonderful team for our welcome. Since 2018 this initiative has been improving student wellbeing, engagement and behaviour across many schools, and it will be expanded to more than 400 schools by 2028.

Yesterday I got to visit Holmesglen TAFE with a member for Southern Metro in the other place, Mr John Berger, to see the amazing new upgrades there.

But I am going to stop there, because I want to thank Kishaya Samarakoon from Huntingtower school, who is our work experience person, who wrote this members statement and did a fantastic job in our office for the week. She will go very, very far indeed.

#### **Kilbreda College**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:00): I would like to congratulate the new principal of Kilbreda College on her appointment. Stephanie Smyth has been appointed after a year of dedicated service as acting principal and eight years as the assistant principal. With almost two decades of experience in education, Stephanie brings, in my view, invaluable expertise to the job. She brings youthful enthusiasm and new direction to Kilbreda College, and I wish her all the very best in pursuing that new, exciting role.

#### **Friends of Black Rock House**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:01): I would also like to remark on the annual general meeting of the Friends of Black Rock House, which occurred on Sunday. I was accompanied by my son Charlie to that meeting. I would like to especially congratulate someone who was presented with life membership of that organisation, Geoffrey Goode OAM. Geoffrey Goode is a rare person who has dedicated the majority of his life to the service of others, whether it be through his service on the former Sandringham council, where he himself as a councillor played a magnificent role in preserving Black Rock House for future generations, which is why he received that life membership acknowledgement on the weekend, or whether it be his work with the Proportional Representation Society or the Beaumaris Conservation Society. We thank Geoffrey Goode OAM for his service to the community, and we also thank Carolyn Brown OAM for her 10 years as president. She stepped down from the committee this year. Friends of Black Rock House is a great organisation.

#### **Power saving bonus**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (13:02): I just want to take this opportunity to remind folks in my electorate that eligible families are now able to apply for and receive our government's \$100 power saving bonus. I cannot express to the house how popular this program has been for folks in Melbourne's west. I know versions of the power saving bonus that we have run in previous years, whilst more expansive, had folks lining up for assistance right across my electorate. Not only was it popular for families and households, it made a real difference, and this is especially the case for folks who are eligible for this round, including seniors in our local community and Victorians on concession cards. For some households \$100 might not seem a lot of money, but when you have got that unexpected expense or you are trying to save that little bit extra this month, \$100 off your power bills does help.

I encourage everyone in my electorate who may be eligible, whether they are a pensioner or concession card holder or whether they are a veteran or on a healthcare card, to hop online and go to the Victorian Energy Compare website with their latest bill and claim this support for their energy bills. If you need any help, you can pop down to my office in Williams Landing, we will give you a cup of tea and have some bickies, and my team and I will be more than happy to assist you with applying.

### **Regional Victoria**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (13:03): Last week I had the privilege of joining Lady Penelope and Christine from Sunassist on a round of Meals on Wheels in Mildura. It was a laugh a minute with these two incredible Sunassist volunteers, who get as much out of it as those that they visit. Their warmth, efficiency and dedication to looking after our most vulnerable locals are nothing short of inspiring. I want to sincerely thank them, the whole Sunassist team and every single one of their volunteers for the incredible work that they do day in, day out to keep our community connected and cared for.

I also want to take a moment of personal pride to congratulate my parents Rosie and Tori Ficarra, who have once again been named runners-up in the Showcase Jewellers Retailer of the Year awards.

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM**: I know. This is the fifth time they have been recognised as finalists, having won the award twice since 2005. For a small family business in a small town to compete against more than 140 stores nationally and consistently be ranked among the best is testament to their hard work, customer care, the old man's stories, no doubt, and community spirit.

Regional Victoria continues to punch well above its weight whilst getting absolutely spanked by the Allan Labor government, and both Sunassist and my parents' retail Showcase store are proof that commitment, service and heart can make a lasting impact in small communities.

### **Bayswater Library**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:05): It was great to be out with the mayor of Knox council and representatives from Knox council to check out the works underway at the new Bayswater Library. Relocated from the front to the rear of the shops, it is way bigger, and it has got so many cool and exciting spaces for our community and in particular young people – some really exciting bespoke spaces. I am proud that the Allan Labor government has delivered funds and that Knox council has worked with the shopping centre to deliver a new space that will be officially open very soon – I think in the next month or two.

### **Power saving bonus**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:05): As well, the \$100 power saving bonus program is open. It is open for eligible concession card holders. I tell you, my office was getting calls yesterday. There are thousands of people on the website, there are thousands of people applying, and it is all about the Labor government putting money back in the pockets of people who need it most. Of course my office is always very happy to assist anyone who may need assistance with their applications. In the first instance you can call 1800 000 832. Even if you are not eligible for this program, the \$100 power saving bonus – we have run a lot of rounds – you can still go and compare your energy bills to get a better price, get a cheaper rate and save hundreds of dollars on energy bills.

### **Working from home**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:06): As well, I am very happy about the working from home policy that the Allan Labor government has announced. It has been extremely popular and super well received by our community. Consultation and engagement is underway, and I cannot wait to see this policy rolled out – only delivered by an Allan Labor government.

**Kew future leaders speech competition**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (13:06): The Kew electorate speech competition is in full swing this month, and I have been run off my feet getting around to local schools to judge round 1 of speeches delivered by dozens of students across the electorate in years 5 to 6 and years 11 to 12. The competition asks students to deliver a 3-minute speech outlining their vision for Victoria, not dissimilar to a first speech in the Parliament. Many of the speeches, if not all of the speeches, have been incredibly powerful and moving. Youth mental health was an issue so many students raised, including winners Harvey from Kew East Primary, Audrey from Camberwell Girls, Dylan from Trinity, Madeliene from Chatham Primary, Radin from Greythorn Primary and Maya from Fintona. Several students also spoke on community safety, including Prachi from Balwyn High, Axel and Harvey from Trinity, Liam from St Bede's and William from Greythorn Primary. James from Xavier and Rohan from Kew High tackled the hot topic of AI, while Alessandra from Camberwell Girls highlighted the importance of financial literacy in the curriculum. Chester from Kew East Primary, Nicholas from Xavier, Aya from Methodist Ladies College and Campbell from Xavier spoke passionately about homelessness and the issue of housing affordability for younger generations. The grand final will be held in September, like other grand finals in this state, here at Parliament, where the winners from each school will compete in the junior and senior divisions. I look forward to their competition.

**Vasey RSL Care**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:08): Last Monday saw Vietnam Veterans Day held on the anniversary of the Long Tan battle. I just want to acknowledge our Vietnam veterans and all that they gave to our communities. For me, it was a delight the very following day to meet with an extraordinary group of people from Vasey RSL Care. In October a remarkable group of cyclists will ride 460 kilometres from Warnambool to Box Hill in the inaugural Tour de V Centre. Their purpose is both inspiring and urgent: to raise awareness of veteran homelessness and to highlight the services available to those who have served our nation but now find themselves without a safe place to call home. The Tour de V Centre will shine a light on the incredible work of RSL Care's V Centre veteran empowerment program in Ivanhoe. Opened earlier this year, the V Centre is the first of its kind in the country, providing safe accommodation alongside tailored support services to help veterans rebuild their lives. This ride will acknowledge the work that they do, and I commend Vasey RSL Care and all the riders.

**Community safety**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (13:09): Neo-Nazis are organising a parade of hatred and racism in Melbourne on Sunday. Built on fear, it is meant to intimidate and divide. While not so long ago white supremacists organised in secret, more and more neo-Nazis are showing up in plain sight with no shame and no consequences. The truth is the far right has been growing, recruiting online and exploiting real frustrations around housing and the cost-of-living crises to fuel their racist scapegoating. It follows years of anti-immigrant dog whistling; mainstream media platforming fascists; and negligent governments, like the Victorian Labor government, who have seen this coming from afar and done nothing. But ignoring the problem will not make it go away. Three years ago the inquiry into far-right extremism delivered 12 clear recommendations to tackle the root causes. We need anti-racism and digital literacy education, we need early intervention deradicalisation programs for young men and we need more – not less – youth support services and a crackdown on white supremacist violent organisations. Now that neo-Nazis are organising in plain sight, it is past time the government stepped in and implemented all 12 recommendations. The violent, racist extremism of the far right must be stopped at its root.

**Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:11): I recently had the privilege of visiting and meeting with the team at Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust at Fawkner Memorial Park and Northern Memorial Park, which are such special places for so many families across Melbourne's north as the resting place

of their loved ones. I saw how GMCT is working closely with local religious congregations to ensure that our cemeteries and memorial parks are inclusive and reflective of the needs and traditions of Greenvale's diverse faith communities. I want to thank Mr Ardimulam Pillay, national president of FESKOVA Australia, for his leadership, dedication and advocacy in working closely with me and the GMCT to ensure that Hindu, Sikh and other funerary practices can be safely accommodated through sensitive and important upgrades at Fawkner Memorial Park.

#### **Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:12): I was delighted to welcome His Excellency the Most Reverend Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil, to our Parliament last week. Archbishop Warda is a tireless champion of religious toleration, freedom and interfaith dialogue and respect. His leadership helped to rebuild and sustain shattered communities after the depredations of ISIS, and his passion for education and health care is inspirational and led him to found the Catholic University in Erbil. His visit was a source of great joy for our Chaldean community here in Melbourne, and I thank him for his generosity and unwavering leadership to so many.

#### **Vietnam Veterans Day**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (13:12): I was delighted to join veterans and members of the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee for a solemn Vietnam Veterans Day memorial service last week at Anzac Park. We remembered the 524 Australians who gave their lives in Vietnam, and I thank Kevin and all of the members of the committee for their tireless work in remembering them.

#### **Ethan Calway**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (13:12): I am pleased to rise today to talk about a few things. If anyone has watched *The Voice* lately, you would see a young man there, Ethan Calway from Warragul, who made all four seats turn. Unfortunately, I do not watch reality TV, but my daughter actually brought this to my attention. Well done to Ethan. He went to school with my daughter, and he is a good kid, so hopefully he goes all the way.

#### **Warragul Football and Netball Club**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (13:13): The Warragul footy club has made the finals for the first time since 2016. I was there on the weekend watching them play Drouin. They are progressing to the finals and they will be playing Moe, so this will not just be Warragul versus Moe, this will be Narracan versus Morwell, my next-door neighbour. I wish all the boys the best of luck.

#### **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (13:13): Lastly, we are coming into fire season, and now that the emergency services levy is on our rates notices and Victorians are paying those exorbitant levies, I have so many CFA and SES members in my area that the government actually now needs to invest in this. We are coming into a fire season. We have appliances that are not up to scratch, and we have equipment that is not up to scratch. They brought the tax in in the name of supporting the CFA and the SES, so my suggestion to the government is: put your money where your mouth is and fix the problems.

#### **Chisholm TAFE**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:14): I was having a bit of a flashback there. I remember playing for Churchill against Moe. I have had some hard games there.

**Wayne Farnham**: You would've king hit them.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Not quite, member for Narracan. It was great this week to join the members of the Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula at the brand new Chisholm TAFE for a bit

of brekkie and a bit of a chat about what is going on in the sector and to give them a tour of the new facility. Well done to Josh Sinclair and the committee. They do such a great job.

### **Frankston and Mornington Peninsula business festival**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:14): It was also amazing to see the Frankston Arts Centre alive with the Frankston Business Collective's Frankston and Mornington Peninsula business festival, which helps futureproof businesses. Well done to Bernadine Geary, David Friend and the amazing Wayne Holdsworth, who spoke on behalf of SmackTalk about some very, very personal issues and some very powerful issues.

### **Vietnam Veterans Day**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:15): Also, a great event was held at the Frankston RSL, the Vietnam veterans commemorative service. Members of our community were able to lay wreaths and remember family members and those who served, whether as national service or through already participating in the army, navy or air force in Victoria, especially those in Frankston and surrounds, who served our community so well. We are so proud of them.

### **Anthony Fernandez**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (13:15): Today I rise to pay tribute to the life of Anthony Fernandez. Anthony's life was defined by his selfless commitment to others. Whether it was through the Lions club, Rotary, St Vincent de Paul or otherwise, he gave his time, energy and heart to those who needed it most. Anthony was also a pioneer in our political community. He fought against racism and division, and he worked tirelessly to build bridges across Victoria's multicultural communities. Even through the toughest of personal health challenges, Anthony never wavered in his dedication. I first met Anthony when he went out of his way to stand on pre-poll for me whilst he was between stints of dialysis. It is said by his family that he cheated death for over a decade. We are all the better for every extra moment we got to have with him here.

Anthony was a devoted husband to Val and a loving father to Michael. He was a man of deep Catholic faith, which guided his life and gave him strength. He was a Liberal Party stalwart. He was also a proud and lifelong St Kilda supporter. On behalf of the Parliament of Victoria and the community he served so faithfully, we give thanks for Anthony's remarkable life. His legacy of service, compassion and faith will live on, and he will be deeply missed. Vale, Anthony Fernandez.

### **Onam festival**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:17): I recently had the honour of attending the Onam festival held by Casey Malayalee at Arthur Wren Hall in Hampton Park alongside my colleagues the member for Cranbourne and the federal member for Holt. The Onam festival celebrates the bounty of nature and the homecoming of the asura king Mahabali, whose spirit is said to visit Kerala during this period. The celebration is marked by a beautiful display of culture through feasting, dance and song, fostering unity and bringing community, friends and family together. Casey Malayalee has a wonderful celebration, and I was grateful to be there to participate in the occasion alongside hundreds from this fabulous community, many of whom reside in the outer south-eastern suburbs. The event featured fantastic music and dance performances, spectacular traditional dress and delicious food – a true display of our vibrant and diverse multicultural local area.

Casey Malayalee is a not-for-profit organisation doing excellent work supporting our community, particularly those who have recently arrived in Australia, through various cultural, social and educational initiatives. The work they do is instrumental in preserving and promoting the culture, traditions and language of Kerala for future generations. I would like to thank the president, Ajith Kumar, of Casey Malayalee for his invitation and to thank him and all organisers and volunteers for their hard work in putting this event together.

**Horsham West and Haven Primary School road safety**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (13:18): I would like to briefly raise a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to direct the Victorian School Building Authority to develop a traffic and parking management plan for Horsham West primary school. This has been an issue for an extended period of time. There have been a number of near misses on that road, and I urge the minister to step up and provide that school with support to make that area safe.

**Agriculture sector**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (13:19): I condemn the Allan Labor government for their continuous attacks on farming communities right across Victoria. We have learned over the past couple of weeks of more cuts to Agriculture Victoria. We are hearing that 49 staff will be lost. That includes a number of frontline scientists who are responsible for amazing research that allows those blue-sky ideas to support our farmers so that they continue to be the best farmers in the world. We cannot see this continuous cut of scientists and the established noxious weeds and pests program – things that help our farmers. We know that this is not the only round of cuts. We have also got the Silver review coming through, and our farmers are still reeling and wondering how on earth they are going to continue to put food on the table and put fibre on our backs when they have got an emergency services tax coming. Our roads continue to deteriorate; getting our freight to market by rail is just so difficult to do and very expensive. Labor do not support the agricultural sector, and it is our Victorian farmers that are paying the ultimate price.

**Future Footscray**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (13:20): Future Footscray is a working group I established in 2023 to work with residents, business, Maribyrnong council, Victoria University, the Western Bulldogs and others towards a strategic vision for how our community can best capture the value that transformative investments such as the new Footscray Hospital will deliver to our community. I am proud of what the group has accomplished to date and even prouder that the City of Maribyrnong will soon officially take ownership of the group, where it will continue to provide important strategic advice that will help shape our community's future.

**Footscray electorate sporting clubs**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (13:20): In other local news, the Footscray Rugby Club has reached new heights, claiming the minor premiership across all three senior grades of the first division. I am told this is a first for any club in Rugby Victoria's history. This on-field success has undoubtedly been driven by their off-field success, with more players and supporters than ever before. They are one of the biggest clubs in the league and driven solely by the hard work of the club's members and leadership team. And the Footscray Lacrosse Club has also had a successful run recently, with the under-14s, under-17s and state league reserve teams all qualifying for their respective grand finals. The inner west continues to kick goals, metaphorically and otherwise, when it comes to community sport. Best of luck to all in the upcoming finals.

**Electric bikes**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (13:21): Don't you just love take-out? The seat of Prahran has got the most extraordinary takeaway restaurants, providing residents in the seat with fabulous food from Chinese and Vietnamese to Indian to Eurasian – a whole range of different types of food. Uber Eats, Hungry Panda and DoorDash all offer an absolutely brilliant service. However, we are facing a crisis on our roads. It has been drawn to my attention, not only being a local but also having found out from people who live in my local area, particularly those that are sight impaired or that have disabilities, that some of these e-bikes are creating absolute havoc on our roads, and I am speaking up for my local residents. Recent research by Monash University has exposed the alarming reality of illegal e-bike operations in our commercial delivery sector. With over 27,000 vehicles monitored across Melbourne, almost half were delivery e-bikes, and the findings are deeply concerning. We find



that some are reaching speeds of up to 54 kilometres an hour and the legal speed is 25 kilometres an hour. These are not isolated incidents; there are collisions, and they have surged by 82 per cent, so we are absolutely wanting to see greater regulation in this space to make certain that there is safety and security on our roads so that we can actually have great services taken home.

### **Geelong electorate multicultural events**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (13:23): Geelong is a beautiful multicultural city with an incredible capacity for connection, reflection and celebration. Multicultural communities take great pleasure sharing their cultures with our community. This month in particular I have had the honour and privilege of attending so many beautiful celebrations that highlight our rich cultural tapestry.

The Djilang Wellbeing Celebration Dinner brought together some incredible individuals from different backgrounds to share their stories and experiences. The evening had a focus on social connection and mental wellbeing, which is so important in our communities. Fostering these values makes a stronger, more united and healthier community. I would like to thank Alison Starkey and her staff for their work in creating an inclusive, respectful and joyful event, and a special thankyou to Mila from the Geelong Filipino community for her tireless efforts in bringing this event together.

The following night I attended the Hindu community of Geelong's Janmashtami celebration. It was an evening of dancing, storytelling and community bonding. I would like to also thank Anand Dogra and the members of the Hindu community of Geelong for their incredible warmth, openness and willingness to share their culture.

On Saturday I attended the Teej Nepali Hindu festival. The night was a vibrant, colourful celebration of women, and I thank Niraj Karanjeet and the Geelong Nepalese Association for hosting this event.

On Sunday I was proud to attend the celebration of the 34th anniversary of Ukraine independence.

### **Chinese community**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (13:24): It was a pleasure to attend the celebration of the 76th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 54th anniversary of Australia–China diplomatic relations. Hosted by Mr An Son Hong, the leader of the Australian Chinese community in Victoria and national chairman of the National Council of Australian Federal Chinese Associations from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, it was a wonderful celebration of the culture, tradition and strong friendship. The Allan Labor government has invested more than \$2 million through the Chinese Community Infrastructure Fund to help Chinese community organisations upgrade the places where people come together.

### **Carwatha College P–12**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (13:25): I also recently attended Carwatha College's multicultural day, a celebration of over 60 different cultures represented at the college. It was celebrated with dance, music and fun activities. A big congratulations to the SRC team, who put on a spectacular day.

### **Mulgrave electorate Indian community**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (13:25): Recently my community celebrated Indian Independence Day, on 15 August, a day that celebrates India's gaining of independence after over 200 years of British colonialism. I was honoured to celebrate this day with the Melbourne Kannada Sangha community in my electorate with recitals from some of the youngest in the community along with food and great conversations. The organisers even had me making dosas, although my skills were probably a little rusty and they ended up like pancakes rather than dosas. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the committee.

**Harkaway Hills College**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (13:26): Recently I had the absolute pleasure of attending the Harkaway Hills College musical *Singin' in the Rain Jr.* It was absolutely fantastic. I am now going to attempt to do a Staikos and name every kid that was in the class. Let us see how we go. The amazing cast, who did a fabulous job, were Felicity VR, Anika, Sienna, Serah, Emilia, Clare, Annette, Dominique, Olivia M, Juliana, Valeria, Andrea P, Christabel, Sara S, Monica, Grace C, Andrea M, Hayley, Maya, Bethany, Evangelene, Sophie, Georgia, Ayana, Raquel, Bonnie, Maria D, Imy, Mia, Aisha, Emily, Senuthi, Shahini, Isabella, Kimberley, Amelia, Aisha, Aimee, Alanna, Angelin, Ann, Arianna, Christine, Danielle, Emily, Felicity H, Grace S, Kiara, Merin, Neihara, Olivia H, Rose R, Sara S, Sophie and Zoe; and of course the amazing backstage team of Jessica, Benita, Adrienne, Sophie, Charlotte, Sasha, Mariana, Hannah, Lucia, Adria and Olivia S. I did it; I am so happy. Congratulations, girls. You did such an incredible job. It was so great to be there.

**Country Fire Authority Werribee brigade**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (13:27): A few weeks ago it was my honour to attend the Werribee fire brigade annual dinner marking the 110th anniversary of the brigade's establishment. It was a little bit different attending this year as a 'dignitary', and on behalf of the Wyndham community it was an honour to recognise their service to us all. For the sake of posterity, I would like to recognise award recipients Danny, Jeremy, Matthew Packer, Vito, Vilma, Adam, Dom, Malcolm, Belinda, Michael, Matt Mannix, Damien, Brett, Lino, John and Darryl. I would also like to recognise Robert Mummery, who received his 50 years of service. Congratulations to Emily Goegan for receiving the Pengelly Award for non-operational members, and to the newly minted firefighter of the year Trent Bartels – welcome to the club.

**Australian Karen Organisation**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (13:28): Finally, I would like to thank the Australian Karen Organisation for inviting me to their wrist-tying ceremony. Congratulations to the organisers on a successful event. In the Karen language: tah blu doh mah.

**Bills****Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:29): I rise to make a contribution on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. I will follow the lead of the opposition lead speaker in limiting my remarks in order to allow opportunity for others to contribute, noting that this bill was introduced pursuant to standing order 61(3)(b). I also join the manager of government business in thanking the opposition for their support of that process.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the context in which this legislation arrives to us in the chamber. All of us were horrified by the sickening allegations pertaining to an individual who worked across a number of early childhood centres in Melbourne. I think many of us remember where we were when we heard that awful news. We were on our way to Kerang to open a kindergarten, actually, at the Kerang South Primary site, and that should have been a happy occasion for that community and for Sandra George, Brooke Arnold, Paul Fernee and all of the team up there at Gannawarra shire. But of course the dark news, the awful news, from that day did cast a shadow on those events for those who had at that stage heard about that news, and our thoughts very much remain with everyone affected. It certainly sent a shockwave throughout the entire sector, but most particularly our thoughts are with those children and families who were directly affected by the horrendous alleged actions of

that individual. We often talk about what a big step it is for parents, who when they take their child to an early childhood centre are often for the very first time placing their child in the trust of someone else outside of their immediate family. We speak about that when we thank those teachers and educators and other staff for the great work that they do, but we acknowledge in this particular case what a horrific betrayal of that trust these allegations represent.

This legislation comes to us in that context and of course in the context of the steps that the government announced at the time, including but not limited to the rapid review undertaken by Jay Weatherill and Pam White, and the government, as the minister and the Premier have made clear, will implement all 22 recommendations from that review in addition to the other steps already taken with respect to devices, the register and so forth. Those recommendations from that review can broadly be divided into those that are more directly for the Victorian government and those that will involve a national advocacy role, and the legislation that is before us today fits into that first category of more direct Victorian recommendations. It stems from chapter 4 relating to the working with children check scheme and the reportable conduct scheme and specifically from recommendations 6.2 and 6.5. I would like to commend the reviewers for the way they have structured that review and draw the attention of the house to the fact that today's bill also really stems from recommendation 1, which the Premier and the minister have spoken to, and that is that fundamental recommendation to make the safety, rights and best interests of children the paramount consideration for everyone involved in early childhood education and care settings.

I just want to conclude by stressing that it is important that whilst today with this bill we will make changes to the way the secretary and the department administer the working with children scheme, it is also just as important to ensure that those who are in centres and who are responsible on a day-to-day basis for implementing the scheme have the resources and the support that they need. I think the points that the review makes about the nature of some of the operators that we have seen come in to the sector, about some of the very complex business structures that we have seen, are an important context for today's bill and indeed for the broader work being undertaken by the government. I was pleased to see that following Victoria's advocacy the Commonwealth, alongside states and territories, has committed to making the safety, rights and best interests of children the paramount consideration under national law.

The member for Malvern in his remarks I think covered off the specific details of the bill before us, particularly the four sections relating to the bans that correspond to bans in other jurisdictions, the obligations on the secretary to suspend a person's working with children check in the circumstances that the member for Malvern mentioned, the introduction of a power to cancel a working with children clearance when it was granted based on false or misleading information and the increase in time limits for commencing a prosecution for the offence of someone who does that. I will not go through those particulars of the bill again but just conclude by saying that it is an important bill that is part of ongoing work by this government and indeed ongoing work nationally. I thank the Attorney-General for her work on it and I thank Jay Weatherill and Pam White for their contribution, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (13:34): I rise too to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 before the chamber today. From the outset can I, like the member for Malvern, stress that the Liberals and Nationals – the coalition – will always put the safety of children first. We will always err on side of caution in protecting children in this state, because it is the number one responsibility of any government to ensure the most vulnerable in our community are protected and government takes every action it can to ensure the laws protect children in this state. That is why the coalition will be supporting the bill before us today. From the outset can I thank the member for Malvern for the incredible amount of work he has done over recent weeks to highlight the desperate need to strengthen the broken working with children check system in this state. I will acknowledge the government, who provided the briefing late last night and an advance copy of the bill to the opposition to ensure that we were prepared for the debate today.

In 2022 the Victorian Ombudsman warned the government that the working with children check system was broken here in Victoria. In fact the Ombudsman said that the working with children check system in Victoria was the most limited in the country and set out a number of recommendations that would have immediately strengthened the working with children check system to ensure that children were safe in settings right across the state. Whether that is childcare centres, whether that is schools or whether that is sporting clubs, wherever children are under the supervision and the so-called protection of adults, the working with children check system needs to be protecting children in this state. But, sadly, it is simply not the case here in Victoria, because when the Ombudsman made those recommendations three years ago the government failed to act. They did not even have the decency to respond to the Ombudsman.

At the time the Shadow Attorney-General, on behalf of the Victorian Liberals and Nationals, put out a statement saying that we support the Ombudsman's recommendations – that we stand ready to implement those recommendations as a priority. That was three years ago. Fast-forward to six weeks ago, when the horrific allegations of child sexual abuse in child care in Victoria came to light, shattering the trust of parents in this state when it comes to having the confidence to drop their kids off at child care and know that the system is going to protect them. At the time the Premier stood up and said they were going to undertake a review. We did not need a review. We knew what needed to be done, because three years ago the Ombudsman laid out a road map as to how to strengthen the working with children check system in this state. Three years ago the recommendations were there in black and white for the government to pick up and to implement urgently to ensure that children were safe in this state. But instead of picking up those recommendations, three years too late, the government under the Premier's leadership said, 'No, we'll undertake a review; we'll delay action again.'

But the Liberals and Nationals were not prepared to wait, and four weeks ago in this chamber we brought forward new laws that would have fully implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations from three years ago, with commonsense, practical changes to ensure that the secretary can obtain and consider any information that may be relevant to an applicant's suitability to work with children. But not only did the Premier, her ministers and every one of those people sitting opposite vote down that legislation, the bill before us today – a bill that is meant to be designed to keep children safe, to strengthen our working with children check system – still does not pick up the Ombudsman's recommendations. It fails to implement them. I am in disbelief that the government has brought forward a bill today that does not implement those recommendations – that puts at risk the safety of children.

Let us just go to one shocking example. The member for Lowan is sitting at the table with me. Ron Marks in Horsham was under investigation for accessing and holding thousands of child sexual abuse images. Police came in, raided his home, found those images and cut up his working with children check card – his physical card. Yet his digital card remained active, and because of that for years after he was able to go and interact with children, engage with children in schools, in kindergartens and in childcare centres. Had the government implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations at the time in 2022 Ron Marks would have been able to be picked up and his working with children check would have been able to be revoked under the Ombudsman's recommendations. Yet the bill before us today would still allow Ron Marks to have an active working with children check. That is how hollow the bill is before us today.

How does this happen? What is the government doing? These are simple, commonsense, practical changes that will keep children safe. Why are we even debating this? We brought the legislation that would have enacted these to the Parliament four weeks ago. It is right here. The government does not need advice on how to draft it, because it has been done. Why is it not occurring? Why do we need to debate the safety of children in this state?

The government's so-called rapid review went to the limitations of the working with children check. It expressly stated that more needs to be done, and it highlighted the 2022 Victorian Ombudsman

recommendations as needing to be urgently enacted, stating that the current laws are not fit for purpose and that compared to other states and territories Victoria's working with children check framework is among the least flexible in the country. Looking at just recommendation 6.1(a), the government's rapid review states that the working with children check regulatory framework needs to:

Allow unsubstantiated information or intelligence (for example, from police, child protection or other relevant bodies) to be obtained, shared, and considered in order to assess, refuse, temporarily suspend or revoke a Working with Children Check.

That is the first recommendation under the working with children check section. Does this bill implement it – no. So why did we have to wait for the rapid review? What did the rapid review achieve if we are not implementing these reforms today? What are we waiting for? We know the disastrous, horrific consequences for children if these laws are not changed, because we have seen it happen. There are too many examples of children not being safe in this state. It makes me sick to my stomach to think that predators can still hold an active working with children check because the system has loopholes that are allowing them to do so and the government is not closing them. What is the government doing? Where is the Premier?

The Premier stood up last week and said every single recommendation was going to be implemented from her rapid review, and then we get legislation that fails to do so. The number one job of any leader, the Premier first and foremost, is to keep the most vulnerable safe, to keep children safe. Premier, you stood up and said we need to take time to have a review. Well, the review has occurred, and the recommendations are clear. They were clear three years ago. To be clear, we did not need the review to tell us what needed to happen.

The Liberals and Nationals brought these laws to the floor of Parliament four weeks ago and every single member of the government voted them down, and today we have a piece of legislation that takes a couple of tiny steps forward but not enough to keep children safe. The government needs to support our amendments in the other place to ensure that children are protected in this state, and we are doing everything we can to make sure the laws are strong enough to do so.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:44): I rise to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. We need this bill. We need it because it is going to strengthen the working with children check scheme and increase protections for children by preventing people who may pose a risk to children from engaging in child-related work.

I normally say it gives me great pleasure to speak on a bill, but I cannot say that this time in the sense that the content of what initiated this coming to the house today – the allegations – is so upsetting. I was listening to the member for Preston speaking earlier and listening to the member for Kew speaking, and these allegations are beyond horrific. As I said before in this chamber, I am sure all of us had a visceral response when we heard about them. It is good that we are bringing in legislation which works to strengthen the working with children check system. Work had been in progress beforehand as well, and with the rapid review that was undertaken and the 22 recommendations – we will be accepting all of them – all 22 will be implemented and that will be happening as well. From October we will see further legislation coming to the house that will deal with more of the recommendations.

This bill before us will make the following urgent amendments to the Worker Screening Act 2020. It will ensure that a person who is banned from working with children in another jurisdiction will be automatically banned here in the state of Victoria. That is known as a mutual recognition of interstate bans, and I think that is incredibly important. It gives effect to a joint commitment by the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on 15 August. That is only just coming up to two weeks ago, so it is giving immediate effect to that decision made there. It will also allow for immediate suspension of a person's working with children check clearance upon being notified of any change or relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding, pending determination of an assessment. At the moment a person can work for 28 days pending the

natural justice process, but this will suspend it with immediate effect, and that is really important as well. I think that is an incredibly potent part of the bill. It will also introduce a power to cancel a working with children clearance where it was granted based on false or misleading information, and it will increase the time limit for commencing a prosecution of the offence of providing false or misleading information in relation to a worker-screening application or assessment. Currently it is up to 12 months, but this will expand it to five years and six months, as it well should.

As I was saying, the events which have precipitated much debate and concern amongst us all here, the allegations made, are terrible. I had children in child care myself – in long day care as well as family day care and short day care. Between my two kids, they experienced all forms of day care, including grandparents as well. It has been a long time since my children were in care, but I have to say those allegations were horrendous – absolutely horrendous. I know that there are many, many in here who do have their children in care, and I feel deeply for them as well, because it is all far too close to home.

I am very pleased that we are working on this, and I do know of that rapid review – which, as I say, was only handed down at the end of last week, I believe – that every recommendation will be adopted by us as a government and implemented, and I know that there will be further legislation presented in October. At the moment this is the first step. Strengthening the working with children checks is an incredibly important aspect of dealing with care and with people who work with children in this state. We have to get it right, and this is what we are working towards right now.

I just wanted to make a quick comment that implementing the rapid review recommendations will actually go further than the Victorian Ombudsman's report. The rapid child safety review considered child safeguarding much more broadly than the Ombudsman's report of three years ago, including the connections between the working with children check scheme, worker registers and the reportable conduct scheme. So there will be a lot more. It will actually go beyond the Ombudsman's report, and I do look forward to seeing that legislation when it is brought to the house. Being mindful that we have an agreement on shortened times, I will now sit down. I commend this bill to the house.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (13:50): The bill that we are debating now, the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, is a very small step forward to implement what is required to make sure that our children are safe and protected from the people in our community who take egregious and heinous steps towards sexual gratification from our youngest children. I speak to this bill because I am so disappointed that it does not do anything to implement the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman's report made three years ago, and I speak to it with a level of experience because my community of Horsham has had to experience firsthand the flaws of the current working with children check system.

It was in September 2021 that Ronald Marks had a large amount of material seized – numerous hard drives, laptops, phones. They had about a thousand images of children in horrific situations: bestiality, children that appeared to be dead and covered with mud – three-year-old children, they appeared to be – being sexually assaulted. That material was seized in September 2021, and at the time, to their credit, Victoria Police also took Mr Marks's physical working with children check card. Police also made a recommendation to the working with children check unit to have his digital working with children check revoked immediately, as you would expect.

In 2022 the Victorian Ombudsman clearly outlined these exact flaws in the system, and Ronald Marks continued to have a valid working with children check even though he had this horrific information caught on his property, in his possession, which he never, ever disagreed with. The Victorian Ombudsman recommended that we do not wait for charges to be laid to have a digital working with children check revoked. Three years later we have had horrific further allegations made against people working within child care who have still got a valid working with children check. We now have a rapid review but not a rapid response from the Allan Labor government. It is shocking for the parents of children at childcare centres, at kindergartens, at primary schools and at secondary schools in the

Wimmera who have had to see this situation unfold and know that their children were put at risk. The legislation that we are debating today does not close that loophole.

It is a massive failure of the Allan Labor government that they continue to put politics above the protection of vulnerable children. It is nothing more than political arrogance to vote down legislation that would have closed that loophole that our local people have been exposed to simply because the wrong side of politics put the ideas forward and put the work into developing the legislation. It is political arrogance which continues to put our most vulnerable children at risk, and I urge the Labor members to support the amendments which have been put forward, which would ensure that it is made into law that, when people like Mr Marks have material seized and Victoria Police make a recommendation to have a digital working with children check revoked, it is revoked that instant and we protect our children.

I acknowledge our local parents, our kids and our educators who are working through this in my local community, because they feel like they have done the wrong thing in not knowing that Mr Marks, who had this material in his possession, had this record and had these charges looming. I also acknowledge our local Indigenous community, who feel shamed and let down by the entire system. I urge the Allan Labor government to support the amendments put forward by the Liberals and the Nationals to put the safety of our children first and certainly make sure that anybody in our community who is known to have material which is abusive of children is never allowed to set foot in a childcare centre, a kindergarten or a primary school or have a valid digital working with children check. That is the least that any government can do.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:55): A priority of any government must be to keep its people safe, most particularly vulnerable children. Our priority is child safety. And yet Victorian children for years have been let down by this negligent Labor government that has ignored repeated warnings about the broken working with children check system and recommendations to strengthen the system to protect our kids. Labor has done nothing for many years. For many years they have ignored the warnings, and families and children now suffer the deeply distressing consequences of being impacted by sickening abuse by predators in early child care and in state care, whose working with children checks should have never been obtained or, if they had them, should have been cancelled. This is now still a situation that this Labor government grapples with and has failed to act swiftly in addressing. Labor has failed our children.

Today the legislation before us, the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, we will support because it does take a small step forward in strengthening the broken working with children check system – but it does not go far enough. There are still loopholes leaving children at risk. In September 2022, three years ago, the Victorian Ombudsman tabled a report of an investigation into a former youth worker's unauthorised access to private information about children, and the Victorian Ombudsman found that Victoria's working with children check system was among the most limited in Australia. The Ombudsman noted the weakness of Victoria's Worker Screening Act 2020 and urged legislative reform to bring Victoria in line with other Australian states, otherwise our Victorian children would remain at risk. The Labor government not only ignored the recommendations, they did not even respond to them.

At the time of the Victorian Ombudsman's report, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals released a statement through the Shadow Attorney-General which committed that:

A Liberals and Nationals Government will urgently amend the Worker Screening Act to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations and give Victoria's children the protection that they deserve.

The recent scandal of alleged child sexual assault in Victorian childcare centres has put the focus on Labor's failure to act when first warned three years ago. We know that in 2025, in July, the Liberals and Nationals introduced the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals have led the way. Despite Labor failing to do this after the Ombudsman's recommendations three years ago, four weeks ago the Liberals and Nationals

introduced this legislation in order to implement all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman, because we know of the significant concern that our families are facing. We have a situation where our families are suffering unimaginable devastation that their children have been exposed to a predator and have been exposed to, potentially, sexually transmitted disease as a result of the system failures under this Labor government. We introduced that legislation, which would have addressed this, and we would have been able to do it quickly, but Labor voted that down.

This bill before us is weak. It does not acquit the Ombudsman's recommendations that were made three years ago, which is why I certainly hope that the government will take the opportunity to accept the Victorian Liberals' and Nationals' amendments that we will be putting and proposing in the upper house, because that will go some way to be able to address this broken system. Again, our focus should be putting Victorian children's safety first. That should absolutely be the priority. It is dismal that this Labor government again not only ignored the recommendations of the Ombudsman – completely failed to even respond – but failed in their duty of care to Victorian children, and they should be utterly ashamed for doing so. It has been the member for Malvern and the member for Kew who have done exceptional work to –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required by sessional orders to interrupt business. The time has come for question time.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Members*

#### **Minister for Environment**

#### *Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Agriculture will answer questions for the portfolios of environment and outdoor recreation and the Minister for Creative Industries will answer questions for the portfolio of tourism, sport and major events.

### *Announcements*

#### **Victoria Police deaths**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): (*By leave*) I wish to advise the house that a police operation is currently underway in Porepunkah in Victoria's north-east. The Minister for Police and I have been briefed by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, and this situation remains active. Victoria Police officers and all of our first responders show extraordinary bravery and courage every single day. They are the best of us, and the thoughts of all Victorians are with them today. I do ask the Victorian community, particularly those in that beautiful part of the north-east of our state, to follow the advice of Victoria Police and avoid the area. More information will be provided by Victoria Police to the Victorian community as it becomes available.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): (*By leave*) I obviously join the Premier with our thoughts to all Victoria Police and emergency services workers across the state as we speak. Whilst this is still active I will keep my comments very short. But we know with an active situation up there, it is not just the emergency services, it is the local community that is impacted. We obviously hear of lockdowns in schools, and we send out our thoughts to the families, the parents and everyone involved at those schools as well. Can I just put on record that it is on days like today that this Parliament – every person in this place – should be standing side by side with Victoria Police and reminding them that each and every day we will have their back. Every single one of them across the entire state and across the entire country is impacted when events like this happen. We hope there is a quick resolution and more information comes out as soon as possible. But to every single Victoria Police officer: today we stand with you, we stand beside you and we will continue to do that during these events.



*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Early childhood education and care**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): My question is to the Minister for Government Services. Two weeks ago the Premier said of a man who was sacked in 2020 after an investigation found he was grooming and kissing toddlers that ‘immediate steps have been taken to cancel his working with children check’. Why does this man still have an active working with children check?

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:04): We will implement all of the recommendations that have been passed down to us as quickly as possible, and we will also make sure that we get it right, because nothing is more important than the safety of children. That is at the forefront of our decisions. There is legislation before the house today around this matter, and I am not going to breach any parliamentary privilege around that.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question had nothing to do with the legislation before the house. It was about an individual who still has an active working with children check after it was told to this house that it would be immediately cancelled. Why does this person still have a working with children check?

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

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** As the opposition knows, the legislation requires change for that to happen. That change is before the house today.

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the matter of relevance, you have already directed the minister to come back to answering the question. I ask you to renew that ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, come back to answering the question.

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** I am pleased that this government has acted on the recommendations that have been passed down through the rapid review and that legislation is before the house to correct this matter.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Can the minister guarantee that this man has not worked with children in the last two weeks?

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:06): There are over 2 million people that hold working with children checks in this state, and they are subject to ongoing weekly monitoring. We have changed the regulations and put in place more of the regulators talking to that system now and reporting to that system, and there is legislation before the house right now to further improve that system.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very, very simple question: does the minister guarantee that this person is not working with children in Victoria, or doesn’t she know? It is a simple question.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to make your points of order succinctly. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked. The minister has concluded her answer.

**Ministers statements: community safety**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): I can advise the house that earlier today I was briefed by the Prime Minister regarding the Adass Israel Synagogue terrorist investigation and its extraordinary implications for our national security. For the first time since World War II the

Australian government has expelled an ambassador, and we support this decision without reservation, just as we have supported the joint investigation every step of the way.

I will start by saying that this is an ongoing investigation and there are still some facts that we do not know, but here is what we do know. In December last year terrorism shattered the peace in Melbourne and destroyed a synagogue built by Holocaust survivors. The target of this act of terror was Victoria's Jewish community. I visited Adass Israel Synagogue twice in the days after that attack. I will never forget the smell of burnt books, I will never forget the burns on their hands and I will never forget thinking just how close this came to being a mass casualty event. My anger at the perpetrators of this act of terror will never, ever subside.

I spoke to Benjamin Klein from Adass Israel earlier today, and he shared with me the complex trauma that this beautiful community are experiencing. I sent him and the entire Adass Israel community the love and support of all Victorians. The fear the Jewish community are feeling after this news is real and intense. Let me say this: when you inflict hurt and pain on one, you inflict it on all. This attack was not just an attack on Victoria's Jewish community; it was an attack on all Victorians. I say this to the Jewish community: your safety is our safety; we stand with you; we stand with your right to pray in peace and your right to live in this state in safety.

#### **Early childhood education and care**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Government Services. The Attorney-General has admitted there are 173 individuals with active working with children checks who pose a risk to children. For how long has the government allowed these individuals to pose a risk to children?

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:10): Thank you for the question, but I dispute the premise of the question. I do not believe the Attorney-General said that that number of people pose a risk in her comments earlier today. However, we have been informed through the regulators that because of the changes that we have made there is a need, with some urgency, to overhaul the working with children check assessments. We have legislation before the house to be able to immediately suspend working with children checks whilst assessments for revocation are being finalised.

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. It is very narrow: for how long have these people been allowed to pose a risk to children? I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to that question, please. She is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister addressed the question at the outset. The minister was adding to that commentary.

**Natalie HUTCHINS**: We have strengthened the regulations to now allow the worker-screening unit to consider information from more regulators to make sure that we are identifying any adverse findings on individuals. Not all of those adverse findings, I might add, are of a sexual predator nature, which is being assumed here, and we have accepted all 22 recommendations of the independent rapid child review. We have boosted the system. We have boosted it with finances, but most importantly we have boosted it with the legislation that is before the house today, with more to come into the future.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:12): How many of these 173 individuals who pose a risk to children are working with children today?

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:12): Thank you for the question. I think it is worth recalling the fact that all people applying for a working with children check clearance will be required to undertake online mandatory training as part of the stepping up of services that this government has accepted through the rapid review.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, it was a very narrow question.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, come back to the question.

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** I think those opposite know what the legislation before the house today will allow the government to be able to change, and we look forward to their support for that legislation going through this house so that we can take immediate action in this space.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, again the minister is debating the question. We are not asking about anything related to the legislation before the house. It is specific to the 173 people.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded her answer.

### **Ministers statements: early childhood education and care**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Last week I met Dia, a childcare worker in Fitzroy, and she told me a story that has stayed with me ever since. It was about a little boy from a vulnerable background who could not speak and his mum, who had never engaged with child care and who was not sure if she was doing the right thing – who did not know if this was a place that she could trust. Over a number of weeks and months this little boy would go to child care, and he would sit by the door waiting for Mum to come back. Dia spoke about how heartbreaking that was and the gentle way she built trust – how bit by bit this little boy came out of his shell, and he began to join in, make friends and look forward to coming to care every morning. Eventually he spoke, and along the way his mum grew in confidence too.

This is a story that moved me, and it reminded me of the extraordinary work our childcare educators do every single day – work that is powerful, precious and life-changing and work that we are here to protect, because families put their trust in this system, and I acknowledge that that trust has been shattered. It has shaken families, and it has shaken childcare workers like Dia. As a Premier and as a mum, I am determined to act, working to keep children safe and to overhaul the child safety system, which is why we have acted urgently, commissioning a rapid child safety review, and now we are implementing every one of those 22 recommendations.

This is urgent work – the work of this Parliament this week and further work that will come before the Parliament – because nothing that we do in this place is more important than protecting children. But also in acknowledging that this is a national system for workers like Dia, it needs a national response, which is why, as a result of Victoria’s leadership, the nation’s laws are going to be strengthened to put the safety and best interests of the child at the centre of every decision, from the boardroom to the playground.

### **Bail laws**

**Michael O’BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:16): My question is to the Attorney-General. Last week two teenagers, including one on summons for aggravated burglary and carjacking, allegedly stormed supermarkets around Melbourne, terrifying retail workers while wearing balaclavas and brandishing machetes. Both were granted bail the following day under this government’s bail laws. Why?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:16): I thank the member for Malvern for his question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about bail and the bail reforms that this government has been introducing to strengthen bail and to put community safety front and centre in every single bail decision that is made. We cannot speak, of course, to individual cases. However, the member is well aware that back in March we made a commitment that we would toughen our bail laws here in Victoria, and in accordance with that commitment we introduced our first tranche of bail laws into the Parliament, and those bail laws are now in operation. Those bail laws have strengthened community safety by putting community safety first, by making sure that in –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Rowville can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Rowville withdrew from chamber.**

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, I would ask you to ask the Attorney-General to come back to the question, specifically why these people have been allowed to get bail under their bail laws.

**The SPEAKER:** Manager of Opposition Business, a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** As I was saying, in accordance with our commitment, we introduced and have passed the first tranche of bail reforms, which has seen community safety for the first time elevated and made sure that it is the overarching principle in all bail decisions by police, by bail justices and by the courts. We have also introduced indictable offence whilst on bail and breaching bail conditions, bringing back that notion that there are consequences if you breach bail. As we expected, since the introduction, passage and commencement of our first tranche of bail reforms that are strengthening bail here in Victoria, we have seen remand numbers increase. We have seen that. We have seen remand numbers in our adult corrections facilities and in our youth justice facilities increase in direct response to our toughening of bail laws.

But we have not stopped there. We made a commitment that there would be a second tranche of bail reforms. We outlined what those would be, and those are before the Parliament right now. It is my expectation that, if the opposition are serious about improving community safety here in Victoria, they will support the passage of that bill. As those opposite know, we have gone further than that. A machete ban will come into operation on Monday – the first in Australia.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Polwarth can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.**

**Sonya KILKENNY:** May I remind those opposite as well that we are talking about retail workers; we are talking about crimes committed in our supermarkets and in our shops. Those opposite will know that we will be bringing into this place laws that will deal with harm and abuse committed against our retail workers.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:20): Despite police strongly opposing both youths being released, arguing they were an unacceptable risk of endangering the safety of the public, the court granted bail. Does the Attorney-General accept responsibility for endangering public safety, given these youths were released under her weak bail laws?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:20): Can I say at the outset what a reckless comment that was by the member for Malvern. Not only does it contradict the independence of our judiciary here in Victoria, but it undermines Victoria Police.

**Michael O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney is debating the question. Bail laws are passed by this Parliament, not the courts.

**The SPEAKER:** Attorney, come back to the question.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** I stand by my comment that what the member for Malvern has said today is a reckless comment that undermines the independence of our judiciary, a convention that has been respected here in Victoria for many, many, many years. I also want to acknowledge the work of Victoria Police, particularly on a day like today, when we have seen such tragedy unfolding up near communities in Bright. I want to acknowledge Victoria Police each and every day for the work that they do in keeping our community safe. We will always back Victoria Police.

**Ministers statements: digital jobs**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:22): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's plan to support workers and businesses to drive productivity, encourage innovation, attract investment and create more jobs. Last week, alongside my good friend the Minister for Police, I visited iBuild Building Solutions in Heidelberg West to announce that applications are now open for the digital jobs program. We want to make sure more Victorian businesses and workers are future-fit, and our successful digital jobs program is doing just that.

The program has already helped Victorian businesses build their digital capability through industry-backed training and has now equipped more than 6000 Victorians with up-to-date digital skills, which is why we are now expanding the program to construction and advanced manufacturing workers, adding more than a thousand free places in training courses over the next two years to support workers that have been traditionally under-represented in the transition to digital jobs – older workers, women and culturally diverse Victorians. Fifty-nine per cent of participants are women, 63 per cent speak more than one language and 40 per cent are over 40 years of age. Victoria is leading the way in digital technology investment and preparing workers for jobs in AI, and this program will support workers and businesses to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology.

We have recently seen massive investments into our economy from major international companies like NEXTDC, Mondelēz, Ego Pharmaceuticals and Amazon, and they know the future is bright here in Victoria, which is why they are creating hundreds of jobs in this state. Their investments are a massive vote of confidence in our economy, and this means more jobs, higher value employment and a more secure future for you and your family. As a government we are absolutely committed to supporting Victorian workers every step of the way to get the skills that they need and to encourage businesses to invest in this great state.

**Land tax**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. This morning the Minister for Finance wrongly said:

We don't tax your principal place of residence. We've never done that. We never will.

Can the Premier confirm her government has sent a reported 400,000 Victorians who run small businesses like hairdressing and personal training from their family homes a land tax bill for the first time this year?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I can confirm this: the Liberal Party clearly remain opposed to people having the opportunity to work from home, because the Shadow Treasurer remains committed to reminding us of that every single day.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very, very specific question. If the government do not understand how many people they are taxing, they should just say that.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Brighton, a point of an order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: It appears that the member for Brighton could do with some assistance in having the working-from-home policy explained to him, because the –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: The member for Laverton is warned.

**James Newbury**: On a further point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, this was a very specific question, not an opportunity for the Premier to try and be evasive. The minister got it wrong – really wrong – and she should just say that.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Brighton will make his points of order appropriately according to the standing orders. The Premier to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In answering the question, I think it is entirely appropriate to correct the misrepresentation that the member for Brighton has made regarding the question that the minister for economic growth was asked this morning. The question was about people working from home – not running a business from home, but people working from home. It is questions like this that remind those of us on this side of the house why working from home needs to be protected from people like those opposite. Cue the member for Brighton.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, you have twice asked the Premier to come back to the very specific question.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**James Newbury:** The Premier is defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I think it is entirely relevant to the question to correct the misinformation that the questioner has put to the house, because the minister was asked a question about working-from-home arrangements. Let me tell you about those working-from-home arrangements.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier needs to be relevant, direct and succinct to the question, which is about land tax bills on small businesses, particularly women who run these businesses from home. How many land tax bills have been applied?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The opposition seem determined to stop the Premier from outlining exactly what the question was that the minister for economic growth was answering this morning and putting some facts on the table. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, Speaker Maddigan has previously ruled that it is not appropriate for ministers or the Premier to respond generally. This question specifically referred to a minister saying that no-one was being taxed on their primary place of residence. Hundreds of thousands of people were just this year.

**Ben Carroll:** Further to the point of order, Speaker, Speaker Maddigan also ruled, on standing order 58, that a minister will have discretion to determine the content of any answer.

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It is entirely relevant to remind the member for Brighton that the question that went this morning to the minister was in the context of people working from home, and that was the context in which the minister provided an answer and also why working from home is not just good for families but also good for the economy. It is good for the economy because it means more workers can get into the workforce, particularly women, who might be able to get into the workforce for the very first time after having a few kids and they can pick up some more work –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question and simply being evasive.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier will come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Again, it is entirely relevant, to be absolutely clear with the member for Brighton, that his interpretation of the answer provided by the minister this morning is wrong. I am sure the member for Brighton thinks he is quite clever in the way he has contorted this question to the house today, but he is simply wrong. That question was put in the context of the government's working-from-home policy that clearly the member for Brighton continues to rail and campaign against – a working-from-home policy that works particularly for women in supporting women to get back into the workforce after having kids.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask the Premier to stop playing the man and deal with the question.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In answering the question, I am standing up for all those women and men for whom working from home works – men and women who have more time in their day, more money in their pocket, who have been good, productive workers.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Mordialloc is warned. The member for Sunbury is warned.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, what about the women hairdressers and personal trainers? We want to know an answer to the question about land tax that is being applied to them, and I would ask, on relevance –

**The SPEAKER:** I ask you to resume your seat, Manager of Opposition Business. That is not the way to raise a point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Working from home works for everyone, including those small businesses in suburban retail areas like in Brighton, because people have more time in their day and more money in their pocket. We will continue to fight for those working people and families, who need the government on their side standing up to people like the member for Brighton.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:33):** A former State Revenue Office official has said there is scope for land tax obligations to further extend to Victorians who move to work from home two days a week. Will the Premier –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will come to order. The Premier will come to order. The member for Brighton to ask his question without assistance from the house.

**James NEWBURY:** A former State Revenue Office official has said there is scope for land tax obligations to further extend to Victorians who move to work from home two days a week. Will the Premier change the current tax laws to protect contractors like healthcare and professional service providers who work from home from being charged land tax?

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston will leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34):** Let me be clear: there are no changes to the tax settings. Working from home is happening right now.

**Sam Groth** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Nepean, this is your last warning.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question did ask the Premier whether she would change the law to protect those workers. As she has said no, I think that can be the end of the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Brighton, you were Manager of Opposition Business for a very long time, and you know how to raise a point of order. And that is not the way.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** With the question, the supplementary question and the one, two, three, four, five, six – correct me if I am wrong, member for Brighton – points of order that have been taken, this clearly demonstrates once again that the Liberal Party stand opposed to workers having the opportunity to work from home. Cue the member for Brighton.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are trying to stop the Premier taxing them.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Brighton, there is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We will continue to stand up for those workers, stand up for those families and stand up for those businesses too, businesses like the Half Moon hotel in Brighton, who know that people in their community have more time in their day and more money in their household budget to reinvest in the local community – workers who are more productive. Businesses deserve to have this support, but workers too particularly, and what is on display here today is that only a Labor government will stand with those workers.

#### Ministers statements: teachers

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:36): Education is everything to Victoria's future. Victoria's educators show up every day with passion, creativity and heart. Our nation-leading NAPLAN results could only be achieved thanks to our nation-leading teachers right across our great state. Victorian students are not only the top performers in Australia but also the top performers of any time on record in our state. The credit belongs to our teachers, and it is wonderful to have so many colleagues here that are former teachers as well. Teachers' work matters more than words can capture. Teachers pour themselves into our kids each and every day. They do not just teach our kids; they believe in them, they lift them and they shape their futures, and in turn our kids shape our own futures here in the state of Victoria. That is why education is the single most important investment we can make in Victoria's future. Teachers carry a responsibility that stretches far beyond the classroom and the curriculum. They shape character and confidence and help make dreams come true.

It is because we know how important our educators are that we are employing a lot more of them. \$35 billion is being invested by the Allan Labor government to build 19 new schools opening next year as part of our 100 new schools commitment. Those 100 new schools are already creating some 4400 teaching and support roles in the Education State. This is building on the more than 35,000 new registered teachers we have had since we came into office. In the past 12 months alone we have recruited more than 1400 teachers to work in Victorian classrooms. In fact this is twice the national average. We need more teachers because we are investing record numbers in the Education State. We need to celebrate and value the profession of our teachers and the positive and ongoing impact teachers have on students and the community. Under the Allan Labor government teachers will always come first.

#### Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Victorians are facing fewer lifeguards on our beaches this summer despite the government charging Victorians an additional \$3 billion in tax, supposedly to support our emergency services. Why are Victorians paying more and getting less?

**Sam Groth** interjected.



**The SPEAKER:** The member for Nepean can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:38): I thank the member for his question, and I reject the premise of his question. On this side of the chamber we are always consistent in the deep respect that we have for our emergency services workers, including those who work along our waterways, helping to keep Victorians safe. We have beautiful waterways in this state, and we want people to be safe. We have strengthened the funding to Life Saving Victoria since coming to government. This includes more than \$21 million to support lifeguards, build new clubs and deliver new boats, drones and equipment. And thanks to the ESVF, we have doubled the volunteer emergency services equipment program so that our hardworking surf lifesavers have the new equipment they need to keep Victorians safe on our beaches. I was recently in the member for Bellarine's electorate – a fantastic, beautiful electorate – where we met with the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club. What we did was we not only spoke to the hardworking volunteers and thanked them for their work but also saw how they had been backed with a new patrol vehicle, new trailer and two new rescue boats.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question is clearly about paid lifeguards and why Life Saving Victoria is seeking money. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The member was very clear. It was about Life Saving Victoria, and the minister on her feet was speaking directly to the question that was asked of her. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Vicki WARD:** I really want to thank the member for Bellarine for her ongoing advocacy for her surf lifesaving clubs and the incredible work that they do. The investments that we are putting in are already ensuring faster responses and safer beaches for Ocean Grove and of course across Victoria.

I think it also needs to be noted that those opposite cannot be trusted to fund these important emergency services that help keep Victorians safe. And why is that? That is because they do not support the funding that we are actually creating. They do not support the work that we are doing.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly debating the question. This is about fewer lifeguards on Victoria's beaches and why Victorians are getting less. I would ask you to ask the minister to stop debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Bridget Vallence** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Manager of Opposition Business, I ask you not to reflect on my rulings.

**Vicki WARD:** We fund our emergency services much more than those opposite have ever done. We are funding nearly \$2 billion in this budget in our emergency services, more than double what those had when they were last in government. It is very clear that it is not this side of the chamber our emergency services need to be worried about when it comes to funding, because we are investing well in our services. It is the cuts that are threatened by those opposite because they do not support the work we are doing in order to adequately, fully, properly fund our emergency services and help keep Victorians safe.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:42): Councils are being asked to contribute up to an additional 300 per cent to cover the cost of paid lifeguards at Victorian beaches because Life Saving Victoria is short of cash, while the CFA, SES and FRV base budgets have all been cut. Why is the safety of Victorians being compromised because Labor cannot manage money?

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:43): I again, for – I do not know – whatever time it is, reject the premise of the member's question because he is absolutely wrong. The Premier has said this. The Treasurer has said this. I have said this. There are no cuts to our emergency services. We understand on this side of the chamber that everybody in this state has a role to play in keeping Victorians safe. That includes the funding that we put in as the Victorian government – the lion's share of funding that Life Saving Victoria receive for lifeguards and services. Everybody has a role to play, and that includes local governments. We all have a role to play, whether it is education, whether it is funding, whether it is supporting, and I would encourage those opposite to actually stop misinforming people and support our emergency services.

### **Ministers statements: creative industries**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:44): Victoria's creative industries are a \$41 billion part of our state's economy. We know that Victoria's cultural offering is a big part of who we are and why tourists come to visit, supporting some 288,000 jobs in the visitor economy, whether it is our festivals – the fringe, the comedy festival, Midsumma, jazz, the Rising festival – or the hundreds of arts and cultural organisations that make our state great. We are also home to one of the great theatre districts of the world, and the jewel in the crown of course is the much-loved Melbourne arts precinct.

We are supporting a \$1.7 billion investment to refurbish the State Theatre and build a new contemporary gallery, the NGV Contemporary Fox, a stunning drawcard with 13,000 square metres of display space. All of these institutions are to be linked by an 18,000-square-metre public garden to be known as Laak Boorndap. There has been incredible philanthropic support and generosity for this project as well, and I thank those who have made generous donations. This project will create some 11,000 construction-related jobs through the project. Last week I and the member for Albert Park had the opportunity to meet a young woman, Connie, from Melbourne's northern suburbs, who is one of 100 apprentices and trainees on that job. She is studying civil construction, and she loves that job. Of course, when completed, it will be a massive cultural drawcard, one of the best cultural precincts in the world.

Yesterday I joined the member for Yan Yean at Hazel Glen College – she is away today – to see students rehearsing for the school's production of *Rock of Ages*. I am sure that many of these talented students will go on to add to the 327,000 people who already work in our creative industries. These are all great jobs, backed by the Allan Labor government.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **Lowan electorate**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:47): (1250) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment, and the information I seek is: when will Coleraine Field and Game will be granted a renewed licence to shoot in and to care for their home range of 75 years at the northern end of Mount Dundas? Coleraine Field and Game have been working very closely with Parks Victoria since 2020, when they were told that there were cultural heritage assessments that needed to take place. Every single time Parks have put forward an issue, Coleraine Field and Game have worked towards a solution and then been met with another barrier. They have worked with local elders to ensure that all cultural heritage matters and the impact on that local area have been appropriately managed, which they have. They have dealt with local land councils. Coleraine Field and Game have now met all cultural obligations, they have met all environmental obligations and they have met all legislative obligations, but now they are being told they still cannot go in due to some proposed Central Highlands greater national park. I ask: when will they be allowed back to their home range?

**Ashwood electorate**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (14:48): (1251) My constituency question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop in the other place, Ms Shing. The question I ask is: when will tunnel-boring machines be on the ground at the bottom of the 19.2-metre hole that is currently in Burwood to get digging started? We recently welcomed our mayor of Whitehorse Andrew Davenport at the site of Burwood to see the recently finished 19.2-metre hole in the ground. There has been a lot of work – and good on Laing O’Rourke and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority for doing that – but we all want to know, including the mayor and the councillors, when we are going to see the tunnel-boring machines. I will even go so far as to say on that very day, to paraphrase Etta James, at last the member for Bulleen has come along, because he said, ‘We’re not going to put the dirt back in.’ So it is full steam ahead under the ground. I cannot wait to hear.

**Croydon electorate**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:49): (1252) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: will the minister fund the vital upgrades to Dorset Road between Hull Road, Croydon and Maroondah Highway, Croydon North? In 2019 the Australian government funded \$50 million through the Urban Congestion Fund to upgrade this section of road. By early 2022 the Victorian government had developed a business case for the project. However, by the October 2022–23 federal budget the Australian government withdrew the funding. Congestion on this primary north–south arterial road that runs through Maroondah has only increased over the subsequent years. As a result Dorset Road experiences significant traffic volume pressure, with peak afternoon queuing extending well over 900 metres. It is also worth noting this section of road is currently constructed to a rural standard, with limited or no kerb and channel and missing sections of footpath that place pedestrians at risk. This long-overdue upgrade to this section of Dorset Road would significantly reduce traffic congestion and drastically improve community and pedestrian safety. It must be delivered now.

**Box Hill electorate**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:50): (1253) The cat is out of the bag. Recently the Shadow Minister for Public Transport admitted that after four elections, three signed contracts and thousands of hours of spruiking its anti-infrastructure agenda, the opposition will not be pausing or cancelling the Suburban Rail Loop once tunnelling work has begun. Early works at Box Hill are almost complete, the tunnel boring machines are under construction and the tunnel shaft at Burwood has been built. My question to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop is: what are the next stages of the SRL that the Box Hill community can expect to see?

**Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:51): (1254) My question is for the Premier, and I ask: why is the Premier refusing to review management of the government-owned property in Prince Street, Hampton? Failing to do so has left my community unsafe. Only days ago almost a dozen cars in Prince Street were attacked – not the vehicles at the property in question, just their neighbours’. Police have implied that they have strong confidence that the incident was targeted. Police attended, just as ambulances and fire trucks have attended the site for other incidents, all in the last two weeks. These incidents follow a recent shooting after an alleged drug deal went wrong and a string of other acts of violence that include threats with weapons against innocent neighbours. The need for action was raised with the Premier in this chamber 26 days ago but has been ignored. The community has been put in danger since – again, ignored. Everyone deserves to be safe from weapons, crime and stray bullets in their own streets. The government needs to stop ignoring and start acting. Do something to keep Hampton safe.

**Bass electorate**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (14:52): (1255) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Can the minister provide an update on the South Gippsland Highway–Clyde-Five Ways Road–

Fisheries Road \$15.4 million intersection in Devon Meadows in the Bass electorate? This is a vital and critical project for our south-east community, including Bass and Cranbourne. The South Gipps highway is a key transport link getting people around, whether it is to school, work or tourism areas or for visiting friends and family or of course goods and freight, and the Clyde-Five Ways intersection has long been recognised as needing an upgrade to improve safety and efficiency. It is dangerous to navigate, and lives have been lost. Our community welcome the Allan Labor government investment in this project, which will improve traffic flow and also, most importantly, deliver safer conditions for all road users. We are all keen to hear about the progress of works and completion timelines.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bass, I ask you to rephrase your constituency question. An update is an action. What is your question?

**Jordan CRUGNALE:** What is the latest information and update on works on the South Gippsland Highway–Clyde-Five Ways Road–Fisheries Road intersection?

#### Brunswick electorate

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:53): (1256) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A major thoroughfare in my electorate, Nicholson Street, does not have a consistent speed limit. From here on Spring Street up to Albion Street in Brunswick the speed limit on Nicholson Street changes from 40 to 60 to 40 to 60 and back to 40 again. From 2020 to 2024 there were 82 injuries reported from accidents on Nicholson Street, 20 of them serious, and two vulnerable road users were struck and killed on Nicholson Street in the past 14 months. Slower travel speeds save lives. When will the government set a consistent 40-kilometre-an-hour limit for all of Nicholson Street?

#### Hastings electorate

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (14:54): (1257) My constituency question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Minister, tell me how many people in my electorate of Hastings will benefit thanks to the new power saving bonus launched this week. Over the last few months I have had many people come to the office asking for help and direction regarding the federal Labor power saving bonus, but equally, I have had many people come to the office asking for help to apply for the Victorian power saving bonus, which only came into effect this week. So to those people who I or my office staff said to come back in a week or two: please come back now so we can assist you in applying for and receiving your bonus. The new \$100 power saving bonus will ease cost-of-living pressures, make everyday expenses more manageable and support financial security for families and individuals across the state. And just a reminder: when applying, eligible households need a recent residential electricity bill and must hold a healthcare card, a pensioner concession, a veterans pensioner concession or a veteran gold card. I look forward to the minister's response.

#### Euroa electorate

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:55): (1258) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. After yet another shocking failure, where a V/Line train lost a carriage near Tallarook, how will this government restore confidence in our regional rail network? Passengers were stranded for several hours, forced onto crowded replacement coaches, and services on the Seymour and Shepparton lines were shut down during peak hour. This is on top of the government's planned 55-day shutdown between September and November when trains will once again be replaced by buses. Then to add a catastrophic safety breach where a train physically detached a carriage shows just how badly Labor has mismanaged and neglected our rail network. It highlights years of neglect driven by Labor's inability to manage money. While billions are wasted on cost blowouts and delays in Melbourne, regional Victorians pay the price, missing work, health appointments and vital travel. We were promised better rail; instead we have been delivered chaos, incompetence, repeated failures and stranded passengers. I call on the minister to urgently investigate this dangerous incident and present a clear plan to restore confidence in our rail network.

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:56): (1259) My question is for the Treasurer as Minister for Industrial Relations in the other place. Just last month our Premier made an amazing announcement that our government would guarantee Victorian workers the right to be able to work from home at least some part of the week if they work in a job where it is possible to do so. We know that for so many Victorians, working from home is not a luxury, it is absolutely critical, whether it is juggling work and care requirements or it is a more productive environment. Working from home is not just good for workers, it is good for the workplace and the economy more broadly. Whilst those opposite may feel like this is a weaponisation of working from home, we know that in so many workplaces across Victoria these flexible arrangements are under threat, with many businesses demanding a return to the office, not realising that in the last five years the workplace has changed. Our government not only recognises this change but embraces it, and we are acting to make sure that for all Victorian workers, private or public sector, if they can do their job from home, they can work from home at least a couple of days a week. So my question is this: how will enshrining working-from-home rights benefit workers in my electorate of Laverton?

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, may I raise with you question 984, which was due in March; 1049, which was due in April; 1060, which was due in April; 1094, which was due in May; and 1120, which was due in June. Having raised these questions with you repeatedly, the Premier still has not responded to any of them, so I do apologise for having to re-raise those issues again and again.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I ask you to just state your questions that are unanswered. Provide your list to the clerks, please.

**Jess Wilson**: On a point of order, Speaker, I wish to raise with you two adjournment matters that are outstanding with the Premier, both about aggravated incidents when it comes to crime in my community. Given the violent home invasion in recent weeks in my community, I ask the Premier to actually respond to these adjournments that are months overdue, and I will provide the numbers: 1055, which was due in April, and 1155, which was due in June. Could the Premier please respond to my community.

**Bills****Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (14:59): I rise today to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. As we have heard throughout the day, this is something that we on this side of the house will not oppose, and we will never stand in the way of protecting Victorian children. We have not stood in the way at one moment in time over the last three years – over the last decade, in fact – because when it comes to children's safety there is absolutely no room for delay, there is no excuse for inaction and there is no justification of failure, because every parent in Victoria deserves to have trust that their child is safe at school, at child care and at sport, and every MP in this place can agree that is currently not the standard that we are living with here in Victoria. Every child in Victoria deserves the right to grow up free from harm, and this is why we are here.

My greatest concern, and something that I think many of us are losing sleep over on this side of the house, is that time and time again the Labor government has failed in its most basic duty in keeping our children safe. While this is a step in the right direction, I think the member for Malvern, who has been such a fierce advocate for Victorian children, said it so beautifully: we need to act quickly. He actually issued a press release, and I want to read a quote from it. I am quoting a few people today to

show the differences on our side of the house. This was published on 14 September 2022, three years ago, and it was in response to the Ombudsman's report that warned in 2022 that action needed to be taken immediately:

Shadow Attorney-General, Michael O'Brien, said after eight years of the Andrews Labor Government – we can add three under Allan now –

Victoria has the weakest Working With Children safeguards in the nation.

We are concerned on this side of the house that this does not go far enough to protect Victoria's children. And I quote him saying:

The Ombudsman has exposed that Labor's poor legislation has created loopholes that only benefits pedophiles and those who would exploit children.

Tragically, this is not a hypothetical situation. Labor's loopholes have led to children being abused by people with Working With Children clearances who should never have been allowed near children.

Three years ago that was published, and not for one moment has the Labor government listened to our side of the house to say there are red flags and there are concerns our children are at risk.

I want to mention the member for Eureka, who earlier this morning opened her speech saying that we are best when we work together. If this was not such a serious topic it would be comical, because I actually know about a month ago that very person, along with 53 of her colleagues, opposed our legislation brought forward by the member for Kew to protect Victorian children. And golly gosh, wouldn't the children's stories be so much different had this government acted three years ago? So many lives have been ruined and so many children's lives have been forever changed because Labor will always put their own jobs and politics ahead of Victorian children.

This is something that we have spent hours and hours on, and my colleagues have not slept to ensure that we have put forward legislation – it is on the table; we have written it for you. Here what we have seen today is a step, but it is PR. It is managing the headlines rather than protecting the children, and that is what we are concerned with. The consequences of this inaction are the horrific allegations that we have heard from childcare centres; the consequence of ignoring warnings changes lives forever. Names like Ronald Marks and Joshua Brown haunt us on this side of the house.

In July 2025 we put forward and introduced the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025; 54 members of Labor opposed it. We will never forgive that. Today we will not oppose this because we understand action has to be taken, but we want it noted the Liberals and Nationals called for actions three years ago. You have failed so many Victorian children. We will not forgive you.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (15:04): I follow on from that contribution and I do actually plead with every member of this place, no matter which side of the chamber: there are alleged perpetrators and alleged offences. I really – not encourage – want you to understand. If justice cannot be delivered to the community that I represent because of statements made in this house, it is an unfathomable position to put the community in that I represent and that so many people in this place represent – if members cannot use more cautious language that does not invite the justice system to deny justice. The member who named people who are alleged perpetrators leaves the chamber, and she put that prosecution at risk. That is disgraceful. Members opposite, I ask you to be cautious in your language, because it is important for the community that I represent.

**Brad Rowswell**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is reflecting upon you as the Chair by using the word 'you', and the comments that the member is currently making are an insinuation against the member for Euroa, which, firstly, is untrue and, secondly, should be made only by substantive motion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak)**: I rule that there is no point of order.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I will continue exactly where I left off, which is: we should be cautious with our language in this place, because it can have a real effect on the people whose lives have been changed negatively forever.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I think the communities that have been affected would not appreciate that those opposite want to talk over those people on their feet, but I will continue. The working with children check changes are important. They are a step, a step that follows on from a recent report which had 22 recommendations. Those allegations have affected the community that I represent as much as any other community in the state, and even more so. I would like to acknowledge that I have been speaking with parents, educators, doctors and all parts of the community since these allegations came out, and they have deeply affected the community that I represent. For those opposite to make light of it, to mock it, is disgraceful. I find it unbelievable that people would make politics out of this.

What I did want to talk about was the working with children check changes that have been made – that is what I did want to talk about and recommend and support – in this place. They allow for the immediate suspension of a person's working with children check and take away the 28 days pending natural justice process that previously existed – and it is important to do so. These changes come 11 days after the Commonwealth's attorneys-general met and decided and agreed, and importantly so, that those in any jurisdiction would automatically be banned in Victoria if they are banned from working in another state. Introduced is the power to cancel a working with children check where it is grounded in and based on false or misleading information, and it provides the opportunity for prosecutions well after the existing date.

I say to those people in the community that I represent: I too feel with you just how horrific this has been. I know that for each person telling me their story, it is so difficult. It is so difficult because they do not speak to me in the first instance like they would about roads or traffic or other issues; they wait until they build up trust in the conversation. They wait until you are midway through the conversation or until you are at the end of the conversation, and it is the last thing that people mention to you. We will keep working on this because there is much more to do in this space, as outlined in the report, and much more beyond that. I commend this bill to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:09): I also rise to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. In doing so I support the comments made by my colleagues. I support the comments made by the Shadow Attorney-General and the Shadow Minister for Education, and I do so because what the Shadow Attorney-General and the Shadow Minister for Education did just a couple of weeks ago is what the government should have done three years ago.

We on this side have been quite clear. We support the government's bill. We do not think it goes far enough, but we support the government's bill. But that does not negate my obligation to tell every Victorian family right here, right now that at the hands of the Allan government Victorian children and Victorian families have been failed. Victorian children and Victorian families have been failed by the Allan Labor government, which was warned three years ago by Victoria's Ombudsman that the working with children check system needed a major overhaul. The government received that information – the government received the Ombudsman's report – and they did absolutely nothing with it, and in the intervening period Victoria's children have been put at risk, so much so that families around the state taking their kids to child care of a morning cannot be guaranteed that their children are safe still today, because this government has been so slow to act. It is important to mention these things, because someone needs to be held accountable. We on this side of the house aspire to the great responsibility that being in government is. We desire that, we want that – not for ourselves, but to do such a better job than the current Labor government.

Even today, as we speak, two weeks since it was revealed that a male childcare worker was sacked for kissing toddlers and grooming families from one childcare centre in 2020 then banned from the industry in 2024, up until this morning he has held a valid working with children check. Still today, at this very moment, he holds a valid working with children check. That is a bloody disgrace – an absolute and utter disgrace – and the people that are responsible are the people who have been called to high office: members of this government, who were warned about these risks three years ago and did sweet nothing about it.

I want to briefly speak about the Australian Childhood Foundation and some representations that I had from them early last year. They came to me when I served as the Shadow Treasurer, asking me to help them, and I was more than happy to do so. They saw, through communication and engagement with some victim-survivors, that there were significant flaws in the working with children check process. Victim-survivors, through their own voices and through a report facilitated by the Australian Childhood Foundation, made simply one recommendation, and that was that the working with children check process should, as part of it, have compulsory training where those applying for a working with children check are able to understand what grooming looks like and understand what child abuse looks like, so then they are better educated and then they are better informed, so when those people who are applying for a working with children check then in fact work with children, they can understand what these things look like and are in a better position to report them. Is that in this bill? Is that very sensible amendment in this bill that we are considering today? No, it is not.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** It was recommended by the rapid review – thank you, member for Kew – and it should be included in this bill today, but it is not. It is a simple thing. As the member for Malvern has indicated, we reserve our right in the Legislative Council to bring a number of amendments forward which will strengthen this bill.

I will end where I began. We will not oppose this bill; in fact we support this bill because it is a step in the right direction. But that does not mean that Victorian families should not know the truth of this matter. When the Allan Labor government had an opportunity to act three years ago, they did not. That is on them, and that is absolutely and utterly shameful.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:14): I too rise to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025. This is the most important bill that we will be debating here in this place this week. For both me and my community in Melbourne's west, especially in Wyndham, what happened that led to this bill entering this place has caused immense harm, immense grief and immense outrage. I ask those opposite to remember that on this side of the house we are also parents. Some of the commentary has been appalling coming from that side of the house. We are community members, we are parents, we are friends and we are family, and all of us are shocked. We are disgusted at the reports of what we have heard has happened in these childcare centres. I have had a centre in my electorate named as one of those that has been identified as one of the sites that abhorrent predator worked at. I have spoken with parents, some of whom are just putting their kids in child care for the very first time – and that is a really big deal for any family, but at this time – and they really are worried that something like that might happen to their child. That is something that all parents, or grandparents, think about.

But what I will say is that this is not the time for politics; it is time for us to take swift and decisive action on this. When news of these atrocities first broke out our government commissioned a rapid review of our childcare settings almost immediately. Now that review has come back to us, and we have committed to implementing all 22 recommendations in full. It is why, in addition to these changes in this bill that we are making today, we will be supporting the sector with a \$42 million funding boost in order to give effect to these recommendations.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.



**Sarah CONNOLLY:** Acting Speaker, could you counsel the member for South-West Coast if she cannot control herself in the chamber?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** Order! I need to hear the member on their feet for their contribution.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** Thank you, Acting Speaker. In fact we are going further than these recommendations, and I understand that a subsequent bill will be introduced later this year which will address things like mandatory online child safety training for applicants, which we know we need, using new screening tools to clear applicants and new requirements to clear and track employees across the sector. I really look forward to that work being completed. That is really important work.

Of course this work cannot be done by us alone. All governments have a role to play in strengthening this sector, and the federal government in Canberra I trust are also taking these issues incredibly seriously and share our commitment to strengthening national childcare regulations. But the work we are doing today with this bill is the critical first step to ensuring that our childcare centres are safe, and it will make sure that a person who is banned from working with children in another state or territory will also be automatically banned here in Victoria, which was a key commitment from all governments made less than two weeks ago, mutually recognising interstate bans. It will also allow for the immediate suspension of a person's working with children clearance upon notification of a charge or relevant finding, be it disciplinary or regulatory, in contrast to the 28-day grace period that currently exists. It will empower regulators to cancel a clearance where it was granted based on false or misleading information, and it will increase time limits for commencing the prosecution of the offence of providing false or misleading information regarding these matters from 12 months to five years and six months. All of these changes are immediately impactful, and they will work to help stop these things from happening again and, most importantly, make sure that our kids are safe when we drop them off at child care. People who have been banned in other states from working with children and who are subject to an allegation or charge that may render them unsuitable to work with children should not in fact be working with children. Whether it is in our childcare centres, in our schools or beyond, these changes will make sure that individuals like that are not permitted in those settings. That is exactly why I wholeheartedly commend this bill to the house.

**Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:19):** We will always put the safety of children first. I listen to this debate with both a heavy heart and a fierce determination to speak up for the most vulnerable members of our community, our children. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals will always put the safety of children first, not only those children in child care, loved by their families and expecting their educators to have their safety as a first priority, but also the children in the state's care, vulnerable children who are our most desperate and deserving of care and protection, not just as a government but as a society. We will of course work constructively with the government to pass any legislation and any reform that requires protection laws in Victoria to get strengthened. We will not oppose this bill.

In 2022 the Ombudsman said the system protecting children was weak – the weakest in the country, in 2022. When she handed down her report highlighting this, we the Lib–Nationals responded with:

A Liberals and Nationals Government will urgently amend the Worker Screening Act to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations and give Victoria's children the protection they deserve.

They were our words three years ago. The Labor government on the other hand did not respond – complete silence. Three years on and only when immeasurable harm to children has occurred do we see this government finally acting – despicable acts that should have been avoided, such as predators intending to infect babies with sexually transmitted diseases. The Ombudsman in 2022 – remember this is three years ago, before these disgusting acts took place – in her summary of the report said:

The biggest remaining gap is the need to amend the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic). Working with Children Check Victoria should be able to act on information that indicates someone poses an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children, regardless of whether criminal charges are brought.

...

Reforms to the legislation are needed to bring Victoria in line with other states and territories, and to promote the rights of children and families enshrined in Victoria's Human Rights Charter.

Not only did the government not respond – it failed to respond – but when we the Liberal–Nationals acted out of pure desperation to introduce legislation a month ago, Labor blocked our bill. This would have strengthened child protection, with the Victorian Ombudsman's recommendations embedded within that legislation. That was what was in our bill. Our bill allowed for the secretary of the department to remove a working with children check immediately if they had reasonable belief there was a chance children's safety would be compromised. Labor's bill today does not. Labor's bill we debate today is weak and does not even address the Ombudsman's recommendations to the government, made three years ago. It does not address them and does not embed them in the bill.

It is only the recent scandal of alleged child sexual assault in the childcare sector that has pushed Labor to act, to focus on the failures that Labor was warned of three years ago. We heard so much in the last few weeks about the rapid review and about how all the recommendations would be acted upon urgently. Well, they are not being acted upon. This bill fails to implement the recommendations from the government's own rapid review. There is only one recommendation in the 22 recommendations – only one.

This legislation does not address the called-for links to police databases, nor does it address mandatory training called for. The Premier in her emotive press conference even highlighted the importance of mandatory training, but this bill does not address that either. The legislation will not even prevent people like we have heard so much about – in Horsham, for example, Ronald Marks, who the media reported was found with child pornography on his phone – being able to hold a working with children check. This legislation does not even address that.

We will not delay the bill or oppose it, as anything which makes Victorian children even slightly safer is worthwhile. We should take the opportunity to remind the government that their delay in legislating all the recommendations is still putting children in danger. I will not stand by while children suffer. I will not. I will continue to fight for reform, and I will hold this government to account. This bill is weak. This is not just a failure of policy; it is a failure of leadership, a failure of compassion, a failure to protect. We support the recommendations from the Victorian Ombudsman and always have done. We have long fought for them. This government have finally been forced to acknowledge the scale of this tragedy and the urgency it demands, but they are not doing enough still. We will be putting forward amendments in the upper house to strengthen this bill, but we will not stand in the way. We will always put the safety of children first.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (15:25): I also rise to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, and I do so with a sense of profound obligation. These are incredibly challenging matters that we are confronting through this legislation, which is of course just the first step in a comprehensive response to allegations – and I am conscious of the need to ensure that language maintains conformity with the need to avoid saying anything that is sub judice – which were so deeply horrifying and confronting I am sure to all of us and to all Victorians when they came to light some time ago. As the member for Preston in his contribution I think said, it is one of those instances where you remember where you were when you heard about them, and your thoughts immediately go to the families of those children who have been impacted by this alleged conduct and the profound and acute distress and concern of parents who also have that sense of uncertainty about what may or may not have happened to their children.

It is almost – it should be – unimaginable, and it I think provokes a really visceral reaction in all of us to imagine that such conduct can take place in settings that must be safe for children. It is a topic that I have been contemplating very actively over the last few weeks in particular because of various life events. But that relinquishing of your child into the care of others is a profound step, as the member for Preston also said. So the need to ensure that the regulatory frameworks that apply in the context of

early childhood education and child care are of paramount importance, which is why I rise to speak in support of this legislative measure, this first step that will strengthen the powers of the secretary and the department to administer the working with children scheme in Victoria and seek to deal with some of those anomalous dimensions of our federation whereby there are loopholes, or there have been loopholes, that have enabled people who should not hold a working with children check in Victoria to do so as a consequence of a lack of information sharing across borders.

But before getting to the content of the bill, I think it is important to deal with the context of the bill. In everything that I do in this debate, I am constantly mindful of those directly affected families in communities that are represented by many people, very sadly, across this chamber, the families of children who were in child care, who should have been able to expect that their children were safe. I also am mindful of the impact that this has had on the medical workforce, those working in paediatric forensic medicine, who have a really difficult job in all circumstances but, when the scale of this alleged offending has been so great, have needed to work with so many children and their families. It is deeply confronting for them, as well as for the childcare workforce, which is impacted. Those who are there every day seeking to do their best, seeking to provide care in a very genuine sense, have a pall cast over the work that they do. They are I think deeply hurt and traumatised by the alleged conduct of the alleged offender in this instance. So I am mindful of the impact that this has had on so many people, and it is why the provisions of the bill are important. They are part of a much broader suite of work; this is just the first step. But I want to thank the Minister for Children for working at that national cabinet and ministerial council level to ensure that we do have national mutual recognition of the Victorian working with children check and to ensure that we have exclusions. As the federal Attorney-General said: banned in one, banned in all. That must be the cornerstone of a functional, comprehensive working with children system across the country.

I do not want to take too much time in my contribution, because I know that there is a lot of interest across the chamber in speaking on this bill, because its provisions are so important – it deals with such profoundly important matters. But I do hope that the bill will enable the secretary to have those expanded powers, and wherever and whenever the secretary is made aware of charges or convictions or findings of guilt, they can cancel those working with children checks. The issues that have been brought to light by this case just emphasise that it is so important that we get this right. So I commend this bill to the house. I know it is the first step, and I look forward to more work being done.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (15:31): The Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 that we have before us should be so much more than it is, and although we are supporting it on this side of the house, it is exceptionally disappointing. The safety of our children should always be our priority, and there are so many families and communities that have been deeply, deeply impacted by horrific incidents recently. I look at the Premier's comments with her press release around this issue:

Child safety comes first – that's why I'm implementing a child safety overhaul.

It is three years too late.

Parliament will sit for as long as it takes to get this Bill passed – no-one's leaving until it's done.

Again, three years too late. This could have been avoided if the government actually did care and did put children's safety first rather than now having to rush headfirst into legislation – and they have not got it all right. This bill takes only minor steps to improve the operation of the working with children check system. It is weak in that it does not even acquit all of the Ombudsman's recommendations that were made to the government in September 2022. That in itself is a failure. Not only have they neglected it for three years, but now, when they have had the opportunity, they have not done that. Not only that, we heard in question time continually about the rapid review – the review of the review. This bill also fails to implement the recommendation from their own rapid review into child safety, which was released last week. This is just not good enough.

In September three years ago, 2022, the Ombudsman made very clear recommendations about the worker-screening check process, and there were five changes to elements. Our Shadow Attorney-General at that time made particular comments:

A Liberals and Nationals Government will urgently amend the Worker Screening Act to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations and give Victoria's children the protection they deserve.

We said that three years ago because we knew it was important, but this government did not, and they let the most horrific circumstances, which we all do not even want to think about, happen under their watch because they were neglectful, and that is something that they should all hang their heads in shame for.

The bill we have now does not, as I said, address all of the Ombudsman's recommendations. Two weeks ago the Liberals and Nationals put forward a private members bill, the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025. All the members on the other side of the house, on the government benches, voted against it. Our bill addressed everything that the Ombudsman said needed to be done, unlike this bill that we have now. I cannot tell you how disappointing it is that you have had three years and you have known for two weeks you had our blueprint of what you could do to get moving here, but again you have failed.

We do have four basic propositions here, as determined by the Standing Council of Attorneys-General last week. If you are banned in one, you are banned in all – well, that is fine. The category C offences now can have an immediate response, rather than having to go through what is seen as procedural fairness for 28 days. The working with children check is suspended, revoked and cancelled if there is false or misleading information. That would include not declaring certain things. We have an extension of time. What this bill should be about – it should be about introducing all of the recommendations from the rapid review. It should be about the Ombudsman's recommendation and putting in what we did in our private members bill two weeks ago. What is most disappointing – because the Premier rabbitied on about the rapid review, on and on, but it mentions:

Allow unsubstantiated information or intelligence ... from police, child protection, or other relevant bodies) to be obtained, shared, and considered in order to assess, refuse, temporarily suspend or revoke a Working with Children Check.

Not urgent enough, not important enough; we will have to wait till October. Same with the mandatory training that was recommended – not important enough. The government continue to let children down, and they should be ashamed. We will support this bill even though the amendments are minor, and we will have further amendments that we will put forward in the Legislative Council.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (15:36): Certainly, every parent deserves to trust that when they drop their child off at child care, they are safe and protected. The recent allegations of shocking abuse in childcare centres have definitely broken that, and that is why our Victorian government has announced a child safety overhaul, certainly pertaining to the bill today, and I will speak to the overarching elements of that. We are also taking immediate action to strengthen the working with children check and child safety in early childhood education and care settings with a \$42 million boost to the sector by accepting and implementing all 22 recommendations of the independent rapid child safety review; establishing a new nation-leading regulator that will more than double the frequency of compliance checks; beefing up the social services regulator by bringing the WWCC, the reportable conduct scheme and the child safety standards under one roof by the end of the year, giving it new powers, removing silos and weeding out predators; introducing mandatory child safety training and expanding professional support programs, including through changes to the national law to build a greater culture of speaking up; and calling on the federal government to prioritise quality and safety in the national childcare system.

I did say from the outset that I would also obviously speak to the overarching elements of this bill. I would proffer that they are important changes and are not to be taken lightly. First of all, the bill will ensure that a person who is banned from working with children in another jurisdiction will be

automatically banned in Victoria. Mutual recognition of interstate bans – we can see is obviously a commonsense approach regarding the very serious matters that are being discussed in the chamber today, and this gives effect to a joint commitment made by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on 15 August 2025. Secondly, another amendment will allow for immediate suspension of a person's WWC clearance upon being notified of any charge or relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding, pending determination of an assessment. Currently – and this is a really important nuance that I think we should not just skim over – people can work for 28 days pending the natural justice process. That is just to understand that important nuance and not to make light of it. Thirdly, it will introduce a power to cancel a WWC clearance where it was granted based on false or misleading information or otherwise pursuant to an unlawful application. And fourthly, there are increased time limits for commencing a prosecution of the offence of providing false or misleading information in relation to a worker-screening application or reassessment from 12 months to five years and six months. I hope that it would be well understood by all those in the chamber the imperative for those changes and also for acting as a deterrent more broadly of some of the grievous behaviour that has been alluded to.

The mutual recognition of interstate bans, which I was alluding to just before, I just want to dive into a little bit more. On 15 August 2025 the Standing Council of Attorneys-General:

**agreed** to urgently work towards implementation, by the end of 2025, of mutual recognition –  
of working with children exclusions –

... so that a person denied a WWCC, or whose WWCC has been revoked, in one jurisdiction cannot be granted or hold a WWCC in another jurisdiction

I think that this is a really important step forward. The bill explicitly prohibits a person who has received a working with children exclusion in another state or territory from applying for a working with children check in Victoria. I certainly echo the sentiments of everyone in this chamber – at least on this side of the chamber, who are very supportive of this, and I understand those opposite are not going to oppose the bill – that working in a collaborative way across the country is an incredibly important way of proceeding when we are talking about many matters but particularly with the safety of children.

I will just finally say one more point, because I know that there are many who do want to speak to these important matters. When it comes to expanding the powers of the Department of Justice and Community Safety to suspend a person's working with children check – noting that this is an important and should be a very effective mechanism when it comes to preventing predatory behaviour but also shutting down predatory behaviour, for want of a better word – the secretary will be empowered to immediately prevent a person from working with children, pending reassessment of the working with children check, if they have been charged with, convicted of or found guilty of any offence that may represent a risk to children or had any relevant disciplinary or regulatory findings made against them.

The importance of this – and I am going to close on this point – is that it will ensure that people who have a criminal record or who have been subject to a relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding are not able to work with children until after their eligibility has been rigorously assessed. On that note, I do not think that there is any value in making light of these changes. They are important changes, and we back them wholeheartedly.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (15:42): When it comes to the safety of children, Victorians do not want half measures, they want certainty. Sadly, this Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025 delivers neither. It is baby steps, and it teeters around the edges. The safety of Victorian children, as I said earlier, is one of the most important responsibilities of any government and in fact of any MP in this place. Parents, carers and communities deserve confidence that the systems that are in place are robust, are thorough and are actually effective when they need to be, and sadly, this system and this bill fail that test.

Three years ago, as we have heard every other member on this side of the house state, the Victorian Ombudsman tabled a report with very, very clear recommendations. And three weeks ago the member for Kew also presented a bill that had all of those recommendations included in that bill. We presented a blueprint to strengthen the working with children system. The recommendations that the Ombudsman had presented highlighted gaps that could put children at risk, and here we are three years later with a bill that does not implement any of the reforms that the Ombudsman identified nor any of the reforms from the so-called rapid review. And here is the ultimate truth: this bill does nothing to give parents peace of mind. Like I said, it tinkers around the edges. It changes the paperwork, but it is not fixing the system. We could do this right the first time. What parents want is pretty simple, in my opinion. It is to know that when they drop their children at day care, kinder, sport, dance, school, Scouts or after-school care, the people that are responsible have been checked under the most rigorous system possible. This bill does not deliver that assurance.

The Ombudsman's recommendations were clear. It called for a more transparent appeals process, greater information sharing between agencies, stronger oversight of interim decisions and clearer communication with applicants and parents alike. These are not radical or expensive recommendations or reforms, they are just common sense. Yet for three years this government has chosen to ignore them, and that is a fundamental failure of every single child in this state. In regional communities like mine, parents are already faced with the challenge of fewer childcare options, fewer sports coaches, fewer teachers, fewer early childcare educators and fewer volunteers, so when the system fails to screen people properly it does not just create risk, it erodes trust that is already eroding. Once that trust is gone kids in the regions completely miss out – they miss out everywhere. We should be debating legislation similar to the bill, if not the bill, that the member for Kew put up three weeks ago – legislation that puts children first, not legislation that puts bureaucracy first. Parents do not want red tape, they want reassurance. I was so spoilt with my children's early education in kinder. Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative is where they were educated from the time they were 12 months old, and I was so lucky, because I knew undoubtedly that when I dropped my kids off at MVAC I did not have to worry. I was not concerned at all, and every parent deserves that reassurance when it comes to their kids. Parents do not want red tape, like I said. They do not want excuses. Parents want action, and most of all we want our kids to be safe.

This Parliament has an opportunity to ensure the working with children system is rigorous, transparent and, most importantly, trusted, and this bill falls well short of that. When it comes to child safety, second best is simply not good enough. I urge the government to listen to the Ombudsman, listen to their own rapid review, listen to the bill presented three weeks ago and listen to parents to deliver real reform that Victorians deserve, because, like I have said, Victorians and Victorian children deserve absolute certainty when it comes to their safety – not half-measures, not excuses and not another missed opportunity, and this bill is all three of those.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (15:47): This afternoon the Parliament is of course dealing with matters that are deeply important. Before I take the opportunity to make some fairly brief remarks on the key changes that are in the bill, I do wish, as others have done, to acknowledge the pain, anguish and trauma about not just the discussion of the matters that are before the Parliament this afternoon but what of course we have seen in the media, the allegations that have been put and the harm that occurs to our most vulnerable – and that is our children, our kids – in this state. I extend that to those who may be listening or who may read this later in *Hansard* and, as other members have done, I take the opportunity to also thank those thousands of childcare workers who each and every day go to work to educate our kids and do so with great care and great passion and do the things that we as parents, as Victorians and as members of local communities wish for each and every day.

In the series of weeks since the allegations were put the government has of course taken a number of steps that go to the matters that are before us with the bill this afternoon. What we are doing today with this piece of legislation, the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, is making key changes that go to strengthening the working with children

check scheme and increasing protections for children by preventing people who may pose a risk to children from engaging in child-related work. As others have mentioned, the bill will make the following urgent amendments to the Worker Screening Act 2020: ensuring that a person who is banned from working with children in another jurisdiction will be automatically banned in Victoria – mutual recognition, that is – to give effect to the joint commitment made by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. It goes on further, allowing for the immediate suspension of a person's working with children clearance upon being notified of any charge or relevant regulatory or disciplinary finding, pending the determination of an assessment. It will introduce the power to cancel a working with children clearance where it was granted based on false or misleading information, and it will increase the time limits for commencing prosecution of the offence of providing false or misleading information in relation to a worker-screening application on reassessment from 12 months to five years and six months.

I intend to keep my comments, as I mentioned, relatively short, but when it goes to these matters, we indeed wish to send strength to those that have been harmed by the practices that have occurred and of course extend our great sympathies to those that are dealing with these matters on this very day. As I think a number of members have mentioned – and I heard the fantastic member for Greenvale make some comments about what it means to drop your child off at child care and have that sense of trust in those people who I mentioned earlier, the vast majority of whom do amazing work within local communities to educate our young people – the abhorrent treatment and disgraceful and disgusting and shameful acts that these allegations have brought to light shake the very foundations of what it means to be a parent, a member of a community and a member of our society. We intend to make these actions today, and we will of course continue, through the Premier, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Children, to work with the Commonwealth, which was brought with the press conference on Friday, and that work will continue to occur. With those comments I would like to commend this bill to the house.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (15:53): I rise to speak on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, and I do so with mixed emotions, because whilst we support the bill, it is with a lament that the government has wasted not just three years. Let us be frank about this: Alexander Jones, who was at the centre of the Ombudsman's inquiry in 2022, was discovered to have committed a sexual assault as early as 2018. That was some four years before the Ombudsman's investigation. So for four years the Allan Labor government – admittedly with the former Premier in charge but with the current Premier at the cabinet table – knew about these matters, knew about the system risks that existed, knew about the imperative for reform.

The Ombudsman commenced her investigation in June of 2022. Let us put it in context. In three months the Ombudsman concluded her investigation and reported, with all of those recommendations. It took the Ombudsman just 12 weeks to identify the urgent reform items that needed to be made. The Ombudsman, amongst her many recommendations, made suggestions to the government and said that the changes were, in her words, 'imperative' against a worker-screening system that was the most limited in the country. And what the Ombudsman called for was very reasonable. It was allowing the working with children monitor to take into account a broad range of matters and not have to wait for substantiated criminal charges or disciplinary matters to approve an application, revoke an application or reassess an application – very sensible reforms. And here we are, more than three years later, seeing a bill which we support but which goes nowhere near far enough to address the concerns.

So the first thing I would say, not just to our young kids around our state, not just to the parents and not just to the grandparents but to all of us who care for the welfare and health of our young children, the most vulnerable in our community, is that this government failed to respond to the Ombudsman's report. This government failed to respond to our bill, which we introduced only a few weeks ago, the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025, which sits in the upper house. This government could support it this week and acquit the obligations of the Ombudsman. They failed that.

But worse than all of that – if that is not enough – this government has failed its own rapid review. Jay Weatherill and Pam White have made recommendations. They have said it is urgent that we fix these things. They made 22 recommendations, and in particular the one that is most pertinent to this bill, which is in chapter 4 – recommendation 6 – the government could and should embrace right now if they were being faithful to the recommendations of Mr Weatherill and Ms White. They have come back to government like the Ombudsman did. Let us look at how long they took. They were appointed on 2 July; they reported by 15 August. It looks like everybody on the face of the planet gets that this is urgent. It does not need a lot of time. The Ombudsman needed 12 weeks. Jay Weatherill and Pam White needed only six weeks. Everybody can see the need for urgent reforms – everybody except this government. For some reason, which defies comprehension, defies a reasonable excuse, defies any kind of understanding, this government is not prepared. Whether it is through indifference – which I would find hard to accept, because despite our differences I know the other side would care about the welfare of our kids – or whether it is incompetence, what is it that leads this government to stonewall on its own review?

So we will support this bill, but what will it take, in the face of the Ombudsman's report and in the face of our bill, which was a constructive effort to deliver urgent reforms and which we pleaded with the government to embrace so we could show the Victorian people this Parliament, under this government, gets it. Even the rapid review this government is failing. It is a bill we will support from a government that deserves the criticism it is attracting.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (15:58): I will speak briefly today on the Worker Screening Amendment (Strengthening the Working with Children Check) Bill 2025, which this government is hastening through Parliament this week in light of the awful revelations that have rocked Victoria over the past several weeks. The Greens welcome these necessary reforms and will be supporting the bill. These reforms are the first step of many needed to improve the early childhood education and care system. However, it is disappointing that the Greens only received the bill late last night, leaving insufficient time for scrutiny. When it comes to the safety of children, the Greens would have preferred a more considered approach.

The Greens welcome the bill and its changes to strengthen safeguards and close the gaps in working with children checks, but it should not have taken a full-blown crisis for this Labor government to act only once it became unavoidable. In 2015 the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report described Australia's working with children check systems, including in Victoria, as in need of urgent strengthening. That was 10 years ago. The Victorian Ombudsman also recommended urgent changes to the working with children check more than three years ago. It has also been revealed that in the same year, 2022, this Labor government ignored repeated warnings from the commissioner for children and young people that ongoing underfunding would mean children would be abused. So why has it taken Labor this long? Instead of acting earlier, Labor has unfortunately waited until there was a crisis and then scrambled to push through changes without proper time for review and scrutiny. Therefore, the result is a bill full of gaps and weaknesses – more of a patch than a real solution. If we are serious about protecting children, this cannot be the end of the work, and the Greens are ready to work with the government to build a childcare system that puts kids first.

The rapid child safety review clearly showed that the childcare sector has been completely reshaped by for-profit corporations – something the government admitted last week. The legislation before us does nothing to mitigate this contradiction. The government can claim as much as they like that child safety will come first under these reforms, but we have seen that every time the system is run by corporations, profits are the priority. Labor have broken families' trust by ignoring red flags, dragging their feet on urgent reforms and keeping the full scale of the problem secret. What matters now is urgency, transparency and funding to make sure that these reforms deliver real change and do not just gather dust. So we welcome the bill before us today. With an issue as crucial as child safety, even half-measures are better than nothing, but I urge the government to understand that until our childcare



system is driven by the wellbeing of children rather than the wellbeing of corporate stakeholders, it is hard to believe that children's safety will ever be the priority. The Greens will keep fighting for the rights of children in this broken system.

**Motion agreed to.**

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

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (16:02): I rise to make a contribution on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. That is a bit of a mouthful. This bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to strengthen medication safety in aged care settings. The claim is that clinical responsibility for administering these very specific medicines rests with qualified health professionals, and I do not think anybody in the chamber would argue with that. It updates the legislative framework governing medication administration in residential aged care facilities, and what it means is that only registered and enrolled nurses, other than health professionals such as maybe your doctors or your pharmacists, may administer prescribed drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. However, as I will explain, this bill does not guarantee that outcome, because until we address workforce shortages around areas of the state where they exist, the intent of this bill cannot be implemented and it cannot play out on the ground. We understand on this side of the chamber and we certainly respect that this aligns Victorian legislation with the national aged care standards and the Commonwealth reforms, and that is why we are not opposing this bill. But it does raise concerns in that area around staffing, which I will elaborate on shortly.

The bill claims to bring aged care settings into line with the standards in hospitals and other health services, and we know that it outlines specifically those scheduled medicines 4, 8 and 9 and their administration to aged care residents. But because of the workforce shortages that exist around the state, there will be exemptions put in place, meaning that in a lot of circumstances and instances this simply cannot occur, and it will create grey areas. There are certainly exemptions we need, and we have got some rural members in the chamber here now who would well know that in a lot of our aged care residences and facilities around the state, we simply do not have the nurses on staff to be able to implement what this bill seeks to do. Prescription medications referred to in these schedules are serious medications. They include antibiotics, local anaesthetics, opioid analgesics like pethidine and morphine, and even clinical trial medications, so we are talking about serious medications here. The reform's intent is good in that it seeks to address the risk of harm from the current practice that allows personal care workers to administer these what you might deem or call high-risk medicines without the education and regulation that apply to enrolled and registered nurses.

However, I want to now elaborate on the staff shortages matter. There are a number of locations around the state, and they are particularly and predominantly in rural and regional areas of Victoria – it exists in my electorate of Gippsland East; I was talking to the member for Shepparton before, and it certainly

exists in her area as well – where we just do not have the nurses in the community, not only in aged care but in the hospital and health system, to meet the need of our communities. This reform will shine an even brighter light on the fact that we have that discrepancy between our aged care homes when metropolitan areas are compared to rural areas. If a facility does not have the appropriately qualified staff, what happens under this rigid framework that has been outlined? I put to you: is it that rigid? The section of the bill that refers to this element says:

A registered provider who delivers funded aged care services in a residential aged care home must ensure that a person specified in subsection (2) administers any drug of dependence, Schedule 9 poison, Schedule 8 poison or Schedule 4 poison ...

The punishment is 600 penalty units, and I think that is a fairly significant penalty. That is about \$120,000 or a little bit more. But the key phrase in that element of the bill is that it ‘must ensure’ a qualified person administers those medications in question. Given this, it puts great difficulty on the aged care providers who cannot access those staff in their communities to be able to do this. What happens when the staff simply do not exist to allow this bill’s intent to be implemented? The bill says ‘must ensure’. When we raised this point in the bill briefing, we were advised that in these circumstances the act would not necessarily apply and the penalties and enforcement would not necessarily apply. The advice that we received was that in these circumstances that element of the bill would be treated as – the term used was – ‘educational’. It is then questionable what difference this bill makes on the ground in comparison with what happens now in our nursing homes, because where we have nurses in these aged care facilities within our community, they presently do administer these medications. They do it now.

I do note that almost a quarter of the complaints in relation to aged care that are made by family members, made by loved ones, relate to medications not being received on time. It can relate to doses being missed altogether, and it can relate to delayed treatments in some instances. When this occurs, that can result in a lack of attention to issues like pain management, and we want to make sure all of our loved ones in aged care facilities are not burdened with that. I acknowledge the second-reading speech refers to unforeseen circumstances impacting nursing availability to administer medication on time. That second-reading speech says that this bill will allow for another person to administer prescribed medication if there is a risk to the resident from delayed or missed medication. I put to the chamber that that is all good and that safeguards to allow our aged care facilities to operate certainly need to be in place. But there is a question that has been raised by some stakeholders as to how that will play out on the ground. We certainly do not want staff holding off on medications to be administered in the hope that a nurse becomes available and with the threat of a \$120,000 fine hanging over their head.

It also says in the second-reading speech that this clause to allow for another person to administer the medications is not intended to cover rosters with insufficient nurses. It says it will only cover unplanned situations. So if it does not cover rosters with insufficient nurses, what happens in that case? That is where that comment in the second-reading speech has been found to be quite ambiguous, not only by me or the minister in the other place but also by stakeholders out in the field. If rosters cannot be filled with nurses due to thin markets, that ambiguous comment indicates that those scenarios and situations indeed may not be covered. As some stakeholders have pointed out, this is ambiguous, and this is something that needs clarification. It also requires clarification on whether enforcement will be applied in those particular areas.

In relation to administration I will clarify who we are referring to here: the only authorised administrators of these medications in this bill are a registered nurse, an enrolled nurse with an approved qualification or another authorised registered health practitioner. The bill is pretty rigid around who can administer and what they can administer; it is ambiguous around what occurs when staffing levels cannot be met by those qualified people. We are told that in locations where qualified staff cannot be accessed it will not be enforced; it will be educational. But there is certainly more explanation needed around the detailed scenarios that sit within that and how that will play out on the

ground. In the scenario I mentioned before, where you might have a resident of an aged care home in pain and requiring medication and there is a registered nurse on but they are tending to another client or clients, does that staff member hold off or do they risk incurring a fine? We must remember that nurses do not only administer medication; in fact it is a very small part of their job. They have got many, many other very important responsibilities to carry out. They are constantly triaging clients at those locations. They undertake an extraordinary amount of palliative care work in our aged care facilities and the complex wound management that we often see, and they generally support residents within those facilities with very, very high care needs.

So that element of how this plays out on the ground does need clarification, and there is plenty of time for this, because this legislation does not get enacted for another 10 months. I would certainly hope that engagement takes place with stakeholders in the field, because the feedback that we got from them in seeking their thoughts and comments on the bill was: 'Yes, we'd have no issue with this. We're generally supportive. We're not sure if it changes much, because we do that now unless they have enrolled nurses in, but we need some clarity around those details and those elements of the bill that aren't fully explained.' We have 10 months to do that, so I would hope that the engagement with our aged care stakeholders occurs to a level that satisfies their concerns and queries going forward.

But in that time we also need some real action from this government to address the workforce shortages, because, as I started off my speech saying, the intent of this bill is good, but it cannot be implemented when you have not got the staff to do it. It is as simple as that. Unless we address the workforce shortages that we are facing in this state, not only in aged care facilities but in our health system more generally, it will be impossible to implement the intent of this bill within that sector. We are going to have exemptions being incurred all over the place, and nothing will really change as to what happens now. Without addressing this we are going to see probably the status quo to a large degree remain, and according to this bill unqualified persons will continue to administer the medicines. As we know, the administration of these medicines is predominantly managed by registered nurses and then administered by enrolled nurses and in some cases careworkers. I know the intent of the bill is to remove careworkers from doing this, and it is acknowledged that careworkers are not trained and qualified to recognise and respond to the issues that may arise. One of the major complaints that are made is that the careworkers do not have knowledge of adverse reactions when medications are mixed. We have a number of our residents in aged care facilities – I have spent a lot of time in those in the last decade with my dear mother – and we do know that the needs of residents within aged care can be extremely complex, and they can require large amounts of different medication to keep their various ailments under control. I think my dear mother was taking nine different types of medication in her latter stages of life, so there is a high level of complexity there, and we do understand and recognise that. Thirty-six per cent of Victorian aged care residents have been prescribed nine or more medications – there you go – and 19 per cent take antipsychotics. It can get very complex, and it can get very complicated.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety actually went into some level of depth in relation to this and in relation to the administering of medications. Its final report came out in 2021. I would not have thought it was that long ago – time flies. But what that report indicated was that they heard about:

... incorrect administration of medicines, and of poor prescribing and dispensing practices. These included overuse of medication in lieu of more suitable treatments, and the prescription of medications that have negative interactions ...

with other medications, which I just touched on previously, because that was in the feedback that we had in liaising on this bill. The commission heard that there were:

... numerous instances of inappropriate management of medication regimens.

It heard that aged care staff members failed to administer medicines correctly in many cases or administered medicines without then ensuring that the aged care patient had actually swallowed that

medication. We heard of failures to administer medicines at the correct time or in the correct doses and of residents being administered incorrect medicines. That was in that commission report in 2021.

In liaison with their stakeholders, Dementia Australia noted that 54 per cent of people living in aged care have dementia. That is a very high number. It is sad, but it is a very high number, and pain management is certainly challenging when those patients' ability to communicate directly and communicate with great detail is compromised. In the feedback that was provided to me, Dementia Australia acknowledged that pain needs to be regularly and effectively assessed by appropriately trained nursing staff with the use of appropriate pain assessment tools that mitigate inaccurate judgements. In a 2020 report in support of that, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia estimated that 20 per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from aged care facilities – 20 per cent is a high number – were simply the result of inappropriate use of medicines. So I go back: that is why we are not opposed to the intent of this bill. The intent of this bill is good. The concerns we have are whether the outcomes that it is aiming to achieve can be achieved on the ground, because without the persons with the qualifications, nothing will change.

I mentioned that 54 per cent of aged care residents have dementia, but it is also important to make the point in this debate that there are a number of residents in our aged care facilities that are able to administer medicines by themselves, and the ability for them to do that does not change. They are still certainly able to do that, and the ability for them to do that is covered by Commonwealth guiding principles, which include regular clinical assessments to determine people's capacity to self-administer. So for those that are able to do that, that is well and good and they can keep to their medication regime. This bill predominantly applies to those who need assistance and cannot do that.

There will be a five-year review of this legislation to check whether the stated objectives are being met. Personally I would like to see that reduced. I think if we do have an issue with this legislation where it is maybe not going 100 per cent according to plan, we should not be waiting five years before we act on it. I would like to think that there is maybe a full review in five years but we are monitoring the outcomes on the ground as we are going, and one of those outcomes we could perhaps monitor is what has actually changed in relation to this.

We are also told that anonymous six-monthly voluntary surveys will be used to collect information from the sector to inform progress and be fed into the review process. I think getting the surveys done is good. Making them anonymous nearly avoids the opportunity to follow up on concerns raised or have the dialogue maybe needed to improve the system. So the surveys are a good idea, but I would question whether making them anonymous is required, because most of the people – from all of our experiences – working in aged care have the best interests of their clients at heart, want the best systems in place and want the best outcomes for those that they grow close to. Surely we can have feedback provided here that does not necessarily have to be anonymous. Having that option might be a good idea, but it certainly should not be mandatory.

Before I do finish up, I just want to make a few comments about the sector and the workforce more generally. I mentioned my own mother before. Mum passed away a couple of months ago, which was after a great life of almost 99 years. For the last 10 of those years, she spent that time in an aged care facility. In fact I think at that particular aged care facility she was one of if not the longest-term residents in there on her passing. She went in at 88 and passed away at 98, nearly 99. That resulted in me spending a hell of a lot of time in that particular nursing home. As part of our job – and I am sure I am speaking for the majority of members in the chamber – we visit nursing homes on a reasonably regular basis. As I travel around, I visit a lot of our World War II and Korean War veterans in our nursing homes as the Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and I have a chat to them. But we do spend a bit of time in those facilities, and it is a very challenging environment to work in at times. As I said, we are often dealing with patients with dementia, and those staff members are dealing with a lot of the clients who are nearing end of life, and they create relationships and friendships with those people towards the end of their lives. It takes, I think, a special type of person to work in that system and do what they do to make that period of the residents' lives the best it can possibly be.

My mum went through periods in the early days of going on outings with groups. This slowed down, progressing to games within the facility to, towards the end, fairly much being confined to her own room apart from mealtimes. But every time I went over there it was clear that she was being cared for by staff who cared. We have seen royal commissions and we have seen inquiries that have at times exposed the worst practices and the worst behaviours of those who work in that sector, but I think it is important to put on the record that this is a minority and that the vast amount of people who work in our aged care sector are people who are in there for the right reasons and doing an absolutely fantastic job, so we thank the staff in our aged care sector in this state for all that they do to look after our loved ones in those latter years of their lives.

In finishing up, I just put on the record that this bill is not coming into effect until 1 July 2026. We are not opposing it, but we have some concerns, with the lack of nursing staff in the state, that its intent will be able to be put into effect, because without the qualified staff it simply cannot be done. I repeat: we are primarily talking about areas of rural and regional Victoria. So before this bill passes, assuming it passes the other place, there is a lot of consultation to do with the aged care sector to sort out those areas that they have found a bit ambiguous or that need more detail clarified to them around implementation. We certainly need this government to embark on a program of ensuring that we have the appropriate staff within our aged care facilities to ensure the intent of this bill can be implemented within our community.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (16:26): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I want to start by acknowledging and thanking all our aged care nurses and staff and workers out there, who are doing a fantastic job. It is important that we recall what happened during COVID and the pressure that was put on those aged care workers in particular and acknowledge the great work that they have done.

When we are looking after older people in aged care, it is absolutely critical that we have these safety mechanisms in place, and we have a great public system that protects older Victorians. That was a shining light during COVID, and we know that for a fact. With people living longer, we know we have to have a safer system. I will say that if you are providing aged care, you have a responsibility to provide safe and quality care for all those people living in your residential facility. It is not just the workers – in fact I would say, looking at the history and looking through the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, that it is not just a small minority of workers; it is the actual owners of these facilities, because back in I think 1997 the Howard government changed the system and allowed the private sector into aged care. That is when we started to see the demise of our aged care system and why we had to have a royal commission into aged care. Having followed that closely, because my parents both went into aged care – firstly, my mother, during COVID, followed a couple of years later by my father – one of my concerns was all the information that I had heard about aged care and that we were failing older Victorians, who required that quality care and were not getting it. Luckily, my parents were in good facilities, and their experiences were what you would expect in a good-quality aged care facility and the staff were amazing, but that is not always the case, and we know that. The private sector is about making profit. It is not about providing the best quality care, it is about making profit, and we know that it was exposed that many of those did not even have an enrolled nurse or a registered nurse in their facilities, and if they did it was minimal.

We need to start dealing with some of these issues, and obviously the Albanese government have started doing that by implementing these reforms. This is an important one too, because we know the royal commission highlighted that administration of medicines was one of the key factors that needed change – that there were too many incidents of medications being administered that were putting people into the hospital system, for example. Yes, some people can administer their own medication, but because we are living longer and have far more complex needs as we get older, we need to have a good-quality system whereby only experts are administering that medication, which will help take

pressure off our hospital system, which has been full of people who have been transferred to public hospitals because of what is happening in aged care. So this is a really important piece of legislation.

The royal commission also found the aged care system failed to meet the needs of older people in the delivery of safe and quality care. As I said, this is about us as a state doing what we can to make sure that these facilities are at their best. There were a lot of recommendations within the royal commission, which I have mentioned, but medication management and safety was one of the key reforms that was required. Older people are increasingly entering aged care later in life with more complex health conditions that cannot be safely managed in their own home. These more complex care needs often require people to take multiple medications, including the risk of medicine-related problems. The royal commission identified that and that medicine management and safety in residential aged care was essential for improvement. The royal commission's report highlighted incidents of inappropriate management of medications, including medications not being administered correctly or residents being given tablets without oversight to ensure they swallowed them.

While medication harm can occur at different points in the process of using medications, including prescribing, dispensing and administration, the Victorian government is responsible for who can administer the medication in residential aged care. Currently medication is mostly administered by registered nurses and, under the indirect supervision of an RN, enrolled nurses and personal care workers. While personal care workers play a vital role in residential aged care, particularly in relation to personal care, mobility and daily living, this is an unregulated workforce without qualifications and skills to understand therapeutic benefits of medication and recognise and respond to potential adverse reactions. We know through the royal commission and what was unveiled through COVID that there were careworkers who were not qualified to administer medication and other areas who were forced into a position where they were administering medication – or not. That was the other issue. So to put the blame on those careworkers I think is unfair. They were directed by their employer to do that. There were some pretty extreme situations that we saw during COVID. I know in my community of Geelong there were some pretty horrific incidents that came about because unqualified staff were asked to do or expected to do things that nurses and registered nurses, who just were not onsite, do.

This is a really important bill to make sure that those aged care facilities are complying. I know our public system is one of the best in the country, and we have quite a large number of public services in the Geelong community who I know my community are very appreciative of. Barwon Health run quite a large service and do the right thing by those patients. I think the important thing too is that there has been quite a range of consultation on this, so everybody has had the opportunity to have input, which is great.

This bill will place an obligation on Victorian residential aged care providers to ensure that only registered and enrolled nurses administer, prescribe and dispense drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medicines; provide that regulations may prescribe circumstances where the obligation does not apply and how these circumstances should be managed; and modernise language and terminology, including to align with the Commonwealth government's new Aged Care Act 2024.

I think also our previous speaker mentioned a shortage in the workforce. This government has had that as a high priority – to make sure that we get the nurses on board – and that will make a difference in providing safe, quality care. We are addressing the staff shortages through providing the free TAFE initiatives for a diploma in nursing. It is available under the Victorian government's free TAFE initiative, which will increase the pipeline for additional enrolled nurses for government and non-government health and care sectors. I know that in my electorate of Geelong the Gordon TAFE are delivering this course. There are many people enrolled in the course. It has been amazing for my community to have those opportunities to have free TAFE and for us to be able to educate and skill up these workers, because we know how important it is for them to be going into managing the medical needs of people in aged care – initiatives making it free to study nursing and aiming to increase the public sector nursing workforce, including public sector residential aged care services. I commend the bill to the house.

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (16:36): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution this afternoon on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. In the time I have available I might just outline the purpose of the bill and talk a little bit about the background, which gives us a picture of how we have arrived with this bill here today. Then, if time permits, I do want to talk a little bit about workforce capacity, which the lead speaker, the member for Gippsland East, touched on in his contribution.

Firstly, to turn my attention to the purpose of the bill, the bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to strengthen medication safety in aged care settings by ensuring clinical responsibility for administering specific medicines rests with qualified health professionals. The bill updates the legislative framework governing medication administration in residential aged care facilities. Only registered and enrolled nurses or other health professionals such as doctors and pharmacists may administer prescribed drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. This aligns Victorian legislation with national aged care standards and Commonwealth reforms. The bill supports clinical governance frameworks that ensure safe and accountable medication practices to bring aged care settings into line with the standards in hospital and other health services. Personal care workers will no longer be able to administer drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications to aged care residents. These prescription medications include antibiotics, local anaesthetics, opioid analgesics like pethidine, morphine and oxycodone. I assure Hansard I will hand my notes in to ensure the correct spelling of these medications, which is not my expertise, but to give the last one a go: benzodiazepines. Medications are not my field of expertise, in administering or taking, so I will try and help Hansard out with some notes here to get those. All those are clinical trial medications. The reform will address the risk of harm from the current practice which allows personal care workers to administer high-risk medications without the education and regulation that applies to enrolled and registered nurses. And, finally, the changes will reduce demand on the acute health system. Hospitalisations due to medication issues are more likely to occur without the clinical expertise and oversight that only qualified nurses and other health professionals can provide.

I put on record my appreciation of all the work that our nurses and health professionals do. I dare say everyone in this place has had experiences with our health system, and my family and I – and indeed my extended family – very much value and appreciate all of the work that our health professionals do. We really do value and appreciate that.

By way of background, currently the administration of controlled medications is predominantly managed by registered nurses and then actually administered by enrolled nurses and careworkers, but careworkers are not trained or qualified in recognising and responding to issues that may arise, such as adverse reactions to medications. Aged care residents increasingly have more complex care needs and require more medications: 36 per cent of Victorian aged care residents have been prescribed nine or more medications, and 19 per cent take antipsychotics. The reform responds to sector feedback and addresses significant concerns identified by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety about inappropriate and unsafe use of medications, including chemical restraints. Just to note some of the contents of its final report in 2021, the commission heard about incorrect administration of medicines and of poor prescribing and dispensing practices. These included overuse of medication in lieu of more suitable treatments and the prescription of medications that have negative interactions with each other. We heard of numerous instances of inappropriate management of medication regimes. We heard about aged care staff members failing to administer medicines correctly or administering medicines but failing to ensure residents swallowed them. We heard of failures to administer medicines at the correct time or in the correct dose and of residents being administered incorrect medicines.

According to Dementia Australia 54 per cent of people living in aged care have dementia, and pain management is challenging when they are unable to communicate pain levels effectively. In feedback provided to our shadow minister for ageing, Dementia Australia observed that pain needs to be regularly and effectively assessed by appropriately trained RNs and ENs with the use of appropriate

pain assessment tools that mitigate inaccurate judgements. In a 2020 report the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia estimated that 20 per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from aged care facilities are a result of inappropriate use of medicines. Those points that I have just spent a little bit of time going through give us a thorough background to this bill, why it is here and why we are not opposing it.

I do not intend to go through the main provisions of the bill – I think the lead speaker outlined those, and I am sure others in their contributions will go through the main provisions – except to note the following exceptions that apply. The bill does not affect the operation of the voluntary assisted dying scheme – new section 36EA(4). Residents may also continue to self-administer medications where appropriate and safe. An individual's ability is governed by Commonwealth government guiding principles, which include regular clinical assessment to determine capacity to self-administer, and exemptions can apply in exceptional circumstances such as an emergency or unexpected staff shortage, where no appropriate qualified staff are available and delaying medication would place a resident at risk. This is not intended to apply to rosters with insufficient numbers of nurses but unplanned temporary shortages. The above exemptions also apply in other situations that are to be prescribed by regulations under the act. In terms of the commencement of the bill, the changes will commence on 1 July 2026, with a 90-day grace period until 29 September 2026.

I want to speak a little bit, in the time remaining, about workforce capacity, because I note that this reform will require additional nurses. It was reported by the *Herald Sun* on 31 July 2025 that the Victorian government expects the sector will need to hire about 650 new nurses. Given there are shortages of nurses across the state, especially in regional and rural areas, there are concerns that compliance could be challenging here. As I said at the outset, we are not opposing this bill. I do acknowledge and restate that one of the main purposes of the bill is that the administration of these specific medications rests with qualified health professionals, and I support that. But given workplace capacity challenges facing the sector, I do wonder what role AI might play in supporting our aged and health care systems in the future.

Indeed there is much discussion, debate and research on the pros and cons surrounding AI. This may be something that the Parliament explores further, perhaps through the joint committees, with appropriate inquiry references to examine these matters in a bipartisan and constructive way. In looking at workforce capacity, I learned in some of my recent reading some figures on the global population and the ratio of workers to retirees shifting, with the labour force dwindling. For example, countries including Japan, Germany, Italy, Russia and South Korea are even now approaching a crisis of working age population. If you look further at the total fertility rate of China and their neighbours in South Korea and Taiwan, you will see the challenges they face in working-age population, workforce capacity and expertise, so they are looking to technological improvements and new technologies.

The point I make is that we too are facing workforce capacity challenges, and the Parliament will do well to advance their thinking around the use of new technologies to support various sectors, including the health and aged care sectors, to address workforce capacity issues and to maintain living standards. We are not opposing the bill, and it has been a pleasure to make a contribution towards the bill today.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (16:46): I follow on from the member for Croydon and the member for Geelong, and I appreciate the member for Croydon has indicated that they will not be opposing the bill. It is a pleasure to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025, and of course I support it. The member for Geelong talked about public sector residential aged care in the community that she represents, and I think that is an outcome that all Victorians, certainly this Victorian government, should be very proud of, our engagement in public sector residential aged care, because we have stuck with it. Almost all around the country governments have largely exited the market. We have a public sector residential aged care rate of about 11 per cent of beds across the state or thereabouts, and they are a really big deal, particularly in lots of regional and rural communities. Our public sector residential aged care facilities ensure that people can be within their community and age within their community.



I know there is a really strong propensity for people to want to age in place in their own homes – rightly so; I understand that. But when the circumstances arise that you are no longer able to be in your own home, having those facilities across all of Victoria I think is a really wonderful thing, and I celebrate that we do have public sector aged care facilities at such a rate in Victoria.

I just want to do a bit of a shout-out to the Boollam Boollam Aged Care Centre in Monash Health's Kingston Centre in Heatherton, which has just been completed. It is the largest public aged care facility in Victoria – 150 single modern rooms and private ensuites for people who are residents. That does not exist in every aged care facility, and I am really grateful that this is becoming par for the course across our public sector aged care. But they do an amazing job, all of the nurses, the staff and the personal care assistants, and I want to give a shout-out to all those people who work diligently in the department. For my sins, I was previously an aged care adviser for former minister Martin Foley, and that was –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Exactly. A big shout-out and round of applause for Martin Foley; I would like to just put that on note. But the time that I spent in that office and some of the lessons that I think we took from it and some of the advances that we were making as a government at that point have really stuck with me and are some of the proudest things that I have been involved in. Introducing the nurse-to-resident ratios in aged care was I think, by some of those opposite, a bit pooh-poohed at the time. They thought that this was a bit of an overreach; they were not happy with it. There were some in the sector who did not like it. But what it provided was that really important skill set that is really required for people who we know are entering the aged care sector older and more vulnerable.

Then, as we did that and as we saw those wonderful nurses in place in what are people's homes, COVID hit. COVID hit the sector, including the aged care sector, in a really devastating way – an absolutely shocking way – and so many people's lives were finished as a result of it. So many people were poorly affected because of it, but not so in public aged care. They did not bear the brunt of it, because they had the nurses who had the skills and the expertise to understand infection control and to put that in place in the facilities that they were working in. The personal care assistants were doing wonderful work as well, and not to deny the fact of their care and their efforts, but they just did not have the skills. They did not have those amazing skills that our nurses have in understanding infection control. It was just so important to residents in those places where vulnerable people live and to their families as well, who were often not able to go into those facilities during COVID – rightly so because of infection control. I just want to give a shout-out to all those nurses but also the personal care assistants and everyone particularly working in the public sector residential aged care facilities at that time. That was a really tough time, and they worked and did their job brilliantly in keeping people who were vulnerable safe. So thank you to them and thank you to everyone in the department who did that work during that time, because they were working to keep people safe – one of the jobs that we should be doing within government all the time.

I note the member for Croydon appropriately and with candour admitted that he should not be giving out medicines – and I am very glad to hear that – and was candid around his challenges with some of the medicines themselves. He did rightly point out that this does not go on to affect our voluntary assisted dying. It does not affect people who self-administer appropriately or where there are exceptional staff shortages. I am not talking about deliberate rostering but genuine staff shortages, which only happen from time to time. I thank him for putting those sentiments on the record, because it is important that people who are in aged care who can take their own medicine be able to continue to do so, and there is nothing in this bill that should prevent them from doing so.

The member for Croydon also talked a little bit about the challenges of the workforce sector and some potential responses to it. This government is not waiting for potential responses to it in the future. We are putting in place those measures that will drive more people into nursing, into a wonderful career, and that includes a landmark 28.4 per cent wage increase to nurses and midwives across their 2024–28

enterprise agreement. Pay does mean something. Pay does affect sometimes the willingness of people to work in a sector when they have got choices. Nurses have choices to do a whole series of jobs because of the high skill that they have, and I am glad to see when they do come into the aged care sector particularly that we can ensure they have wages which are more commensurate with their skills. We have also made it free to study nursing in a series of different circumstances, and that is another way that we are driving people into the aged care sector and supporting the workforce there.

At the moment in the aged care sector, and this is from a 2024 survey, nurses administered medication 91.2 per cent of the time in public sector aged care facilities and 81.2 per cent of the time in non-government aged care facilities. That is just purely a reflection of the requirements that the government has put in place – that 10 per cent gap that exists – because we have made mandatory nurse-to-resident ratios. That is why the gap exists. But it is also reflective of nurses working hard across the whole of the aged care sector to make sure people are safe at a vulnerable point in time. I think we have discussed it already, but I would reiterate that 36 per cent of people living in Victorian residential aged care facilities are prescribed nine or more medicines. That is a huge amount of information that people have to be able to absorb and understand and make sure is delivered appropriately to those people who require that number of medicines. Nine is a huge amount. It is a massive amount, and it is complex, the interaction of medicines, one with another. So I am really thankful that, particularly in our public sector residential aged care facilities, we are meeting 90 per cent plus. We hope that this drives it even higher, and we hope that it drives it higher particularly in the non-government sector. Particularly where medicines are not managed appropriately, they can have devastating effects. We know those devastating effects exist, because 20 per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from residential aged care result from inappropriate medication use. If you do not think that has an impact on you and your family, then you are wrong, because this goes to access to hospitals and access to health care. These will be circumstances where it is most likely an emergency when we see people there – an unnecessary emergency, an emergency that should not exist. So this bill seeks to fix and assist with that. It will not fix it all the time, but if we can get it to a higher level and a higher quality all the time, we will be certainly a much happier community.

In the 20 seconds that I have left, I want to thank the minister. I want to thank also the advisers. I know how hard they work in making sure that the most vulnerable in our community are looked after, and they are always looking for the next thing that we can be doing in this really well needed sector.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (16:56): I rise to make a contribution on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I think the longer we live, the more experience we have of the aged care system. We want it to be good and it has not always been great, but I do know that the experiences that my family and I have had in the aged care system have been particularly positive. That was at Vasey RSL Care in East Brighton and also in Yea. I know my mother-in-law was 97 before she decided she might be suitable for aged care, and she lived out her last three-and-a-bit years there. But we had positive experiences, and I know that that is not always the case. Because of the royal commission in 2021 there have been a number of changes that needed to be introduced, and this bill deals with those.

In particular, the bill updates the legislative framework governing medication administration in residential aged care facilities. This is something that is particularly important because so many residents in aged care require medication. I have one constituent who is in her mid 90s, and her husband I think is 99; she often tells me how wonderful it is because he still does not require any medication. But we know that so many people as they age, for a variety of reasons, require medication. Around this framework, only registered or enrolled nurses, other than health professionals such as doctors and pharmacists, may administer drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. Making this change will bring Victoria in line with the national Aged Care Quality Standards and the Commonwealth reforms. I think that is important, and we would like to see that consistency around the country.

The bill supports the clinical governance frameworks that ensure safe and accountable medication practices to bring aged care settings into line with the standards in hospitals and other health services. The intent here is very good. I am very worried, like a number of other speakers, about how this will play out, because whilst the intent is good, there are a number of issues that are going to have an impact here. The safety and clinical guidance is particularly important. What this bill means is that personal care workers will no longer be able to administer drugs of dependence – schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications – to these aged care residents. With the current system there is a risk of harm with the current practices because personal care workers can deliver high-risk medications and they actually have not had the education that applies if you are a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse – the training that lets them understand how to and sets you up to be able to administer particular medications. If you have not had that, you are not skilled to be able to adequately do these things, and we do need to have things going as best we can.

These changes will reduce the demand on the acute health system; hospitalisations due to medication issues are more likely to occur without the clinical expertise and oversight that only qualified nurses and other health professionals can provide. At the moment in aged care medication is predominantly managed by registered nurses and then administered by enrolled nurses and careworkers, and these careworkers, as I have mentioned, do not have the appropriate skills and training. Aged care residents are increasingly complex in their care needs and are requiring more medications. A staggering 36 per cent of Victorian aged care residents have been prescribed nine or more medications, and 19 per cent take antipsychotics. If we have a think about the types of health conditions that people may have in aged care as they get older, there are often a lot of respiratory conditions and heart disease – people maybe having had heart attacks. They might have strokes or diabetes. Dementia is there. A lot of people actually have falls, and with those falls they might need some pain medication as well. So the range of drugs that are required can be actually quite complex. We had the royal commission, as I mentioned earlier, in 2021, and they heard about:

... incorrect administration of medicines, and of poor prescribing and dispensing practices. These included overuse of medication in lieu of more suitable treatments, and the prescription of medications that have negative interactions with each other.

Whether sometimes this is sloppiness or rushing, I think it is really important that we take heed of this. We had a situation at home with a family member who was self-administering some strong painkillers, Endone, with some anti-inflammatories and antibiotics, and the impacts were quite severe. I realised fairly quickly that they had mixed up the drugs that they were taking when I found in the bin an empty packet of Endone which should not have been empty for another week. I saw the consequences of that and how easily somebody who was completely with it – not living in aged care – just made a mistake with the medication and mixed up the packets. We know that can happen sometimes, and it should not happen. If we are in an aged care setting, in that formalised setting, we really want to make sure that all risks are minimised. This bill certainly will go some way to doing that.

Dementia Australia, who provided some feedback to us on this bill – they had no problems with it – said 54 per cent of people living in aged care have dementia and pain management is challenging when they are unable to communicate more or less effectively. Sometimes they might be quite insistent that they have actually taken the medication but they have not taken it, and perhaps they might even strike out. It can be very difficult, so it is important that we have the right skills and training here for that administration.

One of the concerns that we have is about the workforce capacity, and this hits rural and regional areas much more because given the ratios and what this reform will need – every time they make changes, they require more registered nurses – in the country there are not always more registered nurses to be found. What we also find is that so many registered nurses have actually decided to leave full-time employment and go and work for agencies because they get a little bit more money. Now, this costs the same; people end up doing the same work, but they are getting paid through the agency rather than directly employed by the health service or the aged care service. So what happens in that instance? It

is putting more and more pressure on the aged care facility or the health service because of the funding that is required. This is a real issue, and it is there in conjunction with the lack of workforce.

I know that this bill is not going to take effect until 1 July next year, some nine months away, and there is that 90-day grace period, but I am very worried that there will be a lot of areas where this will be very difficult to administer or implement. I mentioned early on the intent here is very good, but we need to see how problematic it is going to be once it actually gets into practice and what enforcement there will be. Sometimes the enforcement may be lacking because no-one knows that there is a problem. They think it is going okay; they might check once every couple of weeks rather than as frequently as is required.

So I am quite concerned about the workforce capacity, because it exists now, that lack of experienced people in the country. You go to many different hospitals or aged care services, and they cannot find the people to employ now, so if they are going to have to increase the number of registered nurses that they have on their books, it is most definitely going to be problematic. I think it is so important with drugs of dependence, and we know what those drugs of dependence are – certainly the opiates we would all be very aware of, for pain and anxiety, for sleep, pethidine and morphine. We know what drugs are there, and we know how dangerous they are and why there are such strict protocols, even with ambulance officers and hospitals administering them and storing them so they cannot be taken or tampered with. These are such important drugs. We do need to make sure that they are administered properly, but I am concerned about the workforce issues.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (17:06): I am proud to speak about this crucial reform, which is part of a whole package of reforms that we have made in the aged care sector. This Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 is particularly important for older Victorians to make sure that we have the right people with the right qualifications administering what are some pretty hectic substances, which I will go to in just a moment. This bill requires that from 1 July 2026 only qualified nurses and other registered health practitioners, including GPs and pharmacists of course, will be authorised to administer certain medications to aged care residents.

I have to reflect that I have not spent a lot of time in aged care homes, although one of my first roles was doing work experience at a local aged care home. One of the things that I reflect on in my engagement as an MP and throughout my time is that part of being in one of these residential aged care facilities is that you are giving over that little bit of autonomy to people that you need to trust are qualified and have that understanding of your physiology and your needs in order to be able to meet those needs. It is quite a vulnerable space to be in, and I appreciate that. So this bill looks at how we can make sure that we have the right people with the right qualifications administering these drugs.

Drugs of dependence and medicines classified under schedules 4, 8 and 9 – I was just having a quick look at the schedules before I spoke and, like many other people contributing to this bill, probably cannot pronounce a lot of them. But some of the more common culprits in the schedules are things like anaesthetics, antibiotics and stronger medications like morphine and drugs in that particular family. These changes reflect the government's firm commitment to reducing risks associated with medication errors, which in the past have occurred without that clinical judgement or, worse, have resulted in residents missing critical doses altogether. These reforms are long overdue, and it is something that we are here to address today.

The bill directly addresses serious safety concerns highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, where it was revealed that medications were too often administered unsafely and without proper professional oversight. I know some of my colleagues have referred to this, but it is pretty shocking that in some data from the Commonwealth 36 per cent of people living in Victorian residential aged care homes are prescribed nine or more medications. I cannot even remember one or two medications off the top of my head. The professionals who we are designating will be the only ones who can deliver these medications have done years of training to be able to determine how these

different medications interact with the body at different times and make sure that it is done safely and with regard to that particular person's needs.

Nineteen per cent in residential aged care are receiving antipsychotics. This is a particularly nasty family of drugs when it comes to how they can play with other different drugs that might be in your system, so it is particularly important to have people who understand that interplay in someone's body. They were left vulnerable because medication administration was being done by unregulated staff in a lot of cases, who are not bound by those standards required of nurses by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. At this point I would like to just give a shout-out to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) for their advocacy in this, and I know a lot of this comes out of that work that they have done with their members. They are very much a union that is focused on listening to their members and the experiences that they have out in the field, so this was a commitment that we had made at the 2022 state election to make sure that this was brought in.

The other thing that I want to say is that ensuring that only qualified health practitioners handle what are quite often quite powerful medicines and, in the case of some people with a lot of health needs, at quite high doses will reduce clinical risks, improve health outcomes and prevent unnecessary hospitalisations caused by medication errors. I want to just reflect a little bit on the hospitalisation that we are seeing from these sorts of errors. Quite often when an older person is admitted into hospital it is not a good experience and can be quite a lengthy stay, so we need to do whatever we can to avoid hospitalisation whenever we can. Twenty per cent of unplanned hospital admissions from residential aged care are because of inappropriate medicine use. We are dealing with people who have quite vulnerable bodies because of their age and a lot of the other conditions that they may have going on in them at the same time, so it is quite important to have people who understand those interactions, as I reflected on before.

There are some other things I want to reflect on in particular. Some of those drugs of dependence in schedules 4, 8 and 9 are ones that quite often do not interact well with each other unless they are managed. We acknowledge that there are some in those lower schedules that are over-the-counter medications which can still be administered by other people who are authorised in those particular centres to do so, but it is important to make sure that these drugs that do have quite difficult interactions within the body are managed properly.

There have been some concerns raised by people throughout the house – and I appreciate that those opposite are supporting this bill with the care that is needed for this topic – around nursing supply across Victoria, not just in the regions but in our growing suburbs as well. It gives me a lot of pride to see so many of those young people that I worked with in schools wanting to go into a career in nursing, and quite often we would have trouble getting work experience at the Werribee hospital because of various COVID arrangements and things like that. So one of the first contacts that a lot of these young people who want to go into the healthcare profession have with health care is through the aged care system, because often aged care homes are quite happy to take on a work experience student. Because of that we have seen a growth in the number of young people, particularly in my electorate, looking to go into nursing, and that has been helped in part by initiatives by this Labor government to support that growth of nursing supply. Under our free TAFE initiative a diploma of nursing is available. I know that particularly free TAFE is really important to make sure that there are as few barriers to entering into the profession as possible. The making it free to study nursing initiative will also help increase that supply.

We have also seen over the last four years a 28.4 per cent increase in the pay that nurses and midwives are getting under their EBA, and we have invested, in the 2025–26 state budget, \$95.1 million over four years to support the health workforce, including initiatives around registered undergraduate students of nursing, transitional support programs and capacity development for rural nurses. I know yesterday I was contacted by someone who is studying nursing, looking to access that support to go and work in rural areas, and as someone who did a rural replacement in their profession, I would always recommend it as an entry into the industry.

The reform that we are seeing has not happened in isolation; it is part of an extensive consultation with stakeholders. I have already given a shout-out to the ANMF, but it is always important to give them credit for the work that they do, as well as those other peak bodies and the wide range of providers that we have from charities, religious groups and multicultural backgrounds. We understand that this change takes time, and that is why there is a 12-month transition period, which we have spoken about, built into this, giving aged care providers the opportunity to adjust their staffing models and fully comply with these new requirements. We understand that a lot are already doing this in practice, but we want to make sure that wherever you are and whatever aged care setting you are in, you get that same level of care. We have spoken a little bit about how public aged care has led the way when it comes to these standards not only during the pandemic and the way that infection control was managed but also around those nurse-to-patient ratios as well.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the staff in particular at my local aged care homes, at Glendale; Estia Health on Russell Street; Mercy Place, which is one of the places where I did my work experience; Wyndham Lodge; Manor Court, which is a great little one – some of my former teachers are actually at Manor Court and it is always good to see them when we have to go there with the fire brigade for a fire alarm, which is always because someone has burnt the toast; St Vincent's on Hoppers Lane; and Uniting in Manor Lakes. This bill empowers our nurses and health professionals at all those places around Victoria, and I commend it to the house.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (17:16): I rise today to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. At the outset I would like to thank everybody who works in aged care. It is of course our fabulous nurses and it is also our personal care attendants, as well as many, many other supporters who are keeping people in their later years and delivering a fabulous life for them in their sunset days. It is certainly an important role. Having had family members who have spent their last years in aged care and also of course from my time at Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital, where we supported two aged care facilities, I know firsthand the amazing work that people who work in that sector deliver.

It is such a confronting period to deal with, the reality of people as they age. It is a reminder for us all that we are not here forever. It is, I think, particularly confronting when people's minds and their bodies deteriorate at different paces. I think it is harrowing to see someone who is physically still very fit and able but with the impacts of whether it is dementia or other ways that the mind deteriorates over time. A neurological deterioration over time can be very, very difficult for everyone to deal with – the individual as well as the family members and the carers around them. But equally when the mind is agile and the body is frail it is an extraordinarily challenging time. However, we are very fortunate if we are able to make that stage of our life. Again I just want to acknowledge the fabulous work of people in that area. It is difficult, and people are not paid very well. It is very difficult and confronting, as I have said, but also you get to share some of the most special moments in people's lives, particularly in their final weeks, days and hours. We are incredibly fortunate there are so many people who are willing to put their hand up and hold the hand of people when they are not in the prime of their life.

This legislation will make a number of amendments which will align Victoria's legislation with what aged care facilities have to work within anyway through the national aged care standards and of course the Commonwealth reforms. The key shift is really around personal care workers no longer being able to administer drugs of dependence, including schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications to aged care residents.

As was eloquently outlined in the lead speech by my friend and colleague the member for Gippsland East, there are certainly some challenges when it comes to delivering the aspirations of this legislation. We of course want to make sure that there is a minimal number of incidents related to medication being inappropriately prescribed, inappropriately given to a patient or given to the wrong patient. Medication errors of course are far too prevalent. However, we do need to make sure that we acknowledge that anybody can do that. It is not just within the aged care sector; it is not just personal care attendants. Unfortunately, we see far too many people accidentally take too much medication, accidentally overdose, and that can have serious outcomes, not just fatalities. You can see the impacts

of toxication from high doses of certain drugs where people lose their kidney function, and that can be just as debilitating on an individual as can other aspects. So certainly the consequences of medication errors and medication mismanagement are something that we all want to work to minimise.

It is something that the healthcare sector does a lot of work on to have better systems that can identify where there is an extra check that is appropriate. There will be medication reviews. There are of course contraindications for some drugs. We see often a system established where a pharmacist will do a medication review and try to deal with polypharmacy, the prescribing and interaction of multiple drugs, which of course is something that happens quite frequently as we get older. We have different issues that need to have their own sets of medication to deal with those specific issues, and the older you get the more those issues tend to arise. Rather than reviewing all of the different drugs that you are being prescribed or that you are taking, there tends to just be a layering upon layering: 'This is your problem, so we need to add this medication. This is your problem; we need to add this medication.' That in and of itself can have significant consequences physiologically. I have seen aged care residents have a polypharmacy review, and we had residents who were going from taking over 20 tablets a day to less than five. There are certainly opportunities to do that, but it is very difficult within the healthcare system, which has particularly been starved of funds. It is a centralised process at the moment. This is one of the things that actually makes a huge difference: allocating time so people have the opportunity to review the whole suite of medication that someone, whether they are a patient or whether they are a resident, is receiving and making sure that we put in place something that is safe and something that is right. So there are multiple aspects to making sure we get medication right.

Absolutely it is around adhering to the quality management systems, which are the standards that every aged care facility has to meet, whether it is public or it is private. There are legislative responsibilities that have to be met as well, as is included in the legislation that we are debating today. But we must acknowledge that it is not your role, it is not your job, that determines whether you make an error or not, and so I would support additional support being given to nursing staff, who will take on a greater proportion of the administration of drugs in aged care facilities, because equally nurses can make those errors. We want to make sure that we are supporting them, and we want to make sure that they have additional training that supports this move to focus more on administration of medications, because there will be a lot more pressure on our nursing team to be able to deliver that.

This was something that was raised by my colleague the member for Gippsland East. We already have a critical shortage of nurses right across the state. It is particularly prevalent in rural and regional Victoria, and I know that the merger of many of our hospitals under the Grampians Health banner has had a critical impact on staff satisfaction. The people matters survey for Grampians Health certainly has reflected the deteriorating sense of importance and sense of how much people appreciate our health staff, because they cannot make local decisions; some are being made hundreds of kilometres away. I would like to reiterate to everybody who works in hospitals, our aged care facilities, our medical clinics and our allied health clinics as well: I do not mind what you do. I do not care what your qualifications are, what your experience is, whether you have been in for six weeks or whether you have been working for 60 years; I greatly appreciate all that you do to support our community. I think it is very important that everyone who works within health understands that they are valued.

Certainly the Nationals and the Liberals will do all we can to make sure that we have a health system that supports its staff but also delivers for every single Victorian, no matter where they live. We need to make sure that we have a health system that is responsive, that provides that care and support and that is an employer of preference, because we know that people will go where they are treated the best. It may be interstate, and we are certainly seeing that in my part of the state, given I abut South Australia. We have seen health staff who are now working in South Australia rather than working under a centralised model in Victoria.

I think that more needs to be done around supporting older people; I do not think enough focus is given within this place or within the general community. If I can send one message out to the people of Victoria: do not be afraid of visiting somebody in aged care. It is perhaps one of the most inspiring

places that you can go to hear stories of what people have achieved over their lifetime, what is important to them and what they are most proud of. It is something we can all reflect upon, it is something we can all learn from and it is something that we can take in our own life and our own journey to make sure that we can make the most out of our time on this earth.

There are of course issues around this legislation; I have gone through those. But again, thank you very much to everybody who works in aged care. Thank you to our researchers, who are doing an incredible amount of work supporting better medications to make sure that the impacts of chronic disease in particular are held off for longer, that we have better health outcomes and that it is not just about quantity of life, it is also about quality of life. That is what aged care can deliver in the best possible way.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (17:26): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I am very pleased to support this bill. I think, as many before me have said, aged care is something that is so incredibly important to all of us and to our community. We have an ageing population, and the calls on the service for aged care are only going to become greater as we see that population come through. As someone with ageing parents, it is something that I am pretty alive to. You want the best for your family in their later years, and you want to make sure that the facilities and organisations are at the very best standard.

I would say that this government has done quite a bit in this space, and this bill is another example of our awareness of this sector and the importance of this sector. In addition to this bill, we certainly did some huge investments in the 2025–26 budget to bolster public sector residential aged care services, and I think that is so important. If we think back to COVID, the real difference that we saw in aged care services was that the public health services really stood out in that there was no loss of life. In many ways I think that can be attributed to the really important work that this government did around nurse–patient ratios, which also covered off aged care workers. It was such an important piece of legislation to make sure that people that were in those services knew that they had enough staff on hand to care for them.

In addition to that of course we had the ageing well action plan 2022–2026. That was introduced under this government and really sought to look at reducing ageism, fostering intergenerational ties and ensuring that accessibility to services. So it is clear to see that this government has a really strong commitment to supporting this sector and has done so in many ways. I know in my own electorate that Grant Lodge in Bacchus Marsh have been there for many, many years and provide a really, really important service to our community.

I think something I would say in addition, as a regional MP, is that those services locally are incredibly important because you want to be able to continue to see your loved ones and to go and visit them when they are in there. I guess if you live in metropolitan Melbourne there are many options, and you can hop on a tram to go and visit your family. But for us in the regions it is so important to have those services close to home so that we can really keep that connection with them.

Grant Lodge in Bacchus Marsh has been there for many, many years, and I was so pleased that in 2021 they received \$5.5 million under the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund to develop it. I was even happier when a year later, in 2022, the then minister, Minister Carbin, invested a further \$3.75 million. Those investments, which obviously round up to nearly \$10 million, meant that we could really have a high-quality facility in Bacchus Marsh that was dementia friendly but also served the staff and the wonderful nurses that work there. It gave them better spaces in which they could work. I think on this side of the house probably one of our most motivating drives is to care for the most vulnerable in our communities. We do that in many ways across many different policies, but certainly the investment that we have made into aged care is a continuation of that really deep value that those on this side of the house hold.



To go to this particular bill, again I would say it is really about protecting our most vulnerable, our older Victorians in residential care. There are many more people entering aged care, but they are also entering later in life. While that is a wonderful thing that people can stay at home a lot longer, it does mean that they are presenting to aged care with much more complex medical needs. I think we have heard this statistic before, but one in three residents are on nine or more medications. I understand that it is one of the highest rates of polypharmacy in the country. So while I am delighted that we have these medicines available, it is a complex space, so it is important that the people that are administering them are really aware of contraindications and all of those sorts of things.

My own mother has been diagnosed with lung cancer, and she is on a range of different medications. Recently, quite weirdly, she got a Buruli ulcer. Apparently they used to be called Bairnsdale ulcers. It was quite a scary ulcer, but what was really scary going through that process was that the medication she needed to treat the Buruli ulcer had a detrimental effect on the drugs that she was taking to manage her cancer. She is 86, and you get to that age when those contraindications can be fatal. You know, your body is a little bit less robust. So it is so important that we have people that really know what they are doing administering those drugs. This bill ensures that only qualified registered and enrolled nurses and other authorised health practitioners can administer schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. This is going to reduce the risk of medication errors and inappropriate use, which is really about protecting the older people in our community. It is commencing in July 2026, with a 90-day grace period to support implementation. It is important also to note that there is flexibility for unforeseen emergencies like sudden staff shortages. We are making sure that we offer the best care we possibly can.

Like others before me, I would like to acknowledge the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and all of the work that they do in supporting our wonderful nurses. They are a fabulous union who have worked really closely with government to ensure the best outcomes for their members. All of their members want the best outcomes for their patients, so when they have come to us in the past seeking support, it has always been with an eye to the outcomes for the community. I think the nurse–patient ratio is an extraordinary example of that. It was not about just getting jobs for nurses, it was about making sure that people in our health system were getting absolutely the best care that we could offer. So I certainly want to take a moment to really thank them for all of the work that they have done in this space.

As I say, this bill recognises the skills of our nurses and strengthens their role in aged care. Of course, again, this government has gone in with real support with things like the free TAFE nursing courses to grow our pipeline and of course the pay rise that the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation negotiated in their recent enterprise agreement. Whilst these things might seem outside the bill, they all go towards creating a health system and particularly an aged care system that will offer the very, very best to people in our community as they enter their sunset years. It will happen to all of us, and so I think all of us are beholden to make sure that we have the very best care in our community for the people that have given so much to our community.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:36): I am pleased to rise today on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I do not think we could make that title any longer; I think that is about as long as we get. Right from the start I will say we do not oppose this bill. As previous speakers have said – and I will just touch on what the member for Eureka said as well, because I agree with her 100 per cent on this issue – it is incumbent on this government to look after the most vulnerable in our community. I think everyone in this chamber agrees on that and that is an absolute no-brainer.

The bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to strengthen medication safety in aged care settings by ensuring clinical responsibility for administering specific medicines rests with qualified health professionals. The bill updates the legislative framework governing medication administration in residential aged care facilities. Only registered and enrolled nurses or other health professionals, such as doctors and pharmacists, may administer prescribed drugs

of dependence in schedules 4, 8 and 9 medications. Ultimately this amends and aligns the bill with the national aged care standard and a number of critical Commonwealth government reforms.

Before I actually get right into this, I will shout out to our aged care workers, who are phenomenal. When our parents get to that age and we put them into these care providers, we want the best care for them, and especially our aged care nurses do a fantastic job – they do. When you put your parents in there, you know you can go home at night and have a decent night's sleep because you know they are getting looked after properly.

I have listened to a bit of the debate today, and it has been interesting. We talked about administering medication now only being done by qualified people. It has been pointed out a few times – and I did not know this statistic – that 36 per cent of aged care residents have nine pills or more. I will tell you a nickname we had for my dad was Tic Tac, because he used to take that many pills that he used to rattle when he walked. He took a lot of pills, poor old George. I was actually glad that someone was there to help administer his medication, because he was taking a lot of pills. He would take pills to make him do all sorts of things towards the end of it there, and the nurses, again, were absolutely fantastic.

There are a couple of things here I just want to touch on. The last data I can get – and this has probably been updated, but I have got data from June 2022 – says there are about 178,000 permanent residents in aged care and about 7400 respite residents. That is a lot of patients, and it has probably increased a little bit, I imagine, since 2022. But that is a lot of permanent residents.

When we talk about medication, it is very important that it is administered properly. We do not want mistakes to be made and people to suffer. But one thing, especially in regional Victoria, and the member for Eureka touched on this as well, is the nurse-to-patient ratio. We do not always get that in regional Victoria. Even with this bill going through – and I understand the intent of the bill and what the bill is there to do – (a) we are not always going to have those nurse-to-patient ratios, but (b) we may not always have the qualified people to do the medications. That is very problematic in regional Victoria. There are a couple of things around regional Victoria. We already have a shortage of beds. That is problem 1. Problem 2 is getting people to go to regional Victoria and retaining those people in these regional areas, whether it be Warragul or Warrnambool for that matter.

It is very hard to keep highly skilled people in these regional areas, which leads me to the next point. I believe that in the bill briefing the question was asked, basically: if a qualified nurse or a doctor or whatever is not there, what are the legal implications of this? What are the legal implications if someone is not qualified to administer the medication? This may not be anyone's fault other than a lack of staff or a lack of resources in these areas. I do not think that question was answered appropriately. I do not think there was an answer for it. I think the government needs to think about this and maybe have some sort of backup plan, because I do not think you are always going to have the staff there to do the job, and the patient will still need their medication. Maybe we have to look at training more nurses or more people to be better qualified to do this. But there was no real answer to the question, when it was raised, of what the legal implications would be if the problem arises in administration of specific medication. I think the government needs to have a look at that.

It is okay to bring the bill in, and we support the bill; there is not a problem there. But sometimes there are unintended consequences with bills as well, and these things hopefully get ironed out as these problems occur. Not even government has a crystal ball, to be fair, and when problems occur, then then we need to have a solution to those problems. I think the government needs to look at that carefully, especially when we talk about shortages in the aged care sector. The aged care sector is one of our largest sectors in Australia, and it is only getting bigger. It is not getting smaller, because like you, Acting Speaker Mercurio, we are all getting older, and unfortunately one day we will probably end up in aged care as well. By the time you and I get there, hopefully we have got it right, but I think the government needs to bear those comments in mind. When we talk about aged care and how big the sector is, it is no more important than in regional Victoria, and I know we have shortages in my

electorate. Even with the new West Gippsland Hospital, whenever that decides to get up and going, there is aged care in that facility within that area.

The problem we have got now at the moment I will put forward in a meeting with the Minister for Health Infrastructure in the next sitting week, which I am very appreciative of. When I am talking about the West Gippsland Hospital, aged care and also training, there are two components of this hospital that are a federal responsibility in the funding model, which are aged care and training. Unfortunately, we know the government is under financial pressure. We get that. We hear it all the time. What I do not understand is why the government has not gone to the federal government to contribute to this hospital, to stump up the money that they are responsible for. In the case of West Gippsland it is about \$200 million. It is a significant amount of money. I would actually urge the government, if they are struggling to get the project started because of financial constraints, to go to the federal government, go to the Albanese government. We hear often 'They're our friends in Canberra.' Well, make your friends stump up the \$200 million, their share of the hospital. Take the pressure off the state. Make the feds contribute what they are meant to contribute. I need this aged care facility within this electorate, but it is no good to me if no-one can start the project because of a lack of funds.

So do not be a martyr with the system. Go to the federal government and get the money that they are required to actually put in, and then we can get this hospital started and I can have quality aged care in my electorate and have more people trained, more nurses trained, because training is part of it. This is part of the problem – that we do have a lack of trained nurses. So why doesn't the state government go to the feds and ask them to stump up their responsibility for the West Gippsland hospital, take the pressure off the state and get these things started?

As I said at the start, we do not oppose this bill. I know everyone in this chamber believes we do have to look after the most vulnerable in our community, and I can appreciate that is what the government is doing with this bill. There are a couple of issues around shortages, and I probably think the government is aware of that. As I said, the only point is if it is administered, how you are going to deal with that.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (17:46): I would also like to rise and speak in the debate on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. This bill that we are debating has what was in fact an election commitment by the Labor government in 2022. It is also to address a problem that was highlighted in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety a number of years ago – I think it was just during or around the time of the pandemic. It also supports the work of nurses and increases the training and the skills within the aged care setting, because aged care is something that is growing in Australia as the population ages. People do not go to aged care unless there is a requirement to and it is due to some medical condition or a situation where perhaps it is no longer possible to be cared for or for them to care for themselves in their own home. But that does not mean that they should be going into anything substandard. It ought to be good quality care.

I know that there are a number of aged care facilities in the electorate of Thomastown that really do care. They are very professional and they provide a lot of support for those that are living in those facilities. I hear a lot of stories from families who are also very happy with the care that their ageing relatives are getting. But as with anything in these areas, you also get providers or operators that do not always have the best interest of those in their care and are really just using their operation as a money-making exercise to take as much as they can rather than to have any sort of pride or commitment to caring for older Victorians. We need to continue to be vigilant and ensure that we have good, strong legislation making sure that these places have good quality care as well as supporting residents and getting rid of those that are not so good.

It just comes to mind, the Epping Gardens aged care facility and the terrible things that were going on there during the pandemic and the way people were treated in there. It was just something that none

of us even want to think about or go back to. We saw a lot of deaths in that facility. It was all over the media because of the lack of care that was being received. In fact it was the Northern Hospital and nurses from the Northern Hospital that actually had to go in and run that facility and care for the residents. Many of them were absolutely devastated by what they saw and also had a lot of issues afterwards. But anyway, that facility now is up and running and much better than it was.

I think when we look at the regulations and how aged care places need to run, this bill is another step in a very good, right direction because it is all about making sure that residents are safe. At the moment, prior to this legislation being implemented, careworkers, nurses or whoever is there is able to give medications. Of course some of these medications are very addictive, they are strong and they ought not to be taken with other medications, and you need a lot of skill and knowledge in order to make sure that when you are giving such medication you know that you are doing it in a safe way. In some of the statistics that other speakers have mentioned, I think it is something like 20 per cent of hospital admissions from aged care are due to medications being given in a wrong way – either there is something wrong with the way the medication is being delivered or there is an adverse reaction from the resident. If we provide skilled workers, such as enrolled nurses, to give this medication – they have had many years of training in administering medication as well as caring for patients in health settings.

There are particular drugs, and they are drugs of dependence and schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications, that when this bill is implemented will have to be administered by nurses. But that does not mean that some of the over-the-counter drugs will not continue to be administered in the way they are now, and this legislation will not have much effect. While we are talking about nursing staff administering medications, there was not that long ago federal legislation to ensure that there should be nurses actually employed in aged care facilities, because in the past we did not even have that standard. It is really important to make sure that residents in aged care are not just being cared for in terms of their daily needs. They are there because of, in most cases, complex health issues, and so there needs to be the proper attention paid to those matters as well. You really need trained health professionals in order to do that.

That is not to take away from other staff that are not nurses. Many of them do such an incredible job. They really care. They are very caring, gentle and patient and of course they love what they do. For example, there is a young woman in the Thomastown electorate, Shakira, who has just successfully completed her My Aged Care support worker training, and she is just about to start her career working in aged care. Good luck to her, and I know anybody that she will be caring for is a very, very lucky person because she certainly has the empathy and the concern. Also she would be a lot of fun and hopefully will get on well with everybody that she meets.

When I look at some of what this legislation is doing, this is just one area of many. We are trying to make sure that the aged care area is one that works well and is in the best interests of residents. It also builds on things like what we are doing in terms of building up the nursing workforce, ensuring that there is proper pay and equal pay within the nursing professions and also greater emphasis on nurse practitioners. All of these things help us to address some of the challenges we have in the health areas where there is a lack of GPs and other professionals. We are taking action to ensure that we do build up the workforce and that we have the staff to do the work that is required. I know that there were some concerns, for example, about whether there will be enough nurses in order to do this work. Just on that, as I said, we are building up the workforce. Similar things were said when the federal government introduced legislation requiring nurses in aged care places. Requirements under this piece of legislation will not come into effect until 1 July 2026, and there is also quite a bit of lead-up time where there will not be any enforcement action taken, to ensure that aged care facilities can actually implement and have the time to put in place what they need to put in place. If there are issues, they need to raise those issues so they can be addressed.

This legislation will also be reviewed five years from the date of implementation just to make sure that it is working as it should and if there are any other issues that will need to be addressed. Of course the Allan Labor government is always up for doing that. We always want to do things the best way we

can, so it is always important to have reviews in order to ensure that the legislation is doing what we want it to do and that there are no unintended consequences and no other ways that it could be done better.

This is one further step in protecting elderly Victorians in terms of making sure that their medication is administered by properly qualified and trained people, and by doing that of course we are trying to prevent adverse events. I know many have had to go to hospital for something like this when we already have very full emergency departments, so of course this is another step in the many actions that we are taking in order to address those problems too.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (17:56): I speak today on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. This is a bill that will seek to amend the 1981 act to ensure that only registered nurses, enrolled nurses or other authorised health professionals such as doctors and pharmacists can administer drugs of dependence and schedules 4, 8 and 9 medications in aged care settings. On the surface this sounds like a step towards improving medication safety, and of course we all want that. We want our elderly to be safe; we want medications to be managed properly.

Personal care attendants will no longer be allowed to administer these medications, and this includes antibiotics. Some of these personal care attendants, who are often the locals in rural residential scenes, like where I live in South-West Coast, know their patients by name, they understand their routines and they understand their needs and their personalities, and they really are the backbone of our aged care settings. So I want to take a minute to actually acknowledge the great work they do. I was around during the time when we transitioned to personal care attendants in aged care facilities, because we recognise that it is a home environment; it is not a hospital setting.

As has already been said, as we age, the complexities of our health actually can result in medications of many, many tablets, but I want to just take a minute to acknowledge that it does not seem the best use of registered nurses' and enrolled nurses' time to be administering Webster packs. For those that do not understand what a Webster pack is, you go to the chemist, and the chemist, under the instruction of the doctor who is prescribing the medication, puts in the pills and the day and the time of the day so that they can just be administered by popping out the medication. In an aged care facility you often have people who do not remember where they are, like dementia patients, so you cannot leave medications laying around. So often the personal care attendant will just assist the patient – or the client, or the resident – to pop the pills out. That is something I do not think we should lose. Obviously we are talking about antibiotics, and they can be put in these Webster packs by pharmacists and prescribed by doctors very adequately, and also things like Palexia, which is a schedule 8 but can be given bd, twice a day. I think with some of these changes, whilst I understand the royal commission's findings and the intent, we do not want to be tying up staff when it is not as necessary as it is when a patient is going through a change and needs something like an Endone administered for pain or morphine when it is in a pump in a palliative care setting, for example. Those are the things we do want the registered nurses freed up to be able to do. So I want to take a minute to just acknowledge the great work that the aged care facilities do in providing a home environment – and let us not forget the human cost.

In Terang, a town of 2000 people, there is actually a real deficit of aged care beds, and there is actually no respite available. This is as a result of the May Noonan facility being sold and losing the aged care beds from Terang. The nearest option is 25 kilometres away, and the government, when I spoke to them about the need in Terang last time, said, 'Look, it's all sorted. We've been doing a great job. We've got beds in Cobden and Camperdown,' which is quite a distance, and it is not recognising the realities that the families and the spouses do not do any business in those towns. That is not where the community of interest is; the community of interest is in Terang. So often family members are saving the government millions of dollars by caring for their loved ones at home, but they need looking after as well. They deserve support, and they deserve access to respite. The government can assist this by giving Terang hospital funding to provide respite beds and help the people in Terang.

Just last week one of my own family members in Terang had to move into aged care down in Cobden, and it is terribly traumatic for the family. The family members that I am talking about have been married for over 50 years. Visiting involves a treacherous journey on a poorly maintained road full of potholes. For an elderly person, as in the case of my family member, this seems cruel and actually almost irresponsible. But why shouldn't they have the right to be in the relationship they have been in and support each other in their older years? I spoke to Eve, a community member from Terang, last week, who begged me to tell the government that the effect this is having on her community is very significant, and she actually rightfully said it is a form of elder abuse to break up these homes and force people into these situations and not understand the country environment.

Health services in the south-west really do need funding, just like other parts of Victoria. For example, we have a Lookout facility proposed for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and the committee who sit with the Warrnambool regional alcohol and drug centre have been working with the government, doing everything they believe that the government have asked them to do and jumping through every hoop over the last eight years to be eligible to get funding. Yet last week the Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt visited and said she was proud of the collective push of the community for this proposed service. I felt it was really patronising. She actually said:

We're proud to support WRAD and the work they're doing with their community and Traditional Owners to plan for the region's first residential rehabilitation service.

As I said, this rehabilitation centre was shovel-ready 2½ to three years ago, and the government kept putting more obstacles in front or changing goalposts. It is really insulting, and then to give them \$100,000 – it is like me giving my child \$5 as a reward at 30 years of age. It was just such a minuscule amount of money, which was supposed to go towards a feasibility study. Well, the reality is we do not need a feasibility study. It is quite clear, the demand for drug and alcohol rehabilitation in South-West Coast. It is now the only place without a funding commitment or a facility, and we have just had the record overdoses and deaths in South-West Coast. We do not need another feasibility study. We do not need more people dying from overdose. We need all the hard work that the committee of Lookout have put in to be recognised and the facility to be built, with no games being played about where it can go and where it cannot go, no games around more hoops and no patronising words about how proud the government is of all the work that has been done – just getting on and doing it.

Back to the bill: I support medication safety and I support clinical oversight, but I do not support legislation that is rushed. In the bill briefing we asked a question about what will happen in communities like mine where we just do not have the staff. I sat on a perinatal inquiry in about 2017, where we identified that there will be a very large shortage of nurses, and perhaps if the member for Frankston is awake he might remember that we identified quite a few deficits that will happen in the future in health needs. This has not happened in the last few years; this has been going on for 10 years, and I am not seeing the workforce planning. I hear from some of the members recognition that there are 600 nurses or 650 nurses that will be needed to fill this deficit, but this is something we are just not seeing addressed in South-West Coast. I am not seeing the incentives offered, and therefore continuity of care is very difficult in aged care facilities. I have nursed in these facilities. My mum is in an aged care facility and my dad died in an aged care facility last year, so I have been very much at the coalface for some time now, and they do a wonderful job under extraordinary circumstances, but having enough staff to be able to administer the medication when needed is one of the challenges.

I am not sure if we have got a bill in front of us like we have now that does not have any answers to the questions we asked about what will happen if they cannot actually meet the requirements of having the right ratio of staff or the right qualification of staff. What they said was very ambiguous, actually. They would not actually fine people, but there could be a fine, and that fine could be up to \$120,000. Is it the staff that are fined or the facility that is fined? They said, 'Well, we'll just put an educational focus on it.' What is the point of the legislation if there is no actual change that can be identified from the changes that are being made? That was really what we were told during the bill briefing.

I do support this legislation, because it is something that needs to happen, but it just does not have the consequences, it does not have the support. It needs to be considered with proper consultation with the sector to get an understanding of what they need, backed by real workforce planning and investment, not just penalties and promises. This is another example of this government trying to look like they are addressing issues but with no real solutions that will work in the real world and certainly not in South-West Coast. Our aged care workers deserve better, our elderly residents deserve better and our communities deserve better than a government just doing token-gesture bills like the one we have here.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (18:06): I too rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. It is great to hear the member for South-West Coast say she will be supporting this bill. I might remind the member for South-West Coast that almost for a decade we had a federal Liberal government who did absolutely nothing in this sector. I know this because my long-suffering mother was working in the sector for that decade where workers and homes were absolutely falling down around the ears of that federal Liberal government, and they did nothing. It was not until an Albanese Labor government was elected and the Honourable Anika Wells became the Minister for Aged Care, got off her butt and started doing things in that sector, that something was done. So I am really pleased that the member for South-West Coast is going to support this bill, but saying that this side of the house and Labor governments have never done anything to reform this sector is absolute and utter nonsense.

The aim of this bill is to make a number of important changes to the settings that govern our state-run residential aged care facilities here in Victoria. At the core of this bill is the principle that older Victorians living in these residential aged care settings deserve quality care. I am pleased to say that compared to the privately regulated aged care facilities, our state-managed care facilities, of which there are about 180 here in Victoria, outperform the private sector again and again. We certainly saw that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It goes without saying that an important part of our aged care setting is the administering of medication. For years I had conversations with my mother about the settings in New South Wales in which to prescribe medication to elderly residents. These were people who live in the facilities and experience all kinds of vulnerabilities and conditions, things like Alzheimer's and dementia, that mean some of those folks require extra assistance in taking their daily medications. My father-in-law has recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. He is taking stroke medication and blood pressure medication and the whole gamut, and he requires assistance from my mother-in-law to help him on a daily basis take all of that medication. When you go into an aged care facility, quite often residents do need that kind of assistance as well. What we know is that, according to the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, about 20 per cent – one in five – of unplanned hospital admissions from residential aged care facilities are the result of inappropriate and unsatisfactory medicine use. We also know the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety clearly identified that medication management and safety is a key area that needs improvement. That is what this bill is doing here in this place this afternoon.

We heard reports of medicine not being administered correctly and residents being given medication with no oversight to ensure that they actually take them. I know that here in this place we can agree that this kind of neglect is just simply unacceptable in any form of aged care setting. We know that in our aged care facilities here in Victoria about 36 per cent of residents are actually prescribed – get this; this is just so many tablets – more than nine medications, and that is the highest rate of polypharmacy anywhere in Australia. About 19 per cent of residents are prescribed antipsychotics, which, if not managed correctly, can present major risks to the safety of residents and also to the safety of staff – such as my mum, who has worked in those facilities.

Fortunately, we have seen the federal government make some really positive improvements to the aged care sector since the royal commission handed down its recommendations. Mandatory care minutes were introduced so that residents have an appropriate amount of dedicated care time, which includes 44 minutes with a registered nurse. The federal government have also reformed funding to the sector through a new funding model that gives providers greater clarity over the funding they

receive. In fact one of the things we are hearing is that these changes are actually delivering better outcomes for aged care workers themselves. We are hearing it is becoming faster to attract and keep aged care workers. I will say that that is a stark contrast from the disaster the industry was in under the previous federal Liberal government that led to the royal commission's initial report simply titled – remember this – *Neglect*.

As for our government, we here in this state have been working on reforms in this space for much longer, and that started back in 2018 with a review of the administration of medication in residential aged care settings. What this review went ahead and identified was that there was room for improvement in this space to meet basic practice. So in 2022 we undertook sector-wide consultation to strengthen medication management and administration in our state residential care centres. We consulted with unions, with providers, with personal care workers and, most importantly, with those with lived experience in care. I think it is quite often forgotten that for those in aged care facilities, it is not an aged care facility to them; it is their home, it is their bedroom and it is the place where they are going to see out the end of their days. We needed to be able to consult with them, and we did.

What this bill delivers on is it makes a number of critical changes in this sector, which will come into effect by July next year, in order to give the sector the time it needs to adjust or make workforce changes. What this bill will actually do is place a requirement on all Victorian aged care providers to make sure that only registered and enrolled nurses can administer prescribed and dispensed drugs of dependence, as well as schedule 4, 8 and 9 medications. In addition, the bill is going to go ahead and allow for regulations to prescribe any exemptions where this obligation may not apply, as well as how these circumstances, most importantly, going ahead should actually be managed.

The regulatory framework is not something that we have made up. It has been implemented based on the feedback we have heard from the industry, which is that we need to account for unforeseen circumstances that may limit nursing ability. We are talking about things like serious residential emergencies, temporary unexpected staff shortages or other factors that may go ahead and impact the ability of nurses to administer that really important medication on time. This does not always cover insufficient nursing all of the time, but it does account for those unplanned situations that can happen in these settings, and there will be no need for providers to go ahead and seek an exemption.

What I will say is that registered nurses – and my mum actually used to be one, until she gave up being a registered nurse to become a family day care worker when she had children; she could not do the shift work as a registered nurse, having given birth to me and with her husband being a milkman – are the ones that work regularly in aged care settings. Mum would often comment that in New South Wales those registered nurses would come in and dispense the medication. They are also equipped with the skills and the training to administer medications safely.

That is just so important when you are dealing with elderly people who are vulnerable and have all kinds of challenges ahead of them and that they are experiencing based on their age. The skills and the training to administer that medication safely are so important. That is something, as any aged care worker will attest, that aged workers do not always have experience in. My mum said in her experience a lot of aged care workers quite often did not or would not have the confidence to administer those drugs at the levels and the volumes that people needed to take them. They did not have the confidence to go ahead and actually administer them in the first place, so it was a no-brainer to have the registered nurses come in.

I do want to give a big shout-out, in summing up in the last 40-odd seconds, to the aged care workers. They do a really tough job day in, day out. They often do not get thanked. They have to deal with immense challenges. I know that there is job satisfaction; people that really enjoy being there and enjoy that kind of work get immense job satisfaction in looking after our elderly, quite often at the end stages of their life. Like I said, some of them are facing significant challenges when we are talking about Alzheimer's and dementia. They get to know the families of their aged care residents. I know



my mum felt very deeply and was passionate about the work that she did, which is why I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the house.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (18:16): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 dealing with residential aged care. Can I begin by just acknowledging the great work that many of our aged care facilities do in my electorate of Caulfield. Only a few weeks ago as part of aged care worker recognition day, in fact on 7 August, I had the great opportunity to go along with Ageing Australia to attend a couple of our residential aged care facilities and see firsthand what they do. There were two facilities that we joined to recognise workers and carers, provide wonderful birthday cakes and reflect on some great stories. The first was Jewish Care. Jewish Care do an amazing job. We had the opportunity to talk to many of the staff that unfortunately are under-recognised – that would probably be the best way to describe it – in terms of what they do. But I must say the people who do recognise them are many of the families. I did have a family member come up to me during that visit, and she just said, ‘I want to thank the staff and thank you’. When she goes home of a night, she knows that her mother is safe, because they have the care and the support around them.

We then went on to a second facility in Calvary Bethlehem. Calvary Bethlehem is a facility that used to deal just with end of life. It is a fantastic facility that is now taking people on a journey from early retirement all the way through to end of life, through all of those moments along the way. Again, listening to the programs, talking firsthand to the staff and hearing some of their stories was just an amazing thing. I know we all get the opportunity to do that as members of Parliament, particularly when you have got a recognition day where you can understand and support and hear the stories. We had many of the residents come together with the workers, and the residents and families said thank you.

What this bill does – and I was going to get on to the bill – is ensure that we have a tighter framework around medication within our aged care facilities, which is absolutely important. Many of us that have had or currently have ageing parents know how important it is to make sure that their care is absolutely a number one priority. Particularly when you think of the lives that our families, our parents, have given and what they have contributed along the way, at their later years in life we want to make sure they are supported and cared for. For many of us it is the first journey. I know for me, going through it with both my mum and dad, who ended up in a local facility called Arcare – firstly in Arcare in Brighton but later on in Arcare in Caulfield, literally just at the end of my street – to see the work that was done was absolutely important.

We talk about the medication. As a carer for my parents, it was often my responsibility to organise the medication and to make sure everything was done properly. But of course you would often wonder about all the tablets and the medication and what was being prescribed. I think any safeguards we can make to protect our loved ones we should be supporting and we should be encouraging, and that is why the opposition certainly support this bill.

At the moment I have my father-in-law in another facility in Monash, also in my electorate. Again, these are unbelievable facilities. These are places which have full wraparound support. My wife goes in on a daily basis to see her dad. I think it was only yesterday they were going through, and they have a news and sports round-up and they get an expert to come in and talk about sport. They read the papers about what happened and their favourite football teams and everything else. I actually rang her yesterday when all that was happening and heard my father-in-law in the background.

Again, it is just so important to make sure we get the care right and to have the framework in place. The bill amends the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to strengthen medication safety for aged care; to ensure that there is a framework for governing medication; to ensure that the legislation fits into a national framework; to make sure that there is clinical governance around the framework and that there are proper, accountable processes in place; and also to ensure personal care workers will no longer be able to administer drugs of dependence in schedules 4, 8 and 9 in the

medication of aged care residents. This is really important because the personal care workers do an unbelievable job – they become almost part of the family – but you want to make sure that there is a framework around some of this care. The bill also addresses the risk of harm from the current practice, which allows personal care workers without the education and regulation of a proper registered nurse to administer high-risk medications. Again, this is often just about awareness and it is often about education, and that is why we need to make sure there are proper parameters of support around that.

Interestingly, looking at the bill, some of the statistics absolutely surprised me. Thirty-six per cent of Victorian aged care residents have been prescribed nine or more medications, and 19 per cent take antipsychotics. That is a big number and a big amount of medication. As I said earlier, watching Mum and Dad and the amount of different medication and tablets that they are on and just having to manage that – I actually remember a story where Dad had one of his moments and he said, ‘Right, that’s it, I’m not taking any more medication,’ and we had to manage that. The next minute my dad rang my brother and said, ‘Get me out of this place.’ Next minute I went to go and visit Dad. He was not at the aged care facility, and my brother had kidnapped him – well, not kidnapped him; he had taken him because my dad said, ‘I want out.’ My brother took him to Yarrawonga because my brother lives up there, and my dad spent a lot of time in his life in Yarrawonga. For three days my dad had the best time of his life in those later years, going back and spending that time, but without medication. So he did not have his medication. He literally broke out of the aged care facility and had this three-day holiday, and then finally I called my brother and said, ‘That’s wonderful, but we’ve got to get him back.’ So we got him back in the facility, and by about that stage he did need his medication again. So we got him back on the medication and everything was all hunky-dory. But it was really interesting to think, in a very nervous way, that he had been living on medication for probably 15 years – all of these tablets – and he was just going to be completely free of that, free of the aged care facility and enjoying life in those later years. It was a nervous period, but reflecting on it now and just the fact that we were able to have our father enjoy those really important moments, I am sure that will be a moment that my brother and his family will cherish forever, being able to enjoy that.

Just in finishing, again I want to give a shout-out to all of our aged care workers and all of the facilities. As I say, we are very lucky in Caulfield to have A1-standard facilities. We have lots of choice, both in Jewish and non-Jewish facilities – Emmy Monash, Jewish Care, as I say, Calvary, Arcare and a number of others that do a wonderful job, an amazing job – and we are seeing things evolve. I think probably the most difficult thing that we still need to focus on is staffing, because it is a real issue, getting staffing and attracting staffing. I think the government could absolutely do more to ensure that we get more staff into aged care facilities, have some more training programs and particularly for people coming from overseas ensure that they are able to come and work in some of the facilities. That is by and large a bit of a federal issue as well, but we should be trying to support whatever we can so we do not have under-resourced facilities. We should be supporting our workers in health care in any way we possibly can. That is why we on this side will be supporting the bill before the chamber.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (18:26): Can I first just go on the record as saying my thoughts are with the entire police family tonight. We have all spoken before about how dangerous their job is, how unexpected things can be. Even a run-of-the-mill traffic stop can turn into a very serious incident, as we have seen today. Without saying too much and without knowing too much at this stage, some police officers in their duty have been fired upon and we have had tragic circumstances, so our thoughts are with them tonight. I know that everybody in this chamber is united in that and has our solidarity. It is always very shocking to hear, and I am sure it has rocked a lot of worlds up at Porepunkah too. It is such a quiet, beautiful place up at Porepunkah and Bright – I love that area – and unfortunately now it has changed forever. I wish the police who are active on duty at the moment hunting this person the very best overnight and for the hours to come.

Just on this bill, I was sitting here listening to people on this side of the chamber and the opposition as well, and I think there is some commonality between this bill and the bill that we spoke about earlier today in regard to the working with children check, and that is that our work is never done. Our work

here is constant, and these bills are the result of constant diligence. They are the result of measuring issues that come up and then managing those issues, but it is a reminder that our work in here is never done. It is not a case of coming in here, passing a bill and saying, 'Yep, onto the next one. What is the next problem?' It is a case of consistently monitoring the environment, policies and laws that affect the most vulnerable people in our community. As technologies change, as our communities change, our diligence must increase as well.

It has been really interesting hearing some of the stories from people on both sides of the chamber, and I cannot help myself; I will add to those. I, as a firefighter, went to many retirement homes and retirement villages. I love old people. I think we do not have to learn the lessons –

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I love Steve McGhie. I love the member for Melton. Anyone with a pensioner card is my mate. You do not have to live the lessons that they have learned. Honestly, some of the stories you will hear are just wise beyond words, but they are also very funny as well. When you go into a retirement home with a couple of hoses and a breathing apparatus on your back, often people want to pull you up and tell you jokes and everything. One that sticks with me – and I will get to the bill in a second, member for Hawthorn, so do not worry – was in Frankston South when we walked into a retirement village one day. As another member said, this is where these people live. It is their home. It is not just their house. It is not a retirement home. I guess I always saw it as a workplace, and we walk in. But this gentleman says to me, 'Oh, do you know why the fire alarm went off, son?' I could hear the fire alarm, we were looking around to reset it and everything, and he said, 'Because the women in this place are so hot.' Part of me was just like 'Oh!'

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** It reminded me of the fact that it is another stage of life. It is not a stage of life that I had considered until then, but it is a normal stage of life. I will talk to you later, member for Melton; I will get some hints on this. But it is a stage of life that we do not think about that much, because it is an uncomfortable truth that we hopefully all will get old – some of us will not, unfortunately – and we have moved away from getting old in situ with the extended nuclear family. Now people tend to retire – the empty-nesters downsize. I see you looking at me, member for Melton. The way we do things has changed and so has the service we provide people who live in these arrangements.

Unfortunately, we saw some horrible home truths during the royal commission into elderly services. I mean, it was not a surprise to many of us. There are good operators and there are bad operators, public and private. I certainly remember with some of the nursing homes we went into, as almost like a random volunteer visitor who has to come in to check a fire alarm, you would smell that there was something wrong with certain places. You would see that there were not enough people on shift. You would see nurses checking whether people were breathing by putting a mirror in front of their face. Certainly the contents of this bill – it rings true that we have often not upheld the standards that we needed to in this sector.

This bill, going onto a state stream, goes a long way to making sure that we do uphold the highest standards possible for those people and their families as well, because let us not forget that it is a traumatic time for many people to be put in these arrangements – arrangements they need to be in for their own safety and their family's safety. Whether it is a neurological issue or whether it is a medical issue, most people have been put into this arrangement and cannot live at home for a reason. It would be absolutely horrible to suggest to family members or even have that doubt that your mum, your dad, your uncle, your aunty or even the younger people who often are in homes for the elderly or retirement homes are not being looked after properly. To get to a stage that we need to introduce a bill that says only qualified people can give these schedule 9, 5 and 4 medicines says that something has gone

wrong. In this case, we have measured what has gone wrong. We have seen it. We have got the data, and we have managed that issue as well.

I would like to know that when I get older or when my folks are somewhere where they need care, they get the very best of care – not someone who will not watch them swallow the pills, not someone who is not qualified to draw up a needle and give an intramuscular or intravenous injection. These are all things that require specialist skills. My daughter at the moment is doing paramedicine at uni, and it is only more than a year in that she has actually started giving injections. These are things for which you just cannot get someone who has done a certificate IV in community work, or whatever the qualification is, and say, 'Because we're short-staffed tonight, I need you to do this.' That is an absolute recipe for disaster. I understand the pressure that puts on people; I understand the workforce pressures that have been mentioned as well. There are quite a few issues here that need to be dealt with, and they will not be dealt with with this bill. But what this bill does is set that standard and make sure that we do meet the standard that we are setting. We do that by having things like free TAFE courses for nurses. We do that by making sure we monitor the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre system and encourage people from a young age to look at different careers, at different streams and at things they might like to make their career in.

Certainly I thank the minister and her staff but also the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. Like the member for South-West Coast, I was on that inquiry. I had the pleasure of working with some very, very experienced ANMF delegates, and I learned a lot. I think they see it at the coalface. They do not have to hear from a 23-year-old person in the department that has been given a task: 'We need you to create this to solve this problem.' These people work this every day. They are at the coalface. They see the humanity of this, when it goes right and when it goes very wrong, so it is very, very important to listen to them and get that consultation piece right. In this case I think we did.

The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 is a bill that I think has bipartisan support across the chamber, as it should have. It has been very interesting hearing some of the stories. I am probably going to have to buy the member for Melton a bottle of wine after this, because he –

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Now he has perked up; he is looking like he is 50 again. But in all seriousness, the way we treat our most vulnerable people in our community, whether it be children, the elderly, people who are disabled or anyone else, is a measure of us as a government, indeed us as a community, and this bill goes a long way to ensuring that. I guess the reason I came to Parliament was to have bills like this and commend them to the house.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (18:36): I am happy to rise to speak on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. As others before me have said, we certainly will not be opposing this bill. I think this bill is a bit like the bill we were talking about earlier – it touches all of us. It has been interesting to listen to the debate this afternoon and this evening from members on both sides of the chamber and to very touching stories about our parents and our grandparents. It affects us all. I think we all found the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety very confronting, because we all know that if we have not yet reached that stage of dealing with our grandparents or parents, we will at some point. Some of the stories were quite harrowing, and whilst this bill does not deal with some of the more confronting aspects of the royal commission's work, dealing with the qualifications, expertise and knowledge of those who are dispensing medications and administering them for those in aged care settings is obviously a crucial part of the reforms.

All of us, as I said, have our own stories. I know my siblings and I are going through this at the moment. Both our parents are living, I am happy to say, but one of them is experiencing quite a severe condition. It is something that as siblings – and I know we have all got our own stories – is very challenging,

because you are often dealing with your folks, who for almost the entirety of your life you have seen as invincible and unbreakable, and you see them in a different and evolving light. It is very challenging I think for all of us to deal with that aspect. So I think a bill like this is something that we all come to with an understanding of how important it is to make sure that our parents and grandparents – and eventually us – will be receiving the very best of care.

I guess the key points that I want to touch on in my remarks tonight relate to how ready we are for this new system. I think it is important to ensure that nurses, both registered and enrolled, and doctors and pharmacists are sufficient in numbers to be able to meet the demand across the sector. I think aged care providers, the administrators, the executives who run both public sector and non-government sector facilities, the staff and the union leaders – everybody – have a shared commitment to ensuring that the very best of care is there. But there is little in this bill, I am afraid to say, that gives us an assurance that we will be ready for that by 1 July next year; it is not far away. There will be many parts of our state where facilities will simply not nearly be in a position to comply, not because they do not want to but because they will not be able to find particularly the nursing staff but also the medical and pharmacological staff who will be available on hand to deal with demand. And we know that demand is rising. We have intergenerational report after intergenerational report pointing out that our population is ageing – that is not likely to change any time soon – and the costs of providing aged care on our community will continue to grow. So as our population ages and as the costs of providing care rise, particularly where you have complex morbidities, evolving acuity and very diverse levels of acuity within a given facility, it is not going to be easy, particularly for regional and rural facilities, to provide the workforce needed to cover off on that demand.

In this bill and in the materials that support it and in the briefing that has been provided, we simply hear that the government cites its free TAFE for nursing courses, which no-one is cavilling with. But when you have a predicted shortfall of nearly 700, which I think is lowballing the shortfall that we are likely to see, that does give rise to concerns, certainly on my part, that we are not going to have the workforce that we need. So it is a lot more than about the TAFE system. I think what the government needs to demonstrate is that the career pathway for people coming into the sector is such that we can attract and retain staff, and I am just not confident that we are going to get there.

Which leads to a second point that I want to mention, which is that if you concede that you are going to have shortages, what is the legislative and regulatory mechanism to accommodate that? What I would suggest to the government is that whilst we are not opposing the bill and we are not moving amendments, the explanation in the second-reading speech and obviously in the bill that is provided that there will be regulations published that can prescribe the circumstances in which people can administer medications where there are unplanned or unexpected shortages, I do not think will give facilities in particular the comfort that they need in the lead-up to 1 July. Even with the grace period, it is not going to leave them much headroom to plan for how they are going to manage that.

I think it is unfortunate that the government, with all the support that it has for this bill, has not seen fit to bring to this house a proposed regulatory regime that will accommodate those unplanned absences or those unforeseen circumstances – and we have to assume that they are going to occur. No-one is pretending that you can have a legislative or regulatory exemption for facilities that simply do not want to staff up. It is expected that, in a world where we want our parents and our grandparents to receive the very best of care, we want facilities to recruit the staff. But given that they are not going to be able to do that, I do not think it is satisfactory that the government says to this house and upstairs that it will make regulations in due course. People need to plan, and amongst their many challenges, not least of which is providing the best care they can but also navigating through what is a complex set of financial arrangements with a mixture of state and federal government and sometimes local government funding streams, it is incredibly difficult for these facilities to be able to plan for how they are going to meet those unexpected needs, and they will be many and varied. It is not going to be a simple case of facilities not being able to recruit the staff in particularly rural and regional areas, but I would have to say in other areas as well – on the outskirts of metropolitan Melbourne I think we are going to see a

similar phenomenon where they are going to struggle to ensure that there are qualified staff on hand all of the time. We all expect as a Parliament that very best of care, but we have always been willing to work with the government on a matter like this, where we can work towards ensuring that that regulatory framework exists. What I would say to the government is – despite the passage of this bill through this house this week – that it should work without delay to publish a set of proposed regulatory guidelines so there is a regulatory framework and a financial framework to ensure that facilities can meet the need as and when it arises.

I should say that in supporting this bill, I do not want those personal carers who assist so many people in our aged care facilities with their medications to feel like this is somehow a criticism of them, or a slight on them. They do fantastic work. All but I dare say a very small number are so dedicated and should not be made to feel, with the passage of this bill, that they are not providing the very best of care. But the government might do well to work with that part of the sector to ensure that as part of the transition we are not going to miss things. At the end of the day – and I will finish on this – if this transition is not managed as best as it can be and you do have the uncertainty that will surround what is an unexpected or unplanned absence that justifies the administration of a medication by somebody who is not registered or authorised, let us remember that is a life-and-death decision and we need to equip those facilities with the powers that they will need to respond to those urgent situations. We will not be opposing this bill, but I do not think the government should walk away from this debate thinking that it does not have urgent work to do. The bill itself is one part of it, but fixing that uncertainty is the other.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (18:46): I rise to speak in support of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. Firstly, I was out at an aged care facility only a couple of weeks ago to celebrate aged care worker day, and it was fantastic to be out there. I just want to pick up on one thing that the member for Hawthorn raised about personal care attendants. I think this is not about replacing them or whatever. This is actually about protecting personal care attendants in the treatment and support that they give to aged care residents and patients. I am sure that some personal care attendants have been put in positions where they have not wanted to administer some of the drugs but have probably been forced to do that, not knowing the ramifications of some of the drugs if things went wrong or if they happened to overdose the person. I think it does protect personal care attendants. They do a fantastic job, and it was great to be out there a couple of weeks ago celebrating aged care worker day.

This bill is about one of the most fundamental responsibilities that we have here in Parliament: ensuring that our older Victorians, who built this state – our parents, our grandparents, our neighbours and of course our loved ones – are protected. There have been many, many stories from all the contributions made on this bill about people's experiences in regard to aged care facilities. Those residents need to receive the dignity, the safety and of course the professional care that they deserve in their later years. What must come first is the welfare of those people, and that is what this bill is all about – that is, making sure that those residents are protected. This bill enshrines a clear and important obligation that in Victorian residential aged care facilities only registered nurses and enrolled nurses or other registered health practitioners can administer certain classes of medications. Those medications might be schedule 9 poisons, schedule 8 controlled drugs, schedule 4 prescription medications or drugs of dependence.

As I have said, we have all had aged care experiences. Some will be because of parents or family members that are in aged care facilities. In my situation, I was a paramedic responding to aged care facilities for medical episodes. Some of those would have been due to the administration of medication where the resident had some negative response to it, whether that was because of an overdose or the type of drug they were given. It might have led to a fall of that elderly patient where they sustained a fracture. So my experiences in aged care facilities were as a responding paramedic. I have not had relatives in any aged care facilities. My parents did not live long enough to get to aged care, unfortunately, so I have not had that experience of having parents in an aged care facility.

This reform is not just a simple technical adjustment. It is about protecting residents, as we have said, from medication errors, upholding professional standards of nursing and responding to the longstanding calls of the aged care workforce, the unions and of course the families. It is all about keeping faith with the commitments this government made, and it is about delivering on those commitments.

The importance of medication safety in aged care has been recognised for years now, and the 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was unequivocal in its findings that medication management was one of the weakest links in that chain of care yet one of the most important things to maintain a patient's health and welfare. The royal commission documented many cases where residents were given tablets without any oversight whatsoever, where medicines were administered incorrectly and where errors went uncorrected. Again, that can be under instructions. Whether it be a personal care attendant or someone else within the facility, they might have been given a direction to give a medication that they knew nothing about and knew nothing about the ramifications of that drug and how they counteract the administration of any effects of that drug. So it was not their fault and it is not their fault, and it is not about patient care assistants versus nurses. This is about, again, the welfare and care of elderly residents. The royal commission showed that medication errors can be quite devastating in some cases. They can shorten someone's life – they certainly diminish quality of life – and of course they can shatter a family's trust in how their parent, probably, or grandparent has been treated within an aged care facility.

The reform was demanded by the industry and by, as I said, families and unions. I want to give a shout-out to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) for their calls to ensure that only nurses with the training, the accountability and the professional expertise – and it does take professional expertise – administer medications in residential aged care. It takes many years of training for a nurse to become qualified, to be able to administer these medications, as it does for other registered medical professionals. One of those other registered groups in the future may be paramedic practitioners that may be called to an aged care facility, where they may have to administer some drugs. The professionalism of our registered medical professionals, such as nurses and paramedic practitioners, is second to none, and we want to maintain and keep that standard very high.

As I referred to before, this bill delivers on the commitment made by our government at the 2022 state election to the Victorian branch of the ANMF to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 so that only nurses can administer medications in residential aged care facilities. We made that promise, and we have stuck to that promise by introducing this bill. It is very important, because backing nurses means that we are backing safety – that is exactly what it is all about – and of course backing the unions means backing the voice of those on the front line. Again, I cannot thank the ANMF enough for their leadership and all of their members for the fantastic work that they do in making sure that people are safe and that their welfare is protected. They do an amazing job in many, many different circumstances under very trying conditions, sometimes, in aged care facilities. They do a fantastic job, but in all health facilities nurses do an amazing job. Victorian residential aged care providers will be required by law to ensure that only registered nurses, enrolled nurses or other authorised registered health practitioners administer high-risk medications. As I said before, this could mean that in the future paramedic practitioners may be one of those other authorised registered health professionals.

We recognise that there will be circumstances where strict application of the rule could cause harm. For example, in rural settings a delay – and people have spoken to this – in access to a nurse could result in a resident missing urgent medication because they do not have someone that is qualified to administer that medication. That is why this bill gives some level of regulation-making powers to prescribe exemptions and safeguards, and it ensures that where flexibility is needed it can be delivered. But of course again, the core principle here is that for the majority of cases only nurses will administer those types of medicines that were referred to previously.

This bill is not working in isolation. It complements many major reforms already underway at the Commonwealth level, including new staffing models, funding changes and the introduction of

minimum care minutes, which require 44 minutes of direct care by a registered nurse per resident per day, which is really important. Forty-four minutes does not sound like a lot, but when you have a large aged care facility, that is amazing work by our registered nurses. As I said before, they do a fantastic job, and we cannot thank them enough.

This bill is a really important bill for the welfare of our elderly citizens that are in these facilities. It is important that nurses deliver this care. I thank them for what they do, and I thank the ANMF for their leadership in regard to this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (18:56): I rise this evening to contribute also to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. As the member for Polwarth, residential aged care is a big part of many of my communities. Whether it is Colac, Winchelsea, Torquay, Lorne, Apollo Bay, Timboon, Cobden, or Camperdown, right throughout the region there are aged care services that are important to those communities, and they are important because they allow elderly people to remain close to their families and friends and loved ones and be connected in the community. Across my electorate these facilities are provided by both the state – and Victoria has quite a strong reputation for providing a fairly strong state-backed aged care service – and also a mixture of not-for-profit and for-profit organisations who will provide more residential care and then more supported aged care services.

There are a range of issues that pop up from time to time, and medication supply and administering basic health care to elderly people in these homes can be a problem. And the smaller the community, the more difficult it is. A seat like Polwarth has that in spades in many of its communities. Apollo Bay, Lorne, Cobden and Timboon are all communities that are some distance from other larger areas and continually have difficulty attracting a GP workforce but also a nursing workforce. Smaller regional healthcare facilities and aged care facilities often will go through periods where they have a stable workforce; things tick along quite nicely, and all is well on the home front. The staff are well connected to the residents and the patients, and there is a good service provided. But of course it only takes, often, the departure of one nurse, a skilled professional, a GP, from a community, and aged care in particular can be left in a very fraught position.

The intent of this legislation today is the result of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which decided that we really only want registered nurses and enrolled nurses assisting with the distribution of important medications. And while at first glance that makes a lot of sense and that is a noble objective, of course it is an extra cost and an extra pressure on many smaller health services that simply cannot access the skilled staff on a regular basis sometimes and sometimes can go for quite some time without.

The other thing that often separates out regional aged care services is the general care staff. The personal care attendants that work in these facilities are often people who have lived and worked in the community. They often have longstanding relationships with many of the clients and residents that they are supporting and looking after, and it is often a very unique and at times quite a different service to what might be experienced in larger metropolitan and larger regional centres, in a country town, and this is a service that makes them more unique. So while this legislation seeks to be very prescriptive –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I move:

That the sitting be continued.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** The house will suspend for 1 hour for dinner and return at 8 pm.

**Sitting suspended 7:00 pm until 8:02 pm.**



**Richard RIORDAN:** The member for Mordialloc walks in just in time to see how we can discuss these things. We are back on Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 after the half-time break. As we were discussing before the dinner adjournment this evening, we were talking about the fact that in my electorate aged care of course is a really, really important social service that occurs in many of my communities. Across the Polwarth area we have a mixture of private, public and not-for-profit aged care providers offering a range of levels of service. Whether it is in Torquay, Colac, Winchelsea, Lorne, Apollo Bay, Timboon, Cobden or Camperdown, providing aged care is a really essential service to these communities. The aged care facilities enable our elderly folk to remain close to their communities, close to their farms and close to their families and provide a quality of life in the later parts of their lives that they are deserving of.

This bill that we are discussing today of course is about making that experience a safer one, and that is something that this side of Parliament agrees with. We fully agree with the sentiments of the royal commission on how we avoid medication disasters. I have a personal view that in aged care it is a whole-of-community approach to making those days, months and years that people spend in these facilities a good time in their lives and a dignified way to see out the twilight of their years. This cannot be done alone. Particularly in rural and regional Victoria, aged care really relies on the goodwill and support of the local communities, whether it is the local groups that come by and visit or whether it is the personal care attendants and nursing staff who have had a long-term relationship and commitment to the service. Whatever it is, it provides a different level of care to perhaps what might be experienced in the larger metropolitan areas. It is often a very personal level of care. Country Victorians are often short-changed on many things, but often in aged care, from my experience, having been involved with an aged care service for many years but also now as a member of Parliament, you visit these centres and you see how connected communities can often be there.

This legislation is trying to alleviate risk and problems that may arise by insisting that the distribution of various levels of medication on schedules 4, 8 and 9 in aged care settings are only done by registered or enrolled nurses. If you say it very quickly, it makes sense and it is probably hard to argue with. The problem is the legislation really does not set up the necessary safeguards for rural and regional communities where that level of expertise and staffing is not there, so the challenge that the government has with legislation like this is they are going to be left in the situation where we are going to have to turn a blind eye to the legislation on a regular basis because the skills required are not there when you need them. Quite frankly, having legislation that you are forced to turn a blind eye to is legislation that is really not worded and structured as well as it could be, and that causes problems ultimately. You cannot pick and choose when you want to abide by legislation. So this side of the house has a concern: while we support the intent of the government, we would also say that more needs to be done to make sure that in particular rural and regional health services and aged care services have the capacity and the support to make sure that at all times they have got the staff and the skilled staff that this government says they now have to have. That of course can at times require more funding and more support from the state to ensure that the necessary people are on hand in communities.

The reality is that some of our aged care services are in sometimes quite small communities. Take Lorne, Apollo Bay and Timboon, all three in my electorate: they are relatively small communities, and from the outside people looking in think, 'Lorne, Apollo Bay and Timboon are busy, bustling towns.' But these are quite small communities. They do not have a whole bunch of state-enrolled nurses or registered nurses at their beck and call to call upon. So where this legislation could be improved really is by having a structure that acknowledges the shortfall in skills and services, particularly in regional areas, and actually provides more practical and lived experience of how you might solve that problem. These things could include where we have had personal care attendants who may have been working in these facilities for many, many years, have got to know their patients and are capable of doing more, particularly with better support, training and accreditation. This would be an obvious solution to how you might ensure there are necessary safeguards in place to ensure that there are not medication problems along the way.

This legislation, when we look at it, is all of seven pages, and my suggestion to the government is: this is again an opportunity where the government has failed to really think about the needs of rural and regional Victoria and has failed to put enough thought into it and, at seven pages, to solve what is an important problem they are trying to solve but which could have been done better.

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (20:08): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. I was reflecting while listening very attentively to the member for Polwarth and thinking how much I agreed with so much of his contribution until right at the end. But anyway, I was grateful to hear what have been important contributions from both sides of the chamber really going to the heart of what we know in our communities to be extraordinarily important reforms that also speak so much to so many of us from our own experiences with, usually, our parents and the importance of making sure that we have the right staff – that people who are qualified are doing that incredibly important and complex care.

This bill does represent a significant step forward in ensuring the safety and dignity of older Victorians, because too many residents in aged care live with so many complex health conditions and they do take multiple medications, and there are risks of harm from misuse and poor oversight. Those Webster packs can appear very straightforward when people have everything in their lives going along smoothly and going along well. But as soon as there are complexities in life, if we add in people who are feeling unwell, any of those problems that can happen when we see medicines being mixed up can be really so dangerous.

This bill responds directly to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which identified unsafe medication practices as a serious problem. It is also an opportunity for me to acknowledge the Minister for Ageing Ms Stitt in the other place, the minister's office and the people working in the department for what I know to be extraordinarily detailed and complex work in ensuring that only registered and enrolled nurses can administer prescribed medicines. In doing this we are raising the standard of care and reducing avoidable harm. This bill improves the safety and quality of care for older Victorians, and we know that Victorians are living longer lives. It has been picked up by a few members that the idea of our older Victorians living lives in aged care in some sort of passive way has completely changed. My own mother is learning and teaching the ukulele and very involved in her writing class at her aged care facility, and I know of another aged care facility – and I am not going to name them – where they do beer brewing as well. These are people's homes, where people live and where people enjoy the important company of other friends. This legislation also gives families and people living in their own homes in aged care – because I think it is a good reminder always for us to think of them as living in their own homes – peace of mind knowing that medicines are managed by qualified, trained professionals.

This bill also supports better workforce planning and recognises the expertise of nurses, and I will come to nurses in a minute, because I am going to use this opportunity to speak a little bit about the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and the role that Lisa Fitzpatrick had in leading that extraordinary organisation. But I do want to acknowledge as well, first, that this bill provides a 12-month transition period, and this will be incredibly important for certainty for people living in aged care and for people working in aged care, and in particular in this context I think of Cranbourne. Although I have a young electorate, I do have several terrific villages and aged care facilities in Cranbourne, and I am very fortunate to spend a bit of time visiting people who live there, chatting to them about what is going on in their lives, admiring the breadth and depth of the programs and the areas of interest. I do have a very fast growing community. I have spoken about that at length, and this does strengthen our aged care workforce also through other mechanisms that we have used, including free TAFE.

I am going to take the opportunity, though, to thank Nazareth House in Camberwell for the extraordinary care and support that my family are very aware of. I am also going to take the opportunity because my mother's best friend Pat Barry has just passed away, and she spoke in detail

about the palliative care and the dignity of end-of-life care for people who live there. I want to commend the important work that the people who work there do every day. I am very lucky to live in and to represent an electorate that has a really large number of nurses. Many of them are coming from some of our diaspora communities, including a large number of nurses who are from Kerala and other parts of India, a significant number of Sri Lankan nurses and quite a lot of Zimbabwean nurses. I have met some husbands and wives recently, doorknocking, and I know that they care passionately about the care that the people that they work with receive. I know that is the priority for the nurses who live in my electorate and for the nurses across Victoria.

I am going to take a moment to acknowledge Lisa Fitzpatrick, who as I said earlier is the former secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. For nearly 24 years Lisa has been the voice of nurses and midwives, through decades of challenge and change. She has fought for every improvement in pay, conditions and professional recognition, and she has won those fights with principle, clarity and purpose. She has stood on picket lines and in press conferences, and she has certainly been here in Parliament. She has been at bargaining tables, she has been steadfast and she has been determined.

It is interesting for me to reflect a little bit on some of those picket lines. Back last century, I think I can say quite clearly, my brother and sister were both nurses at St Vincent's and were on the picket lines at some of those really formative and important industrial actions that were taken that really elevated, perhaps, the community's understanding and recognition of the nursing workforce as a formidable workforce. Lisa's leadership through that and that legacy of stronger education pathways and respect from the broader community I think can be really acknowledged in this place at this time, working side by side with her late husband Brendan, whose memory is also part of that legacy. I was able to have a quick look online. One of the delegates, Mary Natoli, who is from Cohealth, at the nurses conference spoke about the role that Lisa Fitzpatrick has played and said:

... we know no leader walks an easy path.

There have been times of tension, when views have diverged and criticisms were voiced.

...

Nurses and midwives come from many settings, many identities and many lived realities ...

and what has been important is the great and deep 'belief in democracy and dialogue'.

I am going to very quickly just finish by acknowledging some of the nurses who live in my electorate and in particular one nurse who has actually retired. This is in many ways a legacy for Liz Barton, who has met with the Minister for Ageing, who has been fighting the good fight about the importance of this very particular and very specific reform. Liz Barton is a dedicated nurse. She does embody professionalism and compassion, and she has told me that she thinks that this bill is an excellent step forward, because she is happy it will empower nurses like Liz that are trusted with this serious responsibility and ensure they have the right skills. This has been developed over years. Important consultation has taken place with unions, with providers, with families, with experts and most particularly with people who are living in aged care.

We are surrounded by public aged care services in my community, and I know they are grateful that we are able to ensure that people get the care that they need but also that the Victorian government is using the levers that we have to keep the people in their care safe, to make sure that the workforce is available and the training pathways are available. I commend this bill. I commend Hannah Spanswick for the work that she has done over many years as well in making sure that the broader community and the nursing workforce in particular have that respect that they deserve for their intelligence, their courage and their compassion. I commend this bill to the house.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (20:18): I rise to make a contribution to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025. That is a mouthful. This is a bill that has come before the house to amend the principal act, the Drugs,

Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, to further provide for the administration of medication to residents in aged care. Specifically this bill makes amendments to the administration of drugs of dependence for people in residential aged care for whom the medication has been supplied on prescription. The bill from 1 July 2026 will see the administration of medications that can only be administered by registered nurses, enrolled nurses with specific qualifications and other authorised registered health professionals.

In this place we do get to visit many residential aged care facilities. I am sure many in this place have turned up there, whether it be for 90th birthdays or in recent times there has been a run of 100th birthdays. They are becoming more common and I think a real example of our ageing communities. But I think when we go into those places, there is such a sense of concern and responsibility but also gratefulness for the staff that we see there.

I have a very close girlfriend who works in aged care, Robyn, and the way she treats those people that live in her care is with just such kindness and also as a family member. She often says to me, 'They're like my second family.' I just see the joy, the genuine joy, that she shows to those residents. And we hope that is the case, because it is their home, and it should be a place of respect and dignity and kindness and fun. Often they have their happy hour. I was there recently at 5 o'clock and I had a glass of wine – lots of fun things that go on in these facilities. But we must always ensure that Victorians living in residential aged care receive the right medication, there is no doubt about that, and that they receive it safely. We have had many contributions with many stories shared on this bill. Aged care is such an important industry, and all of us want the best care for our loved ones and those in our community that move into aged care.

When my mother-in-law was living independently and beginning to struggle to manage at home, it was a hard time for her and for our family. It is a significant life change when you are having those discussions about taking them away from their home and moving them into a different facility. It can be quite significant and quite stressful, as I have said. But what we did find prior to moving her was that she was having some medical issues and some medical episodes. It was quite interesting, she was having her Webster packs and doing self-administration of her medications, but what we found a bit later on when we moved her out of her little unit was that underneath her recliner were lots of tablets that she had been popping and not taking and missing, and that was really contributing to some of the dizzy spells and falls that she was having. Medication plays such a significant role in their wellbeing, and when they are not administering it properly, we saw firsthand some of those consequences.

It really is important that currently the administration of controlled medication is predominantly managed by registered nurses, health practitioners and aged care workers. Aged care residents increasingly have more complex care needs today and require more medications. We need to ensure that this is an industry that has the right protections in place to support those living in residential aged care facilities but also those working in these settings. Recently released data by the Commonwealth between July and September last year showed 36 per cent of people living in Victorian residential aged care facilities are prescribed nine or more medications, roughly equating to 60,000 Victorians. That is a lot of work to administer there. It is noted that, through the amendments the bill makes, those living in residential aged care will still have the freedom to administer their own medication if it is safe and they wish to do so. I also note that the bill will not change how medication is administered, like in someone's own home or in hospitals. We must always ensure that Victorians living in residential aged care receive the right medication, they receive it safely, as I have said, and at the right time, from professionals, and we do not dispute that on this side of the house.

However, the bill does raise some concerns regarding the requirement of additional nurses and health practitioners. As recently as 31 July this year, the government expected the industry would need to hire around 650 new nurses. Given that there are shortages of nurses and medical practitioners across the state, and particularly in rural and regional Victoria, including in my electorate, there are concerns about how many of these providers will be able to meet compliance requirements, and who simply do not have the nurses or medical staff. As leading speaker and member for Gippsland East raised in his

contribution, there are serious concerns – and many have also raised these concerns – about being able to provide enough qualified staff, and there are significant staff shortages particularly being experienced, as I said, in regional and rural communities. The proposed commencement date being 1 July 2026 will allow a transition of 90 days, but we do feel there needs to be a lot of work done prior to that date.

The bill has highlighted the significant healthcare workforce shortages and further raises the question of what action is being done to address the significant healthcare worker shortages. Unless we address the workforce shortages, this bill will have significant issues. My electorate has a chronic shortage of nurses, not only at Goulburn Valley Health but also across the aged care sector. Both sectors rely heavily on employment of temporary staff and still experience significant staffing shortages. Currently, as of today, there are 75 vacancies for nurses in aged care alone across the Shepparton district, and GV Health also have significant staff shortages, in recent times being over 400 positions. The bill does allow for exceptions for administration in emergencies or other unexpected situations where delayed medication from the required qualified medical practitioner not being available could put a resident at risk.

From the outset, the Liberals and Nationals will not be opposing this bill. The amendments contained in the bill will address the risk of harm from current practice, which allows personal care workers to administer high-risk medicines without the education and regulation that apply to enrolled and registered nurses. But the reality is that this is going to be difficult to achieve under the current staff shortages being experienced broadly across the health sector. The bill also enshrines a five-year review that will be undertaken by the Department of Health to ensure that these amendments that the bill makes are working as intended and that such providers are being adequately supported. Five years is considered a lengthy time to determine if the legislation is working.

The royal commission highlighted in its final report that as a country our demographics are changing, and they are changing significantly when it comes to aged care. This is influenced by the demand for the provision of aged care and facilities. It is projected that the number of Australians aged 85 years and over will increase to more than 1.5 million by 2058, equating to just under 4 per cent of the country's population. Aged care is not just a single service alone. It provides a range of many programs and services, and in fact the care itself can range from low-level support to more intensive services, as we are discussing today. These services provide critical support and assistance to those living in aged care, helping people with their cleaning, laundry and shopping, with lots of other support mechanisms in place. I am sure many of us in this place have seen firsthand – and it has been discussed today – the dedication and tireless work of our aged care service providers, who deliver exceptional care with their unwavering compassion and professionalism, supporting elderly residents, at times under challenging circumstances.

I would also like to acknowledge a friend of mine. Her name is Yvonne. She is 99 years of age, and she lives independently. Next June she will be turning 100. We are hoping she will get that letter from the King, which I am sure will happen. When you look at someone who is 99, living independently and doing it so well, I think we also need to make sure that they are getting the medical services and protections that they need in place. I often chat with her in regard to that. She has her Webster packs, and she is doing quite well. Looking at this bill and chatting with her in recent times, she just keeps saying, 'I'm managing quite well,' but I question a little bit the oversight of how she is managing that. I think more and more people are living in their own facilities. They are living independently in their own homes, and they are living independently for longer. We want to see that, but we also need to ensure that quite broadly we have all of those services in place and that all those medical provisions are sufficient and working well.

I do just want to refer to the member for Caulfield. He shared a story today about one of his relatives, his brother. They dropped his dad or one of his relatives into aged care. He said the brother went and picked him up. When my mother-in-law went into aged care – we finally got her a place. It takes time. Often you have to go on a waiting list, and it is a fairly lengthy process. We finally got her into a

facility. A couple of days later her three sisters picked her up and took her home, took her back to her unit. It can be a difficult time. It can be a time of transition.

Again, I want to take my hat off, really, to the staff and the people that work in aged care and aged facilities, because they do such an incredible job. I think it is something that we should all be grateful for. Our nurses, whether they be in aged care or wherever they are providing their expertise, we will always be truly grateful for. We do have some concerns. They are more around the implementation of the bill and mainly regarding staff shortages, but other than that we support the bill.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (20:28): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Postponement**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (20:28): I move:

That the consideration of remaining business be postponed.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

#### **Bellarine electorate road safety**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (20:29): (1270) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last year plans were announced to upgrade the intersection of Barwon Heads Road and Golf Links Road in Barwon Heads. This was an important project to include the installation of raised wombat crossings and pedestrian crossings on both the western and southern sides of the intersection to improve pedestrian safety. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the timeline of the delivery of this project. Over the past year we have seen a number of road safety upgrades delivered across the Bellarine, including new pedestrian crossings in Ocean Grove and improved safety at the entrance of Clifton Springs boat harbour. Current works are also underway to install rail safety guards along the Bellarine Highway. We are carrying out resurfacing between Wallington and Leopold and the construction of a new roundabout at Connewarre to enhance safety at a particularly busy intersection. These upgrades have a positive impact on our local road safety. I look forward to sharing further information with my community on where the Barwon Heads Road and Golf Links Road intersection upgrades will proceed.

#### **Community food relief**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (20:30): (1271) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the 2025–26 community food relief program. This is an important program in my electorate, one that is supporting Victorians facing food insecurity and access to healthy and culturally appropriate food. There is a lot of work happening in the district of Clarinda to support vulnerable members of the community. South East Community Links has been a recipient under the program previously, and emergency relief services are a very important resource for our community. They provide immediate support and relief to people facing difficulty. They can help to buy what you need, including food, clothes, Mykiss, petrol and medication.

There is also Make a Difference Dingley Village, which offers a huge amount of support to vulnerable community members facing food insecurity. Together with the Minister for Finance, I have seen firsthand the important service that they deliver. Every Thursday morning their emergency relief program distributes food, gas and electricity bill contributions to houses from out of the Marcus Road office. The program has seen a significant increase to demand due to the cost of living and serves as an important referral point. They also receive referrals from other service providers, such as South East Community Links and the Monash Health hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement program or hospital admission risk program, where financial stress and hardship has been identified. They have done an amazing job servicing residents in the City of Kingston and the City of Greater Dandenong, which has the highest level of homelessness in Victoria. They have been doing important work in the community for more than 40 years now, which is an amazing achievement. I commend Marion Harriden and the executive officers, as well as all the staff and volunteers for their generosity and kindness and commitment to serving the community. I thank the minister and look forward to hearing more on this important program.

### **Gum Nut Gully Preschool**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (20:32): (1272) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Planning and is in regard to the Gum Nut Gully Preschool in Doncaster East. On Sunday the educators and committee and many parents of Gum Nut Gully Preschool rallied in support of the preschool's survival in its current location. At present the state government is offering grants to rebuild preschools under their initiative to expand preschool, which I support and our side supports. But concerning, the government's program means in terms of rebuilding the preschools, they have to take a certain form to be physically rebuilt. What that means is, for instance, the land needs to be flat and a certain style of preschool is then going to be put in place. That is all fine, except for the fact that the City of Manningham Council finds it difficult to accommodate those planning conditions simply because the Gum Nut Gully Preschool in its current location on Larnoo Drive is near the Mullum Mullum Creek, which is wooded and, as is typical for my part of Melbourne, on an undulating location, so it is fairly hilly. It is difficult of course to find a flat block of land to build the government's cookie-cutter approach to kindergartens. We all want the preschool to be upgraded – the committee does, everyone does. The only other option the Manningham council have to avail themselves of the government's grants in this circumstance is to move the location of the preschool to a few hundred metres away, which is a suburban block.

My action tonight is very simple. It is for the Minister for Planning to put an incorporated document into the Manningham planning scheme which would override the overlays that are on that block, such as bushfire and native vegetation, so we do not have to cut down trees so we can allow kids to have the bush education which they are getting on that side at the moment and keep that all intact. If an incorporated document was done by the planning minister for the City of Manningham, it would allow the new preschool to be constructed at the location that Gum Nut Gully is at now and allow the parents, the educators and the committee to continue with what is a magnificent education at that preschool.

### **Bass electorate small business support**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (20:35): (1273) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for her to visit the Bass electorate to meet with our small businesses and community leaders. Bass is a region of remarkable diversity, from Pearcedale to Clyde, up to Lang Lang and over to the waterline and down to Inverloch. Our small business owners and their teams work hard. They are determined to garner every opportunity available. They are creative and want to provide quality services, programs and goods to our community, whether they are a family run cafe, a longstanding tradie, a tourism operator welcoming visitors and showcasing our extraordinary natural environment, a young entrepreneur bringing fresh ideas to market, publicans putting on live music gigs, production companies, big festivals or wineries and distilleries delighting us with all things local. Small businesses across Bass embody the very best of our state's ingenuity and resilience, and I note we have the Minister for Small Business and Employment at the table. These businesses are places of employment

and places of connection. They sponsor local sporting clubs and teams, local theatre groups, festivals and events; they donate to school raffles and fundraise for equipment for our health services. They are active and positively enmeshed in all things community, and many also volunteer for our emergency service brigades and units and lifesaving clubs.

When small businesses succeed, our entire community prospers. Over recent months I have spoken with many who have shown optimism about the future but who also want to get a deeper understanding, have clarity and have confidence in the state's fiscal status, economic development program and programs and supports as they navigate challenges such as rising costs, workforce pressures, working from home and the need to adapt to new technologies. A visit from the Treasurer would be invaluable and informative in a two-way exchange, providing our small business community with the opportunity to share their stories, raise ideas and provide feedback. Equally it would give the Treasurer a chance to hear what is happening on the ground in my electorate and to see firsthand the energy, innovation and community spirit that defines the Bass community. I extend the invitation also to our small business minister to join the Treasurer and me in Bass.

### **Buloke flood recovery**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (20:38): (1274) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is delivery on the promise of flood recovery funding from the 2022–23 floods for the Buloke Shire Council. Recently at a council meeting of the Buloke Shire Council, Cr Graeme Milne moved a notice of motion to write to various ministers, including the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I will actually read in part from that notice of motion so that I do not miss anything out. It says:

Since the devastating floods of 2022 and 2023, our community has waited far too long for the State Government to deliver on its promises of flood recovery funding.

Despite being one of the hardest-hit regions, Buloke Shire has been forced to respond to the whims of the Disaster Recovery Fund Arrangements (DRFA) assessors for the ever changing methodology and procedures to be met with the collection of evidence, scoping of works, and preparation of claim estimates.

...

Council are dealing with a backlog of flood recovery works valued between **\$60 million and \$80 million**, yet only a **small contribution** has been received to date ...

and the goalposts keep moving long after the event.

The majority of our roads remain in a **dangerous and deteriorating condition** – as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety well knows and talks about often –

with Variable Message Signs now required to warn road users of the hazards.

These are not minor inconveniences – they are serious safety risks. Damage to private vehicles has already been reported, and the situation worsens daily ...

and it will continue to do so with our heavy vehicle traffic always increasing. Cr Milne goes on to say:

Our ratepayers, school buses, contractors, families, and emergency services are being forced to navigate roads that are not fit for purpose. This is unacceptable. As a small rural Shire, we do not have the financial capacity to absorb these costs alone. We rely on the State Government to honour its commitments and support our recovery.

So I would ask that the Treasurer and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety work together to make sure a small shire, which already faces such incredible resourcing issues, bearing the cost of such a large geography with a small ratepayer base, gets that funding delivered as promised from the 2022–23 floods.



### Power saving bonus

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (20:40): (1275) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my community and provide an update on the rollout of cost-of-living supports we are providing to locals to help with the cost of energy, including via the new \$100 power saving bonus program. There is no greater issue than when it comes to cost of living for local households. A number of international, national and external factors – including international geopolitical conflicts; tension and trade uncertainty, which continues to impact energy markets in particular; the cumulative effect of those 13 interest rate hikes by the Reserve Bank; the prolonged effects of the pandemic on the economy, the workforce and supply chains; the ongoing disregard of big banks and energy and insurance companies in providing households with that meaningful hip-pocket cost-of-living relief; and of course that decade of underinvestment and Victoria not receiving its fair share from the previous Liberal Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments, especially their lack of investment when it came to clean, cheap and affordable energy – have all, when combined, played a role to compound today's cost-of-living challenges. As the Victorian Labor government, we have remained absolutely committed to doing all we can to support local households with the cost of living through a range of meaningful, helpful initiatives, including with the cost of energy.

That is why I was delighted to welcome the opening by the minister of the new round of the \$100 power saving bonus just this week. From 25 August locals from across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West with eligible pension and concession cards will once again be able to apply for that \$100 power saving bonus. Locals can apply online via the Victorian Energy Compare website [compare.energy.vic.gov.au](http://compare.energy.vic.gov.au), by calling 1800 000 832 or by simply visiting my electorate office at 180 Gaffney Street in North Coburg, where either I or my friendly electorate office staff will be more than happy to help you fill out the form. All Victorians can benefit from that energy compare website. The energy compare website allows Victorians to search for their best possible energy deal by using this free and independent website to shop around for a lower price. Last year users typically saved \$240 on their energy bills by finding a better energy deal and switching providers.

The \$100 power saving bonus is in addition to the array of other cost-of-living supports we are providing to locals, particularly when it comes to energy: the previous \$250 power saving bonus rounds; the \$150 Energy Bill Relief Fund by the Albanese Labor government; the Solar Victoria rebates program; the Victorian energy upgrades program; the energy assistance program; the hot-water rebates; the insulation savings scheme, which starts from 2026; the launch of the new State Electricity Commission pilot program, which focuses on Merri-bek, to help people electrify and transition away to cheaper energy; the savings finder, which is offering Victorians 98 quick and simple ways to access savings and discounts and cost-of-living relief from government; the new seniors and cost-of-living booklets that my office is providing; the Victorian default offer, which is making sure people have the chance to get a fair electricity deal; and Victoria maintaining the lowest energy wholesale price in Australia. It is great to see the minister in the chamber, and I welcome her to visit my electorate to talk about these and the many other initiatives that we are providing to support locals.

### Don Road–Warburton Highway, Launching Place

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (20:43): (1276) I have a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to ensure that the intersection at the corner of Don Road and the Warburton Highway in Launching Place is upgraded and made safe for pedestrians. This means the guardrail needs to be altered – the position needs to be in slightly different spots – and a footpath also installed. The guardrail currently hugs the corner of the Warburton Highway leading into Don Road. It prevents pedestrians from crossing Don Road safely. Pedestrians must walk between the roadside and the guardrail to cross Don Road. This is particularly squeezey, and it is really only a small space, enough for one person at a time. It is a serious safety risk for schoolchildren crossing Don Road and getting to and from the bus stop, with such little space and nothing between them and oncoming or turning vehicles. I have heard the minister talk in this place before about how safety on the roads is

of utmost importance, and I really would like the minister to ensure that the Department of Transport and Planning have a good look at this intersection to change the position of that guardrail and install a footpath so that it can be made a lot safer. It has been causing problems for such a long time, it bends around with the road with shrubs there and it almost falls into the road gutter. There is no designated footpath at the moment, just a track in the grass, and this needs to be altered. There is no guardrail in some spots between the pedestrian and the road traffic.

The pedestrians are primarily school students getting on and off the bus, mostly being dropped off at that point. It is dangerous heading from Launching Place to Warburton because it is downhill and on a sharp corner. It is 80 kilometres an hour on the Warburton Highway and on Don Road, and vehicles tend to fly around this bend. It is really busy in both directions. Directly across the road is the Launching Place Home Hotel, and there is a lot of traffic heading in and out of the car park there and up Warburton Highway and down Don Road. The weather can also make this road crossing even more risky for pedestrians and for drivers. The Yarra Ranges Council and the mayor Jim Child have been particularly proactive in seeking a solution by writing to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety wanting a formal safety review of the site and to upgrade that railing. They want to build a new and purpose-built footpath along the Warburton Highway, remove the old guardrail and install a new guardrail. This absolutely needs to be done. I could not support the Yarra Ranges Council more in their bid to make this intersection much safer for school students.

#### **Casey Thunder Women's Football Club**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (20:46): (1277) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Community Sport. The action I seek is that the minister meets with me to discuss the upgrade to the facilities used by Casey Thunder in Cranbourne East. I am so very proud of Casey Thunder, an extraordinary and inclusive footy club ably led by co-founder Pam Rogers. They were able to get to the big dance, unfortunately coming up short in their attempt to bring the granny to Cranny. I love what they have got going on. I was there to watch their courageous team on Sunday alongside my colleague from Narre Warren North, who was suitably and appropriately excited that Endeavour Hills were victorious. I could not be more impressed with the way that the players at Casey Thunder conducted themselves. They should be very proud of what they have achieved this season. In particular I would like to commend captain Alicia Heins, vice-captain Alice Barfoot, Ruby Bastian, Eden Tone, Abbey McKenzie, Rachael Hunt, Freba Zayee, Kirsty Roche, Lana Fullwood, Kayla Cottrell, Alizha Roche, Elaine Parkinson, Cassie Williams, Montaya Forsyth, Sarah Ventura, Shanae Chadwick, Audrey Robinson, Shereen D'Costa, Leah Swain, Grace Wake and Lauren Chrisanthou. I look forward to seeing the seating installed. I also very much look forward to the minister's response.

#### **Prahran electorate housing**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (20:48): (1278) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Housing and Building. I would like to ask: when will the minister address the security and maintenance issues pertaining to 150 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, home to several public housing residents in my electorate? I had the opportunity to visit the beautiful people in this housing estate. They took me for a tour of their homes. I had lunch with them. They were so hospitable, but from the moment that I walked in the door they expressed concerns about the lack of interest from the current government.

They said that there is graffiti as you walk in the door, which I experienced and I saw. It was right on the front of the building. The lights were dismantled and kicked in. When you walk into the entrance there is graffiti all over the front entrance and inside the entrance hall. In addition to that, they showed me their laundry – a laundry where you clean your clothes. The lockers that they have to lock their clothes up to dry in have not been cleaned in over a year. There were huge dust mounds in their drying facilities. The laundry facilities were just so disappointing. In addition to that, they pointed out what they believed to be a drug den, where there were drug deals and drug paraphernalia. I saw syringes on the ground – open syringes not even with a cap on them – and children playing in the area. They were

desperate for security. They showed me hoarders – hoarders that had collected things from the street and left them scattered in the public area. Where people put their garden furniture there were also a whole range of boxes. There were old mattresses. There was just an array of litter that was a massive trip hazard. In addition to that, as you walked through the hallways to get to each door there were other hoarders who had just put things there. They were a massive trip hazard. They showed me the bird poo that was resting on window ledges. It was piled high. It was a massive hygiene issue. They explained that it was a residence for over-55-year-olds but that there were lots of younger people that were living in there, and they did not know whether there were any approvals for that.

They are absolutely desperate for the housing minister to do something about this. They have pride in their home. What I found when I went there was there was a real sense of community. They have a beautiful herb garden and veggie patch and they have friendships that have formed over many, many years, but at the end of the day enough is enough. Victorians and the people of Prahran deserve to have proper housing, and the people at 150 Inkerman Street deserve a hell of a lot better than this, so I urge the minister for housing to provide a comprehensive report on this.

### **South West Local Learning and Employment Network**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (20:51): (1279) My amendment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is a clear update on whether funding will be provided for student transport in 2026 for the South West Local Learning and Employment Network. South West LLEN is part of the secondary schooling pathways reforms, and it supports school clusters in my electorate and gives rural students access to classes they simply would not have otherwise. This program brings schools together to offer VET subjects. It is a smart, collaborative model offering subjects like agricultural science. They share a teacher, and the students travel to where this class is held. But here is the issue: the program is popular, and when working well the government pulled the transport component. Make sense of that. The decision came after the 2025 families had made plans, students had committed to their studies and the local bus contractor had organised the drivers and the logistics. The Allan Labor government talked about prioritising local learning but then pulled the rug out from under the students, schools, families and local transport operators. It took relentless advocacy before \$250,000 in funding was finally delivered. That is just not good enough, and that is why we need certainty for the South West LLEN now for 2026. Schools, families and students are already planning next year, and local industries such as agriculture, trades and hospitality need a skilled future workforce. We cannot afford another funding fiasco.

The government has finally responded to our relentless advocacy for rural children to have free transport to any school they go to. The Labor government have never understood life in country Victoria. I have sent dozens of representations to ministers for transport to make them aware of the reality of country families' challenges to get kids to school and get to work and milk the cows, or sometimes both. Congratulations to these families who told me their stories so that I could be their voice here in Parliament and who have had their voices heard. This is a significant step forward in assisting families who have to juggle work and family transport to school, when they may or may not work in the town closest to the school. It is a step towards equity in education and understanding of rural living.

While this initiative will ease financial pressure for many families, it is important to acknowledge that public transport infrastructure remains sparse in remote regions like South-West Coast. In many communities in our electorate, families often rely on public vehicles due to the absence of regular bus or train services. The government needs to now recognise we need meaningful investment in regional transport networks. The next generation of farmers, tradies, chefs and healthcare workers deserve better. They deserve certainty, and they deserve to be supported.

### Responses

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (20:53): The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the pedestrian improvement project in her electorate. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action the member seeks is an update on the latest round of the 2025–26 community food relief program for his electorate. The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update regarding the Gum Nut Gully Preschool. The member for Bass raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer, and the action the member seeks is for the Treasurer to visit the electorate of Bass and meet the wonderful small business owners. I would also be very much delighted to visit and meet again the small business owners in the electorate of Bass.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the attention of the Treasurer, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the flood recovery funding in her electorate. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update and information on the cost-of-living measure the \$100 power saving bonus, an important initiative supporting families in his electorate. The member for Eildon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is an update on the intersection on the corner of Don Road and to provide an upgrade and ensure pedestrian safety. The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the security in the local housing estate in her electorate. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to provide an update on the local learning and employment network program in the South-West Coast region in her local community. I will refer all matters to the relevant ministers.

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

**House adjourned 8:57 pm.**