Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 16 June 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)
David Davis (from 27 December 2024)
Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)
Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew[1]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira[2]	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha[5]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem[6]	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina[3]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee[8]	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David[4]	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard[7]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

[1] Resigned 7 Dec 2023
[2] Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;
IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;
Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;
Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026
[3] Appointed 14 Nov 2024
[4] LDP until 26 Jul 2023
[5] Resigned 8 Nov 2024
[6] DLP until 25 Mar 2024
[7] Appointed 7 Feb 2024
[8] PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
FFV – Family First Victoria; Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal;
LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria; LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia;
LP – Libertarian Party; Nat – National Party of Australia; ON – One Nation Victoria;
PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Tuesday 16 June 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (12:03): I have a message from the Governor, dated 9 June:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Act of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **19/2026** Electoral Further Amendment Act 2026

I have another message, dated 10 June:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:
>
> **20/2026** Appropriation (2026–2027) Act 2026

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to further amend the **Electoral Act 2002** in relation to political donations, State funding and reporting requirements, to make consequential amendments to the **Electoral Amendment Act 2026** and the **Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Act 2026** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Small business

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:04): (1349) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the federal budget the Albanese Labor government announced the removal of the capital gains tax discount for small business. Given 39 per cent of all private sector employees in Victoria are employed in small business and small businesses in Victoria generate $417 billion in income, have you modelled the impact of federal Labor's massive capital gains tax grab on small business, investment and the Victorian economy?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:05): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. Mr Mulholland, in relation to the federal budget and legislative changes, of course the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance monitor and give me advice in relation to those impacts. When it comes to changes that are yet to be legislated and indeed have not actually had a bill enter the Parliament, these are matters that we are watching and we will see how negotiations go in relation to what that looks like, and of course I will receive advice as those events unfold. You asked about small business. Small business, we know, is the backbone of many inputs into the Victorian economy. I have got the *Economic Growth Statement*. I was revisiting it again just recently in relation to making sure that we are on track for all of the commitments that we have made for small business, particularly in relation to supporting businesses to adapt, to access export and to get mentoring support. The Small Business Bus I saw was in my region yesterday, and lots of people were lining up to get that support.

Mr Mulholland, when policy matters are settled we will certainly have more to say in relation to how the Victorian government can continue our support for small businesses in the state.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:06): Treasurer, on 14 May Premier Allan commended the Prime Minister for 'having the courage' to change the system. The Labor Premiers of both Western Australia and New South Wales have put their states' needs above party loyalty by criticising federal Labor's attack on businesses through their massive capital gains tax grab. Why is your government backing your Labor mates in Canberra and not small businesses in Victoria?

The PRESIDENT: I do not think you can ask that question along political party lines. There have been many, many, many precedents from Presiding Officers around asking questions. I think if you asked 'Why are you backing the federal government?' rather than whatever, that would probably be a better way to ask it if that is okay.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Given the Premiers of both Western Australia and New South Wales have put their states' needs over party loyalty by criticising the federal government's attack on businesses through their capital gains tax grab, will the Treasurer state a formal position of the government on this attack on small businesses in Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:08): Mr Mulholland, as I indicated in my answer to your substantive question, of course we will monitor any changes and the impact on Victoria. But you asked about the federal budget – this year's federal budget. Finally we have a federal government that recognises Victorians as Australians. We are finally getting a fair share in relation to infrastructure funding, finally getting recognition in relation to GST carve-out –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: While you might want to attack a federal government that wants to back Victorians, I am happy to work with a federal government that will invest in Victorians.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, on relevance, President, I asked if the government had a formal position on the capital gains tax grab on small businesses. I ask the Treasurer to come to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the Treasurer was relevant at the start of her answer.

Corrections system

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): (1350) My question is to the Minister for Police. At the recent PAEC hearings the minister confirmed that remand numbers overall have risen by 70 per cent following the government's bail changes, but people are consequently remaining in police cells for prolonged periods while awaiting transfer. Police cells are not designed to replicate or replace prison cells, and police officers should not be required to operate a parallel custody system to service the government's incompetence on bail reforms. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service says its staff have had to sometimes strongly advocate for an ambulance to be called and that in one case a person very nearly lost their life. VALS has warned that prolonged detention in police cells is creating a very dangerous situation and could lead to another entirely preventable Aboriginal death in custody. What immediate changes have been made to Victoria Police custody and health protocols in response to that warning?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:10): I thank Ms Copsey for her question for the Minister for Police in the other place. I will make sure, in line with the standing orders, I get a written response.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): Thank you, Minister. VALS has reported that a man held in police cells for 26 days experienced a significant decline in his health without access

to medication. Police cells have no onsite medical staff, and they are designed for short-term custody. Will the minister order an urgent, independent clinical audit of health care in police custody, including medication failures, delayed ambulance call-outs and hospital transfers, and publish the findings and required remedial action?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:11): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her concern in relation to these matters. I will make sure that is referred to the Minister for Police in the other place for a response, in line with the standing orders.

Ministers statements: maternal and child health services

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:11): Every Victorian parent knows the green book. It is one of the first things that you are handed when your new baby arrives, and somehow it is also the one thing you can never find when you need it. That is why last week I was very pleased to join the Premier and the Minister for Children to officially launch the new digital green book, available now through the parent portal on the Service Victoria app and website. We know parents have enough on their plate without having to keep track of paperwork and other important documents, and the digital green book is one way the Allan Labor government is making life easier for Victorian families. Parents and carers can now choose to create a profile for their children and access key health and developmental information, including a growth tracker, a digital birth certificate and birth registration details, all through one secure and convenient platform. This is what our government is focused on: providing practical ways to make life easier for families and to deliver services that work for Victorians. And this is just the beginning. More features will be added to the parent portal over time, making it even easier for parents and carers to access important information and services when and where they need them, in one convenient place. I thank everyone who has worked hard to deliver the digital green book. It is on the Service Victoria app now, and of course parents can always choose to continue to use their hard copy green book if that is their preference.

Government performance

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:13): (1351) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your South Australian Labor counterpart just handed down his state budget announcing a public sector hiring freeze – I think I have heard that before – to create, in his words, 'a public sector that is lean and fit and not competing with the private sector'. He also warned that South Australia is not Victoria. Will you explain why a Labor Treasurer in a neighbouring state is using Victoria as a byword for financial mismanagement?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if the Treasurer heard the question. Can you just ask the question again, please.

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I said, the South Australian Treasurer also warned that South Australia is not Victoria. Will you explain why a Labor Treasurer in a neighbouring state is using Victoria as a byword for financial mismanagement?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:14): Mr Mulholland, I can tell you what I reckon: South Australia would like to have our economy – the Victorian economy, worth about $600 billion a year, growing faster than any other state. We are the state that has more business growth than anybody else, with 123,000 new businesses since June 2020 – that is net new businesses – more job creation than any other state, high participation rates and an economy that continues to grow despite the challenges

that have been put at us. In relation to other states and their commentary, as I said, any other state would welcome the Victorian economy and its strengths.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:15): Given that Labor governments in both South Australia and New South Wales are distancing themselves from Victoria's economic trajectory, why won't the Treasurer finally admit that the government's financial management has been a failure?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:15): All right, Mr Mulholland, I think I did this in a minister's statement last week, but you might have missed it. Victoria has added 123,000 new businesses since June 2020. Business investment in the March quarter was up nearly 8 per cent and around 15 per cent over the year, the fastest yearly growth in five years. Since 2020 Victorian business investment has risen by 55 per cent, Mr Mulholland, compared with 37 per cent in the rest of the country – 55 versus 37. The Victorian economy created over 648,000 jobs, again, the highest compared to any other state or territory. Since last budget, participation rates are up and Victorian exports are up. We have lower wholesale energy prices than the rest of the country, and we are building more homes, more often, than any other state.

Assisted reproductive treatment services

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): (1352) My question is for the Minister for Health, Minister Shing. While there have been recent improvements around Victoria's formal fertility clinics, media and stakeholders are reporting concerning information about informal clinics. The current conditions are a perfect storm for exploitation. There is a chronic sperm shortage through clinics, IVF is very expensive and we have the internet: there are unregulated groups operating via Facebook and Instagram and on websites. One such group has 16,000 members, with reports of women being offered sperm but only if they are willing to conceive naturally. Experts are unanimous that informal sperm donations put recipients, donors and children at risk: proper records are not kept, health checks are not mandated, Victoria's 10-family limit is not enforced and there are even reports of sexual assaults. I ask the minister: what is the government doing about regulating informal sperm donors who are operating in the open and seemingly with impunity?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:17): Thank you very much, Ms Payne, for that question and for your interest in and advocacy within this space. We work really hard in Victoria to provide the resources, the supports and the programs for people to realise their dream of becoming a parent and to make sure that IVF is a cost that is able to be managed and accommodated. We do not want to see people choosing between welcoming a longed-for, hoped-for, dreamed-for baby into their families on the one hand and costs that are prohibitive around other areas of life on the other. The matters that you have referred to are nothing short of vile. No-one should be exposed to a level of vulnerability in seeking to access sperm for the purpose of conception. I just want to be really clear that that is actually really disgusting behaviour. Not only does it erode the pathways for consent, but it also seeks to commodify and to exploit people in a time of extreme vulnerability.

As endorsed at the health ministers meeting last September, there is a review of donor matters by the Australian Law Reform Commission. We have got long-established regulatory safeguards in place to protect the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved in egg or sperm donation. We have Australia's first public egg and sperm donor service, and in this year's budget we have continued to support public IVF, which we introduced with $43 million. There are 350 little ones who have been welcomed as a result of public IVF services here in Victoria. Anyone looking to donate or to use donated sperm should ensure that they are really aware of the legislated safeguards, but also under the Human Tissue Act any advertising in relation to donations has to be approved by the health minister. Failing to obtain this approval is actually an offence; it can be punishable by imprisonment – and for good reason.

I want to be very, very clear that we will continue to support public fertility care. We will continue to identify and to address those barriers that we know are all too common for people who may find

themselves in these groups online, looking for the opportunity to have a child, only to be met with some sort of biological blackmail. It is absolutely disgraceful, and we do want to make sure we are addressing those costs and barriers so that more people can have a baby in a safe and regulated way.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:20): I thank the minister for her very thoughtful response. By way of supplementary, I have spoken several times in this chamber about the closure of the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority, or VARTA. This world-leading service was responsible for regulating fertility clinics and protecting the best interests of people receiving treatment and donor-conceived children. It also performed the vital function of community education, and we know community education in this space is essential. It is often our most vulnerable women who are targeted by rogue operators. These are women who are single, from the LGBTIQ community and on lower incomes. It is essential that they are fully aware of the dangers of informal sperm donation. Now that VARTA has been absorbed into the Department of Health, I ask the minister: what education programs is the department doing, for both recipients and donors, about the dangers of informal sperm donations?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:21): Thank you very much for that, Ms Payne. We do want to make sure that we are continuing to provide people with access to accurate information but also the sorts of supports that are available for people to find services that will meet their needs and to make complaints if they either see or are party to any transactions or advertising around the sorts of practices that you have talked to. Anybody who does have a complaint or any information about the practices that you have referred to should report it to the health regulator, or if there is a criminal complaint – as I have just indicated, this is punishable by imprisonment – report it to police.

I want to touch very quickly on VARTA and the work that you have done, but before I do that, the health regulator is aware of the issue that you have spoken to and is investigating it. Again, we want to make sure that we continue to regulate ART providers. There is not enough time to go into it, but let us keep talking about it.

Ministers statements: ADHD services

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:22): When we are talking about Victorians with ADHD, we are talking about hundreds of thousands of people across our state – young adults, children and adults. All too frequently we are talking about symptoms and experiences that can really significantly impact daily life. Part of living well with ADHD is about having access to a diagnosis and to appropriate treatments and supports. That is why Labor is taking action to ensure that Victorians living with ADHD are not locked out of accessing this care, treatment or diagnosis pathway by time or cost.

Expressions of interest are now open to enable an initial 150 GPs interested in training to diagnose and treat ADHD in both adults and children aged six years and over. Currently, adults and children can only be diagnosed by specialists. This can cost families up to $2000, and waitlists can range from six to 12 months. GPs are highly trained practitioners; they work in whole-person, continuous care pathways, and this new training will ensure that from September this year they can safely diagnose and manage patients with ADHD in their communities. That is often underpinned by longstanding relationships with patients and their families, and this change is expected to save Victorian families up to $1400.

Through Thriving Kids, which the Minister for Children is leading, we are making two new development assessments done by professionals available for every child – one before kinder and one before school. This is what real health equity looks like. It is affordable, it is safe and it is quality care closer to home, unlike the kind of thought bubble which some others have been proposing. That is why occupational therapists and speech pathologists, who do really important work in our community, being qualified to screen children in prep for autism and ADHD is a thought bubble. People deserve

better than a 15-minute observation. We are going to continue to do the work to make sure that that is delivered.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:25): (1353) My question is to the Minister for Children and disability. Minister, in December 2024 your government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing awarded a repeat child sex offender a Disability Pride Champion award. Cameron Bloomfield's criminal history included findings of guilt for indecent assault, committing an indecent act with a child under 16 and attempting to procure sex with a child under 16. The department sat on this error for a full year before acting. Can the minister explain how a convicted child sex offender was elevated by this government as a community champion?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:25): I thank the member for his question. At the outset can I acknowledge the tragic impact of child sexual abuse and of course the strength of victim-survivors who seek justice. As Mr Mulholland has identified, Mr Bloomfield's Disability Pride Champion award has been rescinded, and that is obviously more than appropriate. This is a matter that is currently before the courts, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:26): Minister, on your behalf the Parliamentary Secretary for Disability Iwan Walters presented and celebrated the achievement of Cameron Bloomfield and said the nominees exemplify the best of Victoria. His name is still on his website, despite the offender's name being scrubbed from the same press release on the Premier's website. Nominees were required to submit a police check consent form, and this man had convictions for child sex offences stretching back to 2005, with further sentencing in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2020. How is it possible that a department responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children failed so comprehensively to identify and instead gave an award to one of Victoria's most prolific registered child sex offenders?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:27): Again I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. As has been reported, the department made an error. They have rescinded the award, and I will not comment further given that the matter is before the courts.

Proton beam therapy centre

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): (1354) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the Victorian government first announced a plan to develop a national centre for proton beam therapy in 2015. In 2016 the then health minister in a media release said:

> Victoria has provided $50 million in funding towards establishing a National Proton Beam Therapy Centre for the treatment of cancer in Melbourne.

She went on to say:

> Following last year's investment of $2 million, this $50 million means planning activities can intensify to develop a proton beam … centre in Parkville.

In PAEC last month you said:

> There is ongoing discussion happening with the Commonwealth …

Minister, given the $52 million allocated in the 2015–16 and 2016–17 budgets, what planning activities occurred and what was the money spent on?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:28): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that question. I want to perhaps expand upon what you have just said in your question around what I said at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings on proton beam therapy. As you would be aware, proton beam therapy is an

incredibly complex process that is not available anywhere in Australia. We see that patients are having to be treated overseas, which costs a lot of money and involves a lot of impact on people who need that therapy. I just want to also be really clear: we are continuing to work with the Commonwealth. I have been very clear in advocating for proton beam therapy to be able to be delivered here in Victoria. We know that we have the capacity, we know that we have the expertise and we know that we have the interest across the specialist and clinical landscape to be able to do that work. We also know that it will make a fundamental difference to the existing services we have here and will provide that access for people to find that therapy here.

It initially, as you would be aware, Ms Crozier, had gone to South Australia as –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: It had initially, as you indicated in your question, been something that we had advocated for, and there was a preliminary decision to send that to South Australia. As the federal minister has also indicated – and I am paraphrasing him – he was clear that South Australia had not been in a position to be able to advance that work to deliver on proton beams. So on that basis we have continued to advocate for –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I am well aware of the history and the announcement by the government of $400 million back in 2016. My question was very specific. Where has the $52 million gone that was allocated in the 2015–16 and 2016–17 budgets? I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to that specific question.

The PRESIDENT: I will call the minister back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, your preamble was actually really broad in relation to proton beam therapy, and what I am going to say in response to your question is –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I know the minister is trying to deflect from the question. My preamble was specifically around the $52 million. I was explaining what had been said previously. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to rather than debate the question.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was being relevant to the question, but I will call her back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, you might not like the answer, but I want to be really clear about the work that we are doing to attract and deliver the best and brightest people, the infrastructure and the services that can deliver life-changing work through proton beam therapy. It has been reported –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, there are 30 seconds to go for the minister to respond to the very specific question I asked, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question. Where has the $52 million gone?

The PRESIDENT: I had a sense the minister was about to answer that.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, it has been reported by the media – so you would know it – that we have a business case that has been developed and that is being shared by the Commonwealth. We continue to work with the Commonwealth in relation to a decision on proton beam. There were delays because of South Australia. We have inserted ourselves into this process not just to attract the jobs but also the expertise, and Ms Crozier, I would very much welcome a unity ticket with you on this so that we can deliver the services that Victorians and Australians deserve.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): I note that the minister did not go anywhere near answering that question on behalf of the Victorian taxpayer, so I will ask: Minister, did the Victorian government ask the federal Labor government not to proceed with an announcement for a proton beam therapy centre that they were going to make in this year's federal budget?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:33): Sorry, Ms Crozier, did we ask the Commonwealth not to announce an investment that we would be delighted to receive in Victoria? Ms Crozier, it beggars belief that you would get to your feet in this place and seek to imply that we are not trying to develop biomedical biotech and digi tech to deliver cutting-edge supports. Again, Ms Crozier, I have got absolutely no knowledge of any assertion that you are making along those lines. I am really determined to continue to talk to the things that Victoria can deliver, but if you want to run a narrative like this, then no doubt you will find an opportunity to do so. In the meantime we will continue to advocate for the sorts of support services, investment and infrastructure that will save people's lives. If you want to go on a frolic of your own and down a rabbit hole around what we are doing with the Commonwealth, that speaks more to your relationship with them than ours.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:34): I move:

> That the minister's answers be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: Thriving Kids

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is implementing Thriving Kids in Victoria. Last week, alongside the Premier and the Minister for Government Services Minister Stitt, I announced that the Commonwealth government has approved our plan to establish supports for children zero to eight with developmental delay or autism with low-to-moderate support needs. Here in Victoria this represents an incredible opportunity to bring together our nation-leading universal services with Thriving Kids. It also represents the opportunity to act on what Victorian families tell us every day: they want a joined-up early years system where they have equal access, not a postcode lottery, to good universal health services and education services for their children and where, if they need it, they can get that extra support for their child's development and additional needs. They do not want an assessment by mere glance, a gift card and good luck, which is what those opposite are proposing. They want to be able to access supports without having to continuously repeat themselves and without having to subject their children to repetitive assessments. Families want to celebrate their children on their best day, not be forced to constantly recount their worst day. We listen to families. Those opposite clearly do not.

Families tell us they want integrated and where possible co-located support with children's services that understand their child completely. That is why we intend to bring together our maternal and child health, including the 10 free key ages and stages visits, and the early education system, including free three- and four-year-old kinder, with the new state-led Thriving Kids for children aged zero to eight. To help ensure that any developmental delay or difference is picked up early and that children and families get the support that they need, we will implement two new and additional developmental assessments for all children, one pre kinder and one pre school, undertaken by trained clinicians and allied health professionals, and develop a range of state-led allied health and support services, including peer support, parenting programs, supported playgroups, speech pathology and OT. We will begin delivering Thriving Kids in a phased rollout from later this year, with statewide coverage delivered by 1 January 2028 when the changes to the NDIS come into effect.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:36): (1355) My question is to the Treasurer. On Sunday I was in Bendigo listening to FRV members, CFA volunteers, farmers and a thousand regional Victorians who want to see an end to your emergency services tax. As Treasurer, why didn't you attend this rally to listen to the concerns about your tax raised in Bendigo, right in the heart of the Premier's and your electorate?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:37): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Of course it is important to always listen to and engage with Victorians and when it comes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund ensure that we are continuing to tell people about the importance of this fund and what it provides for the Victorian community. In one of the most fire-prone areas in the country – and floods, storms – supporting our volunteers and paid personnel is so important. Having a sustainable funding model is something that we must indeed continue to support. Mrs McArthur, we know that we are collecting around $1.5 billion in 2025–26 – forecast to collect slightly more next year – making sure that that is going into the emergency services response that this state needs.

A member interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I will take up your interjection. What I am concerned about, and this is why I continue to talk to people out in country Victoria, is when there are those out there saying that farmers are paying more when they are not, when they are out there saying volunteers are paying the tax and they are not. This is something where we will continue to talk to country Victoria. There are many, many volunteers out there that are jack of being politicised by those opposite. They are jack of being used as political pawns, when really all they want to do is turn up to their stations, hang out with their mates and support their communities, and they welcome the investment from the ESVF and support from the Labor government.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:38): Thank you, Treasurer. Well, I am sure they will all be very pleased to hear that you do not care anything about the fact that you have taxed them to the hilt and they are not exempt. So did you not attend because you were too afraid to hear the feedback? Perhaps you were on the phone to your colleagues. Perhaps with her approval rating of negative 37 you did not want to be associated with the Premier. I cannot say I blame you, but Treasurer, why weren't you there?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! All sides of the chamber are going a bit nuts.

Wendy Lovell interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Okay. For the rest of question time, the Deputy President says, this side of the chamber is not going to make any noise. I appreciate that.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, I do not think that you heard clearly what I said. I said that at the point that you said all sides of the chamber were a bit unruly, our side was not saying anything.

The PRESIDENT: I will take that technicality on board. Mrs McArthur to finish her question.

Bev McARTHUR: Treasurer, why won't you listen to the thousands of CFA volunteers, farmers, unionists and community members who want this tax gone?

The PRESIDENT: There is a lot in that, so the minister can answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:40): Of course, Mrs McArthur, I am listening to Victorians every day, but what I promise to do is to be truthful to Victorians. I promise when it comes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund I will continue to put out information that is accurate. I will continue to talk about the investments that are made possible because of this fund. I will continue to talk to farmers about the fact that they are not paying any more as a result of the ESVF.

Bev McArthur: They are.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, if they are, send them to me, because there is obviously something quite wrong. If you are happy to stand up –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am sorry, Mrs McArthur, that our side interrupted your Instagram script. But what I will continue to do is talk to Victorians with accurate information. I am more than happy to provide the accurate information to you, Mrs McArthur, so you can also be truthful.

Community safety

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1356) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria. Last week marked 51 years since the introduction of the Australian Racial Discrimination Act and next week marks 25 years since the introduction of the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, both introduced to protect people from racial discrimination. Yet today the far right's white supremacy is growing more emboldened, exploiting cost-of-living pressures to spread division and hatred, leaving black, brown and multicultural communities increasingly being targeted by racist abuse, harassment and violence. Minister, can you update the house on the specific work of the Anti-Racism Taskforce in the last six months to reduce the prevalence of racism in Victoria?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:42): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question. This is an important issue, and I would from the outset indicate that all of the initiatives across the multicultural and multifaith Victoria portfolio have an element of addressing disadvantage and racism and discrimination across the community, whether that is through specific initiatives and the work of the Anti-Racism Taskforce; whether that is through a number of our other programs, including supporting those who have arrived in our country in circumstances where they require specialist asylum seeker and refugee supports, legal assistance or mental health supports; or whether that is through our multicultural grant programs, which are all about strengthening social cohesion and tackling racism and hate.

I want to also acknowledge and thank the co-chairs of the Anti-Racism Taskforce – Ms Watt, who is our colleague here in the upper house, but also Iwan Walters, the member for Greenvale in the other place – for the work that they have been doing over what, I think everyone would agree, has been a particularly challenging time to be leading this work. We do have an anti-racism strategy, which our government released in 2024, which reaffirms our work and our commitment to prevent and address all forms of racism. I would point the member to the very detailed program of work that is outlined in the strategy, together with the specific investment of $4 million in the 2025–26 budget, which enabled the government to deliver a very important round of local anti-racism grant initiatives, which were really about making sure that at the grassroots community level, community organisations, sporting clubs and the like have the capacity to be able to tackle racism in their local community.

Together with our ongoing work through a number of other portfolios, including the Attorney's work and through the Victorian equal opportunity commission's work to tackle hate speech, we have introduced nation-leading legislation to –

Anasina Gray-Barberio: On a point of order, President, the question was very specific around the Anti-Racism Taskforce, not the anti-racism strategy. I know this taskforce is meant to advise you. My question was about what they have been doing in the last six months, not the activities of the anti-racism strategy.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was being relevant to the question.

Ingrid STITT: In the time that I have got left in this question, I would just point out to the member that you cannot separate the two. The strategy and the work of the taskforce are intertwined for good reason, because the taskforce is driving that strategy on behalf of the government.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:46): Minister, that was a very disappointing response. I did not hear anything that the taskforce is doing actively to reduce cases of

racism, which are obviously accelerating in this state. We are not immune to this. Given ongoing reports of racism experienced by culturally and racially marginalised communities, it is essential that the Anti-Racism Taskforce is used appropriately to drive systemic change and address the root causes of racism. Has the taskforce offered any recommendations on best practice responses in the past six months to effectively respond to and reduce the prevalence of racism, and if so, what was your government's response?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:46): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her supplementary question. I know that she wants to take a very narrow cast when it comes to this issue and only talk about the taskforce and the specific initiatives driven under the taskforce, but I would again make the point that this is a whole-of-government effort. I would also point out that the George Lekakis review, which the government commissioned last year, is incredibly important. If the member has not read it, I urge her to do so, because it talks about how you cannot just tackle racism and discrimination in one portfolio of government using a narrow scope. You have got to tackle it across government, which is exactly the strategy that our government is pursuing not just through the anti-racism strategy but through the work of the Lekakis review. I would urge the member to get on board with that effort, because it is across the government.

Ministers statements: Fitzroy Gasworks

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:48): I would like to use this opportunity to talk about my recent visit to the Fitzroy Gasworks precinct, where we broke ground on the next stage of this landmark project. The precinct will deliver 1400 new homes alongside green open space and community infrastructure. At the corner of Alexandra Parade and Smith Street, parcel B is the first site to be developed. It will deliver 513 build-to-rent homes, including 121 social homes and 45 affordable homes. It will also include rooftop gardens, coworking places, event spaces, cafes and a gym. This project is being delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth Labor government and Housing Choices Australia, with construction expected to finish in 2028.

Of course there is work already underway on this site. There is – both completed – Australia's first vertical multi-use sports centre alongside the Wurun Senior Campus. When finished, the precinct will include more than 1000 bicycle spaces, public parking and improved local amenity. This is what good precinct planning looks like. It joins housing services, jobs and infrastructure to make life easier and more affordable for Victorians. We were joined by local resident and councillor Sarah McKenzie, who explained that it is only projects such as these that mean she will be able to afford to raise a family in the area she grew up in.

You do not make housing more affordable by building fewer homes; you do it by building well and building more. Those opposite want to block that progress. We have got the Greens local member spending her time fighting this project. The Liberals want to cut 300,000 homes and hand back power to some of those council blockers. It is only the Labor government that is getting on and delivering homes, jobs and communities for our growing state.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:49): Minister Erdogan will get answers in line with the standing orders for Ms Copsey from the Minister for Police.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I request that you review the minister's response to my first question. I do not believe she answered that at all appropriately. It was very specific and very simple, and I would ask you to review it and have that reinstated.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to review that and get back to you before the end of the day.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (2380) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Education. How are students in the Southern Metropolitan Region benefiting from the Allan Labor government's investment in school infrastructure in Cheltenham? Staff have moved in and students are just weeks away from moving into the brand new facilities at the Cheltenham Secondary College. A brand new permanent building has just been completed, fully equipped with new classrooms and outstanding learning facilities, replacing the year 7 portable classrooms that were previously there. This is a great outcome for students and families in Cheltenham. These kids are going to get a much better education. This would simply not have happened without the advocacy and hard work of the member for Bentleigh Nick Staikos. Nick is a passionate advocate for education in the local community and for giving our kids the education they deserve. He has delivered for Bentleigh year after year after year after year. From new buildings and classrooms at Tucker Road and Valkstone primaries to the STEM buildings at Ormond Primary School and an entire new campus for McKinnon Secondary College, Labor delivers for Bentleigh.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (2381) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister take urgent action to repair all damaged sections of the Murray Valley Highway? Despite announcing road repair blitzes in the last two budgets, the Allan Labor government has failed to significantly improve the state of the regional road network. RACV analysis of Australian road assessment program data has identified 52 dangerous highway sections. One of the worst in my electorate is the Murray Valley Highway, which is the key conduit for freight vehicles and tourists visiting the Murray. The minister must immediately order full repairs for all damaged sections of the highway. The RACV is now conducting its My Country Road survey, and I encourage all residents in Northern Victoria to fill in the survey and help identify the most damaged parts of our road network and what road sections must be prioritised for repair.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2382) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My question is regarding Plenty Road, Bundoora. We saw significant upgrades for this road completed in 2021, and then Plenty Road in Bundoora was later identified as the top car crash site in the country in 2024. Since then there has been a lot of development in the surrounding suburbs, and Plenty Road needs more work to ensure that it is safe and can handle traffic flow. Minister, will you undertake further upgrades to Plenty Road, Bundoora, to ensure safety for all who use this important thoroughfare?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2383) My question is for the Minister for Children, and it concerns the Clyde north-west family and community centre currently under construction in the booming suburb of Clyde North. I had the privilege of visiting the centre just a few days ago, along with the minister, Mr Tarlamis, Cr Stefan Koomen and Cr Anthony Walter. It will be a wonderful facility in the south-east, with family and kinder services onsite. Right next door as well is Turrun Primary School, providing that pathway from kinder through to primary school, making life easier for parents but also, really critically, making that transition from kinder to prep all that much easier for the young ones. My question to the minister is: how is this government investing in these important services for early childhood education and care in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2384) My question is also to the Minister for Children. Minister, one of my constituents recently received the government's kinder kit,

and quite frankly, they were disappointed. One parent even called it 'Labor's latest bribe'. Many families across Victoria – and I have seen this in my own area of the south-east – are struggling to make ends meet, especially with the cost-of-living crisis made worse by the Labor government's irresponsible spending. While some parents are struggling to pay bills and feed their kids, the government is spending taxpayer money on a box full of games and pieces that are simply not suitable for every family or child. On this kinder kit, hundreds of dollars was spent, but parents did not get to choose what they wanted or needed for their kids. We know that each child is unique; every one has different interests and different ways of learning. Learning experiences must be personalised, yet this kinder kit is one size fits all, and without training, the contents cannot be suitable. Minister, how much taxpayer money was spent on this scheme?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:55): (2385) My question is to the Minister for Veterans. My constituent is a veteran struggling with the cost of living and the lack of access to affordable housing. He says many veterans face similar challenges. Veterans are over-represented in Australia's homeless population, and stable housing is one of the biggest barriers to transitioning to civilian life. Veteran Housing Australia, a dedicated community housing provider for veterans, report being contacted every 48 hours by a veteran seeking housing support. VHA manages 100 properties across Victoria but has none in Melbourne's west, meaning vets in the west must rely on already overburdened generalist homelessness services. These vets have served their country, often leaving the services with profound physical or mental injuries. The very least we can do is ensure they have a roof over their head. My constituents ask: will the minister meet with Veteran Housing Australia and the Minister for Housing and Building to discuss ways to address the urgent need for veteran housing in Melbourne's west?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:56): (2386) My question is for the Minister for Police regarding reports of a security vulnerability of the Axon tasers and body-worn cameras used by Victoria Police. Current and former police officers in my electorate have raised serious concerns that the bluetooth-enabled devices can be tracked using readily available apps, potentially exposing the real-time locations of police officers, with the risk of ambush or interference during active incidents. This raises significant concerns for frontline, covert and specialist units, particularly in high-risk operations where maintaining operational security is critical. So I ask the minister: can he update my constituents on what steps the minister has taken to ensure that these devices do not compromise officers' safety?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2387) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Last week I met with my constituents, president Walid and the leaders of the women's team of the Upfield Soccer Club. These young women represent the best of what it means not only to participate in your local sports community but to be incredible role models in your community. This club does not have any specific change rooms for women and girls. The only spaces that they have are two soccer pitches for a membership of 450, and one pitch has a live cricket pitch in the middle of the soccer pitch, which makes it really unsafe. Minister, will you commit to providing funding to the Upfield Soccer Club through the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund before the end of the year? This soccer club, may I add, works so hard to bring communities together in the spirit of football and is a space for young people to gather and thrive.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:58): (2388) My question is for the Minister for Planning. The Western Renewables Link inquiry and advisory committee concluded public hearings on 3 March 2026 and submitted its report on 8 May 2026, ahead of the minister's assessment under the

Environment Effects Act 1978. Constituents across western Victoria engaged with the environment effects statement process in good faith. They are not bystanders. They are farmers, landholders, families and communities who will live with the permanent consequences for their properties: bushfire risk, land use, environmental values and regional amenity. Planning Panels Victoria says release of the report is at the minister's discretion. Will the minister stand with those affected communities and release the IAC report publicly in full or in a substantially unredacted form before announcing her assessment, rather than forcing them into uncertain and delayed FOI processes – *(Time expired)*

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2389) My question is for the Minister for Environment. My office has been continuing to receive complaints about the public dumping of waste. Last week I went to Glasscocks Road in Lyndhurst and saw this for myself. There was an abundance of dumped material, including building waste, dumped motor oil and even a burnt out car. This is apparently a problem for many councils in the area. What are you doing to assist councils in South-East Metro to manage public dumping of waste?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2390) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. It concerns troubling reports in the *Herald Sun* today. Thanks to more than a decade of Labor's financial mismanagement, thousands of Victorian students could be forced to find a new school as the Allan Labor government considers shutting down or merging multiple public colleges. These reports include Peter Lalor Secondary College in Lalor and Northern College of the Arts and Technology in Preston, both in my electorate. It is deeply troubling for these school communities that their education could be disrupted because of Labor's fundamental inability to manage money. This comes on the back of the actual closure of Essendon Keilor College's East Keilor campus, which I asked the minister about last year. His answer was due more than 202 days ago. That is some very late homework by the education minister. Will the minister act to protect these schools and others at risk by ensuring they are not shut down or merged?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:00): (2391) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. This is an issue I have raised before, and I have not yet had a clear answer. The new Bentleigh East ambulance station was first announced as an election promise by the Labor government in 2018. Eight years later the site still has not opened. The ambulance station is a vital service for the community, and I have constituents asking me when it will finally be open. The member for Bentleigh keeps making public statements saying it is set to be open, but those dates keep getting pushed out month after month. This is not good enough, and the constituents want to know when it will be open. So, Minister, when will the Bentleigh East ambulance station open, or is it just going to be held over until an election campaign?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:01): (2392) Since the last election crime in Hastings has risen by 22 per cent. There were four break-ins in five weeks at the dog obedience club. The post office recently had its windows kicked in. Dirt bikes are terrorising the streets at night. Statistics show that crime is up and the people of Hastings are less safe now than they were before Paul Mercurio won the seat for Labor. That is why Frank Schiefler and over a thousand community members are calling for the police station in Hastings to be open 24 hours a day. So my question for the Minister for Police is: will you deliver this? Because the community are asking for it, and because, I tell you what, the Liberal Party will.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (13:02): (2393) At the last council meeting the City of Ballarat passed a motion requesting the Victorian state government increase the number of police assigned to Ballarat by 21, bringing the total to 163. I fully support that, and I hope that everyone can get behind that. It follows a string of criminal incidents, including one on a local resident who just contacted me over the weekend. I saw the video footage where in broad daylight a hooded figure went to steal this person's vehicle. Luckily, they only left with their wallet. Their wife and children were not attacked or anything either. This was in a quiet suburban street. It was not in any sort of shady place, under a bridge or anything like that. So my question to the Minister for Police is: will you increase the number of police officers stationed in Ballarat, or will you continue to ignore the Ballarat community?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:03): (2394) My question is to the Minister for Health regarding qualifications required for working as a maternal and child health nurse in Victoria. There are health professionals that have years of experience in maternal, child and adolescent health nursing who are currently unable to work in Victoria due to incompatible qualifications. I am advised that Victoria is the only state that requires an extra midwifery qualification for a maternal and child health nurse or similar role. Why does Victoria maintain this requirement, which limits the available nursing workforce, when it is not required elsewhere? A qualified and experienced nurse in Bendigo contacted me to raise this issue as she has worked in other states but cannot work in Victoria. I appreciate the minister's review and look forward to her response.

Petitions

Wodonga Golf Club

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 5160 signatures:

> The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the proposed rezoning of the Wodonga Golf Course for a housing development. The Wodonga Golf Course is a vital part of the community, providing recreational, social, and health benefits to a wide cross-section of the community, including families, juniors, golfers, walkers, and local residents. Reducing the course to fewer than 18 holes would fundamentally compromise its viability, making it less attractive for members, visitors, competitions, and ultimately threatening its long-term future. Open green space should not be measured solely by development yield or economic return. The course delivers significant environmental, social, and public health value that would be permanently lost if rezoned. The course is an important part of Wodonga's identity and heritage, with long-standing community connections that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Once this land is rezoned and developed, it cannot be replaced. Future generations will lose access to this space forever. While there are many areas already available for housing development, there are no suitable alternative sites for a golf course of this scale within the region.
>
> **The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council to call on the Government to reject any proposal to rezone the Wodonga Golf Course for non-recreational use and ensure the long-term protection of this land under its current zoning for community recreation and environmental benefit.**

Wendy LOVELL: I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 8

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:05): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General:

Follow-up: Reducing Bushfire Risks, June 2026 *(Ordered to be published) (released on 10 June 2026 – a non-sitting day).*

Reducing the Harm Caused by Distracted Drivers, June 2026 *(Ordered to be published) (released on 10 June 2026 – a non-sitting day).*

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the:

Banyule, Brimbank, Darebin, Mitchell, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges Planning Schemes – Amendment GC281.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme – Amendment C301.

Latrobe Planning Scheme – Amendment C154.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C147.

Manningham Planning Scheme – Amendment C140.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C490.

Southern Grampians Planning Scheme – Amendment C64.

Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendment C320.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment VC311.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – No. 65.

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – No. 64.

Road Management Act 2004 – Nos. 66 and 67.

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 – No. 63.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 57, 58, 59, 61 and 65.

Legislative instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of Dairy Food Safety Victoria Determination of licence classes and fees for dairy businesses 2026 under the Dairy Act 2000.

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Wetlands Closure) Notice No. 3/2026, under section 86 of the Act *(Gazette S274, 28 May 2026)*.

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates for the following acts:

Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Act 2026 – Parts 9 and 10 (except section 223) and sections 7(1), 10, 65, 68(3), 71, 72 and 203 – 3 June 2026 – Part 7 (except section 189) – 3 August 2026 *(Gazette S289, 2 June 2026).*

Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2025 – Remaining provisions – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S307, 10 June 2026).*

Committees

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: government response to the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution in Victoria.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the Minister for Agriculture's response to a petition titled 'Introduce the draft Animal Care and Protection Bill'.

Production of documents

Data centres

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 13 May 2026 relating to the sustainable data centre action plan on the motion of Mr Ettershank. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Construction industry

The Clerk: I table another letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 3 June 2026 relating to construction and transport infrastructure projects on the motion of Mr Mulholland. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Data centres

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 4 March 2026 on the motion of Mr Ettershank and further to the government's initial response on 1 April 2026 relating to the review of water use policies for large industrial users. The letter states that no documents were identified that are responsive to the order. However, the government considers documents related to an industry working group formed to coordinate the Melbourne metropolitan water sector's approach to managing large non-residential water may assist. Accordingly, the government produces two documents in full. I table these two documents together with a schedule.

David Ettershank: On a point of order, President, could I seek some clarification on how it is possible that a single document requested of the government cannot be produced after a month.

The PRESIDENT: I think that is not a point of order and now is not the time for debate on this. Mr Ettershank, you can move a motion to take note of the Attorney-General's response on the next day of meeting.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:08): I move:

> That the Council take note of the Attorney-General's response on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:24): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 17 June 2026:

(1) order of the day, 1, second reading of the Planning Amendment (Restricting Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026;

(2) notice of motion given this day by Bev McArthur on government failures;

(3) notice of motion given this day by Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell on water storage; and

(4) notice of motion given this day by Anasina Gray-Barberio referring matters relating to relocation of public housing residents to the Ombudsman.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Dragon Boat Festival

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:24): I rise today to share a wonderful experience I had recently in attending the Dragon Boat Festival community market in Box Hill. Now in its second year and with over 2000 people attending, this fantastic festival has quickly become a cornerstone event for the local community. It serves as a beautiful celebration of everything culturally significant to Hongkongers and the broader multicultural community who call this diverse region home. Attending the market, it was impossible not to be captivated by the spectacular displays. There was something for everyone, from stunning locally made crafts to interactive stalls that engaged visitors of all ages. Attendees were treated to traditional performances, including a live demonstration of the intricate and timeless art of Chinese calligraphy. And it would be completely remiss of me not to mention the absolute highlight of the day: the striking dragon and lion dances. The energy was infectious, bringing the rich history and folklore of this festival to life right before our eyes, accompanied by the irresistible aromas of delicious traditional Hong Kong foods. Events like this remind us of the incredible strength found in our diversity. I want to congratulate the organisers and volunteers, who poured their hearts and souls into making this year's festival such a resounding success.

Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:26): Last week I attended the official opening of the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery. This is the end product of years of vision, collaboration and determination built on the legacy of the Sisters of Charity and Mary Aikenhead, whose commitment to compassionate care helped shape health care in Victoria. It is fitting that a project with such strong nursing and patient care foundations will now help turn medical discoveries into better treatments and outcomes for patients. What sets the centre apart is its focus on translation. Brenda Shanahan AO, chair of the ACMD – what a force she has been in getting this project to fruition – said:

> The opening of this building is only the beginning. What matters most is what will happen here in the years ahead – the discoveries made, the partnerships formed and the lives changed through innovation and compassionate care.

She was spot-on there and spoke so well on Wednesday night. I also need to recognise former federal health minister Greg Hunt, who also deserves credit. The Commonwealth's $30 million contribution that he delivered made this project a reality. Less credit to Victoria's increasingly invisible Minister for Medical Research: for a government that claims to champion medical research, his absence was curious. The contrast is even starker as the medical research sector warns that essential operational infrastructure support remains grossly underfunded in Victoria. There is little point cutting ribbons on

world-class facilities if the researchers who fill them are being left to fight for their future. Victoria's medical research reputation needs Aikenhead. It also needs greater support.

Community safety

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:28): We cannot ignore what is occurring in many parts of the world, including here. The emboldened far right is successfully weaponising discontent and grievance to sow division and hate directed towards people of colour and First Nations people. The temptation by some to dismiss the loudest voices as fringe elements fails to recognise the very real harm and fear they are causing. Leaving them to go unchecked creates a creeping normalisation of these views that is infecting every sphere of our lives. I have been astounded at the number of times recently when I have tuned into the radio and heard debates where it is somehow totally acceptable for the topic of discussion to be whether all Australians should be allowed the same rights to be able to work, to own a home or to be here at all based simply on the colour of their skin, where their families may have come from or their religion – that it is somehow okay to discuss there being right and wrong kinds of people. How on earth have we reached a place where this is legitimate debate? The people that are hurt by this pervasive racism are our neighbours, our friends, our constituents and our colleagues. Everyone has the right to feel safe, respected and included, regardless of who they are or the colour of their skin, and all those with a platform like us in here should be fighting to ensure that is the case.

Port Fairy early childhood education and care

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (13:29): Port Fairy families have been struggling to find childcare coverage, particularly in the baby age group, and with free three-year-old kinder and free four-year-old kinder there has been some alleviation in that age group. That is why last week I was absolutely delighted to announce 26 recipients of Tiny Towns grants across western Victoria. One of those grants was the Port Fairy community centre in Moyne shire, which received $42,000 to create an additional baby room for the existing childcare centre by converting an office space to a baby room. This will include the fit-out of an existing room and outdoor play space. These works will enable an additional 35 childcare spaces per week. I visited the centre with Moyne shire mayor Jordan Lockett and Cr Myra Murrihy to announce the grant. Director of corporate and governance services Symonne Robinson was very happy that these new places would help get parents back to work and described it as a massive win for the community. I want to congratulate Moyne Shire Council, who have clearly got their finger on the pulse of the needs of the Port Fairy community, and all of the staff who put the application together, and I wish them all the best as they do the renovations.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:31): Over a thousand CFA volunteers, career firefighters, farmers and local government councillors came to Bendigo from all over Victoria on Sunday to protest the emergency services tax. Jess Wilson was there, Danny O'Brien was there and I was there with my Northern Victoria Region Liberal and National colleagues Ms Lovell and Mrs Broad and our candidates Steve Brooks and Graham Watt, but not one Labor MP was present, despite it being in the Premier's and the Treasurer's electorate. Where were they? I have been to virtually every rally that is concerned about this tax since the government saw the need to tax emergency services volunteers and farmers, and I have never seen a Labor MP, or a Greens MP for that matter. They clearly do not listen and do not care. The Liberals and Nationals will scrap this outrageous tax because we will always stand up for CFA volunteers, farmers and career firefighters. I do not believe that local government should be the tax collector for this state. You are a disgrace, you people over there. You do not listen to the people of Victoria – the country people that put food on the table and that put out the fires and leave their own homes. You want to tax them? Well, you will pay the price on 28 November.

Political debate

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:32): I want to use my time to, on behalf of the Greens, condemn the offensive and frankly pathetic sexist and racist statements that some have been trying to bring back into our political discourse. We are seeing billboards with slogans on them that were already out of touch 15 years ago. We are seeing reckless parties and bad actors trying to revive racist policies that this country left behind in the White Australia days. These views are tired, they are outdated and they are just plain wrong. I believe they are out of step with our community, who embrace multiculturalism and First Peoples' connection to land and culture. What Victorians want is leadership and hope. They do not want reheated hate. Those who would drag us back in time are going to have their work cut out for them, as evidenced by the make-up of this Parliament, where we have already reached gender parity; by the euphoric embrace of the Socceroos' triumph – a constellation of talent in that team and a moment of national pride that it was made possible, in part, by compassion for the incredible people who come to us as refugees and migrants; and by my community in Southern Metro, who delivered some of the highest yes votes in support of the Voice in the country. Our Victorian community is strong because of our diversity, and we will not be fooled by political dinosaurs and interstate blow-ins who can only offer up empty promises, worn-out stereotypes and sad echoes of old campaigns. Victorians have said it before and will say it again: no to sexism and no to racism, and the Greens stand with them.

Zahalkaworld

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:34): Last week I attended the opening of the *Zahalkaworld* exhibition at the Jewish Museum of Australia alongside Dr Meghan Hopper, the Labor Party's candidate for Prahran. This exhibition brings forward the collected work of Anne Zahalka over her four-decade career in photography. I am grateful to Anne for showing me around this exhibit and to Gideon Kline and Sidra Moshinsky from the museum for hosting such a beautiful event.

Scotch Hill Gardens

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:34): Also, I joined Minister Kilkenny at the Scotch Hill Gardens development in Hawthorn, yet another success of the development facilitation program, which is designed to help us build higher quality housing faster. With 403 new apartments, 10 per cent being classified as affordable housing, as well as two retail tenancies, this project is delivering the supply of high-quality housing which this area needs.

Alfred hospital

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:35): I also had the opportunity to join the Minister for Health Infrastructure last week when she unveiled the plans for the new Alfred hospital's infrastructure upgrade program. In total, 11,000 square metres of existing infrastructure will be upgraded or refurbished, and this project is expected to be completed by 2030. We all know that the Labor government delivers the health infrastructure which this state needs. I would like to congratulate the minister on this announcement.

Burke and Wills monument

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:35): Today I want to draw the chamber's attention to an FOI that we received from the Department of Transport and Planning. What it shows is an exchange with the City of Melbourne in relation to the Burke and Wills statue, and it makes it very clear that the City of Melbourne changed its position at a secret council meeting. This was a meeting that was not declared. There was no public discussion about this. I say –

John Berger interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, I know it because I can see it in the documents. It actually refers directly to the secret council meeting.

John Berger: Oh, that's a secret meeting! They called it a secret meeting, did they?

David DAVIS: That is what it does. It does actually call it exactly that. They then changed the agreed document, and they have all the deletions and the changed words highlighted and with the strike-through on the words that were going out. But the intention initially was that the Burke and Wills statue, the statue of our intrepid explorers who crossed the continent from the south to the north – and obviously Burke and Wills died; King was the one survivor – had stood in or near the City Square for more than a century. Obviously the works happened on the over-budget Metro Tunnel, and that had to go into storage. The agreement was that that statue would be put back in the City Square. Well, that is not happening. The state government and the council have connived to move it to a distant site. This is our history, our colonial history. We should stand up for it and not have these people – *(Time expired)*

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:37): On Sunday I attended the 'scrap the tax' rally which was held in Bendigo. Both volunteer and paid firefighters, farmers and local residents gathered in unison to protest the looming Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund or levy. Around 1000 people were in attendance, including a handful of my colleagues in the coalition, and we all had one clear message to the Allan Labor government: scrap the tax. Considering that this was in her own home town, we were all disappointed that the Premier could not attend and listen to the message herself, so I shall bring the voices of those in attendance on Sunday to Parliament here today: Premier Allan, scrap the tax.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:38): On Sunday I also joined our leader Jess Wilson and many of my Liberal and National colleagues at the 'scrap the tax' rally organised by the CFA Volunteers Group. Over 1000 people from regional Victoria attended, hundreds of them in their yellow turnout gear, and surrounded by a cavalry of red fire trucks. The message from CFA members was clear: this tax must be scrapped. Labor has betrayed volunteer country firefighters by imposing an unfair emergency services tax that will rip billions from rural communities and will not return that money back to local CFA brigades for new trucks or new stations. A new report by the Parliamentary Budget Office has confirmed that under Labor, Victorians pay the highest emergency services tax in Australia: around $43 more than the national average of $177 per resident, and yet half the truck fleet is over 20 years old and past the date that vehicles should be replaced. This rally was held in the home town of both the Premier Jacinta Allan and Speaker Maree Edwards and in the Treasurer Jaclyn Symes's own seat. All three were invited to attend but refused to turn up and face the firefighters who are hurting because of Labor's policies. Only a Wilson Liberal government will axe the tax, end Labor's waste and give Victoria the fresh start it needs.

Tommy Day

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:39): I would like to acknowledge the passing of Tommy Day III, a Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba man who passed away in late May. Tommy, a multidisciplinary artist from Shepparton, created the tapestry that hangs in the Premier's corridor here in Parliament. Tommy will be sadly missed, and I extend my condolences to his family and friends. Vale, Tommy Day.

Lynbrook Residents Association

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:40): It was an absolute joy to attend the Lynbrook Residents Association community celebration dinner last week. This was a really special event that celebrated the community's successful David and Goliath fight against the proposed waste transfer facility in Hampton Park. The evening was wonderful as everyone came together to reflect, to celebrate and to reconnect. Stopping a disruptive and harmful waste transfer facility for nine councils with their toxic waste literally being in people's backyards in the Narre Warren South electorate was

a team effort, and it was a privilege to be acknowledged as someone who, from the very beginning, stood up and fought with my community. However, there are some other key players that dedicated a great deal of their time and effort and who ultimately played a pivotal role in our success. These people were Vernadette Dickson – we call her our local Erin Brockovich – who received the community award for her efforts; Annette Samuel, our former Liberal candidate for Narre Warren South; Scott Watson, president of the Lynbrook Residents Association; Anthony Tassone from the Casey ratepayers association; Jason Wood, the local, not the MP; Ray; Cr Lynette; Sue, a resident of Hampton Park; and many other people who I may have missed. I want to thank them all for their sacrifice and dedication, and I congratulate the community on this fantastic outcome.

Street Peace

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:41): I also want to take a moment to thank Street Peace for all that they are doing. With 23 Nest nights and 1092 youth attendances, averaging 47 young people, that facilitated 898 mentoring – *(Time expired)*

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:41): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1483, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:42): I rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. From the outset I will just put that the Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this piece of legislation. Further to that, when we come to government, we will increase sworn police officers by 3000, because our police force is under pressure. They need greater powers and they need greater resources, and we will deliver that because we back our police. We will also replace every PSO that the Labor government have taken off 119 stations across Victoria, and we will add an additional 200 PSOs. Crime at train stations is up by 74 per cent, and the decision of this government to take PSOs off 119 of those stations is not only abandoning the community that they are there to support but a reckless and irresponsible decision.

There are less police today than when Jacinta Allan came to the premiership. Despite population growth and despite a rising crime crisis, there are 500 less sworn police officers today in Victoria than there were when Daniel Andrews was Premier. In the last two years and eight months, we have not seen a growth in our police force; we have seen it being cut down – a cut of 500 police officers – and it is not okay. There are now over 1500 vacancies in Victoria Police. The Allan Labor government has either shut down or reduced hours in over 40 police stations in the middle of a crime crisis. This is not because there is no crime to deal with – I wish that was the case. Crime in Victoria is at an all-time high: just about every crime in almost every category in every region across the whole state. The statistics are moving in the wrong direction, and I am going to give you a little bit of a snapshot of what that is like.

Every single day in Victoria there are 750 new victims of crime. The fact that that has not been you or me is just chance. It is fate. It is an accident of where we are at the moment. But we also must admit

that the fact that we are not being attacked or in danger today is because, in order for somebody who is not a passholder to get into this building, they first have to walk up the stairs past some safety officers. What they then have to do is line up at another checkpoint. Then they have to put all their stuff in a scanner so it gets scanned and looked at. Then they have to walk through a metal detector, and if anything goes off in that metal detector, then they are assessed with a wand. That is one of the reasons why we are safe in here today, and I am so thankful for that. I am thankful every time I see any person that plays a part in our safety, I really am. It is a privilege we have. Yet in Victoria we have not even enacted Jack's law in shopping centres and train stations. Jack's law is the ability for a PSO or a police officer in any place to scan somebody with a handheld metal detector, something that costs about $300, to find if that person is concealing a weapon. We have that here, yet we as lawmakers are recipients of a protection that we have not yet legislated for the people that put us here, the people that we are meant to serve.

In Victoria there is a crime committed every 50 seconds, and they are not minor crimes either. According to statistics there is a serious assault every 28 minutes and there is an aggravated burglary almost every hour – unbelievable. From December 2023 to December last year all incidents rose by 23 per cent. Aggravated burglaries rose by 24 per cent, motor vehicle theft rose by 56 per cent, family violence serious assaults went up by 47 per cent, youth incidents were up by 13 per cent and unsolved crimes, which is one area where these reservists are really going to be able to add strength to our police force, were up 47 per cent. At what point will the government realise that this is a serious problem and a serious situation like this requires a serious response?

Since the report into the inquiry into non–family violence stalking by the Victorian Law Reform Commission was tabled in this place in June 2022, non–family violence stalking has increased every single year without exception, every single year. If the death of Celeste Manno was not enough for reform, you would think that a year-on-year increase would be enough for the government to pull that report out of a drawer, read it and implement the advice. The issue has not gone away. It has increased, not once, not twice, but every single year since June 2022 – every single year since it was tabled. The irony is that the report that the government is sitting on holds the answers to the escalating crime that we are seeing. I think the government should stop pretending to search for what is not lost, and it should implement those recommendations. I remind this house that the cost of that report was the life of an innocent 24-year-old.

Despite crime on train stations being up 74 per cent, PSOs have been taken off 119 stations. We are a state in crisis, and that is one of the many reasons that we are supporting this bill today. This is one step in the right direction, but my word, we must take many steps after this. What this bill does is it establishes a police reservist framework that can open frontline work capacity – capacity that we so desperately need. When Jacinta Allan took the reins there were 500 more sworn officers than there are today. It reinstates the Chief Commissioner of Police's power to appoint reservists, allowing the incredible men and women that have served this state to continue to come back into the force and to contribute in an area that this state so desperately needs. It allows reservists to perform administrative tasks and support duties. They can also make initial inquiries to support police investigations. This is so important when a crime is happening every 50 seconds and when 47 per cent of crimes are left unsolved. It allows appointments of reservists on a part-time, a full-time, a fixed term or an ongoing basis, and it includes amendments also to the Firearms Act 1996 and the Victoria Police Act 2013.

I often catch up with police officers that have retired, and to me it seems 'once a cop, always a cop'. We are probably going to hear from a former cop at some stage during the day. I would imagine that the things these incredible men and women experience, which are unlike the things that general members of the public like us experience, change them, change their perspective, and give them a way to relate to and support each other in a way that others cannot. In Mr Battin's speech in the other place he spoke about the difference between what you learn in the academy versus what you learn when you are on the ground. The example that he used was this: you are at the station and you are about to go to a domestic violence crime scene. You know who the victim is and who the perpetrator is. The example

he used is when you go in and then you are surprised when you are attacked by the victim. He said it is not because these people hate cops; it is because they are afraid of the retribution that could come after the arrest. These are things that only police officers can relate to and can support each other through. I really do believe that that is going to be one of the brilliant things that comes out of this legislation. You have got reservists, people that are coming in who have done more than two years in the force, and they can share their wisdom. They can be an incredible support for the next generation of police officers. These reservists will do more than just supporting admin tasks. I believe they will bring experience, wisdom and a different perspective that a new generation, the next generation of police officers, can really be supported by.

More than ever before our police officers need our support. They need our backing. This is one step in the right direction, but there must be more. We must ensure that our police have greater powers and greater resources. That is why the coalition will deliver 3000 additional police. We will grow the workforce. Where the Labor government and Jacinta Allan have seen the force diminished by 500, under a Wilson-led government you will see it grow by 3000. What that will do is it will fill the backlog and the vacancies of the 1500 police that are missing today – that are vacant today. It will add that amount over again to deal with the crime crisis and the growing population.

The very first responsibility of any government is to keep its people safe. Community safety matters to us. We are not here to make excuses as to why offenders offend. We are not here to uphold the rights of the perpetrator above the victim. We are here to keep the community safe. It is the number one role. Laws are not guidelines. They are not suggestions where you can pick and choose which day you want to follow them. The law should be the law. If you break the law, there should be consequences, something that has become a thing of the past in the state of Victoria.

Police are not punching bags either. They deserve respect, and they deserve a government who has their back. That is why we will give police stronger pursuit laws. If some kid decides to steal a car and that initiates a police chase, the responsibility lies with them and it is a standalone offence. This is something that Victoria Police need. They need people that back them. We will toughen bail laws. Mr Battin in the other place also spoke about a cop that arrested a man after a double stabbing. He was speaking to this police officer. This police officer went into a dangerous situation, arrested somebody who had stabbed not one but two people, and then the next day he walked past him because he was out on bail. Imagine that. These police officers are incredible men and women that have a sense of justice in their hearts, a sense of service. They put their lives on the line to protect us. Imagine arresting somebody who has stabbed not one but two people, putting your own life and your own safety on the line in the service of others, and then walking past them the next day and thinking, 'My gosh, was this all for nothing?' This has become the state and the reality in Victoria. It is a blatant disregard for the sacrifices that our police officers make to keep us safe every single day. No wonder the police are leaving the force, and no wonder police officers are burning out. We owe them a massive debt of gratitude for what they do for us, and we need to make sure that we give them the backing that they need.

This is a point and an issue that absolutely must be fixed, and we, the coalition, will back our police. We will restore move-on laws so that our police force can move people on before a crime is committed. Prevention is better than cure. Why is it that we think it is acceptable somehow for police to be so outnumbered, not able to move people on and having to wait until a crime is committed in order to act? It is times like this when tragedies happen, and we want to avoid that happening in this state. We do not want our police officers to feel alone and outnumbered and powerless. We want to allow them to move people on.

We will give police the necessary powers to protect Victorians. They should not have to risk their own lives only to see the perpetrators that they arrested the day before out on the street again. And we will have tougher bail laws, but we will also enact that if you break bail, you will face jail. You will face a tougher test, and it is not something that is going to be overlooked again and again, which is what happens under this Allan Labor government.

We will also give the powers to the police to get violent offenders' weapons off the streets by implementing Jack's law. We will invest $5 million into handheld metal detectors and we will give them the power to use them, allowing them to get prohibited weapons off our streets. The fact that it is commonplace now in Victoria that machete attacks take place is completely unacceptable. I do not know how we ever got to this point, and there needs to be drastic action taken. The government is not even doing the bare minimum to get these weapons off the street. If they did, they would have implemented Jack's law already, and the fact that they have not is an absolute disgrace.

We will protect women, not just in talk but in action. The Allan Labor government has let you down if you are a woman. If you just listened to their talking points, you would just about think you were the luckiest person on earth. Yet in reality, women have been bashed on government worksites. They have been held hostage by people that probably should be in jail. Women in Construction, the labour hire authority, is still registered today.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I am not sure that the contribution that the member is making has anything to do with the content of this bill, and I would ask you to make sure that Dr Heath makes her contributions relevant to the bill that is before the chamber.

Renee HEATH: Further to the point of order, President, there has been a pattern lately of lots of points of order. I would just ask for my time to be paused if it does keep happening – and by the way, this is in relation to bill.

The PRESIDENT: It is all right. We do not reinstate the time on points of order. The member should be relevant to the bill, but in saying that, the first speaker of any party gets latitude. In saying that, that does afford following speakers to actually rebut and address any comments made by the first speaker.

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, I just want to point out that the member should acquaint herself properly with the standing orders, because any member in this place is entitled to make a point of order. Dr Heath may not like that, but the standing orders are what they are.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think that is necessary to pass on.

Renee HEATH: If you are a woman in labour and a woman in Victoria, you should feel let down. We will protect women, and we will do it by implementing laws that have teeth, like 'right to ask, right to know', so if an abuser gets out of jail, you have the right to know and you can protect yourself. We will restore law and order for anyone in any place, because you should never be stuck in a situation where you are vulnerable or in danger. And that is why we will criminalise coercive control.

We will properly fund Victoria Police. We will grow the workforce by 3000 full-time equivalent sworn officers, but more importantly, we will give them the powers and the backing that they need. We will open the 40 police stations that have either been shut down or had their hours reduced by Labor, and what that will do is bring back the sense of safety that is missing in our communities today.

We will implement real adult time for violent crime laws. There will not be a carve-out for anyone to just get away and flout the law. We will implement a law with teeth. This government's adult time for violent crime does not include arson at the moment, so the kids that firebombed Melbourne got off without an issue. In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the minister said serious arson is captured in these laws but then could not describe why what happened in Melbourne was not considered serious arson. I spoke to a firefighter this week in my region, and we were talking about that. He said that the reason it was not serious arson is because they did not know how to do it properly, so what will happen is they will bail these perpetrators, who will then go and do a more fulsome job next time. This is the reality and the despondency that our frontline workers are feeling in the state of Victoria at the moment.

This is the part that gets me really excited about how we will address law and order. We will invest in early interventions to divert at-risk youth from a life of crime, because every child should have the

opportunity to live the life that they want, and to give in to the bigotry of low expectations is not okay. We should not accept that some youths are just destined to end up in a life of crime. I do not know how a lie like that has become acceptable. Who gave anyone the power to decide that a child, because they are from a certain family, a certain background or a certain way of life, should be expected to do nothing more than become a criminal. It is not okay.

One of the lives that has absolutely inspired me is the life of Ben Carson, a young black kid in America, born in the 1950s to a single mum – a divorced family – who was doing it tough, who was a house cleaner. Yet she decided that she would accept nothing less for her kids than for them to live the life of their dreams. Because of that, she was able to get them to read to break through to an education. And this guy became one –

The PRESIDENT: Dr Heath, I do think you are straying quite a lot from the bill.

Renee HEATH: I will get there. But that is okay; I will take your advice.

The PRESIDENT: I just advise you that if you could stick more to the bill, that would be good.

Renee HEATH: I will tell you why it matters. I speak to a lot of police officers, former police officers like Kel Glare and Ivan Ray, amazing police officers that will now be welcomed back in as reservists if that is what they choose to do. They said the number one important thing that helps divert children away from a life of crime is somebody who believes in them. This is something that police reservists do. That is why I am talking about this, because what kids need is not people to accept the worst for them – accept the lowest – but somebody to believe in them, and this is something that these police officers do. When there were police in schools and a child got caught up in the law, a lot of these police officers said to me that what they would do was they would come into the station, they would have to empty the bins, they would start connecting with better role models – good, strong men and women that are upstanding citizens in the community – and they would begin to see a better way of life. I think that matters. You might not think that that has got anything to do with this bill. I do, because I believe that kids can actually break the cycle and do things better, but there have got to be men and women that show them a better way and believe in better for them.

We also need to realise that it is not only when people believe in them; you also have to give these young kids off-ramps, and we will do that. Kids from difficult backgrounds will end up in difficult situations – that is a fact. You will have people from low socio-economic areas that might face different challenges to kids that are not in that situation. You might have people with a family member in jail or who has left them, and they need good people around them to bring out the best in them. This is an area where I can see that working if it is done right. But what we have to do first is we have got to stop accepting the lowest common denominator for kids. It is not acceptable that there have been over 6000 arrests with the same 1000 children, meaning they are arrested and then bailed and arrested and then bailed, and as they are their crimes titrate up. That is not okay. Surely at some stage there has to be a government that refuses to accept the status quo for these kids and begins to see them as people who can do something great in their lives. That is something that, if it is done right, by getting police reservists back – any police officer, really, if they were not so time-poor – it can do. It is one of the life-changing powers of having good men and women believing in kids and telling them that they can do better.

There is something else I want to raise in this debate, and that is the fact that crime in schools has just become completely out of control. I have got a few headlines that I am going to read to you. This one is from one of the major papers on 11 April:

> About 17 students are physically or sexually assaulted or threatened by their classmates every … day in Victoria.
>
> A secret dossier obtained exclusively by the Herald Sun under Freedom of Information laws reveals schoolyard violence rates have tripled in the past three years, with at least 7930 peer-on-peer assaults across more than 1100 government schools …

Minister for Education Ben Carroll of course says that:

> … schools have a zero-tolerance policy for violence and bullying.

Yet:

> … there were at least 3419 incidents of student-on-student assaults across 858 government schools –

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, again, I am listening to the member's contribution, and I do not think that anything related to schools and our public education system and what may or may not be happening in a dossier that the *Herald Sun* has gotten hold of, which is maybe real or made up, has anything to do with the bill that is before the house in terms of police reservists. I would ask that you direct the member to come back to the bill.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to call the member back to the bill. I do accept there have been a number of precedents around first speakers getting latitude. My concern is that other members have every right to rebut the first speaker's contributions and we could be here forever on irrelevance to the bill. So I ask the member if she could come back to the bill. That would be very helpful.

Renee HEATH: Thank you, President. I am happy to have this rebutted, because it is an important discussion and it is an area that a lot of former police officers have been advocating for for years. If you want to look at that, you could look at the Community Advocacy Alliance site. You can see some of the documentation there, and it might help you connect the dots. Another article said:

> Victorian public schools teachers hit, bullied, attacked 153 times a day

That is unbelievable. It also said:

> … thousands of other cases of schoolyard violence going under-reported.

This is a 244 per cent surge in workplace violence in public schools. This is one of the areas that former police officers for years have advocated for – police in schools. If reservists were allowed back, it would restore relationships between police and children so it is not a fear-based relationship but a trust-based relationship. This is something that many former police officers have really been advocating for, because it is an area that can change a life, it can change a culture and it can make the community a lot more safe.

I am really pleased to commend this bill to the house. It is not good enough if there is serious crime happening in Victoria and we are just ignoring it. I will not waste my time on this commentary here. But we must believe in something better. We must find those men and women that have served our community that are willing to continue to give back and to connect with young people that might be heading down a path that is dangerous. If you can turn around a life, if you can give children an off-ramp from a life of crime, that will do two things. The first thing is it will make communities safer. The second thing is it will change the life of that child who is at risk of maybe being locked up because they have got a low expectation of themselves. It is connections with police officers, maybe through Blue Light discos or through police in schools, that can begin to give these kids something better to look forward to and something to aspire to. They will also be an incredible support for the amazing men and women in our police force in Melbourne and Victoria today. I commend this bill to the house.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (14:12): I am going to start off by saying this bill is a good move. It is something that has been needed for quite some time. I will have some questions in committee about the exact role envisaged for the reservists. There are a lot of people who when they leave the force want to leave the full-on day-to-day experience but may not necessarily want to divest themselves entirely of the job. But whilst this is a good move, it is still not addressing the problem of why people are leaving. We are, what, somewhere between 1500 and 2000 police behind just in vacant positions, and then if we add the number sick for various reasons, the force is struggling day to day. What it does not attend to is why people leave. It is good to have people come, but we need to keep them, and that is the problem. Experience walks out the door, and it is very hard-won experience.

I think one of the problems – I am going to go a little bit off track here; maybe not as much as the previous speaker – is there is no meaningful mental health support for members in crisis or those heading into crisis. I should not say there is none, but they need more. The things you see and the things you do in that job – people have these bad experiences once in their life. The police come; they do their thing, and off they go. That might be the third one of the night for the officer. After a while – everyone's piece of string is different – you cannot be in that job and leave unaffected, let me put it to you that way.

It appears that reservists are going to be watch house keepers. This is what I will explore in the committee stage. My experience with watch house keeping may not be everyone's, but I have had some pretty serious violent encounters as a watch house keeper. The only time I ever got to use a long baton was in the watch house, which sounds a bit strange. Also, I have had victims of extremely serious crimes – attempted murder in one case – just walk in. This means the reservists, presuming that is their role, are, at least for a moment, not just going to be witnessing documents; all of a sudden it is full on. As I said, in the committee stage – I do not know if anyone else is going to ask questions, but I will – I just want to explore some of the nuances and see what the government expects.

This is a good bill. It is high time we did something like this. Is it going to fix the problem entirely? Of course not, but it is going to attend to it. I personally detested doing watch house keeping, but it did not bother others. I look forward to the passage of this. I look forward to the people wanting to get back into the force getting back in, and we will see how it works out. I commend this bill to the house.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:15): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution on this bill before the chamber, the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. Might I say, on this side of the house we back the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan to get more officers out on the streets instead of behind desks at police stations. Analysis by Victoria Police shows that police officers currently spend more than 4000 hours a day behind a reception counter or on a desk, and that is 1.4 million hours every year. Staffing reception counters at police stations – it is the government's view that these 4000 hours per day would be better spent out in the community, in vans, walking the pavements and responding to calls for service. That is what reservists will be employed to do, to free up our frontline police officers. Commissioner Bush talked about the strategy required, and the strategy is called 'more street than station'. This is a direct response, freeing up visible policing, tackling frontline staff shortages and responding to active crime crises, for example, youth offences and night-time burglaries. There is a strategy here, and it has come directly from the police force, not just 3AW rage bait or *Herald-Sun* articles or secret dossiers and the like. This is our chief commissioner, who is the head of the Victorian police force, talking with his members about what they need to make this work.

I also want to point out the disinformation that has been spread by those opposite, and I am sick to death of hearing about it, because there is a lot of disinformation happening. Those opposite continue to say we have closed police stations. Well, no, we have not. What has happened is that counter hours have been reduced. Like we said, the strategy that was put forward, which is more street, less station, has meant the redirection of policing resources to out on the street and actually dealing with crime. What that has meant is that there were some police stations that had counter hour reductions. That is not a closure. That is absolutely disgraceful disinformation, because all those opposite want to do is frighten the community. But what the police service itself was saying was, 'We have a strategy to deal with this', and we backed it. Victoria Police guarantees that no physical stations are closing down, but front counter access is restricted overnight or on weekends, and local crews continue to work inside the buildings and deploy for 24/7 emergency dispatch and proactive community patrols. Now, again, that is not what those opposite would want you to believe. They continue to incite fear within the community with their pathetic disinformation, and again, it is a direct contradiction of what the police commissioner has said himself: 'We want more street, less station.' So that is what we are doing.

Might I add, when we hear the discussion around staffing and resourcing and workforce and the like – and I will come to those opposite and the claims that they make in a minute, because none of it is

costed – it is actually quite challenging. The police force is an enormously big organisation with lots of people that work in it. And guess what, you are going to have retirements. You are going to have people off sick. As Mr Bourman pointed out, policing is a hard job, and you are going to have people who are affected by what they see. You cannot get away from that. It does not matter what those officers say and what their platforms might be. I have heard nothing they have said at all that has actually addressed this point. What are they going to do to support police officers who come away with complex PTSD from what they have seen on the job? They have said absolutely nothing about it – nothing. We are about supporting workers. We support workers over here. That is why we made sure that we pay our police officers properly and gave them a really good EBA that was negotiated with the government and the police union. We talk to the police all the time. That is why we are supporting the strategies that are being put forward by the police commissioner. But again, I have heard nothing from those opposite about how they are going to address workforce shortages. What pipeline are they going to build? They have said nothing about this. They have said nothing about how they are going to recruit more people into Victoria Police.

I was just doing a little bit of research myself and thinking, 'Well, what is the average age of a police officer?' They are not particularly young. They are in their mid-30s to 40s. It was a similar situation that happened with nursing a couple of decades back. There was a problem where we could not get enough nurses, so the government acted to make some nursing qualifications free and the federal government acted to give funding towards making your degree free if you went to university to become a nurse. Again, I have heard nothing from those opposite about any of that – none of it. I will talk about what we are doing in a moment about early intervention and the like, because again, I am not hearing anything of significance from those opposite.

We heard Dr Heath talk earlier about the fact that the Liberals are going to have this $5 million in metal detectors to get weapons off the street. How is that going to work, honestly? You are going to have all sorts of human rights abuse claims, and we have seen this happen in America. They are basically borrowing all their garbage from the American playbook. So, what, are they just going to walk down the street and pull people up and say, 'Right, we want to wave a metal detector over you'? It is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard.

Then they say they are going to add more police and add more PSOs. Well, let me say their claim of 3000 new police and station reopenings is uncosted. This is the largest and most expensive pillar of the Liberals platform – 3000 more police officers, hiring 200 PSOs and physically reopening 40 brick-and-mortar police stations. Mind you, none have been closed, so that is a load of garbage. But the omission that the coalition have made is they have not released a line item budget detailing the exact salaries, training expenses, equipment procurement or structural capital costs required to reopen and staff dozens of police stations. There is nothing. There is no detail and, I might add, the Liberals have said they will cut $22 billion in savings – $22 billion from the budget to cut back office public service bureaucracy positions. But is this a back office position, sitting on a counter at a police station? The craziness, the abject just pulling it out of thin air is ridiculous. Again, there are no costings at all.

They talk about their safer communities initiative. Again, this is not costed by any external party. This is what Dr Heath talked about with Jack's law. This has only been internally costed by the Liberal–National coalition. There is no external third party that has given any costings, and they formulated these policies but there has been nothing. They have capped at $100 million what they will allocate to these programs.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, President, we had to endure Ms Terpstra's complaint about Dr Heath travelling off the track, and I have not heard anything in relation to the bill so far. She has moved on to our policy. She might like our policy. It is good that you want to talk about it, but –

The PRESIDENT: I think, Mrs McArthur, you are debating the point of order, and this is the peril I foresaw when I did advise Dr Heath that following speakers have every right to pick up and rebut speakers' contributions, even though first speakers do get latitude. That is what I said to Dr Heath. I

said, 'Yes, you have a bit of latitude.' So there is no point of order, Mrs McArthur, because now we are going to have a debate that has been opened up to talk about everything. That was my concern, and maybe I will think about how in the future we may be able to rein it in and people can concentrate on the content of the bill.

Sonja TERPSTRA: These policies by the Liberal–Nationals are not costed, so again, they are just whipping it out of thin air, and it is just ridiculous. I might just say we also heard from Dr Heath about what they want to do. They want to lock up kids, but then they talk about early intervention. I do not know how you do this all together. None of what Dr Heath said earlier actually makes any sense, and it is completely, wholly inconsistent. For example, on this side of the chamber we are investing $9.5 million in Blue Light intervention, which means the things that used to work, where you had police helping kids, whether it was in the gym or boxing or all those sorts of things, are coming back, and we have invested $30 million in the violence reduction unit. Again, these things matter, and they need a number of responses. There is no magic silver – pardon the pun – bullet to fix these problems. These are problems that are based in trauma in communities that have come from different places. There could be family violence – and might I add family violence is one of the main drivers for these sorts of things, but I have heard nothing from those opposite about how they are going to address family violence. Our frontline police are out there every day dealing with really difficult problems, difficult human problems, and again the Liberals have just got no answer to it.

I return to the bill, where we say the police reservist scheme in this year's budget is going to deploy 200 police reservists to sit in police stations. The legislation provides a necessary framework for a modern, fit-for-purpose reservist scheme to be established. Again, this is why we have funded that initiative in the budget, and it is why we are progressing this important legislation. We also encourage anybody who might have retired from the police to return. There have been a number of high-profile people who are doing that. I might add, since coming to government, we have made a record investment of more than $5 billion in Victoria Police to deliver Victorians the modern world-class policing services they deserve. This includes new police, new and upgraded stations, new technology and fit-for-purpose organisations into the future. This means more than 3600 additional police have been delivered by the government since 2014. Like I said, I have heard nothing from those opposite about how they are going to address the shortage in the pipeline – nothing at all. As I said, it is similar with nursing – there was an ageing cohort problem in that profession.

Again, police do a really difficult job, and I thank them. I want to thank on record today all the hardworking police officers in this state. They do an amazing job in very difficult circumstances. We do not need those opposite talking down their efforts, actually, because that is what they are doing. Every time those opposite want to whip up fear and loathing about crime in this state, they are criticising Victoria's hardworking police, and that is something this government would never, ever do. But you have got no solutions and no answers over there. That is why in this year's budget, we have invested a further $18.3 million to roll out 3000 new mobile devices for specialist police, which will mean faster decisions. Those opposite cannot be trusted on community safety. It is a complete disgrace. We have just heard a crazy grab bag today of ridiculous talking points that are not cohesive. They actually do not create any strategy.

I am pleased to hear that the Liberal Party is supporting this bill, but you would not have known it by Dr Heath's contribution. All she did was roll out negative, critical talking points to attack police officers and their hard work in this state – a thorough disgrace, because they are out there every day on the front line doing their very level best for Victorians. But what we hear from those opposite is it is never enough; it is never good enough. Let us talk about Nicole Werner in the other place and her machete bin. Oh my goodness, let us revisit that machete bin. She claimed that the bins were worth $325,000. Remember: 'You could buy a Ferrari with that' – that was the comment. And how wrong was she? But that went all around the universe on social media – what an embarrassment – and on 3AW and the rage bait and all that sort of stuff. But you know what, that just shows Victorians that those opposite are not fit to govern. If you cannot even get a simple proposition right about the costing

of a program that was about delivering a solution – it was not, again, a magic silver bullet, it was a solution and something we would have kept working on. We never said this would resolve a problem entirely; it was part of an overall strategy. But for Ms Werner, the member for Warrandyte in the other place, to claim that it was $325,000 was completely incorrect. She did not take into account all the other line items that came with that. You cannot trust the coalition when it comes to even doing basic things like rolling out a program. They just want to have a social media hit – how embarrassing. Again, I point out that the coalition's community safety platform has not been comprehensively costed by any independent external watchdog. There has been no independent costing, just them pulling it out of thin air, like Ms Werner did – how embarrassing – and I am sick to death of them always talking down Victoria's police.

People want to know that they have a good frontline police service. That is what this bill is attempting to do – to free up police who can get out there and be on the street and actually do what they want to do, which is catch crooks. In the meantime these reservists will be able to man police stations. If people want to come in for whatever reason they need to go into a cop station, they will be able to do that. That is why we are putting through this bill today. I will leave my contribution there, and I commend this bill to the house.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:30): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. The Liberal–Nationals will support this bill, but let me be clear: this bill is not a solution to Victoria's crime crisis. At most it is a modest administration measure that may assist Victoria Police at the margins. It is not the answer to a reduced police force. It is definitely not a substitute for properly funding police stations or properly rostering full-time members or for strong bail legislation. What this bill does create is a framework for police reservists, allowing former police officers to return in a reservist capacity to perform administrative and supportive duties. This will help reduce some administrative pressure. However, Victorians should not be misled that this bill will fill every police vacancy. They should not be misled that this bill will reopen police stations or restore PSOs to train stations. This bill will not fix the weak bail laws, and this bill will not stop cars from being stolen, homes from being invaded and businesses from being robbed and firebombed, as we have seen in recent months in Victoria.

In many ways this bill is an admission of failure of this government. Crime has continued to rise across Victoria, with crime rates reaching a 20-year high in 2025, with around 630,000 events recorded across the state. What this means is a crime was committed every 50 seconds and a serious assault was committed every half hour. A theft from a retail store occurred every 13 minutes and nine cars were highjacked across Victoria every week. What I have just listed are not just statistics; they all are victims. They are shop workers, the owners of businesses and commuters, but mostly they are people who no longer feel safe in our community. Under this Labor government what we are seeing is 150,000 vacancies on police rosters. More than 50 police stations are closed or on reduced hours, and PSOs were stripped from 120 train stations. There has been a rise in youth crime and a 15 per cent increase in unsolved crime over the past year; 286,329 crimes remain unsolved, and this is almost half of all recorded crime. The Victorian population grew by 8 per cent between 2020–21 and 2024–25, yet police numbers declined by 2.6 per cent over the same period. At a time when demand is rising and communities are facing a crime crisis, why has the Allan government reduced funding for the police force by nearly $50 million?

This bill in reality does not really address the crime crisis. The government wants to bring police reservists in to help with administrative support duties. Traditionally police reservists were a practical solution to make the police force larger, cheaper and more flexible without hiring more full-time police. Full-time police members now exit the police force quicker than the Labor government can hire them. The last new reservist was appointed back in 1991, when I was in the job. There have been no new recruits after that point, and only a small number of ageing reservists remained in service until early 2020, when the final two members retired. So yes, this bill helps the police force in administrative

areas, but we should not let the Labor government use reservists as a cover-up for the broader failure of a properly resourced Victorian police force and the retention of valuable, experienced members.

We have seen the consequences of this failure across the state in recent years. Turn on the TV or look on your phone or on social media. The horrific series of firebombings and related attacks against people have been reported everywhere. Let us put this in context. I keep mentioning all these numbers. On 26 March there was an arson attack at the Love Machine nightclub in Prahran. On 15 April, two weeks later, there was an arson attack at the Albion hotel in South Melbourne. On 16 April there were two arson attacks, one at the Emerson nightclub in South Yarra and one at the Kittens Strip Club in South Melbourne. On 17 April there was an arson attack on the Soho restaurant. On 23 April there was an attempted arson attack at France-Soir Restaurant in South Yarra. On 25 April there was an arson attack at Bar Up in Prahran and on 26 April a drive-by shooting at the Emerson nightclub in South Yarra while patrons were still inside. On 27 April there was another arson attack, at the Left Bank restaurant in Southbank. On 2 May there was an arson attack at the George Hotel in South Melbourne. On 4 May there was an attempted arson at the Electric Bar in Prahran. On 5 May there was an arson attack at a Chery car dealership. On 15 May there was an attempted arson attack at Bar Bambi in Melbourne's CBD and on the same day another arson attack on trucks at businesses in Tottenham and Sunshine North in my area.

What I have listed is 16 incidents of serious offences within days of each other. Police have reported more than 40 incidents overall linked to this crime wave. This should not be normal. This is not the Victoria I grew up in. This is definitely not acceptable in any civilised state. When businesses are firebombed, venues are being shot at and members of the public inside premises are being targeted, the government cannot pretend that community safety is under control and that these reservists will alleviate the crime crisis.

We are seeing a pattern across my electorate as well. Crime is out of control. Across the Western Metropolitan Region, in my electorate, total offences have increased from 123,182 to 128,875 in the year ending December 2025. This is an increase of 5693 offences in 12 months – motor thefts, residential aggravated burglaries, family violence serious assaults. Total serious assaults rose by 336 offences. There were prohibited weapons offences. At the same time, under this Labor government's weak bail legislation, we have seen a revolving door where these young offenders have been apprehended by police and then released again and again and again. Offenders are constantly being rebailed and rebailed and rebailed. This sends the wrong message to young offenders. It tells them there are no consequences and minimum accountability is an option.

This bill may reduce some of the administrative burden on Victorian police. However, police reservists cannot replace full-time members and frontline officers. Police reservists cannot open police stations. Police reservists cannot replace PSOs at train stations. Police reservists cannot replace strong bail laws. This is why delivering 3000 more police is necessary to address the 1500 vacancies we have at the moment, to reopen all those closed police stations and to restore public confidence in the Victorian police force.

We will restore confidence in the community that there are consequences if you commit a crime, through 'break bail, face jail' and strengthening the existing law of 'adult crime, adult time', and restore confidence in public security and safety on our train networks, which is vital. An additional 200 PSOs will do that, returning to all the 120 stations that were originally manned. By contrast, this bill is a modest attempt to address the 1500 vacancies in our police stations. We support it because it is a measure that assists the police and is worth supporting. However, no-one should be pretending this is enough. Victoria is in a crime crisis. Businesses are being firebombed, cars are being stolen, families are being confronted in their homes. Young offenders are cycling through bail like we have never seen. Police stations have been closed and hours reduced. PSOs have been stripped from train stations to go into shopping centres. It is clear that the police are overworked, under-resourced and buried in paperwork.

I can attest to that. I know the pressure police are under because I wore that uniform for 28 years. Our dedicated men and women in blue do extraordinary work, but they cannot be expected to be able to continue to hold the front line forever, especially when the government continue to cut resources, weaken bail laws and refuse to take responsibility. Rather than congratulating themselves for bringing forward a reservist framework, the government should be explaining why Victoria Police has reached this point – why there are 1500 vacancies, why 40 police stations have been closed or had their hours reduced, why PSOs are being removed from 120 train stations, why business after business is being firebombed across Melbourne – and the list goes on. These are the questions we should be asking the government and demanding answers to.

We support this bill because it assists the police and wherever we can support the police we will, but do not mistake our support for satisfaction with the government's approach. This bill does not really address the police shortage in any way. The rapid exit of experienced members from the police force during a crime crisis is a warning sign. Victoria needs more police, stronger laws, police stations to stay open, visible patrols, PSOs to be at stations where they are supposed to be and consequences for offenders. Offenders need to understand their actions have consequences. But most importantly Victoria needs a government that backs victims and backs police officers.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:42): I would like to start by saying that the Libertarian Party will be supporting this bill, the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. It is my belief that this bill will provide some modest assistance to the police force in managing their resources, and for that it is welcome.

Of course the pandemic dominated the last term of Parliament, but in this term of Parliament, especially after engaging with many, many constituents in the south-east, the dominant thing that many people are concerned about is crime – absolutely. I have been to lots of listening post things at supermarkets, I have been to markets and I have been to community events, and the thing that people always bring up is they are worried about crime. They are worried about home invasions. They are worried about having their car stolen. They are worried about their wife or daughter being attacked. They are worried about all sorts of things. They are worried about going to the supermarket. These concerns are real because the crime is real.

I was rather shocked recently. I went to a forum in the City of Berwick that was about crime for local traders. We had Neighbourhood Watch, some local police, people from the council, lots of other people and lots of local business owners there. The police were volunteering out of their own time, by the way. They were not getting paid for this; they were doing it because they care about community safety. They said that on many shifts in the City of Casey there are only 12 police officers available. To put that in context, one of the things that they said was that the population of the City of Casey is not far different to that of the entire state of Tasmania. The idea that there are only 12 police officers there just seems incredible to me. That is just the way it is. I was talking to the retailers there. A lot of them said that they just do not bother reporting crimes anymore. People would just come in, especially to liquor shops, steal their products and walk out the door. They do not care that there are CCTV cameras there. They know that the police will not turn up in time. It is too dangerous for the staff to intervene, and if they have to do a police report, then it is a lot of paperwork. They have got to deal with the police report, they have got to deal with the insurance company and all those sorts of things, and they just do not report it. Ultimately, those costs end up with other Victorians, because it means we have got higher insurance rates and we have got higher margins required by businesses to recover those losses. Ultimately, everyone pays in Victoria for this sort of crime, except for the criminals themselves.

The government here is doing one thing that is good. It was not something that I was planning on when I went for election to get into Parliament in the first place, and indeed even this term I did not foresee it, but crime has been a huge issue that we have been forced to engage in. Indeed I have been doing what I can to engage in these issues to help the community feel safer. One of the things that the government did that was very good was listening to the community on the concerns around the

Frankston serial killer. The government actually agreed with that, and that was a good thing that the government did.

Another thing that I have been bringing up – I think that the government's approach here is far too modest but at least they are doing a bit of it – is increasing access to pharmacotherapy for opiate addicts. I think that this is a key measure, and I would urge the government to push a lot harder on this, because every person that you get on to pharmacotherapy is another person out of the hands of organised crime, another person not committing petty crime to feed their habit, and maybe you have got a chance of getting them straight – or if you cannot get them straight, at least you can get them to be a functioning member of society who is not committing crimes to feed their habit. I urge the government to do as much as it can on increasing access to pharmacotherapy.

Some of the other things that the government has done, though, are either hopeless or counterproductive. I know that the opposition loves ridiculing the government about the machete ban, and indeed I have engaged in that too, but I think everyone should be reminded that it was not government policy to come up with the machete ban. They got goaded into it by the opposition, and eventually the government did it. Now they are getting ridiculed by the opposition for the machete ban, and maybe the government has learned a lesson not to cave in to opposition policies, because I do not know how the opposition was intending on machetes being surrendered, but it would seem that if you are going to have a machete ban – which I have said before and I say now I think is stupid and does not actually achieve anything – having a bin out the front is probably the most sensible way of doing it rather than tying up police time accepting these things, because I am not sure how else you could do it. I do not think they are going to put them in by post – they are pretty big and heavy. On that note, I would urge the government to not go along with what the opposition is proposing – this Jack's law that they have been promising. In my view this is just another ineffective feel-good policy that does not actually achieve outcomes. Indeed the research in Queensland has proven that it has not actually decreased crime overall, so I do not think that that is a very good policy to implement.

I would also urge the government to, as we have been talking about for ages, look at the incentives that are driving these crimes rather than at the enforcement end, as by then it is far too late and the crimes have already been committed. Look at the government policies that incentivise much of this. I have spoken many times about the federal excise tax. I know that the state government is not responsible for that, but it should at least publicly state that and make it clear to the federal government, as the New South Wales Premier has done. Premier Minns in New South Wales has actually been very vocal about this issue and done a very good job in advocating for the federal government to change policy here.

But there are things that the state government is responsible for. Their procurement policies – we have seen how organised crime is taking advantage of that. The government need to totally rethink their procurement policies. The government has acknowledged that there are problems with the justice system as a whole and in particular bail, and we need changes here. We absolutely need changes to the bail system. I have spoken to police personally who have been absolutely demoralised by arresting someone multiple times – sometimes multiple times in a day. They get out, they arrest them, they pick them up, they get out. It does not require a lot of imagination to see how demoralising that would be for police who feel they are doing their job and are being let down by the law. I think that that is a very clear thing.

Another thing that I have been speaking to a lot of people about – I have brought up in this place and it turned out to be wildly popular, far more popular than I anticipated – is castle law: the idea that the law should lean more heavily in favour of the home owner when defending themselves against violent criminals. I do not advocate for this sort of thing because it is something that I think is cool or whatever; it is because there are so many people who feel threatened and confused in this situation and they have brought it to my attention, and we need to have some sort of solution, like self-defence and pepper spray. There are so many people I have spoken to – mums, young women and older people in particular. They often bring up the idea that they want some way to protect themselves. They feel

vulnerable, they feel scared and they have got no way to protect themselves. Recently I was at a market in Cranbourne, and I spoke to an older man. He said, 'I don't know what I can do to protect myself if someone comes into my home or if someone attempts to harm me on the street. I'm just an old man; I can't physically defend myself.' He wanted to be able to access pepper spray so that he at least had some chance of defending himself. I think he should have that right. I think he should have that right to fight back. It is sad that we have got ourselves into a situation where it is necessary to think about that. It is sad that our constituents feel so scared that they feel the need to arm themselves, but that is the reality at the moment, and we need to fix that.

I have been going to a lot of these forums that have been happening – either I or my staff. In fact it has got to the point where I am actually running my own forum in the City of Casey. I have invited along a bunch of experts to try and listen to people's concerns about crime but also to give them some practical advice. That will be happening next Monday night right near Casey Central. Hopefully we will get some people along to that and be able to hear from some experts about practical things that people can do to increase the security in their home and what they can do about reporting crimes.

One thing I would urge anyone listening to this to do is to not just ignore crimes. One of the things that was brought to my attention was that the areas that get the police resources are the ones that report the crimes. Apparently in the south-east a lot of people just do not report crime, and therefore the crime does not exist as far as the data is concerned. I would urge people to at least report crime, either through a police station or Crime Stoppers or something like that, so at least we get it on the record that a crime has occurred and someone has been harmed. Hopefully that will lead to better acknowledgement of the levels of crime that we actually have in the south-east.

It is sad that we have got to this situation. It is sad that so many members of Parliament are having to push on the issue of crime and that crime has got so bad, but nevertheless, that is where we are at, and that is what we need to do. This bill provides some modest, increased human resource planning for the police, and for that I commend it. But I would urge the government to go harder in these areas, acknowledge the underlying incentives that are driving crime and try and at least acknowledge it and do something about it if they can. Take people seriously when they say they feel scared and want to try and protect themselves and their family. I think that the government's position that people should just call 000 and wait to be hurt is not acceptable to most people.

We absolutely need to fix these problems in the justice system and with what is happening with bail. I think the government has heard that. Whether their actions will actually solve it or not is another matter. I know that the government is very good at selling things but often fails very badly during execution. I hope that is not the case, but anyway, we can only hope for the best. I am hopeful that we will get better resourcing for police, because we clearly need it, especially in the south-east in the City of Casey. Police in and of themselves are not the answer. I think the government knows that. There are many other things that the government could be doing to prevent crime, and they should be doing a lot more.

On that, I will leave it, but I will say that everyone in this place must realise the community concern around crime. We might have different ways that we want to deal with it, but ultimately that concern is real. The dangers are real. People are really upset. They want action taken, and this is a small action. Therefore I will support it.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:55): I am pleased to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This bill is about acknowledging expertise. It is about acknowledging currency and experience in policing and about keeping active or serving police officers right where they want to be and where their skills and qualifications should place them, and that is doing active policing. The bill establishes a contemporary police reservists framework that gets more sworn officers out of stations and into communities. It backs the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan, it has the support of the Police Association Victoria and it is funded in this year's budget.

This is achieved by the bill amending the Victoria Police Act 2013 to reintroduce the chief commissioner's power to appoint police reservists, providing the necessary framework. This includes a new oath or affirmation; regulation-making powers covering qualifications, training and long service leave; and consequential amendments to related acts. Reservists will hold the powers of a constable at common law in the exercise of their functions. This will include the duty to maintain public order and prevent anticipated breaches of the peace. To be eligible an applicant must have a minimum of two years cumulative service as a police officer in Victoria or another jurisdiction. These are experienced former police officers with real institutional experience and knowledge, and that is the exact point. The Allan Labor government has backed the scheme with funding to deploy up to 200 reservists delivered in the 2026–27 budget, and Victoria Police has already received over 600 expressions of interest from former officers motivated to come back and support their former colleagues. This is a vote of confidence by previous officers in this reform.

Victoria Police analysis shows that officers currently spend 4000 hours a day behind reception counters and desks in total, across all of the police. That is 1.4 million hours every year tied up in administrative duties. Active police officers want to be out educating their communities and preventing and solving crime, and that is exactly the skill set that they have. They have the currency of training and practice and all of the expertise to do that, so reservists will change the equation, reducing administrative time and keeping police officers more on the street. By taking on key administrative and back office functions they free highly trained sworn officers to be present, visible and responsive in their communities.

I recently met with Warrnambool police, as I do on a fairly regular basis, and I was quite pleased to hear that youth crime in our region is remarkably low. In fact the most common crimes committed in my community are family violence, speeding and driving while distracted. I think that is a sober reminder of the persistent significance of family violence in our criminal space. Reservists will help with policing family violence and traffic offences. They will keep processes moving behind the scenes so that experienced frontline officers can stay where they are needed most – out in our communities, building exactly the kinds of relationships that make a difference.

This government backs Victoria Police. Every day, in any weather and at any hour, Victoria Police officers put themselves at risk to keep our community safe, and I want to take this opportunity today, on behalf of western Victorians, to thank them and their families for the service they give our state. The Allan Labor government has backed that service with genuine investment. Since coming to government we have committed more than $5 billion to Victoria Police. We have delivered more than 3600 additional officers since 2014, we have new and upgraded stations across the state and we are providing the technology needed to keep the force modern and fit for purpose. This budget adds $18.3 million to the rollout of 3000 mobile devices for specialist police. This will put real-time information in their hands in the field rather than back in the station, letting them make decisions faster and creating less paperwork and more time to protect Victorians. Those opposite cannot claim this record. The last time they held government they did not fund a single additional police officer for four years. We can only suspect that if Jess Wilson gets a chance to govern, she will cut these types of roles that have a particular set of expertise. Administrative and procedural expertise – that is what these roles are going to be good at. While they choose to politicise community safety, we choose to act on it. The Allan Labor government works with Victoria Police and with command, rather than against them.

This bill establishes a framework to make sure that administrative work is done by those skilled and talented in administrative work, and the budget provides the funding. Our communities provide the proof that when police are supported to be present and connected, it works. This bill is about putting the right expertise where it needs to be, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:02): I also rise today to contribute to the debate on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This is an important bill addressing administrative burdens on Victorian police, because it is going to allow for the availability of frontline police in the police portfolio. I live in the City of Casey. People in the City of Casey are

very, very aware of how our police resources have been stretched, so much so that even though we have one of the highest crime rates, one of the highest domestic violence rates and one of the highest rates of aggressive assault and criminal activities taking place in the City of Casey, we do not have the highest call-outs for police, because people have simply got to a point where they are starting to despair and think, 'Well, there must be somebody that's worse off than me' or 'They're not going to get here.' There are so many stories of people feeling let down. If we can actually have our frontline police stations open and if we can actually have more police able to go out on the beat, it is going to make a massive difference to the people in my region in the south-east.

This particular bill has a number of elements to it. It is going to establish the police reservist framework, which is going to open up police workforce capacity. These appointed police reservists, on probation, are going to take the same oath that police take, and they will have to have at least two years prior service as a police officer in Victoria or in another jurisdiction. They also may have to meet other prescribed criteria, although these criteria are probably going to be waived in exceptional circumstances. Appointments can be full-time, part-time or casual and may be fixed term or ongoing. This is good news for Victorians.

I am so aware of – in fact I speak regularly in this chamber about it – the crime situation and the need to support our police force. We know that crime is at an all-time high under this particular Labor government, with a criminal offence occurring every 50 seconds. So while I am speaking over this period of 10 minutes or so, think of how many people have just endured some form of criminal activity in their businesses, in their homes, on their cars or maybe on their own personal bodies. It is simply not good enough. Every day 746 people become victims of crime here in this state. The yearly Crime Statistics Agency data reveals that crime is up in Victoria. I know that we are getting new statistics this week, and I am looking forward to seeing what those are, but I do not think that the news is going to be particularly good news, because in the City of Casey we know that crime was up by 12.7 per cent in 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, and in the City of Greater Dandenong, where my office is – in the middle of the south-east, among the 11 electorates that I represent – crime rose by 6.5 per cent. When it comes to police, there are currently about 506 fewer full-time Victorian police officers than when Jacinta Allan became Premier. What an achievement – just when we need more, we have less. There are 1500 vacancies on Victoria Police rosters. Think about that – 1500. Forty-one Victorian police stations remain closed or are operating on reduced counter hours. And let us take the machete bins that were introduced here by this particular government – what an epic failure – which cost $13 million.

Members interjecting.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Well may you moan – that is taxpayers money that was spent, and we have rising crime and not enough police. Let me just add, as a person from an education background, that if we were to bring in some of our people that have had to retire in the education force as well, maybe we would not have a situation with such a shortage of teachers.

I know that I have mentioned many times in many motions and in many different debates and adjournments statistics that are important for us to remember. Crime across Victoria has increased more than 25 per cent, with almost 295,000 offences remaining unsolved. Think about that just for a minute. In my area it is well known that that we have had people who have had firebombings, whose businesses have been burnt down, and in just over a week the young people who caused those fires have been released to walk free, to do it again. Reports that come to me through local people suggest that these young people are being offered large sums of money in order to burn down businesses. That is very concerning. That is organised crime; that is not random.

How are we going to combat that when the average Joe Blow that has something happen to them does not even feel they can ring the police because the police are occupied with so many other issues? We have, for instance, in my City of Casey some of the highest statistics for domestic violence, and the police have to prioritise that to try to save lives. But while the police are doing that – and that could

maybe take them a few hours to sort out – that is a car and a police unit that are not out on the beat to come when someone rings because they have got a criminal situation. I have heard about it because I have also attended these local community group forums that the City of Casey has been holding. Just about everybody had a crime story, and just about everybody had a situation where they did not feel that they could call the police and see them actually turn up. That is a real concern. It is a real concern when we are living in what is supposed to be a civilised, organised culture and situation and not only do we have young people who have just committed horrific crimes being able to walk free but the police are stretched so they cannot even get to everything. I am not sure how many cars we have in the area of the City of Casey; maybe it is half-a-dozen. I do know that these people are working extremely hard, and I know that we need to encourage them. I want to say this to everybody in the south-east: you need to make the call to the police, or to Crime Stoppers if you do not want to have your name recorded in what you are doing, because if you do not do that, they will not realise how much we need our police services supported in our area so that we can increase them. Do not give up on making those calls just because they cannot get out. We need those statistics to help us get more police. So please keep making the calls even if you feel let down because they cannot get to you in time.

I have been calling on the government because I know that we need these police stations manned. I know that places like Dandenong and Frankston need to have fully staffed and fully operated stations. I know that we need them from Chelsea and Mordialloc right across everywhere in the south-east. We have an issue with crime, and we need more police. We now finally have a little bit of a solution here that will help some of these police to come in and work in administrative tasks. It is going to make a huge difference. I have to pay attention, though, to the fact that this government promised a police station in Clyde North, where we have some of the highest numbers of domestic violence incidents taking place. This newly built police station that we in the community were all told – and I live in the City of Casey – was going to provide 24-hour access continues to remain closed to the public, despite the population growth and rising demand in the area. I also want to acknowledge that Victoria recorded more than 640,000 criminal offences in the past year, which is a 12 per cent increase on previous reporting periods. We will know a little bit more about how bad things are when we get the current statistics and they come out. I have to also comment on the fact that Victoria's police numbers remain lower than in New South Wales, and that contradicts what the Premier claimed in terms of the workforce. Quite clearly the Premier has been corrected, because now we have this bill before the house.

Ms Ermacora said, 'What is the coalition going to do about it?' Well, number one, we are supporting this bill because we want to see more police. We know that we need them, and we know that they need more support. I know that my community needs to be able to ring a police station, they need to be able to ring 000 and they need to know that the police are going to be able to come out to them when they have those situations arising with criminal activity and that they will not be in a long list of people who are simply waiting for that police car to turn up. The police do an amazing job, but we need more. This is a short-term solution, and it is one that the Liberals and Nationals 100 per cent support because, as you may have noticed, we have ex-police on our side. Yes, we do. Trung Luu just spoke earlier; he is a former cop. Brad Battin, who is our shadow minister, is a former cop. We actually have former police who are members of Parliament, not ex-staffers. We have people who have worked in real jobs in the community, and that is why we care about what happens under these policies and what happens when these bills become law. It was mentioned: 'What will the coalition do?' Let me tell you, we have an actual plan. We have a plan for Victoria because we want to actually see things change.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, it may not have any substance, but the document that Mrs Hermans is holding up is clearly a prop.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Ignoring the preamble, do you wish to speak on the point of order, Mrs Hermans?

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am actually using it as my notes.

Harriet Shing: No, you are not. You did not look at it once.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am about to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I am going to rule on the point of order. It was being used as a prop. I would ask you not to wave an item for the camera or for the broader chamber, Mrs Hermans, but apart from that you are free to use your notes.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you, Acting President. We have a plan to keep Victorians safe, because Victorians deserve to feel safe. They deserve to feel safe in their homes. They deserve to feel safe in our streets. Victoria's crime rate has reached a 20-year high. A crime is committed, as we said, every 50 seconds. Every 13 minutes we have a theft in a retail store. There is a serious assault every 28 minutes. Every week there are nine carjackings across Victoria. There are, as I mentioned earlier, 1500 police vacancies, and 40 police stations have closed or have reduced hours. These are not just statistics. They are not just numbers on my page. They are reality for every Victorian. So what will we do? We will deliver more police on the beat. We will deliver more PSOs for community safety. We will deliver stronger police pursuit powers. Under a Jess Wilson–led government, we will deliver tough bail and sentencing laws, not like the flimsy, revolving door things that we see currently under this government. We will deliver targeted prevention and intervention programs because we also care about changing the person and their future, not just talking about it.

I am a person that has formerly worked in social work and youth work. One of the rules of that, and I have said this in this chamber before, is that there must be consequences for actions. You cannot teach people things if there are no consequences for actions. You are teaching them when there are no consequences that they can do it again and that next time maybe they can take it just that little bit further. Basically, you are teaching them to continue to have a life of crime. There is nothing that is getting turned around in that time, so there have to be some consequences for actions. But there also has to be some thought put into it, because when people are given the opportunity to have an education and to be given a hand up over a handout, they can turn their lives around. We want to see people have that opportunity. In some cases they are turning to a life of crime because they simply do not have that.

We want to see a stronger police force, and we have a plan to boost frontline safety that will deliver 3000 more police, reopen police stations, restore public access and put police back on the front line. I am glad to see that the government had to copy our ideas to try to put a little bit of that together in this particular bill, and that is why we will be supporting it. There will be 3000 more police if we have a coalition government in November. As I said, we will reopen our police stations so that we have more visible law enforcement in our communities and more consistent protection.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:16): I am going to rise today to make a brief contribution on this bill, which introduces reforms to provide a police reservist scheme in Victoria. The proposed scheme will boost capacity and ease pressures on frontline police officers by enabling police reservists to perform a number of administrative and supportive tasks. We know that this is a temporary measure to plug the gap, essentially encouraging retired police officers and former serving police officers to come back on board into the police force to perform some administrative duties and take that pressure off frontline workers. We know that there are currently 1500 to 2000 unfilled positions within Victoria Police, so this very much is a temporary measure. The situation is not unique to Victoria. Staff retention and recruitment is a huge issue in every state in Australia. Police are leaving the police force in droves. That is due to toxic workplace culture, to burnout and to an ageing police force. But this gives us an opportunity to rethink where police resources are best utilised, and that is some of the contribution that I want to make today.

We know that police are currently being called out to deal with mental health issues and family violence issues and to deal with poor behaviour in out-of-home care. We think that they could be better utilised by looking at alternative first-responder models – mental health workers attending sites and specialised family violence support services attending. Currently when it comes to family violence –

and as Mrs Hermans raised, in Casey City Council we have a huge issue with family violence, predominantly – police are being called out to family violence incidents as the first responders. Obviously for any sort of violent incident it should be the police that are first responders, but often they do not have the specialised family violence training that is needed.

I have spoken many times in this chamber about the Alexis model. What we are seeing with the Alexis model, where we have a specialised family violence unit supporting both perpetrators and victims of family violence, are very positive outcomes in that space. This model is currently only in a trial phase, and it is active in five family violence units within the police force. I have advocated time and time again for that model to be implemented in the south-east. As I have indicated before, and as many in this chamber have spoken about, family violence in the south-east, and predominantly in the Casey council area, is highly prevalent. It is quite a unique space to be looking at, particularly as there is such a culturally diverse community in Casey. There are new developments in Casey. It is a fairly new community. When we look at the Alexis model and how successful it is, in its trial phase only we are seeing an 85 per cent reduction in family violence recidivism. Think about the police time and resources that could save by avoiding ongoing recurring call-outs of police. When we have a specialised family violence unit allowing people to access services quickly and effectively, we are seeing a reduction in misidentification, we are seeing survivors being able to access the support services that they need and we are also seeing perpetrators access services they need to change their behaviour, because let us face it, not everyone wants to leave a family violence situation. They want the behaviour to change, and that is what these units are doing. They are specialised units, and they are effective. Interestingly, 75 per cent of victim-survivors felt that the program helped decrease family violence in their lives. This is an example of a way better model of operating where you have a specialised family violence unit working with the police and effectively taking away a lot of the burden on police to be those responders to family violence time and time again. This is about changing behaviours.

Another issue I want to raise in particular around rethinking police resources and how we could better utilise police resources is obviously drug law reform. Today the Penington Institute issued their *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2026*, and what it showed, alarmingly, is that seven Australians are dying of an overdose every day. These are preventable deaths. One person is dying every 3½ hours of an overdose, and that data is from 2024. How is this related to police resources? Well, when you have police attending or stigma associated with criminalisation of drug use, you are less likely to see people who need access to health services provisions accessing those provisions. I heard on the radio this morning Alison Ritter from the University of New South Wales, who is an illicit drug policy researcher and expert. What she says is that a much bigger share of government funding is spent on law enforcement than on harm reduction. She said:

> We've got good evidence from research that we've done that it would be far better to refer people … into harm reduction and treatment services than put them through the criminal justice system.

She went on:

> … only half the number of people who are seeking treatment are able to receive it …

She said:

> There's no other health-related condition where society says we're only going to treat half the number of people who might require it. That's a huge gap in our system.

Imagine if we decriminalised all drugs and treated drug use as a health issue, not a criminal issue. These were some of the experiences that we got to delve into as part of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. We went to the ACT and spoke to Scott Lee, who is the ACT police commissioner, and a number of public health experts around decriminalisation of cannabis but also decriminalisation of drugs more broadly. What the police commissioner identified was that the administrative burden that has been lifted because there is no longer the criminalisation of all drugs in the ACT has had a huge impact on their ability to put frontline services and frontline police officers where they are most needed, not dealing with victimless crimes around drug offences.

When we reduce stigma, we know that those that need access to help and services do in fact access it. By removing stigma, by removing that criminalisation, you allow people to effectively move forward with accessing help where they need it. Obviously, with cannabis reform we still see roughly 4000 Victorians arrested every year for cannabis possession. We are talking about small possession charges, under 50 grams. It is a young person having a joint on them and getting busted at the train station; it is someone at a rally having a little bit of weed in their pocket and getting picked up by the police. We know 4000 arrests a year has to be a huge weight on the police resourcing that we currently have, especially when we are down 2000 officers. Eighty per cent of the community believe that cannabis should not be a criminal offence – 80 per cent. I am not the only one saying this in this place. When it comes to the cost of police time and resources, the PBO, the Parliamentary Budget Office, recently did some costings where they indicated the operating cost of policing cannabis-related crimes in Victoria is estimated to be approximately $5.8 million per year. That accounts for around 56,800 hours of police time. If we equate that to a full-time workforce, that is 27 full-time police officers – and that is just on cannabis reform. That would be an extremely low result as to an estimate, I would think.

In summary, I think that we can identify that a huge amount of money is currently spent on policing, and I am not too sure that it actually makes our community much safer. I think we have a real opportunity in this place to talk more about where police resources are fundamentally needed, and we know that that is in relation to any violence within the community. Police should be the first responders and right there protecting our community. There is no denying people should feel safe in their community. But it is time that we rethink some of these outdated laws that currently impede police from actually being those frontline support workers where they are needed, in comparison to drug-related offences.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:26): I am pleased to also rise to share a few remarks on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, which is an important part of our package of continuing to reassess, re-evaluate, listen to genuine need and implement genuine reforms that make Victorians safer. Many colleagues in this place have shared their experiences with their local communities with their local police forces, and I believe I am now the third speaker in a row representing the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. On that note I wish to also join in thanking and acknowledging the incredible work that our police officers do – our sworn officers and our PSOs, obviously, here in the precinct, on railway stations and in shopping centres – and the work that both civilian and sworn officers do day in, day out to keep our communities safe.

Recently I did have the opportunity to attend a crime forum in the City of Casey which was held by local command, and it was very good to hear the direct feedback touching on some of the points that have already been raised by other speakers in this debate. We do know, for example, that domestic and family violence continues to be the driving cause of their workload, and my colleague Ms Ermacora, before she was in the chair, was remarking on that aspect of their work. Indeed at that point, following the initial tranche of bail reforms – it is early stages, but the police have been reporting positive feedback back to the community on them. Since that time we have had the second tranche of bail reforms come through, and throughout the process and in the lead-up to it I did have the opportunity to speak with many of my constituents, including one who I have spoken about previously in Berwick, and their input and their sharing with me of their story, their really traumatic story of their experience, really did help to drive our advocacy, which led to these new stronger, tougher bail laws to be in place, which are having an impact. There is still further work to be done, but they are having an impact and they are keeping Victorians safe, as they deserve to be.

As Mr Limbrick mentioned, the City of Casey is a very large area, and combined with the Shire of Cardinia, the population is already larger than that of Tasmania. We do have a large and growing area, and it is for that reason that this government has been investing in a rebuild of Narre Warren police station. That has just reopened – a full rebuild – and of course there is the new Clyde North police station, which has already been mentioned in debate today as well. We are continuing to make those

investments, and as other colleagues have noted, we do still have the single largest police force in the country. Notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding the many investments that have been made in police resources over a long period of time, there is an acknowledgement that in Victoria, as in other states, we are seeing a shortage of police officers, and whilst the funding is there and the resources are there, we really do want to encourage more people who think they might have the appropriate skills to consider putting their hand up to become a Victoria Police officer. These people do incredible work day in, day out.

Joe McCracken interjected.

Michael GALEA: I see your interest over there, Mr McCracken. You might be looking for a new career, as we are very sad to be losing you from this place this year. Maybe it would be something that you could do. You could come out to the academy in Glen Waverley and we could catch up there, and you could tell us and give us an update on how you are going in the academy. I am sure you would make a fine officer. Whatever your background – and I understand that they do seek to have people from very different backgrounds – it is something that we want to see. Just as with every other state undergoing similar challenges, we are really keen to see this. There is the Made for More campaign underway right now, which is promoting policing as a career to Victorians. Indeed, as I have previously commented, even the Queensland police force is getting in on the action by mistakenly putting their policing recruitment adverts onto our trams – but we will certainly take it.

In the meantime, that does not mean that we are just going to sit back and say, 'We're doing our best to recruit.' We have got this in place. There is the new academy in Mildura on the way as well. We are doing all these things. We are not just going to sit on our laurels and wait. The bill before us today is a real opportunity to find an innovative approach through the re-engagement of police reservists, something that has not been a big feature of our system for some 30 years now. Under this bill, and indeed the $62 million of funding that has been provided in this year's state budget, we will provide for the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint police reservists as he or she – currently he – deems necessary to perform non-operational duties, like supporting the commencement of an investigation, supporting officers and assisting them with public inquiries and doing that background administrative work and indeed the public-facing side at the police counter as well. It will really ensure that Victoria Police can – as they are in the process of, and quite frankly, as they already have – shift towards a model of deployments, not just sitting around at stations. They are on the roads, they are out on the streets and they are in our shopping centres and indeed on our public transport network as well. Whilst that is the case, it is important to keep our police stations open for as many hours as possible. Police reservists will assist us in doing that, ensuring that these officers will be able to do so whilst the sworn officers are out on duty.

Any police or former police members with a minimum of two years of service in the force will be eligible, but it will not be solely restricted to former members of Victoria Police. It will also of course be open to those from other jurisdictions within the country as well. The processes, which will be outlined through the bill or its regulations, will enable the chief commissioner to ensure that these reservists are most appropriately engaged and then most appropriately deployed to support the work of sworn officers on operations such as Operation Pulse.

I have spoken a few times about this very significant and very important initiative of the current Allan Labor government. We have seen a very successful rollout and deployment of PSOs across train stations across metropolitan Melbourne.

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: What we saw, though, with a fixed program, Mr Davis, was that stations such as Dandenong did not get any PSOs until 6 pm. It was terrific for them to have PSOs of an evening, but there were no PSOs under the previous model before 6 pm. This new model, firstly, allows for the intelligence-led deployment of PSOs so that they are at the busiest stations, at the stations where crime

incidents are more likely to happen, and so that they are there at the times when they are needed, not just waiting around at a quiet station that sees very little traffic from 6 pm onwards. That is part of the intelligence-led deployment.

Operation Pulse itself is about putting extra police resources but also PSOs themselves into our suburban shopping centres, with a pilot currently of six centres, including Fountain Gate, Bayside in Frankston in my electorate as well as Eastland, which is not too far away. This is a really important response. We did bring in last year stronger laws and tougher penalties for those who do seek to assault or violently abuse retail and other frontline workers, doubling the summary offence to six months and bringing in a new indictable offence with five years. It is a very important new set of laws that I was very proud to be a part of, and indeed it is the first tranche of a package of reforms, the second of which will be with us in the Parliament very soon. The impact of that is supported by Operation Pulse and the resources that are being put into these shopping centres. We have seen across the centres over the summer trial of Operation Pulse a 50 per cent drop in violent crime at these centres since the start of the program and indeed a 73 per cent drop in retail stock loss as well. We have heard emphatically from shopping centres, from the retailers, most importantly from the retail workers themselves and also most importantly from the customers themselves. I have had people, retail workers and customers alike, talk to me about their experiences in visiting Fountain Gate and the difference that that visible police presence has made. Indeed I was just out there the other day again, with the hardworking member for Narre Warren North Belinda Wilson, talking with shoppers and seeing the firsthand impact that is happening and indeed seeing some PSOs out there in the centres too. That is just one example.

Given the commentary that was brought up in relation specifically to the City of Casey and to the south-east, I thought Operation Pulse would be a very good way to highlight the work that we are doing, not just resting on our laurels and relying on old models but actually looking at what is working when it comes to fighting crime, looking at what we can do better, acknowledging that and, in some cases, bringing in those tougher penalties, the serious consequences, the tougher bail laws, making the tough calls, not because it is the politically easy thing to do but because it is the right thing to do. That is backed up with our resources, our investments into Victoria Police and innovative ways of ensuring that they can do their job fully.

Having reservists in police stations to do the backlog, the admin work and the customer-facing side of things from time to time as well frees up the resources of our sworn officers to do the job that they are trained well to do and that they excel at. That also means of course that the Victorian public will be seeing the vast amount of officers that we do have on a more regular basis, giving all Victorians that little bit of extra peace of mind. This is a very straightforward bill. It is a sensible bill. I am glad to see support for it, perhaps near unanimous, from across the chamber, and I hope to see it pass later today.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:37): I am pleased to rise and support the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. As has been pointed out across the chamber, this is a sensible bill. It brings back a more structured role for reservists and makes use of an experienced workforce that we should use. But it is in the context of the state government having lost control of crime in this state, having lost the ability to ensure the safety of the community. This is at a high level, and we know that this is the case when it comes to the fires at retail premises and threats to hotels and so forth that are occurring on a wide front, hundreds of stores having been attacked. That is one side of it. On the other side, we know that there is personal safety. Home invasions, carjackings, all of these are becoming increasingly common, increasingly concerning and increasingly violent, as we see.

I have held a number of forums locally in the recent period, and at each of those people have come forward with terrible stories in a way that 10 or 15 years ago they would not have been likely to have done. That is the result of 12 years of Labor. It is 12 years of failure. It is a wind-down of policing. It is a weakening of our bail laws. It is a weakening of our penalty system. It is a weakening of the position of our courts. I do not let the courts off the hook on this either. I think many of the magistrates and judges have not been as tough as they should have been. But it is true that the laws that they have had to apply and the laws they have had to implement have been weakened successively by this

government. They had a little flurry a year ago to try and tighten some things up, but a lot of this is too little and too late and too weak and too pathetic in the way it has been implemented by this government.

The truth is that the community is at risk. I look and I do simple figure work, and in Boroondara crime is up 12 per cent over the last year – 12.1 per cent, to be honest. I can go through many of the municipalities in my area. Monash is up a lesser amount – it is up about 1.5 per cent. But again it is significant. As you move through the municipalities, there are higher crime rates now than there were one year, two years or three years ago. The truth of the matter is that the community is less safe, and the intensity of this crime is also greater. We have held some forums in and around Glen Iris, suburban Glen Iris, and in one or two of the streets there have been repeated burglaries, home invasions, shocking attacks on people, with no police nearby and often no police coming in a short period of time. It is not an individual case here and there; this is a pattern that is occurring in our state. The community is less safe.

There are less police on the beat in Ashburton. The police station has been closed. We reopened it fully. We restaffed it in government between 2010 and 2014. By 2016 this government was winding down the police at Ashburton, and now it is just a closed shell. The doors are closed, the station is there. There is nothing you can do, and the police are not accessible in the way they used to be. The local knowledge that people need in policing is not there in the way that it used to be. The same is true at Mount Waverley. The same is true across a number of other areas in my electorate. I have closely investigated this. I was down in Eaton Mall in Oakleigh the other day talking to people about this exact point. We have seen some very vicious attacks that have occurred in parts of the Oakleigh electorate as well. I could go on, and I just worry that the community is not as safe as it should be and could be. It is our intention that we are going to fix this.

I want to put one fact on the record. There are 500 fewer police than when Jacinta Allan took the top job – 500 less police in Victoria. The population has gone up, the crime rate has gone up and the intensity of crime has gone up, but there are 500 fewer police. That is the failure of this government. It is entirely Jacinta Allan and her cabinet's fault in the end. They need to provide the resources, the staff, the wherewithal and the support when it comes to the offenders coming to court. I can point to case after case after case in my electorate where offenders are just let out – not once, not twice but dozens and dozens of times. They commit serious offences and they are out within an hour. It is actually disgraceful, and the community, I think, has had enough. The community has had enough.

Now we see a harebrained scheme, I have to call it – it is the only thing I can think of – to strip the PSOs off the key railway stations. I looked at my electorate. I went through this. There are 32 railway stations in Southern Metro where the PSOs, protective services officers, will be stripped out of the stations and two that are immediately adjacent to my electorate. So there are 34 stations where the PSOs are stripped out and are no longer there.

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: No, we have said they have got to go into shopping centres too, and we will have more police. Our plan is for more police and more PSOs – thousands more police to make sure that they can do the job and stop the crime. We will put the penalties in place and we will make sure that these frequent flyers are dealt with and that they are not able to just get out and go off and do another crime, threaten another person, do another carjacking, invade another home, frighten another family or frighten another street. That has got to stop. It has got to stop; let us just be clear. But the list is actually very long. Labor should adopt our Liberal plan to toughen sentencing, deploy 200 extra PSOs and 3000 police and restore the PSOs to all metropolitan rail stations. This was a Baillieu government policy: PSOs on every station from dark until last train. So if you are a woman and you want to catch the train at night, you can do so with safety. You can get off at a station where there are two PSOs. They are moving around and close to the station, perhaps in the car park nearby, so that you are safe and you can move around. You know when you get off the train that you will be safe. That is not the case now.

We have surveyed people extensively. Linda Fitzpatrick from Sesame Street in Mount Waverley came to one of my surveys, and I had a long conversation with her about this:

> The only reason I would catch public transport after dark from the city is knowing a PSO is there at the other end. No PSOs at train stations will make me reconsider my mode of transport and which station I'll use at night …

Of course it will. People are worried about safety. When you get off the train, you do not know who is at the other end. You do not know. They could be thugs. You could be bashed or brutalised or robbed. But if there are PSOs there, you will be safe. It will actually force those thugs and bullies away from the stations. Let us be clear: people have got a right to be able to move around safely and securely.

John Berger interjected.

David DAVIS: You may not regard this as important, but in your electorate 32 stations have lost PSOs. Thirty-two of those stations have had the PSOs stripped out, and two more stations which are adjacent to it have lost their PSOs as well. This is actually quite a serious matter for Southern Metro, I have to say, Mr Berger. But you of course live far down in the country. You do not catch the train in Southern Metro in the same way and go home late at night. You would not actually understand, because you do not catch the train home late at night.

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, Acting President, could Mr Davis refrain from pointing and lower the volume of his voice. We can all hear him. He has got a microphone; he does not need to yell.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Actually he did need to yell over everyone else, so I will take this in two parts. Mr Davis knows it is unruly to point. If everyone else can keep it down a little bit, that would be awesome. We have 6 minutes to go.

David DAVIS: Thank you, Acting President, for your guidance. I will resist the urge to point. But I do want to pick one rail line out in my electorate – the Glen Waverley line. I looked at this line today. I got my staff to have a quick look and work it out station by station. We had not done it by line; we had looked at it in other ways – by municipality and so forth. At Richmond there is a PSO presence all day; East Richmond, no; Burnley, yes; Heyington, no; Kooyong, no; Tooronga, no; Gardiner, yes, from 5 pm; Glen Iris, no; Darling, no; East Malvern, no; Jordanville, no; and Syndal, no. That is the Glen Waverley line. There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine stations on the Glen Waverley line that have had their PSOs stripped off the stations. That is not a good thing. That is a terrible thing. The people who want to go to those stations should be able to do so in safety. Gardiner has PSOs from 5 pm, and Holmesglen, Mount Waverley and Glen Waverley have them from 5 pm as well. It does seem that certain lines have been targeted by the government to strip the PSOs out, and the Glen Waverley line seems to have come in for special attention. Southern Metro I think has come in for special attention, but I think the Glen Waverley line is the one that is really copping it.

The truth of the matter is we need local members who are prepared to stand up, to speak to the police, to speak to the Minister for Police and to speak to the Premier and say, 'We're not happy. We're not happy about you stripping these police out of these stations.' Where is the member for Ashwood? He has never stood up and said, 'Put those PSOs back.'

John Berger interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, he has never said it publicly. He is as quiet as a church mouse. He lets himself be run over by the government on this. He should stand up and say, 'Put those PSOs back.' That is what he should say. I am pointing again, Acting President, and I should stop it. I have got to stop pointing. It actually is a serious matter. Where is the member for Ashwood on these matters? He is nowhere to be seen. He is not prepared to stand up. He is not prepared to fight. It is time he stood up for his electorate and demanded that all of the PSOs be put back on stations in his electorate – along the Glen Waverley line would be a very good start. There are other stations that it will also impact:

Ashwood and Oakleigh. Where is the member for Oakleigh on these matters? He has not stood up either. It is time he did.

Melina Bath interjected.

David DAVIS: 'Softly, softly,' you say. Well, they are not just going softly, softly. They are so soft it is silent. Actually I think the softness has slipped into acquiescence. They are going along quite calmly with what the government is doing, but their local community is not calm. The local community is furious; the local community has had enough. The local community say they want their PSOs back. The local community are very clear when I talk to them, and we have been out on the stations talking about these matters, that it is time the PSOs were put back. It is time the member for Ashwood found his voice. He should stand up for his electorate rather than acting as a toady for the Premier and the police minister and minister who is responsible for stripping these PSOs out.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:50): I stand to support the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This is a good bill. It is good to have an opportunity to talk about what is contained within it. I want to start off by acknowledging all those that work in Victoria Police. They do incredibly important work keeping us all safe and supporting Victorians at some of their most important times of need. It is critical that police can respond to calls when needed, and to enable this, the government has provided funds to deploy 200 police reservists. We have already had 600 expressions of interest in these roles. It is fantastic to see the passion and the desire to get in there and do this work. The bill stipulates that police reservists must have a minimum of two years of cumulative service as a police officer, so police reservists will bring that experience and that institutional knowledge from the service they have provided previously and will be there to support Victoria Police and keep them out in the community. The police reservists will have powers of a constable in common law and will be a great addition to ensure that, as other speakers have talked about, Victorian police are able to have the maximum presence in our community possible.

Victoria has the most police officers of any state in Australia, and Victoria Police are receiving record numbers of applicants, with the academy having full double squads graduating. I think everyone who I have heard speak on this bill supports police reservists being deployed to ensure that we are able to get our Victorian police out supporting the community and responding to calls. They will do incredibly important work to ensure that important roles – taking calls, responding to people walking into stations, following up on various forms of paperwork – are able to be done, ensuring that our police officers can be out there either responding to calls that they have received or simply showing a presence in the community. I absolutely support this bill, and I will leave my contribution there.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:53): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026 as well. The Liberal Party is supporting this bill. The bill will amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 to enable the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint police reservists. The reason for our support of this bill is that the Liberals believe that allowing former police officers to work as reservists and undertake administrative tasks will alleviate the pressure on frontline officers and enable a greater focus on proactive policing and community safety as well as keeping stations open.

This bill is necessary because police morale is at rock bottom under the Labor government. Police have experienced significant workload increases and shortages in their stations, and they are leaving the force. There are 1500 vacancies across police rosters, which is putting enormous pressure on the remainder of the police. Under Jacinta Allan, police force numbers have gone down by over 500 in just the last two years. And due to the staffing crisis, Labor have been forced to close or reduce the opening hours at more than 40 police stations across Victoria, including Kyneton in my electorate and also the police stations in the Whittlesea police service area, the Mernda police station and the Whittlesea police station in my electorate, and Epping and Mill Park, which are just outside my electorate. Those closures impact on community safety.

In December last year a woman who was stopped in a car at an intersection was approached by a man who attacked and damaged the car. The woman was frightened, and she did drive off. Fortunately, she was very close to the Reservoir police station – it was only 100 metres away – so she pulled into the police station, thinking she would find safe refuge. She got out of the car and tried to enter the police station to seek help, only to find that that police station was closed and unstaffed. Even worse, the person who had damaged her car, who had attacked her car at the intersection, had actually followed her into the police station car park. He then cornered her in the car park, attacked her and slashed her with a knife. In the very place where this woman had actually gone to seek safe refuge, she was attacked. She was left alone and defenceless because the police station was closed.

We also know that domestic violence does not just happen during business hours and criminals do not just work during business hours. One of the main concerns that was raised with me about the closure of the police stations in the Whittlesea police service area (PSA) was around domestic violence services. Women were telling me that these incidents happen more often at night or on the weekend and there is nowhere for them to go to seek refuge. That is really disturbing.

We have seen a number of changes that have led to this. We know that in the Whittlesea police service area the stations have been reduced in hours. We used to have three 24/7 police stations in that police service area, Mernda, Epping and Mill Park, and we had one station with lesser hours in Whittlesea, but in about October last year the police in the area started to contact me to say that as of 2 November the stations would all have their hours cut. Mernda station opened in 2017 as a 24/7 station. We were told that that was going to provide 24/7 coverage and that there would be less officers and less hours needed at Whittlesea because Mernda would be open 24/7, servicing that area. In fact the government said Mernda police station would get an extra 45 police officers. But now we know that Mernda police station has actually been reduced in its hours. When the police started contacting me last year to say that from 2 November most of those stations were having their hours reduced, this was because, they told me, they were operating at between 40 and 60 per cent of their designated numbers at that station. Instead of having the full complement of police officers filling the rosters at the four stations, they only had between 40 and 60 per cent. We can see why you cannot keep patrols on the road and keep a police station open if you are operating with such low numbers. From 2 November Mernda and Epping stations, which were 24/7 stations, were reduced to only opening between 10 am and 6 pm Monday to Friday and Whittlesea station was reduced to only two days per week, which left Mill Park as the only 24/7 station.

People were concerned enough about that, but in May this year we had a second round of reductions in that area – the second reduction in just six months. The police actually put up a social media video that announced that from Sunday 31 May Whittlesea police stations would be forced to make further reductions to their operating hours. It was a rather bizarre video where someone turned up to a station and the station was closed, and then police tried to explain that because they were not at their station they were out in patrol cars. We need people out in patrol cars, but we also need police at the stations. We need places where people can seek refuge and places where people can go to raise their issues with police. That social media video finished with a page that I have a screenshot of, which said that the Mernda police station would now only operate just two days a week, from 10 to 6 – a station we were promised was going to be a 24/7 station with 45 extra police officers, operating two days a week from 10 to 6. Also, Mill Park station is no longer a 24/7 station. It is only open between 1 and 9 pm on weekdays and from 10 to 6 on the weekend. The Epping police station is open Monday to Friday, 10 to 6. Again, that was 24/7, but is now Monday to Friday, 10 to 6. And Whittlesea police station, it was announced on this video, would be closed and would only be available by appointment when someone could be there. After I raised this issue the police actually took that video down, and they then reposted it a few days later with the main part of the video but without that panel at the end, which I do have a screenshot of, and they changed the wording slightly around the Whittlesea police station. The other stations remain open for the same hours that had been announced earlier in the week, but for Whittlesea it now says that it is going to be open one day a week, on Wednesdays from 10 till 6.

This was a real concern for people in the Whittlesea PSA. They had already had their police station hours changed. We have had some significant crimes, particularly just near the Mernda police station. We had the murder of Aidan Becker at the Mernda railway station, just a few hundred metres from the police station. We had a young girl being attacked viciously at the Mernda train station. People are very concerned about safety. I am in a chat group with residents from Donnybrook, and it keeps me awake at night, because they are concerned about people breaking into their cars and breaking into their homes. On the very first day that the new roster kicked in for the reduced hours at Mernda, at Mill Park and at Whittlesea, on Sunday 31 May at 12:50 in the afternoon the Donnybrook residents rang 000 because there was a person in their neighbourhood who was trying to break into homes. There were several videos going up of this same person trying to get into different homes. It took until 4:40 pm for the police to call them – not for the police to visit but for the police to call them. They were not very happy with the service that they received from the police, and I have certainly raised that with the local superintendent.

The Whittlesea LGA has seen a significant rise in crime in recent times. For the year ending 2025 we saw a 20 per cent increase in serious assaults. We saw a 24 per cent increase in motor vehicle thefts, a 31 per cent increase in prohibited weapons offences and a 137 per cent increase in criminal incidents on public transport. And what has happened in that time: we have seen the police numbers go down not only in that police service area but right across the state because this government are not resourcing police with the numbers and the legislation that they need to hold criminals to account.

We know that police are leaving the force because there is very low morale due to the government not supporting them. Part of that is when the police do charge someone, they take them to court, and these people get off time and time again. There was an article in the *Shepparton News* on Friday last week about a man who was arrested with 17 new offences. He already had 12 counts of bail against him, and he was arrested for performing 17 new offences. Some of those offences included burglary, criminal damage, theft of a motor vehicle, unlicensed driving, committing an indictable offence while on bail, contravening a conduct condition of bail, eight counts of theft and three counts of handling stolen goods. Guess what happened. He was granted bail again, so he is now back out on bail to continue breaking his bail conditions and perpetrating crimes in the Shepparton region. It is a disgrace. Jess Wilson has a plan to make this state safe again, to make people in this state feel safe in their homes, to ensure that we can deal with the levels of crime in our community and to ensure that our police are resourced to do that both with numbers of police on the ground and also with the legislation to back them up. Under the Liberals, we will recruit 3000 extra police, we will recruit an extra 200 PSOs and we will reopen the more than 40 police stations that Labor has closed or reduced in hours, including Kyneton and Mernda.

In addition, we will back that up with the legislation that is needed to ensure that criminals, when they do have offences against them, are charged and pay the price for that. We will make sure that if they break bail, they do face jail, because that is what the community expects. The community want people who are breaking the law to actually suffer the consequences of the law. There is no point in letting people out time and time again to continue committing offences and not doing anything to stop that. It does not help the people of that community, and it does not help the criminals themselves. Entrenching criminal activity because people can get away with it is not improving those people's lives. People need to understand that there are standards that they must live by and that if they do not uphold the letter of the law, they will face consequences. That is the only way we are going to reduce crime in Victoria and make Victorians feel safe again.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:07): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to my good friend the Minister for Police in the other place, Minister Carbines, and thank him for the work that he does to keep our community safe.

The purpose of the bill is to allow for the creation of a new police reservists program, which will enable reservists to undertake administrative tasks within Victoria Police. It is clear that community safety is

a concern many Victorians currently have, including most of my constituents in the Southern Metropolitan Region. It is also true that Victoria Police has more staff than any other police force in the nation, yet these brave men and women who serve our state so admirably often find themselves unable to do their jobs because they are focused on sorting out administrative tasks back at the station. The problem this bill fundamentally seeks to address is that while the administrative work our police officers attend to is crucial for the effective operation of Victoria Police as an organisation, it can be a drain on resources and keep police officers desk bound for far too long. When a police officer is sitting at a desk, they are often doing important work. It is, however, often the case that that could be done just as effectively by somebody else, such as a reservist, allowing the sworn officer to spend more time in the community responding to and preventing crime. This bill seeks to solve that issue, creating a force of uniformed reservists to work in police stations to do the necessary administrative work. As a consequence, this will free up police officers to spend less time at their desks doing paperwork and more time out having a visible presence in the community. Essentially what we are doing is providing Victoria Police with more resources and giving them more efficient ways to allocate resources to different aspects of what maintaining a police force involves.

This bill means that Victorians can have confidence that there will be police on the street and fully staffed stations when they need them. This is part of the Allan Labor government's broader commitment to ensuring community safety throughout this great state. Specifically how this bill will achieve these aims will involve giving the Chief Commissioner of Police the power to appoint reservists. While the bill does not mandate a specific number, funding has been provided in the budget for 200 positions. These reservists will be given the responsibility of supporting sworn officers through completing non-operational duties. Reservists will be given the general duties and powers of a constable at common law. They will be given the responsibility of non-operational duties – tasks such as supporting the commencement of an investigation and front desk duties such as accepting crime reports or assisting with public inquiries.

Those eligible to work as police reservists will need to be able to demonstrate at least two years of experience serving in a police force. This could be with the Victoria Police or a police force in another jurisdiction. Appointments as a reservist could be made on a part-time, full-time, fixed-term or ongoing basis, allowing for individuals to find arrangements which work best for them. This will allow more flexibility to allow different people different arrangements according to what will work best for them. We expect many different reasons why former officers or currently serving officers who might seek to transition to become a reservist might apply to become a reservist, and this flexibility will make the position suitable for more types of people. People have different reasons for exiting the force. Some retire, some move to a different industry, some move outside Victoria and some make these decisions based on thinking about what it is they wish to prioritise in their life. What this bill will enable these people to do is to continue to serve in non-frontline service, keeping their experience, their expertise and their knowledge inside Victoria Police. Under an Allan Labor government, community safety will always be a priority. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:12): I am pleased to be able to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. The Nationals do support this bill. The reintroduction of police reservists is a practical measure that can support police operations, and we know certainly at this point in time that police need all the help they can get. I think rising crime is one of the biggest issues we have in Victoria at the moment, particularly when I speak to people around Bendigo, where my office is located and which is in the Premier's backyard. It is certainly out of control, and Victorians want to feel safe. They want to feel safe when they are at work. They want to feel safe when they go shopping, when they travel on public transport and when they are in their own home. Victorians want to feel safe. In Victoria right now we have a crime committed on average every 50 seconds. Theft or theft from retail stores is happening all the time – every 13 minutes. A serious assault is happening every 28 minutes. Three cars are stolen on average every hour. There are nine carjackings across Victoria every week. There are over 1500 vacancies in our police force, and more than 40 police

stations have closed or are on reduced operating hours. As of early this year, we have only got two CBD stations open 24/7, and hours in regional Victoria have come down as well.

These statistics that I have talked about are certainly not just numbers on a page; there are real people that are being impacted by crime, often violent crimes. I can think of so many examples that have left people feeling absolutely traumatised. I remember speaking to a gentleman in Bendigo who was attacked, and his hand was permanently injured. That is a lifelong issue that he is going to have to face now. We know businesses that have faced threats. We know parents that are anxious because they could be victims of a carjacking with children in the back seat. These events have actually happened. I have spoken to and met with a lady whose house was broken into several times. Her car was stolen, her husband was stabbed and she has now left the region. I have spoken to another gentleman who was at the marketplace in Bendigo doing some shopping, and he was hit on the back of the head and forced to the ground. There is another gentleman, a man in his 70s, who was assaulted at Kennington Reservoir. He was knocked to the ground, which resulted in a fractured eye socket. I know Andrew Lethlean, the Nationals candidate for Bendigo East at the coming state election, was contacted by a lady. I will just read what she wrote. She said:

> This morning I was home alone in my bush property with my 3 month old baby when I had someone try to get inside who had clearly been living rough for a few days. I ran around and locked my doors, grabbed my baby, locked myself in my bedroom and called 000. After calling them, I called my husband to come home from Kangaroo Flat (25 minutes drive) and all my neighbour's. In the 1 hour 45 minute wait for a police car to arrive, my neighbour's found the man hiding in another neighbour's property.
>
> They apologized to me for the delayed wait stating no staff were available to respond.

I also have a family member who found themselves in a similar situation: four people trying to break into their home. They slept in their clothes for a number of weeks because of the fear of it actually reoccurring and have since put shutters all over the house. They did comment on how amazing Victoria Police were in their response, but soon after there was a knock on the door again from Victoria Police to ask for more footage from their security cameras because the people had come back over the fence of her property to steal the cars from the house next door. This is happening all too often.

I have spoken to retailers. I know many have left the Bendigo mall area because of theft. There has been repeated crime, and I have met with businesses in Kyneton and in Gisborne and it has been a similar experience. I know in Shepparton Kim O'Keeffe has raised issues about how there have been incidents just recently of young students being bashed. There are significant crimes there, with stores being firebombed. The same thing has happened in Epsom. In Mildura there have been horrific incidents, and I know my colleague Jade Benham has been highlighting some of those cases. Just recently in Bendigo there have been further store windows smashed. I was also contacted by security just recently at Parliament wanting the CCTV footage from my electorate office because someone had stolen a car and then walked across in front of my office.

This is hitting home for so many people across Victoria. I heard from a doctor just recently in Strathdale. He has got video footage of a man walking down the street and climbing on his partner's car. He then stomped on the windscreen seven times. The man then walked next door and smashed the ute windscreen at that address. This is all happening at 7:30 in the evening in Strathdale. Just recently we had a horrific incident in Bendigo, the stabbing of a homeless person. CCTV vision shows a group of teenagers wearing balaclavas. A 41-year-old man was allegedly set upon by six youths in Bath Lane. That was about 9 pm on 4 June. He was treated by paramedics and taken to hospital with serious injuries. In this case charges have been laid and further investigations are underway, but that is not the case for many Victorians. Nearly half of all offences in Victoria remain unsolved. The statistics show that there have been nearly 630,000 offences recorded in a year and over 286,000 crimes remain unsolved.

We support this bill, but there is so much more that needs to be done. Only by restoring community safety and breaking the cycle of crime can our community really thrive once again, because if you are

in fear, it affects every area of your life. We have a plan. We are now less than 24 weeks from the next state election. Our plan will deliver more police on the streets, recruiting an additional 3000 police officers, and more PSOs for community safety. As has been pointed out by David Davis, it is so important to have PSOs at our train stations and also in major shopping centres. We need stronger police pursuit powers, we need stronger bail and sentencing laws and mandatory consequences for repeat offenders and we need targeted prevention and intervention programs, because that is so important. Just recently I met with Street Peace. They are doing incredible work on the ground in Bendigo. They are sharing meals and working with young people who are at risk and a bit disconnected and really helping them through mentoring and through that community connection to get back on track.

In Victoria police numbers are down. In the past four years we have seen Victoria's population grow by 8 per cent, but police numbers have fallen by 2.6 per cent. There is an acknowledged and quite a significant administrative burden that is stopping officers spending more time on the front line. Some we have heard are spending up to 7 hours per shift on paperwork. We have heard that IT systems are outdated, and repetitive reporting can reduce the time for patrols to get police out there. I know that I have spoken to police that are very tired. They are tired of doing the work required to get criminals off the streets only to see repeat offenders out on the streets again in no time. We have seen so many examples of people being let off on bail time and time again – multiple times. We have heard from police that it can be a smaller number of repeat offenders that are causing many of the issues, and this needs to be addressed. We need to ensure that we back our police force, that we break the cycle of crime and that we restore community safety. The Nationals support this bill so that reservists can support our police officers, but this is not a new idea; it is not a new concept. It is a scheme that has existed in the past, and it gradually diminished.

I just also want to acknowledge that today in the Parliament we have actually got Victoria Police Legacy and the work they do to support families. They are a not-for-profit entity that started in 1980. They provide ongoing support services for police families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. We thank them for their work. It just goes to show how much of a sacrifice Victorian police officers are prepared to make when they are out on the ground supporting us and keeping our community safe. But there is so much more work that needs to be done, because this is one of the biggest issues facing Victoria at the moment, and we need to restore community safety as a priority.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:22): It will be just a brief contribution from me today to say that we do understand that community safety is of the utmost importance to the community, and that is why it is of utmost importance to the Labor government. We know that every Victorian has the right to feel safe, whether it is at home, at the shopping centre or on the streets, and this government is making sure that Victoria Police have both the resources and the broader support that they need to make our community safer. We are taking the action that is required to deliver the laws, deliver the resources and deliver the support, and that is what this bill today is all about.

One of the things that we have heard from the community is that they want to see more police out on the streets and they want to see more PSOs where it matters, and that is what this bill is delivering. The police reservists that are going to be enabled by this bill not only boost the number of police in and around each of the stations but free up the resources to get police from behind a desk and onto the streets. That is exactly what our community are telling us they want to see from Victoria Police – that they are out there on the streets, a visible police presence, not stuck behind a counter or stuck behind a desk. I think if you were to ask people what they wanted – do they want people behind a desk, do they want people behind a counter or do they want police on the streets where they can see them and where police can see prospective criminals? – they would absolutely tell you that the community wants police on our streets.

The other thing obviously that we are doing, as others have spoken about, is recruiting more PSOs and giving the flexibility to the Chief Commissioner of Police to ensure the deployment of PSOs is based on intelligence and on data. That is again I think what the Victorian community wants to see – that

policing resources, whether they are police officers, sworn officers or PSOs, are being deployed where they are needed the most to help tackle crime, and that is what this government is continuing to do.

I will just make a few comments briefly about the impact of the additional support that the government is providing to Victoria Police and the changes to the laws that we have been making to give police more powers and also send a very clear message out into the community that crime is unacceptable – that violent crime is unacceptable. I know my colleague Mr Davis, in his contribution, wanted to point out what was happening with crime statistics in various local government areas in the Southern Metropolitan Region. He mentioned that rates are up in Boroondara, and that is the case. I have spent some time listening to and talking with local police in the City of Boroondara. I was with the member for Ashwood last year at the Boroondara neighbourhood policing forum, where we both listened to what the local police were telling us. They were talking about how there are both intelligence-led and patrol-led responses to the changing nature of crime in the community. We listened to members of the community as well, heard what was happening on the ground and lent our support to that effort. It was really great to join the member for Ashwood at that Boroondara neighbourhood policing forum to listen and to make sure that we heard firsthand exactly the issues in those communities, particularly in Boroondara.

The latest statistics in Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston are showing a decrease in the offence rate. In Glen Eira the overall crime rate has reduced by as much as 7.4 per cent. In Bayside it is a 1.3 per cent decrease, and in Kingston there is a 3.4 per cent decrease in the offence rate for 2025. Particularly in certain offence categories, in parts of these communities we are seeing a significant effect and a reduction in offence rates. In Kingston, for example, burglaries and break-ins are down by nearly 25 per cent in 2025 compared with the year prior. Break-ins and burglaries are down 6 per cent in Bayside and 13 per cent in Glen Eira. We know there is more to be done. We know that there is more to do to make sure that our community is safe. But what these statistics demonstrate is that the action the government is taking is working. We are making inroads, we are backing our police with resources and laws, we are doing everything we can, and we will not stop doing everything we can under this Labor government to make sure our community is safe.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (16:28): I am pleased to rise to sum up debate on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. May I take the opportunity to thank everyone that has contributed to this important bill, a bill that is about practical, sensible reform to assist our frontline police force. As Mr Batchelor so eloquently put it, this is an issue that is a paramount priority for government. Community safety is what we live and breathe, and in the range of reforms that this government has already committed to and has rolled out, you would see that. I do note that this bill itself is actually quite narrow in scope, and I know many of the contributions have touched on a large array of issues around community safety. I think it is important to have those broader debates at times, because community safety touches each and every one of us, and that is why as a government we are so focused on ensuring this sensible reform is implemented today.

We have not waited for the reforms to pass this chamber. I do want to take the opportunity to thank Victoria Police and the Department of Justice and Community Safety for their hard work and insight in preparing this piece of legislation but also really laying the groundwork by taking early expressions of interest that have already seen over 600 former serving members of the police force express a desire to return to assist the current police force. The Treasurer just stepped out, but she was here, and she has already provided funding for 200 new police reservists in this year's budget to give effect to this bill, enabling recruitment to commence so that we can see that administrative burden that so many have talked about lifted off many in our police force. They can get out from behind the desk back into the field, so to speak, as our Chief Commissioner of Police envisages.

I know many of us talked about the wider context, and that wider context is important to understand that we are recruiting. In fact Victoria Police is increasing capacity in a way never seen before. The academy is full. We are doubling intake from 650 to 1300 a year. The new regional academy next year

in Mildura – I know Ms Benham has mentioned it a couple of times in here; she would be very happy to hear that about Mildura – all those out there, and the Mildura community, will I am sure enthusiastically respond to the academy. I think they will get a lot of good local recruits as well in regional Victoria, up north.

A modern, fit-for-purpose police reservists scheme is a central part of our justice agenda, as I stated earlier. It will complement additional recruitment of frontline officers, and the amendments in this bill will reinstate the power of the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint new police reservists. Bringing experienced police reservists on board means freeing up the workload of our hardworking officers, allowing them to spend more time hitting the pavement. As has been made clear, police reservists are not themselves an entirely new concept. In fact they have been in place since the 1950s. To a certain extent we had moved away from police reservists, but our new chief commissioner, Commissioner Bush, as part of his plan for a new-look Victoria Police believes that police reservists have a much greater role to play than they did in the past, and that is why we are here today. The plan will see police reservists undertake administrative duties in police stations, freeing up frontline police officers. The duties that are envisaged include managing public inquiries at police stations, assessing and triaging requests from the community, preparing briefs and supporting documents, processing evidence, organising internal communications and helping to coordinate logistics for operational teams, all subject to operational decisions of the chief commissioner, who has the power to really justify where resources should be allocated appropriately, understanding the operational challenges.

Analysis by Victoria Police shows that about 4000 hours each day are spent behind a desk, for the current police, and the chief commissioner's view is that those hours would be better spent on the pavement and out in vans. So we are listening to the chief commissioner. That is why we are here. We are delivering the support our officers need, and this new bill sets out the requirements, and the fact is that you will need a minimum of two years of cumulative service as a police officer in Victoria or another similar jurisdiction. It means that experienced officers will come back to support their former colleagues. It also provides a flexible working environment where people can return on a casual, flexible, part-time basis if needed. I think providing that flexibility is important and will assist – I think that has been one of the keys to the expression-of-interest process. It has teased out those people that are able and willing to work but maybe not willing or able due to family or personal circumstances to on a full-time basis return to the force.

I am pleased to see many experienced former officers ready and willing to contribute, and I think this will be a vital measure that will enable the government to recruit those 200 police reservists, drawing on hundreds and even thousands of years of experience. I can see, Acting President Bourman, you may also be interested in one of these roles one day, because these are the roles that will appeal to people, like I said, of all ages, and we want that experience back in the force to assist and support hardworking police. We are ensuring they can focus on doing what they do best, and that is keeping Victorians safe. On that point, I know we will be having a committee stage, so I might leave my contribution there. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (16:34)

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, I want to ask a couple of questions around the consultation that was done on this bill with the First Nations community. Can you inform the house what consultation was undertaken with First Nations communities, Aboriginal organisations and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria before this bill was introduced?

Enver ERDOGAN: It is a really good question. I think the nature of this bill is it is a very time-sensitive bill, and as we have heard from all the contributions, it is an issue of grave community concern. I understand that the consultation was focused mainly with Victoria Police, Victoria Police command and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and that is where most of the consultation happened. In terms of the discussion with First Nations people, I know that the minister's expectation is that Victoria Police will continue working with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus as deployment commences. But in terms of the formulation, because of the time sensitivity, that consultation was with Victoria Police.

Katherine COPSEY: Given the disproportionate policing and imprisonment of Aboriginal people and the continuing high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, do you think that that is actually good enough?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I might get you to rephrase your question because you are asking for an opinion.

Enver ERDOGAN: That is okay. I am happy to give it a go. I think it is important to understand that for many of the people that will be filling these roles there is a requirement of two years prior service. As part of the formulation of the training to onboard people, mandatory Aboriginal cultural awareness training will be rolled out. That has been confirmed to me by the Minister for Police's office. I think it is important that we are aware of the challenges that First Nations people face in the criminal justice system, not just in policing – across the courts and across the justice system and in the legal sector too. But I think mandatory Aboriginal cultural awareness training is something that is being rolled out as part of this deployment.

Katherine COPSEY: I just want to comment that I am pleased to hear that. It was something I sought information on in being briefed on this bill, what training the reservists would receive, given things have materially changed. We have adopted treaty in Victoria since many of these people have been in service, so I am very pleased to hear that. But it is not quite to the point of consultation prior to the bill being formulated and introduced. The horse has bolted when we are getting to talking about implementation. How has the government considered its obligations under treaty and the principles of self-determination in designing the police reservists scheme?

Enver ERDOGAN: You would notice that the First Peoples' Assembly was not necessarily set up at the stage when this bill was in the works, particularly in April and May. I understand that the assembly commenced in May, so it made it more challenging and we were time sensitive. There is a compatibility statement with the bill saying that it is compatible with treaty. Nonetheless I do take your point. I think this is important legislation and where possible we should always consult with First Nations people, but this was a unique set of circumstances. Many in the chamber have talked about the community's concerns around safety and the need to free frontline police up from administrative duties and the time sensitivity. Even before the bill was passed, there was a budget allocated to this deployment that meant that that was not possible in this circumstance.

Katherine COPSEY: As I referred to earlier, there is a disproportionate policing and imprisonment impact on Aboriginal people and disproportionate entanglement in the criminal justice system generally. What assessment has the government made of the scheme's potential impacts on First Nations people?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think in terms of the impacts, this is about experienced officers returning to do more administrative tasks. It is not envisaged that they will be out doing operational duties. Nonetheless, I think having more police doing operational work in the field is a good outcome for all Victorians, and Aboriginal Victorians, because we know that Aboriginal Victorians are disproportionately victims of crime. I think this will have a positive impact for Aboriginal communities; that is my view in relation to the implementation of this bill. But I do take your point

about the consultation process in the unique set of circumstances where this was very time sensitive and it was required that we pass and introduce this legislation this sitting week.

Katherine COPSEY: Was the Aboriginal Justice Caucus or the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service consulted in the development of this bill, and have the Yoorrook Justice Commission's findings been considered in developing the bill?

Enver ERDOGAN: In short, no, they were not consulted in relation to the development of this bill. As with my answer to the previous question, this was because of the time sensitivity. Further consultation would have potentially delayed this bill. It is urgent. We know the community need to get police out from behind the desk and into the field, out in the communities, doing the frontline policing that they do so well. In that nature, there was a bit of a truncated process for this legislation. It is unique where you will have a large budget allocation before a bill is even introduced. This is one of those circumstances where that is what was required in the interests of community safety. But the expectation is that Victoria Police will work closely with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus going forward, especially as deployment commences. As soon as we get royal assent, the goal is to have people on the front line, and there will be that mandatory training that I talked about earlier.

Katherine COPSEY: Would you be prepared to undertake to do better in future than you have on this bill?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Actually, you are asking a hypothetical. It is not a question. The questions have to be about the actual legislation.

Katherine COPSEY: I will rephrase. Minister, you have said that this was an exceptional circumstance. Is it the government's intent that on a bill of this nature you would normally consult with Aboriginal justice stakeholders?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think it is fair to say the goal is to consult on all justice reforms with the Aboriginal community, because the Aboriginal community is so over-represented in our justice system. It is the government's position that, where we can, we will always endeavour to consult and work closely with the Aboriginal community and stakeholders, whether it be the legal service or justice caucus, on matters regarding the justice system which do so deeply affect Aboriginal people. I think that is an expectation not just of myself; it is a commitment that I and others made at Yoorrook. This is exceptional. With other justice legislation that we see this year I am expecting that there will be some consultation with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus before bills come to this chamber, but it is not always possible. I cannot give you a guarantee because the circumstances change. These are matters of, in many instances, community safety. We are talking about potentially matters of life and death. That is why sometimes there is a truncated process such as this one, and we have had them in the past as well for bail reform. So I cannot rule it out, but that is not the goal. The goal is to have the best kind of gold-class consultation to ensure that Aboriginal stakeholders have that consultation in relation to justice reforms.

Katherine COPSEY: I will just point out that when we are talking about a state that has a record of implementing policies that have contributed to deaths in custody, this is a matter of life and death for stakeholders as well.

Turning to the need for the scheme, why is the government focusing on recruitment of reservists when we have 1500 vacant positions currently in Victoria Police?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think the need for this legislation is to enable Victoria Police to free up frontline police officers and get them out from behind the desk. We know that there is a larger administrative burden than there has been historically, and I think that is a reflection that policing work is harder today than it was in the past, to be frank. There are a range of reasons for that. I think the changing nature of our society and community expectations have probably contributed largely to that too. But I think this is about deploying people into more administrative functions and getting the right

people. The academy itself is at capacity. We are doubling capacity next year to 1300 recruits, but we know that attrition is a challenge. These are difficult jobs. That is why I always take opportunities like this to thank police for the work that they do in keeping us safe. I think this will mean we will be able to attract a new source of talent – people that have already served in the past and for some reason have gone on to do other activities or whose personal life circumstances may not have allowed them to continue in the police force. That is why the return and the rollout of this scheme is much needed to boost recruitment. These reservists will be experienced and ready to go. There is no risk that the reservists are necessarily a substitute. I feel we need these reservists for these administrative roles, but we also still need to keep recruiting, and that is why we are doubling recruitment. We are going to do as much as we can to get the right talent in, and having this experienced workforce I think will assist in freeing up frontline police work.

Renee HEATH: Just following on from Ms Copsey's questioning on treaty, my question to the minister is: the government did not follow the treaty process last week with the urgent bill on fundraising, and from memory the reason that was given was that that particular bill did not actually carry significance with Indigenous Australians, which I do not understand – but that is an aside. This bill does. Like Ms Copsey said, there is an extremely high representation of Indigenous Australians within the justice system, so there was a huge song and dance about the treaty. Because you have not consulted with any of these Indigenous bodies and stakeholders, can you guarantee that this legislation is going to be fit for purpose?

Enver ERDOGAN: We are talking about experienced officers returning to support the current police force. Therefore, yes, it will be fit for purpose, understanding that this is the Chief Commissioner of Police's vision for the force in terms of being able to deploy more people back into frontline policing and free up the reservists to do the more administrative tasks. I think that is the important part. It is not like we are getting people with no experience back into police stations; we are getting people with a minimum of two years. Many of them will have decades of experience. I think it is an asset to have them back on the team, so to speak, in many instances, so I am very confident that they will be fully capable to do the roles that the chief commissioner sees fit.

Renee HEATH: I have absolutely no doubt about the experience of the reservists that will be coming back in and serving in this manner, but I just think it is worth pointing out that if you believe in the treaty process, if you think that bills must go through this process so they are fit for purpose, you must admit that you have undermined your own process and that there is no guarantee that this is a fit-for-purpose bill.

Enver ERDOGAN: I get the point Dr Heath is making about the consultation. It is a similar point that Ms Copsey made about the consultation, and I think I have already answered that question. I think the bill is fit for purpose because it is very targeted, sensible, practical reform to support more frontline policing. About the consultation, could it be better if you had more time – sure. But I think community safety is time sensitive. Every day we stay here debating these issues is a day that we do not have these reservists doing the administrative tasks to free up frontline policing. Therefore I would say in an ideal world, yes, you would do broader consultation, but we do not have that time in this instance. We know community safety is of the utmost concern – we all hear it in our electorates and in our communities – and therefore I feel in this instance it was what was needed. But I do get your point, and I think it is a similar point to the one Ms Copsey made about our commitment to the treaty process and how it is implemented with justice reform.

Katherine COPSEY: Just going back to the need for the scheme, Minister, what functions will reservists perform that could not be undertaken by existing police employees, by PSOs or by appropriately trained civilian staff?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think the tasks could all be performed by existing police. The police reservists will do some of the administrative functions that current police do, but not all of them. The police could do all of them, but the issue is the police academy is full, and that is why we are doubling

the intake next year. In a perfect world you could train a much larger number of police and put them into the field, but it is not possible. And it is also difficult to attract and a challenge. Our police force, like every other frontline workforce, is really fighting to keep the talent, that is one issue. When we have reserves, we have the talent of people with previous experience that want to return. They may not want to do all the roles of a police officer but are happy to do some of them. So this provides a pathway back and provides that flexibility needed to free up frontline policing.

Katherine COPSEY: Is there a risk that this scheme will become a substitute for addressing those workload retention, morale and staffing problems within Victoria Police?

Enver ERDOGAN: In short, no, it is not a substitute. Our investment in a new academy shows that there is no substitute for police officers, but this will complement the work of Victoria Police.

Jeff BOURMAN: Minister, just following on a little bit from what Ms Copsey was going on about, the actual role of the reservists, currently we have PSOs and we have watch house keepers. The watch house keeper role is where you can do anything from the front counter to looking after property and giving the officers guns and stuff like that and signing this, that and the other. If, say, someone wanted to go back to doing the reserve role, what exactly are they up for?

Enver ERDOGAN: That is a really good question, Mr Bourman. I think at a high level, police reservists will have the common-law powers of a constable, but other specific statutory powers will not be conferred on reservists, such as powers to arrest, detain or interrogate. So they will not have those powers, but otherwise they will have the common-law powers of a constable. They will be at the reception counters doing a number of tasks, such as responding to public inquiries, taking reports, arranging collection of evidence, taking statutory declarations – we know that is also a significant time resource for police. These administrative tasks are generally performed by police officers, mainly in stations. These are the kind of roles that we envisage, but it is not an exhaustive list because the chief commissioner, if they see fit and believe it is necessary, will have the flexibility, as operational needs require, to make changes. But that is the way it is envisaged initially.

Jeff BOURMAN: It seems to me it is kind of like a watch house keeper role. I am going back a while now, but that was kind of what the watch house keeper did, which brings up a few issues. As I mentioned in my speech on the second reading, the watch house can sometimes turn to worms in an instant. What training are the reservists going to get in terms of both the general law and refresher training but also defensive tactics and such?

Enver ERDOGAN: These are really good, practical questions, Mr Bourman; you just get straight to the point. I think the training is a really important point, because a lot of these people are not new to the role of policing. They have minimum two years experience as a starting point. But we are looking at training options. That is still being developed, the final training, but there will initially be five days in-person training followed by additional self-directed training, which will include e-learning and written materials. They will be offered both at the academy and at the Victoria Police Centre. At this point they will not need to carry operational safety equipment, so that is not the goal here. But Victoria Police does require all sworn employees that do not have a medical exemption to undertake operational safety and tactics training, including police reservists. So they will be subject to that same training program, most likely in the form of e-learning. It covers training in terms of frontline support work like station emergency procedures and de-escalation. Equipment use will also be provided, but it is not the goal that they will be carrying equipment themselves to use. But it is at the same time at the discretion of the chief commissioner. If in the future the chief commissioner has a different vision for the reservists, I think it is important we provide him with that flexibility.

Jeff BOURMAN: To touch on something, just to confirm: will they be sworn members? Will they be sworn in?

Enver ERDOGAN: Yes, they will be sworn in – not as police officers but as reservists.

Jeff BOURMAN: You mentioned that it would not be envisaged that they will have to carry defensive equipment, but as I said, with watch houses you get all and everyone coming in there. Will the stations where the reservists are deployed have what I would call 'new watch house arrangements', where they have got security glass and things like that, or would it be possible that they will be at the old open desk type arrangement as well?

Enver ERDOGAN: That is a very detailed question. I will need to go to the box on that.

Mr Bourman, they will be at different police stations across our state, but at all times they will be supervised by a current serving police officer who will be in charge of, especially, the custodial settings that come with that.

Jeff BOURMAN: With custodial settings, obviously there will be at least a sergeant in charge and so on. But you brought up another question I had not thought of: would a reservist be as well as a watch house keeper or instead of a watch house keeper?

Enver ERDOGAN: Police officers will be the watch house keepers, not the reservists.

Jeff BOURMAN: That is good. Will the reservists be deployed in 24-hour stations on a 24-hour basis, or are they just envisaged to be an office hours arrangement?

Enver ERDOGAN: I can confirm that obviously operational decisions are for the chief commissioner, but it is envisaged that their contract will be from 7 am to 7 pm.

Jeff BOURMAN: I want to get on to the firearms. I read that clause 12 allows the reservists to carry and use firearms. Obviously as a watch house keeper or reservist at the front counter from time to time you will deal with property that might be firearms, so you would need to have that exemption. You said something before about how it will be up to the chief commissioner what they can do down the track. What firearms training are the reservists going to get in the event that they, for whatever reason, need to carry a firearm – because they have the exemption to do so?

Enver ERDOGAN: You are right – and that was a good pick-up – that the bill has a consequential amendment to the Firearms Act 1996 to include police reservists as a class of non-prohibited persons who are exempt from the requirement to hold a firearms licence under the act, which means that they would be allowed to carry. It is not proposed that police reservists will carry operational safety equipment, including firearms. This amendment will enable such an operational decision in future. At this stage there is no specific firearms training envisaged. I might just seek some guidance in terms of technicalities here.

I think they will have some minimal training as part of that five-day initial induction training, understanding that these are former police officers, so they already have experience in using firearms. The initial plan is not for them to be carrying firearms, but obviously the chief commissioner will have the power to make that decision in future if they see fit. But these are people that have used firearms before, because they are experienced. Initially it will just be part of the five-day training – not a large part of that, because it is not proposed that they would carry operational safety equipment, including firearms, initially.

Jeff BOURMAN: Now for the big question. The government says 'two years cumulative service'. At what point in time will it be too long to presume that that service has stuck in? I am just asking for a friend: would 26 years be too long?

Enver ERDOGAN: Could you just reframe that?

Jeff BOURMAN: At this stage you can have up to two years cumulative service. It has been 26 years since I left the force, so I am using that as an example. Would my more than two years back then be okay? At what point in time does the government intend to say, 'It's been a long time – maybe a bit long'? Is there a hard or even a soft limit on it?

Enver ERDOGAN: Good question, Mr Bourman. No, there is no limit. I think there are minimum requirements, such as the two years of service, and I guess it would be a minimum two years cumulative service as a police officer in Victoria or a similar jurisdiction. I think we have got the UK and New Zealand initially. I think that is the minimum requirement, and like any other application for any other role or job, if you are fit enough for the role – because there will be broader health requirements as well; they will not be at the same threshold as a police officer, but there will be good character and fitness requirements – I see no reason why someone that is not older and experienced could return to the force to do the role. I think it would be case by case, but there is no limit. You can have a 20-year career break and then return.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, what safeguards will prevent reservists from being gradually deployed into frontline policing without further parliamentary scrutiny?

Enver ERDOGAN: Ms Copsey, that is a really good question. I think the deployment of reservists is a matter for the chief commissioner. You are right, the legislation will give the commissioner that flexibility. It is not the chief commissioner's intention that they use or carry, for example, firearms and be deployed on operational matters. That is not the goal. The goal is clear: to do those more administrative tasks to free up the existing police force. But legislatively there is not a restriction.

Renee HEATH: How many police stations will be reopened due to these reservists coming in?

Enver ERDOGAN: Dr Heath, that is a very clever question, but I think you would understand that operational decisions are a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police. The Chief Commissioner of Police recognises proactive operations, allocating resources where needed and responding to calls for assistance to best address crime and community concerns. I think that is his focus. The goal of this is to open up, obviously, some police stations – and I know the Deputy President contributed some local examples – that have had shortened hours. The goal is to reopen some, but in terms of where they will be deployed across the state, I think that is a matter for the chief commissioner. It is not practice for members of the executive to get involved in day-to-day policing. That would be very inappropriate.

Renee HEATH: You must be aware of an estimate of how many will reopen.

Enver ERDOGAN: I point to my previous answer. I think operational decisions are a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police. He recognises the need to have police stations open, and that is why a lot of the roles for people will be front-of-counter roles. But ultimately that is a matter for the chief commissioner. I do not want to pre-empt his decision-making. We want to see 200 across stations across the state, and that is the reason why we are here today.

Renee HEATH: How many stations will have their hours extended?

Enver ERDOGAN: I feel it is asked and answered. This is an operational matter about deployment. The chief commissioner, depending on the resources he has, will allocate resources to where he sees the greatest need, but that is a decision for him to make. Our goal is in providing the resources to him, and that is an additional 200 reservists that he will have at his disposal effectively, at his use, in terms of resource allocation going forward.

Renee HEATH: What modelling was done to come up with the number 200?

Enver ERDOGAN: I understand initially it was a budget investment decision. The $62 million would provide us with the ability to recruit 200 new reservists.

Renee HEATH: You are down 500 police officers – there are 500 less today than when Daniel Andrews was Premier – so that does not really make sense as to how you came up with 200 for the reservists. How far will these reservists have to travel for work, or will you put the reservists close to where they live? What is the plan there?

Enver ERDOGAN: As in my answers to other operational matters, it will be a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police. But in relation to the specifics of this one, I do know the answer. The chief

commissioner has been broadly wanting to deploy people closer to their existing communities, so where they live, where possible, understanding that some of these people with experience are returning and some will be looking for flexible work arrangements that suit where they are in their stage of life. Therefore it is still a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police, but I think it is envisaged that people are deployed close to their own communities.

Renee HEATH: Was the number 200 a request from the commissioner of police?

Enver ERDOGAN: Dr Heath, can you just re-ask that question?

Renee HEATH: The legislation is drafted around 200 reservists. Was that number given to you or requested by Commissioner Bush?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think what she is asking is: was the specific request from the commissioner for 200 reservists?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think the goal for the commissioner was to have police reservists assist and to free up police for frontline policing work. In terms of that figure, I think that was what was initially considered as something that was achievable. When you are setting up effectively a new scheme, it is always difficult to tell whether you will be able to fill those roles. Two hundred was thought of as a number that we could start off with and roll out. We have been overwhelmed, I must admit, with 600 expressions of interest already, and it is fantastic to see that there are a large number of people willing to do this work. But 200 was effectively a government decision to start with the reservists.

Renee HEATH: Will office hours or station hours in Mernda station be opened?

Enver ERDOGAN: Operational decisions are a matter for the Chief Commissioner of Police. In terms of the hours at specific stations, they will be matter for the chief commissioner to consider.

Renee HEATH: Are there any priority areas that you know of, regardless of where they are? Is this a strategic operation or is it just because it is a big place, Victoria? Two hundred could be sucked up like that. Are there priority areas for these reservists? If so, where are they or when will we find that out?

Enver ERDOGAN: These are decisions for the Chief Commissioner of Police. He knows where the greatest need is to tackle crime and so that is his decision. He has not provided me with a list, if that is what you are asking. Do I have a list with me? No, I do not have a list of where the chief commissioner has decided to allocate the 200 new reservists. I am sure he has plans and the decision is for him to make to ensure Victorians are as safe as possible.

Renee HEATH: Is there a goal to get rid of the by-appointment system? This is something that has really caused a lot of stress in a lot of areas. Essentially, if you want to report a crime or speak to a police officer, you have to book an appointment. The argument – one that I strongly subscribe to as well – is that a criminal is not going to attack you and you are not going to be assaulted at a time where you happen to have an appointment with a police officer. Is that a gap that you are expecting this legislation to essentially close?

Enver ERDOGAN: I feel like the by-appointment system is a bit outside the scope of the bill. Nonetheless I think having more police at counters will mean that it will be more accessible for the public to report crimes in person. I hope that I have been able to answer some of your question.

Renee HEATH: Surely you must consider that this is firmly within the scope of this bill. The reason – and it is in much of the documentation – we are getting these reservists in is because the police force is so under pressure, so overwhelmed. How can this possibly be outside the scope of the bill?

Enver ERDOGAN: You are talking about the by-appointment practice, which is an operational practice by the chief commissioner. This bill is not going into how the chief commissioner goes about his operations and what he does or does not see as being fit. What this bill is about is providing him

greater resources to allocate them to where he believes there is the greatest need. But on your issue about front counters and being more accessible, of course this will give him more resources to allocate to front counters across the state where he sees the greatest need is and where resources are deployable.

Renee HEATH: What percentage of these reservists will be allocated to country Victoria, if any?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think the goal is to recruit people from across the state. I think the goal is to have them spread across the state, metropolitan and regional. We know the need for more frontline support for police is across the state, and I envisage that you will find that once we have the 200 in place and the chief commissioner makes his deployment decisions they will be spread across the state.

Renee HEATH: Am I correct that, yes, it is a goal but there is no commitment for a percentage of these reservists to be committed to regional or country Victoria?

Enver ERDOGAN: It is not my intention to direct the commissioner on his deployment decisions, but we have been clear that this is about 200 additional resources for the whole state, metropolitan and regional. So where the police commissioner sees fit, he should be deploying these resources.

Renee HEATH: Will this change allow any PSOs to return to train stations?

Enver ERDOGAN: Again, I think PSOs are outside the scope of this bill, if I may take that point. I think with the deployment of PSOs and this assertion we have had in this debate, we are getting off track, and I am reluctant to go down this path. But I reject the premise that PSOs have somehow been taken off train stations and put elsewhere; we have actually invested in more PSOs in this budget. But I think it is outside the scope of the bill. I do not want to get into a discussion about PSOs today.

Renee HEATH: The other question that I have is: what ratio is it per reservist to police officer back on the street? Is it one reservist per extra police officer on the street? The goal of this is stated in the material. Do you understand what I am asking?

Enver ERDOGAN: In the materials, as it states, there are 4000 hours daily that police do more administrative tasks, and some of those hours will go back into frontline policing.

Renee HEATH: Okay, so it is not like it is one police reservist equals one patrol or two police reservists equals one patrol; it is on an ad hoc basis.

Enver ERDOGAN: That level of detail is still to be determined, and it is a matter for the chief commissioner.

Jeff BOURMAN: I have one question that came up while I was thinking about this. I am going to give you a bit of a hypothetical, but I think it will be an important one. Should in one of the smaller stations the watch house keeper call in sick, and let us say that it is not custodial, and there is one other sworn member in the place, and an emergency occurs and that sworn member has to go off to deal with the emergency, what becomes of the reservist? Do they shut the doors? There has got to be a proposition if there is no defensive tactics qualified person. What does the government envisage will happen if, for whatever reason, the reservist finds themself alone in the station?

Enver ERDOGAN: Again, that is a very operational matter, Mr Bourman, but I think in the end there are operational decisions made all the time, even now with the existing police force. I am sure police will have their own system to determine what is safest and best practice going forward, but I think I will leave that matter for the chief commissioner.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am just wondering what incentives are going to be provided to encourage and entice retired people. When you think about the fact that you are asking them to stand behind or at the front counter unprotected for, let us say, $80,000 to do administrative work, I am not sure how many retired qualified police are going to want to actually come up and stand up and actually take that risk. What incentives has the government put in place in order for this particular proposal, scheme, bill, act, as it will become, to actually be effective and to work?

Enver ERDOGAN: That is a really good question because it gives me the honour of sharing that we have had a lot of expression of interest. What has been attractive to so many people is that with these roles the goal is to see them doing more administrative tasks, so it is not as physically demanding for some that may not want to do the frontline policing. Also, the remuneration is $86,000, as of June this year, for a reservist, and it has attracted quite a bit of interest, with 600-plus expressions of interest already for the 200 roles. Clearly, people want flexibility in returning to work. They can sometimes be people that have had a career break or want to return to some part-time or flexible opportunities, and that is what we are providing. Clearly, there are a lot of Victorians that want to continue serving but maybe serving in a different way as a reservist. There is the salary but also the joy of supporting the police, understanding that people that work in the justice field – I can say as a former corrections officer – are attracted because these are values-based organisations. There are many people that may not want to do the full duties of a police officer but are happy to do the police reservist role. There are 600-plus Victorians that have already expressed an interest in doing this work, so we think it is a very attractive proposition, particularly when you have not just the remuneration but the value of giving back to community safety.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I appreciate the answer. What you are saying is that the incentives are already there because there are a number of people that are applying. Given that we are still significantly short in the workforce – say, 1500 short – and you are only looking to do maybe 200 of these positions but have 600 people who are willing to offer their services, what are the parameters you have put in place to make sure that this is going to be a functional situation? Why did you restrict it to 200? Was it just because that is the number of desk jobs you had available, or was there a reason for it to be restricted to 200 when you have got 600 applicants?

Enver ERDOGAN: This is a new scheme; police reservists being deployed in this manner is the first time that our chief commissioner has envisaged this. We thought 200 was a good number to start with. You raised another issue about police vacancies. That is why we have a new academy opening up in Mildura next year to double the intake from 650 to 1300 new recruits. We are scaling up. We accept that there are vacancies. Across the nation there are vacancies in frontline work, in particular in police work. That is why we are doubling the capacity from 650 to 1300 as of next year. In Mildura we will have a regional base for an academy, and we will have these 200 reservists to complement the police force. You need to understand that this is not to replace the full gamut of police work. Police work is quite large, and the gamut of duties to undertake is quite extensive. This is not to replace it; it is to complement the police force whilst we build up the police force with the doubled intake in recruits to close that gap of those vacancies you are talking about.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Just to fully finish off on what I was wanting to understand, you have got the 200 positions, you have got the 600 applicants and you have got a new academy that is opening up to help with that, but what consultation took place with the people that are applying to be reservists and those who are still currently working in admin in terms of how this is going to operate? Did you actually consult with a bunch of people that would qualify to be reservists as to how they would feel? I am aware that police on the beat have always been strapped up and ready to go with their weapons. Even when they come to the front desk, they are strapped up and they are ready to go. They have that sense of protection. They have a sense of being on the front line, even if they are in admin and coming to be the face. I am just wondering what consultation took place, because these guys are going to be in a more vulnerable position. I am just wondering if you have got some feedback on that, please.

Enver ERDOGAN: Thank you, Mrs Hermans, for providing me with the opportunity to discuss this. This was a suggestion from the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, to set up the reservist scheme. A prerequisite of being in the reservist scheme is a minimum of two years previous experience in a police force, and that police force will be in an Australian, UK or New Zealand jurisdiction as a starting point – minimum two years. These are not people that are just fresh graduates, so to speak; these are people that have experienced a police force for a minimum of two years. Many will have decades of experience and be coming back and looking for something maybe more administrative –

more paper based or desk based – to free up the police officers doing the desk work so they can be out in the field. This was the chief commissioner's idea. That is his vision. As a government we are trying to empower the commissioner to have more resources at his disposal. Like I said, this is not to replace police work. We are doubling the academy to recruit more police. I am sure the local member, Jade Benham, will be excited to have the Mildura academy opening up in her electorate next year.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Just to clarify then, what you are saying is it is the commissioner's idea. Therefore, Minister, you do not know what level of consultation has taken place beyond the fact that the commissioner has said, 'This is what we're going to do.' Is that how I am to interpret what you have just said?

Enver ERDOGAN: Just to clarify, Mrs Hermans, we have consulted with Victoria Police, the organisation and command, obviously, and the chief commissioner. There has been consultation from the department with Victoria Police, but the idea has come out of Victoria Police to support frontline police work so that they are not stuck at a desk and they can be out on the beat, so to speak, in the community. I think that is the goal. That is where it has come from. It is an idea from Victoria Police itself. But again, it is not a substitute for recruiting new police. We are doubling the recruitment from 650 to 1300.

Renee HEATH: I have only got a few more questions, Minister. With the first one, I just want to clarify from before, to get a clear answer. If there is no understood ratio of reservists to patrols, then if 200 reservists are spread across the whole state, that could in fact not equal one extra patrol. Is that something we have to be ready for? I am actually being serious; I am not being cheeky. It might not release one more patrol out in the state.

Enver ERDOGAN: The goal here is to give greater resources to the chief commissioner, and then the chief commissioner makes the decisions about deployment. So if the chief commissioner decides that this area is a particular focus and to put the resource there, that decision would be totally his to own and his to make. We are not going to interfere in operational decisions, but having an additional 200 people – I am sure the chief commissioner will appreciate that. The goal – again, the implementation will be up to the commissioner – is that these 200 reservists will mainly do administrative tasks at a desk, freeing up someone who was at a desk to go out and do frontline policing. That is the goal. But ultimately, we are not going to make that decision for the chief commissioner. That is his role, and obviously we respect the independence of the commissioner to do that work.

Renee HEATH: However, the chief commissioner must have explained to you why this was so important in terms of operational impact, because otherwise you would not have bypassed the treaty process. In your own words you said the reason that you did not consult the appropriate bodies was because of a timeframe issue. Yes, this is important, but the chief commissioner, when directing you, must have explained to you in terms of operational impact what this would do – or did he not?

Enver ERDOGAN: I might actually go back to the point you made earlier about the potential to redeploy the 4000 hours that are currently lost in administrative tasks – that is what police are doing – to do frontline policing. That is the potential. Potentially you are going to get an additional 4000 hours of frontline policing out on the streets or in vans. That decision, though, in terms of the implementation, is still for the chief commissioner. But that is the goal, the 4000 hours that will be saved from people doing administrative tasks every day.

Renee HEATH: My understanding – and I know that you said this is for people who might not want to do full duties et cetera – is that section 45 of the Victoria Police Act 2013, on the status of police reservists, does specify that police reservists have the functions of police officers under certain provisions and are taken to be police officers for those purposes. It also lists several other things. Essentially, they have got the powers, they have got the ability to undertake the tasks. However, it says and clarifies in section 46(2) of the act that police reservists must follow the direction and the control

of a senior police officer while keeping their usual police powers. The way I read that is that they have the full powers of a sworn police officer, but they are under the command of the senior officer on shift. Am I understanding that correctly? After this I just have one more.

Enver ERDOGAN: At a high level, no, because they will not have the full powers of a police officer. They will have some of the powers of police officer. What they will have – let me just try and explain – are the common-law powers of a constable. Common-law powers of a constable is what they will broadly have. That is the remit, whereas other police officers – sworn officers – have specific statutory powers on top of that. On top of that, they have powers to arrest, to detain and to interrogate. The reservists are not going to have those powers.

Renee HEATH: Last question: in part 13, why will this act be repealed on the first anniversary of its commencement?

Enver ERDOGAN: I am told that is just standard drafting practice. There is no specific reason other than that.

Richard WELCH: Minister, you have piqued my curiosity. I am a big supporter of the reservist program; it is very good. But I want to just understand the maths a little bit. It is going to provide 4000 extra hours – over what? Four thousand per day?

Enver ERDOGAN: I am glad that it has got your interest, and thank you for your support for the bill. The goal is 4000 hours a day that police that were doing administrative tasks will be relieved, so technically they could potentially do 4000 hours a day of frontline policing.

Richard WELCH: So then exploring what Dr Heath was asking before, what is the ratio of hours to a patrol being released?

Enver ERDOGAN: The focus here is not on the ratio. The issue is we are providing more resources to the chief commissioner to deploy, and the chief commissioner is saying that potentially having 200 reservists means 4000 hours of administrative tasks. That burden can be lifted off Victoria Police.

Richard WELCH: No, I understand that is the purpose, but what is not clear in the design of what you have done is how many people it actually releases to patrol. And clearly when the commissioner came to you with this as a proposition, at the forefront, probably in the first bullet point, was 'We'll be able to either open these police stations or add this number of patrols.' So it might be accounted for in terms of hours, but the operational impact – you are not going to simply agree with this on the basis of hours. You are going to agree with this on the basis of efficacy, and that would be reflected in how many extra patrols we are going to get.

Enver ERDOGAN: In terms of the efficacy, I think I will leave that for the chief commissioner to decide. But what it does mean is he has an additional 200 people that will assist him. An issue that many in this chamber have raised in the past has been, for example, the counter service. So it will mean he will have staff that will be able to assist in servicing the public in those roles. But ultimately, these are all subject to the commissioner deploying the resources to where he sees fit.

Richard WELCH: Sure, but haven't some of your own press statements and your own commentary and government commentary about this been that it will get more police out on patrol?

Enver ERDOGAN: That is the whole purpose of the bill.

Richard WELCH: But now you say you do not know.

Enver ERDOGAN: What I am saying is I am not going to go into ratios. We are giving the resources. Common sense says if someone is doing the desk job, the person doing the desk job is freed up to do something else. That is what is going to happen in practice. But in terms of where those resources are deployed or the ratios in terms of out in the van on the road compared to the burden of administrative work, these are really detailed operational matters that I will leave to the chief

commissioner to decide where he thinks they are best allocated. We are giving 200 extra staff to assist with that workload. How he chooses to deploy them I think is a matter for the chief commissioner.

Richard WELCH: I will not pursue it any further beyond this question. I will try to make my statement sound like a question too. That seems to me quite bizarre, because how then did anyone arrive at the figure of 200 if you do not know what the operational impact is going to be? You are funding this program. The funding is to provide 4000 hours, but you do not know, have not had it described to you, have not received advice and have not asked questions as to the operational impact of it. That seems very vague, very loose. Why wasn't it 500? Why wasn't it 100?

Enver ERDOGAN: Mr Welch, I think 200 is a strong starting point. It means 200 extra staff, because obviously we know it is –

Richard WELCH: How do you know? You don't know.

Enver ERDOGAN: Two hundred is a strong starting point. We know that there are vacancies in Victoria Police, but Victoria Police do have strong burdens of administrative work. So that is –

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, Deputy President, can you bring the member to order, please? The minister has been very generous in taking the same question over and over. It would be nice if he was given the opportunity to answer.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think there was getting to be a bit of a conversation or a debate there between the minister and the member. I would ask the member to direct their comments through the Chair.

Enver ERDOGAN: Having 200 is a strong starting point. The Victorian police commissioner will have those resources. He will deploy them as he sees fit. He knows where the issues are and where the greatest need is, and I am sure he will make those deployment decisions.

Renee HEATH: Sorry, Minister, but one of your answers raised another question. When you said that the capacity or potential of these 200 reservists was to free up 4000 hours per day – 4000 divided by 200 is 20. Are these reservists doing 20-hour days, or have you potentially made a mistake?

Enver ERDOGAN: I will get clarity.

I understand the 4000 hours was the administrative work that could potentially be relieved from frontline police per day. That was what I was informed.

Renee HEATH: It is extraordinary that you are expecting reservists to do 20-hour days, and that is based on – no, it is, Minister. That is exactly why I clarified. That is extraordinary – that you are saying the potential is for 4000 hours per day. That is literally based on every single one of those 200 doing 20-hour days every day, never having a sick day. In the bill it literally says that these reservists will be available on a full-time basis, a part-time basis, a fixed-term or an ongoing basis. Those are the four provisions. Yet now what we are hearing is in order to meet your expectations or the potential, every single one of those 200 reservists will have to do 20-hour days every day. Surely there is a mistake in the drafting here or the calculations – and I would say a major one. In fact I would say the Labor Party would argue that it would be unlawful to work that much.

Enver ERDOGAN: I think that is more of a statement than a question. I think the goal is clear. The goal is to free up people to do more frontline work, and that the additional 200 staff will provide the flexibility for the chief commissioner to better allocate resources.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, perhaps if I can be of assistance, you might seek some advice from the box, because you did tell the member before that it would provide 4000 hours per day. The member is quite correct. If you divide 4000 by 200 people, they have to work 20 hours per day. Perhaps the box could give us some advice on that.

Katherine Copsey: On a point of order, Deputy President, far be it from me to question, but I think it is the role of the members to ask the questions of the minister and not the Chair.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: No, I am just suggesting to the minister that he may like to seek some clarity, because it is important that we get things right in the committee stage.

Enver ERDOGAN: I think it is asked and answered.

Renee HEATH: I am just confirming that under this legislation 200 reservists are expected to work 20-hour days every day to reach the goal. Yes or no? I am being quite serious; I am not being facetious.

Enver ERDOGAN: I think it is clear that Victoria Police shows that 4000 hours a day are spent doing reception or counter work, and it is envisaged that these 200 will go a long way to making sure that a lot of that work is done by the reservists and support relieving those 4000 hours.

Renee HEATH: I will just point out that that just completely undermines what we have just been questioning and talking about. I understand it was a mistake, but these details surely matter. Therefore there is absolutely no way that this legislation can take the burden of 4000 hours per day; there is no possible way that that can happen.

Enver ERDOGAN: The deployment of resources is a matter for the police commissioner, but I think these 200 staff will go a long way to assisting in a lot of those 4000 hours being done by reservists instead of frontline police.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 13 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (17:44): I move:

> That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (17:44): I move:

> That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:44): I move:

> That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 and 3, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:45): I am happy to rise and speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–27) Bill 2026. I am pleased to make a contribution on the appropriation. I want to begin by putting on the record the opposition's thanks to the many people who make this Parliament function: the attendants and the grounds staff, the clerks and chamber staff of both houses, and kitchen and catering staff, and the reception and front-of-house staff in the Department of Parliamentary Services, all of whom have done their job with cheerfulness, professionalism, good candour and sometimes under great pressure. We do appreciate what they do. That also includes of course the library, Hansard, IT and security teams as well.

To the Clerk of the Legislative Council, the Clerk of the Assembly and their deputies, and to the staff of the investigatory committees, thank you for the work that you do. I want to thank too the independent officers appropriated through this bill: the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Auditor-General, the Victorian Ombudsman, the IBAC Commissioner, the Chief Integrity Inspector at Integrity Oversight Victoria and the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission.

If members look at schedule 1, they will see the total appropriation rises from $297.204 million to $313.713 million. Despite media headlines, the bodies whose whole purpose is to hold this government to account have not done well in this budget. Integrity Oversight Victoria, the body that oversees the integrity system itself, rises by just 2.7 per cent. The Auditor-General moves from $20.419 million to $21.046 million, which is little more than indexation, and this is an office already missing its own reporting timeline targets. I would have thought that given the scale and importance of the Auditor-General's work in this state there was a far stronger case to be made. And this is the real concern here: these are the agencies with the oversight of government, and the government continues to fail in giving them adequate funding. The Auditor-General, IBAC and the Ombudsman jointly renewed their call for a transparent and independent funding model. Investigations into government corruption continue to be shelved due to a lack of government funding. Genuine integrity requires that the bodies enforcing it be funded adequately and transparently, not merely at the discretion and on the timetable of the government they are meant to watch. But that is how it works here in Victoria under Labor.

This bill provides the essential financial authority for the Parliament, and we will not stand in the way of that. But I would urge the government to take seriously a simple principle of accountability and transparency: the Victorian public are entitled to know why these decisions by their elected representatives to underfund integrity bodies are made. With those reflections, I will support the bill.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:49): It is an absolute delight to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026. Before I really get into the funding allocations for our departments and agencies, I want to take a moment to look around and reflect on where we are. Every single year in this Parliament's term I have spoken on the Parliament appropriation bill, but I have got to tell you, this one feels particularly special. This is the final Parliament appropriation bill of this Parliament's term, and as we start looking towards the upcoming election it gives us a real moment to reflect upon how this whole institution actually functions day to day, and most importantly, the folks who make it all possible.

This bill seeks an appropriation authority from the Consolidated Fund for our Parliament and our independent officers for the upcoming 2026–27 financial year. That is the funding that literally keeps the lights on, the water running and the doors open in this spectacular workplace. It is the funding that

ensures our democracy not just functions but actually thrives. But we all know that this building is much more than just sandstone, green and red carpets and the gold leaf on the ceiling, as beautiful as it is. I want to spend a really significant part of my contribution today giving gratitude to the people that make this building work. In here we parliamentarians use the phrase 'public service' a lot, but truly it is the folks that this bill pays for who are the absolute exemplification of what it means to be a public servant. You are the stewards of our democracy, and I know firsthand that the hours are incredibly long, especially for those dealing with this chamber. The demands are sometimes overwhelmingly high, and the public recognition is all too rare. But I want to thank every single staff member in this precinct, and I would like them to know this: you do not just serve us; by serving this Parliament, you are directly serving the people of Victoria. When you unlock the heavy doors in the morning, when you brew that much-needed coffee, when you fix the wi-fi so we can read our emails or when you print the actual bills, you are enabling this chamber to pass laws that build our state. You are a massive part of something so much larger than any individual in this room, and every single Victorian is better off for your service. I could go to each of the individual areas here that are supported by the Parliament, but I just need to say to each and every one of you: when you look at this bill before us, know that it is here to serve our democracy. I cannot support this strongly enough. With that I commend this bill to the chamber.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (17:51): I just want to use this opportunity to thank those in Parliament that look after us. We have Hansard behind us. We have security. We have IT – I am sure to forget someone. We have catering. We have the chamber staff; I see Theo over there. We all do a job in this place, and they do as much of a job as we do; we just do different parts of it. I think the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026 is an appropriate time just to say thanks to all.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:52): I also rise on this Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026, because I want to put on record my sincere thanks to all the incredible people that work in here. I think you have one of the hardest jobs in the world, working with 40 sometimes high-maintenance politicians. It is a lot of type-A personalities put in one chamber and let loose on each other. I absolutely want to commend every single one of you for your patience and for being calm when things are a little bit intense. I spoke this morning about the security team. From the minute you walk in or even see the steps there are people there making sure that there is always somebody that has got your back. Also, just when you walk out generally, it is the people around here. It is the Gregs of this world. It is the Theos. It is the people like that that you off-load whatever thought to first, and I just think it is absolutely fantastic, particularly when we do really late nights – that is not a regular job. I think it was last Thursday night everybody here – of course we are expected to stay until 5 am, because that is on us. We keep asking questions; we keep making speeches. But to the people that just day in, day out serve here, making democracy work and making sure everyone is safe, fed, well looked after: we are just so incredibly grateful for you. So thank you, and here is to another 12 months.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:53): I would just like to echo the comments of Dr Heath and Mr Bourman. This is an extraordinary place, and what makes it so extraordinary is the people that keep it together on a day-to-day basis. It seems like it is never too much trouble. Whether we are going into tables, going in for a meal or just walking the grounds and meeting the garden staff and the security, it is just an extraordinary privilege that we enjoy. I am in constant awe of the people who work here, just at their sheer professionalism. I would like to put in a plug, if I may, because I think one of the critical elements of this place is the committees. I think it is very, very clear that those committees are running on the smell of an oily rag, and they are critical to our function, particularly as a house of review, to understanding what we are dealing with and to coming to the truth. I look at the way in which at the moment they are covering each other and trying to fill the gaps, and I think that that creates gaps, potentially, in our own democracy here in Victoria. Having got that off my chest, on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria I would just like to extend our profound thanks to everyone who makes this place work.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:55): I have spoken on my feet before about how incredibly lucky we are to have the democracy that we have in Victoria and indeed Australia. When I am out in community and those conversations arise, I talk about how much we should value it. Though people may have issues with various political parties or positions and all this sort of stuff, at the end of the day we should really value the democracy that generations before us fought so hard for. Of course it would not operate in a way that enables our society to live relatively peacefully and respectfully without all the staff here, so I echo the comments made before me that have picked up on so many of the points. I think the committees do an incredible job, whether it is being asked to be mobile or to go out into the community and out into the regions in the work that we do. To the point Dr Heath raised before about the hours of work here, not only having to do the hours but having to listen to all of us is a massive task in itself. It would be remiss of me not to shout out the dining staff and the incredible toasted sandwiches that have been on the menu in recent years, because $14 for the size they are is quite incredible, and they provide the energy to keep us all going. But in all seriousness, to everybody right across the parliamentary staff – security, Hansard and everyone all the way – thank you so much for what you do.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:57): I was not planning on speaking on this, but I think I will jump in for a contribution. I am very delighted to jump in for a contribution on this one; it is one of my favourite things to speak on every year. I want to put on record my thanks to all the parliamentary staff who work in this building, from the clerks to the people in the table office to the cleaners to the catering staff and to all the other staff that work so hard so that we can do our jobs as members of Parliament. I think if it was just left it up to the members of Parliament, this place would be in disarray. We do rely heavily on the parliamentary staff, the parliamentary library and everyone that is involved in putting sitting weeks together, which is a meticulously planned process.

Can I particularly thank the security team that looks after all members of Parliament. I know we have had in my office in Meadow Heights a bunch of very serious incidents of crime around the outside of the office, and the security team have always had a really good working relationship with Victoria Police to make sure the community is safe. One recent example over the last 12 months was where a pedestrian was hit by a car right outside my office, literally right outside my office, and suffered serious injuries. We worked together, the security team and I, to put pressure on the landlord to put in some pedestrian bollards so that the community could be safe from both erratic drivers and people that might have their foot stuck on the accelerator and be driving too fast, because ultimately the safety of the community, particularly around Meadow Heights, is very important. The way that the security team in particular have cooperatively worked with Victoria Police to help solve a number of different assaults that have happened outside of my office has been commendable.

I would also like to thank the property team who help all of us. We have had quite a bit of water damage over our time at the electorate office, and they are always hugely attentive. They also were when for some reason or another the landlord thought it was appropriate to put out some poison and poisoned a whole bunch of pigeons, which very much distressed the community in Meadow Heights. Thankfully, that is not a practice that has been continued. I would like to particularly thank the property team and the security team for the work that they do. It is also a good opportunity to thank staff in particular. I would like to thank my staff: Ryan, Percy, Orshina, Adam and Baris, as well as Bernadette, who is leaving us to, hopefully, join this place as the number 2 candidate for the Northern Metropolitan Region. I would like to finish there, but again I thank all the staff around the Parliament for the work that they do.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:00): I too wanted to put on the record my gratitude for the incredible work that the staff around Parliament do. As has been said, they keep this place running, and they are always so welcoming and accommodating. It is possibly not always well deserved, but it is something I always very much appreciate. They treat all of us so well. I always feel incredibly well supported and looked after. I also want to extend special thanks to the security team in

particular, who have supported my team and me through some challenging situations over the past year. I really appreciate their hard work, responsiveness and accessibility at all times.

I do want to make a few comments on where we feel further funding is needed and some areas where we were disappointed with this bill. Firstly, I would like to see some more funding going towards supporting the work of parliamentary committees. A key function of this house of Parliament in particular, given the make-up of our committees, is conducting inquiries that dive deeply into subjects of interest to the community, but they are also a key mechanism for us to hold the government to account. The committee staff this term have done an absolutely extraordinary job. We have made a lot of committee referrals, and the demand has been high. We have also had a number of select committees. But it can be very challenging for them, given the limited resources that are provided for these committees. We would like to see more funding going towards this so this Parliament can do its job properly and so we do not have to feel, every time we make a referral for an inquiry or to establish a select committee, that that work needs to be constrained because of the lack of resources that are being provided.

I also want to touch on funding for integrity agencies. The government has again refused to give our integrity agencies the resources they need to do their job. In February the Ombudsman, the IBAC Commissioner and the Auditor-General took the extraordinary step of writing a joint paper to call for more funding to maintain confidence in our integrity system. Despite being asked to do more since its functions were effectively expanded in 2019, funding for the Ombudsman has not increased commensurately, effectively limiting what it can do and resulting in fewer own-motion and complaint-led investigations. Similarly, IBAC has got a backlog of complaints now, and it is having to rearrange its staffing to try and manage this backlog. Both of these are clear examples of the impact that failure to adequately fund these integrity agencies is having, yet this budget, yet again, has failed to deliver the funding they have been asking for and that they demonstrably need.

It is also a fundamental problem that still has not been addressed that the funding for these entities whose job it is to hold the government to account is determined by the very same government. The process lacks transparency: agencies request the funding, but these bids remain cabinet in confidence, and the agencies receive no explanation when they do not get what they asked for. This conflict of interest is not a new problem. In 2022 the Ombudsman, IBAC and the Auditor-General recommended that their funding be set through an independent process, but of course the government ignored those requests. So earlier this year they suggested a more modest change, which was 'Okay, maybe the government can have the final authority, but at the very least there needs to be greater transparency and parliamentary scrutiny over the funding process' – but again, nothing.

I have said it many times before in this place: strong integrity agencies are in everyone's interest, foremost that of the Victorian public. Public trust in governments and other institutions is plummeting, and with scandals like the Big Build effectively brushed aside by the Victorian government and integrity agencies unable to look into them, who can blame the public for this sentiment? These agencies are integral to ensuring transparency, accountability and proper oversight of the government and its agencies, and they are core to maintaining public trust. With this budget the Labor government has once again signalled it does not take integrity seriously, reinforcing the growing view that it is just here to maintain power for itself and not to serve the community's interest.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:05): I too rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026, and I want to thank all of the parliamentary staff out here as well – they do a fantastic job – right down to those stewards who stand outside the chambers and those who come in and hand us the papers. It is so professional; everybody here is so professional in the way they behave. The people in the papers office – it is extraordinary work that they do, and they are always smiling, always pleasant and always easy to work with. Those who are at Hansard right now having to record, those who are transcribing and working on the details and even those in our dining rooms and our services: we are so grateful for the work that you do. I also want to acknowledge the security guys, because they have to put up with a lot, with us coming in and out and

those lost tags or misplaced tags or left-at-home tags that we have to go through. We get to know them because they are often the first point of call. Quite often too security are the first lot of people that we will reach out to when we do not feel safe, and they go out of their way to work those hours and to be approachable and reasonable to make sure that we can do what we do here. In fact this parliamentary process would not even function if it was not for the fantastic staff.

I really want to take on board what Dr Mansfield mentioned too about the importance of the integrity of the process people have for actually being able to receive their funds and their wages and the importance of having a government that is transparent. We do not see that, unfortunately, with this government. That is why the community does feel quite outraged, because people are doing it tough, and no doubt there are many parliamentary staff who have things that they are having to deal with too. It just would be great to have that total transparency so that people can see where their hard-earned taxes are going when they have concerns with government, government processes and agencies.

I just want to thank not just the members of Parliament but everybody here that works to make this process work for us and for every Victorian. I know some of you work very long hours, and you put in that little bit of extra effort because you understand how much the Westminster system that we have matters and how much the parliamentary process matters. It matters to the Victorian people, and it matters to how we function. I know that wherever we go in this building we are met with people who are always highly professional in doing and going about their everyday jobs without any thanks, often without even any recognition. It is a thankless job most of the time, but this is one opportunity where members of Parliament can actually stand up and say to you: you are doing a great job out there. Thank you for making this place work, and thank you for the hours and the time and the effort that you put in.

I also want to acknowledge those who have worked on committee processes. Those guys put in an incredible amount of time and effort. There are some very, very clever people that work behind the scenes in committees, and they do work to produce some really interesting documentation that we can work through as a result of the questions and the things that are being produced in inquiries. I am very thankful for all the additional efforts that they put in.

We know that this whole parliamentary process also exists because of all those that are working down at St Andrews Place, and we thank them as well, even though they may may not be watching today. But to all of you that make this Parliament work: you deserve your wages. You deserve more. You deserve thanks, so today I just want to take the time to do that. And keep going, because we do have to do the very best we can by the people of this state and by this nation so that we can actually have a country that is worth living in. Thank you for doing your part to make that possible.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) incorporated the following:

I am pleased to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill.

A Bill that allocates resources to support the function of the Parliament of Victoria and related departmental support activities.

The Parliament of Victoria runs, every single day, on the work of hundreds of people who simply get on with their work, professionally, reliably, and without fuss.

In previous years I have been glad to express my appreciation for the work done here at Parliament and by the DPS. I have usually chosen one or two aread and focused on thanking them for their work. I have previously thanked the corporate services teams including human resources, finance, payroll, attendants and security staff during sitting weeks.

This year, I would like to start at the front door.

Members of the public are encouraged to visit our Parliament House.

Students on excursion, a constituent who has never been here before, a school or community group from Horsham or Portland, Geelong or Ballarat making the journey to Melbourne.

The first people they meet are staff members diligently doing security checks and they are then welcomed at the vestibule.

These staff are, in the truest sense, ambassadors for democracy.

They greet, screen, register and host guests across a long working day, with warmth and professionalism, regardless of who walks through the door.

That welcome matters.

For many Victorians, it shapes their entire impression of whether this place belongs to them.

I am grateful for every one of those interactions.

Behind that welcome sits an enormous architecture of risk assessment, security protocols and safety management.

Work that is largely invisible because, when it is done well, nothing goes wrong.

The people responsible for keeping guests, members and staff safe carry that responsibility every day without fanfare.

I checked in with my Electorate Office Security Advisor, Chris Pace to get a better idea of how many people are actually involved.

The Security Operations Parliament House is overseen by Adam, the Operations Manager.

He oversees the day to day running of security operations at Parliament. From protests, to liaising with Victoria Police and house departments.

There is the Security Support Team – Sunny, Tammy, Paramjit and Amit, their roles are administrative / technical back-end programming of our systems.

The friendly people who answer the phones from Electorate Officers, MPs or departments within POV.

They schedule maintenance calls, handle day to day monitoring of all things related to visitors and security.

Then there are the **Security Advisers** – Chris, Steven, Suzi and Courtney.

Their roles are varied, from security incident management, site visits, assisting MPs and staff with security advice, security risk assessments, assisting property services in assessments on new sites and liaising with Victoria Police.

They support security at 128 EOs across Victoria.

The Security Officers based at Parliament House are responsible for weapons and entry screening, mailroom duties and carparking management.

They all deserve our recognition for keeping us all safe and able to perform our duties.

One of my strong convictions is that Parliament must not just be a Melbourne institution.

Victorians in Warrnambool, Stawell, Geelong and Ballarat, right across Victoria's regions deserve the same access to their elected representatives as anyone in the inner suburbs.

That access depends entirely on electorate offices and on the staff who run them.

Electorate Officers are the front line of representative democracy.

They are employed under the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005, but what no legislation can fully capture is the dedication they bring to that role every day.

They listen to constituents in distress.

They navigate complex government systems on behalf of people who don't know where else to turn.

They are often the human face of a system that can feel very distant.

My electorate office team is also backed by Parliamentary Staff.

And I want to thank the property team who worked so hard to establish my office in central Warrnambool late last year.

It was, to put it plainly, a marathon effort.

Their persistence and professional outfitting of a new office meant that South West Victorians now have access to a Labor MP for the first time since 1955! And I say thankyou for that.

It is also true that we spend a lot of time here in Spring Street governing for the State.

Every law begins as an idea from a community to solve a problem.

It could be from a community need, or an election commitment, or an inquiry recommendation.

A minister and their department draft the Bill, which is then formally introduced, debated, and examined clause by clause.

Both Houses must agree before it proceeds to the Governor for Royal Assent and becomes law.

Inside this building, the Clerks of both Houses perform work that is foundational to the integrity of our proceedings.

They provide accurate procedural advice, process legislation, prepare documentation for sittings, and maintain the records of debate.

When we speak in this chamber, their work is what ensures our words are recorded correctly and that the business of government proceeds with the rigour it demands.

Our committee system is one of the most important mechanisms this Parliament has for scrutiny and community, stakeholder and technical engagement.

Victoria has joint investigatory committees, standing committees in both Houses, domestic committees and select committees.

At the moment they cover everything from electoral matters to early childhood education.

Each of these bodies undertakes time-consuming, substantive work on behalf of Victorians.

None of that work happens without secretariat support them.

Every committee is supported by a team.

A Committee Manager or Executive Officer, research staff administrative staff and the Hansard team.

They are, **critically**, apolitical.

They serve all members equally, regardless of party, providing unbiased advice and analysis.

In a polarised era, that impartiality is precious.

The research they produce, the briefing papers they write and the hearings they organise form the architecture of our accountability.

Committees also use media and communications to connect their inquiries with the public.

They call for submissions, publish reports, produce short videos, and reach Victorians through social media.

This public engagement work is coordinated by the secretariat alongside Parliament's Communications and Public Engagement team.

For regional communities especially, who may not easily visit Parliament House, this outreach is vital.

The Department of the Legislative Council and the Department of the Legislative Assembly also each play a distinct and essential role.

They provide procedural support, process legislation, prepare sitting day resources and procedure guides, and promote public understanding of parliamentary democracy.

The Procedure Office, the Serjeant-at-Arms Office, the Clerk's Office and table office provide expertise that members rely on. I want to make special mention of the LC Table Office team, Tom, Juliana, Theo, Annemarie, Kirra and Tash, who field all sorts of questions and requests with a happy smile every sitting day.

And then there is the Tours and Customer Service Unit which brings Parliament to life for thousands of Victorians each year.

For a child from Colac or Mildura who visits Parliament House for the first time and begins to understand what this place is and what it stands for, that experience can last a lifetime.

The staff who deliver these tours deserve our thanks.

I also want to acknowledge something we rarely discuss: the technology that underpins everything we do.

Parliament's statewide information technology network links every electorate office to Parliament House, enabling members across Victoria to do their jobs.

An intelligent email security system protects all parliamentary users from thousands of on line security issues every single day.

This infrastructure is maintained by people who work methodically and often thanklessly to keep the institution running securely.

The House Committee oversees the management of parliamentary services.

This encompasses every aspect of this place. From our information technology, to the Parliament gardens, from refreshment rooms to the maintenance and renewal of this historic building as well as the new buildings.

They reflect the care this institution takes in presenting itself, as a place of public trust.

Every person I have described today, from the vestibule staff welcoming a first-time visitor to the researcher finishing a committee report late at night, gives their expertise and care to an institution that belongs to every Victorian.

These are the people that make democracy real. They do so quietly and often without recognition, and I say thank you.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

President, I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–27) Bill 2026.

This bill provides the appropriation authority necessary to support the Parliament of Victoria and a number of independent parliamentary offices during the 2026–27 financial year.

While appropriation bills are often viewed as procedural or technical in nature, they remain an important part of the parliamentary process.

They provide the practical means through which institutions are able to undertake their responsibilities and continue serving the Victorian community.

At its core, this bill is about ensuring that Parliament remains equipped to perform its constitutional functions.

It provides funding for the operation of both Houses of Parliament, parliamentary committees, parliamentary services and a number of independent officers whose work supports accountability, transparency and public confidence in our democratic system.

Without appropriate funding, Parliament would be unable to effectively carry out many of its responsibilities.

Members would be less able to represent their communities; committees would face constraints in undertaking inquiries and independent oversight bodies would be limited in their ability to perform their important functions.

This legislation therefore provides more than a series of financial allocations, but more crucially it provides the resources necessary for Parliament to continue serving Victorians and to continue fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to it.

Essentially these appropriation bills allow for this Parliament to withdraw funds to continue the basic operations of the government.

That can be anything and everything from the running of our Electorate Offices in our communities, to something as specific and straightforward as administrative staffing arrangements here.

But more importantly it ensures our democratic system can continue to deliver for Victorians.

Every member who enters this chamber does so carrying the views, concerns and aspirations of the people they represent.

While members may approach issues from different perspectives, the common thread that unites us is a commitment to serving our communities and contributing to the democratic process.

Our system is deliberative and allows for a range of voices to be heard, and as much as that might cause strong disagreements, it is also important that we continue to deliver on the basic needs people expect.

And President, that is why ensuring that there is a properly funded parliament is so important.

It ensures that the people's business can be conducted smoothly and with assuredness.

It is crucial that Victorians have the confidence that this institution is well funded and up to the task of representing the great people of this state.

It's not just the administrative and functional work and operations of this building, but the hard work that goes on out in the community.

People approach their local members seeking assistance with government services, navigating complex processes, raising concerns about local issues or advocating for change within their communities.

Electorate offices often serve as an important connection between individuals and government.

They help residents access information, assist people experiencing difficulties, engage with community groups, businesses and local organisations, and through their hard work we can advocate for local priorities.

They provide a forum through which community voices can be heard.

This work is often undertaken quietly and without significant public attention, yet it remains one of the most important functions of Parliament.

And that is why while these bills may seem mundane and procedural, they are important to the functioning of government.

These appropriations provide for the specific purposes set out in legislation and they do not lapse annually like the annual Appropriation Act, and thus need this separate legislation.

The Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill seeks authority for $102.1 billion in total for the ordinary annual services of Government for the 2026–27 financial year, whereas this Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) seeks permission from this Chamber for $313.7 million in total for Parliament, and independent officers of the Parliament, in respect of the 2026–27 financial year.

The bill also supports the vital work of parliamentary committees.

Parliamentary committees perform some of the most detailed and valuable work undertaken within this institution.

Committees bring together members from different political parties and different perspectives to examine matters in depth.

They investigate issues.

They conduct inquiries.

They review legislation.

They hear from experts and stakeholders.

They receive submissions from members of the public.

They provide opportunities for communities to engage directly with parliamentary processes.

Committee work frequently allows Parliament to examine issues in greater detail than is possible during debate in this chamber.

Complex issues often require extensive evidence gathering and consultation.

Committees provide a mechanism through which that work can occur.

They enable Parliament to draw upon expertise from industry, academia, community organisations and the broader public.

The recommendations that emerge from committee inquiries can contribute to policy development, legislative reform and improvements to government administration.

Over many years, parliamentary committees have examined issues across a broad range of policy areas including health, education, transport, justice, housing, environment and economic development.

While committee reports do not always attract the same level of attention as major legislative debates, and while they do not always have the same level of partisan exchanges and debate, they often make a significant contribution to public policy and public understanding.

The effectiveness of committees depends on having access to appropriate support, expertise and resources.

This bill assists in ensuring those functions can continue.

But President, the central premise of these Bills is to provide authority for the Government, Parliament and the independent officers of Parliament to spend money, allowing them to perform their functions, including delivering frontline services and the initiatives in the 2026–27 Budget.

That budget, President, delivered on the essential services Victorians expect from their government.

From investment in schools, to health, and critical cost of living relief, these are complex policy solutions which require the smooth functioning of government.

But most importantly, President, these Bills deliver on the initiatives set out in the Budget.

A Budget which is focused on what matters most.

As many in this Chamber should be able to personally attest to, we had free Public Transport in Victoria up until the end of May, and now half priced Public Transport, providing relief not just for rail commuters, but for drivers by taking off demand from petrol stations.

The enactment of policies like that require the budget to be executed by a highly professional team behind the scenes, whose work can only be financed through legislation such as this.

This is before we even get to the enactment of the 20% rego rebate for motorists, with one million Victorians already applying for this scheme in the first 48 hours.

It speaks to the importance of the work we do here, and the importance of ensuring it continues to function properly.

Closer to home, the legislation also provides funding for Parliamentary Services.

Much of the work undertaken by Parliamentary Services occurs behind the scenes, yet it is fundamental to the operation of Parliament.

Parliamentary Services supports members, staff and visitors and provides many of the systems and services that enable Parliament to function effectively.

This includes procedural support, information technology, building operations, security, broadcasting services, library services and a range of administrative functions.

In a modern Parliament, these services are more important than ever.

Technology has transformed the way members engage with constituents and access information.

Digital communication has expanded public access to parliamentary proceedings.

Committee hearings and parliamentary proceedings of all kinds can be viewed by Victorians regardless of where they live.

Information is available more readily than at any point in our history.

These developments have strengthened public engagement with democratic institutions.

They have also helped bring parliamentary processes closer to the communities we serve.

Maintaining and improving those capabilities requires ongoing investment.

This bill helps ensure Parliament can continue meeting those community expectations.

President, the two Appropriation bills this chamber has debated this week go hand in hand to deliver on the core needs of our constituents.

I've already spoken to our effective cost of living relief plan, as outlined by the Treasurer in her Budget several weeks ago.

I have not mentioned however other strategic policy decisions such as the Fair Fuel Plan, which ensures the Government can monitor the prices of petrol pumps across the state and, by keeping these tabs, guaranteeing Victorians aren't being ripped off.

The daily fuel price cap is now a legal requirement.

Our anti-price-gouging laws mean that fuel retailers must set a daily cap on fuel prices and publish it in advance, so you can find the best deal tonight and know the price won't jump tomorrow.

It's important work, delivering the priorities of the Allan Labor Government's transformative budget, and we need to continue to support it.

With this Budget we're providing further cost of living help with $120 million to support families with kids, including:

$28 million for the Affordable School Uniforms Program, saving families $93 on average on uniform costs per application.

$24 million for outside-of-school-hours care for young Victorians with disability.

$16 million to continue and expand the Glasses for Kids program to more classrooms, delivering free vision screening and glasses for kids who need them.

This was a budget which put our kids and their future front and centre, and it's crucial that we allow for the enactment of these decisions.

Something which might not be as well set out with this Bill, but is equally as important to its outcome, is how the delivery of our budget priorities allows for the expansion of housing supply in this state, and as a result making it easier for aspiring families to own a home.

This is achieved through not just strong investments in social housing across Victoria, and my community of Southern Metro, but through relief on bills such as energy.

We have a proud record of delivering for Victorians with expanding our energy efficiency programs, supporting working families getting cheaper and more efficient energy solutions for their homes, driving down their bills and minimising their impact on the environment.

But President, something that will be of keen interest to people like me as a result of this bill, is the $1 billion pothole blitz.

As a former Branch Secretary and National President of the Transport Workers Union, I know a thing or two when it comes to roads and transport.

And with that, I want to emphasise how important the $1 billion pothole blitz is.

In 2026–27 alone, we will spend over $1 billion on fixing potholes and resurfacing roads, the highest amount and therefore the biggest road blitz in Victoria's history.

It reduces wear and tear on your cars and trucks, it makes the journey smoother, and without question makes your journey safer, especially for those transporting large cargo around the place.

While those Opposite often like to disregard our long term investment in this states infrastructure, it is something I am proud of.

Whether it is the large projects transforming how we move around Melbourne and Victoria, or something more straightforward such as this pothole blitz, it is all important work which is delivering on both the immediate and long term needs of Victorians.

And these budget plans are enacted only through the passage of core procedural bills such as this Appropriation bill.

The Allan Labor Government wants to see our major investments through, and see that Victorians have a Government which delivers on what it promises.

We've already delivered city-changing projects like the Metro Tunnel, running right through my community of Southern Metro.

I've already spoken to our cost of living programs, but the importance of delivering on both these large scale projects and on schemes to get working families through their immediate household struggles is important.

Delivering on these matters is what Labor Governments do, and it's what the Allan Labor Government's budget for 2026/27 does for working families.

And while speaking on the Metro Tunnel, I want to mention another critical investment outlined in the Budget which is exciting for many rail commuters, many of whom live in Southern Metro.

Southern Metro is a very diverse community, ranging from Kew and Albert Park, all the way to Ashwood and Brighton.

We are very blessed to have an extensive rail network running throughout the region.

We've already announced as part of this government's investments, that there will be more frequent train services across the network.

Not only has one of the busiest rail corridors in our hemisphere, that being the Pakenham and Cranbourne rail lines, seen a rapid increase in services to 'turn up and go' levels, but our other lines will now be seeing more services as a result of the untangling of our network.

Sandringham for example, will see more frequent train services, something I'm sure many across the line are overjoyed to hear.

But this budget, again which can only be put into force with these Appropriation bills, invests $1.3 billion for trains and services across our metropolitan network.

That includes new rolling stock and trains, with higher capacity, to roll out across the network to the joy of many train enthusiasts.

But it's also core money for maintenance works, including but not limited to safety upgrades across much of the network.

And it's also money dedicated to improving a lot of the active transport infrastructure in this state, particularly for cyclists, the number of which is growing across Southern Metro by the year.

And I want to of course mention how we're investing in making these services more accessible with upgrades to ensure all Victorians can access these services, and that nobody is left behind.

To summarise that, President, this is a very important Bill.

It deals with the mundane and procedural matters of this place, but remains as important as anything else.

It helps ensure Parliament can continue serving the Victorian community.

And it helps ensure the Parliament of Victoria remains capable of fulfilling its responsibilities both now and into the future.

President it is for these reasons that I support this legislation.

So President, I support the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–27) Bill 2026 and strongly commend the bill to the House.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:09): I echo the sentiments of previous speakers. It is always

a pleasure to speak on the Parliament appropriation bill, this one being the 2026–27 one. I am not quite sure how many I have spoken on. I reckon it is certainly over 10, if not all 12 since I have been here. But it is always a good opportunity to talk on a bill which is often somewhat short in comparison to others that are debated but is something that unites us in our recognition of the people in this place.

The bill also covers issues such as integrity and accountability functions and basically ensures that the important people that help democracy function get paid. I would like to put on record the government's appreciation for the tireless efforts from the staff in this place, from the expert advice and stewardship of the clerks Robert and Anne and assistants Richard and Keir to the Usher of the Black Rod's office, led by Sally and Michael, and support from Annemarie, Chris, Tom and the staff in the chamber support office, Nat in the President's office and Council committees office, who provide amazing procedural and research support to our members on committee business.

A special thankyou to the chamber services team, who probably put up with us more than anybody else. In earshot we have got Michael, Greg and Theo out there, I think. Thank you so much for the work that you do. There is always a special shout-out for Hansard, who have to listen to everything that we say. Thank you very much for your skills and valuable service and sometimes enduring things that perhaps you should not have to, but thank you anyway, and also security, catering, gardening and all of the people that make this building function.

The hard work and dedication of the Council leadership team make the place run seamlessly. I think we all acknowledge – I think it was Mr Mulholland who acknowledged this – we are all pretty aware that this place would not function if it was left just to MPs. I also would like to say we work harder in the red place than the green place, and that extends to all of the staff that support that as well, so go team red. And it is always an opportunity to use the debate on this bill to acknowledge electorate officers. They are out there every day in the communities that we represent helping to deal with issues of the day. In my team I would like to extend my thanks to Jada, Ange, Makayla and Ruby. And with that, I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:12): I move:

> That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:13): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026, a bill that is an omnibus bill that covers a wide variety of aspects, which I will enumerate steadily. We will not oppose this bill, but we will seek to amend it. The purpose of the bill is to establish a legal framework for a

voluntary 10-year structural defect insurance product for residential apartment buildings as an alternative to developer bond schemes established under the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025; to amend the minimum financial requirements (MFR) framework for builders entering the Victorian building industry, returning power to the Building and Plumbing Commission to set industry standards; to reform the place-of-public-entertainment – POPE, as it were – permit regime by moving regulatory detail from primary legislation into regulations and creating a head of power for a mooted risk-based permitting system; to expand emergency powers for building surveyors to enable intervention on condition-altered land; to confer on the Minister for Housing and Building certain powers to designate flood-prone areas, mirroring the existing powers to declare bushfire-prone areas; to extend the civil liability immunity to authorised nominating authorities under the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 (SOP act); to make transitional and consequential and administrative amendments to a series of other acts; to amend the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012 to provide levy exemptions and offsets for Homes Victoria, community housing organisations and eligible volunteers; to allow ministerial declarations about the timing of changes to residential fixed charge and principal-place-of-residence (PPR) concessions; and to amend the Land Tax Act 2005 to extend and clarify principal-place-of-residence land tax relief for owners constructing or renovating homes, including joint owners and owners affected by timing anomalies in the existing exemption and deferral rules. As I said, there are a number of parts of this bill that are strongly supported, but there are aspects that we do not support either. Some aspects are overdue and in that sense are supported, including the MFR correction, the extension of SOP act immunity, the 10-year insurance framework and the emergency order reforms. The MFR amendment is particularly important in that parts of the industry and the opposition have been calling for that for some time.

The Treasury measures in the bill are also, in some measure, supportable, particularly insofar as they provide levy relief and remove certain unfairnesses in land tax treatment for construction and renovation cases. While the levy commencement element gives effect to the budget update delay, it also leaves the government with a mechanism to defer politically difficult increases in the fixed charge for non-PPR residential land beyond 1 July 2027 if desired.

The recommendation to amend is driven primarily by the POPE provisions, which embed fundamental structural flaws in the legislation without amending them. This has been a longstanding set of arrangements. These places-of-public-entertainment changes that are being made are problematic. We had an important parliamentary inquiry during COVID and towards the end of COVID, looking at a number of the entertainment and other arts and smaller self-employed people and the impact of COVID there. One of the things that became very clear is the events industry was savagely impacted by COVID, but the government seemed to have little understanding of the events industry. They thought that events are major events, which are one key area, but they are only one area. The whole events industry could be everything from weddings to business conferences to a whole series of other event-related economic activities – community festivals and so forth. The government seems still to have no understanding or proper grappling with the importance of that sector to the Victorian community and the Victorian economy, and it is in that context that a number of our amendments are drafted. If I could perhaps have those circulated, that would be appreciated.

I am indebted – and I will make this very clear to the chamber – to Simon Thewlis, a well-respected person in the events industry, for the support and information he has provided and his briefing notes provided to me and others on the POPE provisions in the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill. His briefing notes I think are highly instructive. They provide a very clear understanding of what is needed in the events industry. They point to some of the positive steps the government is taking, but they also point to a number of the failures of the government to take the relevant steps. They say, and I am going to quote directly from some sections of this briefing note provided to me on 17 May 2026 by Mr Thewlis:

> This is potentially the biggest change to event-related legislation in Victoria in over two decades.

> The Bill contains many other matters – building insurance, flood-prone –

et cetera, et cetera –

> which may be time-sensitive. We are not asking that the … Bill be blocked. We are asking that the PoPE provisions be amended so that they genuinely improve event safety and reduce unnecessary burden.

Regulatory burden, I think, is what he is saying. He goes on:

> **THE CORE PROBLEM**
>
> The Government says the Bill addresses uncertainty, inconsistency, duplication and late-stage approval risk. Those are the right problems to identify. They are the problems the Event Industry has been raising for many years.
>
> The current PoPE regime has a number of fundamental problems. This Bill – the first major rewrite of PoPE legislation in over two decades – was the opportunity to fix them. Instead, it embeds two of the most fundamental problems further into the Act, potentially locking them in for another generation.

I think this is very instructive, and the evidence provided to that state upper house inquiry, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry in the last Parliament, actually looked at a lot of these issues and made serious recommendations. The government have not understood what is needed here, they have not understood the events industry and they have not understood how it needs to be looked at within the bureaucracy. There is a lack of focus within the bureaucracy on the events sector, and that is a mistake culturally for the state, but it is also a mistake economically. It means that many important events that could proceed and that could actually provide significant economic outcomes for the state do not.

The first is the building surveyor sign-off over the entirety of events. Mr Thewlis said:

> There is no issue with building surveyors assessing buildings and structures at events. That is their area of expertise and their role there is welcome and appropriate. The problem is that a PoPE permit covers not just the structures, but the entirety of … an event – the "place" – including … operational, safety, crowd, traffic and emergency management …

And of course he is right.

> This gives a single building surveyor effective sign-off over an entire event, including many matters well outside building surveying training and experience. These same matters are already … assessed – often more comprehensively – through council event permits and other approval processes.
>
> The Bill had the opportunity to separate structures from outdoor event places. It chose not to. It created a new "place of public entertainment permit" that is still applied for to, and decided by, a building surveyor.

I think his point is well made. Mr Thewlis said:

> **2. NO WORKABLE APPEAL OR REVIEW PROCESS**
>
> The current PoPE system has no practical appeal process for event organisers. The Building Appeals Board is a building sector body that operates on building sector timelines. Event builds may take only a day or a week. That a right of appeal … cannot be exercised before the event opens is not a real remedy.
>
> This problem has been raised repeatedly – and was specifically highlighted in the Government's own briefing on this Bill, with reference to the cancellation of the Esoteric Festival where there was no real way to challenge the ruling of the Municipal Building Surveyor.
>
> DTP's verbal advice on 14 May 2026 confirmed that the standard building appeal process would apply under the new system. The legislation was rewritten and yet the same fundamental flaw was left in place.
>
> These are not problems that can be fixed … through Regulations. They are fundamental to the legislative architecture. If they are not addressed in the Act now, they will be embedded in the new framework from day one.

I think he has nailed it in two clear points. That is partially why I am giving reference directly to some of his statements.

> **THREE YEARS OF REVIEW – AND NO POLICY OUTLINE**
>
> A review of event approvals – including PoPE – was announced in 2023. That review has involved … government departments over … three years. Yet the Event Industry does not have a single piece of paper outlining what the new PoPE regime will look like.
>
> The Bill creates a broad enabling framework and leaves the practical detail to future Regulations and Ministerial guidelines.
>
> The Explanatory Memorandum confirms this, stating the implementation will require a large number of matters to be prescribed in subordinate legislation.
>
> Verbal advice from DTP on 14 May 2026 indicated the Regulations are unlikely to be finished until early to mid 2027 – after the November 2026 election.
>
> In the events world, we don't start building an event until we understand the bigger picture of what we are creating and are confident it is viable. This Bill puts the foundations in place before the bigger picture is known.

He said that members are being asked in Parliament:

> … to pass the main legislative architecture before anyone has seen the detail that will determine how the … system will actually work.

He asked for four points to be made – firstly, that the government provide a detailed policy outline. I will do that in the committee stage.

> This should explain: which events and gatherings will require PoPE permits and which will be exempt; what thresholds and criteria will apply; whether open-air events and gatherings can be captured; how duplication with council … permits will be avoided …

He made a number of other serious points, which I will raise in the committee stage. He asks a second thing:

> … **REMOVE OUTDOOR "PLACES" FROM THE BUILDING ACT PoPE FRAMEWORK**
>
> The Building Act should regulate buildings and prescribed temporary structures used for public entertainment. That is where building surveyors have genuine expertise.

That is a fair point. He goes on to say:

> Outdoor event sites – the "places" – should not be treated as building matters. They should be assessed through the council event permit, planning permit and public land approval processes that already exist …

He talks about how:

> This is the single most important structural change. It removes the main source of duplication. It removes building surveyor sign-off over matters outside their expertise …
>
> **This approach is consistent with Option 9.1 in the Government's own 2017 Regulatory Impact Statement for the Building Regulations.**
>
> …
>
> **The 2017 RIS noted that some Municipal Building Surveyors had themselves submitted that they did not have the requisite skills to assess events in open spaces.**

He says that was nine years ago; the issue was deferred, not resolved; the bill appears not to have dealt with that matter at all.

His ask (3) is that if places remain, guardrails are put around them:

> If outdoor places remain in the Bill, the Act must include clear limits on what future Regulations … capture.
>
> The Bill repeals existing Act level limits such as the requirement that limits PoPEs to a place which is enclosed or substantially enclosed; or to which admission can be gained by payment of money or the giving of other consideration …

> The Bill replaces them with open definitions – "prescribed places" …
>
> Without guardrails, future Regulations could require PoPE permits for any public gathering of 50 people or more …

If that is not what the government intends, it should say so.

His ask (4) is to create a fast, practical event appeal process:

> If PoPE remains under the Building Act, the Act must include a practical review mechanism that operates on event timelines.
>
> The planning of most events happens on a vastly shorter timeframe than construction projects. With a community event with a lot of community stallholders the full detail of structures and other equipment being used at the event may not be known until quite close to the day of the Event.
>
> Similarly, event builds may take only a day or on a large event up to a week.

Some disputes arise and there is a need for appeal or some review. It should be available on the same day or within 24 hours.

> For planning … disputes, five business days may be appropriate.
>
> The review panel should include event expertise – not only building and legal …
>
> The key principle: the review … must operate in event time, not construction industry time.

He points to a series of legitimate consultation concerns, and he explains why this matters to the events sector. It is a big sector with many, many thousands of people employed. Our amendments seek to deal with this. We will have more to say about some of the other aspects. We understand that other parties may have amendments, and I am not foreshadowing the detail of those. I will let them talk to those, and we can discuss those either when the bill is in committee or later, but we are aware of those. Ours focus on these other matters directly around the community-based organisation, the prescribed temporary structures and the matters that assist with a review panel.

These are thoughtful clauses that we have put together. They are not attempting to create World War III or trouble; they are actually trying to help an important sector in the economy, in our state, to actually function more effectively – lower cost, more events, more employment, more community activity, and all of that through some simple, thoughtful amendments. I am thankful to Mr Thewlis and others in the events sector who have talked to me and to David Southwick in particular and to those who have put forward these sensible and practical ideas. We will put those to the chamber later and seek support.

Sitting suspended 6:30 pm until 7:30 pm.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:31): I rise today to speak on behalf of my Greens colleagues with respect to the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. The Greens, I will state from the outset, will be supporting this bill. There are a lot of different elements to this piece of legislation, and I will not go over every single one of them, but there are a few changes that I would like to focus on. The first is the setting up of the framework for decennial insurance for apartment buildings over four storeys as an alternative to the current developer bond scheme. Anything that adds protections for apartment owners from defective works and dodgy builders is a good thing; I will just state that from the outset. Adding this first-resort, no-fault type of insurance will make it easier for owners corporations to make a claim for rectification without having to deal with long, difficult battles around fault and responsibility. We would have preferred, I will state, though, that this insurance be managed and run through the state in the same way that the first-resort home warranty scheme covers other residential buildings in the state, and we would encourage the government to consider this in the future. But for the time being, providing the cover to apartment owners in this way is a good thing, and it is an important element of this bill.

Further, I understand there are also some changes within this legislation to be made around designation of flood-prone areas. I think the important thing here to note is that as climate change–induced flooding

events become more commonplace, we need to ensure that there is centralisation effectively of the flood-mapping processes that allows for more timely decisions and clearer provision of information to people. Flood declarations have very real-world implications for people, and for those that already live in flood-prone areas and for those who might want to live in those areas or in areas that are yet to be designated in this way – flood prone – we need to make sure that people have certainty and have clarity on how these processes work. I specifically want to put on record my acknowledgement both of constituents within my patch but particularly of lower house colleagues that have been in recent years impacted by changes with respect to flood mapping and what that has meant for their material circumstances and for any financial decisions that they may be making with respect to, for example, buying a home or to insurance costs that they may have to pay. I just want to put that on record for the impacts that they have been facing.

Moving on, though, I now turn to the government's later addition to this bill, as it exited the Assembly – of the extension of the temporary tax concession for off-the-plan strata dwellings for another six months. This is now the third time that this house has been asked to vote on the same tax concession in less than two years. We were told in 2024 that this concession was both temporary and targeted. We now know that it has been neither of those things. Is it too cynical perhaps to suggest that this Labor government – which is, let us face it, desperate for some good news – keeps on extending this temporary concession for just a few months each time just so that it can put out more media releases and spin on the same housing policy? I just do not believe the hype. Really it appears to be that this is the same old, tired housing policy from a government that has run out of ideas to help renters and first home buyers. But we also know that this particular tax concession, in the way it has been put forward, is not targeted. As has been well reported over the last 12 months, this policy, we were told, would help those struggling to afford a modest first apartment, but it has instead been hijacked by billionaires and investors buying luxury city pads priced at $20 million or more, handing them tax concessions of up to a million dollars they neither asked for nor needed.

You have to hand it to this Labor government for its lateral thinking, because I never would have thought that, during a housing crisis where there are literally zero affordable homes in Victoria right now for a single parent on Centrelink payments, where there is a public housing waitlist with over 120,000 people on it and growing, where renters receive notices of annual rent increases of sometimes 20 per cent or more and where rough sleeping is at record levels and homelessness services are being overwhelmed, this Labor government could look at all of this and still think, 'Won't somebody think of the billionaires? Why should they have to pay their fair share of stamp duty on their multimillion-dollar city apartments?' – homes that they will not even live in most of the time.

As a result, the state Labor government has actually brought in a tax policy on housing that on one hand demands that Victorian first home buyers buying a modest weatherboard in the burbs at a bit over 750K pay their full share of stamp duty, but on the other hand hands out stamp duty tax concessions of up to a million dollars to billionaire property investors buying a luxury city penthouse off the plan. In response to this injustice, this Labor government parrots the same kind of drip-down economics talking points that we see straight from the Trump administration: by handing millions in tax concessions to the 1 per cent – the billionaires, the wealthiest investors – and making them even more profit, this may somehow lead to them leaving behind some crumbs of cost-of-living support for the tens of thousands of people elsewhere in our community who really need it. As I said earlier, there is not one home classified as affordable in Victoria right now for a single parent on Centrelink payments. I ask: does Labor truly expect anyone to believe that the best way to fix this is by giving stamp duty concessions to billionaire investors?

The Greens have tried several times to amend this particular element of legislation, to direct the stamp duty tax concessions to those who really need them: first home buyers and people buying family homes. We have a more modest amendment this time, and I ask that that now be circulated. The Greens amendment we introduce this time around is modest. We hope it is sufficiently modest that it may gain support from across the chamber. I have outlined in my contribution some of the much

broader problems that my colleagues and I have with the current tax concession settings here. This particular amendment is straightforward. It is quite self-explanatory. It makes the extended stamp duty concession only available to people who will be using the dwelling as their principal place of residence – that is, homes for people to live in, rather than homes being used as financial assets for property investors, corporations or property trusts. I say that because the Greens stand for homes for Victorians to live in, not people hoarding apartments and not luxury penthouses being used as financial assets at the Victorian taxpayer's expense. With those brief comments all being noted, I commend the bill to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (19:38): I too will make a brief contribution on this legislation. I am pleased to speak on the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. Obviously the bill addresses a number of changes that have already been referred to around building. I do want to focus my contribution on the changes that have been made to the emergency services and volunteers levy. The operation of the levy has evolved as a result of the government and MPs listening to the community and listening to CFA and SES members, and the changes do reflect the feedback. I want to firstly make it clear that the emergency services and volunteers levy is an integral part of delivering funding to our emergency services organisations, but it only forms part of the revenue we invest in protecting Victorians during emergencies. In this past budget the government recorded $1.24 billion more spent on emergency services than was collected through the emergency services and volunteers levy, and that has also contributed to funding for a more inclusive and stronger CFA – building more stations, investing in the fleet and supporting SES units as well.

In relation to volunteers, these investments are all aimed at supporting our emergency services volunteers, and we are also recognising their hard work through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund rebate for active Country Fire Authority and VICSES volunteers. This means that unlike with the previous fire services levy, eligible volunteers do not pay a levy on their primary place of residence, farmland or single farm enterprise. This exemption was put in place following feedback and suggestions from CFA volunteers. I remember a while back I was a CFA volunteer, and there was discussion about that too.

The Treasurer has announced that the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund variable rates will be frozen for all Victorians, but for farmers this means that the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund variable rate is frozen at the 2024 rate of 28.7 cents per $1000 of the capital improved value. That is a local government rating system, the CIV. This rate is the same as the fire services levy. We have also increased the cap on capital improved value of land for farmers from $5 million to $10 million. This means any farmers who are eligible volunteers are entitled to a full rebate for farms worth up to $10 million. For anything above $10 million their rate is capped at the 2024 rate. So the take-home here is that effectively this means farmers pay the same or less as under the old fire services property levy.

Jess Wilson's Liberals and Danny O'Brien's Nationals have a plan to cut $40 billion from services Victorians rely on. This includes them repeatedly stating that they will scrap the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. This means fewer trucks, fewer stations and no volunteer rebate. Their cuts plan will slash brigade support officers and incident controllers. When the Liberals and Nationals were last in government they cut the CFA. A former Nationals emergency services minister said no government department can be exempt from budget cuts. If given the chance, they will do it again.

This bill makes a number of changes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund that are reflective of feedback and that make more sense. The bill makes changes in the land tax space as well. I will conclude my remarks there and just keep it as brief as I have.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:44): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate about the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. There are a couple of elements. I know there have been quite a few issues that have been talked about, because this bill does cover a number of different factors, but there are two that I want to speak to. The

first is the change where the bill gives the Minister for Housing and Building power to designate flood-prone areas, creating a parallel to the existing power to declare bushfire-prone areas. Designated areas will be land with a 1 per cent or higher probability of annual flooding. New buildings in designated areas will be subject to additional construction standards, and the designation power interacts with Melbourne Water's existing flood overlay responsibilities under planning law. But it does have a bigger impact. I have a particular interest in this because I was part of the flood inquiry. With that, I visited people that were impacted by the floods right across northern Victoria – this was back in 2022 – and I could see the consequences of development in flood-prone areas. Certainly this power is intended to provide a centralised, state-based method for declaring that areas of land are flood prone.

Whilst we are supportive of this bill and we are putting forward amendments, I just want to flag that I am a bit hesitant about this whole statewide, state-based approach and giving so much power to the minister. I know in the flood inquiry part of our recommendations were to better support local councils and catchment management authorities (CMA) to be able to implement some of those changes into the planning scheme, and it is important for people to be aware of where they are building and what may happen. But it is just as important to get the balance right. We do need to encourage housing development, but we do not want housing development in areas that are going to be a constant issue, because that would just increase people's insurance and make it very difficult. But I know a lot of these flood plains are very attractive to developers because they are cleared and it can be easier for them to actually develop. A lot of developments now have roads that are used as part of the drainage system, and it can be a surprise to people that have bought in a new housing estate to suddenly find they cannot actually exit because the roads are flooded at the time.

It is important that the government do give some insight, because they were not able to provide any indication of the assessment that they undertook to do this. Where is the data coming from? If it is not reliable, what is the process for reviewing that data? As I reached out to different people to talk through some of the concerns that I had with this bill, I was advised that the state has more capacity than local councils. Some local councils do not have the planners in place to be able to cope, and there has been a big backlog and there have been quite big delays with actually getting that flood study data into the planning scheme. Unless it is in there, you cannot take that into account when a council is considering whether or not building can take place.

I have spoken to organisations like the Master Builders Association of Victoria, who held an event recently in Bendigo. There were a number of builders there. I heard some of the challenges they are facing with local councils and significant delays with very straightforward application processes. With some of them, just the permits required for things can cost more than the actual work itself, so there are definitely challenges that need to be addressed, and I guess this element is part of that. But I am still concerned about a Melbourne-based ministerial office making broad plans across the state. It is important that if it is not right there is an avenue for people, councils and CMAs to provide that feedback and ensure that there is transparency when it comes to flood overlays and how often this information is reviewed. I know in Junortoun there have been a number of developments that have been approved very rapidly, but that bigger picture of a number of developments happening at the same time and the impact that that has on the local drainage need to be taken into account, because otherwise it does create a risk of long-term flood exposure for new housing estates. What I have heard as well is that the bushfire overlays have caused additional costs to housing and quite significant delays and uncertainty about how they actually apply, and we certainly do not want to see the same happen with the introduction of these changes.

Another element to this bill that Ms Ermacora referred to is the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and the amendments that are going to be given effect in this bill from the 2025–26 state budget. Reference was made to listening to farmers. I think it is important to call that out, because there was a rally in Bendigo that I attended on Sunday that had farmers and CFA volunteers from right across the state, and certainly there were no Labor MPs in attendance to actually hear from them. We even heard the Treasurer today talking about how farmers will not pay more. I spoke on the phone with farmers

today that have had it calculated, and it looks like they will be paying about $20,000 more with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. So this is putting a lot more pressure on regional areas. It is not a flat rate across the state. This is certainly putting farmers in a very difficult position. Some farms are quite extensive, with numerous different lots, and it certainly does have a big impact.

I was at a CFA meeting just last week with Andrew Lethlean, the Nationals candidate for Bendigo East, and we heard from people that have put in for the rebate on the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund but are not eligible because the property is actually in the name of their partner. These are really practical things. If you are going to say, 'We're going to provide a rebate' – well, it is not actually happening on the ground. It is one thing to defer the pain of increased tax – which I will say is funding services that were previously funded within the state budget, so this is another tax grab. The government have introduced I think about 67 new taxes or increased charges since they have been in government. But that is probably because they have got a debt that is fast approaching $200 billion a day – sorry, not a day. Oh, man, if that was the case! But yes, that is what we are headed towards.

When it comes to interest on that debt, that is significant. A couple of years ago I was raising concerns at the time that it was $15 million a day in interest that we were paying on that debt, but we are now paying over $24 million a day. By the end of the forward estimates, it will be about $32 million in interest every day – just paying the interest, not actually paying for any infrastructure or any service improvements in our state, which we so desperately need, particularly in regional Victoria. When you look at the new infrastructure spending that is allocated from the state budget under Labor to regional Victoria, it is about 12 per cent, but 25 per cent of the population call regional Victoria home, so we want to see a much fairer share of funding coming to regional areas.

This bill tinkers at the edges with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. The community right across Victoria have made it very clear it is not enough to defer the pain. They want to see the tax absolutely scrapped, and we have committed to scrapping the tax if we win government in November. I will conclude my remarks here.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (19:53): I am pleased to rise to speak on this legislation that has got a lot of words in its title, the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026, a bill that will make some important changes to the building system and make some improvements to the tax law. I was going to go through, in a bit of detail, some of the issues, but I thought it probably best to start where Mrs Broad concluded, and that is, yet again, the Liberal Party and the National Party confirming that it is their intention to cut funding for emergency services in the state of Victoria. When you get up and you say you are going to scrap the tax, what you actually mean is you are going to cut the funding. The one thing that those who put themselves on the line to help their fellow Victorians at times of fire, times of flood and times of storm should know is that the Liberal Party and the National Party are going to cut funding to emergency services in the state of Victoria, because that is just what the previous speaker from the National Party said. When you scrap the tax, it means you cut the funding, because there is no other logical conclusion from the policy position of the Liberal Party and the policy position of the National Party other than that funding for emergency services will be cut by them. If you remove the revenue stream, you have got to remove the spending, particularly in the context of a supposed 10-year economic plan that says that frontline services are going to be cut across a range of other portfolio areas. The only logical conclusion from the policy position that the Liberal Party and the National Party are taking –

Members interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If it is nonsense, as those opposite are interjecting, perhaps they can stand up either in this chamber or outside it and explain how it is possible to scrap a tax and not cut the funding it provides. They cannot. They cannot explain how they could scrap a tax without cutting funding. 'Scrap the tax' means 'cut the funding', and that is all there is to it.

What Labor is doing by investing in our emergency services is making them better prepared for the more intense fire seasons we are having and for the more frequent floods. I do not know if people have caught up on the news today, but we just saw today from the Bureau of Meteorology a warning about the significant, intense and extreme El Niño weather system that is coming for Australia in the coming 12 months. What the scientists are telling us is that our weather systems are becoming more intense and that we are going to experience and expect longer and more severe fire seasons. We have seen in recent years that that is a reality. We have also seen significant flooding across the state of Victoria repeatedly. We saw in January some parts of Victoria experiencing a fire event and a flooding event at the same time. That is how extreme our weather patterns are getting.

The responsible course of action, which is the course of action that this government has initiated, is to ensure that our emergency services are adequately resourced and adequately prepared for the range of emergency situations that we ask them day in, day out to go and confront. That was the position that the Parliament's own committee reached when we examined the 2022 flooding. Under the previous arrangements that existed under the old fire services property levy, the Victoria State Emergency Service, the primary response agency for floods in the state of Victoria, did not get access to funding out of those arrangements – arrangements that the Liberal Party and the National Party say they want to reintroduce. All we can think is that that will mean that those emergency services agencies are going to be left high and dry by the Liberal Party when they hang them out to dry by cutting their funding after they scrap the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. The problem we have is that the Liberal Party and the National Party will not come clean. They will not come clean with the community, and they will not tell the truth, which is that their policy to scrap the tax is a policy to cut the funds, and the CFA and the SES are going to bear the brunt of the Liberal and National cuts that are coming.

There was a slight issue with the clock, but I am advised I have still got 8 minutes to go, and perhaps that gives me a good opportunity to talk about other things in the bill. I would not mind just talking about the Liberal and National cuts to emergency services that are coming, because we know that they are. Members opposite continue to exhort by way of interjection that that is not their plan, yet they refuse to stand up and say how they are going to scrap a tax and not cut the funds and not cut the programs and not cancel the orders for new CFA trucks, for example, that this fund is helping to deliver. I think if the National Party and the Liberal Party want to be taken seriously when it comes to emergency services, instead of just propagating mistruths they could actually start articulating a clear policy position that comes clean with the Victorian community. They will not because they cannot, because they know that the only possible answer that they can give is that services will be cut, that new stations will not get built and that new trucks will not get ordered, because that is what the Liberal and National parties' policy on emergency services will deliver.

The bill does a range of other things in addition to making some amendments to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. It makes a series of amendments across the building system, really seeking to improve on and provide reforms, in addition to the existing suite of reforms that this government has made, to ensure the building system itself is protecting the interests of Victorian consumers and delivering the safe, high-quality and affordable homes that Victorians deserve. One of the other things that we are doing is ensuring that for those builders who are doing the right thing we are easing the administrative burden on them so they can continue building. We are improving the enforcement powers, for example, for the new Building and Plumbing Commission, and introducing a decennial insurance product for apartment buildings of four storeys or more.

We know that now, when many choose to buy into the apartment market, there are, sadly, fewer protections if costly building defects arise. We know, particularly in the Southern Metropolitan Region, across my part of Melbourne, that there are increasingly people choosing to live in apartment buildings. This bill delivers additional protections for them and makes sure that the new insurance product for apartment buildings of four storeys or more will provide additional security. It will provide additional peace of mind for those who are increasingly choosing to live in these types of homes. While we are introducing the developer bond scheme next year as an interim measure, we would

ultimately like to ensure that apartment owners have the same protections as traditional home owners. The decennial insurance scheme for apartments, once it is operational, will be an alternative for developers who do not want to use the developer bond scheme and will provide better protection for consumers.

We have also heard loud and clear from industry that the proposed minimum financial requirements for builders who want to undertake work in Victoria, which were released for consultation in February, need more lead time if they are to operate as intended. There is therefore another provision in the bill that allows the Building and Plumbing Commission to continue to assess builders' financial stability in a way that maintains the status quo, with a view to a transition to the more stringent model, which is currently prescribed in legislation, over a period of two years. There are a number of really important improvements this bill makes, and I commend it to the house.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (20:04): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. We are happy to support the reforms to increase consumer protections in relation to the housing system, and we are very pleased to see the changes to the existing Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. We do have issues around the reforms to the place-of-public-entertainment (POPE) permit scheme after consulting with various stakeholders in the festivals and events space. I understand this may be subject to a possible house amendment, but unfortunately this has not been circulated in a timely manner such that we can actually see the nature of it, so I am going to waffle on regardless, if I may. The grand prix and other well-publicised, well-funded big events make up a small proportion of the festivals and events held in this state. The vast majority of the economic activity and social benefits derived from events actually comes from more modest events. Community events, music festivals, conferences, expos, brand activations in metropolitan areas and across the regions all contribute to the thriving events ecosystem in this state. While stakeholders have acknowledged that the current POPE scheme has fundamental problems, they have real concerns that the reforms in the bill not only fail to improve event safety and reduce unnecessary burden but will be the death knell for the event sector in Victoria, which is still reeling from the impacts of the COVID lockdowns.

Looking at the role of building surveyors in the place-of-public-entertainment scheme, there is no issue with building surveyors assessing buildings and structures at events. That is what they are qualified to do. They are not necessarily, and very often are not, qualified to sign off on an entire event site – the place – including operational questions, safety, crowd traffic and emergency management matters. Under the current place-of-public-entertainment permit scheme, community festivals with less than 5000 people are exempted from the process. For example, if I have an event in a park – let us say a 420 celebration of cannabis event with just a hundred guests and 60 police and a couple of dogs – I will not be required to have a building surveyor sign off on my marquee or stage.

The reforms in this bill potentially expand the POPE permit scheme to include these smaller events. However, it is hard to know what the scheme will look like as 'place of public entertainment' and 'public entertainment' are not defined in the legislation. While the minister in their second-reading speech assured us that the reforms would enable 'a risk-based framework, supporting proportionate regulation and giving event organisers and regulators certainty and clarity for … approvals under the Building Act', it is hard for event organisers and regulators to have certainty and clarity when, for example, the definitions of 'place of public entertainment' and 'public entertainment' will be detailed in subsequent building regulations. These regulations will not be developed until some later date, most likely in the next Parliament, and who knows what that will look like then.

There are also binding guidelines that must be considered when assessing permit applications, and they include prescribed conditions that may be imposed by the prescribed approver. Again, we have no idea what this will look like in reality, but we are being asked to again take it on faith, and that is a commodity that is running thin with this government. We are left with no idea about what types of events or places will be impacted by the new regulations and require sign off by a building surveyor. Under these reforms it is possible that community gatherings, Anzac Day services, community

markets, school fetes and local festivals could all be pulled into a building permit process which is really designed for buildings, not events.

Another concern is the lack of a practical and timely appeal process for event organisers. Obviously events run on a very different timescale to the building sector, and a right of appeal that cannot be exercised before an event opens does not really work. This is what happened with the Esoteric Festival, which had no way of challenging the ruling of a municipal building surveyor in time and resulted in the festival being cancelled hours before it was due to commence, leaving ticketholders, stallholders and artists all high and dry. We do not believe this can be fixed in subordinate legislation at a later date, and once again we know who will be writing those regulations.

In our opinion the amendments moved by the opposition are modest and practical changes, and we will weigh those up in the context of the government's proposed house amendment, should we be so privileged as to see it. Many smaller events report that POPE compliance can cost up to 20 per cent of their total budget, making some events unviable. Long-running community festivals have been cancelled because of the complexity and cost of POPE compliance. As I said earlier, stakeholders identified issues with the current POPE legislation, and there is scope in these amendments to fix these issues. Victoria's event industry contributes billions of dollars to the state economy and employs tens of thousands of Victorians, so we really need to get this right, and this bill, as written with regard to POPE, does not.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (20:10): I want to rise to respond to some of the things that have been said by members of the government today. The first thing is that Ms Ermacora spoke about how the changes in the emergency services tax have been reflective of feedback. When I think about that, I wonder where their feedback is coming from and whether it is from the echo chamber or whether it is from the people that it actually affects, because I remember the day it passed. I remember that day because out on the steps of Parliament there were thousands of farmers. There were thousands. You can google it. I know you were not there, but you can google it. There were thousands of farmers, there were thousands of career firefighters and there were thousands of volunteer firefighters, and the feedback that they were giving was that this was a tax that they rejected, that they could not afford. That is the reality, and it is the truth of the matter. Then on Sunday there was another rally in Bendigo – again, thousands of people. Some came in and even spoke to my colleague Mrs Broad. They had calculated their bills, and they are increasing by up to $20,000. I am not saying that is the cap. That was the reality of what those people had calculated. So the feedback that these people are giving is that they reject this tax.

Another thing Ms Ermacora said was that this tax only reflects part of what we invest in Victoria when we face emergencies. That is interesting, because there are so many CFA trucks that still do not have air conditioning. FRV have not had a pay rise in six years, yet they continue to turn out. I was at a fire station just this week, and they were talking about the investment that has been made into their fire trucks. It was a new perspective and a good one. They said, 'This isn't a matter, when we're talking about the lack of air conditioning in our trucks, of us being sooks and our own comfort.' What they said was, 'You know when you're in a car in the morning and it's freezing cold, or it's fogging up because it's boiling hot, the first thing you've got to do as a matter of safety, so you can see out that windscreen, is turn on the air conditioning to make sure it de-fogs.' It is something as simple as that. They said, 'You have no idea what it is like when you're heading into a fire. You're boiling hot. Yes, it's uncomfortable, but it's bearable. But when you're heading into a fire and because of the lack of air conditioning you cannot see, you're in a dangerous situation that has all of a sudden escalated.'

They also said that fire trucks need air conditioning because they are not just a vehicle to get from one place to another; they are a safe haven and a place of refuge. One of these firefighters spoke to me about a little girl that had been pulled out of a house fire absolutely dehydrated, boiling hot and distraught, and sitting in that air-conditioned cab for them was the biggest relief that they could ever imagine. I think it is worth knowing about this because, yes, we make decisions in here, but we are not the ones in the trucks going out and fighting these fires and putting our lives on the line. This

particular firefighter spoke about a place of refuge. When people are pulled out of buildings that have been burning, they go and they sit in an air-conditioned truck. He also spoke about when one of his colleagues was having a major anxiety attack because it was the first time that somebody had died under their watch, and that was a place of refuge and a place of comfort. These basic things are not getting funded in Victoria, and that is the reality. During the Dargo fires earlier this year, a good friend of mine from Sale had spent all day up in Dargo fighting these fires in a truck that did not even have the basics. It could not be that place of refuge. He was so sick the next day, so spent. These are the things that we cannot dismiss. So our plan is absolutely not to cut the CFA or to cut the services that people rely on.

I want to talk about the track record of the people that are across the chamber giving financial advice. It is the Labor government –

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: I love how they get all excited. But let me just tell you some facts. It is this government that has racked up more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined – fact.

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: Well, I think a good thing to do is sometimes just hold up a mirror, because you have been dishing out the advice, so I am just going to reflect some things back. There is more debt. Every child born in this state inherits their own little chunk of debt, about $22,000 a person. If we did not have this exorbitant bill of interest of more than $1 million an hour, I tell you what, we could upgrade some trucks. We could put in some air conditioning, we could get some new ones and we could pay our firefighters. I am wondering where the feedback that you are getting comes from.

I particularly, though, wanted to talk about those things and also the scare tactics. When you were talking about scare tactics and how the Liberal government is always implementing scare tactics, I looked up 'projection'. Let me read it to you: 'When somebody accuses you of the exact behaviour they are guilty of, it is primarily called projection.' This is a bit of interesting psychology about those opposite. 'It acts as a defence mechanism where a person subconsciously avoids their own flaws by attributing them to someone else.' So I am going to say this: it is you guys that have been in government for over a decade. It is the Labor government that have caused this monumental mess. It is the Labor government that have mismanaged the budget so much that they have had to put in this emergency services and volunteer levy that is calculated on the value of the land, not the income, which is going to be devastating for farmers once all of –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: I am going to just pick up on what the Treasurer just said. She said, 'When they own $50 million farms.' This is exactly the issue. You would think that the Treasurer would know this, coming from a rural and regional area. A lot of farmers, yes, in terms of land, would be considered quite wealthy. In terms of income and cash turnover they are extremely tight. I am glad the Treasurer brought this up, because the week that the government brought in the emergency services levy through the lower house, Victoria was in one of the most critical situations in terms of drought. That week I was in Inverloch.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: Seriously, Treasurer, I know that you like to interject and minimise people's pain and suffering, but you brought it up. These are the facts. I was in Inverloch, and there was not even enough water for them to hose down their sheds twice per day.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: You can respond to this if you want, Ms Shing, because the people that are suffering are in your electorate, and you should be standing up for them.

Harriet Shing: Don't point, mate.

Renee HEATH: Well, you just pointed. What is going on here is that the drought was so bad that these farmers were in tears, literally in tears. There were about 50 of them saying, 'We do not know how we can make it through. We've always had feed. We've always had people from other areas to help us. We've got none of that.'

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: What was that, sorry?

Jaclyn Symes: Drought relief that you would not be able to afford if you cut the ESVF.

Renee HEATH: Wow. That is unbelievable. These people were broken. Farmers have been on the farm generation after generation after generation, and then, do you know what, they brought in the emergency services levy and they just about broke the spirit of the people that feed us. And all we can hear from the Treasurer just shows her complete disconnect from the plight of the people that feed us, the people that build the homes –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: All she says is, 'Oh, if they have a $50 million property, if that's the cost of the land they should then be able to cop whatever we feel like throwing at them.' Unbelievable. Anyway, I think the reaction of those opposite has really said enough. It has shocked me, and I did not think I could be shocked by them after they –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: Anyway. The rudeness and the disregard from those opposite does not show any respect to the people that are suffering – the people that serve our state, feed our state and do everything to build it. I am glad that some people here are on five times the average wage in the state of Victoria and that because of that they have become so out of touch with the plight of these people. But I want to say that if you were looking for feedback, you would have turned up on the steps of Parliament. If you were far too busy then, you could have turned up in Bendigo on the weekend, because there are people hurting, and what they do not need when they are being crushed by the burden of tax in this state is people that are on probably 400K a year telling them to suck it up. I will leave it there.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (20:22): I will make a few remarks in relation to the bill. I will probably not retaliate to a lot of the material that Dr Heath gave, because frankly she is continuing to use information that suits her narrative without relying on the facts. I do not particularly want to get into a tussle, because if she does not believe facts then I do not think me repeating them to her again will actually have much value.

What I am going to do is focus on the people that are going to benefit from this bill and the reason that we are doing it, rather than play political games. What this bill does is deliver on the government's commitments announced in the 2025–26 budget update and the 2026–27 budget, including tax relief for more Victorians, and of course we are doing this whilst we have just released our budget, which is all about making life easier, safer and more affordable for every Victorian. The legislation will make a range of amendments to various taxation acts to provide tax relief to community housing organisations, expand the eligibility for our nation-leading emergency services and volunteers rebate scheme and make it easier to get land tax exemptions for homes that are under construction or renovation.

At the outset speakers will note that this is a building legislation and Treasury legislation bill. I appreciate the housing and building ministers, both current and former, allowing me as Treasurer to put these tax measures in this bill. There was no need for a standalone tax bill this year, given that there were no new taxes again for the second year, and there are some small amendments that really did fit into this bill quite well. So for the benefit of the chamber and the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, having one piece of legislation is the way that I was happy to proceed with this.

The minor administrative amendments to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund are certainly based on feedback, because quite often somebody will have a particular situation where they write to me about the application of the fund and the application of the rebate, and in some of those measures I have been able to provide exemptions or make provision for people who write to me on an individual basis, but when you see that you can make that a universal fix, that is when you do respond to the feedback that you have given, and that is what you will see in this bill today. At the outset, we know that the ESVF is a sustainable funding model for Victoria's vital emergency services. We talk about it quite a bit in this chamber.

I do want to put a few things on the record. The ESVF is not the only source of income for emergency services. The government does consistently provide more funding than what is collected through the levy. For example, the budget papers show that in 2025–26 there was $1.24 billion more spent on emergency services than was collected through the ESVF. This is just an indication of the expenditure and level of resourcing that it takes to ensure that you have a world-class, well-resourced emergency services system here in the state of Victoria. Much of that is a result of being one of the most fire-prone places and a recipient of the most severe weather events in the world. We know that our firies and our SES volunteers in particular are often stretched in relation to responding to the ever-increasing and more severe events that afflict our state.

As I said, in terms of the additional funding each and every year, you can see the same with the forecasts in the budget that was released. In 2026–27 the forecast emergency management budget is $1.982 billion, and the Forest Fire Management Victoria emergency management output budget is $445.7 million. $1.609 billion is expected to be collected through the levy. So you can see the expenditure for emergency services and how it is so important to have the ESVF to supplement that expenditure for sustainability but also to ensure that you can do so much, because you are wanting not only to equip your emergency services with the resources and the personnel that they need but, when things happen, to make sure that you are able to respond with support for recovery, whether it is drought, whether it is fire or whether it is flood, and ensure that you have a well-resourced emergency services system in recovery is just as important as it is in relation to equipment and preparedness.

There are no changes to the ESVF variable rate for 2026–27 again, and I thank other speakers for their contributions mentioning that for farmers the variable rate for primary production land stays exactly the same as it was under the former fire services property levy. Because of the rebate that we have introduced that can be applied for if you are an eligible volunteer, which you can acquit against your primary place of residence or a farm capped at $10 million of capital improved value, what that actually means is that under the ESVF, if you are a farmer and you are a volunteer, you are paying less or nothing compared to what you were paying under the former FSPL.

The bill does seek to delay the changes for investment properties until the date declared by the Treasurer, providing councils with time to test and finalise the information-sharing arrangements. The bill also, again based on feedback that we have received from the community housing sector, provides a 50 per cent reduction on the fixed charge applied to land owned or managed by community housing, in recognition of the important role of community housing organisations in providing a home for Victorians in need. We are also seeking to broaden the existing ESVF levy exemption for Homes Victoria from just public housing to all land owned by them. The bill also makes it easier to apply for a volunteer rebate, including for those volunteers who hold a resident right in a retirement village. This was literally from the example of a CFA volunteer who wrote to me in relation to his liability for the ESVF through his status as a resident in a retirement village. I fixed it for him, but we are making sure

that we can fix it for everyone. I have ensured that we have approved his rebate and ensured that others in a similar situation can just access the normal process.

I want to touch on the land tax exemption changes. We want to make it easier to get land tax exemptions on homes that are being built or under construction, again, based on feedback and experiences of when people bring matters to my attention, rather than using an ex gratia situation to fix this for this cohort of people. Effectively, the general principle is that if you are building or renovating a home that you intend to live in and that you are not drawing a profit from, you should not be liable for land tax. This amendment seeks to ensure the legislation effectively is operating as intended.

We are doing it by updating the 'work starts' date to make it more representative of when construction starts and to ensure that the planning or the acquisition of building permits does not get in the way of a person's exemption. We are also simplifying the timing of the qualifying occupation date to be six months after construction or renovation finishes, and this will, importantly, apply whether construction takes more or less than four years. It is just about fairness, ensuring that in situations where significant time elapses between getting your building permit and starting construction, your exemption covers the actual build. To make it fairer for families, we are also seeking to ensure that home owners whose construction takes place within a single calendar year can access the exemption on the same basis as owners with longer construction periods. This means that if your renovation lasts less than a year, you will be exempt from land tax. We are also making it easier to get an exemption from land tax when you are constructing or moving from one house to another. Those residents will be able to obtain up to two years of exemption on both properties as long as they are not receiving a profit from either of those properties. As I said, this is about fairness, ensuring that the system works as intended and making sure that there is no disadvantage for those that are not moving from a principal place of residence.

Lastly, the bill does seek to extend the temporary off-the-plan concession for another six months. The current concession expires in October 2026, and the legislation extends that out to April next year. The move responds to industry feedback. We are concerned that the interest rates will cause a slowdown in some of the developments getting underway, and we are wanting to continue to incentivise the market. I note some of the comments that Mr Puglielli has made in relation to his concerns about the beneficiaries of this tax. Mr Puglielli, I can assure you this exemption from tax is about generating construction. It is about building more homes. I know we had a conversation last time that the bill was in, and I had some sympathies for the observation that it can benefit people at the top end. One thing that has been borne out in the experience so far is that the average saving for the applications received in the 2024–25 period was $25,000, so that is not an indication that it is multimillion-dollar properties that are benefiting from this but more those around the $600,000 mark.

I am very conscious of continuing to keep an eye on this. I will get new data at the end of this financial year. With this particular exemption and the way it is set up, the fact that I have replicated it for another six months means that it gives me more time to have a look at it. If we were wanting to do something similar again, looking at potential caps and the like is something that I am very open to and something that I will be able to provide more information about when I get more of the data. But at this point in time we still want to generate activity in the building industry. The building industry said this is working for them. Yes, it is a temporary measure. We want it to be popular. I want to send a message: 'It'll be really good. You've got six months to access it.' I am looking at what that might look like afterwards. It may not exist in six months – use it or lose it – or if it is working really well, we can look at some of those changes and particularly the issue that you have raised. I take your point in terms of wanting to benefit those that are living in homes, and there is policy merit for those discussions, but this is really about generating construction, building more, adding to supply and having a benefit in relation to having more choice out there in the market. I am sure we can have a bit more of a conversation in committee. I do thank you for your thoughtful contributions. I understand where you are coming from. I do not disagree entirely, but we will not be supporting your amendment for the reasons that I outlined. I commend the bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:34): I also would like to speak on this bill briefly. The tax components of this bill whereby the government is putting in new rebates and exemptions are effectively a small tax cut. Therefore the Libertarian Party will be supporting this. I am one that will support a tax cut anywhere, for any reason, at any time. However, I do take issue with some of the things said by the government on this. Mr Batchelor said earlier in response to Dr Heath that if you are going to cut taxes, won't you have to cut services as well? I might point out two ways that you can deal with that. The first is what the government does already, and that is to sell more bonds – the government is racking up bond sales like there is no tomorrow. I note that the last time the Treasurer went to New York to meet these ratings agencies, like S&P and Moody's, she copped a lot of criticism from the opposition and lots of other people, but I did not criticise the Treasurer. In fact I would be happy if the Treasurer went to New York every week to maintain our credit rating.

A member interjected.

David LIMBRICK: I do not mind. If she wants to go to New York every week to maintain our credit rating, I will support that, because if our credit rating gets downgraded, this state is in deep trouble. With the amount of debt that we have at the moment, with the Treasury Corporation's bond portfolio rollovers that will happen soon, if that credit rating gets downgraded – I think the opposition was talking about figures like $1 million an hour in interest. I do not know what it is at the moment. But whatever it is, if we get a credit rating downgrade, it is going to be a lot more than that, so it is absolutely essential.

The other thing implicit in what Mr Batchelor was saying – if you cut taxes, then you have to cut services – is that implies that our government is 100 per cent efficient and there is no waste whatsoever that can be removed. We know for a fact that this government wastes money. I mean, let us bring up some minor examples: $70,000 for a plaque. I mean, are we serious here? $589 million –

David Davis: There were two plaques.

David LIMBRICK: Two plaques – I went and saw it myself. $589 million for Commonwealth Games that never existed. I do not know the number, lots of people are saying $15 billion – the government disputes that, maybe they can tell us what the number is – but billions of dollars flooding to organised crime through corruption on our building sites. There is waste left, right and centre that could be removed. This government is not taking serious action to remove waste. We are not raising taxes in this bill, but the idea that you cannot cut taxes while leaving services as they are is ridiculous. That implies 100 per cent efficiency of government, which not a person in this state believes, including all the members of the government. No-one in the government believes that they are fully efficient and that there is no waste to get rid of.

People talk about our state's debt. One thing that is quite remarkable about the state's debt – I have been doing a lot of constituent engagement recently, going around to supermarkets and events and lots of different things. One thing that has really surprised me is that average everyday people are worried about state debt. Now, you think of state debt as something a bit removed from the everyday person, something that only people who care about economics and politics think about. But let me tell you, there are a lot of people in this state who understand that we are too far in hock, and they are worried about who is going to pay that off. Of course it is going to be their children and their grandchildren and whoever else until such time as we eventually pay it off.

We should be worried about how many bonds we are selling at the moment through Treasury Corporation. Treasury Corporation do a good job at managing the debt portfolio. They made some really smart decisions during the pandemic. They issued very long term bonds at very low interest rates, which was a smart decision, but that was only a small portion of the portfolio. There are going to be a lot more that are going to roll over soon. The Treasurer knows that interest rates are on the rise. Semi-government bonds, which is what Victorian bonds are classified as by investors, are a bit on the nose.

Lots of people have asked me how we will know when the state is in real financial trouble. My response has been, and I maintain it, that ultimately it will come down to bond sales. When institutional investors, like our superannuation funds, decide that they are waiting until semi-government bonds are tapped out and when international investors like the Chinese government, the Japanese government and others are tapped out, then the state government will be forced to look for new markets to sell those bonds into. When they try and sell them to everyday punters, then that is when you know we are in deep trouble. My answer to those people that ask me 'How do you know when we're in real trouble?' is: when you see advertisements on social media for state government bonds, that is when you know you are in big trouble, because that means that they cannot place them with international investors anymore. That means that the trips to New York have failed and that means that China and others who buy our bonds either do not want to buy more or, worse, have decided to dump them, which could happen.

There is another part of this bill that I was going to spend a lot of time speaking on around event regulation. I have consulted with stakeholders on this. They are unhappy with the status quo. They are unhappy with what the government is doing, and I think it is safe to say that they want the government to relook at this. It is my understanding that the government is actually moving an amendment to remove that part of the bill, which means that if that is successful, at the end of today we will be back to the status quo. The status quo is not great, though. It is not great at all. I hope that the government engages a bit better going forward, because I think everyone in this chamber would agree that events are a very significant part of the Victorian economy. The government extract taxes from these events, which they will need to pay off their bonds at some point. So we want these events to go ahead. We want it to be as easy as possible for people to go ahead with major and smaller events.

I note that the government makes a big deal about big sporting events like the grand prix and this sort of thing. Maybe there should be more of a light shone on some of the other events that happen in Victoria, like corporate events, like conferences and this sort of thing, because they bring in a lot of money to Victoria. Frankly, New South Wales has been cutting our lunch a bit on that, and I think that we should try and get back in the game and get these corporate events back in Victoria. I hope that the government agrees with me there. We need to make sure that these corporate events are being held in Victoria and that New South Wales is not cutting our lunch. Nevertheless that is going to be removed from the bill. I hope that the government handle the consultation and engagement better on whatever they are planning next. Suffice to say I do not think anyone is happy with the status quo. It is very cumbersome. It is very difficult for people to manage.

It is good that we are getting some minor rebates and exemptions for people for taxes, but our state is taxed so badly that people do not want to invest in our state. People are discouraged from investing in our state. I want our state to be known as the lowest taxing state in Australia. I want people to see Victoria as an investment haven where they will flock to and invest money, but we make it so difficult with all of these taxes that discourage investment. It makes me sad when I see the potential of this state. I love Victoria, I want it to be prosperous, but the taxes and debt are holding this state back.

One way of dealing with that is the government cutting waste. There is a lot of waste in this government. The government do a lot of things that are unnecessary, and at the same time they do not seem to be managing the very basic things that we expect of government, like fixing the roads, like getting crime and organised crime under control, like our healthcare system. These sorts of very basic things the government seem to be failing on, yet they want to expand into ever larger machinery. They just cannot manage it all. It is just too big. It is too big for this government to manage. They need to scale it back. I think that there is an appetite in Victoria. I think that a lot of people in Victoria are sick of the government being so big. They want to scale it back. People want us to cut debt, people want us to be more financially sustainable and they do not want us to be taxing so much. I think that there is a lot of support for that in Victoria. I think that the government could do a lot. There are a lot of people at the moment that want a change of direction. Either the government changes direction or we change the government. One of those things is going to happen. Maybe the government is listening to

people now – I do not know – but I would like to see a change in direction too, and part of that should be a large cut in waste.

I note that the government has actually made some attempts here, and I am going to bring it up again because it annoys me so much with VicHealth. The government said that they wanted to get rid of VicHealth. Fifty million dollars a year – that is a pretty small saving in the scheme of things. The Greens and the opposition went absolutely nuts about getting rid of VicHealth. I have no idea what part of VicHealth they think is so essential to Victoria, but seriously, if the government cannot even get the support of the opposition for such tiny, tiny cost-saving measures, we are in deep trouble. The government needs to be bolder on this, and the opposition needs to be called out when they do not support it. I will certainly support the government if they want to cut spending. I think that the opposition should support the government if they want to cut spending, because this debt is getting to the point where everyday people are concerned about it. They are worried about our future, and we need to get it under control.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (20:45): We have had a panoply of contributions across the chamber today. I just want to put that onto the record. I have been referred to by the Treasurer with a most unsavoury term just now. I am not going to put it on the record or seek to have it withdrawn.

We are creating some nation-leading reforms, and that has been the subject of discussion in this place over a number of iterations of the reforms that are being delivered in latest form by this bill. We want to make sure that, as we continue with our consumer focus on the way in which people can access safe, high-quality and affordable homes, we have a measure of focus and effort and attention in the areas of natural disasters where we know that landslips and floods can have a really devastating impact on local communities. We also want to make sure that in making buildings more resilient we also have that strengthened compliance framework and the work that is occurring across the Building and Plumbing Commission.

The developer bond scheme is something that has been addressed in substantial form this evening and in previous conversations, and also the work that we have done on the minimum financial requirements for builders who want to undertake work in Victoria following the release of measures for consultation. Again I just want to thank people who have provided their feedback, who have provided their position on what the impact of MFRs would mean and the way in which further time was needed in order to enable them to operate as intended. This is therefore part of the provision in the bill that allows the Building and Plumbing Commission to continue to assess financial stability in a way that maintains the status quo, with a view to transitioning to the more stringent model that is currently prescribed in the legislation over the period of two years.

This is something that was brought to my attention on a number of occasions when I had the building portfolio but also as a local member. There were a number of conversations that I had out in Gippsland at Farm World in particular. I note that there were a number of building companies and people who came to speak with me at some length about the impact of MFRs and what that would mean without a transition period as far as hardship was concerned and the viability of their business. The Treasurer has gone to this in relation to the matter she has spoken about this evening. The refinements and the changes that we are making to legislation are, in so many instances, as a direct result of the feedback, the questions and the concerns that we receive from communities. That is, by its very definition, a process of listening, of consideration and of response. That is indeed what part of that particular MFR process is directly geared to address.

Smooth commencement of the first-resort insurance scheme and new rectification orders is also about making sure that we do have that protection to really transition to a new system with a measure of consistency and viability that we need to support our industry as we continue to encourage the building and development of new homes across the state, and to make sure that when consumers – again, back to that consumer focus – choose to invest, they also have protections if costly building defects arise.

The building monitor will have those powers to declare an area to be flood prone, and that is similar to the existing powers held by Minister Staikos to declare bushfire-prone areas. We are also delivering on commitments, including tax relief for more Victorians, as the Treasurer has spoken to, to make life simpler, easier and more affordable with, again, a significant measure of reform that has been informed directly by communities and their feedback. There has been some considerable debate on places of public entertainment – POPE – and the way in which the POPE and permit process is run. We believe our position modernises and streamlines that permit process in a way that does benefit industry, does bring Victoria more in line with other jurisdictions and does so in a way that ensures that our calendar remains really full of world-class events. You only have to look at what is happening in Melbourne and indeed the entire state, week to week, month to month, season to season, to see that we have a blockbuster line-up of events, something to appeal to everybody no matter your age, your interests or your location.

Those opposite have tried to block reforms in relation to places of public entertainment and expose young people at festivals to some pretty unacceptable risks from fires and crowd crushes, amongst other risks. We have seen a couple of examples of this in recent times around fundamental challenges to public safety because of a failure to take account of everything from waste separation through to the building and construction of stages. But we are placing those POPE changes that were set in the bill to one side so we can actually move ahead with some key reforms that reduce Victorians' taxes and protect them from the serious debts which can be incurred when they are forced to self-rectify defects in departments. We are really looking forward to conversations continuing with industry to ensure that those POPE permits continue to protect the value of our nation-leading events schedule. On that basis I would like to circulate the amendments in my name.

We have also heard that changes to the minimum financial requirements scheme are somehow a government backflip. Perhaps I might want to address that as well. We released these regulatory changes for review earlier this year, and we heard really clearly that they needed some changes. Again, this is a further example of the nature of conversation, discussion and consideration of community views. If people see that as somehow a shortcoming, then they do a great disservice to the responsibility of government – that is, to consider impact and to make adjustment or amendment in circumstances where that is possible and where that is able to strike an appropriate balance. The changes in this bill are in fact about response to industry feedback. Again, I suspect that had there not been any change, we would have heard those opposite saying that we had failed to listen to industry. Now that there are changes being made in direct response to industry feedback, they are referred to as a backflip. Surely we can be a little better than that narrative, because we are doing this in a way that lifts the administrative burden for builders without reducing consumer protections – those consumer protections which were blocked and opposed and voted against by those opposite, incidentally – and we know that the changes in this bill have got really strong industry support.

We have also heard a lot from those opposite about flood-prone area declarations. Our current mapping processes, just for the avoidance of any doubt, will not change, despite the concerns of those opposite – only the manner by which flood-prone areas can be declared.

Importantly, I am really proud to see reforms introduced which will protect homebuyers in apartment buildings from costly defects by introducing a 10-year-insurance-period product for apartments. Again, this is further evidence of the consumer focus that we have in making sure, as we move toward home ownership increasingly being realised in the form of an apartment, that people who save, often for a lifetime, to make the biggest purchase of their lives are not left with their hearts broken and their wallets emptied and no recourse available to them.

I am looking forward to the consideration of any matters or questions that may arise in the house. With that and with the amendments as have been circulated, I commend this bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (20:57)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I have only got a few questions, so I will try and get through them quite quickly and then perhaps give opposition the floor. Just starting with respect to architects, I have had a few architects contact my office, and I would say this is regarding rectification of defects and the like. Can I ask how the government will ensure that architects, engineers and other design professionals are only held liable for defects proportionate to their actual contribution rather than being exposed to claims arising from the actions of developers, builders or certifiers?

Harriet SHING: Just bear with me. I am just looking to see whether this is in fact within the scope of this particular bill. It certainly supports a range of other building system reforms which do go directly to the work of those professions that you have identified. What we are doing with this bill, though, is making a private market insurance scheme possible, so it is not actually about the operation of that scheme as it relates to the professions that you have identified.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: There might be a theme with some of these questions, so I will move quickly. Has government consulted with professional indemnity insurers regarding the impact of the scheme on premiums for architects and engineers, and will that advice be released publicly?

Harriet SHING: Again, this is about the existence of the scheme as a private market insurance pathway and not in fact about the modelling for the purpose of impact on these particular professions. That is not to say that this is not important, but it does sit beyond the scope of this particular bill.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I ask: who will ultimately determine whether a defect is considered a relevant defect under the scheme, and what safeguards will exist to prevent inconsistent or commercially influenced decision-making here?

Harriet SHING: There will be a process by which regulations are established, and in the course of that creation of regulations for those purposes there will be consultation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I ask: does the government have any intention to establish an independent technical assessment process involving suitably qualified architects and engineers before defects are determined for insurance purposes?

Harriet SHING: Before defects are determined?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, before.

Harriet SHING: This is actually a private market product, just to be really clear. Again, when and as that product is developed, it will be developed by reference to the scope of a private market product. There is no role for government in preinspection, as it were.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just on the decennial insurance scheme, what additional documentation, certification and compliance obligations does the government expect architects and other design professionals will have to undertake as a consequence of that scheme?

Harriet SHING: The bill does not actually impose any obligations on architects under the scheme, nor does it actually change any statutory rights or responsibilities that architects currently have. There are a range of standards, obligations and responsibilities that operate by virtue of an architect's accreditation or recognition in that field of specialisation. They are not disturbed by this, and they continue to operate. But the bill itself does not actually set any obligations under the scheme for architects.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I might move on to building surveyors, on another matter. Situations have been reported to me wherein some large-volume builders are bundling the surveying costs into their

packages, which effectively means that if you do not choose the builder's preferred surveyor you pay extra, as well as other examples wherein a large builder flatly refuses to deal with surveyors that do not meet certain onerous requirements. Can I ask what the government is doing to ensure that customers have true independence when choosing a building surveyor.

Harriet SHING: You have actually asked a question that I myself took a great deal of interest in when I had the portfolio. It is actually really important that we are avoiding any actual or perceived conflicts of interest or any disruption to the obligations that already regulate building surveyors. Again, they are required to acquit their level of skill and expertise with the necessary level of diligence, which is subject to the oversight of their own profession. The Building and Plumbing Commission also does a lot of work in that space, and I think I addressed that in some great detail – mediocre detail perhaps, but some detail nonetheless – when we did the buyer protection legislation and the committee stage of that particular bill. But again, that is something which is subject to oversight within that particular professional regulation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I believe this is my last one, just on the place-of-public-entertainment (POPE) reforms regarding those events that are now due to be taken out of the bill, pending an amendment in that respect. Acknowledging that that is the government's intended course of action now and taking that and putting it to the side, as I believe you said, Minister, just to understand timelines, do you anticipate those provisions in some form coming back this term, or is there another timeframe that you could indicate for the house?

Harriet SHING: We are removing the POPE permit work because we would like to have some further conversations with industry on the issues that have been raised. There are not any specific timelines or changes that are being contemplated because that would then mean that we had a preconceived idea about where these conversations might end up, if that provides you with any assurance. It is intended to be a good faith process, and I look forward to it being able to get underway.

David DAVIS: I just want to make some comments about the POPE clauses, and we have said quite a lot already during the second-reading debate about the large set of provisions that were in this bill, the permit system, all the matters around places of public entertainment and so forth. We obviously had amendments. We will no longer move those amendments, because in effect they are superseded by the government's intention to remove those clauses of the bill. On one level we are pleased about that step so that the entrenchment of errors and mistakes in the bill is avoided. That is a positive, and we put that on the record very clearly.

Equally, this does not resolve the longer term issues for the events sector, and it does seem that somewhere deep in the government there is, I do not know, a gremlin or whatever it is. I am not sure what it is, but there is something that is deeply resistant to reforming the events sector that seems to want to keep a level of control and rigidity that is unnecessary – a level of control and restriction that adds little but adds cost and adds impact on the sector so that the events sector is penalised here. I accept that the government have said that they will talk to the sector. Some of us were on the inquiry of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in a previous Parliament when the events sector gave a lot of material – this was partially in response to COVID but more broad than COVID – and laid out some ways forward. The government chose not to respond to those recommendations and those entreaties that came from an upper house standing committee, so there is this resistance. There is some group of gremlins, I think – even more than a single one – somewhere deep inside the departments. That is a problem, and it has got to be dealt with.

We lay out a very clear way forward to talk to the sector and to work to solve some of these problems. If elected, we will work closely with the sector – thoughtfully with the department but closely with the sector – to find ways to solve some of these problems. There has been a break or a distance between the department and the events sector, which is a very significant sector. It is not just major events. For some reason the government is obsessed by the major events component, and I am not diminishing the importance of that in any respect. But events is a much broader –

Harriet SHING: You go to most of them.

David DAVIS: Well, I do not actually. I go to one or two, but I have not been to the grand prix for quite a long time. Leaving that aside, the events sector is a much broader part of the economy, and it does seem that the government has not really understood what is required to properly regulate it to achieve the safety and proper regulation objectives that we all want but at the same time not crush the sector in the way that these regulatory imposts have for a long period. I want to put on record my thanks to Simon Thewlis and his supporters, who have worked very hard to try and distil some of the material in a way that can be understood very clearly by people in this chamber and elsewhere. I think his first-rate work has been instrumental in convincing the government to step back from what I think would have been a very unfortunate way forward with a number of the amendments that were in the original bill, so thank you. We appreciate the fact that the government has stepped back, but it is about looking forward. The gremlins have got to be worked with, the department has got to be worked with constructively, and most importantly, the sector has to be engaged with. We cannot have a government that is distant from this events sector given its importance for the Victorian economy and the growth of the Victorian economy. It has the ability to be a very significant generator for the state, and that balance has got to be got right.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Davis, for that. I am not sure how many times you may have received a challenge from your office to use the word 'gremlin' in a 5-minute contribution, but I suspect that someone in your office may just have won a meat tray. The department is going to continue to engage on the detail of the reformed POPE scheme, and it would have done that following passage of the new heads of power in any event. I just want to be really clear about that. We set forth a model that was about increasing flexibility and cutting red tape for industry. We could have moved forward in a really measured way and responded to industry concerns. But the amendments, just to be clear, that were proposed by the opposition that are no longer being pressed, as you have flagged, Mr Davis, would actually have exposed young people in particular to unacceptable risks, and they would also have devalued the very nation-leading events that you have referred to. And I am not talking just about blockbuster events here; I am talking about a range of others. We need to make sure that we are not diluting or damaging community confidence in the safety of people who go to these events, whether they are festivals or whether they are shows.

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: What I would say is that we need to strike a balance, but at the heart of every single conversation on any kind of public event, whether it is the smallest of festivals or the largest of blockbuster multiday events, public and community safety has to guide the work that we do. One of the things that I found interesting, though, about your contributions is that you were referring to oversight and to regulation when in fact you opposed the development and delivery of the Building and Plumbing Commission and you have opposed the work that we have done to resource that body to provide it with the powers necessary to enforce compliance with relevant minimum industry standards. So your opposition to that – your opposition to a range of pieces of legislative reform in the building space and what would fall very, very readily into the category of cuts that are being proposed to the tune of $40 billion – would tend to erode the credence of the statements that you have made here this evening, Mr Davis, that you do actually stand by a commitment to make sure that there is the necessary level of regulation and of oversight. But nonetheless I will follow the timbre of the contribution that you made by thanking you for your withdrawal of those amendments on the basis that we will continue to engage with industry. We will continue to have conversations, obviously, without confining ourselves to any foregone conclusions about where they may end. I move:

1. Clause 1, line 5, omit all words and expressions on this line.

David DAVIS: We will support that amendment as outlined. This removes the POPE section from the bill, and this tests it, so there you are.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: As has been already highlighted, there were initially to be changes regarding place-of-public-entertainment permits within the bill, but this amendment would seek to put them to the side for important industry consultation and feedback. It was apparent, at least from the perspective of my office, that there was not agreement between the sector and the government regarding what these changes ought to look like. While we are not specifically moving forward with those changes in the bill as it would proceed following this amendment today, I am pleased that the government is committing clearly on the record to continue to consult with the sector to update the event permit system so that it works for everyone and that it ensures smoothly run and safe events and festivals.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clause 2 agreed to.

Division heading preceding clause 3 negatived.

Clauses 3 to 44 negatived.

Clauses 45 to 81 agreed to.

Clause 82 (21:18)

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (21:18): I move:

4. Clause 82, lines 16 to 22, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Clause 83 negatived.

Clause 84 agreed to.

Clauses 85 to 88 negatived.

Clause 89 agreed to.

Clause 90 negatived.

Clauses 91 to 147 agreed to.

Clause 147A (21:20)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly** –

Clause 147A, lines 4 and 5, omit all words and expressions on those lines and insert –

'After section 21AA(2) of the **Duties Act 2000** insert –

"(2A) Despite section 21(2), the consideration for a transfer of dutiable property is to be adjusted under section 21(3) or (4) if –

(a) the dutiable property is residential property consisting of a single dwelling; and

(b) the residential property is a lot in a strata subdivision that has common property; and

(c) the transfer meets all the requirements to receive a concessional rate of duty under section 57J other than the requirement that the dutiable value of the dutiable property is not more than $550 000; and

(d) the contract for the purchase of the dutiable property is entered into on or after 21 October 2026 and before 21 April 2027.".'.

Jaclyn SYMES: I thank Mr Puglielli for his ongoing interest in this matter. It was discussed in my summing-up. This amendment that we are seeking to maintain, as opposed to change, is something that I am keen to do for another six months to bring projects to market sooner, boost housing supply, support the construction sector and grow the amount of houses available, whether they are to purchase or to rent. As I have indicated to you, I am alive to the concerns that you have and will be more than

happy to have ongoing conversations with you about this, particularly as the data becomes more available.

David DAVIS: This is an on-balance decision for the Liberals and the Nationals. We have looked closely at what Mr Puglielli has brought forward, and there is some merit in it. We are persuaded by the government's points to us on this occasion, because we think there is some fragility in the sector and we are conscious that an extension for a six-month period is a modest step, and it is lower tax in that sense. On this occasion we will support that extension in the current form. We understand the points you have made. There is merit, and we are certainly open to that discussion.

David LIMBRICK: The Libertarian Party will not be supporting the Greens amendments on this. I take a bit of issue with something said by Mr Davis just now. Actually, what we should be saying here is that adding any stock to the housing stock will help overall supply. It does not matter whether it is the low or the top end of the market. This is a basic economic principle, because if it is at the top end of the market, it will push everything else out underneath. If it is at the bottom end of the market, it will do the same. Adding anything to the market is good. Therefore this artificial limiting saying, 'Oh, well, only these people should get a tax concession, and other people shouldn't because of the value of the property,' I think is displaying an underlying ignorance of the economic principle that we have here.

We have heard lots of things like this from the Greens about rental caps and that sort of thing. Thankfully the government has not been crazy enough to listen to any of that stuff. The Greens always talk about lived experience and evidence-based policy. Well, the evidence base for this sort of stuff is pretty awful – like for rental caps – wherever you look. If you were to listen to the lived experience of people who have lived in socialist hellholes that have actually implemented policies like this, you would understand that they are not very popular now. So I do not buy that this limitation, making it even more limiting, is going to somehow help people who need to buy a property, because it will not at all. If houses get built at this level – indeed if they get built at a higher level – it will still help overall supply in the market, which will help availability for everyone. I think the government should be raising this rate, frankly, for anything new. If people want to build a new house in Victoria, what sort of moral case does anyone have to stand in their way at the moment? Housing is the issue that is causing our society to fracture at the moment. We are seeing political extremism all over the place. No-one should be standing in the way of any housing whatsoever being built in this state.

Council divided on suggested amendment:

Ayes (7): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (31): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Suggested amendment negatived.

Clause agreed to; clauses 148 to 153 agreed to.

Long title (21:31)

Harriet SHING: I move:

8. Long title, omit "places of public entertainment,".

Amendment agreed to; amended long title agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments, including amended long title.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (21:32): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (21:32): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (21:33): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Public transport fares

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:33): (2572) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to update me as to the uptake of the contactless tap-and-go technology across the metropolitan train network. From Sunday 14 June full-fare passengers have been able to use their credit or debit card, their phone or their wearable device to tap on and off across the metropolitan train network. No more topping up a Myki card before you head to the station and no more being caught short at the gate – your bank card or phone does the job for you. This government has delivered it, backed by a significant infrastructure investment, with new ticket readers progressively installed across the rail network. The fares are the same as Myki. Right now that means tapping on at half price, allowing passengers on the train network to enjoy both the convenience of contactless payment and the benefit of half-price travel at the same time. Concession holders should continue using their Myki card, and Myki remains available for all passengers who prefer it. This is about giving Victorians more options, not taking anything away. The next step is rolling out tap-and-go access across trams and buses, and my constituents are eager to see that happen.

Labor Party leadership

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (21:34): (2573) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier, and the action I seek is that the minister takes a few moments from his undoubtedly busy schedule to listen carefully to the following ode:

Old mate Ben says he's not inclined,
To seek the crown that's on his mind.
"No vacancy!" he loudly cries,
While measuring curtains with his eyes.

Ben swears allegiance, firm and true,
"No, no, I will not challenge you."
Yet every interview he gives,
Doubts and questions tend to live.

When Andrews ruled with iron glare,
Young Ben decided he'd have a dare.
The former Premier lost his cool,
And dressed him down before the school.

The caucus –

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, President, I am just not sure that the action that Mrs McArthur seeks is within the minister's responsibilities under the general order.

The PRESIDENT: I was not going to put it through anyway. It is just weird. Have you actually got a real action?

Bev McArthur: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: Why don't you try that first, and then we will see. What is your action?

Bev McARTHUR: That he listen carefully to what I have got to say, President.

The PRESIDENT: No. We will move on.

Data centres

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (21:36): (2574) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for her to reject Zerra DC's permit proposal application for a multimillion-dollar hyperscale data centre at the Broadmeadows Ford factory site and meet with the Broadmeadows Says No to Data Centre local community group. We have seen the Premier and your government rolling out the red carpet for billionaire tech giants and their data centres with no clear plan for the environmental risk, the demand on energy and water and the employment costs at stake. The Greens, alongside so many in our communities, are deeply concerned about the frenzied fossil fuel data centre boom across Victoria, especially in Broadmeadows in Northern Metro as well as in our western suburbs.

This Allan Labor government is giving a free pass to data centres to be built at a scale and pace that is outstripping the legislative and monitoring safeguards needed to protect Victoria's water and energy security. We know data centres operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week to process, store and manage massive amounts of digital data. Hyperscale facilities require even more electricity and significant volumes of water to keep servers cool. What this Allan Labor government is glossing over is the potential scale of harm to communities like my community, where I grew up, in Broadmeadows. My constituents are expected to accept these developments without knowing what it could mean for their day-to-day living – how much it will increase the cost of their power bills; reduce access to clean water; increase air pollution to dangerous levels, resulting in poorer health outcomes, such as asthma; and consume land that could instead be used to help address the housing crisis.

Data centres will only amplify existing inequities. Broadmeadows residents are right to be concerned and outraged by this proposal for a hyperscale data centre in their backyard. Communities like the north and west, multicultural and First Nations communities deserve better than becoming the dumping ground for developments that benefit tech billionaire corporations. It is essential that we protect the health, safety and wellbeing of our community as much as we consider the environmental and economic impacts. The data centre boom is locking us into a fossil fuel intensive, climate disaster future at a time when we should be rapidly reducing emissions and building a cleaner, more sustainable economy.

Health system

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (21:38): (2575) This evening my adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. Victorians want access to the right care right when they need it and as close to home as possible. Our paramedics do an extraordinary job under immense pressure every single day, and anything we can do to support them and improve patient flow across the broader health

system is a win. That is exactly why I am proud that Ambulance Victoria has finally and officially joined the Allan Labor government's virtual hospital pilot. This is a serious, practical initiative that is making it easier and faster for people to get the medical support they need. As part of this rollout, we now have dedicated paramedics embedded directly within the Royal Melbourne Hospital's digital coordination centre. These paramedics are using real-life data from our emergency departments and ambulances to make faster, better-informed decisions about exactly where to take patients. This means our patients get to the right hospital faster and our hardworking paramedics get back on the roads sooner to respond to the community.

As I said, Royal Melbourne Hospital, in my electorate, is one of the hospitals leading the pilot, and it is focused on ensuring Victorians can receive high-quality care and recover in the comfort of their own homes. By doing this we are actively freeing up crucial hospital beds for the patients who need them the absolute most. Of course there is money behind this to support it. Labor is firmly backing the virtual hospital pilot through a targeted $6.1 million investment, building on our massive $437 million expansion of the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, which is helping more Victorians access critical care faster and closer to home. The contrast could not be clearer. The Allan Labor government is building a more modern, efficient public health system that will always back our health workers. We all know exactly what $40 billion in Liberal cuts will mean: brutal cuts to paramedics, cuts to our hospitals and cuts to the basic care our community relies on. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how this pilot is tracking and how many patients have utilised this program since it began.

Ferntree Gully community safety

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (21:40): (2576) Clare Fitzmaurice, the Liberal candidate in Monbulk, recently met with the Village Township Group Ferntree Gully, who raised several concerns around the shopping precinct in the area. This incredible group of community members are dedicated to the area and they want to see it thrive. They want to see businesses succeed, they want to see the area being welcoming and appealing for people to live in and to visit and they want the area to be socially cohesive. On their behalf Clare recently wrote to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure detailing the group's concerns about the state of disrepair of VicTrack land in the vicinity of the shopping strip, and they eagerly await the minister's reply.

However, this is not the only issue that they are up against. Despite this government standing up and lecturing Victorians about how wonderful it is to do business in this state, the evidence on the ground tells a very different story. Small businesses in the area are struggling to keep their doors open and many have shut. Approximately 50 per cent of the shops in the main street are vacant, and Clare spoke to more shop owners who were planning to shut up shop soon because it is just so hard to keep a business running. Graffiti covers any spare wall or flat surface, significantly reducing amenity and adding to the feeling that the area is unsafe. The rate of crime in the area is an issue. Shop staff are often scared to walk to their cars in the dark, stealing from shops is frequent and kids on e-bikes are deterring customers.

The very high concentration of rooming houses in the area results in regular instances of antisocial behaviour that are a problem for retailers and customers alike. There was previously state government funding for some support workers to support these people living in these houses, but it was cut in the recent past and problems have escalated as a result. The community are not against rooming houses, but their concentration and a lack of support for these community members and their integration is a key issue. The group recently met with Knox City Council, and they have invited the local Labor MP to come and discuss issues. My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Police tonight. The action that I seek is for the minister to outline to the Village Township Group Ferntree Gully what is being done, if anything at all, to make their community safer.

Zoos Victoria

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (21:43): (2577) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for him to remind Zoos Victoria of their key obligation to fight wildlife extinction. My relationship with Zoos Victoria is quite complex. I do not agree with the confining of exotic animals for entertainment purposes, but they do do some genuinely meaningful conservation work in our state. That is why I was really concerned to hear last week that up to 100 jobs across the four zoos sites were on the chopping block as part of a proposed cost-cutting exercise. Zoos Victoria publicly states that it is fighting extinction and conserving wildlife for future generations. That is what they maintain their social licence under. That is all well and good to say publicly, but if any jobs within the wildlife or conservation teams are at risk, then Zoos Victoria are in direct conflict of the narrative they use to maintain that social licence. Publicly Zoos Victoria have said there would be no cuts to frontline services or ongoing conservation or wildlife rescue roles, but they have also refused to directly confirm that conservation programs, including ones that seek to build back the population of threatened species or emergency response programs, will be spared from these cuts.

One thing that I am particularly concerned about is the future of the marine response unit, which last year alone helped in 977 cases across our state. My own office has seen firsthand just how incredible and integral the marine response unit is, responding to calls that involve seals, turtles, seabirds and other marine wildlife. They fill a critical gap that wildlife volunteers cannot usually respond to and also help alleviate the burden on that volunteer network as well. These are also the people who get the call-out when our iconic penguins at Phillip Island or St Kilda Pier find themselves in strife. Of course Sammy the seal, who made strides on social media for popping up in random places all over the Mornington Peninsula, was regularly visited by the marine response unit as well, and just last month they received a very sad call to a dead seal who locals believe was Sammy.

With the very real threat of bird flu hitting our shores, any job losses in this space would be catastrophic. I know this to be true firsthand, with these teams taking the ducks from the duck-shooting season to test them for bird flu when we bring them in from the rescue units. I can only imagine the impact that their absence would have on other volunteer teams, such as the Wildlife Rescue network and Vets for Compassion, who are already run off their feet and struggling to keep up with demand.

While we wait to hear about the intended restructure, my office has reiterated to both Zoos Victoria and the minister himself just how important it is to keep these programs in place, fully funded and adequately staffed, for our native animals. Given Zoos Victoria is a beneficiary of taxpayer funds, I call on the minister to seek an assurance from Zoos Victoria that our state's wildlife will not be left worse off because of these job cuts.

Education system

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (21:46): (2578) My adjournment matter is for our wonderful Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll regarding the rollout of literacy and numeracy checks in Victorian schools. These assessments provide early identification of students needing support and help ensure no child falls behind. The action I seek is an update on the rollout of the phonics and numeracy checks across Victoria.

Regional Trials Network Victoria

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (21:47): (2579) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently confirm whether Victorian government funding for Regional Trials Network Victoria will continue beyond 30 June 2026, which is in just a few days time. Cancer does not discriminate by postcode, but too often access to treatment, clinical trials and health outcomes do. Regional Victorians continue to face significant barriers when diagnosed with cancer. They are more likely to travel long distances for treatment, less likely to participate in clinical trials and in many cases experience poorer outcomes than their metropolitan counterparts. At a time when cancer incidence is forecast to increase as our

population grows and ages, this disparity should concern every member of this Parliament. A single example, and something that is dear to me and close to my family, is prostate cancer, one of the most prevalent cancers in Victoria, responsible for 17 per cent of all diagnoses. Seven thousand men this year will be diagnosed; 800 of those men will die. Prostate cancer hits hardest in the west and east of our state: a heat map of deaths shows from Geelong to Warrnambool and from Sale to Mallacoota as bright red, well above the national average.

Regional Trials Network Victoria was championed by this government as a tool to bridge that gap. Bringing together regional health services, clinicians and researchers, the network was to expand access to cancer clinical trials for patients living outside Melbourne. RTN Vic's own documents say its work was supported by a $2.4 million Victorian government grant through the Victorian Cancer Agency's improving rural health outcomes initiative. That funding equates to approximately $500,000 per year over the life of the network's 2020–25 strategic plan. However, just a few weeks ago the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre told me, in this very Parliament in Queen's Hall, that this money runs out in a fortnight. I also understand that nothing replaces it. Why would the government allow funding to lapse for a network specifically faced by regional cancer patients? Why would support be withdrawn just as demand for cancer services continues to grow? And what message does that send to regional communities who already face additional hurdles accessing specialist care?

The government is always spruiking improving health equity, strengthening regional health care and getting care close to home. Those commitments must be backed by action. The action I seek is for the minister to confirm whether funding for RTN Vic will continue beyond 30 June 2026, identify any funding allocated in the 2026–27 budget to support the network and, if funding has not been renewed, outline what steps will be taken to ensure regional Victorians do not lose access to the clinical trial opportunities, research capability and collaborative cancer care that the network has helped deliver. Regional cancer patients deserve the same access to gaining care close to home. They deserve the same hope, innovation and life-saving treatment opportunities as any Victorian, regardless of where they live.

Foley House

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (21:50): (2580) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is urgent intervention to secure funding that will keep Foley House in Footscray open and its residents in their homes. Foley House is a longstanding residential care facility run by the Salvation Army providing 24-hour support to residents with complex disabilities, acquired brain injuries, significant mental health diagnoses and trauma. The residents of Foley House were told it would be their forever home. Without Foley House many of these men would be at risk of cycling through prison, crisis accommodation, hospital beds or rough sleeping. Residents are now being transferred out following the Salvation Army's decision to close the service due to accelerating cost pressures.

Community concern around the closure of Foley House has been overwhelming. Workers, residents and local Greens councillors have spoken out. Despite the strong community outcry, the government has only provided funding to facilitate the closure and relocation of residents, not offered funding to keep this essential service operating. Surely, given the current housing crisis, keeping this facility operating is in everyone's interests, not least all the residents that call it home. Footscray has no crisis or transitional accommodation, despite a large rough-sleeping population. Closing Foley House will push some of the most vulnerable community members into housing that does not meet their needs and places them at high risk of experiencing homelessness. I call on the minister to step in, pause all resident transfers and work with the Salvation Army and community to secure a long-term funding solution that keeps Foley House open and allows displaced residents the opportunity to return.

Southern Metropolitan Region police resources

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (21:51): (2581) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. Recently Victoria announced the active deployment model, extending coverage

of PSOs to cover more train stations at more times of the day. This change was supported by an increase in the number of PSOs in the 2026–27 Victorian budget, with $44 million going towards recruiting an additional 50 PSOs. This will increase the ability for PSOs to detect and deter crime and keep the community safe whilst they use public transport. More PSOs for more hours in more places along our public transport networks means our community is safer. The action I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on how the expansion of PSOs has improved community safety in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Maiden Gully telecommunications infrastructure

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (21:52): (2582) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Government Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to engage with telecommunication providers and relevant government agencies to address the significant mobile phone and internet connectivity issues affecting the Maiden Gully community. Maiden Gully is a vibrant and rapidly growing suburb on the outskirts of Bendigo. Local schools are growing rapidly, reflecting the increasing number of families choosing to call the area home. However, essential telecommunications infrastructure has failed to keep pace with growth. The Maiden Gully Progress Association recently conducted a survey after residents repeatedly identified poor telecommunications as their number one concern. They distributed the survey to local households in May this year, and the survey received over 110 detailed responses. Over 80 per cent of survey respondents reported poor coverage or no coverage in some areas. The community survey data from Maiden Gully demonstrates widespread and persistent mobile coverage failures dominated by Telstra but affecting all carriers. According to the association, a representative resident statement from the survey illustrates the severity. It says that if you are in the centre of Maiden Gully, you can rarely get service, especially during peak hours. Residents report systemic mobile coverage failures; widespread poor or no mobile coverage across residential streets, shops, schools and community facilities; frequent call dropouts and inability to make or receive calls indoors; unreliable emergency alert delivery, including late, missing or location error warnings; and a direct impact on CFA volunteer response times.

These issues raise serious concerns for the community's safety, particularly during emergencies when reliable communication is critical, and the impacts are being felt across the community. Maiden Gully Primary School has raised concerns about its ability to reliably contact parents when required during the school day, Jenny's Early Learning Centre has reported communication failures that compromise its duty-of-care obligations and local businesses are also suffering. Maiden Gully IGA has advised that internet outages regularly disable EFTPOS terminals, disrupting trade, frustrating customers and creating difficult situations for staff.

For a growing regional community, this situation is unacceptable. Residents, businesses, schools and childcare providers should not be forced to operate with unreliable communications infrastructure in 2026. The action I seek is for the minister to acknowledge the documented service failures affecting Maiden Gully and work with telecommunications carriers, the Commonwealth government and relevant agencies to fast-track infrastructure improvements. The community needs assurance that emergency alerts and critical communications can be received reliably when they are needed most. I thank the Maiden Gully Progress Association for raising this issue, and I ask the minister to advocate for improved telecommunications services for the residents of Maiden Gully.

Alternative first responders

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (21:55): (2583) My adjournment is for the Premier. The National Justice Project recently held an online event entitled 'Alternative first responders: turning ideas into action', and it highlighted the urgent need to fund alternatives to police-led crisis responses. This powerful event featured advocates from a cross-section of community, justice, health and harm reduction organisations who spoke of alternative models to police involvement which are already working despite limited funding and support from the government. We are increasingly seeing the inappropriate use of police as the default response in situations where police

are unable to provide the necessary care and de-escalation to people experiencing psychosocial distress, people experiencing family violence, people experiencing homelessness and overpoliced communities, to name but a few.

Police-led crisis responses are problematic at best, but we know that encounters with police, particularly for vulnerable people, can cause significant harm and even death in the community. This was exemplified by one of the speakers, Apryl Day from the Dhadjowa Foundation, whose mother, Tanya Day, died in a police cell after falling asleep on a train and subsequently being arrested for public drunkenness. This was a clear instance of someone who should have received care instead of being criminalised – someone who would be alive today but for her interaction with police. The Yoorrook report cited many examples of overpolicing of First Peoples through the inappropriate use of police as first responders and using the criminal law and police to respond to conduct associated with social inequality such as intoxication, drug use and mental illness.

Victoria's reliance on police is due to underinvestment in alternative models and the failure of government to properly fund health, social and community support services, a trend continued in the latest budget, which effectively cut funding to these sectors while throwing millions at policing and jails. Given the shortfall inside Victoria Police, it is time to accept that alternative first responders experienced and skilled in harm minimisation practices should replace or supplement police in situations where a health or social response is needed to keep our communities safe. Recognising that this will require a whole-of-government approach, the action I seek is that the Premier commit to the expansion and capacity building of existing community-controlled, non-police, alternative first responder models and services and resource them accordingly.

Bush nursing centres

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (21:58): (2584) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health. It relates to a very important sector in our rural communities, and that is the bush nursing centres. I have a number in my Eastern Victoria electorate, and they are centred in East Gippsland in Buchan, in Ensay, in Cann River, and in Gelantipy, Swifts Creek and Dargo. They are the heartbeat, often, of these little communities, which are very, very remote. Often the trusted staff are more like family than just casual staff. This begins often at birth, and for many, many years they can care for family members and whole families. These services, by being so remote, often provide the full gamut of services from immunisation and birth to palliative care and emergency in acute situations. The bush nursing centres in Swifts Creek and Dargo have written to me recently. I think I raised Swifts Creek a little while ago. They are in a dire situation, and that is because departmental funding has not kept pace with operational costs. Indeed in recent years there has been a modest increase – a 2 per cent increase, almost not keeping up with CPI – in terms of funding, but the operational costs have risen by almost 20 per cent. So they have had to make harsh and difficult decisions that they are very frustrated with and cut back some of their services, cut back their opening hours and of course then cut back their care. These people care deeply about their patients and their community. Bush nursing centres require processes such as reporting, accreditation audits, mandatory memberships, all of which cost a significant amount, but there is no additional funding. Safety and service delivery pressures are also increasing.

In short, these regional people are doing it tough. These communities deserve the best health care. There are service providers there and there are nursing staff there that really deserve to be funded to treat these people in the way they need to, and not only these people. It is a tourist area and in popular times there are increased visitations and tourists. The action I seek from the minister is to raise the funding for these bush nursing centres to ensure that funding keeps pace with cost increases and specifically to prioritise urgent support for the centres in Dargo and Swifts Creek as well as the others I have mentioned.

Bus route 246

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (22:01): (2585) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to improve bus route 246 by increasing service frequencies and introducing effective bus priority measures along that route. Route 246 runs between Clifton Hill and Elsternwick through St Kilda, travelling along Punt Road and Barkly Street. It provides one of Melbourne's most important north–south public transport connections, filling a big gap between rail and tram corridors. Despite being a high frequency route, the 246 is regularly overcrowded. Passengers report buses arriving already full and leaving with people unable to board. This is particularly difficult for older people, passengers with disabilities, parents with prams, those who need to get to work and anyone who simply cannot wait indefinitely for another service. The problem becomes worse in the evening when services become less frequent. At popular destinations, like Point Ormond, large numbers of people can leave at the same time after sunset, only to find that the available buses cannot meet demand. I have personally experienced being left behind by a full bus on the 246 route in St Kilda.

Reliability is also undermined by congestion. A bus carrying dozens of passengers can be delayed behind a small number of private vehicles because it is given no meaningful priority. This is an inefficient use of our road space to get around. It also discourages people, if they feel they cannot rely on being able to get on the bus, from choosing public transport. The 246 needs more frequent services, particularly during the evening and weekend peaks. It also needs practical priority measures, such as dedicated or part-time bus lanes, queue jump lanes, traffic signal priority and better enforcement against vehicles that are blocking bus movements. The government should treat this route as the major mass transit corridor that it is. Minister, will you provide this key route with priority measures like bus lanes, traffic signal priority and increased frequencies to reduce crowding?

Lost Dogs' Home

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:03): (2586) My adjournment is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the government's intervention in the escalating animal welfare crisis, which I became acutely aware of when I visited the Lost Dogs' Home in Cranbourne recently. The Lost Dogs' Home in Cranbourne is overburdened, with diminishing support and increasing demand, and it has made a desperate plea for help. They also have a Lost Dogs' Home in the North Melbourne area. They have done a survey recently, and 61 per cent of the pet owners seeking their help are living below the Australian poverty line, with 58 per cent delaying essential veterinary care because they simply cannot afford it.

The Lost Dogs' Home is urgently calling for low-cost veterinary care for pet owners experiencing hardship, and it is difficult to see how any government committed to animal welfare and families could ignore that call. Ordinary families who do not have a concession or health care card are also having to part with their pets. I was there when a family of children were saying goodbye to their beautiful pet. It was the most beautiful dog and they were wonderful children, and it was clear that they did not want to part with their pet.

In the past five years the Lost Dogs' Home has admitted 43,756 stray cats and kittens as well, with the intake increasing every year. In fact right now the increase in cats is a real problem for them. This is not fair. It is not sustainable. The Lost Dogs' Home is seeking local and state-supported incentives to encourage the adoption of stray cats, including low-cost desexing, microchipping, vaccinations and reduced registration fees. These measures are practical and evidence based and would drastically reduce the burden on shelters and councils. Currently each council decides the fees, so there is no equity or uniformity around accessing lost pets. Some people pay more to recover their dogs or cats than others, depending on their council.

In 2024 alone 73,300 cats and dogs were admitted to Victorian pounds and shelters. The Lost Dogs' Home is responsible for a quarter of that intake, supporting more than 18,000 animals every year. The dedicated staff eat outside without a dedicated indoor staff room because they have run out of space,

and they are doing the heavy lifting without the stable long-term support that such a role demands. I call on the minister to meet with the Lost Dogs' Home as a matter of priority to establish a clear explanation of how it will address the escalating pressures they have identified. They are beautiful animals without owners or homes, and there are so many of them and they need our help.

Waste and recycling management

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (22:06): (2587) My adjournment is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently tackle the dumped rubbish crisis affecting the growth areas of Melbourne, particularly in Melbourne's north. I would point particular attention to Somerton Road in Greenvale, Camp Road in Broadmeadows, the area surrounding Mickleham Road in Craigieburn and Yuroke and the area surrounding Roxburgh Park train station. Minister, some days do not go our way, as I am sure you know, and they are not going the way of our residents in the northern suburbs, particularly with the dumped rubbish crisis we are seeing in the north. Residents particularly around the City of Hume and places like the City of Whittlesea and Mitchell shire want to have pride in their community. They want to live in a community where they feel proud of it, where it is an attractive place to come to and go to, and they are proud of where they live. But because of the dumped rubbish crisis that we are seeing, that is not the case too often. Councils are doing their part. Hume City Council now spends over $8 million on dumped rubbish and offers a range of services, including timely clean-up of dumped rubbish. Yet on our state arterial roads and state-owned land we are seeing dumped rubbish stay there for months.

I know it is the same in the western suburbs, in the south-eastern suburbs and in northern Victoria, and I know through Mitchell shire as well. The government is not cleaning up its rubbish, and it needs to give this issue the urgency it deserves. We saw in government media releases they promised the increase in the waste levies a few budgets ago would enable the EPA to do the work to tackle this crisis, and the councils that I speak to consistently scoff at that claim. They claim the EPA has done nothing to address this crisis affecting our communities, and all the increase in the waste levy has done is spring up a whole bunch of black-market open-air waste incinerators in the very same suburbs in the growth areas of Melbourne. This government is not taking this issue seriously. We need a serious response for a serious crisis. It is quite clear that if you want to get rid of dumped rubbish, you have just got to dump Labor this November.

Wyndham Vale train station car parking

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (22:09): (2588) My matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding the need for a shuttle bus service between the Hobbs Road commuter car park and Wyndham Vale railway station. Since opening in 2023 the Hobbs Road car park, located approximately 2.3 kilometres from Wyndham Vale railway station, has seen low utilisation despite being a $6 million investment. Many commuters have chosen not to use the facility due to the distance from the station; concern about personal safety, particularly when walking during early morning and late evening; and a lack of convenient transport connections. The action I seek is for the minister to consider providing a shuttle bus service between the Hobbs Road commuter car park and Wyndham Vale railway station.

As a result there is significant spillover of commuters parking in nearby residential streets. This is an ongoing frustration for local residents, who are finding it increasingly difficult to access parking near their own homes. Wyndham Vale's councillors and local residents have raised valid concerns about this issue, particularly given Wyndham is a rapidly growing community. The municipality is projected to exceed over half a million residents by 2041, and Wyndham Vale station alone has recorded more than 1.8 million passengers in entries and exits between 2023 and 2024. These figures clearly demonstrate the growing pressure on local transport infrastructure and surrounding neighbourhoods. Importantly, a practical solution already exists. Increased use of the Hobbs Road car park will significantly alleviate parking congestion in nearby areas. However, commuter car park uptake will remain limited without proper accessibility and safety measures.

To address such requests the minister should provide a dedicated shuttle bus service between the Hobbs Road car park and Wyndham Vale station, operating during peak morning and evening periods, and implement additional safety measures at the car park including regular patrols and improved lighting and surveillance to ensure the safety of commuters and their vehicles. This measure would not only improve utilisation of existing infrastructure but also reduce the burden currently placed on local residents while enhancing public safety and community convenience. I urge the minister to listen to the concerns of my residents and take action on this matter. A shuttle bus service is a practical, cost-effective solution that would deliver immediate community benefits.

Lancefield planning

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (22:12): (2589) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to remove development plan overlay schedule 24 (DPO24) in Lancefield. The background details of this issue are complicated, but the human impact is simple and heartbreaking. Residents in Lancefield have land that they wish to subdivide to build new housing, but the overlay makes it practically impossible to develop and they cannot sell the land with such constraints on it. Affected landholders feel completely trapped after years of hopeless struggle, and their relationships with their families and neighbours are strained while their mental health continues to degrade. It is time the minister stepped in and put her powers to good use to intervene and resolve what has become an unnecessarily tangled problem.

Planning for DPO24 started back in 2016, since which time there has been a pause on all development applications. The overlay applies to three areas covering approximately 150 acres of township land that are zoned residential and are within the settlement boundary that surrounds Lancefield. The overlay was intended to facilitate small-scale infill building to increase the diversity of housing types and to guide dwelling replacements and rebuilds. But instead of facilitating new homes, the overlay is actually functioning as a barrier to all new housing building. Since it was gazetted in 2020 not a single new house has been built within the overlay, which shows that the planning tool is clearly not functioning as intended. Lancefield is a district town identified for future growth and should be contributing towards meeting the municipality's housing targets. Developing the land would provide around 300 new dwellings in a rural area of Victoria where new homes are hard to find. The purpose of the overlay was not to prevent housing sprawl but to coordinate among groups of landholders on the choice of development plan to maintain town character and style. However, the requirement to secure agreement between approximately 27 landholders has become a fatal flaw that essentially gives each landholder a veto over development.

Shadow Minister for Planning David Southwick recently joined me to meet with two Lancefield landholders who are desperate to develop their land but have been blocked at every turn. They were almost brought to tears as they shared their story of long frustration dealing with this restrictive planning overlay. Almost half of the landholders want to sell or develop but are being prevented from doing so because the others have no interest. Macedon Ranges Shire Council supports the removal of DPO24 and wrote to the Minister for Planning in 2023 pleading for help, but nothing has been done to move forward towards a resolution for this issue. Council has written twice more this year – *(Time expired)*

Mineral resources

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (22:15): (2590) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it relates to changes made or announced in the Commonwealth budget, the 2026–27 budget, which seek to replace the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount with a discount based on inflation and introduce a minimum 30 per cent gains tax from 1 July 2027. I am in receipt of correspondence from very many parts of the minerals and mining sector, and they seek that the minister for resources in Victoria puts this on the agenda for the next meeting of resources ministers and that these matters are discussed, bringing those ministers to a position where they can bring some weight to bear on the federal Treasurer and the Prime Minister. They have brought

forward this capital gains tax change, but it is going to strike hard. Exploration and resource development, as you will understand, is vital to the state of Victoria and its economy. Small ASX-listed mineral exploration companies rely on a relatively small pool of retail investors to raise capital to fund their entire operations. Without the grant of an exemption, the concern is that this tax reform threatens to undo the hard work they do to drive greater mineral exploration and to find the mines of the future.

I am very much of the view that the minister is in a position to bring this forward with her equivalent colleagues in resources in other states and to take a united front to the federal authorities. As I say, the proposed changes will have a significant impact on Australia's mineral exploration sector and in particular on Victoria's mineral exploration sector. We need to stand up and fight for our miners. This is another nasty hit from the federal government. It has not been thought through properly. The impacts on exploration and mining have not been understood. These are very high risk businesses. Early-stage decisions are very high risk. There is no steady production at that point. There is a high chance of failure. In fact some people say one in every thousand exploration projects becomes an operational mine, so it is a very high risk sector. Banks and super funds avoid these areas. The capital gains tax discount makes the potential pay-off big enough after tax for retail investors to take that risk. If the proposed capital gains tax changes proceed without a mineral exploration exemption, junior explorers will face reduced capital, leading to fewer discoveries, mines and government revenue. This is a silly decision by federal Labor, and it is time state Labor stood up and said, 'We're opposed to this.' We need to look after our miners and make sure their returns and incentives are strong.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (22:18): This evening there were 19 matters to a range of ministers, two of which were addressed to me. One of them was from Ms Purcell, which I will take on notice, but there was one also by Mr Mulholland directed to me about illegal dumping on Somerton Road and across the outer north in Melbourne, which I feel I can probably address on my feet today. In relation to that matter I want to thank Mr Mulholland for bringing this to the attention of the chamber. He is not the only member of Parliament that has raised this with me. I can confirm also the member for Greenvale Iwan Walters and the member for Broadmeadows Ms Kathleen Matthews-Ward have raised this. The mayor Carly Moore has also spoken and raised this issue as a matter of concern from a council perspective of what they are seeing and experiencing. It is of grave concern to me as the Minister for Environment and for our government.

That is why as recently as January we set up the illegal dumping clean-up rebate, which is our partnership with agencies who partner in the clean-up. Land managers such as councils can claim up to 50 per cent back. We obviously have the EPA in place as the main regulator. We are the first government in almost 50 years that really has strengthened the environmental protection laws in this state, in 2017, and we have an illegal dumping taskforce in place now. But of course there is always more that needs to be done. There is a scourge going on. There are tough penalties. I have seen infringement notices. I can confirm as minister that I am having discussions with the EPA, and as I update my statement of expectations eight weeks into the role one of my focuses will be on seeing a stronger focus on tough action on polluters. That is one of the statements of expectations that I will be looking to include. I am in the drafting phase of a statement of expectations to the EPA. Thank you for bringing that to this chamber. I think it is an issue that should not be about partisan politics. We do not want to see people dumping their illegal waste in our streets, and I am committed to making sure we do have tougher consequences in place.

On that note, I will make sure all the other 17 matters that are not addressed to me are passed on to the appropriate ministers for response.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (22:20): I committed to Ms Crozier to reviewing an answer from Minister Shing to one of her questions in question time, and I have determined that the minister did respond and answer the question.

The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 10:21 pm.