



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 25 August 2026

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, Gaele	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

CONTENTS

CONDOLENCES	
Colombia earthquake	3449
BILLS	
Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026	3449
Firearms Amendment Bill 2026	3449
Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026	3449
Royal assent	3449
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Youth mental health services	3449
First Nations mental health services	3450
Ministers statements: dental services	3451
Dental services	3452
Cannabis law reform	3453
Ministers statements: kindergarten funding	3454
Mineral resources	3455
Patient transport	3456
Ministers statements: Scams Awareness Week	3457
Ambulance services	3457
Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation	3458
Ministers statements: electricity infrastructure	3459
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Western Victoria Region	3460
Western Metropolitan Region	3460
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	3461
Northern Metropolitan Region	3461
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	3461
Southern Metropolitan Region	3461
Western Metropolitan Region	3462
Eastern Victoria Region	3462
Northern Victoria Region	3462
Northern Victoria Region	3462
Western Victoria Region	3463
Southern Metropolitan Region	3463
Northern Metropolitan Region	3463
PETITIONS	
Grey-headed flying fox control	3463
Sex work regulation	3464
Cardinia roads	3464
Western Metropolitan Region bus services	3465
BILLS	
Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026	3465
Introduction and first reading	3465
Sale of Land Amendment (Property Developer Integrity) Bill 2026	3466
Introduction and first reading	3466
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	3466
Alert Digest No. 11	3466
Annual Review 2025: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments	3466
Procedure Committee	3466
Standing Orders Review 2026	3466
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	3466
Inquiry into the Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Infrastructure in Victoria	3466
Legal and Social Issues Committee	3470
Inquiry into Claims Made through the Transport Accident Commission (TAC)	3470
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	3473
Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates	3473
60th Parliament End of Term Report	3475
PAPERS	
Papers	3477
PETITIONS	
Responses	3477
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	

CONTENTS

Notices	3478
General business	3478
BILLS	
Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026.....	3478
Instruction to committee	3478
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Point Grey	3478
Education First Youth Foyers.....	3479
Data centres.....	3479
Warnambool rail line	3479
Timothy Geoffrey Austin	3480
Greenlife Industry Victoria.....	3480
Ukraine Independence Day	3480
Electricity infrastructure.....	3481
Tim Read.....	3481
Colin 'Stocky' Stockdale.....	3481
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	3482
BILLS	
Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026.....	3482
Second reading.....	3482
Committee.....	3506
Third reading.....	3510
Corrections Amendment Bill 2026.....	3511
Council's amendments.....	3511
Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026	3511
Council's amendments.....	3511
Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026.....	3511
Second reading.....	3511
Instruction to committee	3535
Committee.....	3535
Third reading.....	3555
ADJOURNMENT	
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region sporting facilities.....	3555
COVID-19.....	3556
Corrections system	3556
Hume Tech School.....	3557
Clarkefield development.....	3557
Cannabis law reform	3558
Electricity infrastructure.....	3559
Rural and regional health services	3559
Road maintenance	3559
Melbourne tourism	3560
Roxburgh Park train station.....	3560
Data centres.....	3561
North American wildfires	3561
Road maintenance	3562
Voices for Special Needs.....	3562
Maiden Gully Primary School	3563
Suburban Rail Loop	3564
Responses	3564
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Written responses	3564

Tuesday 25 August 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Condolences

Colombia earthquake

The PRESIDENT (12:04): Today I wish to acknowledge the tragic earthquake that struck Colombia on 10 August, claiming more than 300 lives and injuring over 4500 people. On behalf of the chamber I extend our thoughts to the Victorian Colombian community. We offer our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones and to all those who have been affected by this devastating disaster.

Bills

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Firearms Amendment Bill 2026

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (12:05): I have a message from the Governor, dated 18 August:

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 Clerk of the Parliaments:

28/2026 Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Act 2026

29/2026 Firearms Amendment Act 2026

I have another message, dated 25 August:

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 Clerk of the Parliaments:

30/2026 Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Victoria Act 2026

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Youth mental health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): (1429) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, following reports that 10 young Victorians, including children as young as 13, died in two suspected suicide clusters in Melbourne's east, and despite warnings about a potential cluster being raised last year, will you immediately establish an urgent independent inquiry into these deaths and the systemic failures in Victoria's child and youth mental health system?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:06): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, and at the outset can I indicate that any suicide, particularly of a young person, is absolutely devastating. I give my heartfelt condolences to those impacted by these incidents. It is an incredibly difficult time for those families, loved ones, friends and indeed that community.

It certainly would not be appropriate for anyone in this place to attribute causes or contributing factors in relation to these individual cases. These matters are currently before the coroner, and that is absolutely appropriate. I will not be cutting across that work, and I will not be commenting further, given the matters are being dealt with by the coroner right now.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): Minister, you did not answer the question, but I will ask you this: given these deaths did not trigger a systemic review of the mental health system,

how many children have to die before your government investigates whether the system itself is failing them? Surely that is your responsibility, Minister.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:07): That is a pretty disgraceful question, I have to say, and it makes a number of flawed assertions and assumptions. I have indicated already that I do not intend to cut across the important investigation that the coroner is currently undertaking.

First Nations mental health services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:08): (1430) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Back in 2023 you said:

We're implementing every recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, as we promised.

VACCHO, Victoria's peak body for Aboriginal health and wellbeing, has been calling for funding of two healing centres to deliver culturally safe, evidence-based mental health support to Aboriginal people. This was a specific recommendation from the royal commission to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians and save lives. The design of the healing centres has been complete since 2024–25, and detailed modelling shows that these healing centres would save \$38 million in avoided costs and \$100.8 million in reduced costs over the next decade. Despite this, there have now been two consecutive budget cycles without funding to deliver these important healing centres. Minister, to support the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, will you fund these healing centres and fulfil this royal commission recommendation?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:09): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question. Of course at the outset I want to acknowledge the incredible work of not only VACCHO but all of our Aboriginal community controlled organisations across the state that are continuing to work incredibly hard to close the gap that is being experienced still by Aboriginal Victorians when it comes to not only health outcomes but mental health outcomes. We are certainly, as a government, absolutely committed to a future that is based on equity, on truth and on justice. We are proud that we have a treaty in our state, which is all about making sure that Aboriginal communities have the power and the resources to be able to deliver self-determined outcomes. In the mental health space, I have been proud to work with VACCHO. We have established, in partnership with VACCHO, the Balit Durn Durn Centre, which was a key recommendation of the royal commission. We have worked closely with them as they build their capacity right across Victoria, which includes social and emotional wellbeing teams that are assisting Aboriginal Victorians right across the state, and we are very proud of that work. This year's budget of course does commit to one of the very important recommendations out of the royal commission, to establish the Nest, which is a family wellbeing service model, and I want to acknowledge the work of VACCHO and the Balit Durn Durn Centre in developing business cases for both the Nest and the healing centres.

There is no question that we need to continue the effort and there is more work to be done, because it is unacceptable that Victorian Aboriginal communities still have a disproportionate suicide level compared to the rest of the population. Can I say that there has been powerful evidence that has been heard at both the mental health royal commission in relation to these issues but also at the Yoorrook Justice Commission – the truth-telling commission. We will continue to work hard and closely with VACCHO and ACCHOs right across the state because we know that the best solutions to these issues rest with the community and with those specialist community-controlled organisations that are working hard on this. There is more to do. I acknowledge that the healing centres' work is incredibly important, and I will continue to support those efforts and the advocacy that VACCHO continue to pursue in relation to strengthening the mental health supports for Aboriginal Victorians across the state.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:12): Thank you, Minister, for that response, although I note that you did not make any commitment to funding these healing centres. At least 121 Aboriginal people have, sadly, died by suicide in Victoria since the royal commission's report was tabled 2000 days ago. VACCHO is outside Parliament today, as you know, calling on the government to urgently implement this royal commission recommendation and fund healing centres for Aboriginal Victorians. They have said:

If we are serious about preventing suicide, the government must invest in Aboriginal-led solutions that Aboriginal communities have been calling for over many years.

The healing centre model has been shaped through almost 3599 hours of community consultation and integrates cultural and clinical approaches to healing. It is a sensible, well-evidenced model that will make a big difference to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Victoria, and frankly, it is pocket change compared to some of the spending priorities and commitments this government has. Minister, can you explain why the government has delayed funding for this sensible, well-evidenced and Aboriginal-led model?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:13): Of course I was very proud to join VACCHO on the steps of Parliament this morning, and the issues that they are advocating for are incredibly important. I do not have any intention of doing anything other than advocating strongly for our Aboriginal community controlled organisations to continue to receive the resources they need to deliver those important services across Victoria. I think I did acknowledge in my substantive answer the incredible work that VACCHO and the Balit Durn Durn Centre have done in developing these proposals, and I will continue to work closely with them. They have held the pen on these budget bids. I will continue to support their efforts, and the budget processes will deal with those issues, I am sure.

Ministers statements: dental services

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:14): The Victorian Labor government has a strong track record of stepping in and stepping up to fight for working people and their health. We did this with urgent care clinics, we did it with free fertility programs and we are doing it again with free access to dental care. Over the weekend the Premier announced the Labor government will open 10 free dental clinics across Victoria, a \$230 million investment that will deliver structural cost-of-living –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I will reset the clock if people continue.

Ingrid STITT: From the top, President?

The PRESIDENT: Yes. The clock has been reset.

Ingrid STITT: The Victorian Labor government has a strong track record of stepping in and stepping up to fight for working people and their health. We did it with urgent care clinics, we did it with free public fertility care and we are doing it again with free access to dental care. Over the weekend the Premier announced the Labor government will open 10 free dental clinics across Victoria, a \$230 million investment that will deliver structural cost-of-living relief. With dental not covered by Medicare, we know too many Victorians find it hard to access the care that they need, and we know dental care is critical to your health and wellbeing. At these new clinics up to 100,000 Victorians a year will be able to receive free check-ups and treatment, including procedures like fillings, root canals and extractions. They will deal with the most urgent cases first, and they will be targeted in areas of high need – no appointments, no bills and no need to suffer alone.

Free dental needs a strong workforce. That is why we are backing in our dental reforms with almost \$13 million in workforce packages. Our investment will include career pathway development, clinical

scholarships, traineeships and relocation support. This builds on the almost \$240 million investment in public dental this year alone, an investment delivering public dental care at over 40 services across the state and free dental care for kids at school.

Those opposite have made their priorities clear. They will cut \$40 billion from the state budget, and you cannot do that without cutting health services. You definitely cannot do that and deliver free dental – and we will.

Dental services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): (1431) I am pleased to be following the minister after her statement. Minister for Health, the Australian Dental Association says 48 per cent of dental chairs in Victoria's public dental system are vacant, while Victoria has the worst paid public dentists in the country. Yet your government has promised 10 new urgent dental clinics, open seven days a week and treating more than 100,000 Victorians a year. That is at least 50 extra public dentists, when the ADA says you are more than 300 short on the chairs you have now. Minister, this is just another con job. Where are you going to find the dentists for these 10 clinics?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:17): Despite the efforts of those opposite to run negative on something that Victorians have been calling for for too long – your postcode or your bank balance has determined whether you get good dental care or not – we are about changing that, and we are about making sure that no matter where you live or what your personal circumstances are you can access free dental health care. This builds on the significant services that we are already providing across community health and of course through the dental hospital and the Smile Squad. Can I just talk about the Smile Squad for a minute. A thousand schools the Smile Squad have been to – 175,000 Victorian students getting excellent oral health –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I know the minister is wanting to promote certain government policies, but my question was very specific, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has still got 2 minutes and 15 seconds, so I will call the minister to the question.

Ingrid STITT: Context is important. It is important to actually show our track record when it comes to the provision of public dental, unlike those opposite: our free dental clinics, alongside Smile Squad and of course our investment in public dental health and making sure more Victorians can get access to the dental care that they need. Too many people are waiting in pain and not getting treated in a timely manner.

In relation to workforce, we are investing \$12.9 million in building and supporting Victoria's public dental workforce, and that includes support for 30 dental assistant traineeships and 20 graduate dentists every year, on top of what we are already doing. As well as relocation support to attract clinicians where they are needed the most, we are investing in clinical supervision, career pathways and other measures to retain our hardworking public dental workforce. We know that these targeted initiatives work. Our Smile Squad workforce action plan increased the number of clinical teams by 50 per cent – from 36 to 54 – between June 2024 and June 2026. We are not in the business of listening to those opposite when it comes to investing in and supporting our amazing healthcare workforce. We will continue to invest strongly in existing public dental, but we will do more, because that is what Victorians have called for – more access to dental care. It is about dignity. It is about making sure that Victorians are not waiting in pain for the care that they deserve.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:20): Minister, 86,000 Victorians who are the most vulnerable are already waiting for public dental care, yet instead of clearing that waiting list, your government is promising to open free public dental care to every Victorian. Why are you putting

thousands more people into the public dental system when you cannot provide timely care to the 86,000 vulnerable Victorians already waiting?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:21): This is nation-leading reform. This is the Victorian government stepping in and stepping up to meet an incredibly serious dental care need. Victorians –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister is answering the question.

Ingrid STITT: People have been talking a big game about dental care in Australia for decades. Our government is getting on with doing something about that through the provision of expanded access to free public dental health care. Only those opposite could possibly be negative about this. It is just incredible and beggars belief. We will continue to deliver on what Victorians are saying they need – not only excellent dental care but also structural cost-of-living relief.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:22): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:22): (1432) My question is to Mr Mulholland, who last sitting week was kind enough to offer me advice on furthering the cause of cannabis reform. Mr Mulholland, in May you moved motion 1435, noting that Victoria's net debt will reach record levels by 2030, that Victorians pay the highest taxes of any state in the country and that our taxpayers will spend more on interest repayments than on operating Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and all kindergarten services combined. If elected, a Wilson government would inherit this debt. Given, then, the grim fiscal environment a Wilson government would find itself in and that it would be foolish, if not irresponsible, not to do all that it can to increase revenue, will a Wilson government legalise cannabis, or will it, like the incumbent government, recklessly reject the \$1 billion in revenue projected by the Parliamentary Budget Office?

The PRESIDENT: I am sorry, Mr Ettershank, I cannot put that question. In terms of the kind of question that can be put, if a non-government member has a notice of motion, they can be asked about when they intend to bring on that particular debate. So if you want to rephrase it about when he wants to bring on that debate, you can, Mr Ettershank, if you would like to.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, President. In the context of the question that I have put so far, could I ask Mr Mulholland: when will the Wilson government move to legalise cannabis such that it can pick up the \$1 billion in revenue?

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Mr Ettershank, it needs to be isolated to when the member intends to do it, and then I think the member in response would have to keep his answer to when he intends to bring on the debate and not respond to the preamble. So I will call Mr Mulholland, if he chooses to respond.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:24): I am very happy to speak to the timing of my excellent motion on government debt. Given that we now have an additional sitting week, perhaps there might be an opportunity on 23 September, in grand final week, to move that particular motion, because it is an important motion that goes to the \$200 billion in debt that this government has racked up.

The PRESIDENT: I think that is enough.

Evan MULHOLLAND: We are spending more, as the motion states, on the interest on the debt –

The PRESIDENT: Mr Mulholland, I think you have acquitted the answer within the standing orders.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: When I am gone you are all going to blame me when this happens in the future – that I actually put the question. I do not know if you can add a supplementary to that, Mr Ettershank, but have a crack.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:25): Thank you, President; I would love to have a crack. I thank Mr Mulholland for that response, and I suspect that it will be warmly welcomed by the newly formed Stoners for Mulholland group in the northern suburbs. In that same motion, Mr Mulholland, you further noted that there were currently 506 fewer full-time Victoria Police officers – and 1500 vacancies on Victoria Police rosters – than when the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP became Premier and that crime was at an all-time high in Victoria, with a criminal offence occurring every 50 seconds. In your own words Victoria Police are vastly under-resourced. So I ask Mr Mulholland: when would you envisage that a Wilson government would consider removing criminal penalties for cannabis to free up scarce police resources?

The PRESIDENT: I will rule that out and we will move on.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:26): I move, by leave:

That the motion be debated forthwith.

Leave refused.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:27): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's latest Building Blocks partnership. Last week I joined member for Western Victoria Ms Tierney and the member for Lara in the other place to announce a new Building Blocks partnership with the City of Greater Geelong. This now marks 21 Building Blocks partnerships that our government has agreed with local councils and the non-government sector to fund a pipeline of infrastructure projects and deliver new kinder places. Through this latest partnership we are investing an initial \$18 million to build two new children's hubs: Lauderdale Court Community Hub in Armstrong Creek and the Lara West Community Hub. Together these centres will provide up to 510 new kindergarten places for local families and include space for maternal and child health consultations and community services. Importantly, children at these centres will be able to access free kinder, an initiative of this Labor government which is now saving families more than \$5000 per child across their kinder journey.

Free kinder is a winner for Victorians. It supports every child to have the best start in life. It helps parents and carers get back to work or study, and it puts money back in their pockets. But do not just take my word for it. Let me share with the house a few reflections on our free kinder program. Three-year-old kinder is a terrific idea. I could not agree more with free three-year-old and four-year-old kinder. It is a good policy, and I recognise that early education is extremely important for our young, developing kids. I thank the member for Narracan and the member for South-West Coast for their reflections on this important Labor policy. In fact so popular is free kinder that I have been asked to, and I quote, 'fast-track the free kinder program'. I thank Mrs Hermans for her suggestion, but it is difficult to fast-track something that already exists. In the future she might want to run her support for free kinder past her leader first, because it is the Leader of the Opposition who has written to me advocating for kinders to be able to charge fees – to cut free kinder. The Leader of the Opposition wrote to me asking to charge fees and cut, therefore, free kinder. Chaos and cuts from those opposite; some things never change.

Mineral resources

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): (1433) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Minister, I refer to your gazettal of savage, extraordinary new taxes and charges on the mining and extractive industries which will jack up licence fees and costs on average about 234 per cent. The Cement, Concrete and Aggregates Association of Australia has warned that this will significantly increase quarry operating costs and the price of essential construction materials, impacting directly on housing, infrastructure and renewable energy projects. I ask: how does forcing up the price of quarried rock and consequently the cost of home construction help Victorian families to acquire their first home?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:30): I miss you, David, already. But thank you for your question. Yes, the government has for some time been undertaking a review of fees for exploration, mining and quarrying activities. This has predominantly been driven by the need to improve cost recovery for regulatory services that are provided to these sectors. As you have indicated – I think you are aware of this, Mr Davis – fees have not increased for 12 years. The fee amounts have been subject to a RIS, and lots of consultation was sought and responded to in that process. The government policy is to recover the costs of regulating the private sector to ensure regulatory services are efficient, effective and sustainable. The mining and resources sector has benefited in recent times from extensive government support. The increase is just bringing the industry up to a baseline that many regulated industries already operate under. It is government policy which I note the previous coalition government also adhered to. The previous government's minister for resources also believed in cost recovery and had increases in their time.

I was pleased that you asked about housing –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, whilst I did have a preamble, the question itself was very direct about how these increases help Victorian families acquire their first home.

The PRESIDENT: I heard the minister say 'housing'. I will hand over to the minister for her answer.

Jaclyn SYMES: The context is important, Mr Davis. But of course you did ask about housing, and it is always great for the Labor government to be given an opportunity to talk about housing, because contrary to the constant negativity particularly from that side of the chamber rabbiting on, we continue to be leading the nation in housing approvals, housing commencements and housing completions. We are also comfortably leading the nation in first home buyers, with almost 40,000 new loan commitments in the last year – over 10,000 more than New South Wales and over 16,000 more than Queensland. Mr Davis, we always will stand with those wanting to buy their homes, and our record speaks for itself.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I notice that the minister failed to address this issue of the actual price of housing. The Minerals Council of Australia has said:

Every dollar in government fees, charges and taxes is a dollar less put into the ground in exploration, which is the lifeblood of the future Victorian minerals sector.

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies said:

These new changes go beyond and push Victoria into ... the most expensive jurisdiction in Australia in which to explore and mine.

Minister, your first act in the resources portfolio has been these savage new taxes. Isn't it a fact therefore that you are making it more expensive to mine and quarry in Victoria by new charges?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:33): Mr Davis, as I have indicated, the process to arrive at the changes to the fee structure have been many years in the making. They have been subjected to an extended period of consultation with industry, including a regulatory impact statement. This is about ensuring the sustainability of the regulatory framework, which is all very important, but it also helps to promote the industry, particularly in regional areas.

Patient transport

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:34): (1434) My question is to the Minister for Health. Regional Victorians are sleeping in their cars, crowdfunding accommodation and delaying medical treatment because they cannot afford to travel for care. VPTAS pays just 21 cents a kilometre for travel and \$45 a night for accommodation – rates that have barely changed in a decade and are the lowest in Australia. On 28 July your predecessor said in an answer to a question from me that VPTAS's role is to:

... ensure that rural and regional Victorians are not left out of pocket for essential travel ...

In a cost-of-living crisis, Minister, why has the government failed to increase VPTAS reimbursements in line with CPI?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:35): Thank you very much for your question, Ms Crozier. I am certainly cognisant of how important it is for regional Victorians to get access to the health care that they need. That is why our government continues to make record investments in not just health but also ambulance services to support our paramedics. When it comes to the non-emergency transport system, this is an important part of the system, and we will always ensure that that system delivers to those Victorians that need transportation when it comes to their health needs. We continue to review the arrangements that are in place, and we are as a government very well aware of the cost-of-living pressures that Victorians are facing. That is why we have a range of different programs in place across different government departments and portfolios to support Victorians, and the non-urgent transport program is just one of many.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): Minister, I refer again to the previous minister's answer on 28 July, when she said:

... we implemented some changes to the VPTAS to make things easier for Victorians who access the scheme ...

On the contrary, recent eligibility changes have in fact made it harder for patients to access VPTAS assistance for flights from Mildura. Seventy-three-year-old cancer patient Pearl now faces a 10-hour bus or train trip to Melbourne for a PET scan, and young Claudia, who is living with juvenile idiopathic arthritis, will miss three days of school every month for treatment since she falls outside the criteria for VPTAS support. Minister, what advice did the government receive to justify the changes that have left Pearl and Claudia ineligible for assistance?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:37): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. As I have indicated in the house previously, if there are individual constituents that require any follow-up, I am very keen to make sure that we facilitate that and get the appropriate answers from the department. So if Ms Crozier would like to provide me with those details, I would be more than happy to follow up and provide an answer to Ms Crozier outside of the standing orders.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, that is an example I am using to show the ineligibility criteria. The minister needs to answer the question I asked. They are examples. There are

plenty more. That is just a cop-out from the minister, and I would ask you to ask the minister to answer the question.

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

Ministers statements: Scams Awareness Week

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:38): Today I rise to update the house that this week is Scams Awareness Week. Scams are a growing and increasingly sophisticated threat that can target anyone regardless of their age, background or confidence using technology – beware of the blue-and-orange T-shirts on the streets. Last year alone –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Reset the clock. I reckon we will be resetting the clock again and again.

Enver ERDOGAN: Today I rise to update the house that this week is Scams Awareness Week. Scams are a growing and increasingly sophisticated threat that can target anyone regardless of their age, background or confidence in using technology. Last year alone Australians reported more than 480,000 scams with combined reported losses of \$2.2 billion. But those figures alone cannot capture the distress and disruption experienced by every victim.

As Minister for Government Services, I know Victorians rely on digital services to interact with government. These services make it easier to access information and support, but the convenience must be matched by services that are safe, secure and trusted. Scammers seek to exploit that trust. They impersonate government departments and services through text messages, emails, websites and phone calls, and artificial intelligence and other technologies have meant that scams are more convincing. The traditional warning signs are becoming harder to spot for all. That is why the message of this week's Scams Awareness Week is simple: stop, check, protect. Stop before clicking a link and providing personal information, check that the person or organisation contacting you is genuine and protect yourself by acting quickly if something does not feel right.

The Victorian government is helping people put that advice into practice through Service Victoria's Scam Safe Check. This simple online tool helps Victorians assess whether a text message, email, social media post, website or phone call may be suspicious and explains what they should do next. Government has an important role to play in all this, but all of us have an important role to educate the public. I encourage every Victorian to pause when something does not look right, use the Scam Safe Check and report scams when they encounter them. As more government services move online, we will continue working to make them easier to access while ensuring Victorians can use them with confidence and trust.

Ambulance services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1435) My question is again to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Minister, on Wednesday 12 August 40 ambulances were off the road because they could not be staffed. The following night it was 44. On Saturday 15 August Ambulance Victoria advised Victoria via social media:

We're expecting a busy night in Metropolitan Melbourne tonight.

...

If your emergency is not urgent or life-threatening, you may experience extended delays.

...

You can help us by

Saving paramedics for life-threatening emergencies

Meanwhile, ramping at our hospitals right across the state was impacting ambulance response times. What percentage of the Ambulance Victoria fleet was available that Saturday night?

The PRESIDENT: There is a fair degree of detail in the question, but I will call the minister to answer the question.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:41): Our government will always make sure that the sickest Victorians have priority. We have backed our ambulance services with significant funding – \$2 billion in funding since coming to government – and a 50 per cent increase in the number of paramedics on the road. I am certainly not going to be taking lectures from Ms Crozier about performance. We are absolutely laser focused on supporting our incredible paramedics, and I do want to take the opportunity to thank them for the work they do. I have had the opportunity since coming into the portfolio to meet with some of the recent graduates, including a number of MICA paramedics that will be out in regional Victoria and paramedics who will be working right through our state, providing that care when people are at their most vulnerable. I do want to thank them for their efforts.

We know that there has been increased demand, and this is not unusual when it comes to the winter peak. The chief health officer has recently indicated that we are seeing quite a late winter peak this year, and so I would certainly encourage Victorians, no matter where they live, to make sure that they are availing themselves for non-emergency matters of the other important services that our government has backed, including urgent care clinics, including the virtual emergency department, so that we can make sure that our ambulance services are there for the most life-threatening and urgent lights-and-sirens incidents.

We will continue to support our ambos. We are doing important work, backed by \$50 million worth of investment in this year's budget alone, to improve the way in which we dispatch our ambulances and also to ensure that we improve the flow between our ambulances and our emergency departments. I know that our ambulance services are working incredibly closely with our health services in major hospitals in that regard, and I want to thank them for that work. Again, this is about backing our paramedics and making sure that they have the resources and the continued investment, which our government has been proud to do – \$2 billion of investment and a 50 per cent increase in paramedics on the road.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): I note that the minister did not even try and attempt to answer the question I asked. It was very simple, and I would ask her to get that percentage figure, because it is important I think to understand what is going on in Victoria. She gave a lot of platitudes. I note that 500 graduate paramedics cannot get a job.

Minister, given the ongoing ramping and the extensive delays in our emergency departments – there are some terrible situations that are occurring, and ED doctors are certainly speaking out about what is happening – and you talked about response times, why have you failed to release the latest VAHI data, which was due on 31 July?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:45): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary. The data is due to be released very shortly.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1436) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, under the ministerial code of conduct ministers have

an overarching duty not to accept gifts, hospitality or benefits that could be seen to conflict with their official duties, yet as minister for regulating casinos you accepted both gifts and hospitality from Crown Casino to attend the Brownlow. As minister for regulating gaming you accepted two tickets and hospitality at Derby Day from Tabcorp. Finally, as minister for regulating liquor you accepted two tickets for hospitality at the AFL Grand Final from liquor and pokies giant Endeavour Group. Minister, can you explain why you accepted hospitality from not one but three gambling and liquor corporations that could reasonably be seen to be in direct conflict with your official duties as a minister in direct contravention of the code of conduct?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:46): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in my engagement with stakeholders. I think it is important as a minister of the Crown to engage with all stakeholders and to attend events. We are the major events capital of the nation, and we host a number of events. Our government is a significant contributor to the hosting of most of those events, like the Australian Open, like the grand prix, like a lot of the racing industry. These are important events, and it is important that a government voice is there. It really gives me an insight into your mindset and that of those in the Greens party – the lack of engagement with the sector, with industry – because we know we need a safe sector that is regulated well. We have been leading the nation in terms of reforms. No state has done more to minimise harm when it comes to gambling – 4 am to 10 am closure powers, slowing down spin rates, load-up limits – and across the board we will continue to do more.

We know that the harm caused by gambling is not unique to Victoria. It does transcend borders. The harm in Wodonga is the same as the harm in Albury. We know this trend, and we need a national approach. But in terms of engagement or official attendance, I of course take a precautionary approach and, where something meets the threshold, do declare it. Nonetheless my presence at these events is not necessarily an endorsement of a position; it is a presence at a major event that our state is hosting.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:47): Minister, these are not cups of tea at stakeholder meetings, as you seem to be trying to characterise them. This is accepting gifts and hospitality from actors in the sectors that you are supposed to regulate. They are not key chains or fridge magnets or little plastic trinkets that get given out at stakeholder briefings here at Parliament. I am reliably informed that the value of the hospitality packages that you have accepted from the gambling and liquor industries on three separate occasions in just a six-month period would run into the tens of thousands of dollars. In not accepting any personal accountability for these conflicts with your official ministerial responsibilities, Minister, how do you square this with the Premier's claim that integrity is not optional under this Labor government?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:48): I really am concerned by that question, Ms Copsey. If you have an allegation to make, please put it by way of substantive motion. What I will say is I always act properly. I will always attend and engage with stakeholders irrespective of what their views are. That does not mean endorsement of their views in relation to policy. Attending major events such as the racing season – a lot of members across the Parliament I know from all sides of politics are invited to these events, and it is important that we do have a presence so we hear the concerns. These are some of our largest employers in the state, and I will continue to have that positive engagement.

Ministers statements: electricity infrastructure

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:49): I would like to use my ministers statement today to update the house on how only a Labor government will ensure the lights stay on and bills stay down by building VNI West. Victoria's ageing coal-fired power stations will retire. This is not ideology, this is reality. AEMO, CSIRO and the independent

experts all agree renewables are the cheapest form of new generation you can build, and that is why VNI West matters. It connects new and existing generation into the grid, including from Snowy 2.0 in New South Wales. This then moves to households and businesses. As our state's electricity usage grows, so must our network that moves the electricity around the state. Cancelling VNI West is what happens when a panicked coalition lets political survival dictate energy policy. It is reckless, and it is driven by anti-renewables ideology, risking blackouts and soaring power bills for Victorian families and businesses. Around 4.65 gigawatts worth of new renewable generation and storage projects are seeking to connect to the grid through the VNI. That is approximately \$11.6 billion of investment that will leave the state if the projects do not proceed. Not building VNI West will stop the energy transition in its tracks, along with \$18 billion of wages that the energy transition will bring to regional communities.

This government has a plan. It is working. Not only are renewables now supplying 45 per cent of Victoria's power but our prices are the cheapest in the nation. Those opposite – who I honestly do not believe the shadow minister actually even agrees with – will throw out this cheap renewable power and gamble with Victoria's power system, just to appease One Nation voters. Only this Labor government will keep Victoria's lights on and the power bills down.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): I move:

That Minister D'Ambrosio's statement be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, Mr Davis has been in his place long enough to know that he should refer to people in this place by their correct title.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order. I do not think Mr Davis wants me to put the question.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I would ask that a number of questions that I have asked be reinstated – including the last one – and be answered, including on the percentage. The minister can clearly find that out. She failed to answer my question around why they have failed to release the data. She said it is coming soon. Well, she said that last week.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to review the answers and get back to the chamber – to the last question, I believe.

Constituency questions

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:52): (2529) My question is to the Minister for Skills and Training. What is happening in Ararat at the moment is an absolute disgrace. Aradale, which is one of the beating hearts of the Ararat community, was shut down over the weekend. And why has it been shut down? Because Melbourne Polytechnic cannot manage the site properly. They might be forgiven for not knowing about the problem, but it was raised by me in this chamber in February this year, and nothing has been done to repair the building to a state where people can be brought through it. Nothing has been done at all. Tourism operators and local accommodation providers are all impacted by this, and nothing has been done. It has been completely ignored. My question to the minister is: what are you going to do to fix this situation that you have known about for months and months and months?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:53): (2530) My question is to the Minister for Health. My constituent is a sexual and reproductive health practitioner concerned about parties like One Nation advocating for limits on late-term abortions. The South Australian Parliament recently debated a bill to restrict late-term abortions, which account for less than 1 per cent of all abortions. My constituent says that debating these matters alone is harmful, as it undermines clinical decision-making between a patient and their doctor. GenWest's *Action for Equity 2024–2030* identifies that groups and

communities in Melbourne's west experience poorer sexual and reproductive health outcomes compared to the population as a whole. My constituent asks: what is the government doing to strengthen and enhance abortion access in the Western Metropolitan Region and to address the threat to reproductive rights posed by One Nation and other conservative parties.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2531) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. Ms Narelle Lawton, a resident in Borlase Street, Yallambie, has been severely impacted by the North East Link. In 2022 Borlase Street was temporarily closed for construction of the North East Link, but this was meant to be a temporary closure. They have now been advised it is going to be permanent, without consultation and in contradiction to everything that preceded. This leaves that entire street, particularly this family, in an incredibly disadvantaged situation. Ms Lawton has previously written to Minister Carbine, her local member, seeking answers and traffic modelling and impact assessments. None of these have been forthcoming. It is terribly unfair to this community and to the people in this street, and I ask the minister to please intervene and assure the community that this street will be reopened.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2532) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. Minister, my constituent, a sex worker, contacted me after choosing not to report a crime against them because of misinformation provided by a uniformed member of Victoria Police. Sex work is work, and sex workers deserve to be treated with respect and dignity and to have equal access to justice and police protection. This experience highlights the need to ensure that Victoria Police members understand the rights and needs of sex workers and are equipped to respond appropriately. Minister, my constituent asks: will you advocate for additional sex worker affirmative training of frontline and new recruits to Victoria Police to ensure sex workers have access to a safe working environment, justice and recourse when it is needed?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2533) My question is to the Minister for Finance. Recently I met with financial support services that operate in my local area, including Each, who provide financial support for small businesses that are doing it tough. They are the only organisation in the whole of the south-east who provide this specialist budget support to small businesses, and I was horrified to learn that they have been reduced to one worker – they used to have 12 – and that this program is going to be cut at the end of the year. Between high taxes, increased costs and out-of-control crime, small businesses are struggling immensely under the Carroll Labor government. The last thing small businesses in my area need is to have this last morsel of a safety net snatched away from them. Minister, why are you cutting funding to this critical service, especially at a time when it is sorely needed because of your mismanagement in this state and your failure to support small businesses in Victoria?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2534) My question is to the Minister for Education. I have been contacted by a number of constituents in regard to infrastructure funding for Murrumbena Primary School, including Mark from Ormond in Bentleigh, a parent at the school.

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Mr Davis is saying yes, because he is well aware of the issue I am about to raise. Mark writes that the school hall was built in 1996 and is half the standard size for a school hall. Nearly 30 years on, this outdated building can no longer accommodate the 550-plus students. The ageing plumbing is now causing health and sanitation problems, which are issues well beyond what routine maintenance budgets can fix. Meanwhile, neighbouring schools, especially in Bentleigh, have

received millions of dollars in capital funding for new halls and sports and community facilities in recent years. Will the government commit funding for upgraded facilities at Murrumbeena Primary School so that this community can finally have the safe, modern school infrastructure they deserve?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:58): (2535) My question is for the Minister for Police. A recent shooting in Altona North, along with two ram raid arson attacks overnight in St Albans and Kings Park, have heightened concern about community safety across Melbourne's west. These incidents have occurred in public areas frequented by families, shoppers, local traders and residents, raising concern about organised crime-related violence. Many innocent members of the community are at risk. My question for the minister is: can you please update my constituents on what action the government is taking to address the increase in organised crime-related offences, including alleged targeted shooting at residents' properties, drive-by shootings at busy shopping precincts and ram raid attacks, to ensure the safety of local residents, workers and businesses across Melbourne's west? Minister, your PSOs will not be the answer to these problems.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:59): (2536) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. This government has neglected our police force for the last decade, and very sadly and alarmingly, Moe has a crime rate that has risen by 60 per cent in the last little while. The government has spruiked its new policy about police reservists. However, Moe has had its station hours cut, and it is down to between 10 am and 6 pm. The government has put reservists in both Traralgon and Wonthaggi police stations but has neglected those other very important areas. My constituent wants to understand when you will put reservists in Moe and when you will open up the hours so that they can serve this lovely community far better than it is being served now.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (2537) My question is to the Minister for Children. Castlemaine is in my electorate, and a parent contacted me to raise concerns about the potential closure of the Mount Alexander family day care at the end of this year, a service that supports around 100 families. Mount Alexander shire is experiencing unprecedented demand for child care, kindergarten and early years services, with current waitlists now exceeding 440 children across the shire and demand continuing to rise. Despite this demand, this year the region was assessed as no longer high priority by the Commonwealth government under the Community Child Care Fund and their grant application was unsuccessful. Family day care is a home-based model of care where educators run small services from their own homes. It is a valuable service that families rely on. The board of the Castlemaine Child Care Co-operative expects to make a decision about the future of the service in early September. I ask the minister to work with the co-op and the local community to support childhood development and ensure that families can continue to access the services that they need.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (2538) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health: will the minister support young people in north-east Victoria by providing dedicated adolescent mental health beds in the Hume region? Katie Kendall from Wodonga is a young woman who has been bravely speaking up about the need for better mental health services for young people in northern Victoria. Katie recently hosted a forum where she was joined by the terrific Liberal candidate for Benambra Steve Martin, who is a strong advocate for mental health, and spoke on the need for improved services for local young people. Katie ran a petition with over 300 signatures that I tabled on 12 May this year, but the minister still has not even responded to the petition and the answer is now more than two months overdue. The minister cannot afford to remain silent on this urgent call for better mental health services. The minister must listen to the voices of those who signed the petition and fund adolescent mental health beds in the region.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:03): (2539) My constituency question is to the minister responsible for liquor regulation. Communities That Care in Geelong has undertaken extensive research into under-age access to alcohol. Its testing found that 48 per cent of packaged liquor outlets surveyed in Geelong sold alcohol to a young person independently assessed as looking under 18 without requesting identification. In 2023 the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee recommended increased mystery shopper compliance exercises, and in July 2024 the Victorian government supported that recommendation in principle and said it would consider incorporating controlled operations into liquor enforcement. Two years later Communities That Care says this has still not occurred. Minister, when will the government introduce controlled test purchasing operations to properly enforce laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to minors in Geelong and across Victoria?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:04): (2540) My matter is for the Minister for Police. The question very simply is: when will proper police resources be available and security and safety be enhanced in and around Murrumbeena? The background of this is on Saturday night, the 23rd – actually, more correctly, early on Sunday morning after midnight – an Asian man and an accomplice sought to break into a Kia Stinger car. They smashed the window – this was observed by local residents closely and directly. Then the owner came out, and they thumped him. He was king-hit and was also hit, I believe, with some sort of weapon, but I have yet to establish that for sure. The Moorabbin police did attend later, but there was some delay. This is a violent situation – Dalny Road in Murrumbeena. People are scared. The government has lost control of our streets. The violence is shocking, and it is time – *(Time expired)*

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:05): (2541) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and it concerns what action the government will take to improve the safety of students, parents and staff at the Arrowsmith campus of Beveridge Primary School given significant concerns about the school's inadequate drop-off and pick-up infrastructure. I would like to acknowledge the advocacy of Mitchell Shire Council on this issue. The current gravel area has no clear road markings, designated lanes, adequate signage or traffic management. With multiple lanes of vehicles moving through the area without a safe crossing point for children, this is a disaster waiting to happen. Given the rapid growth in student numbers and the documented safety risks, will the government now commit to working with the council to deliver the infrastructure needed to keep the Beveridge Primary School community safe?

Petitions

Grey-headed flying fox control

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2415 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the large colony of grey-headed flying-foxes at Rosalind Park in Bendigo. The scale of the colony is causing significant damage to the park including to historic trees due to persistent noise, odour and faecal contamination. This has resulted in significant loss of public space, and is affecting residents, students, businesses, community events and local tourism.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to consider all options to relocate the grey-headed flying-foxes from Rosalind Park in Bendigo.

Gaelle BROAD: I move:

That the petition be considered on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Sex work regulation

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 160 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need to ban registered sex offenders, including serial rapists and convicted paedophiles from working in either the sex industry or stripping industries. A conviction for the following offences can result in someone being on the registered sex offender list: rape, incest, bestiality, child porn and child molestation. Since 2023, sex work has been fully decriminalised in Victoria, giving sex workers rights at work, including the right to safely report crimes to police. However, there is a loophole in the law which currently permits registered sex offenders to work in the sex industry or stripping industry in Victoria. This presents an unacceptable risk to sex workers and sex work clients.

This is not a hypothetical. There is at least one known registered sex offender currently working in Melbourne with police unable to prevent this.

By expanding the current prohibition applied to child related employment to also cover sex work and stripping, this situation can be rectified and safety for both workers and clients can be improved.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to implement a ban on registered sex offenders working in the sex or stripping industries.

Cardinia roads

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 2001 signatures:

The petition of the undersigned residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the House that:

- Cardinia Shire Council is responsible for maintaining approximately **831 kilometres of unsealed roads**, representing one of the largest unsealed local road networks in metropolitan Melbourne.
- Many of these roads are identified within Council's **Local Street Sealing Initiative (LSSI)** as **high priority**, based on criteria including **road safety, public health impacts, maintenance burden, and emergency access requirements**.
- Unsealed roads create significant and ongoing impacts for residents, including:
 - Dust pollution affecting respiratory health and daily living
 - Poor road conditions leading to safety risks, vehicle damage. and increased travel hazards
 - Reduced accessibility for pedestrians and vulnerable road users
 - Limited and unreliable access for emergency services
 - Drainage deficiencies and overland flooding from road easements causing damage to private property
 - A disproportionately high and recurring demand on Council's operational budget to maintain deteriorating unsealed roads
- Cardinia Shire is one of Melbourne's most **disaster-prone regions**, experiencing:
 - **Bushfires in the northern areas**
 - **Flooding in the southern areas**
 - **Severe storm events** frequently resulting in road closures and loss of access:

In these conditions, unsealed roads significantly compromise **emergency response, evacuation capability, and community resilience**, and highlight the need for:

- Improved environmental outcomes, including protection of sensitive waterways through better road and drainage design
- Reduced long-term maintenance costs, enabling reinvestment of Council's operational budget into other priority community services
- Despite the existence of a transparent prioritisation framework through the LSSI, Council's **current funding levels are insufficient**, and reliance on significant resident financial contributions creates inequitable outcomes and delays critical infrastructure delivery.
- Evidence demonstrates that, over the lifecycle of a road, **sealed roads can result in lower overall costs** due to significantly reduced maintenance requirements compared with unsealed roads.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Victorian Government to:

- **Provide targeted State funding**, co-funded where appropriate with the Commonwealth, to support the sealing of unsealed roads in Cardinia Shire;
- **Prioritise funding to seal up to 60 kilometres of Cardinia Shire's highest priority roads**, as identified through the Local Street Sealing Initiative;
- Recognise the sealing of these roads as **essential infrastructure investment**, necessary to improve:
 - Community safety
 - Public health outcomes
 - Emergency access and disaster resilience
- Work with Cardinia Shire Council and the **Crag21 (Cockatoo Road Action Group)** to accelerate delivery of priority projects within a **clear and defined timeframe**.

David LIMBRICK: As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

Western Metropolitan Region bus services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 189 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that bus services from Riverwalk Estate, King's Leigh Estate and adjoining estates to Werribee Secondary College and MacKillop College need to be increased and urgently reviewed. Residents in these rapidly growing communities are facing significant challenges due to insufficient bus capacity. Many students are unable to board services because buses are already full, resulting in children missing school or arriving late. This situation is placing considerable stress on families. Wyndham City is one of the fastest-growing regions in Victoria and infrastructure must keep pace with this growth. The lack of adequate public transport services, particularly for school routes, is both concerning and frustrating for parents. Many parents are being forced to leave work to drop off and pick up their children, which is neither sustainable nor practical for working families. Given the increasing population and ongoing development in these estates, it is essential that transport services be reviewed and expanded as a matter of priority. Reliable and sufficient school transport is not a luxury, it is a necessity for ensuring students can safely access education, mental wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently review and increase bus services from Riverwalk Estate, King's Leigh Estate and adjoining estates to Werribee Secondary College and MacKillop College or consider introducing higher-capacity transport options to support the growing community of Wyndham Vale.

Bills

Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:09): I introduce a bill for an act to revoke an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions that prohibits new gas connections for new buildings, apartments and residential subdivisions and to subsequently amend the Building Act 1993 to repeal regulation-making powers for prohibiting the connection of reticulated gas, extending the capacity of an existing reticulated gas connection and the installation or replacement of reticulated gas appliances and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

David DAVIS: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Sale of Land Amendment (Property Developer Integrity) Bill 2026*Introduction and first reading*

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:09): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Sale of Land Act 1962 to provide for certain property developers to comply with requirements about the provision of information relating to services and facilities which are provided or proposed to be provided to benefit land being sold by the property developers, to make minor related amendments and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

David ETTERS HANK: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 11*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:10): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest No. 11* of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Annual Review 2025: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:11): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table the *Annual Review 2025: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments*, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Procedure Committee*Standing Orders Review 2026*

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:11): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the *Standing Orders Review 2026*, including a minority report, from the Procedure Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee*Inquiry into the Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Infrastructure in Victoria*

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (13:12): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the inquiry into the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria,

including appendices, extracts of proceedings and minority reports, from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Georgie PURCELL: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This is the final report I will table as chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for this term, and it was certainly a challenging one for the committee. It is clear that Victoria needs to manage a significant waste problem, namely the substantial amount of waste going into landfill, with all of its environmental concerns. The committee heard that really clearly, but we also heard clearly that there are significant and understandable concerns of communities that may be affected by waste-to-energy facilities, particularly in the communities that they live in. I want to be clear that it was not my role as chair of the committee or the committee's role to determine whether or not waste to energy is appropriate per se – but that discussion was certainly held, and we heard many different views really strongly – and it was not the committee's role to determine where certain facilities should be located. However, it was the committee's role to identify the concerns and to ensure that the right questions are asked in the processes that lead to the establishment of these facilities, including community consultation and education surrounding the proposals.

The inquiry certainly attracted substantial community interest, particularly from communities, as I said, that are likely to be affected by proposed facilities. That is exactly why the committee travelled to Sunbury for one day of public hearings to hear from the community there. I am really grateful for the strong and passionate advocacy of community members who appeared before us in panels and provided written submissions to the committee, as well as the evidence and detailed input from experts in environmental and waste management. Despite there being a range of differing views, often on completely opposite ends or somewhere in the middle, the committee appreciated the respectful approach of participants in the inquiry and certainly those who attended our many public hearings. Our final report makes findings and recommendations in relation to waste challenges, waste-to-energy technology, what a waste-to-energy facility can incinerate, what a waste-to-energy facility can emit and where a waste-to-energy facility can be built.

As always, I would like to express my appreciation to committee members for their cooperation and to the committee secretariat for their professional and thorough work during the inquiry process, particularly the administration team of Julie Barnes, Sylvette Bassy and Monique Riordan-Hill, who provided excellent support to us all throughout the inquiry. I would also like to thank Joshua Pedersen, who worked with the committee throughout the inquiry as a research assistant. Finally, I would particularly like to thank Jessica Summers, the inquiry officer for the inquiry, who provided excellent research and writing for the report, as well as expertly managing much of the committee's evidence gathered during the inquiry.

It is also the final time that I will thank committee manager Michael Baker. This was Mike's final report before a well-deserved retirement at the end of this term. Yesterday our committee met for what may be the last time – hopefully the last time – and he said he would be in the gallery to watch this report being handed down, just as he sat in the chamber for the delivery of the first report he worked on in 1988. I was not even born then, Mike. Mike has been a terrific support to me as chair across the term and wonderful to all committee members. It has been an absolute joy working alongside him. Thankfully, Mike is a close-by constituent, and I am sure that I will see him in his retirement. We are all just so grateful to Mike for his support and guidance over the last four years as a committee. It meant a lot to me, my first time being chair and being supported through that process. Mike is not just a lovely man but a true professional on the committees team, and I am sure I speak for many members in thanking him for his service to committee teams and to the Parliament over many decades.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:17): I too want to thank everyone who helped with this inquiry, in particular the secretariat and the committee chair and my fellow committee members. I especially want to acknowledge the community members whose advocacy got this important inquiry to happen in the first place. I do fear that many will potentially be disappointed. While the majority report here contains I think a good summary of the concerns and evidence that we heard, ultimately it is my view that the findings and recommendations fall well short. The problem for me is the premise of the report, which accepts that thermal waste to energy is a part of Victoria's waste management system, so it focuses on how we can tinker around the edges and better regulate the technology rather than taking issue with the technology itself. I think this flies in the face of the overwhelming evidence received by this inquiry from experts in waste, environmental management and public health as well as hundreds of community members.

I actually did something I have not done before: I did not support the adoption of the majority report. I have outlined why in a brief minority report and explained that it is the Greens' position that thermal waste to energy should be removed from Victoria's waste management options and that this government should do so because we believe that it is their duty to adopt the precautionary principle, and not only that but take heed of the established evidence, which demonstrates that there are known harms from thermal waste to energy, not just to human health but to climate and to ecosystems. There is strong evidence that it will harm our efforts to reduce waste and implement a genuinely circular economy.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:19): I rise to speak on the report as tabled. The Liberals and Nationals also submitted a minority report on this matter. Some very brief conclusions we drew are that Victoria definitely does have a landfill problem that needs to be addressed, that there are bad environmental consequences of landfill and that waste to energy is one of a range of technologies that may be appropriate in addressing those disadvantages. But it must be said that in Victoria's execution of this policy there have been some extraordinary scenarios where the lack of consultation with communities in terms of where these plants will be placed has been breathtaking in its arrogance, and while the technology has strong international precedents and while bodies like the EPA are extraordinarily eloquent in explaining why they should be placed where they are, they have absolutely no capacity for introspection or explanation as to why they have lost social licence for these things. The reason they have lost social licence is very, very clear: they do not consult, they do not listen to genuine concerns and they have done nothing for the communities. As a result, we had the extraordinary situation where the then energy minister's policy was to petition against her own policy in her own electorate. It is breathtaking. Effectively everybody is a loser, because the state does not get to address a serious landfill problem and communities do not feel heard and may have inappropriate developments in their own areas. The inquiry was worthwhile. We heard a lot of really good information – and thank you, Mr Baker, in particular – but in some senses it was a missed opportunity because of the lack of introspection and self-examination of the government and the government bodies concerned.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:21): I would like to commend the comments of Ms Purcell and Dr Mansfield, and I concur with their thoughts. Clearly we do have a landfill problem, and I think it is equally clear that the answer to that problem is not waste-to-energy incineration. The committee agreed that there are a range of highly toxic pollutants that are produced through this process, as well as extremely toxic fly and bottom ash. It is also of great concern that it would appear that the government is basically seeking to contract out waste management, having failed abjectly at meeting their requirements to divert waste. There are some positive recommendations, including the monitoring of emissions on a continuous basis and that there be an investigation by the Auditor-General to undertake a review of the regulatory framework.

However, there was also a unity ticket between the government and the opposition. We saw, for example, a very narrow interpretation of the precautionary principles. There was a question that the safety of waste to energy be established prior to permits being granted – that was rejected; that all

waste-to-energy projects have an environmental impact statement – that was rejected; that the minimum buffers be established around these things – that was rejected; and in the context of that referral to the Auditor-General that, until such time as there is actually a finding from the Auditor-General, there be a moratorium – that was rejected. We have a situation now where there is a need for action, and we are just not seeing it. And what a stark contrast it is, as Mr Welch suggested, where we have government ministers and MPs, state and federal, rejecting this technology while the government says, ‘It’s all good. No worries.’ There is no social licence for this project. I also would like to extend my profound thanks to the secretariat, to Michael Baker and to Jess for all of their great work. It has been a pleasure to work with them on this inquiry.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:23): Victoria certainly has a massive problem when it comes to waste. Our state cannot keep burying waste in the ground. During the parliamentary inquiry into the development and expansion of waste-to-energy infrastructure in Victoria, the committee did hear substantial evidence that Victoria’s landfills are filling up and are projected to begin running out of capacity in the mid-2030s. Waste to energy has an important role to play in dealing with the waste that cannot be recycled while generating useful energy and reducing our reliance on landfill. Labor have been in government since 2014. They have had plenty of time to get it right, but the waste in Victoria – pun intended – is an absolute mess. They have wasted their time in office and managed to waste taxpayer funds in the process. Mr Welch referred, in the Liberals and Nationals minority report, to a government minister sponsoring a petition about a project in her own electorate while she was the Minister for Energy and Resources, and that is extraordinary.

The Sunbury hearing was well attended because of community concerns about whether the proposed facility is appropriately located, particularly given its proximity to residential areas and concerns about traffic impacts and heavy vehicle movements that put pressure on public roads in the area. The community raised important concerns, but they felt ignored in the process. Victoria should use waste to energy where appropriate – location does matter – and waste streams, environmental impacts and community interests need to be properly considered. We should prioritise reducing, reusing and recycling waste, but for the material that cannot be recycled, sending it to landfill should not be the only option. Waste to energy can reduce landfill, create jobs, support regional industries and generate energy. But we cannot afford poorly planned waste-to-energy facilities.

I do want to thank the committee members and the secretariat, particularly Michael Baker for his work on this report and also the decades of service that he has contributed to this Parliament – we appreciate that. We support waste to energy where appropriate, and the Nationals will continue to push for sensible waste reduction.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:25): (*By leave*) I just want to make some comments. I was not a committee member on this inquiry, but I have followed it closely. I do want to put on record my thanks to Michael Baker.

The PRESIDENT: You are a participating member.

David DAVIS: I am a participating member, but I was not an active member on this inquiry. But I have followed it closely. I do want to put on record my thanks to Michael Baker for the work he has done on inquiries over a number of years; I cannot tell you how many, but it is a lot. I am thankful and I think everyone is.

I want to pick up some of the points that have been made by others. The state government’s policy on waste management is in chaos – there is no question of that – and it does need to be thoroughly rethought. I do want to put on record the work of Simmone Cottom and her fierce advocacy for her community on these matters. She has been a tireless, very significant advocate – and many have paid heed to the work that she has done in the local community of Sunbury – in her strong advocacy for that community, against the particular proposals that have been put to that community. I note the

hearings, but I also note the firm private advocacy that she has undertaken so that people in this chamber on all sides know what the community is feeling.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:27): I rise to speak briefly on this report, as I am a member of this committee. I would like to pay tribute to Michael Baker for his decades of service to the Parliament and acknowledge his work and my appreciation for the support he has given the committee and committee colleagues as well.

On waste to energy, I would echo the comments of Mr Davis, Mrs Broad and Mr Welch. We have the bizarre scenario where we have got members like the member for Mill Park, who designed and introduced this policy into the Parliament, then turning around and running petitions in her own electorate against waste to energy – against her own policy. That also goes for the member for Thomastown and the member for Sunbury, who were all in the Parliament when this legislation was introduced and all spruiking the merits of it, then turning around and petitioning their own communities against it. I think it goes to show why there is no social licence for these projects at the moment, when you have government members flip-flopping on policy. I will tell you one individual that has not flip-flopped on this policy, and that is Simmone Cottom, the Liberal candidate for Sunbury. She stood by her community and has got a firm commitment that if the Liberals and Nationals are elected, there will be no waste incinerator in Sunbury.

Motion agreed to.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Claims Made through the Transport Accident Commission (TAC)

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (13:28): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table the report on the inquiry into claims made through the Transport Accident Commission, including an appendix, from the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Joe McCRACKEN: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I think one of the most powerful aspects of this report is that it gives voice to the people that have had many significant challenges when dealing with the TAC in various circumstances. We as a committee heard some incredibly compelling and heartfelt and sometimes distressing evidence given about experiences that people had had with the TAC, and to every witness that appeared and to every person that made a submission: I want to thank you, because it was worth it. I also want to acknowledge the committee staff, who did an excellent job assisting the committee to do their work. Particularly I want to pay tribute to Mr Limbrick, who was the original mover of the motion to establish the inquiry. So thank you, Mr Limbrick, and indeed all the members of the committee, including Mr Galea, who is in the chamber as well.

I want to draw people to some parts of the report that I think are quite pertinent. Finding 3 talks about the TAC having mutual clients with other service providers at state and federal level, including the NDIS. The report certainly talks a lot about the interface between those two organisations and quite a lot of the challenges that have been experienced as well, and navigating that system was incredibly difficult for a lot of people. Finding 9 talks about the complexity of the administrative requirements of the TAC compensation scheme, and it increases proportionately as the complexity of a person's situation increases. For some people – for example, those that have had brain injuries – it is a burden that they have found incredibly challenging to deal with, and so there was discussion about the supports and the adequacy of the supports that are in place to help someone navigate that process.

Medical service providers who do not take on TAC clients listed the extensive administrative requirements that the scheme has as a major reason for not taking on those clients. That is at finding 15, and that was an incredibly important part of the inquiry as well. It goes on at finding 20 to talk about TAC clients in regional areas finding it incredibly difficult to have access to services when a lot of those services are not provided. With a lot of the operators there might only be one or two in a small regional town, and if they do not want to provide a service through the TAC, then you get nothing. So it is a gap that exists, and it is real.

Finding 22 states:

Complex legal, insurance and administrative processes can be overwhelming, confusing and distressing for TAC clients ...

It was even found that that can add secondary trauma. That is significant as well, and a lot of the witnesses that we heard from explained that very clearly.

Recommendation 6 is:

That the Victorian Government review surviving spouse and legal guardian payments in the situation where a child is orphaned and a new guardian is appointed.

It was such a sad story that we heard, but it is a very real story and a situation that we would never wish on anyone. I hope that when the government take on this report they give serious consideration to that particular aspect.

Recommendation 7 is:

That the TAC review its current claims management process to identify ways of constantly improving the disability-centred and trauma-informed practices ...

I think that is a huge one as well, because a lot of witnesses came forward and said they found dealing with the TAC a huge, huge challenge. To be fair, that was a large proportion of the submissions that were put forward. I really do hope that this inquiry makes a difference to those in government that read it and they take it upon themselves to implement some of the recommendations that have been put in this report. We would never wish for someone to have to deal with the TAC, but when they do, we would hope that they are supported in every possible way they can be so their recovery is assisted so they can get back on with living their lives. We hope that this report can help people to do that.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:34): I am pleased to rise to share a few words on this, and I welcome the tabling of this report today. At the outset I would like to also acknowledge our chair Mr McCracken for measuredly and studiously guiding us through this inquiry and acknowledge all other committee members, including Mr Limbrick, whose initiative it was for us to do this inquiry, and the very hardworking staff with Patrick O'Brien and his team. This was an opportunity to look at the TAC through a couple of snapshots, the first being through the macro lens. We did receive a large amount of evidence about the TAC's role, whether it be in terms of catering to more than 40,000 cases and claims on an ongoing basis each year or some of the work that is being done, such as the TAC protocols, which do show some promise in avoiding some of those more protracted and litigated disputes where they occur. It is also good to acknowledge that the TAC's proactive engagement with our committee certainly assisted us, and in terms of some of the reforms that they signalled to their client management systems, we very much look forward to seeing them and the effects that they will have.

Very importantly, as the chair was pointing to, this is also an opportunity to look at the scheme at the individual level, and I do really want to acknowledge the vast majority of people who came and spoke to our committee and who shared their evidence with us under great difficulty in many cases, including – and this is not meant to be exhaustive – Michael and Tamara Tesseymen, Kerryn Airs, Melita Parker and in particular, touching on what the chair commented on, Bernard and Michelle Robertson, a couple who tragically lost their daughter in a road traffic accident. Their daughter was a

single mother, and Bernard and Michelle have taken custody of their grandchild. Due to a fault in the legislation, they are not eligible for the same spousal payments had there been a surviving spouse, and recommendation 6 of this report very much goes to that legislative change that is required. I look forward to talking more on the report at a future date.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:36): There are times when you cannot help but be cynical about what goes on in Parliament, but this is not one of those times. The tabling of the report on the inquiry into claims made to the Transport Accident Commission is a great example of how things should work here. An accident victim first contacted my office back in February and organised a meeting with TAC claimants, many of whom were connected through a Facebook group. When I heard their stories, the seriousness quickly became apparent, and I moved to set up an inquiry. But it was sheer luck that I was able to do this in a timely manner after winning a draw to get a slot to debate the issue. To the credit of everyone here, this motion was supported, and I would like to thank the staff and the committee members, in particular the chair and deputy chair, who are here also. I think everyone can be proud of their involvement in this inquiry.

The inquiry heard how our lives can unravel through no fault of our own at any time. This report will not end the challenges faced by victims of road accidents, but it offers hope that we can fix the safety net. I am not here to criticise individuals at the TAC, who do difficult jobs and help many people, but I am here to say that all of us need to be held accountable and all of us need to remember who we serve. The heroes are here in the gallery and those who came before the committee. So many of them have amazing stories of perseverance. None of this could have happened without their advocacy, lobbying or openness. For many of them I know that that suffering is not over, and their advocacy will continue to be important. This report is not the end of a process; it is just the beginning. But there will be no more suffering in silence.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (13:38): I join fellow members of the committee to rise and make a reflection on the tabling of our final report on the inquiry into the Transport Accident Commission, and what I want to say before I begin is my thanks to Mr Limbrick for bringing this to me but also to our chair Mr McCracken for the way he managed what was an incredibly challenging inquiry. From the very beginning it was clear how deeply road trauma impacts our community. No-one expects to be involved in a serious accident, and when the unthinkable happens Victorians rely on support systems to be there. When we first debated that motion back in February, the number of lives lost on our roads this year was 33, and as of only a couple of days ago that has risen to 158. That is why I express my deepest personal appreciation for the many people who bravely reached out to share their personal stories. Reliving trauma is never easy, but your willingness to recount your experiences with lodgement, treatment and recovery provided a really essential human lens for this committee and the work that we did. These contributions served as a vital reminder of why our support systems must be transparent and responsive.

I also want to express my sincere gratitude to all the stakeholders, medical professionals, legal experts and community organisations who took the time to prepare detailed submissions and give evidence at the inquiry. Your collective insights helped us thoroughly examine the broader health and disability landscape, the on-the-ground realities of the scheme and the practical ways that we can continue to improve client outcomes. I want to thank the committee secretariat as well and my colleagues for their work, patience and collaboration through this process. The work done in this report helps shape our path forward, ensuring that we can continue to adapt to support and protect those who most depend upon it, and I look forward to seeing action come to life from the stories told throughout this inquiry.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (13:40): I too would like to rise and make a brief contribution on the tabling of this report. This inquiry was really important. It was important to centre the voices of TAC family members, individuals and clients and hear about their traumatising experiences. The stories that we heard as a committee were quite harrowing, talking about case complexity as well as the administrative burden placed on clients when it came to situations where they were obviously upended and impacted by road trauma, and then having to access the TAC

compensation scheme and how difficult it was to navigate the frameworks and the challenges. In some instances we heard how some clients actually had to FOI their own personal information. That should not be the system that is trying to support road trauma clients and family members. TAC should, in every way possible, make the process for TAC clients as trauma free, trauma informed and person centred as possible, because what we heard were issues of suicidal ideation and very deep mental health challenges along the way when clients were trying to access compensation.

I really hope that the findings and recommendations from this report will be meaningfully taken on by the government, because too many family members fall by the wayside when through no fault of their own they have had to access TAC in the first place. I would like to thank the chair, and I would like to thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this important inquiry to the Parliament, as well as the secretariat and everyone involved in this inquiry.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:42): I too rise to make a very brief contribution on this report tabled today. It was terrific to be able to hear from the Transport Accident Commission. I too thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this before us and all those who participated and made this possible – my parliamentary colleagues and of course the department as well.

It was incredibly important to hear from the TAC as well as to hear from victims. One of the things that came out of this and is in the report is that it is still difficult for people in regional Victoria to access the services that they need when they are in an accident. Another thing that was very evident was that there are discrepancies. If a child is orphaned and no longer has a parent to look after them and they go with grandparents, the same payments do not apply to grandparents that would have applied to a single parent in a situation where there has been a loss of life. These are things that have come out of this particular inquiry that are going to be reviewed, and recommendations have been made. It was also important to hear that when there are delays or discrepancies in understanding what the medical diagnosis and treatment is, that can also be problematic for an individual who is experiencing those delays because they then have to look at the treatment and the payments themselves in the interim.

There were a number of things that came out of this. The TAC was very ready and willing to continually make improvements, which I think is a very positive thing. I think that all in all the progress that has been made and will continue to be made in the TAC and for future people who may need to access the funding through the TAC is positive, and I think that this report is very helpful in that process.

Motion agreed to.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:44): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a report on the 2026–27 budget estimates from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Michael GALEA: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

It is somewhat bittersweet to be talking about the final Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates hearings for this term of the Parliament. We will have some other reflections on the PAEC more broadly in a subsequent report. However, this was, as always, a really valuable opportunity for the committee to dive in and engage on behalf of the Parliament with the projected budget and to go through that in broad and finite detail as well. This year's state budget is another one that delivers on the government's fiscal commitments and invests in Victorian households, and it is also one that came about earlier this year at a particularly difficult time through foreign conflicts in the

Middle East. In spite of that, notable facts from the budget which are reiterated and endorsed through the PAEC report include that the gross state product is projected to increase by 1.5 per cent this year, with employment increasing by 1.25 per cent, wages growth to remain above inflation and population to return to long-term growth trends as well. Of course in terms of the government's fiscal strategy we are now well and truly progressing through the various steps of that, with the objective to stabilise net debt as a proportion of GSP targeted to be achieved in this financial year, which will then allow the subsequent stage of reducing net debt as a proportion of GSP to follow in the years thereafter.

Of course the state budget is critically important, but so too are the household budgets of 7 million Victorians. That is why it is good to see this budget continuing to invest in meaningful, practical cost-of-living relief for Victorians, as we are in a difficult time, with reference again to some of those broader economic headwinds that are affecting not just Australia but other developed economies around the world too, indeed through measures like the 20 per cent off rego, which has been extended following the hearings for another month. It is now closing in just a few days time, early next week, and it is a really important initiative that has been taken up with gusto by Victorian households. This is a really good opportunity to remind people to claim the 20 per cent off rego discount and indeed to avail themselves of half-price public transport, which continues to provide benefits to tens of thousands of Victorians each and every day as well.

This report obviously is a broad look into various different facets of government expenditure and revenue, so there was a focus this year on some of the very important judicial and justice reforms that have been implemented by this government and put through the Parliament over the preceding couple of years. That includes measuring the performance, financial outcomes and projected financial outcomes of the court system, the corrections system and all the other interrelated parts as we have seen the success of the government's bail reforms, the rollout of PSOs to shopping centres through Operation Pulse and other initiatives as well. This report does take a detailed look at its impact on various parts of state spending, which is good to see as well.

In the transport space there continues to be significant investment by this government, and one other part the report looked at was the Suburban Rail Loop. It is great to see this very important city-shaping project continuing apace and to see the transformation that this is going to bring to the south-eastern suburbs, broader metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria as well. Indeed I take the opportunity to welcome the announcement from Premier Carroll, from the Treasurer and from the Minister for Public Transport this morning identifying ways in which this city-shaping and vital infrastructure project can be delivered in an even more cost-effective manner. It is very important that when it comes to spending taxpayers money it is done in as prudent a way as possible. Today's announcement certainly seeks to continue that work and to make sure that this very, very important project which must proceed and which would potentially be cut by a Liberal–One Nation coalition can proceed with all the thousands of jobs let alone the city-shaping opportunities it will provide in the years to come. Now, with my time coming to a close –

Members interjecting.

Jeff Bourman: On a point of order, President, I invite Mr Davis to withdraw his comment and what he just called Mr Galea, without repeating it. I heard it.

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, I did not.

David Davis: On the point of order, President, it is a matter for the relevant member to a call for that, if anything.

Michael GALEA: I will ask Mr Davis to withdraw.

David Davis: I withdraw that he is a whacker.

Michael GALEA: On a point of order, President, as Mr Davis well knows, withdrawing a comment is not an opportunity to repeat it to the chamber, though he is certainly an expert at doing that.

The PRESIDENT: That is very unparliamentary, Mr Davis. Can you please just withdraw –

David Davis: I do withdraw. I know he is sensitive to the matters around ‘whacker’.

The PRESIDENT: No. Have another crack at it and just stand up and say, ‘I withdraw.’

David Davis: I withdraw. President, I do note he is very sensitive.

The PRESIDENT: No. Have another crack at it and just say, ‘I withdraw.’

David Davis: I withdraw, President.

Michael GALEA: On that note, I very much look forward to Mr Puglielli’s annual PAEC poem.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:50): I have been summoned. From the outset, I will thank the secretariat, Igor and the team, for what is a massive undertaking every time one of these reports needs to be brought forward. I also want to thank fellow committee members for the weeks that we slog out doing the PAEC process.

PAEC examines budgets, our economy made visceral
 With information plentiful and right through to peripheral
 We heard the debt of our fair state but not solutions literal
 More taxes on the corporations because of course I’m not a Liberal
 We are very well acquainted too with reasons mathematical
 From ministers, departments and officials most emphatical
 About all the reasons things are going well, naught problematical
 And anything opposing this condemned as though fanatical
 There was a flavour missed this year: integrity
 Miraculous: not knowing diaries of staff or those of gambling lobbyists
 The lottery: the deal was struck with answers quite the sloppiest
 So IBAC’s been referred a minister who is not the jolliest
 We know department histories, changed minister’s portfolios
 We’re asking the hard questions but the answers would be more holy, though
 I could quote a wonderful exchange with Lily D’Ambrosio
 And again commander Weimar was the government’s fair Romeo
 So here I stand still calling for a modicum of PAEC reform
 To which extent I will stand before you now and happily perform
 In short, the chair should not be government – I mean the person, not chair literal
 That is my message from the Greens to parties Labor Liberal.

Motion agreed to.

60th Parliament End of Term Report

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:52): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table the *60th Parliament End of Term Report*, including appendices, from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Michael GALEA: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

It is an exciting report, although the gallery seems to be a bit lighter on than it was. It is effectively PAEC’s version of a high school yearbook. It gives a bit of a quickfire summary of the work that we have done over the preceding four years. It does give me a chance to make a few acknowledgements, including to some former members of the PAEC who I see in the room, Mrs McArthur and Mr Welch,

and Mr McGowan is somewhere in the precinct as well, I am sure, and other former members of the committee in this place as well as my colleague here Mr Puglielli who remains on the PAEC. There is a lot of important work that the PAEC undertakes. Indeed we have just spoken to one of the most prominent and visible parts, which is the estimates process. Over the course of this Parliament, this committee has tabled 15 separate reports, including estimates but also a wide range of other activities as well. Certainly though for each estimates and outcomes hearing there is a great deal of work done by the incredibly hardworking secretariat, by broadcast, Hansard, the catering teams and all the other support staff in the Parliament too. Particularly for estimates, and the gruelling daily long-haul flight that that turns into for PAEC members, I do want to acknowledge the tireless efforts of our staff and our secretariat, including our executive officer Igor Dosen, lead analysts Dr Krystle Gatt Rapa and Charlotte Lever, financial analyst Dr Kathleen Hurley, analyst Dr Merryn Smith, research assistants Rowen Germain and Erin O'Neill as well and administrative officer Jacqueline Coleman.

For this and many other inquiries, including two very important follow-up inquiries to Victorian Auditor-General's Office reports this term, which included one into gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria, we had some very powerful roundtable sessions held here in the Parliament, with a forum for young people to share their perspectives on gambling in the Legislative Assembly chamber. This was certainly very moving for me and I know for so many other government members as well. We also undertook a Victorian Auditor-General's Office follow-up inquiry into local government financial and fraud controls. Further to this, there was an own-motion inquiry by the committee this term into vaping and tobacco controls, which was kicked off with a regional hearing in Shepparton. It was great to hear a wide breadth of evidence, again in fact particularly from young people. I will acknowledge again the student leaders from Greater Shepparton Secondary College, who came to our inquiry and spoke very powerfully.

Beyond the inquiry space, though, there are a number of other important functions that the PAEC undertakes as part of its public accounts function. That included in this term the ongoing financial and performance audits of the Auditor-General's office, and it also included the recommendation to reappoint the Auditor-General for a second term. Indeed it also consulted on the selection of a new Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is a very important part of the Parliament, as a relatively new function and officer, but it is a service that has been taken up with gusto by members across the aisle in both chambers. Indeed it is quite a unique situation in Victoria. We are the only state or territory to have a permanent and ongoing Parliamentary Budget Officer role. Other jurisdictions, like New South Wales, do have a time-limited one solely for election time, but in Victoria we are the only state to have that ongoing going function. We met with many visiting delegations from other states who were quite interested in the Victorian model and how they can adapt that to their own jurisdiction.

On that note, of course there is also the ever so highly important work of the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees, which held two meetings in the course of this term. Members of the PAEC, including me, were able to represent the work of our committee. It is always good to hear, connect with and learn from the experience of other jurisdictions in this space as well.

We have had quite a few members of the PAEC, and I have already acknowledged the members from this chamber, but I do wish to acknowledge all of the members I have had the privilege to work with on this most absorbing and enlightening committee over the past term. I pay particular tribute to the chair, the member for Laverton Sarah Connolly, who has been a wonderful example and role model and whom I have certainly learned much from in this term through the PAEC and more broadly as well. I want to pay tribute to her tireless dedication to ensuring that we could fulfil our functions to the fullest manner, be it through various inquiries or the other work that the PAEC does. I do commend this brief report on the PAEC to the house.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:58): I also, similar to the last report, want to congratulate fellow committee members and the secretariat on their work over the course of this Public Accounts and Estimates Committee term. This is a report that I did not really know existed until quite

recently, and then I had forgotten that they were going to be debated separately, so I do not have a big, long poem. However, I have written one of those acrostic-style ones, so Hansard might need to reflect it that way.

Public
Accounts
Estimates
Comprehensively

Rendered
Exceptional
Following
Overhaul
Reforms
Mainly

Non-government
Oversight
When?

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order of 5 August 2026 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Lynch’s Bridge Historic Precinct Reserve.

Health Complaints Commissioner – Report, 2025–26.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 20 (*Gazette S402, 10 July 2026*).

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s Report on the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes.

Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968 – Compliance Officer – Statement of Findings: Appeal of a decision to reject a claim under the Electorate Office and Communications Budget (Appeal reference 2026/01), under section 9H of the Act (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Glen Eira Planning Scheme – Amendment C240.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C500.

Melbourne and Port Phillip Planning Schemes – Amendment GC296.

Surf Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C150.

Warrnambool Planning Scheme – Amendment C222.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Land Act 1958 – No. 113.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – No. 114.

Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 – Nos. 111 and 112.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 99, 113 and 114.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning’s responses to three petitions titled ‘Return Harold Freedman’s Geelong

regional history mosaic mural to public display', 'Reject proposal to rezone the Wodonga golf course' and 'Rezoning of Kingswood golf course'.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:16): I move, by leave:

That on Wednesday 26 August 2026:

- (1) standing and sessional orders be suspended to the extent necessary to allow general business to include three petitions that have qualified for debate under standing order 11.03(10);
- (2) the following general business take precedence:
 - (a) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026;
 - (b) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Local Government Amendment (Stability of Councils) Bill 2026;
 - (c) order of the day 4, second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026;
 - (d) notice of motion given this day by Sarah Mansfield on the ministerial code of conduct;
 - (e) notice of motion given this day by David Davis disallowing statutory rules 111 and 112 made under the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990;
 - (f) petition qualifying for debate 3 standing in the name of Wendy Lovell titled 'Mernda police station';
 - (g) petition qualifying for debate 4 standing in the name of Nick McGowan titled 'Prostate cancer and men's health awareness'; and
 - (h) petition qualifying for debate 7 standing in the name of Renee Heath titled 'Financial assistance for roadworks in Pakenham'.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026

Instruction to committee

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:18): I move, by leave:

That standing orders be suspended to the extent necessary to provide that it be an instruction to the committee when considering the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026 that they have the power to consider amendments and a new clause to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to establish a new process for requiring financial institutions to produce documents that are relevant to certain offences.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Point Grey

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (14:18): Lorne is a spectacular town on the Great Ocean Road, and if you know Lorne, you will know Point Grey is pretty special as well. Last week I joined representatives from the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, Surf Coast Shire Council and Regional Development Victoria to see how the \$12.95 million redevelopment of Point Grey is taking shape. The redevelopment will provide new and improved facilities, including a new Lorne Aquatic and Angling Club building, a new co-op that includes hospitality, new accessible public toilets,

improved parking, public open space, walking paths and new facilities for visitors and fishing. Importantly, it will honour the cultural, fishing and timber history that has made Lorne what it is today. I take this opportunity to thank the Lorne Historical Society for their input. Point Grey is being delivered by GORCAPA and funded through the Geelong City Deal. The Geelong City Deal is unlocking the potential of the Great Ocean Road visitor economy. It is bringing together greater economic opportunity to communities right along the Great Ocean Road, including Lorne. This is the vision of the state Labor government, making the benefits of the great Geelong City Deal flow through to all communities along the Great Ocean Road. It is a project that locals can be very, very proud of and visitors can enjoy for generations to come.

Education First Youth Foyers

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:20): As I near the end of my 24-year tenure in Parliament, I look back with immense pride on the Education First Youth Foyer policy that I developed and the delivery of the first three Education First Youth Foyers in Broadmeadows, Glen Waverley and Shepparton. The work of the youth foyers is truly transformational and is good Liberal policy that helps young people build a better life by giving them a hand up rather than a handout. I recently had the great pleasure of visiting the Glen Waverley foyer and attending the 10-year anniversary of the Shepparton foyer. It was deeply rewarding to hear the success stories of young people who were homeless and disconnecting with education but have now gone on to finish their education. Through the foyer they managed to finish school, study further and find employment, and many have even gone on to buy their own homes. That is why it is so disappointing to see Labor show a lack of urgency in expanding this successful program. In February 2023 the government announced funding for two additional Education First Youth Foyers in Wodonga and Wangaratta. The Wodonga foyer opened in May 2025, but the Wangaratta foyer has not even started construction yet. Instead of transforming young lives in Wangaratta, the government has wasted 3½ years. It is time to get on with the job of completing the Wangaratta foyer as soon as possible. I have also repeatedly called for youth foyers in Bendigo and Mildura, but Labor has refused to make further investments while wasting millions of dollars on pot plants and coffee machines.

Data centres

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:21): Last night Melton City Council became the latest in a growing line of councils to pass a moratorium on new AI data centres. Congratulations to the community, who did not stop turning up and calling on their council to advocate on their behalf. The data centre proposed in Plumpton in the City of Melton would be the largest data centre in Australia, and the scale is truly mind-boggling. It would be almost the size of six Chadstone shopping centres or 175 MCGs. It would use 2.4 gigawatts of energy, which is more energy than our largest coal-fired power station, Loy Yang A. For context, Loy Yang A currently provides 30 per cent of Victoria's energy – one data centre. Melton residents have been rightly dismayed at this proposal, which is going to cause noise and heat for those who live right nearby and add astronomical pressure on water and energy supplies without any clear benefit for them. They are part of a growing movement of communities right across Victoria who are deeply unsettled by Labor's enthusiastic entry into the AI arms race before proper regulations are set up to protect our environment, climate, communities and household bills. While the costs of these data centres for communities are enormous, the benefits are not at all clear. They will create minimal employment opportunities while the AI they support is likely to take jobs as the profits go into the pockets of tech billionaires. The Greens will back communities like Melton all the way, and we will not stop until the moratorium is in place.

Warrnambool rail line

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:23): I am delighted that six-carriage VLocity trains will soon operate on the Warrnambool line, delivering much-needed extra capacity on our busiest services. It is terrific news for our whole region, from Portland to Heywood to Hamilton and all the way down the line to Melbourne. Testing and regulatory approvals are now underway, with longer

trains expected on the busy Friday and weekend services later this year. Demand on the Warrnambool line continues to grow, particularly as we make public transport more affordable for all Victorians. When we introduced the regional fare cap to cut the cost of a return trip from Warrnambool to Melbourne, it saved more than \$70 per adult, and with half-price fares we know so many more people are choosing to travel by train. The Carroll Labor government is responding to that increased demand by delivering more capacity, enabled by the completion of the new \$30 million Warrnambool stabling facility. I am incredibly pleased to see the testing underway and look forward to the six-carriage VLocity trains alleviating pressure and carrying passengers on the Warrnambool line in the near future.

Timothy Geoffrey Austin

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:25): Timothy Geoffrey Austin passed away peacefully at Port Fairy hospital on 15 June this year, aged 91. In 1956 Tim established Elfinvale Stud Kelpies, beginning a bloodline of Australian kelpies renowned for their intelligence, natural instinct, endurance and extraordinary work ethic. For 70 years Elfinvale has represented the very best qualities of the Australian kelpie. Tim's contribution went beyond breeding and training. In 1991 he published a book entitled *Our Australian Kelpie* that documents the history and working qualities of this uniquely Australian breed. His efforts helped preserve and promote the knowledge passed down through generations of stockmen and breeders. Today, in the stud's 70th year, that work continues under the stewardship of Tim's son Tom Austin. Tim leaves behind a remarkable family legacy but also a living legacy in the dogs that continue to work Australian farms and stations. On behalf of the Parliament, I extend my condolences to Tim's wife Judy, his children Jane, John and Tom, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the wider Austin family. Vale, Tim Austin.

Greenlife Industry Victoria

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:26): Today marks the beginning of my favourite week here at the Parliament of Victoria. Each year, Greenlife Industry Victoria puts on an amazing display of new plants and even old favourites. Queen's Hall turns into a beautiful indoor garden where members and visitors can admire the display, be inspired and recognise the importance of our horticultural industry here in Victoria. I look forward to spending as much time as possible in the exhibit and listening to all the advice I can take in.

Ukraine Independence Day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:27): Earlier this week Ukrainians all over the world celebrated Ukraine's 35th independence day. They celebrated the united, undefeated and unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people as well as the preservation of their unique identity, language, traditions and culture. I proudly joined the rally at Federation Square to mark this occasion and to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian community along with parliamentary colleagues Michael Galea and Ann-Marie Hermans from this place and Matthew Guy and David Southwick from the other place.

It is important to acknowledge that on the 24 August 1991 Ukraine declared its independence, restoring the sovereign statehood of a nation. But this was not the beginning of Ukraine's statehood; it was the culmination of a centuries-long history and a long struggle to regain a sovereign state. Ukrainians continue to pay an extraordinarily high price for their independence and freedom, and that same spirit of self-determination endures today, tested but unbroken, as Ukraine is once again defending its independence and territorial integrity against brutal and illegal Russian aggression. This struggle is not only for land but for the right to exist, for the freedom to choose one's own future and to live in dignity. They are fighting to defend the international rules-based order so that this type of aggression cannot be perpetrated against others, and their response is one that will be noted throughout history and for generations to come.

Our solidarity with the resilient and defiant people of Ukraine remains steadfast as they fight for freedom, self-determination and human dignity. We continue to acknowledge the unwavering resolve,

strength and bravery of the Ukrainian people in their justified and bold defiance. I want to thank everyone who has supported Ukraine and Ukrainians in this fight as we recommit to a strong and free Ukraine and a just and democratic future for all Ukrainians. Slava Ukraini.

Electricity infrastructure

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:28): I want to draw the chamber's attention to the document released today, the 2026 *Electricity Statement of Opportunities* for the national electricity market, by AEMO, the Australian Energy Market Operator, and I think this house is entitled to a level of scepticism about AEMO's productions. The first point is that they are founded on the policy decisions of state governments. They do not, unlike the views of some, give the best outcome; they give an outcome driven by the enumerated policy statements of the particular local governments. In fact AEMO's report fails to tell the full story on a lot of issues around the reliability of our electricity supply. It is based on unrealistic and indeed, I think, somewhat rosy assumptions that power will be available when and where it is needed and that transmission lines will be built, noting the track record on this is not good and also noting that AEMO has consistently failed to allow for projects running late or over budget, and in Victoria that is certainly true as the costs have increased and increased. I note also that the controversial VNI West line appears to have had slippage, even in this, out to November 2031. Those who would say the VNI West would deliver electricity in the period around 2028 are sadly wrong, because the time has slipped by – (*Time expired*)

Tim Read

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:30): He is as charming as he is intelligent. He is the voice of reason as much as he is a determined fighter for justice – the kind of determination that comes from caring so much for people. He is not a man of many words but definitely a man of integrity and action. His achievements in Parliament may not have the public accolades he deserves, but his handprints are all over them. Integrity in politics matters to him. Democracy without big money matters to him. Representation of communities matters to him. The protection and independence of VicHealth matter to him. High-quality public education and funding for our public school teachers matter to him. Public housing and ensuring people have safe and secure housing matter to him. Health care that is accessible and high quality matters to him. These are the public goods he believes every Victorian deserves. He is a family man. He is our friend. He is Dr Tim Read, member for Brunswick. Thank you for setting the bar on what it means to be a public servant and a strong representative for Brunswick. I look forward to welcoming Adam Pulford come November to continue your legacy of people over profit every day of the week.

Colin 'Stocky' Stockdale

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:31): Cool in a crisis and compassionate in the community: today I recognise a remarkable South Gippsland legend, I am going to say, Mr Colin 'Stocky' Stockdale of Koonwarra. On Sunday he received the CFA's highest award, the Outstanding Service Medal. For six decades Stocky has served our community. Since joining a long time ago back in Koonwarra he has performed as brigade captain, group officer, strike team leader and incident controller as well as in many other active roles. He has been a leader, and he has been turning out to many fires over those six decades, including into New South Wales with the Hunter Valley fires, the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the 2019–20 East Gippsland fires. As he did, he mentored, he cared and he protected. There is no doubt there have been lives saved and communities protected because of Stocky's work. It is not only his operational expertise, it is his character. He is a quiet achiever, he is a trusted mentor and he loves a practical joke, and he is so calm and so caring right across his community. I congratulate him, his wife Snookie, because it is a family affair, and all his community for doing such wonderful work. Well done, Stocky. We love you to bits.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:33): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1583, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:33): I am very pleased to rise and speak to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. As a former nurse and midwife myself, I am always very pleased to be speaking to these bills when I can and to also, when we get these bills, understand the intentions of the government. I want to just say a few things around this bill and those that I have spoken to. Before I go to this bill, the bill essentially amends the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 to categorise or recategorise hospitals for the purposes of nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios, and it recategorises some hospitals at a higher level and categorises additional hospitals in schedules 1 and 3 of the principal act. That is important in relation to some of my colleagues who are in regional parts of Victoria where many of these recategorisations will have an impact and what it will mean to them. They are being put into those schedules, and therefore the nurse-to-patient ratios in those areas and specifically in those hospitals will have an impact, and also to areas around emergency departments and intensive care and the like.

I want to just place on record I have been around the state over the last few weeks, or few months, since we have been here, speaking to a whole range of clinicians, administrators, people within hospital boards and, importantly, patients, and they have been telling me the impacts of what is going on. I just moved a motion in the house around a Ballarat nurse who has written an open letter, very distressingly. This bill impacts exactly this very issue, because that nurse, who was a nurse at a busy regional hospital, the Ballarat Base Hospital, part of Grampians Health, was saying, in her words, the ‘caring was destroying me’, while she and fellow nurses felt abandoned and unheard. I do think that is really concerning, given these are the frontline nurses that do the work on behalf of the community and do an extraordinary job. We know that there is burnout and we know that staff are feeling under pressure and are not feeling supported, and part of what the government is trying to do with this bill is to provide that support and to put ratios in place to enable that to occur.

I will go back and just talk a little bit about the history before I get into this. In 2015 the then Andrews government introduced the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 to enshrine in law the minimum staffing levels for nurses and midwives in the Victorian public health system, and at the time the then shadow minister Mary Wooldridge was very clear about our support of those intentions. Those ratios were previously part of the nurses and midwives enterprise agreement, and since that time there has been a tranche of legislation that has been brought into the Parliament that has dealt with a number of areas around the patient ratios. That included ratios in specific settings, including stroke, haematology and oncology wards, palliative care, aged care, birthing suites and emergency departments. As I said, ratios apply to hospitals across the state according to classifications as levels 1 to 4 as listed in the act’s schedules, which I referred to earlier.

I was just reflecting on the debate, and at one point there was criticism around what had gone on. But in the 2018 tranche of legislation there was a real gap, and nurses and midwives that work in special care nurseries were not included in the bill. It was flawed, and I went back and had a look at what I said at the time and what Ms Wooldridge said at the time too. She was very clear:

Can I say at the outset that the Liberal–Nationals are not opposing this bill.

The bill did not proceed in 2018 and had to come back in 2019. There was quite a kerfuffle, and the government carried on and made a big deal out of it. So did others. It was completely unnecessary, because the government had stuffed up on the bill. When it came back in 2019 and we were debating it, I said at the time:

So I am very pleased that that flawed bill from the last Parliament has been rectified and that those midwives – those excellent midwives that provide the care in special care nurseries – are now recognised ...

I said it then and I say it again now, because I know what those nurses and midwives do in special care nurseries. I worked at the Women's Hospital for 10 years and know the amazing work that they do providing care in very difficult times and sometimes over very extended periods of time. That bill was flawed in its design, and the government corrected that and we debated that in 2019. I put it on record because I think there are some that just do not really understand the facts about what went on, and I would hope that they would not try to misrepresent actually what had gone on at the time.

This bill, as I said, implements the review that the government undertook into hospital classification, which then went to assess a hospital's workload and determine its staffing requirements. The review applied algorithms using health services' public datasets to reclassify hospitals based on their capacity and also patient complexity. I think that is very important to say, because with the mix of patient complexity, the mix of staffing that needs to be in place to support that patient complexity is incredibly important. It is why I raised, at the outset of the debate, the nurse that wrote that open letter to say how she and others felt abandoned and unheard, given the complexity and demands that are in our current health system. I want to say that it is a very different time from when I was nursing or when I was working at the Women's as a midwife and running a specialist clinic there – a very different time. The volumes are much greater. The complexity is much greater. With COVID and our increasing and ageing population – when people did not get screened and they did not have their elective surgeries – they were always going to get sicker. I said that at the time, and I maintain it. Bad government decisions have contributed to a lot of complexity that is being seen now.

The bill does raise a few issues, and I will tease some of this out during the committee stage. I did ask this in the briefing. Just as in the previous ratio-amending legislation, it is unclear if the allocated funding will be sufficient to meet the high costs of employing more casual agency nurses if hospitals are unable to recruit permanent staff. It is my understanding that the government has allocated \$109.7 million for these changes and it will add 253 full-time equivalent positions within the public health system. The last lot of legislation allocated a funding boost of I think \$270 million. I would like to understand a little bit more around the numbers that this equated to, because it was unclear to me with the answer that I got back. The department said, 'Yes, we've implemented it,' but it is not telling me exactly how many staff were put in place. Did it meet those requirements that the government said it would?

One of the other issues that has come to my attention is we do not have any real information on how well hospitals, especially in regional Victoria, are managing the current requirements legislated last year. We know that in some circumstances some hospitals can get exemptions. As I said, when I was asking this during the briefing the written response that I received was:

100% implementation of the April 2025 legislative amendments came into effect on 1 July 2026.

Data post 1 July 2026 is not yet available.

But that is not my point. I was asking, 'Have you been able to fulfil what you promised to do through the legislation of last year in providing the staffing arrangements that are needed?'

I want to go to the various feedback that I have received from stakeholders, and I thank them very much for providing their feedback. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, quite rightly and correctly, say:

The bill is the result of years of advocacy by ANMF nursing and midwifery members, particularly members in regional Victoria.

I am interested in that point. That is very true; they have been big proponents of these ratios. They go on to say:

It is backed by data. All proposed changes to the hospital level (Schedule 1 of the Act) or ED level (Schedule 3 of the Act) are based on a review of the Department of Health data. These levels in the Act determine the ratios in general medical/surgical wards, ICUs and emergency departments.

They also say:

The improved ratios will ... provide an opportunity for additional graduate nursing positions across these hospitals ...

While I am speaking about that, 1500-plus graduate nurses cannot get a job in this state. As I said at the outset, it is the complexity of the patient but also the experience of the staff which are very, very important to be able to manage what a hospital, a ward, an emergency department or an intensive care unit requires. It is not just about numbers going into those areas; it is about the skill set, the experience and the ability for those nurses to actually do the work in those very complex areas. I am pleased if there is opportunity for graduate nurses, but you cannot have all junior nurses coming into a system where you have got senior nurses leaving without that ability to mentor, support and supervise and provide, give and pass on their knowledge and expertise in this area. I know from my own experience how important it was for senior nurses to be there to impart their knowledge and to be there as a backup for you while you are dealing with some very difficult, challenging and complex times – sometimes extremely challenging. When you have got multiple things occurring at one time, you have to be able to allocate and understand the priorities of the care that you need to deliver, and that comes with experience and an understanding of the complexity of the patient, of the surrounds and of the environment that you are working in so you can determine the decision that you are making. That comes through that experience and leadership of senior nurses, and I am worried about that level. It is not just about numbers; people have got to recognise the complexity, and that is why I am interested in the data and interested in what that mix is.

The Australian College of Nursing provided some excellent feedback on the bill, and I thank them. They also raised this very issue I have been speaking about, around the number of nursing graduates completing their studies and becoming eligible for registration at the end of 2025. They spoke about the number, and they said to me:

ACN is aware that the 2026 cohort of nursing graduates is likely to be larger than that of 2025 ...

That is 1500 graduates, as I mentioned.

This highlights a critical disconnect between workforce demand and workforce planning, particularly in light of reductions in investment in transition-to-practice programs for newly qualified nurses in Victoria.

They went on to say that the additional funding may be needed to meet the higher costs of employing more casual agency nurses. Legislated ratios combined with workforce shortages increase reliance on agency nurses, which can impact hospital budgets and also affect continuity of care.

I have been an agency nurse. I worked as an agency nurse for a short period. You are put into situations which you are not familiar with, so it takes longer for you to familiarise yourself with procedures, understand the patient background and all of those things. That is a very legitimate concern that the ACN raises around the impact on continuity of care and also the constraints on hospital budgets. There are hospitals and health services in this state that are in deficit – so they tell me. The government might say what they like, but they are under enormous pressures. When you have got these legislative

requirements coming in – and I note that this is not going to be in place until 2029, I think – to make way for where these specialist areas are going, where these nurses are required, there is a huge demand on hospital budgets and the administrators and executives who are looking at those budgets and trying to work within the parameters that they have been provided. Those constraints that they are currently under could have an impact on things on such as planned surgery and emergency department capacity. We have seen reports this week that Royal Melbourne are turning away patients. They are not taking patients. They are dictating who they are taking, and that is a very significant issue that I am very concerned about.

The ACN obviously supports the bill's intent and the important benefits of ratios for nurses and patients yet notes that the effectiveness of ratios is dependent on the availability of a sustainable workforce. They highlight the disconnect between workforce demand and workforce planning, which may compromise the ability to deliver these legislative changes after the transition period. I think that is an important note that the ACN has picked up on. They are supportive, as we are, but how it is done, what is in the system now and what is happening in the system are very important to understand.

The Australian College of Critical Care Nurses also provided feedback. They also support stronger staffing ratios, but they warn that Victoria may not have enough specialist critical care nurses to safely meet the new requirements, particularly in regional hospitals and senior ICU roles. That goes back to my original point around the intention. No-one is disagreeing, but can it be delivered, especially in those regional areas where we know there are workforce shortages? There are gaps in these areas for clinicians at very senior levels, whether it is doctors or nurses. These are critical areas, like emergency departments and intensive care. You cannot just walk off the street as a newly branded nurse and be expected to manage a patient in an ICU or an emergency department competently. You need to have that experience, that time in the system, which gives you confidence and provides you with an ability to learn and grow and impart that experience as you work. The ACCCN also raised concerns about Victoria's current education and training capacity to develop the specialist workforce that may be required, including postgraduate, critical and nursing education, transition to specialty programs, clinical education positions and development pathways that enable experienced ICU nurses to progress into senior clinical and leadership roles – exactly what I have been talking about and discussing. It is very important that people understand how those transition programs actually do work and the impacts if they are not carried out or if they are not implemented appropriately.

There is no question that the Liberals and Nationals absolutely support the intent of this bill. We do not oppose this bill, but we have these concerns, and I will get clarity from the minister through the committee stage around some of these issues. We all want our nurses and midwives to be supported, to be safe and to be able to care for the patients that they are caring for, not to feel abandoned and not to feel unheard, like the Ballarat nurse who wrote her open letter. I mean, that was just a stunning plea, if you like. Somebody has been driven to that extent because of months and years of feeling under so much pressure. That is what we have got to stop. That is why we need to support our nurses and midwives in the incredibly important roles that they undertake.

I was so pleased, actually – the other day I was walking to a stakeholder meeting down here in Albert Street, and there were three women in the middle of the road calling out to me, and they had all come from St Vincent's. One of them said to me, 'I worked with you at the women's hospital,' and they were just terrific. They were talking about their work. They loved their work. They were such great nurses and midwives, and one of them was in a senior role, I think. It was so fabulous to hear these nurses reach out to me in the middle of Melbourne. I could not remember working with one of them, but we did recount some stories at the time, and they are happy memories. That is what I would hope for all our nurses and midwives, to have those happy memories, because it is a fantastic vocation. To those graduates that are coming through, I say stick with it, because it is important that you do have the ability to follow through what you have learned through the vocation that you have chosen. There are some fabulous men and women out there who are doing so much for the Victorian community,

and if we can provide greater support and understand what the challenges are and work towards fixing those, then we will go a long way to providing exceptional care, which we are all striving to do.

I am concerned, however, that there is so much pressure on the system at the moment, whether it is budgets or whether it is other things, like, as I referred to, the Ballarat nurse who left the system because she just could not do it any longer. She said, 'Caring was destroying me.' That is the last thing anyone wants to hear. I am sure those around her will be providing her support, but it is very unfortunate that a nurse has had to go to the length of writing an open letter to say that is the pressure they are under. She is not on her own. There are others that are saying, 'We feel unheard and unsupported.' I hear that too. I have nurses that contact me all the time about the challenges that they are under, and we do need to be supporting them. If this legislation goes some way to doing that in those areas – and this the final tranche of implementing what the government set out to do – then that is a good thing. But I will be raising questions in the committee stage to understand a little bit further what the government is going to do to alleviate some of these pressures.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. Before I get into the detail, I want to acknowledge the strong advocacy and hard work by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Victorian branch. I want to acknowledge in the gallery some colleagues today: assistant secretaries Sam Casey and Nicole Allan and also secretary Maddy Harradence. I can also reflect on my time at the nurses union working with Paul Gilbert and Lisa Fitzpatrick in regard to the very first bill that came to the Parliament that enshrined nurse-to-patient ratios in law. Might I say that when the Victorian Parliament introduced the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 – when Victorian Labor introduced that – we were only the second jurisdiction in the world to legislate nurse-to-patient ratios. That was a promise that we kept, and I am really pleased to be here today speaking in this chamber again about extending and expanding nurse-to-patient care ratios, because they are important and we know they work. I am going to talk a bit in a minute about why they work and why they are so important.

They are important from a workforce perspective but also from a clinical perspective. They deliver better patient outcomes. There is a lot of detail about this, and I know that there are lots of different angles to this as well; it is not just one-dimensional. I was just reading some of the detail about this in the ANMF journal from July 2024 that talks about some of this. For example, we have as a result of these reforms clinical outcomes and patient safety outcomes that reduce patient mortality. There is broader health services research that evaluates that the change in nursing ratios demonstrates a direct inverse relationship between higher nurse staffing levels and in-hospital mortality. The studies on mandating staffing thresholds show that ensuring that nurses handle no more than four patients on acute day shifts significantly reduces the risk of preventable inpatient deaths. That can only be seen in one way, and that is as very good news. It is very good news for the care that gets delivered in our public hospitals and it is also good news for patients and their families – they can have confidence in our public health system and know that through these ratios they are getting the very best care that can be provided in our public health system.

What has also been highlighted by these reforms is that there are mandated ratios that correlate with measurable drops in failure-to-rescue events: nosocomial infections, medical errors and pressure injuries. Sufficient staffing ensures timely monitoring, enabling early detection and clinical intervention when a patient's condition deteriorates. Again, as we know, by making sure that these ratios are in place we know that our nurses have more time to provide excellent care, so we can see that these things are being documented and being studied as well. Also, importantly, lower readmission rates and shorter lengths of stay – nobody goes to a hospital by choice. But of course we need to when we are very sick, and when we go there, what we are seeing is that the implementation of ratios demonstrates a net reduction in average length of stay and fewer unplanned 30-day readmissions. This alleviates the ongoing burden of higher acuity cases needing readmission to

hospitals. Now we have this increased care, it is much better. We are seeing fewer 30-day readmissions, so again it is better for patients and better for hospitals.

I might just add that on the workforce aspects these nurse-to-patient ratio changes will see an additional 253 full-time equivalent nursing positions added to the system, and this is backed by a \$109.7 million investment in our public health system. The legislation will reclassify 26 hospitals, including 17 in rural and regional Victoria, to a higher level. I was pleased to see, while sitting here researching and looking at the notes and information, that Maroondah Hospital is one of those ones that is going to be reclassified. It is a very important hospital in my region. It is a very busy hospital in my region. It has lots of different acuities there. I was just there the other day. We were talking about the newly announced stage 1 redevelopment rebuild of Maroondah Hospital, which is the paediatric ED. We are seeing lots more children being admitted to the ED, and it is a good thing that our government invests in ensuring that Maroondah Hospital will have a dedicated paediatric ED. Having little kids in emergency departments is not such a good thing – it is a very busy and very stressful environment – so if we provide a quieter space for children to be admitted it is much better for them as well.

I just might quickly go through some of the hospitals that have been listed: Maryborough hospital, Maroondah Hospital, Mercy women, Royal Women's Hospital, Werribee Mercy – these are some of the busiest hospitals in our public health network – Angliss, Rosebud, the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, Victorian Heart Hospital, Sandringham, Ballarat Base, Bendigo Health, Latrobe Regional, Shepparton, Bairnsdale, Echuca, Sale, Swan Hill, West Gippsland, Wimmera, Wodonga, Wonthaggi, Ararat, Colac, Wangaratta and Hamilton. As you can see, many rural and regional hospitals will stand to benefit from these additional ratios. As I said earlier, what we know is that means that there will be better patient care, better patient outcomes and reduced readmission rates as a result of these ratios.

I will not go into great detail because I know we have got to be efficient today in our contributions, apparently, because we want to get through the day and not be here till 3 o'clock in the morning, but nevertheless one of the other things that we know as a result of workforce stability and continuity of care is that these ratios also mean better nurse retention and recruitment, because the pressures that our hardworking nurses are under are just crippling. It is a very busy, very challenging environment and our nurses do a fabulous job, but what we seeing is that there is an improvement in nurse retention and recruitment and also, importantly, a reduction in burnout and missed care. Those things are really important. When you are tired and burnt out because you have been going from shift to shift to shift and dealing with patients with very high acuity and just racing, it is very difficult. These ratios mean that we will see a reduction in the burnout and the missed care, so again, it is very, very critically important.

I could go on and on. There is lots to talk about on this. But also, importantly, in terms of ongoing policy refinement – and I remember talking about this with my colleagues when I was at the nurses union; we always talked about things like skill mix management – it is really important that we make sure that where we have nurses, and this is something Ms Crozier talked about, there is a consideration around that. Obviously when you have got a shift of nurses, you need to make sure they have got the right skill mix, that people are being supervised properly and also that those nurses are learning on the job, if they are new graduates and the like. There are a range of things that look to cover those sorts of aspects as well.

As we know, the investment in our nurse-to-patient ratios and the extension and expansion of them will also mean that additional roles will create more opportunities for graduate and early career nurses. We have delivered a huge pay increase, and full credit to the nurses union for bargaining for that 28.4 per cent pay rise. That means our nurses were fully recognised in that pay increase as well, because they work very, very hard, and we know the challenges that they all experienced during COVID as well. With that pay increase, clearly the members were very strong in their view about making sure they were recognised in that bargaining agreement, and they won a significant pay increase. But also there is the advocacy, as I said before, of the ANMF and their pursuit of ensuring

these nurse-to-patient ratios are fully delivered and what this will also mean for nurse-to-patient ratios across Victoria.

I want to talk about some of the detail: in ICUs the gold standard of one-to-one nurse-to-patient ratios on all shifts for level 1 and 2 hospitals, as well as team leader and liaison nurses; in emergency departments improving staff ratios in resuscitation cubicles on morning shifts in line with afternoon and night shifts; in maternity services safer one-to-four midwife-to-patient ratios in postnatal and antenatal wards on night shift, down from one-to-six; and in high dependency and coronary care units the introduction of an in-charge nurse overnight. Again, this is critically important. You can see the detail about how this is going to be delivered and the rollout of it.

Also, the Victorian government will continue to support workforce recruitment and retention and professional development in regional and rural areas, and here is some of the detail around that. The rural urgent care nurses capability development program supports registered nurses working in urgent care centres in rural and regional Victoria to provide safe, high-quality care. In 2024–25, 349 nurses were supported through online learning modules, face-to-face workshops and clinical placements, and the Maternity Connect Program supports midwives and nurses working in rural and regional health services to maintain their skills by providing short-term clinical placements in larger regional or metropolitan maternity health services, supporting them with their professional development and skill improvement. So there is scaffolding and infrastructure around this legislation, and you can see I have gone to some of the detail about how we are going to ensure that the skill mix will be met and how the appropriate staffing will be attended to. I will leave my comments there because, as I said, we have been told we need to be efficient today with our contributions, but I commend the bill to the house.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:07): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the discussion that we are having in the chamber today about the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. In 2015 the government moved to enshrine in law the minimum staffing levels for nurses and midwives in the Victorian public health system, and this amendment seeks to update the existing classifications of 26 hospitals, including 17 in rural and regional areas. Health care in rural and regional areas is not always that easy to come by. I was speaking with a lady today from Harrietville whose husband had severely injured his knee, and she had to go to Wangaratta. They could not get an X-ray there and could not get an MRI. They then had to go to Bright, where they got an X-ray, and ended up having to go to Albury Wodonga Health, which was a 2-hour drive. A 7 am surgery was locked in, which meant overnight accommodation the night before. But this is the challenge that is occurring in our regional areas when it comes to health care, and recent news reports show that there have been over 3300 patients admitted to emergency that stayed over 24 hours. Seventy per cent of those were from rural and regional hospitals, and that includes in Bendigo, which is where my office is located, and I live in that community.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report from 2024 shows that over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the number of patients that are having to stay 24 hours or more. That is incredible pressure on staff and those are not very good outcomes for patients. I have spoken with a number of people who have been in contact with me who have raised concerns about being left in a wheelchair, being left in a corridor, waiting for support or going to the emergency services and not being able to get it. I have also heard from many – and I have spoken about it in this chamber – about the lack of ambulance services being made available and even taxis not being available and families finding the very difficult circumstance of having to get their loved one at a traumatic time to the hospital. I have heard from nurses in response to this bill, and they have indicated to me that the hospital emergency department presentation and hospital admission data has been collected for all our Victorian public hospitals and that it has been recognised for some time that the current classification system does not reflect the increased demand we are seeing in our public hospitals.

As has been mentioned, the changes in this bill come into operation at different times for general wards, emergency departments and intensive care units. Changes to general ward ratios for hospitals in schedule 1 commence on 1 July 2027. From that date, hospitals that have been recategorised or are

newly included must comply with the nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios that apply to their new level. Schedule 1 changes – the hospitals upgraded to level 1 – include Bendigo Hospital, which is in the Northern Victoria electorate. Hospitals classified as level 2 include Albury Wodonga Health's Wodonga campus, Echuca Regional Health and Swan Hill District Health, which are all in Northern Victoria as well. I note that for the hospitals upgraded from level 2 to level 1, the ICU staffing requirements that apply to level 1 hospitals will not apply until 1 July 2029 under these transitional arrangements. I know that certainly with the emergency department wait times that we are seeing that is a significant concern.

I understand it is complex, and I really appreciate the work of Ms Crozier in this space. It is so beneficial to have someone with experience of working in the sector. I know this from my own family. I have got an aunty that was a nurse. She is now retired, but she spent her whole career as a nurse and with training, and it was very beneficial to have her insights. Now my own daughter is studying nursing, so I hope that she will be able to help contribute in future, because we know that we really need to support those people that are undertaking training. Ms Crozier has undertaken a lot of consultation and received feedback from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the Australian College of Nursing and the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses, and there have been a number of concerns raised. Just as we have had with previous legislation that has come through this chamber over the years that has been about amending the legislation, it is unclear if the allocated funding will be sufficient to meet the higher costs of employing more casual agency nurses in hospitals that are unable to recruit permanent staff. I know from speaking with people that that is a very expensive way of trying to retain staff numbers. The department staff were asked in the bill briefing if all hospitals are meeting the current ratios, which commenced in full on 1 July 2026. It was taken on notice, but at the time of this bill report it had not yet been responded to. The Australian College of Nursing acknowledged the important benefits of ratios for nurses and patients but noted the effectiveness of ratios is dependent on the availability of a sustainable workforce.

I know this from the feedback that I have had from nurses in the community. I will quote them, because it is very beneficial to hear from them directly:

In my 25 years nursing, I have seen increased demand for health care and increased acuity of patients with added complexity to the Nursing role. Part of our nursing role is to support our nursing students, graduates and less experienced nurses. The evenings are at a time when less staff are working to provide support to these nurses, and having the improved ratios would definitely help to give these staff the adequate mentoring and support they need early in their career, which in turn, helps retain them in the system and keep patients safe.

There are many Government targets our hospital strives to achieve, and the pressure to meet these is filtered down to our wards. With the high patient turnover and acuity, it often feels like a rush against the clock to get everything done, and at times things are missed because we simply don't have the time in the day to do all we would like, and all our patients deserve. For some staff this leads to increased personal leave, burnout, or moving to other less demanding areas. Improved evening ratios I could see would alleviate some of this pressure, and would result in improved care to our patients.

Another nurse wrote to me about this legislation. I think it is very important to share this insight, because I have heard this is happening. The situations and the threats that nurses are facing now when they go to work are appalling. Her correspondence to me stated:

Nurses are being assaulted, and nurses are leaving bedside nursing because of it. Weekly a friend tells me of a job they've applied for outside of the hospital. More nurses are dropping to casual so they can decide when they want to be present on the ward.

I was punched in the face by a patient when I was six weeks pregnant. Just last week, a nurse friend of mine was slapped in the face by a different patient. Those incidents were approximately a year apart, yet despite the constant occupational health and safety meetings our hospital holds, there has been no meaningful change in that time.

She went on to say:

Last year, we had two patients with dementia become physically aggressive towards each other in our hospital hallway. It was young female nurses who were left standing between them, frightened, while we waited for hospital security to arrive. When you have two physically capable, violent men standing metres apart, those few minutes feel like an eternity.

These situations are becoming one of the things nurses are most frustrated and fed up with. Not because we don't want to care for these patients, we do, but because we are being asked to manage increasingly complex and sometimes dangerous behaviour without the resources or appropriate environment to do it safely.

They went on to say:

Improved ratios are absolutely part of the answer, and the reclassification bill is an important step. But improved ratios are just the start.

The state election is fast approaching, and regional health care is just such an important topic to so many people that I speak to in our community. We are committed to upgrading hospitals and health facilities – Mildura base hospital is one of them, and I know Jade Benham has been a very passionate advocate for that – but also to getting the healthcare workers where they are needed. I hear so often about the lack of accommodation. I know in Swan Hill that has certainly been a big issue. There are jobs there, but it is the housing that can hold people back. We are also committed to abolishing Labor's GP tax so practices can bulk-bill more patients and keep fees lower, making it more affordable to see your local doctor, because that is so important. It is important for us to make sure particularly that regional and rural services stay viable. We are committed to delivering the 2021 mental health reforms in full. Victorians were promised all 74 recommendations from the 2021 Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, yet five years on regional Victorians are still waiting for the local community-based care they were promised.

Just recently I met with a number of nurses in my office, and they were telling me about plans. They are part of the Bendigo Base Hospital Trained Nurses' League, and they were fundraising to construct a statue that was to be locally sculpted. They were raising funds to recognise 106 years of service. Speaking with those nurses and the wealth of information that they had in the room and the experience that they had across working in different parts of nursing, they were so passionate about their career and so grateful for being able to look after patients and contribute to their care. Of the thousands of nurses that I know that have been trained at Bendigo, they have gone on to work across regional Victoria, across our state, interstate and also overseas. I was delighted to hear recently that they were successful in raising the funds that they needed to construct that statue, and it is going to be launched in 2027. For Jenny Trewartha, the president of the Bendigo Base Hospital Trained Nurses' League, and all her companions, I just want to acknowledge their work, not just in their careers as nurses, but being able to look forward to that statue being unveiled and the recognition that that will give to the many thousands of nurses that have contributed to our health system.

We certainly, as Ms Crozier has indicated, are not opposing this bill. We want to support the staff, and we also are so desperate to see improved outcomes for patients at times when they desperately need our support.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:20): I am pleased to contribute on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. This bill will change how hospitals are categorised via the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015. It will recategorise 26 hospitals to a higher level for the purposes of required nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios, and this means that they must roster more nurses for the same number of patients, improving staffing and patient care. We know that higher ratios increase patient safety and improve patient outcomes – I think we have had agreement on that across the chamber – and we know that they also make safer and more manageable workplace environments for our nurses, who bring extraordinary expertise and commitment to their increasingly complex jobs. It is a fact that seems to be lost sometimes, historically, by those opposite.

Let us take a look at the historical record. This bill is the latest in a long history of Labor governments backing our nurses and prioritising the safety of Victorians. The story of nurse-to-patient ratios in Victoria starts with the damage done during the 1990s under Jeff Kennett's Liberal government. Seventeen public hospitals were closed and thousands of hospital beds were closed. It was by any measure a hollowing out of Victoria's public health system, and it fell hard on regional communities, with hospitals in towns like Koroit, Mortlake and Macarthur closed down. When Steve Bracks was elected in 1999, rebuilding the nursing workforce was a priority. In 2000 Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australia and one of the first in the world to mandate nurse-to-patient ratios. These ratios were contained in the nurses enterprise agreement but not in legislation, and as soon as the Liberals returned to office they tried to remove them or undermine them. Then opposition health spokesperson David Davis had written to the nurses union promising to maintain nurse-to-patient ratios in their current form ahead of the 2010 election. Seven months into government, that promise was broken. A leaked cabinet document signed by Davis in May 2011 revealed the Baillieu government's actual plan. They planned to cut the number of nurses and midwives; to put the safety of Victorians at risk, with fewer and less qualified healthcare staff; to attack our hardworking nurses and midwives with worse working conditions; and to push the dispute into arbitration, effectively a backdoor way to make ratios disappear altogether.

Ahead of the 2014 election Daniel Andrews made a commitment that a Labor government would legislate ratios so nurses would never again have to strike to defend safe staffing levels, and that is what they did. On 23 December 2015 the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 was proclaimed. Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate minimum nurse-to-patient ratios in public hospitals, and over the next few years we set about specific ratios for stroke, haematology and oncology wards. Just last year our government invested over \$100 million in delivering the one-to-one gold standard ratio in ICUs around the clock and improved emergency department resuscitation staffing, and we brought in a safer one-to-four midwife ratio overnight in maternity wards and an in-charge nurse overnight in high-dependency and coronary care units. These changes came into full effect on 1 July this year. There is a bit of a pattern here. Labor governments introduce the ratios and protect them and Liberal governments try to take them away, which undermines Victorians' health and makes lives worse.

The reforms in this bill are important for the safety of all Victorians but particularly those in regional and rural areas. Of the 26 hospitals across Victoria that will move up a level, 17 of them are in rural and regional Victoria. In my electorate, Ballarat Base Hospital moves from level 2 to level 1 – that is the highest classification in the act – Grampians Health Wimmera Base Hospital in Horsham moves from level 3 to level 2, Ararat hospital and Colac Area Health both move from level 4 to level 3 and Hamilton Base Hospital will have a legislated minimum staffing ratio for its emergency department. Warrnambool Base Hospital was reclassified as a level 2 hospital in 2022, reflecting the number and complexity of matters that the expert staff there manage. Our community has felt the benefit ever since: more nurses at South West Healthcare, safer staffing in our wards and our emergency department and better outcomes for patients right across the south-west. Warrnambool shows us what is coming for Ballarat, Horsham, Ararat, Colac, Hamilton and beyond.

Ratios on paper are not enough. We need the workforce to fill them, and that has certainly been described in this debate as a problem. But we have that covered as well. It is harder in rural and regional Victoria to cover new positions. We are continuing the \$270 million Making It Free to Study Nursing and Midwifery initiative, and it will support 17,000 nurses and midwives. This year's budget included \$26 million to boost the graduate nursing and midwifery program, and that is 250 more graduate positions. For rural and regional services specifically, the rural urgent care nursing capability development program supported 349 nurses last year through online learning workshops and clinical placements. The Maternity Connect Program gives rural midwives and nurses short placements in bigger maternity services so they can build their skills without leaving their community. This is really vital because it allows qualified midwives to work in smaller hospitals where there are not as many births per year. They may not reach their number of births or deliveries per year if they stay there, so

they go to a larger hospital for a short period of time and do a range of births that cover off on their gap areas and maintain their accreditation. The nurse practitioner program funded 34 small rural health services last year to create new nurse practitioner roles. On top of that, we delivered 28.4 per cent pay rises for nurses and midwives, historically a female-dominated area and therefore underpaid. This is what a real commitment to rural health looks like – not one announcement but a program of reforms. It is actually change after change after change, budget after budget. I commend this bill to the house.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:28): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. Victoria was the first jurisdiction in the world to implement nurse-to-patient ratios across its public health system. They were introduced in 2000 via the Nurses and Midwives (Victorian Public Sector) (Single Interest Employers) Enterprise Agreement 2000–2004, which established minimum staffing requirements and the various hospital categorisations. These were formalised in the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015.

Nurse-to-patient ratios have been critical in improving outcomes for patients and improving workloads for nurses and midwives across the public health system. While the ratios have been amended and expanded over the years, the hospital categorisations first established back in 2000 have remained ostensibly the same. The current bill responds to the classification review into hospital levels in medical and surgical wards and emergency departments to determine appropriate staffing and midwifery workloads and staffing requirements. These reforms update the list of hospitals in schedule 1 and schedule 3 of the act and will result in 26 hospitals being recategorised to a higher level, with consequential increased staffing ratios. Seventy per cent of these will be in regional Victoria. It is very pleasing to see that the people of regional Victoria will benefit from these amended categorisations.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation have been advocating for a review of hospital classifications for a long time and have welcomed the reforms in this bill. As the title suggests, it will lead to safer patient care. It will save lives. It will support the health and wellbeing of our incredible nurses and midwives. We are blessed in Victoria to have a world-class hospital system, which is largely attributable to our extraordinary health workforce. Anyone who has spent time in hospital – and I have had three rounds of inpatient care in the term of this Parliament, so I do consider myself somewhat of an expert consumer of health products – will attest to the professionalism, the dedication and the compassion of Victoria's nurses and midwives. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that they are appropriately remunerated and supported to develop their careers to their full potential. Likewise, it is incumbent on us to ensure that patients can expect a clinically appropriate staff-to-patient ratio. In short, this bill is in the interests of everyone. I congratulate the government for their actions in this space, and I commend the bill to the chamber.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:31): I am rising to make just a few brief comments on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026, and in doing so follow Ms Crozier our Shadow Minister for Health's lead in not opposing the bill. I just want to make some brief comments around the bill and then particularly nurses in my Eastern Victoria Region and also the environment, the hospitals, in which they perform their amazing tasks in the service of the health and wellbeing of our good people. This bill reclassifies 26 hospitals, and those include 17 in regional and rural Victoria, some of them in my electorate. The government has allocated over \$1 million to do this and promises over 250 additional full-time equivalent positions.

We support certainly the objective of this bill of improving patient safety and care and also supporting the hardworking nurses and midwives within our workforce. Indeed I really want to pay homage to and thank the nurses right across Victoria and also the learning institutions that have produced nurses. My own son is a nurse and went through Federation University in the Latrobe Valley, in Churchill, with some excellent nurse teachers in that space. He has, sadly for us, moved on to New South Wales – a New South Wales gain – and works in Westmead hospital now as a nurse unit manager. So it goes to show the level. I know he really enjoyed his time. He went through Melbourne hospitals and also

the Latrobe Regional Hospital, having that breadth of experience in a different range, whether it was acute, emergency – I know he particularly liked the emergency department – or the aged.

I just want to reiterate the experiences of others, indeed Ms Crozier, who was at the very forefront on the hospital ward as a nurse, knows the important role that they play. Having experienced, in some form, being in hospital over many years, you really are at a very vulnerable stage of your life when you are in there, for whatever reason. It is those nurses who not only provide that human care, that physical care, but who bring skills in technology, understand the physical body and how that operates, coordinate with other services and the doctors and also give social and emotional support. People are vulnerable when they come into hospital, and they so magnificently start to heal the mind sometimes as well as the body, and that reassurance is all part of the healing process. We know that a ratio written into the legislation does not care for the patient; it is qualified, supported and properly rested nurses that do that. Some of the information that I have heard and learned from speaking to nurses in recent times is that our hospitals are significantly under pressure; there is no doubt about that. Indeed over the weekend I spoke to someone who was not a nurse but had worked in a hospital and had gone onto part-time and then casual. She said there was work piling up in the administrative section of the hospital, and it was really that they were short staffed, but she was not called in because there were just literally no funds. People were working extra-long hours and trying to remove that backlog within the administrative section.

We know our nurses do that shift work. If you are a night shift nurse, you are a particularly valuable type of person because that is certainly a significant impost on lifestyle. Missed breaks and overtime and occupational violence – we have seen that. I am sure that there have been many studies done on that and the importance of preventing occupational violence.

Georgie Crozier: That is why we are doing PSOs.

Melina BATH: I am very pleased that Ms Crozier was only a week ago, I think, announcing PSOs in policing – we need that. Just because someone is sick or a family is stressed, there is no excuse for creating a violent situation for our valued staff across the board. Indeed the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) a few years ago put out a report – it was over the whole of public health respondents in Victoria. It said that up to 40 per cent of people were experiencing burnout. In 2024 the People Matter survey said that burnout was a real issue in our hospital system. The West Gippsland Healthcare Group staff highlighted that in that survey: 40 per cent responded with burnout. That is an alarming state – 40 per cent. Thirty-four per cent responded as such in Latrobe Regional Hospital. These figures do cover all staff, so it is not just our nursing staff. The *National Nursing Workforce Strategy* warns that without reform the nation could face a shortfall of almost 80,000 nurses by 2035. That is significant. We all stand up here and thank our nurses and appreciate them, but on the ground things need to happen to support nurses to stay and remain in that workforce. I know Ms Crozier just read into *Hansard* a short moment ago the testimony of a nurse that was just so frustrated and felt that her values and health were so compromised that she could not be in that system any further.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Melina BATH: That is a real shock, it is a real shame. She is not the only one, you are right, Ms Crozier.

I want to also point to a couple of the hospitals that are being changed under this legislation. The West Gippsland Hospital was opened in 1939, standing on that magnificent hill. But if you talk about nurses' stress and when you look at some of the stress that they have to cope with, the corridors are narrow, the lifts are inadequate, there are leaking roofs, there is water damage, there is makeshift storage and services are dispersed across several buildings. That leads to, in itself, fatigue and an endurance level needed to have to cope with an antiquated and not fit-for-purpose hospital setting. Then look at patient beds and equipment and the like. My mum was recently in that hospital and had fantastic service. She is a mature lady, and she was treated for carpal tunnel syndrome, but I think she was actually treated

in the paediatric ward because they could not find a bed for her because there was no space. Again, the nurses go to the nth degree for care and kindness, but you have to ask: when is enough enough? The government came around and promised in 2022 that it would produce a new hospital in West Gippsland, and yet we are still waiting. There is not a shovel in the ground on a donated piece of land, and I know the successive members for Narracan, both Mr Blackwood and Mr Farnham, have been huge advocates and strong citizens in advocating for this. I also know that we are going to build it if elected at the end of this year. \$850 million: that is a commitment that we are not breaking like the government is.

Indeed you can expand it a bit further. We know there is an area that has a growing population, a population in need, and it has a hospital that I also know quite well, the Wonthaggi Hospital. We have committed \$350 million for stage 2 and stage 3. Again, when I had a rare moment in there overnight a little while ago, the nurses were coming up to me when they found out that I was a member of Parliament – I was not dying; I had a condition, but I was not dying – and they wanted to tell me what needs to happen in our health system. They were very professional. I kept on asking them, ‘Well, what’s going on here and there?’ and they had plenty of wisdom to share with me. Latrobe Regional Hospital, under this legislation, will be upgraded from level 2 to level 3. We know that there has been burnout and concern, and we do know that there is ramping. We know that that is a hospital doing amazing work, but it is under pressure and it is under stress.

I will move to a couple of other parts in my electorate. East Gippsland’s hospital, the Bairnsdale Regional Health Service, under this legislation will become a level 2 hospital. It is the catch-all for people far, far away, from Mallacoota to Orbost and all the north and south of Bairnsdale. And I know my colleague Mr Tim Bull and indeed our candidate Gemma Rendell have got a petition out. Why is that important? Because they know that they need a stage 1, they need an upgrade, they need a new emergency department, and they need to stop that ramping. When I spoke with ambulance officers some time ago during the EBA negotiations, when they came out and spoke to us, they too were very worried about that ramping there. We need to be able to have a hospital fit for purpose now and into the future – planning into the future. The other day I was at the Heyfield Hospital, again with Gemma Rendell, and we had a good look around there. This is a beautiful hospital. People are so passionate about this hospital in the Heyfield area because it is a real blended hospital. It has got an aged care facility there and it is right beside the medical clinic. It has opportunity to grow, and it is just a really wonderful model. I know the CEO, Michele Gardner, is very passionate. She is going to squeeze every cent that she can get out of the government, but she also wants to know that it can grow and be serving that community.

In terms of bush nurses in our region, I have mentioned this many, many times, but when you go into the remote and rural regions in all of Victoria, but particularly in East Gippsland, these people are absolutely gold. They are trusted people in our communities. Talk about extending – they work beyond their hours, I am sure beyond any EBA, if they are on one. They respond in times of crisis. They are getting squeezed and squeezed and squeezed by a government that is not live to the process. There is cost impost on administration. There is cost impost on all of the services – that is, electricity and the works. There is more pressure on their budgets, and they are having to cut – which actually really, really affects them deeply, because they are part of their community – and reduce those services because they are literally not getting any extra funding. Talk about burnout – they hold the fort 24/7, and we are very, very respectful of and highly grateful for their services.

Finally, in relation to this bill, as we have seen with previous amendments in 2025, concerns remain about adequate funding, as I have just outlined, and the health services’ ability to comply with these new requirements given the current workforce shortages and overstretched hospital budgets that I have just been speaking to. I will leave my contributions there. I thank Ms Crozier for all the work that she has done over all my time here, which is 11 years – a dedicated, passionate, considered and on-the-ground shadow minister. I really hope that she can take this forward and become the minister very soon.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:44): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the legislation before us today and confirm that the Greens will support this bill in the name of Victoria's hardworking nurses and midwives. In reclassifying 26 Victorian hospitals, this bill acknowledges that our health system is no longer sustainable. As the population has changed, pressure on the workforce has grown, often without the proper pay or support for staff to reflect these challenges. This has led to an overburdened health system that, despite being fuelled by the hard work of many individuals, is in a state of overwhelm. The very fact that hospital categorisations have largely remained unchanged in 25 years despite dynamic population growth across the state speaks loudly to the strain that the system has been under. So I welcome the improvements being made to patient ratios through this bill. Put simply, better working conditions for nurses and midwives at the backbone of our health system only improve patient care, health outcomes and population wellbeing as a whole.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation have played a key role in these changes, so they should be congratulated for their hard work and advocacy. When we speak to an overburdened health system, we know that it is not only nurses and midwives who are struggling. Currently we have doctors, radiographers, social workers, speech pathologists and many more allied health professionals across the state taking action because this Labor government refuses to substantially improve their pay and working conditions. Just last week Victoria's public hospital doctors stopped work, showing this government they are sick and tired of lagging wages and unsafe conditions in hospitals across the state, and last month allied health staff made it clear that they were fed up with declining wages and a government that does not take their contribution to the health system seriously. If this government can recognise that improved pay ratios for nurses and midwives in our hospitals mean safer patient care, then why can't it take action for the rest of the health workforce? These strikes represent much more than just the whimsical grievances of a number of health workers; they have involved a significant number of public health professionals who know that without change our health system will collapse. When the government stops putting investment in public health above all else, we know that it has been prioritising the interests of big corporations for too long.

I also want to take an opportunity to speak to the challenges being faced by regional hospitals across Victoria and particularly in my electorate. The vast majority of hospitals being reclassified by this bill are regional. While regional hospitals will welcome the opportunity for improved patient care and workforce conditions, the reality is they will struggle to fill these positions without significant support. When I speak to people living in regional Victoria, time and time again I hear about two common challenges: housing and child care. The whole spectrum of regional services struggle with recruiting and retaining experienced staff because the foundations of a sustainable workforce are not being invested in. Regional hospitals are no different. Without support, it is clear that hospitals will struggle to fill the positions created by these ratio changes. A health workforce is only as strong as the fundamental services that enable it. If key worker housing is not made available and childcare options are left dwindling, regional hospitals will only end up filling gaps with agency staff, and we know that is not a sustainable solution. So while the government might herald this bill as a win for our public health system, I want to be clear: there are significant parts of the system that are under strain, and many are looking towards the government to step up. If we can make important changes like those we see in this bill today, surely it is time to fix the rest too.

Moirá DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (15:48): I rise also today to speak in support of this bill, because it is true that one nurse caring for four patients is better than one nurse caring for five. But that is a pretty small improvement to actually have to pass something through Parliament to get, and I think that that exposes something very, very wrong about the way that this Labor government deals with patient safety ratios and workers rights in general. These ratios should be based on objective data if they are truly for patient safety, and they should have allocated funding to support them, giving flexibility to the hospitals to respond to whatever crisis they are facing, whatever numbers they are facing, whatever complexity of case loads they are facing. Instead here we are again with an election around the corner and something that is going to look very good on a flyer.

I also find it very upsetting that the way that it is dealt with at the moment is that a hospital does not automatically get the funding for this. They get classified into a different ratio class, but then there is no guaranteed nurse workforce and there is no guaranteed funding. Instead hospitals have to collect the data, and then the government decides whether to act at all and when. So everybody has been left waiting. In the west in particular the nurses have been waiting, the patients have been waiting and the hospitals have been waiting, especially Werribee Mercy. In 2010–11, 217 patients spent more than 24 hours in its emergency department. In 2012–13 it was 264. In 2015–16 only 57 per cent of emergency patients were treated within the clinically recommended time. It has been a shemozzle for years and years and years. I had one of my babies there, and they were absolutely fantastic. I did not actually see the problems. But when I had a miscarriage and I had to go in through the emergency department and they left me waiting there 16 hours until I fainted, and seeing all the people around me, all of that was pretty devastating. We have heard terrible, terrible stories, anecdotally, from those living out in the west, about Werribee Mercy Hospital – not the dedication of the staff, not the qualifications of the staff but the absolutely unbelievable pressure that that hospital is under. The consequences of that are just harrowing for people. A few paramedics that I know say on the lowdown, ‘If you ever have to call an ambulance, don’t let them take you to Werribee Mercy.’ That is how terrifying it is. The people out in the west know that is true. They have also been waiting, obviously – waiting, waiting, waiting – for the Melton hospital.

There was a Footscray Hospital upgrade, which was of course reduced in scope before it had even started to be built. For the Melton hospital, the scope of that project has already been reduced. Again, Labor suffered a swing of 16.6 per cent against it and almost lost the seat of Werribee, and now, when it is about to lose seats regionally and in Werribee those are the places and those are the hospitals that get recategorised. I just think it is actually cruel, especially for a party that calls itself the party of workers, to make everybody dependent on the pork-barrelling done in this place, instead of establishing ratios and patient safety based on objective data tied to funding so that they can just deliver the health care that is needed, regardless of the political fortunes of the people in here.

I was also very interested to hear everybody rave about the Australian Nursing Federation, now the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, which is of course the union that I grew up most closely associated with, waiting in the halls every day after school because my mother worked there. She was one of the people who worked there that did really care about nurses. In fact she cared about nurses so much that she refused to participate in the corruption that she saw going on, and they black-banned her from working in Victoria for life. That is not working for the nurses; that is not what I consider a legitimate union activity – but that is a story for another day.

The last piece of the puzzle is obviously the shortage of nurses. My eldest daughter applied for and got a grant to start a nursing degree from this government, and then they pulled the funding and she could not continue. What a waste of money from this government and what a waste of time for my daughter, and who knows how many other people that happened to. We are looking at a shortfall of 80,000 nurses. It is one thing to adjust a ratio, to make an announcement. If there are not any nurses, if there is not any money and if there is an election around the corner, I really hope that people have run out of the ability to keep hope in this government, because I just do not see how they are going to be able to deliver it, even though it is only one extra nurse on one afternoon shift for one less patient. Yes, I am going to support it, but I am not actually going to be praising you much about it.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:54): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and make a contribution on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026. Our Labor government knows that our nurses and midwives are the lifeblood of our healthcare system. Every single day, on every single shift, they are the ones providing safe, high-quality and deeply compassionate care to Victorians at all stages of life. They are the ones that are by our side. They administer critical care, and they support our families through some of the most difficult moments of our lives. We know their jobs are incredibly demanding and the emotional, physical and psychological toll of their daily work is immense, and their roles can never be taken for

granted. They give so much of themselves to keep us safe, and it is our responsibility to make sure we are keeping them safe in return. That means delivering the safe workloads, the decent conditions and the needed protections they deserve.

Since our government first introduced the original Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 we have set out minimum staffing rules, which quickly became a bit of a foundation for patient safety in this state. Those rules ensure that nurses are not stretched beyond their limits and that patients receive the focused attention they desperately need. But we also know that health care does not stand still. Our communities are growing rapidly, medical care is becoming much more advanced and the kinds of treatments people require in our public hospitals are getting more complex. The reality we face is that the hospital tiers and categories we currently use to decide staffing levels were actually drawn up more than 25 years ago, and they have barely changed since. It is simply not sustainable to manage a modern health system using categories from over two decades ago. That is exactly why we made an absolutely clear promise that we would undertake a comprehensive review of these rules to bring them into the modern era.

The Department of Health has now completed this vital work through the hospital classification review, looking closely at how busy our hospitals actually are and figuring out exactly what staffing levels they truly need based on real-world data. This bill is a direct, tangible result of this review, delivering on our promise to update the laws so that our nursing ratios finally match the pressure our hospitals are facing right now. We are making sure the law reflects the reality on the wards. Importantly, we have committed to checking those hospital workloads on a regular, biennial basis going forward. By committing to these reviews every two years we are guaranteeing that our frontline workers will never fall behind again and that our staffing levels will always keep pace with the exact needs of our community.

A massive and completely necessary upgrade to our hospital staffing laws does not just happen by accident, and it certainly does not happen without the proper resources to back it up. We are proudly backing these critical changes with a massive \$109.7 million investment. This significant funding is entirely dedicated to paying an extra 253 full-time equivalent nursing positions right across our public health system. We are making sure that when we ask our hospitals to put nurses on the floor, we are giving them the funding they need to make it happen without compromising on vital services.

I want to speak about where this funding is going, because this legislation is a massive win for healthcare workers across the entire state, including in the Northern Metro Region with the incredible Royal Women's Hospital. Given the sheer volume of complex maternity, neonatal and specialist care delivered there every single day to women and families across our community, these new ratios mean better, safer care for women when and where they need it most. This reclassification means reducing workload pressures, preventing burnout and supporting staff retention right in our backyard. As I said, this is a winner for the whole state as we upgrade the legal staffing requirements of 26 different hospitals in total. Seventeen of those are in regional and rural Victoria, proving once again that no matter where you live in this state, you deserve to be safely staffed with a high-quality public sector workforce. We are seeing major regional hubs like the Ballarat Base Hospital, Bendigo hospital, Latrobe regional and Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton being elevated along with a huge number of other second-tier hospitals. Can I just give a particular shout-out to Echuca hospital. I know some of the team there, and they are a phenomenal outfit.

This legislation does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of the progress this government has made to build, support and completely respect our healthcare workforce. I have immense pride, actually, in saying that our Labor government will stand with our nurses and midwives every single day. We will fund them, we will support them and we will protect the laws that keep them and their patients safe. We will listen to the experts, we will back our workforce and we will back our hospitals to make people's lives better. I am proud of the work that has gone into this legislation and enormously, enormously grateful to the nurses and midwives who look after us all. I commend this bill to the house.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:59): I rise to speak in support of this bill, which makes some really important progress. I want to acknowledge the nurses and midwives whose advocacy has helped get us here, as well as the ongoing advocacy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. The basic principle behind this legislation is a simple one: if we want safe health care, we need enough nurses and midwives to provide it. This bill continues a reform that began in 2015, when Victoria became the first state in Australia to legislate minimum nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios. Since then there have been successive rounds of improvements, and this bill is a next step, reclassifying 26 hospitals, 17 of them in rural and regional Victoria, to a higher staffing level and lifting ratios in general, medical and surgical wards, emergency departments and ICUs. It is expected to add around 253 full-time equivalent nursing positions to the system, which is a really great thing.

Anyone who has been through the hospital system in a moment of vulnerability knows the importance of ratios. They save lives in many circumstances and provide emotional support at a time when many need it most. I have had many stints in hospital, particularly when I was unwell but undiagnosed with an autoimmune disease. I have always appreciated the ongoing support and care of our nurses in public hospital systems, as I said, when people are often feeling very, very vulnerable. But when a nurse is stretched across too many patients, care can be missed. As someone who, again, has recently travelled through the maternal healthcare system, I know that ratios are not just numbers on a piece of legislation; they are about whether a nurse has time to properly assess a patient or whether a midwife has time to listen to a pregnant woman who says something just does not feel quite right. These changes are important not just for the highest level of patient care but to ensure that patients feel dignity.

I want to speak a little bit about why that matters so much in maternity care, because through recently having a baby myself I have just discovered even more about the critical importance of this work. Pregnancy and birth are some of the most significant experiences in a person's lifetime. I am sure many in this chamber would know that themselves. It is also a time when you can feel at your most vulnerable, most scared and most anxious. While this bill is a fantastic thing, I am hopeful that a lot more work can be done to build a maternity system that understands that safety is not just about clinical intervention or whether tasks and technical care are performed correctly but also about whether women are listened to. That may be whether they understand what is happening to their bodies in a healthcare setting, whether they can give informed consent to that care or whether they can have continuity of care, which I was just so lucky to have. It is a rare experience, going through the Royal Women's and the maternal fetal medicine clinic, because I was deemed high risk with my autoimmune disease. It is hard to describe how meaningful that continuity of care is, and it is something that I know to so many women across the state, no matter how their pregnancy is categorised, would mean so much. It is about whether women feel respected and whether they can access the care that they need when they need it regardless of where they live.

Improving ratios is an important step in this, but it cannot be the end of maternity reform. Last year the *Victorian Maternity Taskforce Report* was handed down, which many in the chamber would be familiar with. That taskforce identified workforce recruitment and retention, limited access to models of care that support choice, gaps in strategic leadership and service planning. There was also commentary on access to culturally safe and specialist services close to home as significant challenges within our maternity system. Its recommendations are organised around four pillars: consumer experience, access to models of care, quality and safety and maternity workforce. The taskforce recommended that women should have greater choice in and control over their pregnancy and birth experience, including access to personalised models of care and continuity. I cannot speak to just how much I agree with that. I had a recommended C-section. Many of my friends had elective C-sections, and making that choice, having that decision-making power, feeling in control and feeling safe left me with a really positive experience of the birthing system. But I know for so many women that is not the case, whether that be because their birth plan is not followed or whether they experience birth trauma or obstetric violence or have an experience within the system that makes them feel as if their autonomy and consent are not respected. That can happen unknowingly, and not intentionally, through working

in a strained and busy public health service, but it is really important that we build on the work to ensure that women are listened to and acknowledged in our healthcare system.

Last year, when I was pregnant myself, I met with Jess Larkin and Rowie Cooke, who are two passionate advocates for maternity care reforms with experience working in a range of different ways in the birthing space. They provided me with a document that shows that more than half of Victorian women currently receive no continuity of care across the perinatal period and that in 2023 only 5 per cent of Victorian women had access to midwifery continuity of care. As I stated, unlike most, I was very lucky to receive continuity through my pregnancy and birthing experience, and I know that that care is so important to establish that relationship and to build trust and feel safe in what is ultimately a huge life-changing decision that can leave many people feeling nervous and exposed within the healthcare system. It is the best model of care, and continuity matters because pregnancy should not be a series of disconnected appointments. Of course all of our midwives are amazing, but certainly those disconnected appointments can result in differing opinions and differing advice and women constantly repeating their history, their fears, their experiences and their circumstances to a succession of strangers. Building that relationship with the person caring for you when you are pregnant is so incredibly important from start to finish. The taskforce similarly recommended expanding similar evidence-based models of care that support women's choice, particularly for women who face additional barriers to accessing care, and it found that continuity models can improve outcomes, improve women's experiences and reduce burnout among midwives as well.

We also cannot talk about maternity care without talking about the experiences of women who leave the system traumatised by what happens to them. My colleague Emma Hurst in New South Wales led a parliamentary inquiry into birth trauma in the state, and it revealed harrowing stories of women within birthing systems and their experiences while bringing their babies into the world. Those experiences are not unique. In fact one in three women report experiencing birth trauma, and around one in 10 report experiencing some degree of obstetric violence. One of the reasons highlighted for this happening is in fact a lack of continuity of care, and it is considered a major factor in contributing to avoidable birth trauma. The taskforce recommended resources and workforce training to prevent birth trauma, as well as better mechanisms for women and families to provide feedback about their experiences of care and to be able to debrief on that. So often when women have babies we focus on the fact that the baby is born and the baby is healthy, which results in a minimisation of autonomy and experience, and things that are as small as changes in language in birthing settings can go a really long way to reducing birth trauma in our hospital systems. Women should not have to wait until something goes catastrophically wrong before their experience is taken seriously, and any experience that leaves a woman feeling vulnerable or that their autonomy and consent were not considered should be taken with seriousness at any level. The taskforce found that Victoria lacks maternity-specific workforce planning and identified the need for better strategies to address workforce shortages, burnout, retention, career pathways and distribution of skilled staff across the state, which again has been acknowledged as one of many wonderful things that would help reduce birth trauma as well.

Lastly, I just want to touch on regional access. As noted, this bill makes some great changes when it comes to regional and rural hospitals, and I am pleased that the bill specifically addresses those challenges and improves the level of care in regional areas. I have heard the contributions from a range of regional MPs like me, and often we hear in our communities the very real issues in receiving care, whether that be as a hospital patient or as a pregnant woman on her birthing journey. Certainly even just where I live we have lost a range of birthing facilities, which significantly impacted women in the Macedon Ranges until Castlemaine was re-established and certainly left women with an option either way, which can be a lot of time when in labour or ready to have a baby. There is more work to do to expand regional care and to ensure that your postcode does not determine your experiences in the hospital system, particularly when it comes to maternity care and providing those services to women who might be high risk or require a different level of care than another patient.

In closing, this bill is welcome, and stronger ratios are an absolutely incredible thing for our nurses, midwives and of course patients in Victoria's public hospitals, but I am just really hopeful that the government and any future government will acknowledge the need for continued work to improve maternity care and support for parents in our state. While a number of recommendations from the *Victorian Maternity Taskforce Report* were immediately accepted, there are more to be built upon and other ones to be accepted, whether that be expanding regional services, stronger midwifery leadership, ensuring women have genuine choice and control or of course acknowledging the very real impacts of birth trauma, which are currently often left out of the conversation or not considered when we speak about this type of work. I am hopeful that it does not stop here and that this government or any future government will be committed to improving the experiences of women in birthing systems in our state. It should not just be about getting women and babies safely through the hospital door. It must be also about ensuring safety and respect and ensuring that women feel heard and empowered throughout their entire journey, because we know that when that happens the experience of motherhood and the experience of the child benefit as well.

I am grateful for this piece of legislation, and I am hopeful that some of the work in the taskforce that has not been acted on will be, because it was a great piece of work by the government. But that work now needs to be built on and acted upon, and I am really hopeful of seeing that happen. I commend the bill to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

President, I rise to make a contribution on Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026.

I would like to thank the Minister for Health for her ongoing work on this issue, and for her support of nurses and midwives, who are a critical part of our healthcare system.

The amendments contained within this bill aim to achieve one thing, ensuring that Victorians can access safe and high-quality healthcare in our hospitals, all the time.

It was the Andrews' Labor Government initiative and care for both health workers and patients that started the Safe Patient Care Act.

It was under a Labor Government in which healthcare workers were protected from ridiculous demands and overworking, due to short staffing or patient demand.

And it was under a Labor Government in which all of this was enshrined into law.

It was under a Labor Government in which patients were guaranteed a high standard of care, due to the fair work conditions of nurses and midwives.

Labor is committed to making sure that Victorians have the very best healthcare, with stronger and safer nurse-and midwife to patient ratios.

Since the Safe Patient Care Act was introduced in 2015, the demand on Victorian public hospitals has increased.

Both patients and workers should feel supported in our healthcare system and not stressed or let down.

The Safe Patient Care Act established minimum nursing and midwifery staffing requirements for publicly funded health services.

The workloads on midwives and nurses impact the quality of patient care, and that shouldn't be compromised due to increased demand.

Since then, the Labor Government has delivered many ratio improvements, further assisting healthcare workers.

These changes followed our commitment to protecting the rights of midwives and nurses, enshrining these protections into law.

20 years ago, public hospitals were first classified into tiers, based on patient and care complexity.

Tiers were then used to determine the minimum number of staff required per patient, ward, or bed.

This merely acted as a minimum and does not prevent the operator of a hospital from staffing a ward with additional nurses or midwives.

These classifications were enshrined into legislation with the Safe Patient Care Act, in 2015.

This was done to ensure adequate staffing levels for nurses and midwives, and to protect both their working conditions, and the quality of treatment provided to patients.

President, in December of 2025, we began our review into the classification of Victorian public hospitals, upholding our promise to nurses and midwives across the state.

The amendments to this bill follow our review in the classification of Victorian public hospitals.

This review used data-driven algorithms, through the use of publicly available datasets across the Victorian healthcare system.

It aims to more effectively classify hospitals and protect the high standard of the Victorian public health system, which Victorians are accustomed to.

Public hospitals across Victoria are classified as into “schedules”, with each schedule having a unique set of classifications.

Schedule 1 hospitals contain general medical and surgical wards, that are specialty or non-specialty.

Schedule 3 hospitals are those that possess an emergency department.

Furthermore, within each schedule, every hospital is given a weighting of between 1.0 and 1.6, given by the Modified Monash Model.

The Modified Monash Model takes into account the number of hospital bed days, emergency department presentations, the average number of hours of ICU care, and the number of Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Special Care Nursery babies that are admitted.

The bill updates the categorisation of hospitals within a schedule, in accordance with the findings of this review.

This update means hospitals must roster more nurses for the same number of patients, with higher ratios of registered nurses to patients improving patient outcomes through reduced length of stay and fewer adverse events.

Correctly aligning staffing levels with the capacity or complexity of a hospital, the patient experience is improved.

And importantly, this supports the rights of nurses and midwives.

From my time as both State Secretary and National President in the mighty Transport Workers Union, I understand the impact and importance of securing fair working conditions for people, and why they are so important.

This amendment sees the workload of nurses and midwives be set at reasonable levels, as these people who perform such critical roles cannot be subject to being overworked, when trying to care for others.

The public health system should not be a place where it’s workers are exploited in service of simply being able to care for more patients.

Australia has always been at the forefront of the union movement, with Australians advocating and fighting for better conditions for over a century.

I’m proud to support a bill that keeps the interests of workers at hearts, while also improving the care experience for patients alike.

This means less pressure on our hardworking nurses, preventing burnout and retaining the workforce.

As a result of this amendment, 26 hospitals will be recategorized into a higher level, with 17 in regional and rural Victoria being reclassified to a higher level.

That means 26 more hospitals with increased nurse to patient and midwife to patient ratios; 26 more hospitals that can effectively care for more patients, and 26 hospitals where nurses and midwives have better working conditions.

The amendments in the Safe Patient Care Act are backed by a \$109.7 million investment.

The implementation of these changes will occur in phases, to support a smooth transition for all facilities and hospitals.

This will allow health services to incrementally adjust to the increase in staffing requirements and not be overwhelmed by the changes.

Additionally, this enables proper training for graduate nurses, to uphold the superb standard of care that Victorians are accustomed to and deserve.

These nurses can then join the workforce in time with the phased rollout, guaranteeing a smooth transition.

The uplift in nurses and midwives will begin in the 2027/28 financial year, starting with general medical and surgical wards.

Emergency departments will follow the transition in the 2028/29 financial year, with intensive care units starting the uplift in nurses and midwives in the 2029/30 financial year.

The changes from the review will provide a massive boost to staffing in hospitals right across Victoria, making sure our great state can keep up with the demands of its citizens.

This bill will mandate 253 additional full-time equivalent nurses in the public health system, a necessary and beneficial improvement.

Supporting our hardworking nurses and midwives should be a priority, and the Carroll Labor Government wholeheartedly agrees.

Giving nurses and midwives more support on the ground with better conditions will prove beneficial to all parties concerned.

Health workers are better protected from overworking, and the quality of patient's care is not compromised by the workload of nurses and midwives.

We've also committed to strengthen the Graduate Nurse and Midwifery program, with an investment of \$26.078 million, to deliver an additional 250 graduate nursing and midwifery positions in the health system.

This Government has a strong and consistent track record of supporting our health workforce, through better conditions and increases in pay.

Nurses and midwives are the backbone of the Victorian public health system and should have working conditions and pay that match.

This is not the only way that we're focusing on healthcare, as the Carroll Labour Government is committed to bolstering healthcare across Victoria.

We're backing our health professionals, guaranteeing that Victorian health workers are getting a fair go, in return for the vital work they do.

Their skills and expertise have been recognised, with their new agreement reflecting our dedication for maintaining a quality system for patients and workers alike.

Healthcare workers have received a 28 percent pay increase over the next 3 and a half years.

They will also receive a one-off payment of \$1500, as well \$3500 a year for professional development, five days of paid reproductive leave, better classification structures, and clearer career progression.

Additionally, we delivered a 28.4 percent pay rise for nurses and have consistently strengthened nursing to patient ratios.

Our workforce deserves better pay and improved conditions, and the Carroll Labor Government is proud to have delivered this.

President, while hospitals are critical part of the healthcare system, the frontline of health in Victoria are paramedics, and we've also delivered improvements in this area.

Recently, we welcomed more graduate paramedics to our ranks, reinforcing our already world-class force, and supporting them even more.

In the last year, we have recruited 294 graduate paramedics, and since July more than 80 graduate and qualified paramedics have joined the service.

Additionally, we have also welcomed 4 new Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance (MICA) paramedics into Ambulance Victoria.

The MICA paramedics are specialists who are trained in advanced intensive care, and who can help those who are the most ill or injured.

This Labor Government is backing in our paramedics, to make sure our workforce meets the demands of Victorians, securing better conditions for those who do such important work.

This new cohort of paramedics will hit Victorian roads on Monday the 14th of September; a huge win for all Victorians.

Amongst all of this, regional Victorians and their needs cannot be overlooked.

People from regional centres in Victoria can face challenges accessing healthcare and support, so we're continuing our investment into these communities.

The Carroll Labor Government understands this, and we've invested in a \$655 million redevelopment of the Ballarat Hospital.

The redevelopment includes an array of improvements, including a new emergency department, 100 more short stay beds, a new theatre suite, a new helipad, and new and expanded perinatal and critical care hubs.

This amounts to an extra 14,500 inpatients being treated each year, as well as 18,000 more emergency.

Extra capacity means expanded care for locals that's faster and more effective.

We're ensuring that Victoria's world-class public health systems stay protected, and that this quality extends for decades to come.

Victorians should live their whole lives in a state where public health is a priority, and this Carroll Labor Government has committed to it.

We're also building more accommodation for health workers in Wonthaggi, at Bayside Health's Wonthaggi Hospital.

This new space provides 20 rooms for health workers, such as doctors, nurses, visiting specialists and allied health staff.

Attracting and retaining staff for regional hospitals is always a focus, and these works will help to achieve that.

This retention of staff will expand the care and capacity of services available at Wonthaggi Hospital, securing the best possible care for all residents and locals.

This work in Wonthaggi is on top of the similar projects that have been completed or are underway in Kerang, Kyabram, Benalla, Goulburn and many others.

This is a part of the more than \$50 billion that the Carroll Labor Government has delivered for our regions.

We're supporting our regions, giving them the tools and assistance necessary to service their local residents and population.

President, the Carroll Labor Government has also brought healthcare closer to home for many people in the West, with the opening of the bigger and better Footscray Hospital.

This new \$1.5 billion facility has been providing state-of-the-art services to thousands of Victorians.

In the six months since the facility was opened, it has cared for 19,000 admitted patients, on top of supporting 23,000 presentations to the emergency department.

This relieves pressure on other hospitals and provides convenient access to care for many patients.

Having a hospital on your doorstep or within a short trip, can make all the difference in life-threatening scenarios, and we're proud to supply this change to Victorians.

Convenience also removes a barrier to receiving treatment, encouraging people to utilise our amazing healthcare system, making sure that small problems don't escalate.

Once Footscray hospital is fully operational, it will have more than 500 beds, an increase of 200.

This will allow the hospital to treat an additional 15,000 patients every year, expanding the service even further.

The new Emergency Department will be able to support another 20,000 patients each year, and additionally has a dedicated mental health, and alcohol and drug hub, to reduce strain and pressure on the general Emergency Department, whilst increasing safety.

Footscray Hospital also boasts an increase in resuscitation bays, fast-track bays, acute and short stay beds, on top of a high-tech satellite radiology hub.

All these changes mean that patients can see a dedicated specialist faster and easier, so they can receive the care sooner.

President, the health of young people, and particularly young women has been underrepresented, and they face barriers to receiving treatment, or severe delays in diagnosis.

Quite frankly, this is unacceptable.

All patients in Victorian hospitals deserve to be treated with an equal level of care and consideration.

That's why we're making it easier for those who are experiencing painful periods, pelvic pain conditions and endometriosis to receive the specialised care and support they require.

Conditions like these can lead to debilitating pain and can disrupt daily life for young people, and it should be easier to receive treatment.

We're introducing a Victorian-first, dedicated Kids and Teens Pelvic Pain Clinic, which is available at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Through this service, a specialist Nurse Navigator will triage patients, and connect them with the right care, that's closer to home.

President, now young people and their families can access potentially life changing care closer to home, with less barriers and hurdles.

Distance or convenience shouldn't stop young women from receiving care.

This is just another way that we're continuing to deliver faster and more effective healthcare services to Victorians, and the Carroll Labor Government will continue to fight for better.

Victoria cannot continue to provide world-class public health to millions of Victorians, without proper investment and funding, as well as protecting those that provide these services.

Protecting and improving Victoria's public health system is an ongoing effort, and this Labor Government supports all those workers who deliver it.

I commend this bill to the chamber.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

Victoria has a world-class healthcare system, and Victorians deserve the very-best healthcare. That is why this Labor government enshrined strong nurse-to-patient ratios in law last year, and with this bill is strengthening them even further.

The *Safe Patient Care Act 2015* sets out how to determine staff-to-patient ratios in particular hospitals based on its capacity and complexity to ensure patients receive the best care possible and a safe workload for staff. This is then used to categorise hospitals in the Act's schedules to set a staff-to-patient ratio that reflects the needs of that specific hospital. In developing this system, the Government worked closely with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, health services, and the Victorian Hospitals' Industrial Association.

The bill before us will amend those schedules to promote a further 26 hospitals into a higher category for the purposes of nurse-to-patient ratios and midwife-to-patient ratios.

These reforms will add an additional 253 full-time equivalent nursing positions to Victoria's world-class healthcare system. More nursing staff means increased patient safety, improved patient outcomes, and reduced hospital stays.

And I'm proud to say that two of the 26 hospitals receiving higher staff-to-patient ratios will be the Sandringham Hospital and the Victorian Heart Hospital in my electorate.

The Sandringham Hospital is a crucial asset to residents in the Southern Metropolitan Region that has already benefitted from \$5.62 million towards the refurbishment of the hospital's outpatient facilities.

The Victorian Heart Hospital was delivered by this Labor Government as Australia's first state-of-the-art, specialist cardiac hospital providing innovative, patient-centred care. The Heart Hospital was not previously categorised, so these amendments will ensure that patients can continue to receive the best care possible with enshrined staff-to-patient ratios.

Patients and staffs have benefitted from modern and upgraded consulting rooms, clinical areas and public spaces to boost healthcare outcomes, reduce patient wait times, and support the hospital's committed workforce in increasing their capacity for specialist medical, nursing, and allied health care.

To allow health services to incrementally adjust to the increased staffing requirements, a phased approach will allow the uplift to occur gradually starting from the 2027/28 financial year.

Labor understands that our healthcare system is only as good as the thousands of workers who keep it running smoothly – which is why Victoria has a world-class health system.

Victoria's world-class nurses and midwives devote themselves to caring for Victorians, and this Victorian Labor Government has a strong track-record of backing in our health workforce.

Our reforms to staff-to-patient ratios not only benefit patients, but they benefit workers. They deliver manageable workloads for staff, reduce the pressure on our hardworking staff, and deliver safer working conditions for nurses and midwives.

We are continuing to strengthen the pay and conditions of our health workforce including nurses and midwives who received a 28.4% pay rise, and medical professionals who recently agreed to a 28% pay rise over the next 3.5 years.

We are making it easier for students pursuing nursing or midwifery through our \$270 million initiative making it free to study nursing and midwifery, as well as investing \$26 million to strengthen the Graduate Nursing and Midwifery Programme through deliver of an additional 250 graduate nursing and midwifery positions in the health system.

We are backing workforce recruitment, retention, and professional development in regional and rural areas to ensure that no matter where you live in Victoria you have access to world-class healthcare. In fact, of the 26 hospitals receiving a higher staff-to-patient ratio, 17 of these are in regional areas.

Victoria has a world-class healthcare system, and Labor is making sure that Victorians continue to have access to the very best healthcare with stronger, safer nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (16:11): I thank all members for their contributions and note the broad support that has been expressed for these reforms in the chamber today. The Victorian Labor government is making sure that patients have the very best care with stronger, safer nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios. This bill will further strengthen nurse-to-patient ratios right across the state by reclassifying 26 hospitals, including 17 in rural and regional Victoria, to a higher level. I note that a number of members have made note of the changing nature particularly of regional hospitals. This will help ensure hospital classifications in the act are contemporary and better reflect our growing, changing health system.

As we have been discussing in the second-reading debate, this bill will change how hospitals are categorised in the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015, updating the law so that certain hospitals are recategorised at a higher level for the purposes of required nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios. This means they must roster more nurses for the same number of patients, improving staffing and patient care. This will improve mandated nurse-to-patient ratios at 26 hospitals across Victoria in general, medical or surgical wards, emergency departments and intensive care units. We know that higher ratios of registered nursing staff to patients increases patient safety and improves patient outcomes through reduced lengths of stay and fewer adverse events. It also means less pressure on our hardworking nurses, preventing burnout so that we can retain our incredible health workforce. The additional roles will also create more opportunity for graduates and early career nurses.

The hospital classifications reflected in the act were first established over 25 years ago and have remained largely unchanged since then. The hospital classification review was conducted to develop a contemporary approach to assessing a hospital's workload and determining appropriate staffing requirements, and the assessment of classifications was determined based on this transparent and objective methodology. I certainly want to acknowledge the work of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association and health service leaders during the development of the review.

This bill will add over 250 full-time equivalent nursing positions to our health system, and the amendments to the safe patient care act are backed by \$109.7 million of investment. I note that a couple of members questioned whether the funding would be available for these additional nursing and midwifery roles, and we have certainly backed it in with that investment. The commencement dates for the recategorisation have been staggered to support an orderly implementation of the changes. That is not dissimilar to how we have managed previous rounds of improvements to ratios. This will support staffing recruitment, including for specialised roles, as well as support operational readiness, providing affected hospitals with sufficient time to prepare for any obligations. It will also enable appropriate training for graduate nurses, who can support the uplift needed. The uplift will start with general medical or surgical wards in the 2027–28 financial year, emergency departments in the 2028–29 financial year and then intensive care units in the 2029–30 financial year.

We know that building and supporting our workforce is key to safer patient outcomes, and we are taking strong action to support recruitment and retention right across the state. Safer nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios are part of that work, and when you have better working conditions and more support on a ward, you do reduce burnout, making Victoria one of the best places to be a nurse. We are also continuing to deliver on the \$270 million Making It Free to Study Nursing and Midwifery initiative. We have also strengthened pay and conditions for a number of key sector workforces, including nurses and midwives, and we are investing \$26 million in this year's budget to strengthen

our graduate nursing and midwifery program through the delivery of an additional 250 graduate nursing and midwifery positions in the health system.

We are also continuing to support workforce development in regional and rural Victoria, and a couple of my colleagues have already gone to these specific programs, such as the rural urgent care nurses capability development program, which supports registered nurses working in urgent care centres in rural and regional Victoria to provide safe high-quality care. In 2024–25 alone 349 nurses were supported through online learning modules, face-to-face workshops and clinical placements, and the Maternity Connect Program supports midwives and nurses working in rural and regional health services to maintain their skills by providing short-term clinical placements in larger regional or metropolitan maternity health services, supporting them in their professional development and skill improvement. There are a number of other targeted initiatives that I am sure we will discuss in the committee stage.

This bill, whilst quite narrow in scope, is very good for Victorian patients and good for our health workforce. I would like to thank, again, all members for their contribution. I would also like to acknowledge our nurses and midwives, who do the most incredible work and deliver world-class care to Victorians across the state every day. I also want to acknowledge the leadership of the ANMF, who are in the gallery today, and thank them for their tireless advocacy and for working with the government on these very important changes. I understand that there are some questions in committee. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (16:18)

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, I just wanted to raise a couple of points just to get some clarity, if you would not mind. Has there been any risk analysis by the department on whether the new staffing ratios will lead to budgetary restraints in other areas of hospital budgets, such as planned surgery or any other services that will be impacted, given some concerns that have been raised? Also we know that health services are under huge budgetary constraints at the moment.

Ingrid STITT: As I indicated in my summing-up, the amendments to the act are backed by \$109.7 million of investment, and that is to fully fund the 253 FTEs and nursing positions across the identified health services. That of course, as we know, will recategorise 26 hospitals, 17 of those being in regional and rural Victoria, to a higher level. So the government has committed the funding that will be required to roll out these changes.

Georgie CROZIER: I think in my contribution I accidentally said that in the last legislation there was \$270 million – I meant 270 FTE with \$101 million. Just with that \$109 million in the latest announcement to implement these 253 FTE, and the \$101 million for the 270, how will you be allocating that across the 26 services that you have identified, especially in this latest tranche of legislation?

Ingrid STITT: Noting that there is a phased approach to the implementation with the general medical or surgical wards changes being implemented by 1 July next year, and then 1 July 2028 for emergency departments and 1 July 2029 for intensive care units, the FTE and the funding have been developed taking into account the changed needs of those hospitals and the review that went into looking at what the workloads were and what the appropriate categorisations ought to be. The funding that has been arrived at has certainly been driven by a number of factors taken account of, including,

obviously, the wage rates, the EBA, shift allowances, overtime et cetera, in a similar methodology to the way in which the wages component of the previous tranche of changes to ratios were developed.

Georgie CROZIER: I will go back to the numbers, the FTE, in a minute. You just mentioned the review, and I have a question around that. I understand that the algorithms document is available on the department's website, but not the actual review. Is that publicly available, the hospital classification review that was done by the department?

Ingrid STITT: Certainly the algorithm has been provided. The work of the review was really looking into what the workload and requirements to meet higher ratios would be. I can certainly check that with the advisers box as to whether there was actually a review report provided, but the work was done in a process that involved the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association, and also there was consultation with a number of health services CEOs to ensure that the review was taking account all of the factors that need to be considered in changing the categories in the act.

Georgie CROZIER: Are you able to check that?

Ingrid STITT: Yes. I can check that, certainly.

Ms Crozier, the document that is provided on the department's website is the review document, which includes the details of the algorithm.

Georgie CROZIER: Okay. I will go back and have a look at that. I just cannot recall if it had all of those stakeholders and the CEOs referenced in that. I will check that out.

We have just spoken about how in the 2025 legislation there were 270 FTE, and this year there are 253. In the briefing we raised issues around the implementation of that amendment from last year. From memory in the committee stage at the time, I think it was you, acting on behalf of the minister in the other place, who said the additional 270 FTE nurses were required for full implementation of those changes, which is the same as what is proposed with this. When I asked in the briefing whether all of these positions had been filled by the date, with full implementation, of 1 July this year, it was unknown in the briefing, so nobody could tell me if that had actually occurred. So it was taken on notice, and the response I received was:

100 per cent implementation of the April 2025 legislative amendments came into effect on 1 July 2026.

Data post 1 July 2026 is not yet available.

It is completely not answering the question I asked. I was asking about the 270 FTE. Can you confirm that the 270 FTE positions have all been put in place as of 1 July 2026?

Ingrid STITT: Ms Crozier, just going back to the issues that you raised in the briefing and the explanation that you were given, 100 per cent implementation of the April 2025 legislation amendments came into effect on 1 July this year. Health services are required to adhere to those requirements in the act. I think that the answer that was provided to you was in relation to implementation of these mandated ratios and what information we are able to source from health services, and it is not currently available in a consolidated form, so we will be gathering that data. But the data post 1 July 2026 is not yet available. Obviously, there are requirements in the act around adhering to the ratios, and there is a process available for any noncompliance.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, you just said you are gathering that data, but how are you tracking the progress of those additional staff that are required to ensure that the implementation of the 2025 legislation is actually taking place? How is that being done?

Ingrid STITT: Health services are required to comply with the act and have the appropriate staffing arrangements in place, and they are, as you know, closely monitored by our nursing staff but also the ANMF, and there is a process in place if it is thought at any time that ratios are not being complied with.

Georgie CROZIER: But that is my point. If you are gathering data but you are saying the health services have got to put this in place and if they do not there are going to be penalties or something will happen, how do you know? When do you know, given that staffing can be very fluid in a health service? You have provided funding for 270 FTE, yet we do not know where they are or how long it is going to take to have that full complement put in place. I will just say that. How are you tracking that? How is the government, the department, tracking that with the health services that are being impacted? Are they asked every month to give a progress report on meeting the ratio requirements? How, with those 270, do we know? Because otherwise it is just a figure that you have plucked out and you cannot measure it. I am trying to understand how you are tracking it.

Ingrid STITT: The government has funded health services to deliver additional nursing and midwifery staff to comply with the requirements under the act. There are obviously regular performance meetings with each health service, in accordance with the normal process of managing both budgets and also performance of our health services, and this would be no different in that regard. We would be looking to see whether health services are implementing the changes that the law requires. I do not want to give you the impression that these changes have not been implemented, but what I am saying is that there might be some circumstances where health services may need to engage either an agency or a casual to maintain service capacity under certain circumstances – it might be sick leave or it might be a particular circumstance in a ward. But they are still required to adhere to the act, and the funding has been provided by the government in order for them to do that.

Georgie CROZIER: Given there have been several tranches prior to what we are discussing just now, how many breaches have there been with health services that have not been able to meet the ratios under the previous legislative requirements?

Ingrid STITT: Perhaps the best way to answer that is to talk about what the process is in the act if there is a suspected breach of the mandated ratios. Under section 41 of the act, a nurse, a midwife or a worker representative may notify the hospital operator of an alleged breach of a ratio or ratio variation.

Georgie CROZIER: The dispute resolution process.

Ingrid STITT: That is right, yes. The information on these arrangements is managed and held at that individual health service level. There is the ability, under section 42 of the act, for that dispute to be escalated to the Magistrates' Court, which can impose civil penalties on the health service, but the Department of Health has no record that that has ever been triggered or occurred as a process to date.

Georgie CROZIER: That is good news. Has any health service said to the department that they are really struggling with being able to consistently meet these ratios and therefore been provided with an exemption because they are undertaking the service? As we have discussed in previous debates, when the legislation was brought in, we understand that there are exemptions in place and they can apply for them given the circumstances. But has the department identified any areas in rural and regional Victoria, which it really is affecting – not so much metropolitan Melbourne – where there are significant concerns with health services being able to meet those ratios?

Ingrid STITT: I can certainly seek some advice on that, but I think that we have got some recruitment, support and retention programs that are targeted to assist regional and rural Victorian health services, noting that they can sometimes be the areas that are harder to staff. So we have got a mix of training pipelines and we have got the financial incentives, recruitment support, professional development and the broader workforce reform to attract nurses to rural and regional areas. And there are a number of programs, including the rural graduate nursing and midwifery programs, the scholarship and education supports, the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria support and the professional development and career progression. We do not provide exemptions for ratios. The process in the act is followed if there is an exemption sought.

Georgie CROZIER: That is what I am referring to.

Ingrid STITT: Yes. So there is a process in the act, but the department itself does not provide the exemption. There is a process that is followed at the health service and local level. But I guess the point I am making is that we have got a strong program of supports in place to assist regional and rural hospitals to recruit the workforce that they need. And I think the strong growth in our nursing numbers – some 17,000 since 2015 – certainly bears out that we have seen year-on-year growth in our nursing ranks.

Georgie CROZIER: With a growing population we are going to need more nurses, so we need those. The implementation period to 1 July 2029 provides an opportunity for detailed workforce planning, as outlined by the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses. They want to know what modelling has been undertaken to determine the additional ICU nursing workforce required as a result of the proposed changes. My questions are: has modelling been undertaken to determine the additional ICU nursing workforce required because of the proposed changes? And what are the workforce needs by hospital for each of those hospitals that have now been designated in a different schedule? Has that all been determined through that consultation that you did with CEOs and ANMF and the Victorian Healthcare Association? I suppose it is around that modelling in the lead-up to 2029 with those hospitals.

Ingrid STITT: That process is the modelling, so the classification review work and the algorithm, which looked at what the workload –

Georgie CROZIER: I do not think that is publicly in the review that we were talking about.

Ingrid STITT: The work of the classification review did look at a more contemporary approach to assessing a hospital's workload and in turn determining the appropriate staffing requirements. You would know from the previous bill and legislative changes previous to 2025 that we have taken a phased approach so that we can support the staggering of the implementation of the changes and try and ensure that hospitals have got time to do the recruitment necessary to adhere to the act.

Georgie CROZIER: So I take it that you are very confident that the pipeline of nurses coming through can meet future demand?

Ingrid STITT: Yes. This is an opportunity as well to create more positions, and I think that will be warmly received in regional Victoria.

Georgie CROZIER: They are certainly struggling. I spend a lot of time speaking to regional nurses and others in the regions around the issues arising, which are very alarming. Has modelling also been undertaken to determine demand for bedside nurses, team leaders and the liaison nurses, which is also part of the suite of what you are talking about in the various pieces of legislation that have been brought in over the last few years?

Ingrid STITT: As the bill outlines, the uplift will start with general medical or surgical wards in the 2027–28 financial year and then move on to emergency departments in 2028–29 and then intensive care units in 2029–30. There are a number of areas where that will be applied, including workforce availability. A recategorisation will trigger those higher staffing ratio obligations. Some hospitals may have a degree of operational readiness already, but we have taken the deliberate approach of giving them time to stagger the changes. Some hospitals may need to expand services or reconfigure wards before the new categorisation can take effect. So there are a number of different factors that the staggering of the changes allows hospitals to manage. There might be risk management and continuity-of-care considerations, and consistency with previous implementation approaches has shown us that the best way to do this is to stagger the reforms.

Georgie CROZIER: How many hospitals need to be reconfigured to meet the ratios?

Ingrid STITT: These are examples of what hospitals might need to consider in implementing the 253 FTE across the three tranches of implementation.

Georgie CROZIER: I am not disagreeing with you, but I am understanding that you are saying that to manage this there is going to be some reconfiguration, so that would have been in the modelling. Likewise, with agency staff over the next little while, has that modelling been done to see if there are additional agency staff required in any of these areas?

Ingrid STITT: The FTE numbers that we are funding are based on the reclassification findings and what will be needed to deliver the higher ratios.

Georgie CROZIER: Does that FTE include agency staff, then? Is it permanent FTE or is it a mix of both? And if it is a mix of both, what does that mix look like?

Ingrid STITT: It has been modelled on FTE. Certainly the industrial requirements of the EBA will be relevant as well in terms of modelling the numbers.

Georgie CROZIER: Given that there are concerns now from various stakeholders about areas where there are shortfalls, particularly areas like emergency departments and intensive care units, and when you look at some of these areas where they have got an ageing workforce, especially in regional Victoria, I think it is only fair to ask: what is the agency component that has been considered as part of those numbers of FTE? Was that work done, or are you saying, 'No, we're just hiring permanent staff. They're available. We will not need any agency staff'? What I am asking is: if you need agency staff, of those 270-odd FTE or 253 FTE, what component of agency staff will that require?

Ingrid STITT: Ms Crozier, the model calculated the additional FTE required and applied the wage assumptions of FTE to the numbers that we have funded in –

Georgie CROZIER: Agency staff are different.

Ingrid STITT: I understand that, but we are not intending to uplift ratios by hiring a bunch of casuals or agency staff. We have calculated the costings based on FTE in accordance with the EBA requirements.

Georgie CROZIER: Are you saying there will be no agency staff required to meet the ratio requirements?

Ingrid STITT: I want to be careful in answering this, because of course there are circumstances across the health system where agency staff are utilised. But the FTE that has been calculated and the work that has been done in developing the reclassification and the work of the reclassification review are based on FTE.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 7 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (16:44): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (16:45): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY 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.

Corrections Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (16:45): I have a message from the Assembly in respect of the Corrections Amendment Bill 2026:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Corrections Act 1986** to provide that a prisoner's right to be in the open air is subject to operational considerations, to provide for a review of the operation of certain amendments to that Act and to further provide for persons detained in police gaols and to validate certain actions taken without delegations in place between 29 April 2024 and 18 May 2026 and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (16:46): I have a further message from the Assembly in respect of the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Racing Act 1958** and the **Domestic Animals Act 1994**, to amend the **Australian Grands Prix Act 1994** in relation to approved motor sport events under that Act and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:47): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026, and from the outset I want to acknowledge that debates about crime and criminal law are ultimately about the consequences experienced by real people, their families and their communities and are not just an academic debate here in the Parliament. We have seen those consequences tragically in recent weeks, with the death of Van Viet Truong, a longstanding and much-loved member of the Sunshine community. He was a local trader for some 30 years. The extraordinary outpouring of grief following his death demonstrates the impact that he had on that community and the terrible sense of loss that followed. His death has touched Victorians right across the state. It is another devastating reminder of what can happen when repeat and serious offending is allowed to continue unchecked, when dangerous offenders remain on the streets and when the justice system fails to provide consequences necessary to protect the community.

For years members on this side of the chamber have raised concerns about rising crime and the weakening of laws here in Victoria, indeed the weakening of laws here in this chamber in this term of Parliament. For years those concerns have been dismissed by the Labor government, by those opposite, which repeatedly sought to argue that there was no crime crisis and that Victorians' concerns about safety were somehow exaggerated and misplaced. I remember Mr Galea talking about how we were just after a *Herald Sun* headline or a 3AW interview. I remember Ms Terpstra jeering at us from the other side about our concerns when raising valid concerns about crime. It is only now, on the eve of an election, that those petrified of community sentiment are seeing that they need a political fix, but it is not a genuine fix. If it was a genuine fix, they would not have weakened the bail laws in the first place, they would not have had a soft-on-crime approach that has resulted in devastating consequences and they would not have cut police. We would not have seen a dramatic reduction in police. There are

less police now than what there were three years ago. That is a result of consistent underfunding of our police force and a lax approach to this issue. That position is no longer sustainable.

Victorians can see what is happening in their communities, they can see the impact of repeat offending and they can see the consequences of weakened bail laws. In particular we have seen young repeat offenders arrested through the hard work of Victoria Police only to find themselves back on the streets from what has become a revolving door of bail. This did not just happen; it is by design. Those opposite designed the system. They are trying to change some of it now to save their political skin, but the reality is that the system of laws that they designed has resulted in a catch-and-release bail policy. We have a catch-and-release bail policy under this Andrews–Allan–Carroll government because that is the way that those opposite designed it. It is by design, and it is not what you will get under the Liberals and Nationals. With an election approaching the government is scrambling to convince voters it has suddenly discovered the importance of law and order. After years of dismissing concerns about crime, Labor is now rushing legislation into this Parliament in an attempt to repair the political damage caused by its own record.

The Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026 is part of that response. The bill creates a new offence relating to the recruitment of children for criminal activity, an aggravated offence carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment when an adult recruits a child to engage in criminal activity; it is punishable by 15 years of imprisonment or more. The government says this delivers on the commitment made by the former Premier and the former Attorney-General in November last year to establish an aggravated offence for those who recruit children into serious criminal activity.

We agree that the recruitment of children by criminal organisations is a serious problem and one that demands a serious response. That is why the Liberals and Nationals will not oppose this bill. However, we do believe the legislation contains a significant and obvious loophole, and we will seek to amend it. The fundamental problem is that the new offence has been constructed around the age of a recruiter; the government has decided that the offence should apply to an adult who recruits a child rather than focusing on the conduct of the person doing the recruiting. This distinction matters. The objective of this legislation is to prevent children from being recruited into criminal activity. The law should target the act of recruitment itself rather than creating an arbitrary distinction depending on whether the recruiter happens to be 17 years old or 18 years old. Under the government's legislation an adult criminal could recruit a 17-year-old and then use that 17-year-old to recruit other children. The adult has recruited one person, while the 17-year-old could potentially recruit many more, yet the serious recruitment offence created by this bill would not apply in the same way to that 17-year-old recruiter. That is a loophole that organised criminals will understand very quickly.

Criminal networks are not going to politely operate according to the intentions expressed in the Attorney-General's second-reading speech. They will look at the legislation, identify where the weaknesses are and adapt the way they operate accordingly. Effectively the government risks creating the legislative conditions for a criminal pyramid scheme: an adult recruits one young person, the young person recruits many others, and the recruitment continues down the chain. If the purpose of this legislation is to genuinely disrupt the recruitment of children, why would we leave such an obvious weakness in the law? This is why the Liberals and Nationals are seeking to remove the word 'adult' from the relevant provisions. Put simply, if a person recruits a child to engage in serious criminal activity captured by this bill, the recruitment offence should apply. That is a commonsense proposition. If a 17-year-old is deliberately recruiting children into organised criminal activity, why should that conduct be treated fundamentally differently from the same conduct undertaken by a 19-year-old? The conduct is the same, the intention is the same and the potential consequences for the children being recruited and the broader community are the same.

The problem reflects a broader weakness in Labor's approach to youth crime. Again and again the government constructs different categories of offending based overwhelmingly on age rather than properly recognising the seriousness of the conduct involved. This is a tired and lazy government that

is addicted to bandaaid solutions that might get a good run on social media rather than fixing the crime crisis that they have spent a decade presiding over. Although, if you have a look through the comments section of any of the Labor government MPs, you can tell they are not getting a good run on social media at all.

Can I point out the fact that we are only in this situation because the criminal underworld has set up shop here in Victoria. Criminal organisations and criminal operations have infested every sector from waste to construction sites, where they have been able to accumulate large amounts of funding from taxpayers – up to \$15 billion. They are doing just as well off the tobacco trade. It is funding other criminal activities. It is funding the cash payments to young people to engage in criminal activity. Victoria, because of the weak laws we have, has created a black market ecosystem here in this state, and you have to wonder why. The ‘why’ is because Victoria is clearly viewed as the best place for the criminal underworld to set up shop. That is a deep mark of shame upon this tired, lazy, 12-year-old government that has been addicted to continuously weakening laws when it comes to our bail system, our justice system and crime legislation.

The consequences of the approach that this government has taken are increasingly apparent. The statistics referred to in relation to outcomes for children committing offences show an extraordinarily low proportion receiving detention. The overwhelming majority do not. That matters when we are dealing with a small cohort of serious repeat offenders who have learned what little consequence they may face for their behaviour. For those offenders, the system can be something to be exploited. If organised criminals know that younger offenders will be treated differently, they have an incentive to use them. If they know younger recruiters will not be captured by the same offence as adult recruiters, they have an incentive to structure their criminal activity accordingly. The government itself acknowledges that existing laws have not adequately dealt with this problem. At the bill briefing to my colleague the Shadow Attorney-General, the government confirmed that between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2024 there were just 29 charges under the existing offence and only four individuals were convicted. During the same period we have witnessed an extraordinary increase in serious offending, gang activity and concerns about children being recruited to participate in criminal behaviour. Four convictions demonstrates why stronger laws are required, but stronger laws only work when they are properly designed. There is little point creating a headline offence carrying a headline penalty if those responsible for organising criminal activity can simply change the age of the person they use to conduct recruitment. That is why our amendment is important. We will move it in this chamber because we believe the law should focus on the offending behaviour. If a person deliberately recruits children into serious criminal activity, the legislation should provide an appropriate consequence for that conduct regardless of age.

This goes to the wider frustration that Victorians have with Labor’s approach to law and order. The community is not angry because young people who make minor mistakes are being given opportunity to turn their lives around. Victorians understand that young people can make mistakes and that rehabilitation has an important role in our justice system. The concern is about serious violent and repeat offenders who continue to commit crimes despite having been arrested time and time and time again. One offender has been bailed over 50 times. There is palpable anger in the community when I am going out and about in my electorate, which I am constantly doing, and we are seeing continuous crime on our streets. It was barely a week ago that shots were fired at Craigieburn Central amidst machete attacks. I am constantly hearing about aggravated burglaries, carjackings, armed robberies and other serious offences, while the victims are left wondering why someone with a lengthy history of offending was still on the street. The same Craigieburn community are still mourning 15-year-old Darweish Mohamed, who was stabbed to death and dumped outside Craigieburn Community Hospital. Three young people, one only 14, have been charged with his death, and it would not surprise you that one of them was out on bail. There must be a distinction between a young person who makes a mistake and a serious repeat offender who repeatedly chooses to terrorise the community. Labor’s approach too often fails to recognise that distinction.

We see the same weakness in the government's so-called 'adult crime, adult time' laws. Labor looked to Queensland, where around 50 serious offences fall within the relevant framework, but chose to apply the Queensland model fully to only five offences and partially to another three. That means only a fraction of serious offences that could have been included are actually covered. The Liberals and Nationals have committed to expanding the Victorian approach to 25 serious offences because we believe serious violent offending must carry serious consequences. When someone commits a serious violent offence, particularly when that person is a repeat offender, the justice system needs to respond to the seriousness of the crime rather than provide an effective get-out-of-jail-free card because of the offender's age. And Victorians understand that. They understand the difference between youthful misbehaviour and someone invading a home armed with a machete. They understand the difference between a mistake and repeatedly stealing cars and committing aggravated burglaries, terrorising innocent people.

We saw a shocking incident in Donnybrook the other night where a car had flipped and a couple, as well as a number of other people, pulled over and were helping the man out of the car that had flipped, only for that same man who was in the car that had flipped over to hop in the very car of the people that were assisting him and steal it. It was found that the car that had flipped in the crash was also stolen. This is repeatedly terrorising our community. But we see the continuous neglect. There is no better example of neglect than the area of Donnybrook, which does not have its own police station in that corridor. Craigieburn is the closest station, and it takes police sometimes over 20 minutes to get to that Kalkallo–Donnybrook corridor, even with the lights on. That is not good enough. It has got no local police station. Wallan is basically a front counter, and even that is closed most of the time. This goes to the neglect that we continue to see while not actually engaging with communities like Kalkallo and Donnybrook that are consistently speaking out on these issues. Yet Labor continues to write legislation which contains these artificial distinctions, and every time concerns are raised about the consequences, the government insists that everything will work as intended. Too often it does not. The Liberals and Nationals have repeatedly warned that particular reforms would fail to address the underlying problems, and the evidence being experienced in communities across Victoria is proving those warnings correct.

Now we have a new Premier telling Victorians he is going to do something about crime, but Victorians are entitled to ask what exactly that means and why meaningful action was not taken earlier when this Premier was Deputy Premier. This is not a new government. This Premier was a senior member of the government that weakened bail laws in 2023. This Premier was Deputy Premier to Jacinta Allan when no action was taken in response to the crime crisis we are seeing in our community. Absolutely nothing has changed in their approach. He was Deputy Premier when the crime crisis escalated. He cannot separate himself from the decisions that have helped create the circumstances Victoria is now in.

We have also seen growing concern about police resources and police station closures. Following the tragedy in Sunshine, local mayors have themselves raised concerns about policing and station closures. These are legitimate concerns shared by communities across Melbourne and regional Victoria. Police see officers working incredibly hard to apprehend offenders, often dealing with the same offenders repeatedly. Then they see these offenders released and get off over and over again. We do see station closures. In my electorate we have seen the Flemington police station closed, and I know our Liberal candidate Tommy Ledoux has done a lot of advocacy on it. Thankfully, a Liberal and Nationals government led by Jess Wilson will reopen Flemington police station. But take this for example: we had a shocking case last Christmas Eve, I believe, where a woman was being chased by a former partner, a domestic abuser, with a knife and went to Reservoir police station, where she was slashed because Reservoir police station was not open. The government spent millions – I believe almost \$20 million – building Reservoir police station. It was built at the time. In 2021 it opened. It had a smoking ceremony. Labor MPs were there – Lisa Neville, the then minister, was there – and they had the gall to bill it as a police station that would be open to the public for 24 hours. Yet five years later it got closed by this government. And you have the member for Preston out there boasting about it: 'We're just going to close the front counter.' It is absolutely shocking that they would close a police

station that was built as a 24-hour station, and the Reservoir community is deeply, deeply upset about this situation. It just goes to show the waste by this government in terms of their approach to crime. The good news for the people of Reservoir is that the Liberals and Nationals under Jess Wilson will reopen Reservoir police station to allow the community to visit that front counter to get access to all those important services. Communities should not have to see local police by appointment. Too many Victorians feel the system has become more concerned with the offender rather than the victim. They see people accused of extremely serious crimes receiving repeated opportunities, while victims are left with the consequences.

With only a handful of parliamentary sitting days remaining before the election, Labor cannot credibly pretend that after more than a decade in government it has suddenly arrived at a solution to Victoria's crime crisis. They can change premiers, but they cannot change the utterly disgraceful way they have managed crime in my electorate and across the state. Victorians will judge this government on its record – this government in which Ben Carroll was a senior minister or Deputy Premier the entire time.

The recruitment of children for criminal activity is particularly disturbing and an example of why consequences matter. Organised criminals recruit young people because they believe that those young people are often useful to them. Part of that calculation is the distinct knowledge that young offenders can be treated more leniently by the justice system. We have seen serious allegations in public comments from police concerning children being recruited to commit arson attacks against Victorian businesses, and this should concern every member of Parliament, because the government's 'adult crime, adult time' laws exclude arson from an offence which would be uplifted to a higher court, which shows their big act of suddenly being tough on crime is just a smokescreen. Deal with the offences. If the government were serious, they would have included arson in those laws. Why are criminal organisations recruiting children to undertake this work? They are not doing it accidentally. They understand the vulnerabilities in our justice system, and they understand that younger offenders can be used to insulate more senior criminals from consequences.

We have announced 25 serious offences that should be covered under the 'adult crime, adult time' laws, because we reject the idea that serious violent offending is somehow less serious simply because an offender is 17, 18 or 19. If a 17-year-old deliberately recruits younger children into a criminal network, the damage caused by that recruitment is not somehow less serious than a recruiter who is 18 or 19. That is the fundamental weakness we are getting to and are seeking to address. As drafted, this legislation risks allowing an adult offender to recruit one younger person and to have that person undertake broader recruitment operations. If we have identified the recruitment of children as sufficiently serious to justify creating a new criminal offence carrying extraordinarily significant penalties, we should make sure the offence actually captures those responsible for doing the recruiting.

The Liberals and Nationals therefore support the objective of preventing criminals from exploiting children. We support stronger consequences for those who draw children into serious criminal activity, and that is why we will not oppose this bill. Our amendment is designed to remove unnecessary age-based loopholes and focuses on the offence and the conduct Parliament is trying to prevent: the recruitment of children into serious activity. As I said, the Liberals and Nationals will not oppose the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill. However, we will seek to amend the legislation so that it does what Victorians reasonably expect it to do. We should close the loophole now rather than wait for criminals to exploit it and us return to this Parliament later to repair another law that did not work as promised. I cannot tell you the amount of times we have warned, in contributions and in committee stages, that a particular element of a bill will create consequences, only for them to happen and for the government to have to come back. So I think it is fair enough for the government to accept our amendment in this regard. That is the approach the Liberals and Nationals will take and is the principle behind the amendments that we will seek to make to this bill. I ask that my amendments be circulated.

As I said, this government has weakened the bail laws. They have continually taken a lax approach to issues of justice and bail and have repeatedly sought a worldview and a narrative that somehow

prioritises – how sick they are – the offender over the victim and that see the scales of justice tilted towards the perpetrator being the victim of society rather than the victim being the victim. They are called a ‘victim’ for a reason – they are the victim, and they are the people we should be looking after. I will conclude my remarks there.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:17): I am pleased to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. This is a significant bill that strengthens Victoria’s laws and sends a clear message to adults who recruit children to commit serious crimes. There are few things more cowardly than an adult deliberately using a child to do their dirty work and commit a crime. It involves the exploitation of a young person’s vulnerability, their trust, their inexperience or their desire to belong. Sending a child out to commit a serious and potentially violent crime is absolutely reprehensible. These adults are not innocent bystanders, they are not simply a bad influence – they are deliberately putting children in harm’s way to protect themselves.

The bill before us implements the following: if you recruit a child to carry out serious criminal activity on your behalf, you will face serious consequences. We know organised crime is changing criminal networks, increasingly using technology and encrypted applications to reach young people, sometimes without ever meeting them face to face. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission has found that children are increasingly being recruited by serious and organised crime groups because they are cheaper to hire, more impressionable and increasingly accessible online. Just think about the calculation involved in that – an adult involved in organised crime looks at a child and sees someone who is cheaper, someone who is easier to influence, someone who can be manipulated, someone who is easy to intimidate and someone who will take the risk while the adult stays at arm’s length. These criminals know and understand the consequences of the activities they are involved in. They know the potential for violence. They know there is possibility of arrest, imprisonment, injury or even death. When a child becomes involved in serious offending, that young person can easily be exposed to further criminal activity and violence, becoming trapped in a cycle of offending. Their education, relationships and future employment can all be affected.

Crime affects all parties. There are of course the victims of the serious crimes these young people are recruited to commit, as well as the wider community rightly expecting to feel safe. That is why we need to go after the adults behind this behaviour. These reforms will create a new offence for an adult to recruit a child to commit a serious crime. This will apply regardless of whether any criminal activity is carried out by that child or not, or even if different criminal activity takes place. The offence is the recruitment itself. That is where the harm begins. Last year the government increased the maximum penalty from 10 to 15 years in prison for the existing offence of recruiting a child to carry out a criminal activity. These reforms go further by creating a stronger maximum penalty where children are recruited to commit serious crimes. This is in direct response to organised crime networks that are increasingly recruiting children to commit offences on their behalf, including arson, aggravated burglary, home invasion and carjacking. If found guilty, offenders could face life imprisonment.

Importantly, the bill also addresses the reality of how recruitment occurs. An adult will not be able to simply turn around and claim that they did not know with certainty that that person they recruited was a child. The offences will also apply where the adult is reckless as to whether the person is a child or where they know the person is, or probably is, a child. That is particularly important when we are dealing with organised crime networks operating online. Recruitment may occur anonymously through social media or encrypted applications and at arm’s length. Our laws must reflect that reality. Adults involved in serious criminal activity should not be able to deliberately avoid asking questions about age, then use wilful ignorance as a shield. Community safety does require consequences. People who organise serious crimes and exploit children to carry them out need to know that Victoria will come down hard.

Community safety is also about prevention. The best possible outcome is that a young person never becomes involved with a criminal gang or the justice system in the first place. That is why I also strongly support the fact that our response goes beyond criminal penalties. The Victorian budget

invests \$30 million in the violence reduction unit to support programs that involve the whole community and disrupt patterns of youth offending early. There is also an additional \$9.5 million for the Blue Light Victoria youth mentoring program. That program is about reaching young people who may be experiencing school disengagement, isolation or a lack of positive role models. Keeping young people engaged matters because organised criminals are looking for vulnerabilities to exploit. They are offending, but they are offering young people a false sense of belonging. We need strong communities, trusted adults and positive role models around them. I have spent some time speaking with senior police officers in Warrnambool about the importance of youth engagement. They told me that having strong sporting clubs and strong personal connections from schools to neighbours is one of the main reasons that youth crime is lower in our region. It shows that kids with trusting relationships and involvement in their communities are less vulnerable to hostile outside influences. That is why these programs matter, to help prevent violence before it starts, with programs that intervene early and support our young people.

I want to be clear: there is no choice between accountability and prevention. We definitely need both. We are providing serious consequences for those who commit serious crimes, and even stronger consequences for adults who exploit children for their own criminal purposes. At the same time, we need to intervene early and give young people every opportunity to choose a different path. Children must be held accountable for serious offending, but we must also pursue the adults operating behind the scenes. This bill also forms part of the government's broader response to organised crime. Victoria Police has been given additional resources through Operation Eclipse to identify the adults exploiting vulnerable young people. We are investing \$5 million to allow hospitality venues to opt into providing live CCTV feeds directly to police and establishing a \$10 million Hospitality Security Fund to help eligible venues improve their security. An expert from the violence reduction unit is also being embedded within Victoria Police's state command and coordination centre to strengthen our work preventing gang recruitment. The Victorian budget provides \$62 million to recruit up to 200 reservists, helping free up more police officers to work in our communities. These measures have a common purpose: to make Victorian communities safer.

This bill is preventing crime, holding offenders accountable and keeping our children away from the criminal justice system in the first place. I commend the bill to the house.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (17:26): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. Let us be very clear: adults who exploit children and draw them into serious criminal offending cause enormous harm. They harm victims and communities. They harm the children that they recruit. Children should not be used as disposable labour by organised criminal networks, and Victoria already has laws to deal with this conduct. It is already an offence for an adult to recruit a child to engage in criminal activity, carrying a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment. The question before us is not whether recruiting children into crime should be illegal – it already is. The question is whether this bill effectively targets the people who control and profit from that exploitation and whether the extraordinary increase in penalties proposed by the government is justified. The Greens do not believe it is. We will not be supporting this bill today.

This bill creates a new aggravated offence, carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, where adults recruit a child to engage in criminal activity punishable by 15 years or more. It also broadens the existing recruitment offence so that an accused need not actually know that the person is a child. It is enough that they know the person is or probably is a child. These are serious changes, and they should be carefully targeted, and they should be proportionate. Instead, as drafted, this bill casts the net extraordinarily wide.

The government repeatedly, once again, has described this as a measure against organised crime gangs and targeted, but once again the rhetoric does not match the bill that they have actually brought to the chamber. Organised crime is not an element of the offence. There is no requirement that the accused be part of an organised criminal network, no requirement for commercial gain, an exploitative relationship or a position of authority or influence or even a significant age difference in the way the

government has drafted these offences. It is entirely possible to draft a recruitment offence that targets organised crime by requiring a connection to a criminal organisation or an element of exploitation or commercial benefit, as other offences in the Crimes Act 1958 already do. The government has not done that with this bill. I will be asking the minister to explain why the offence has been left so broad.

This matters because the people that this law is most likely to reach are not necessarily the people sitting at the top of organised crime networks. The Federation of Community Legal Centres has given a clear warning about this. A young person who was themselves recruited and exploited as a child may turn 18 and have a younger sibling, cousin or friend involved in offending. Under this bill that 18-year-old can then be exposed to the maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Once again this government wants to expose very young people to life imprisonment.

Organised crime networks are sophisticated. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, ACIC, describes organised crime networks as decentralised, digitally enabled and increasingly operating across borders and online. The people directing these networks do not necessarily approach a child themselves. They can recruit one vulnerable young person and have that person draw in siblings, cousins, friends and so on. Each additional layer of removal creates distance between the people making the money and directing this conduct and the young people who ultimately are the ones taking and bearing the risks. If the government genuinely wants to disrupt the business model, it should be targeting its efforts up the chain, not down it. This bill risks doing the reverse. It can punish the young person at the bottom while leaving the person directing them at arm's length completely untouched. The government's own statement of treaty compatibility acknowledges that First Peoples are already profoundly over-represented in the criminal legal system and that this bill may increase that over-representation. I will be asking the minister what modelling the government has actually undertaken to understand the scale of that impact. It would appear to be zero, but we can discuss that more in the committee. That should have been central to the design of this legislation from the beginning, and it is deeply disappointing, yet again, that we have a justice bill coming before this place which has such obvious implications for First Peoples, and it has proceeded, once again, without the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl even having an opportunity to advise on it.

The expanded fault element of the bill is also deeply problematic. In a group of 16-, 17-, 18- or 19-year-olds who socialise together, people may not know one another's precise ages. Under this bill, an 18- or 19-year-old who involves a younger peer in offending can be caught because they knew that the person was probably a child. Again, that is a long way from the rhetoric and the picture that the government has painted of targeting senior organised crime figures deliberately recruiting children for profit. If the government genuinely intends to target exploitation, it should draft offences and laws that do that. The Federation of Community Legal Centres has suggested alternatives that would be more effective and obvious safeguards which would properly target this bill towards the cohort that the government states it is targeting. These could include a meaningful age difference; a position of power, authority or influence; an exploitative relationship; or protections for people of similar age or in peer or family relationships. Once again, the government has seemingly dismissed offers from the sector to try and create a law that more effectively targets the behaviour it states it is trying to address.

The second problem is the effect of this law on sentencing principles. The maximum penalty, life imprisonment, is the most severe penalty available under Victorian law. It is the maximum penalty for murder. This bill attaches the same maximum to a recruitment offence which covers a very broad range of underlying conduct. This disrupts the coherence of our sentencing hierarchy, and it can undermine the proportionality and rationality of our criminal justice system in Victoria. The existing recruitment offence, which exists prior to this bill, already criminalises the conduct this bill is directed at, and it already creates a very substantial maximum penalty of 15 years. The government has not demonstrated why this is inadequate or how increasing the maximum to life imprisonment will actually prevent or stop organised crime recruitment. We have not been told how much the existing offence is actually being used, how many people have been charged or convicted under section 321LB, how many of those cases have involved organised crime or what evidence demonstrates that the

existing 15-year maximum is not a sufficient deterrent. It is not clear whether the extraordinary proposal for a life maximum sentence was referred, either, to the Sentencing Advisory Council for advice on this bill. And there is a revealing contradiction in the government's own evidence for this bill. The government relies, in its public commentary on this bill, on the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's *Opening the Books* report to demonstrate that organised crime groups are increasingly recruiting children. But the ACIC's own chief executive has been equally clear that harsher criminal penalties are not by themselves a solution. She has said:

... we can no longer arrest our way out of the problem.

The ACIC's prescription is broader: better intelligence and technology; coordinated law enforcement; and stronger community resilience, prevention and support for vulnerable people who are at risk of being drawn into organised crime. That is the lesson that this government appears to have ignored, as this bill responds primarily by simply satisfying a sound bite, creating a broader offence and attaching the harshest penalty available under Victorian law. But you cannot cite the ACIC to justify the scale of the problem and then disregard the advice of the ACIC when they tell you what is required to actually address it.

Victoria Police's own youth gang strategy makes the same point. It emphasises early intervention, mentoring, education, employment and rapid referral to support services, because children do not become vulnerable to recruitment in a vacuum. Many have experienced trauma, family violence, disability, disengagement from school, homelessness or poverty. Many have already come into contact with child protection or the youth justice system. Community legal centres have highlighted the particular vulnerability of children who cross over, with involvement in both child protection and youth justice, and the government itself recognises that some people remain sufficiently vulnerable to stay on child protection orders until the age of 21. Yet that same person, once they turn 18 – once this bill passes – can be treated as an adult recruiter and be potentially exposed to a life sentence. There is something profoundly incoherent about that and about this government's stated acceptance of the evidence and what they do to try and make their political problems go away. Punishing young adults immediately around these children more harshly will not dismantle the criminal networks exploiting them. It will mean that the next group of young people continue to be used as cannon fodder. Nor will it address the conditions that make children susceptible to recruitment in the first place. This bill ultimately, we fear, will be ineffective and harmful.

There are also serious questions about consultation, once again, in this government's approach to justice issues. The Federation of Community Legal Centres has expressed disappointment at the lack of consultation on a bill with consequences that extend well beyond the government's stated target. The government should tell this chamber which community legal services, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and Aboriginal legal services were consulted before an offence carrying the most severe penalty available in Victorian law was introduced.

The Greens want children protected from organised crime. We want the people who direct and profit from that exploitation held accountable. We want communities to be safe. These are serious problems, and they require serious lawmaking, not simply reaching for the largest penalty available to further the race to the bottom with the Liberals on crime issues in this state, or for the sake of a sound bite, or for the sake of getting through another day of press conferences and media rounds. If the government wants to disrupt organised crime, it should target those who control and profit from it and invest in preventing vulnerable children from being recruited in the first place. This bill is too broad in its drafting and who it catches, too blunt in how it defines culpability and disproportionate and irrational in the sentencing that it imposes. It risks criminalising young and marginalised people who have themselves been exploited, and it risks failing to reach the people who control the criminal networks above them. The Greens will be opposing this bill.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:38): I also rise today to speak to the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. The interesting thing

about this bill is that it is meant to be targeting those who are recruiting children. It is meant to be sorting out a major problem that we have. I have attested in this chamber many times to the increases in crime in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region which I represent, and those increases in crime in the last few years have been significant. But the reality is that the majority of the recruitment that is taking place of children, people who are still at school in many cases, is largely being done by other students in school or young people themselves. So a bill like this does not actually curb the problem, particularly, as everyone has mentioned today, as we have a real problem in Victoria with organised crime. This is the state for criminals to do business in. This is the state for cartels to move into and take over and start ruining and destroying the lives of so many people with their criminal activities.

I was very interested to hear what the Greens had to say. I have noticed that this increase is significant. I mean, we are moving from 10 years to 15 with the possibility of life imprisonment for recruitment, but it is not going to target the volumes of people who are actually doing the recruiting. In fact what it may do, as has been noted, is actually really have an impact on young people and those that maybe turn 18 and are engaged in this very serious offending and do not actually realise how serious what they are doing is. We know that when you are committing a crime, in most cases you know you are committing a crime and you know that there should be consequences and you know that you deserve to have those consequences. If you do not know that, then this is how you learn.

One of the things that was really interesting during the bill briefing was that the government confirmed that between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2025 there were 29 charges for the existing offence of recruitment and only four individual offenders were convicted. That does not sound like a lot, but if those four were at the top of the food chain in terms of recruiting children who were then recruiting more children, well, that would be significant. But this is an unknown factor. This is a weak bill from a Premier who is scrambling in a state that is in total chaos, because we have had Labor in government for far too long.

It is a big thing to actually have a life sentence in jail, but it is not quite what the Greens are saying – that it will be just arbitrarily given. It is a maximum life sentence that can be given in this increase in this bill, but it will also be increasing the penalty from 10 years to 15 years, and that is going to be a significant change. I was one of the ones that went to this bill briefing with the government and spoke up, because I know from the intel from my constituents that the majority of the recruitment that is taking place with young people is actually taking place with other young people. In fact I have heard that in some of the schools particular cultural groups get targeted by these criminal gangs. They target these particular cohorts and they use older students to recruit, for example, year 7 and year 8 students. In fact I have had young people in schools even tell me that children as young as 10, 11 and 12 in primary school are also getting recruited to recruit others and that large sums of money are being paid to young people to entice them. We are talking about thousands and thousands of dollars. I think the most I have heard for a young person to do an offence, like Mr Mulholland mentioned, of arson was something like \$20,000. I have heard other reports of \$3000, \$4000, \$5000, \$6000 being offered to young people to go and do a criminal offence with the thought that there are not going to be any consequences.

We have this lawless state that has been created by a government that simply does not know what to do, does not understand boundaries, does not understand consequences for actions and is not prepared to take the consequences for their own actions and for their own part in criminal activity. We have the CFMEU and \$15 billion – at least – disappearing from the Big Build into opportunities to make money for themselves and for others. If they are not prepared to be transparent and really own up to their own part in criminal behaviour and activity, then why on earth would they want to be able or even know how to be able to bring in laws that are going to make a significant difference? However, we have to work with this incompetent government and, given that at least this is going to increase some of the penalties and hopefully be a deterrent for some, the Liberals and Nationals have got some amendments that we are going to make. We recognise that all people involved in recruitment need to understand the serious nature of what they are doing. The reason we have these gangs is that this recruitment is

taking place, and the more that it takes place, the more people that see the opportunity to make a quick buck through criminal activity, the more we continue to have a community that simply does not feel safe on the streets, in their homes or in their businesses. It is not good enough. Everybody has, quite frankly, had enough.

I am so pleased that the coalition, the Liberals and Nationals, have got a plan. We have a real plan on how we are going to keep Victorians safe – safe in their homes and safe on our streets – because we recognise that right now, because of this recruitment that is taking place, every 50 seconds a crime is being committed. We also recognise that every 13 minutes there is a theft from a retail store and that every 28 minutes there is a serious assault. Every week there are nine carjackings across Victoria. There are 1500 police vacancies and more than 40 police stations which have closed or have reduced hours. How can you fix a crime problem in this state with those kinds of numbers? You cannot. That is why we have such extreme penalties coming in with this particular bill, with a life sentence for recruiting children. I wish it was going to solve the problem, but as I have said, it is not going to solve the problem because we have young people recruiting young people. This bill is going to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to create a new offence that will be punishable with life imprisonment, but that is going to be only for the adult that recruits a child to engage in criminal activity. Their first imprisonment conviction could be 15 years imprisonment or more. That is what this bill is going to do. It is going to increase it to 15 years. It is also going to allow a person that is in their first offence to have at least five years but less than 15 if it is the very first time.

The big issue here is: how is this going to apply to the children that are recruiting? They need to understand the consequences of their actions and what this bill will do. There is one thing that is a little bit of a furphy. What can you expect? This is a Labor government that has been giving us furrphies for years. They keep going around announcing ‘Under our plan, you will face a life sentence in jail.’ On 26 June they said that perpetrators will face life in prison. But when we look at the outworkings of this actual bill, while it creates a life penalty, it is not a mandatory sentence. The charter statement expressly states that the court retains the discretion to impose a sentence proportionate to the offending, including a non-custodial sentence where appropriate. So that is something that needs to be understood as well.

I need to also remind people that in my region, in the south-east, we continue to see escalating violence and repeat offending. I am also aware that schools in my region have a reputation for having young people that are actually encouraging younger students to be involved in criminal activity. Students that are not involved in criminal activity have told me about this situation off the record, very quietly, saying that they are worried because they feel that a culture is developing in the community where older students are being encouraged to recruit younger students. What they need to know, these older students who might be enticed, is that there are going to be really severe penalties, and they are likely to be the ones caught up in the severe penalties. While the cartels, the real criminals, the organised crime leaders who have recruited and trained you, are likely to get off scot-free, you may not.

It is important to have boundaries. It is important to have consequences for actions. I have talked about that many times in the chamber. That is one of the reasons we are in this situation: there have not been consequences for actions. I do want to see reform, and I do want to see young people having the opportunity to not get caught up in the criminal world. But at the same time we need to see sentencing that fits the actual crime, and we need to see it affect the people that are involved. But since this is all we have to work with from this government, the Liberals and Nationals see that at least the government is attempting to do something. We know that we need to get our community to a place where it feels safe: where people feel that they can be at home and not be worried about being broken into on a regular basis, where they do not have to be stressed at night as to whether that noise was someone trying to steal their car or break in and where they do not have to be worried about being in their business and waiting to be attacked again and again and again. We need to end this cycle of crime that has completely changed the lifestyle that we experience here in Victoria, and to do that we do need to stop the recruitment of children, because it simply is completely un-Australian. That is not the nation that we had the privilege of growing up in; that is certainly not the nation I had the privilege of growing

up in. This has not been a place that has needed to have children investing their lives in a life of crime. There have never been such rewards for crime until recently for children, and we do need to stop it.

I think that this bill does not go far enough in actually addressing the real issues that are enticing these young people to do the recruitment, and I think that that would have been something that should have and could have been added into the bill and could have been looked at. The fact is that when they put this particular amendment together, they did not do the significant consultation that they needed to do in order to make appropriate changes, so we are left with an inadequate bill that is going to have inadequate and potentially unfortunate consequences for people that perhaps are not hardened recruiting criminals. Those who are are likely to get off scot-free, to find ways to avoid it and to find loopholes within the system. I know that has been spoken about in this chamber quite a lot, so without further opportunities to speak I just want to reiterate that crime is taking place in the south-east and throughout Victoria. People are being recruited. Young people are actually recruiting young people, and this particular bill is not going to address that situation appropriately or adequately.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:52): I rise to speak in support of the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026, and I would like to thank the Attorney-General Ms Kilkenny and the Minister for Crime Prevention Mr Edbrooke for introducing this legislation to properly punish the criminals who recruit children into crime. There is nothing quite as evil as organised criminals recruiting young people into committing crimes and into gangs. The criminals who engage in such behaviour are some of the worst of the worst. They target young and vulnerable children across the state, and they recruit them into committing serious crimes. The crimes that they get these young people to commit are serious and have significant impacts upon victims. There is nothing quite as disgusting as what these criminals do. They prey upon the vulnerable kids in society to get them to do their dirty work so they can sit back and avoid the risk. Oftentimes the kids who these criminals prey upon are those kids who already have difficult lives or who are vulnerable due to their living situations or intellectual capacity. The Carroll Labor government recognises this fact and is actively working to ensure that they face consequences for the actions that they take. This bill removes the requirement of those convicted of recruiting kids into crime to have done so whilst knowing the age of the person they are recruiting. What matters is intent. If you engage in activity that could induce a child into committing a crime, that should be enough to face the full force of the law.

This bill is not just about targeting the scourge of youth crime and violent crime; it is a key component in the fight against organised crime. It was made clear by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission that recruiting young people into criminal acts is done by a number of organised crime outfits, and we have responded accordingly. In the case of violent youth crime, it is why we have introduced adult time for violent crime. We are talking about serious crimes like assaults and home invasions. No-one should live in fear of assaults or home invasions. Adult time for violent crime in combination with this bill targeting gang recruiters demonstrates that the Carroll Labor government takes this issue of youth crime seriously and we are taking the tough but necessary actions to eliminate it from our state.

This bill before us today is part of the Carroll government's 'serious consequences, early interventions' plan – early interventions to prevent crime from taking place and serious consequences once a crime does take place. We recognise this and have taken action to ensure that Victorians feel safe when going about their daily lives. To that effect, we have increased the number of PSOs and police on the beat and present in our communities, ensuring that people feel safe when going about their daily lives. According to the statistics available to us, this program made 84 per cent of shoppers feel safer and resulted in halving the criminal events taking place. Obviously, these Victorian police operations backed by the Carroll Labor government have worked to reduce crime in shopping centres and have made Victorians feel safer. Due to the efforts of the Carroll Labor government youth crime is down and overall crime is down. To March 2026, overall offending rates were down by 3 per cent, and youth offending rates were down by 6 per cent. This means that our reforms are already working, and today

we build on that record with this bill designed to tackle criminals who take young Victorians under their wing for their criminal enterprise.

I want to briefly speak about the government's amendments today. These amendments will let the Chief Commissioner of Police or a senior officer similarly authorised by the chief commissioner issue a notice to a financial institution to produce documents or information. If they refuse or give police false or misleading information, they will face a penalty of up to 1200 penalty units – just over \$250,000. Powers like these already exist in the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia; now we will have them in Victoria too. This scheme will commence on 21 December and help police move faster on intelligence, because watching the adults who recruit children is only half the job. Organised crime is the root cause of the shocking violent crime we are seeing across our community, which is why we are backing Victoria Police with the powers and the resources to disrupt and dismantle these networks. The Carroll Labor government is treating this with the utmost seriousness, and that is why I commend the bill and the government's amendments to the chamber.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:57): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. Recruiting children into crime is completely unacceptable. It is wrong because it takes advantage of children when they are vulnerable. The government says this bill is about targeting organised crime gangs and stopping them from recruiting vulnerable children, and I support that goal, but I am concerned that this proposed offence does not actually do what the government says it will do.

Firstly, the offence is drafted very broadly. It could apply to any adult who recruits any child; there is no requirement that a person is connected to organised crime or that they are making money from that child. We also need to think carefully about how recruitment happens and who holds the power. A child who is recruited into criminal activity can be vulnerable themselves. They may have been groomed, pressured or exploited by someone older or more powerful. They may later involve a younger sibling or friend or someone within their community. These are children who may already be vulnerable and who may have experienced trauma, neglect, family violence, poverty, homelessness or other difficult circumstances.

When a child is recruited into criminal activity they are not simply making a choice in the same way that an adult does. Children are still developing. They are more vulnerable to pressure, manipulation and grooming, particularly when that pressure comes from an older or more powerful person. That is why our response must be about more than punishment; it must be about protection. Young people who end up in the criminal justice system are some of Victoria's most vulnerable: 53 per cent were a victim of abuse, trauma or neglect as a child; 41 per cent either have a current child protection case or were previously subject to a child protection order; 49 per cent present with mental health issues; and 42 per cent have been witness to family violence. A young person who has experienced abuse, neglect, family violence, homelessness or other forms of trauma may be looking for safety, belonging, protection or a sense of connection. That is exactly the vulnerability that organised crime can exploit. But that does not necessarily mean they are part of an organised crime network; it may mean that they are caught in a cycle of behaviour that started with someone else exploiting them.

Within our youth justice system we see a significant over-representation of young people with disability, as well as children who have been involved in both the child protection and the youth justice systems. These are some of our most vulnerable young people. Some are being targeted by older people who recognise their vulnerability and use them to carry out criminal activities. These children can be directed, manipulated and coerced by adults who profit from their exploitation. We need to ask a simple question here: who are we really trying to target? If the aim is to dismantle organised crime, then we should be targeting the people who organise, control and profit from the exploitation of children. Simply prosecuting people further down the chain will not break the business model of organised crime. In fact we are risking criminalising vulnerable children who may themselves have been victims of exploitation.

If our goal is to dismantle organised crime and protect vulnerable children, then our laws must distinguish between those who exploit children and those who are being exploited themselves. Vulnerable young people need protection, intervention and support, not a pathway into the adult criminal justice system and potentially a life sentence. We need to invest in prevention, because by the time a vulnerable child is involved in the justice system we may already be too late. When we talk about keeping young people out of the justice system, we need to focus on early intervention and restorative justice. This is not about being soft on crime, it is about preventing crime in the first place. Yes, we should be tough on organised crime, but equally we should absolutely protect children from being recruited and exploited. But being tough does not mean making an offence so broad that it catches people who are not the intended target. Good laws should target those with the power, control and financial benefit, not simply those who are easiest to prosecute. If this bill is genuinely about protecting children and disrupting organised crime, then the law should focus on the adults who exploit children and the people who organise and profit from that exploitation. We need to make sure that in trying to protect vulnerable children we do not end up criminalising vulnerable people who are caught in the same cycle of exploitation. On behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, I say we strongly oppose this bill.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:02): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026 – the Fagin bill, if we can call it that. It is an important bill, but as Mr Mulholland has outlined eloquently, the bill is deficient in a number of significant ways. Not having a focus on a penalty for every time somebody tries to recruit a young person is a mistake, and I think that his amendment goes significantly towards dealing with that. But we do have a crime problem across the state. I know wherever you look in Victoria crime is up, and violent crime is up too. In my own area, when we look closely at the figures, it is very clear that this is the case. If you look at Victoria and you look across the three-year period to the end of March 2026, aggravated robbery is up from 2396 to 3016 and motor vehicle theft up from 18,000 to 33,653; that is an 86 per cent increase. If you look at stealing from a motor car, it is up from 53,000 to 85,000 – a 57 per cent increase over that three-year period. If you look at train station offences, they are up from 6870 to 12,558, an 82.79 per cent increase, and yet we have got a government committed to removing PSOs from train stations, which we think is a serious mistake.

I will turn to a couple of my key municipalities and just pick on a couple as examples of the problem that we face. Motor vehicle theft in the City of Boroondara is up from 370 to 748; that is a 102 per cent increase from the year ending March 2023 to the year ending March 2026. If you look at stealing from a motor vehicle, that is up from 1314 to 2000 – a 52.21 per cent increase. Stealing from a motor vehicle is a classic case. Stealing from a retail store went up from 463 to 753; that is a 62 per cent increase across those three years. That is the period Jacinta Allan came in. She really lost control of the situation in the state. There is no sign that Ben Carroll, as her deputy at the time and intimately involved with all of the decisions that were made, whether it be potholes as road minister, whether it be crime prevention – he was the Minister for Crime Prevention during this exact time. In Boroondara train station offences went up from 97 to 173; that is a 78 per cent increase.

In Monash, another municipality in my area, aggravated robbery went up from 52 to 76. Motor vehicle theft went up from 624 to 1074; that is a 72 per cent increase. Stealing from a motor vehicle went up from 2048 to 3160 – again, a 51.63 per cent increase over three years. This is frightening. Stealing from a retail store went up from 758 to 1136; that is a 49.87 per cent increase. You can see why shop assistants were so worried. You can see why that sector has been so concerned.

We moved a motion in this chamber last year that was opposed by Labor. Labor did not like the motion. They really kicked and fought against it, and all we were doing was asking for workplace orders to be brought in, like much in the rest of the country. The new Premier has said he will do that now, but he would not do it before. He would not stand up on these sorts of matters.

On the matter of train stations, offences went up from 183 for the year ending March 2023 to 511 – a 179 per cent increase. Yet in my region the number of train stations that have had their PSOs stripped

is truly frightening. I do not think this is what people want. I think people want a safe, secure community.

The Liberals and Nationals have solutions on a number of these points. The amendments to this bill are an example of us creatively and constructively thinking about how we can actually develop a way forward to make sure that these things are dealt with. We have made recent announcements: a new court of criminal appeal to hold offenders to account. The appellate courts are important – creating a court of criminal appeal. There used to be one back in the 1990s. It is clear that this is a sensible move from James Newbury, the Shadow Attorney-General, and a recognition that creating a court of criminal appeal will actually set the tone, importantly, and make sure that the law and the sentencing arrangements and rules are being obeyed in lower courts. It will mean that where the Parliament changes the law and sends a clear signal to the judiciary that the judiciary will be in a position to ensure that the Parliament's views and thereby the community's views are properly reflected.

In the case of sentencing, we have also said greater sentencing statistics should be available and that Children's Court sentencing data should be available in the same way some of the adult material is. This is, again, a sensible step. The plan to expand adult crime and adult time is a very important set of steps that we have proposed – cracking down on car thefts. The example I am giving here is the number of car thefts in my region, whether it be in the City of Boroondara or whether it be in in the City of Monash or other municipalities. It is true, I can say, right across my region of Southern Metro. We have been very clear that we will make sure that there are real consequences for youth offenders who do these sorts of crimes, and where there is an adult crime there will be a response with adult time.

Talking of the train stations, though, there are 119 train stations where the state government is stripping the PSOs from those stations, and this will leave them denuded. It will mean that people going home at night will not be secure in the knowledge that there is anyone there to protect them. Women in particular will be frightened to go to those stations in the evening or on dark or cold nights. They will not want to walk from the station to a nearby car park. We think that restoring the PSOs is a very important first step, and it is one of the ones that we will be very prepared to take. I know that in my area, in the electorate of Ashwood, Theo Zographos has been very active at train stations, talking to people and getting the message out that we need to restore PSOs to stations. A whole swag of these stations in the Ashwood electorate have been stripped. On the Glen Waverley line and on the Alamein line station after station has been stripped of its PSOs by this government. I think they have written off some of these areas. They say, 'We don't care about these areas,' and I think that is a big problem.

We have also said there need to be new police – 3000 new police. We know new PSOs are important, and that is a part of the solution, but having new police is a very important set of steps. There are vacancies in the rosters under this Labor government. We know that Jacinta Allan's achievement was a fall in the number of police in the time she was in the job, and that is a frightening outcome. The population is increasing, the crime rate is increasing, serious crime is increasing, violent crime is increasing, but Jacinta Allan and Ben Carroll, that team, that duo, are cutting the number of police, cutting the penalties, making it soft and making it straightforward and easy for criminals. We think that that is a significant mistake. There are solutions, like boosting the number of police and reopening the police stations.

I look at a police station in my area like Ashburton that has been closed by this government. We reopened it in government between 2010 and 2014, and this government closed it. It is just sitting there as a police station with no police at all. It is quite a long distance, and the distances in the metropolitan area should not be underestimated. The stretch that is on police resources in the metropolitan area should not be underestimated. It takes quite a while to get from a distant police station. The example I used in this chamber earlier in the day was a case in Murrumbeena on Saturday night where there was an attempted theft and break-in to a car in a street in Murrumbeena. A gang of two frightening people smashed the window of the car but also hit the owner of the car in the head, and he has got a serious situation now. It took a little bit of time for the police to come from quite some distance away, from

Moorabbin. I know Acting President Berger will understand that that is not immediately close; they are at some distance and it takes some time.

The other thing I think is misunderstood is that local policing is powerful. Police who understand a small community understand the problems and understand even some of the characters who might be involved on occasions. But if you are in a big district office and you only very occasionally go to a part of the suburb, you are not going to have that background, you are not going to have that knowledge, and that is a serious point.

More police officers, PSOs returned to the stations, 'break bail, face jail', the 'adult crime, adult time' focus, stronger pursuit powers for our police, targeted prevention and intervention programs – the truth is, as I say, there is real concern about what we are facing in Victoria. My office is again and again regaled by people, good citizens who are just wanting to go about their business. They are just wanting to live peacefully in their area, but they do not want the violent home invasions, they do not want the carjackings, they do not want the theft and they do not want the violence. It is time it stopped. It is time it was ended. I have got to say this government has not stood up on this, but we will.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:14): I also would like to say a few words on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. I will tell you one thing that I agree with the government on: these criminals, especially with organised crime, who systematically recruit children to conduct crimes are scum of the earth. These people have nothing in common with decent Victorians. These people exploit the vulnerabilities of children for profit. They do not only do that, they put these children's lives at risk. They put their lives at risk in two ways. They do it firstly by entrapping them into a life of crime, and they do it secondly by the crimes themselves. Crimes like car theft, like burglary – these are contact sports. These are not riskless crimes. Kids have been killed carrying out these crimes. They have car crashes and this sort of thing. It is only a matter of time before more are harmed, so I am fully supportive of throwing the book at people who want to use children to commit this sort of crime. It is absolutely wrong.

We actually already have offences such as incitement under the current criminal act that would allow people to be charged who try to recruit children for doing this sort of thing. But I do think that it is worthy of consideration of a special offence, such as what this bill is talking about, because it is such a heinous thing to engage in. We must send a message that our society rejects those people that would recruit children to do this type of thing. I am very sympathetic to that.

The problem I have got with this bill is I am very sceptical about how effective it will be. As we have seen with the methods of recruitment that organised crime has been using, some of this is driven from overseas. What are we going to do? Are we going to somehow go through the encrypted messaging and crypto payment services that these kids are getting paid with and hunt someone down in Iraq or wherever they are conducting this crime from? I do not think that is actually a feasible thing. We know this from other jurisdictions. Ireland has had similar types of laws, as we have heard – Fagin's law. Actually it has been quite rare that this has been used in their prosecutions, so I am sceptical as to how effective this will be.

The thing that it is really missing here is, although we may condemn what criminals do in recruiting children, the bill again is only addressing the symptoms of the problem and not the problem itself. The problem itself is the types of incentives that have been caused by government policy. Let us look at some of the crimes that we are actually talking about here – in particular aggravated burglary, home invasions and car theft. Why do organised criminals recruit children to do this type of crime? One of the reasons is because they want to do firebombing attacks. They want to do arson attacks. We are very familiar with arson attacks in Victoria – far too familiar. They need to do this to extort or mark out some territory for one of their tobacconists or liquor stores or someone that does not want to sell the product that the organised crime group wants to sell. In order to conduct a firebombing attack, they usually need to steal two cars. They need one to carry out the raid and another one for the getaway. When you steal modern cars these days, you cannot hot-wire them anymore. It is not easy to do that.

Usually you have to break into someone's house and get the remote control. So for one firebombing attack, you need two home invasions and two car thefts. That is what these organised crime groups do. They say to these kids, 'We're going to pay you some money. You go and break into someone's house. You steal their car. It's got to be a good car, good enough that it will be reliable, and we can use it to conduct the attack and get away.' They pay them to do that.

We have not addressed the incentives at all. In the case of tobacco, it is the federal excise tax and the fact that we have stupidly prohibited most nicotine alternatives, such as vaping and pouches and these sorts of things. Of course that has not actually stopped the sale of it at all. You can go anywhere and buy vapes in Victoria. In fact they are more available than they have ever been, but they are supplied by organised crime. Prohibition has totally and utterly failed, and yet the government continue with this failed policy because some health bureaucrat told them it was a good idea and they do not want to back down because they will look stupid. So they just continue letting the crime continue, and they ramp up the offences, ramp up the penalties and hope that somehow that will fix it – and of course it will not.

Regardless of all these incentives that have been set up by the government themselves – largely the federal government, but the state government washed their hands of vaping when they brought through the tobacco legislation for tobacco licensing. It was not talked about a lot at the time, but we used to have some regulations for vaping in Victoria that were regulated by the state government. The state government has just completely washed its hands of that now. There is nothing at all that is regulated by the state government to do with vaping now. It is all a federal thing, and the state government just pretends that every shop in the city is not selling vapes when in fact it is. You can buy them anywhere. In fact you can buy them online. As I have said before, organised crime is two or three steps ahead of the government, so it has already dealt with the government's tobacco licensing scheme before it has even come into effect really. You can happily buy whatever you like that is advertised through Instagram. I get ads all the time on things that can be shipped from Brisbane to Victoria. They are so brazen they show pictures of the inside of their warehouse and the packing. And you will never guess who the biggest distributor of illegal tobacco and vapes in Australia is: it is actually Australia Post. Yes, they do it all through Australia Post. But I do not know, maybe online distribution will stop the arson attacks because they will not be selling it through retail outlets anymore. It is hard to know exactly what sort of effect that will have.

Nevertheless it is a serious thing recruiting children to do this sort of crime because it does two things: it puts the children into a life of crime, but it also puts their lives at risk. Putting children's lives at risk intentionally of dying in violent circumstances is a terrible, terrible thing that should be rejected by a peaceful, civilised society and that should have some of the harshest penalties. Therefore, despite my concerns about the effectiveness of this bill, despite my concerns about the government refusing to seriously address the incentives for this type of crime, I will not be opposing this bill.

Sitting suspended 6:23 pm until 7:30 pm.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:32): I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. It has been quite an interesting debate to listen to. I just want to start from the outset by saying that crime itself is traumatising. So listening to quite a number of people talk about how we have got to give people specific carve-outs if they happen to be traumatised or if they happen to have had a rough upbringing, these sorts of things, while I can understand it from a compassionate point of view, at some stage somebody has to break the cycle. Youth crime is at a crisis point in Victoria, and it is a multifaceted and devastating issue.

The first impact of youth crime is obvious, and that is that Victorians are less safe. There is a recorded criminal offence committed every 50 seconds in Victoria. That means that there are about 500 new victims of crime every single day here. But another angle that deserves our notice is the fact that we are losing a generation to youth crime. There is a pattern that seems to be so familiar that we see over and over again. It is a heartbreaking pattern that shows that youth offending starts when kids disengage

from school, and nothing seems to be done, and then they start playing up, and nothing seems to be done, and then they get involved in petty crime, and nothing is done, and then they get involved in bigger crimes and might come in contact with the justice system – and then they are bailed. Then this cycle goes on and on and on. The pattern continues and crimes escalate, and it is something that absolutely must change.

Often young people are being exploited by adults when it comes to criminal activity. Many of the same children are committing four out of five home invasions. What this bill does is create a new offence, punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment, for where an adult recruits a child to be engaged in criminal activity, and that is something that I completely agree with. I think that adults who engage children and recruit children to be involved in criminal activity should have the book thrown at them. I really do believe that. However, there are some carve-outs here that I believe leave already vulnerable children more vulnerable, and I will talk about that soon. This offence is punishable on first conviction by 15 years imprisonment.

Due to soaring youth crime, in November last year the then Premier and the then Attorney-General committed to creating a new exaggerated offence. In their opinion, this bill acquits that. The first job of any government is to keep its people safe, and that is something that the Allan and Carroll Labor governments have failed Victorians dismally on. For a very long time the government that is bringing this bill today did not even want to admit that crime was an issue at all. I genuinely believe that this Labor government puts ideology above community safety. The government have put themselves above the victims of crime. They often put perpetrators above victims of crime, and I think that it is a completely inverted justice system. Victoria needs laws that work – laws that do not have carve-outs for everyone, allowing offenders to wriggle their way from justice and accountability. It is just wrong. We need to have more than the appearance of tackling crime, and police need to have the powers that they need to enforce the laws. I believe that this government has really fallen short on all of those points.

In February this year Labor's adult time for violent crime laws came into effect, yet just in May Victorians watched as a 14-year-old girl had 109 serious criminal charges just dropped. Prosecutors could not overcome the *doli incapax* legal principle, which presumes that children aged 14 and under cannot fully understand the crimes that they commit – that they cannot understand the consequences of them or they cannot understand that they are morally wrong. This is something that I, quite frankly, completely disagree with. Children are brilliant little things. They have the ability to grasp incredibly complex concepts, and to say that they are not capable of knowing whether stealing a car, running over a person or murdering somebody is wrong is, quite frankly, insulting. In fact 3 minutes after this girl, who committed these crimes and had 109 of the charges dropped, hit a cyclist with a stolen car she actually googled, 'How long is a sentence for running someone over?' That is somebody who has the ability to understand consequences, because she looked them up. This proved to Victoria that the laws are so weak and the laws are so weighed in favour of the perpetrator above the victim – weighed in favour of somebody who can run someone over, google what sort of time you get for that sort of offence and then get rid of it completely – that you can in fact find a loophole and you can find a situation where you can wriggle your way out of consequences. You can google that and you can figure out what the consequences are, but legally you can be completely absolved of any responsibility. The government – the lawmakers, the people that are meant to keep this state safe – are saying that these kids have no ability to figure out what is morally wrong.

This young girl's crimes included 15 car thefts, dangerous driving, weaponising vehicles to target pedestrian communities, aggravated burglary and committing crimes while on bail. The prosecution outlined several criminal instances, including antisemitic incidents in Ripponlea and Caulfield. This girl, who they are saying does not have the capacity to figure out what is wrong, searched, 'Where do Jews live?' and then swerved a stolen car targeting a Jewish family – overlooked. In Brighton she rammed a 45-year-old cyclist, which has caused a brain bleed. I do not know how that cyclist is doing, but I do know that after a head injury like that you are at a high risk of any other sort of head injury. If you get one within the next six weeks, for instance, you are unlikely to recover. This girl has put many

innocent lives at risk, and her phone records showed that she thrived on the notoriety of these activities, closely monitoring social media engagement regarding her actions and seeing if she was getting a result. Yet all those charges were dropped. Community outrage really reached a fever pitch, and I believe it was completely justified. There really was not much that was getting this government to move until it hit them where it really hurts, and that was in their polling.

After years of rising youth crime and after years of injustice, it seems like Labor are just signalling a tough-on-crime approach but lacking the substance. The reason I raise this is because I worry that there is going to be a similar consequence from this bill, because this adult time for violent crime – Labor’s version of it – came into effect in February. Yet in May there was the first test for these laws, the first test of the policy, and it seems to have failed completely. While the government spruiked that if you are a young person who carries out a violent crime, you will face adult time, this young person had every single one of her 109 charges dropped – serious charges.

Labor said that it modelled this on what had been working in Queensland. However, it did not. The reason it worked in Queensland is because in Queensland, yes, they raised the penalty and they had 50 offences within their adult time for violent crime laws, but at the same time they invested \$100 million into providing off-ramps for these kids. This is what the Labor government have not done. Labor just increased penalties while cutting youth justice prevention programs and cutting off-ramps for these kids. Not only that, but it was also proved in May, when all these charges were dropped, that their adult time for violent crime laws have no teeth.

I am going to read to you right now some of the areas where they have no teeth. Here are some crimes that Labor have not included in its laws, but we will: burglary – not in their adult time for violent crime laws; serious assault causing serious injury; manslaughter was not in there; rape was not in there; arson was not in there; trafficking large quantities of drugs was not in there; offences against children, including trafficking – what that means is forcing kids under the age of 18 to engage in sexual acts – was not in there. This is an absolute joke. In the state of Victoria laws are treated more like guidelines, and the evidence is that they are not upheld. What is happening here is a revolving door of bail.

What I have seen Labor do time and time again is have a great title, but then when you dig into the laws, they really do not have enough teeth for that outcome to actually be achieved. We could face a similar problem here. Like I said at the start, the bill does create an offence for adults who recruit a child to engage in criminal activity. However, there is a carve-out – of course, as there always is – for young people. We will seek to amend this bill to take out the word ‘adult’, so it actually gives this law some teeth – so that anyone of any age who recruits a child to be involved in criminal activity would then fall foul of this law and be guilty of this offence. Because, as it stands, this legislation leaves a whopping loophole for children to be more exploited. What can happen is that an adult can recruit a child recruiter, essentially outsourcing the risk to that child, and then that child goes and recruits other children, not falling foul of the law. I do not think this is protecting children. I think it is doing the exact opposite.

I am going to quickly read what Mr Newbury said in his second-reading speech. He put it well:

An adult offender will recruit one child who will now do all of the recruiting. This bill creates a new loophole which is encouraging an adult criminal to conduct a pyramid scheme. That is exactly what will happen as a result of this bill, and the government was not able to explain why the offence was only targeted at adults. Recruitment is not and should not be an offence that only an adult commits. If a 17-year-old conducts a recruitment campaign of criminals, why should that 17-year-old be treated differently than if that recruiter is 19?

I completely agree with what he says. What this bill does is it underlines the problem with this government and the way it creates different classes of offenders. One type of offender will completely get away with whatever it is that this bill is introducing to actually prevent and address.

I hope this chamber supports our amendments because Victorians deserve laws that actually work. Laws should be more than just signals from governments that they wish things were better. We have

a plan to tackle the crime crisis and to establish community safety in Victoria again. That is why we are going to hire 3000 more police. We are going to reopen the police stations that this government has shut. We are going to restore the PSOs to all 119 stations that this government has taken them off, and we are going to add another 200 PSOs. We are going to implement real adult time for adult crimes, ones that will have teeth and will include things like rape, like trafficking children and like trafficking huge numbers of drugs. It is unbelievable that under this government they have had the title 'adult time for violent crime' but they have not given these laws the teeth that they need to actually implement that. That is why I brought up that case study of that 14-year-old girl. We will bring in a new tough one-strike bail rule. We will establish a new court of criminal appeal to ensure consequences match community expectations. And this is the part I wish I had more time to talk about: we will invest in giving kids the off-ramps that they need. It is so upsetting to see in the state of Victoria that if kids disengage from school, it is almost impossible to get them to turn their lives around. They are almost destined for a life of crime. These kids who have unlimited potential are set on a path of complete destruction because this government keeps overlooking the warning signs. That is why we will invest \$100 million into these sorts of programs. What makes us different is we will implement deterrents. There will be accountability, there will be rehabilitation and there will be prevention.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (19:47): I rise to speak on this bill, which I have not 100 per cent decided if I will support. It depends on which amendments get through. I just want to say from the outset that my vision is bigger than this bill as it currently stands. I think if we are really serious about protecting children in this state from getting involved in a life of crime, then we cannot just deal with the issue at the serious end, with crimes already having been committed and at a serious level. You just cannot start right at the worst-case scenario; it is not going to work. You actually need to cut the legs out from under the whole entire model. You need to reverse the whole risk and reward model that currently exists. We actually need to make sure that children are no longer useful to criminals, so that they themselves actually put in all of the effort, to make sure that children are not involved in crime. It is not about whether they asked if the kid was over 18 or anything like that, it is that they make sure that there are no children involved in crime because it is not even worth the risk. If we were serious about keeping our kids away from criminals, we would make sure that it hurt too much for the criminals to even risk it. At the moment the reward travels upwards, while the children carry the risks. They carry the physical drugs or the physical weapons. They steal the cars. They are the ones whose bodies are on the line. Yes, they are at a smaller risk of incarceration – probably not at all with this revolving bail system that we have. But, look, we make the laws here, don't we, so we can fix these things.

I have put some amendments forward, and they can be circulated by the clerks when they like. Under my amendments if an offender involves a child, that offender's own legal exposure is set. They have already committed the offence. If the organiser places intermediaries between themselves and the child and responsibility travels back through those intermediaries, that does not mean that they get off the hook. If you transfer the danger onto a child while retaining the authority and the reward of the crime, that should increase your culpability. We need to send a message in society that if you involve children in crime, they will not be a shield for you. We are going to come after you. We are going to crush you harder than ever before. It is a whole separate offence. It is not just that you have committed a crime, but if you involve children in that crime with you, we do not care if you knew how old the child was. We do not care about anything. You have committed the offence, and we are going to add to your punishment. You do not get to use children as a human shield. Distance cannot be protection for these criminals. We are under no obligation in this place to tolerate the involvement of children in criminal activity. We are entitled to impose one absolute condition on criminal activity, which is to keep children out. The child and society should not bear the risk of criminals' wilful ignorance. They should literally carry all of the punishment and the risk on themselves.

As I said, either the government is serious about protecting children from criminal activity or it is not. If it is serious, I believe that actual age must matter more than an offender's claimed belief about the age of the child involved. A person who chooses crime is not entitled to a legally safe way of involving

other people in crime, especially children, just because they did not find out their age. If someone under 18 becomes part of that criminal activity, the additional risk should fall upon the offenders, not upon the child. That is the standard against which I have assessed the bill. I think it is a central moral proposition. We all agree here that recruiting children into serious crime should be its own separate wrong. We all agree with that, and it should be charged over and above the underlying offence. I support the bill's severe penalties for adults who recruit children into the most serious criminal activity, and I support imposing liability even where the child refuses or is stopped or never even commits the intended offence.

But the bill does not yet reverse the model that feeds children into a life of crime. If the purpose of this Parliament is to stop children being drawn into crime, then we have to look honestly at how that happens. We know that children do not just wake up one morning and suddenly decide to take part in an aggravated burglary, carry a weapon, pick up a machete or get involved in a gang. We all know about the grooming process that comes before it. We all know about the incentives. We know that criminals prey upon them like every other groomer that ever was who wanted to exploit children. We know how they work, and if we know these things, then we have the responsibility to do something about it. We know they watch for vulnerability. We know they offer money, approval, status – protection, even – or a sense of belonging. We know that they expose children bit by bit to criminal behaviour until it does not really feel wrong anymore; it feels normal. It feels like everybody is doing it. We know that, like with every other groomer, the first request may sound harmless. It might not involve much. It might be just a small thing: carry a bag and do not look inside. Who knows? Basically, the children are groomed. They are rewarded for crossing one small line, then another and then another, or they are coerced. But eventually, if they are not coerced, the requests become more serious. The child knows too much, owes too much or is frightened of what might happen if they try and leave. This is the pipeline into a life of crime of our most vulnerable children. It begins with grooming, testing and the first apparently minor criminal risk. By the time the child is recruited for an offence serious enough, it is often too late.

Again, we can look at how many children have turned into a pretty scary sector of our society. One of my friend's sons was bashed last sitting week – knocked unconscious by three kids who just came up behind him. There were witnesses everywhere. It was unbelievable. There was no real reason. They were not stealing from him. He has now got some kind of long-form concussion. Obviously his parents are devastated. They are both emergency services workers, and they have both said that the people they find most frightening in society now are teenagers. They do not even have to be on drugs. They are irrational and violent. How did we allow teenagers as a whole set of people to become like that in this society? Clearly they are not following our example. Clearly they have been drawn into a life of criminality.

By the time we punish them with this bill, or punish the adults who drew them in, the effects of it are going to take another 20 years to dissipate, because they have already got all these other kids in the pipeline. The identified result at the far end of the pipeline, we all agree, is terrible. But the bill as it stands does not deal with what is feeding it. It creates no separate offence of grooming a child for later criminal activity. It leaves the first, less serious criminal tasks outside the scheme, even when those tasks are deliberately used to test obedience and make criminal behaviour feel normal.

It does not comprehensively address a criminal group that accepts and uses a child and where no-one can prove the particular conversation in which the child was first recruited took place. That matters because the people who commit these crimes are not foolish. If they have got to the point where they have worked out that they should get a kid to face the risks for them, they are clearly scumbags, but they are not idiots. They will organise themselves around whatever the law is that we pass tonight. I hope that we do not allow the pipeline into criminality to remain intact. If liability rests mainly on identifying the person who spoke directly to the child, then the organiser will use somebody else. If the first offence must carry at least five years, then the child can be started on smaller jobs.

If the prosecution must prove that the offender knew or should have known the child's age, then the people involved have every reason to avoid asking. It is very simple to avoid that responsibility. Why would we give them an out when we can write the law and shut that loophole? The knowledge-of-age requirement is one of the central problems with this bill. The prosecution must prove beyond reasonable doubt that the adult knew the person was or probably was a child. They can say 'Well, he told me he was 18', 'He looked older', 'I asked, he lied', 'I never asked' or 'Someone else recruited him'. The child's actual age may be perfectly clear, but the trial turns upon what the offender claims was in his mind. That is precisely the incentive my amendments remove. The prosecution must still prove the accused's criminal conduct and the child's age beyond a reasonable doubt. But an offender should not be able to preserve ignorance, use an intermediary or rely upon somebody else's assurance and then ask the court to give them an out – to use that ignorance as though it was innocence. The rule is simple because the moral duty is very simple. People who choose to commit crimes together must keep children out. The same moral distinction applies to very young children. The law protects a child under 12 from criminal conviction because of the child's age and incapacity. That protection belongs to the child. It should never become a protection for the older people who involve them.

I am not sure if anyone here has read *Freakonomics*, but it is a book I find very interesting. They looked at, among other things, how youth were involved in crimes. Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner put the economic point simply: criminals, like everyone else, respond to incentives. They reached that conclusion using research based on four years of financial records from one Chicago crack gang. That was just one historical American study and I am not saying that it could be completely transferred here, but I am pretty sure that the principles are obviously related. It showed that criminal activity is run in a hierarchy. That is what gangs are. The gang they studied had approximately 20 senior leaders forming what it called a board of directors. Local leaders paid revenue upwards. Officers managed enforcement, money and transportation. Beneath them were street-level dealers known as foot soldiers, and beneath them were unpaid rank-and-file members who actually paid dues for the chance to move upwards. It was not random. It was not just a collection of people behaving badly; they were organising around the laws. They were organising around the laws, and the laws as they stood incentivised recruiting children into their criminal enterprise. This is an old study. We should have done something about this long ago. The senior board members were estimated to make approximately US\$500,000 a year, the local leader about \$100,000 and the foot soldiers an hourly rate of \$3.30. Across four years a member of that gang could typically expect nearly six arrests and more than two non-fatal injuries. The chance of being killed was one in four. Yet the top 2.2 per cent of the gang membership received well over half the money and were obviously never at risk like the youth they recruited.

That is the criminal model in its clearest form: the money travels upwards and the danger travels downwards. The people at the top keep the profit, the authority and the distance, while the people at the bottom carry the drugs, the weapons, the arrests, the injuries and the consequences. When a child is placed at the bottom of that hierarchy, the transfer of risk becomes more profitable, more morally repugnant and more urgent for us to do something about. I urge the people in this chamber to reverse that incentive and to reverse it early. That is why I have included tier 3, so that we immediately start punishing this from a lower level offence and we start diverting children away into helpful social services as well.

My amendments are designed to do four things, to address four ways in which children are corrupted into crime: recruitment, coordination, participation and grooming. They apply when a child is first groomed or tested through a less serious criminal task as well as when the child is drawn into the gravest offending. They remove the incentive to preserve ignorance about age, because it becomes irrelevant, and they require courts to confront the true culpability of those who transfer all of the risk downward onto children while retaining all of the benefits and the safety for themselves. The amendments also recognise that children can be used to corrupt other children. I have said in this chamber before that we make special allowances for children because we love them, because we have hope for their future, because they lack an adult's wisdom and because we want them to be good

adults. I still believe that a child who has been directed, groomed and coerced by an older person may be both responsible for the harm done to somebody below them and for the crime they have done and also a victim of people above them.

That is why my amendments deal separately with child offenders. The court must consider the child's authority over others, their position in the hierarchy, whether an older person directed them and whether they were themselves groomed, coerced or exploited. We do not have to choose between placing minors in adult prisons and pretending that they did nothing wrong. We can have proportion, but accountability is necessary, and it is necessary from the start. Care for a young offender cannot mean shovelling justice out of the way for the younger child that they may have recruited. Rehabilitation, in my view, requires some kind of punishment – you have to acknowledge that something wrong has been done and you have to suffer a punishment. But that does not mean throwing a young person's entire future in the bin. It means giving the conduct an honest consequence while giving the child a genuine path back. A system that teaches young people that responsibility itself is an injustice will not rehabilitate them, and it will not protect the next child that they may recruit.

Compassion for children and compassion for society is only going to be real if it has the outcome that we desire. If we say we want to protect children from becoming involved in criminal gangs and criminal activity, then we have to measure it properly by the exact outcome that we want. Otherwise we are doing what they are doing: we are literally using the idea of protecting children as a shield. This law sounds good, but is it actually going to do anything to disrupt that pipeline? If it does not, I really do not see how we are any better than them, actually. If we care about children more than we do about protecting ourselves from criticism, then we have to be willing to take the political hits necessary to protect them. We have to stand in between them and those criminal gangs. We have to be harsh. We have to intervene early. We have to impose real consequences on the people who feed the pipeline, even when those people are children themselves. We have to make sure that responsibility travels upwards through the criminal hierarchy so that they can never again use children as human shields for their own criminal activities, and then we have to provide a practical way for those children to come back to us and come back to a productive life in society.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (20:05): I thank the previous speakers on the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026. There has been heavy engagement from others from this bill – I thank them for that – and that is evidenced in some consideration of what I would classify as very well intended amendments. I can go through in committee stage why the government has some problems with those, but at the outset I do appreciate the engagement. There is obviously somewhat universal support for the intention of this bill to crack down on child recruitment and the harm that it causes, so I do appreciate that.

As we have heard, the reforms create a new offence for an adult to recruit a child to commit a serious crime. The new offence covers 71 specified serious crimes, such as arson, carjacking, home invasion and aggravated burglary – indeed offences that are particularly concerning to members of the Victorian community. I just want to spend the summing-up talking about the house amendments that the government is bringing. I ask that they be circulated. We know that catching adults who recruit children is only one part of the job. We know organised crime is a root cause of the shocking violent crimes that we are seeing across our community and effectively organised crime runs on money. Money is the whole point – it is why they recruit children in the first place – so if you follow the money, you find the people giving the orders. We have listened to Victoria Police and responded with these amendments. They are powers that are really about dismantling the networks. They are complementary to the recent investment of \$170 million to establish the organised crime command. We have previously also strengthened unexplained wealth laws, so criminals must prove they came to their wealth legitimately or lose it entirely. The amendments that I am circulating today are effectively the next piece of that work.

What happens right now is that if police want records from a bank, they have to go and get a search warrant. They have to set out every document they want and how it is linked to the offence they are seeking to gain more evidence from, and they need to do this in an affidavit. If the institution has no office in this state, they then need extraterritorial warrants, and then an officer has to physically attend a premises to collect documents that only ever existed as data. Effectively, this is a system that has operated in a world that potentially only considered filing cabinets. It is not necessarily fit for purpose for online banking, and it certainly was not built with an idea of how to deal with cryptocurrencies. The processes can be slow, and that means that the investigation can be slowed. It gives capacity for criminals to get ahead and potentially move money when the process is just underway.

The amendments will let the Chief Commissioner of Police or a senior officer authorised by the chief commissioner to issue a notice to a financial institution to produce documents or information. It covers banks, credit unions and building societies, and it also covers crypto exchanges, casinos and betting apps. A notice can be issued where police reasonably believe an institution holds documents that may assist the investigation or prosecution of an indictable offence – offences like recruiting a child to commit a crime, and offences like extortion, financial fraud and trafficking in weapons, drugs and illegal tobacco. Institutions will have between five and 28 days to comply, and there are penalties if they do not or if they provide false or misleading information. Of course institutions that do the right thing and comply will not be exposed to any civil liability for doing so.

They are serious powers, so they come with limits. An application must be in writing. It must name the offence, it must identify the account and it must set out the grounds for the officer's belief. The officer issuing the notice must be the chief commissioner or an officer of at least inspector rank, authorised in writing by the chief commissioner. They must be satisfied that the institution holds the documents and that those documents may assist the investigation, and they must turn their mind to how reliable the information in front of them is. The chief commissioner must keep a record of every application, every notice issued and every document produced, and the chief commissioner must report to the Attorney-General every year on how many notices were sought, how many were issued and the kinds of offences they were used for, as well as any other relevant information that can be requested by the Attorney-General. Evidence obtained under a notice will be admissible on the same footing as evidence obtained under a search warrant, and the ordinary rules of evidence will apply. Powers like these already exist in the Commonwealth, in New South Wales, in Queensland, in WA and in South Australia. The scheme is proposed to commence on 21 December if it is not proclaimed earlier.

The new powers are, I think, self-explanatory, but effectively they help police move faster on intelligence and make sure that we are jumping on the paydays for crime bosses and hoping to avoid those and prevent crime. It is complementary to the bill and some of the announcements that the government has recently made. I commend the bill to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (31): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, 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, Richard Welch

Noes (7): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Instruction to committee

The PRESIDENT (20:18): Before we go to committee, there is an out-of-scope amendment for consideration. Considering the amendments on sheet MD02C circulated by Mrs Deeming, in my view they are out of the scope of the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required. I remind the house that an instruction motion can trigger a procedural motion debate.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (20:18): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider amendments to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to enact further provisions relating to the recruitment of children to engage in criminal activity and other forms of the criminal corruption of children.

Motion agreed to.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (20:20)

Renee HEATH: Minister, I want to know: was the First Peoples' Assembly consulted on this bill?

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to stakeholders, there was targeted technical consultation with legal stakeholders. When it comes to the First Peoples' Assembly, they were still forming and therefore were not available to be briefed but were sent the information. You might remember that this bill was introduced two months ago.

Renee HEATH: So the answer to that question is: no, they were not consulted.

Jaclyn SYMES: I answered your question.

Renee HEATH: Okay, they were not consulted. Who, Minister, completed the statement of treaty compatibility of this bill with, as it says here, each of the objects in a section of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025? Who completed this task?

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, I will draw your attention to the Statewide Treaty Act statement of compatibility, and you can read for yourself there in relation to consultation and other matters.

Renee HEATH: So it was the minister responsible that completed this.

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, I would draw your attention to the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 statement of treaty compatibility in relation to this bill. It goes for five pages. It is attached to the legislation.

Renee HEATH: So it was the minister that completed it. Is the minister that completed it a First Nations Australian?

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, I am not in a position to confirm that in relation to the minister. I also do not consider it relevant to the bill. If you would like to bring me to an element of the bill that you would like to discuss, I am happy to do that. I have drawn your attention to the statement of treaty compatibility, a statement that would not exist under your party's position, but it is there for you to read.

Renee HEATH: Well, it does relate directly to the bill, and the reason it relates directly to the bill is because it says –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: It does relate to the bill, because it says:

... I note that First Peoples represent less than 2 per cent of the Victorian population but in 2025 made up 14 per cent of alleged offenders proceeded against by police via arrest or summons as a result of alleged offender incidents.

It goes on to say:

The Bill also introduces a recklessness fault element for the new and existing recruitment offence. It is therefore expected that these amendments may lead to more prosecutions and increased custodial sentences for adult offenders which has a risk of further increasing First Peoples overrepresentation in custody.

The reason I raise this is because it is your government, Minister, that have made a song and dance about the treaty, but what qualifications has the minister got to complete this when, according to your own process, you should have consulted the First Peoples' Assembly?

Jaclyn SYMES: When it comes to the development of legislation and when it comes to the development of statements, a range of advice is brought to the development of these documents. Again, you are asking about consultation. It is in paragraph 6 of the statement.

Renee HEATH: Will this legislation lead to increased custodial sentences for First Peoples?

Jaclyn SYMES: This bill is not targeting people based on their personal characteristics or whether they are First Nations people. Of course not. The way you framed your question would seem to suggest that this is targeting Aboriginal Victorians. I think you are conflating the purpose of a treaty statement to be very up-front about the fact that we acknowledge the incarceration rates of Aboriginal people. We have spent many years working with Aboriginal Victorians on separate policies and justice initiatives. We are just about to sign the Aboriginal justice agreement, iteration 5. These are issues that are very important to the government, and I think describing the treaty process as the government making a song and dance demonstrates your commitment to Aboriginal Victorians.

Renee HEATH: It is not an opportunity for you to reflect on me personally, and I think you are completely wrong in what you just said about me. What protections have you got for children that will be recruited through other children?

Jaclyn SYMES: What protections?

Renee HEATH: I picked up on what you just said. For example, right now this bill covers adults that recruit children, but it does not cover children that recruit children. A widely held concern is that a recruiter might recruit a child to recruit other children. What protections do you have against that happening?

Jaclyn SYMES: As always when it comes to criminal bills in particular or bills in the justice space, they should never, ever be viewed in isolation. When you understand the full justice system, you will recognise that there are a range of offences that already exist. There are already laws that cover children who recruit other children to commit offences, because they can be charged with offences like incitement or complicity. The maximum penalties for some of these are serious. They can carry a maximum penalty of 15 years.

We do not need new offences that complicate the existing law and make it more difficult for Victoria Police to decide how offenders should be charged. I understand that the opposition have amendments to that effect. The strong advice is that it is not required. As your question asked about what can happen to children who recruit other children, there are existing laws, as I have outlined.

Renee HEATH: So children recruiting other children falls within existing laws, is that what you are saying?

Jaclyn SYMES: There are other laws that could be applied, yes.

Renee HEATH: What are those laws?

Jaclyn SYMES: A child who directs, commands or encourages another child to engage in criminal activity may be charged with other offences such as incitement or complicity, as I just outlined to you in my answer to your first question asking what offences apply. Just to repeat: there are offences. Incitement can correspond to a maximum penalty of the underlying offence. For example, incitement

to commit arson would carry a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment. Similarly, a person found guilty of complicity is taken to have committed and is liable to the maximum penalty for that offence. Apologies, I do not have the sections in the Crimes Act 1958 that those offences are covered in, because that is not what this bill is covering today.

Renee HEATH: In the overview of this bill it states that it creates an offence for an adult recruiting a child to engage in serious criminal activity. What constitutes ‘serious’?

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, indictable offences that carry a penalty of 15 years or above.

Renee HEATH: A maximum sentence of 15 years and above? Yes, okay. Does that include rape?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Symes, Dr Heath asked a question to which you just nodded. I think you should put the answer to the first question that she asked on record. Do you want to repeat that question, Dr Heath?

Renee HEATH: I just was clarifying. What I am trying to figure out –

Jaclyn SYMES: I had already answered it, and then she was just asking about it again.

Renee HEATH: What was that, sorry? I am really not trying to be cheeky. I am trying to get proper answers here.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I am just concerned about getting the questions and the answers to the questions into *Hansard*, and a nod cannot be recorded by *Hansard*.

Renee HEATH: Okay. Does rape constitute a serious crime?

Jaclyn SYMES: That was not the question that she was referring to. It was the one before that.

Renee HEATH: Which was if it is 15 years or above, the maximum penalty?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Yes.

Renee HEATH: Okay. The question I asked – I cannot remember the exact wording – was: what constitutes a serious crime is a crime that could carry a maximum sentence of 15 years?

Jaclyn SYMES: At least 15 years – a minimum. You asked about what constitutes a serious offence for the purposes of these laws. It is offences that attract penalties of at least 15 years. The penalty for rape is 25, I am pretty sure, so yes, it would cover that offence.

Renee HEATH: I just want to know: what about home invasions and aggravated burglary? Are they considered serious crimes?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, they are all covered.

Renee HEATH: This leads me to a similar concern I have, which I believe relates to the intent of one of Mrs Deeming amendments: what happens if an adult, with the intention of grooming a child, gets them to carry out smaller crimes. Will they fall foul of these laws?

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, I believe you would have been part of this chamber when we did recruitment offences for other offences, lower than 15 years. We have previously addressed that in this chamber. There are also aggravated circumstances that can apply for the recruitment of children for lower level offences. This is the next iteration. Arguably the lower offences have already been dealt with.

Renee HEATH: Just to clarify, though: with the lower offences, those recruiting children into lower offences that do not meet the serious crime threshold will not fall foul of these laws?

Jaclyn SYMES: Just to be really clear on the question that you are asking, these laws that we are dealing with today apply to the serious offences that we have just had a conversation about. There are existing provisions and the ability to look at other forms of involving children in crime.

Renee HEATH: Then my understanding is, no, they do not fall foul of this law. What I am asking, and I am trying to get to a yes or no, is whether criminals, adults, that recruit younger children but not to carry out a serious offence – it might be to carry out a lower level offence at this stage, as a gateway, if you like – will fall foul of these laws.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have just got a slight problem with the way you are asking the question. The behaviour you are articulating is illegal; it is just what offence would apply to the relevant conduct. The legislation is introducing a new recruitment offence that applies to an adult that recruits a child to engage in serious criminal activity. There are existing laws that people can face that apply for offences of lower than 15 years but at least five years. I think you will remember that we have done some of this previously, so you have to consider them all together and what might apply in a suite of responses.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Minister, do you have the number of people who have been convicted for the other recruitment-type offences?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not believe I do. I will ask and, if I can, get you that figure.

I do have that. Between January 2018 and 30 December last year there were almost 50 charges for the existing recruitment offence. Given the nature of organised crime, you would appreciate it can be difficult to prosecute these offences. Often it involves things like the reluctance of children to disclose information about who has recruited them or a lack of identifying information as to who is directing the criminal activity, which we can discuss a little bit in the house amendments in terms of being able to follow the dollar and see where transactions have been made, because the advice is that in almost all instances children that are recruited are paid, so some of that evidence will support, hopefully, more prosecutions in this space.

Evan MULHOLLAND: That was very detailed. How many of those 50 were under 18?

Jaclyn SYMES: The offences that I was referring to were offences that apply to adults.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Have any children been charged under the other recruitment offences?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, as in the answers that I was providing to Dr Heath, there are other offences that can apply to instances of children recruiting or encouraging other children to commit crimes. The specific crime of recruitment of children that I read out before is only applicable to adults.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, tier 1 attaches a maximum penalty of life imprisonment to recruitment, where the underlying offence carries 15 years to life. Can you explain how recruiting a child to steal or damage property can be treated as warranting the same maximum penalty as murder and a higher maximum penalty than rape?

Jaclyn SYMES: With respect, Ms Copsey, you are asking me, as the minister responsible for carriage of this bill, to give you a personal opinion.

Katherine COPSEY: I am trying to tease this out. There is concern that I have heard from stakeholders about the way that this bill has the potential to disrupt the sentencing hierarchy and the rationality and proportionality of sentencing in Victoria. I am asking you to reconcile the sentences that would flow from those different scenarios. In particular I am keen to understand how the government is putting this bill forward and asserting that it will not disrupt the sentencing hierarchy.

Jaclyn SYMES: When it comes to the penalties that have been arrived at with this bill, the maximum penalty reflects the elevated seriousness of recruiting a child to carry out these offences that are of significant community concern. It is about discouraging the recruitment of children by organised crime groups and providing courts with the ability to impose a sentence that reflects the offender's

culpability. It is sending a clear message that recruitment of children to commit serious offences has consequences, has a serious impact on children that are recruited and has a serious impact on victims and the community and that we are wanting to discourage this as much as possible. Of course, as with the existing offence, the new recruitment offence does not carry a mandatory sentence; it does not require a court to impose a custodial sentence. The maximum penalty is appropriate, given that the recruitment of vulnerable children, including by organised crime, is very serious offending, which, as I said, can have significant consequences. However, given the scope of the new offence applies to criminal activity punishable by 15 years to life imprisonment, it can apply to a broad range of conduct. Therefore it is appropriate that the courts retain discretion to impose a sentence that reflects the offender's culpability. The government will continue to monitor the operation of the recruitment offences and determine whether changes are necessary to tackle the current prevalence of recruiting conduct and organised crime.

Katherine COPSEY: Organised criminal networks do not necessarily have senior figures approaching children directly. They may exploit a young person first, and then they may task that young person with bringing in others, who might often be their siblings, their cousins or their friends. Under this bill it is the exploited young person who could be charged and face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment while the older person may remain faceless and continue to profit from recruitment arrangements at arm's length. Minister, can you point to anything in the drafting that distinguishes a young person who recruits because they themselves are being exploited –

Jaclyn SYMES: Do you mean a young person over 18 – but young?

Katherine COPSEY: Yes, a young person of 18 or 19, or around that age – I am not being too specific – who recruits because they themselves are being exploited, as distinct from the older person who is exploiting them.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Copsey, I understand the question that you are asking, and particularly with the house amendments that we have proposed, we really want police to be able to identify the leader, the orchestrator, the person who is often evading the laws and recruiting, as you said, potentially several levels down, networks of kids through WhatsApp and the like. We want them to be able to get to the top to stop this predatory behaviour. Those in the mid-tier, if they are adults, will be captured by these laws if the evidence suggests that they have been recruiting children and we think that is appropriate. But as I outlined in my answer to your previous question about the range of approaches and the discretion of the court, they would be able to look at the factors in relation to the evidence that is put before them, which would mitigate against some of the issues that you have identified. At the outset it is still a crime to be a middle person, but we hope that the tools that we are giving police give them the ability, and therefore the incentive, to keep going to get to the more senior offender, effectively, which stops the behaviour that is ultimately leading to several people getting caught up in the justice system.

Katherine COPSEY: I will deal with the government's house amendments perhaps when we come to discussing those, but I want to ask, with the principal bill, how increasing penalties enables what you just outlined – reaching through the structure of exploitation to the person at the top of it. How is that achieved by just increasing penalties?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated, Ms Copsey, there is discretion in the court for a broad range of penalties based on the offending behaviour.

Katherine COPSEY: But distinct from existing recruitment offences, how does this bill provide different tools, apart from heavier penalties, that will enable that structure of exploitation to be investigated and the person at the top of it to be targeted?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think there is probably a fairly long answer to that from a range of different positions, but I will have a go, building on where we have started this conversation. The new recruitment offence will apply to adults, including similar-aged young people – so an 18-year-old who

recruits a 16-year-old or, as you said, someone who is 25, if we are talking about those that we normally consider to be relatively young people. This will be in the same way as the existing recruitment offence. It will be a matter for Victoria Police to make the initial determination about what charges to lay based on the available evidence. The young person may be a co-accused of the child if they are also involved in the underlying criminal activity – so that younger step-down recruiter role. A sentencing court will retain the discretion to impose a sentence that reflects the culpability of the conduct as well as a range of other factors. The new recruitment offences target adults who recruit children to commit serious offences. We are also committed to measures to break the cycle of reoffending and preventing youth crime before it begins. They include reducing violent youth crime with serious consequences and early interventions. There is the violence reduction unit, which works with a range of young people in a variety of communities. It is all about ensuring that the whole community is involved in programs and disrupting youth crime patterns early. There are also opportunities to prevent and stop crime through a range of other initiatives that we continue to expand on. The VRU are giving us lots of advice in relation to the programs that they are running which can benefit young people, even those slightly over 18.

Katherine COPSEY: So, Minister, the offence as drafted could capture an 18-year-old who invites a slightly younger friend to commit a property offence with them, even if they do not know their friend's exact age. Under the offences drafted that 18-year-old could face life imprisonment for involving their slightly younger friend. Is that the government's intent?

Jaclyn SYMES: The courts retain discretion, as we have gone through, but as we have gone through in the second-reading debate, this is really designed off the feedback of Victoria Police in relation to organised crime and the recruitment of young people. So when you ask about the purpose, the purpose is designed to crack into that particular behaviour. Of course, as you have identified, the offences could pick up younger people who recruit slightly younger people, so young adults that recruit children, where there might not be a large age gap, can be picked up. That is why there is court discretion and there is police discretion in relation to what is the most relevant charge to apply. That is why it is important to retain court discretion to impose sentences that reflect the culpability of the conduct as well as a range of other factors.

Katherine COPSEY: It would be entirely possible to draft recruitment offences that incorporated elements of organised crime – for example, a connection to a criminal organisation or an element of exploitation or commercial benefit – as other offences in the Crimes Act 1958 already do. Why has the government left this offence so broad?

Jaclyn SYMES: I would just repeat the answers that I have provided, Ms Copsey. You do not want to complicate the law, and I think I will have this conversation with Mrs Deeming in a similar vein. If you get too prescriptive about exactly when and you take the discretion away too much, it just means that you make everyone's job harder and the law actually becomes vaguer.

Katherine COPSEY: Just also touching on consultation, as some others have in their questions as well, I just want to ask about some specific organisations and whether or not they were consulted on this bill before its introduction. The community legal sector, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, Aboriginal legal services, the Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service or the Federation of Community Legal Centres – were they consulted on this bill?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have an exhaustive list of who was consulted. It was targeted consultation with the likes of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) and VicPol. I will ask for any others that were consulted, but as I indicated in my remarks to Dr Heath, it was a targeted consultation with legal stakeholders. But also I would point to the fact that this bill has been in the Parliament for some time, and therefore there has been the opportunity to have conversations in the lead-up to the debate tonight.

Katherine COPSEY: How did the government satisfy itself that an offence carrying the most severe penalty available under Victorian law would operate as intended without hearing from organisations that work directly with the children and young people it will affect?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I have indicated, the likes of VLA, courts and those that deal with the application of the law were certainly involved in the considerations of this bill, and as I think I had indicated, this is an area of law that we will be closely monitoring.

Katherine COPSEY: Was the proposed life maximum sentence referred to the Sentencing Advisory Council for advice?

Jaclyn SYMES: I took you through the advice that I have in relation to how the policy decided on the penalties.

Katherine COPSEY: What evidence does the government rely on for the proposition that the existing 15-year maximum sentence has proved insufficient?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said earlier, the rationale relates to the offences that they are connected to.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, apologies if you went through these stats earlier. How many people have been charged and convicted under existing section 321LB in the past five years?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have five years. I have got 1 January 2018 to 30 December 2025.

Katherine Copsey interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: That will do. I have got 48 charges for the existing recruitment offences that were heard in court, resulting in 12 convictions.

Katherine COPSEY: I am not sure whether you will have this, but in how many of those 12 cases where there was a conviction was there an established connection to an organised crime network?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, I do not have that information, Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, could I trouble you to obtain that on notice for me, please?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not prepared to take that on notice, Ms Copsey. I would encourage you to perhaps ask offline. I know for a fact that it would not be data that would be available in an easy form, so I am not going to sign up the Attorney – the advantage of having held a portfolio – for that data, because I doubt that she would be able to get her hands on it easily. I think if you had a conversation with them, anecdotally the courts would probably have a view.

I am compelled to make some comments on it, just given the evolution of some of the crime patterns that would be reported – and this is not official data. You asked about the last five years. Victoria Police and the courts would both confirm that the prevalence or the number of cases of organised crime infiltrating young people has certainly been more concerning in recent years. This is not something that existed 10 years ago. This is something that has been facilitated by online cryptocurrency, encouraging people to commit crime for money and the like. We know through the advice, particularly from Victoria Police, that they are very concerned about the impact on young people from large organised crime groups. Does that mean that every child that is recruited by an adult is connected to organised crime? Probably not, but it is something that we have been told over the last maybe five years is something that they continue to be concerned about. So we are responding to concerns that people have – both those responding to crime and those that are working with young people – about them being targeted. This is, again, why these laws are catching up with the experiences that we are hearing from a range of stakeholders.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, I am just going back to the impact of these laws and the potential impact on First Peoples. I think you have spoken to this before, but I want to ask: given the acknowledged potential for this law to disproportionately impact First Nations people in the statement

of treaty compatibility and the existing over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the criminal legal system, what modelling has the government undertaken on the likely impact of this new law on Aboriginal young people in particular?

Jaclyn SYMES: The new and the existing recruitment offences obviously apply to all adults. However, the government also recognises that Aboriginal people are over-represented in Victoria's justice system. The changes in the bill may lead to more prosecutions and increased custodial sentences for adult offenders, which could have a risk of further increasing First Peoples over-representation in custody. We obviously recognise that the best outcome is for children to avoid contact with the criminal justice system altogether. This offence sends a strong message to deter organised crime groups and others that may recruit vulnerable and impressionable children to commit serious offences. The government remains committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. We will monitor the reforms to see that they are achieving their intended community safety objectives and to understand and, where possible, mitigate the impact on Aboriginal communities and other vulnerable cohorts. But it is also relevant that we know that it is vulnerable kids that are generally targeted by organised crime. We know a lot of those vulnerable kids are out-of-home-care kids. They are kids that have had low-level interaction with the justice system. They include First Nations kids. This is a law that is designed to target adults, hopefully with the benefit of protecting those vulnerable young people.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, just on that, there is a difficult conflict that the government finds itself in here. The state may continue to consider a young person to be under a child protection order, for example, until they are 21. How can a young person who is aged 18 to 21 be treated as an adult recruiter under this bill when they could be in circumstances of vulnerability like a continued child protection order?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think you are identifying one of the exact factors that a sentencing court would have discretion to consider. They would be asked to ensure that the response to sentencing reflects the culpability of the conduct as well as a range of other factors, such as what you have brought to the chamber.

Moir DEEMING: I move:

1. Clause 1, line 3, omit “1958 –” and insert “1958 to enact new provisions relating to the recruitment of children to engage in criminal activity and other forms of the criminal corruption of children.”.
2. Clause 1, lines 4 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
3. Clause 1, page 2, lines 1 to 4, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

In the interest of keeping things brief, the big difference between my amendments and the basic bill is that there is no need to prove recruitment. If your criminal activity involves a child, that is it – you have committed the base offence. You can recruit a child; you can coordinate a group that plans, arranges, organises, funds or recruits children to be involved; you can participate in criminal activity in which a child also participates; and you can groom the child. That is the only way that you would guarantee getting the punishment to the people at the top. I have also made sure that there are reduced maximums for child recruiters. They are still very, very harsh, and it is pretty terrifying to think that young people could do something to be exposed to that kind of a sentence. I do believe that you have to have some kind of punishment, but I do not think that under the age of 18 we should be as harsh as we are on adults for this secondary punishment that is not even committing the offence.

Then I have got sentencing directions, which also escalate and de-escalate in severity and punishment in proportion. Transferring physical, criminal or legal risk onto a child has to be considered as serious. The offender retaining control, authority or benefit while the child bears all of the risks has to be treated as very serious. I want the court to treat it as aggravating if the child actually participated in the crime, if there is repetition or protraction or if there are force, threats, coercion, blackmail, deception,

exploitation, emotional manipulation using other children or insulating the offender through other people. All these things have to be taken into account.

That is what is different about my amendments to the other incitement laws. The main issue for me is that you do not have to prove that anybody knew how old the child was. I do not think we have to do that, and I do not think it is wise. I think we need to start the punishments at the lower end of the scale, and it needs to deal with this idea that it is just unacceptable in our society that you involve children in your criminal activity.

Renee HEATH: The coalition will not be supporting these amendments. Just from listening, I certainly appreciate the intent. But they were not given to us in time to go through the correct process, so that is our reason why.

Katherine COPSEY: The Greens will not be supporting Mrs Deeming's amendments.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said in my summing-up, I appreciate the thought that Mrs Deeming has given to this legislation. I understand what you are attempting to do with your amendment. We are not in a position to support your amendment, Mrs Deeming, for a couple of reasons. At the outset, we had a little bit of conversation across various parties tonight in terms of what applies when and what are appropriate sentences, what is the level of culpability, do you consider the age of the offender, do you consider the age of the victim and a range of factors that the courts are well equipped to address. We would be concerned that your amendment would add complexity and confusion to the existing law. The offences of incitement and complicity adequately cover the field. If a charge cannot be brought because of an age reason, you can always fall back to those offences regardless of the age of the person who was recruited.

Fundamentally, the other concern I have with your amendments is that you are in effect seeking to overturn a pretty core principle of the justice system, and that principle is that to convict a person of a crime the prosecution must prove the person had a guilty mind when they committed the relevant act. That is why, the way we have crafted it, you still have to have known or should have known that you were recruiting a child. That is pretty standard across the statute books. We think the balance is right through that. It is also, as I said, consistent with other laws. We think the setting is consistent with how serious criminal laws have been written for centuries, and we are not proposing that we should depart from that principle. As I said, I understand what you are trying to do. We think that the laws cover the field adequately to pick up instances of behaviour that we all agree is inappropriate and illegal.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is that Mrs Deeming's amendments 1 to 3, which test all her remaining amendments, be agreed to.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (2): Moira Deeming, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Noes (35): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negatived.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Mulholland, I invite you to move your amendments 1 to 4, which test your remaining amendments.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 1, omit "an adult" and insert "a person".

2. Clause 1, page 2, line 3, omit “adult” and insert “person”.
3. Clause 1, page 2, line 4, omit “child.” and insert “child; and”.
4. Clause 1, page 2, after line 4 insert –

“(d) to provide that these offences may be committed by a child as well as by an adult.”.

I spoke about this in my second-reading speech, which I am sure everyone in the chamber was listening to. The amendments insert a new provision to reflect the bill’s purpose by providing for those offences to be committed by children in addition to adults. We do not believe there should be a difference between whether someone is 17 or 18 or 19 or 16. Ultimately, the recruitment of children to commit another act is a bad thing.

In terms of unintended consequences, we think the existing provisions unamended in this bill will have the consequence of using children to recruit other children, as we have already seen in the community. What we have been particularly asking about in committee have been other parts of the law where recruitment offences have been committed. About 50 of them have taken place and the minister could not name one that was a child. Obviously there probably is. We think that this bill would have massive unintended consequences if left unamended. It makes no difference whether someone is 16, 17, 18 or 19. Picking an arbitrary age is not the way we should be focused. We should be focused on the actual offence, and the actual offence is a sickening offence that we want to see stopped.

Jaclyn SYMES: The government will not be supporting this amendment. Describing 18 as an ‘arbitrary age’ when it comes to the creation of laws is not language I would use. We have laws that apply to adults and laws that apply to children in a range of appropriate circumstances. Eighteen is not arbitrary; it is the legal adult age. In any event the amendment that you are proposing is not necessary because children who recruit other children to commit offences may already be charged with existing offences like incitement and complicity. The maximum penalties for those offences correspond to the maximum penalty for the underlying offence. For example, incitement to commit arson would carry a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment. We do not need new offences that just complicate the existing law, because that makes it harder for Victoria Police to decide how offenders should be charged and therefore creates complications in the justice system more broadly. We need a strong deterrent for adults who target children to do their dirty work, and that is what this bill is proposing to do.

David LIMBRICK: I have one question for Mr Mulholland. My understanding of this amendment – please correct me if I am wrong – is that this would essentially expose children to potential life imprisonment. Is that correct?

Evan MULHOLLAND: We do not believe there should be a difference between someone who is a child or someone who is an adult as to whether they are charged with this offence. We are very concerned about the unintended consequence of the bill being left unamended in relation to the recruitment of children.

Katherine COPSEY: The Greens will not be supporting the Liberals’ amendment. We are concerned about the breadth of what is proposed. We know that the younger someone is when they first have contact with the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to reoffend, so I do not think it will achieve its purpose. It will also divert attention from the government’s stated intent, which is targeting those who are further up the hierarchy of the criminal organisations that are currently targeting young people. We do not think that the Liberals’ amendment will strengthen the bill.

David LIMBRICK: I thank Mr Mulholland for his answer. I feel like we have a fundamental disagreement here, though. I do think that children are different, and that is sort of the whole point of the recruitment of children idea in this bill. Therefore, the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this amendment. I actually agree with the government’s position that if children have been committing crimes, then other offences such as incitement et cetera exist and they should be applied in those cases where appropriate.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (23): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Amendments negated.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendments 1 and 2, which test your remaining amendments.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 4, omit “child.” and insert “child; and”.
2. Clause 1, page 2, after line 4 insert –
“(d) to establish a new process for requiring financial institutions to produce documents that are relevant to certain offences.”.

I went through, in some detail, this house amendment in my summing-up. Effectively, in summary, these reforms seek to reduce delays and operational challenges that Victoria Police encounter when obtaining documents from a financial institution through the existing warrant processes. It does not change how you use the information, it just makes it easier to obtain and is complementary to some of the topics that we have been talking about tonight, because it helps with collating evidence about where the money comes from, which is often what is being used to incentivise people to commit crimes on behalf of others. There are some other benefits, but that is why it is relevant to tonight’s discussion.

Katherine COPSEY: I actually have a few questions about these amendments. The Greens are concerned and troubled by these amendments, and we will not be supporting them this evening. But I want to understand the breadth of what is being introduced here, very much at the last minute, in the bill that is before us tonight. Minister, can you confirm that these amendments would enable police to make financial institutions hand over information without a warrant or a subpoena in respect of any suspected indictable offence?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Copsey, I am happy to take you through some of the information I put on the record. This is a big change, and that is why they are significant powers and that is why I outlined some of the limits and the processes to be undertaken. Would you like me to repeat some of those?

Katherine Copsey interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, sure. That is okay. This might take a while. An application must be in writing, it must name the offence, it must identify the account that it is seeking information from and it must set out the grounds for the officer’s belief that it is related to an indictable offence. The officer issuing the notice must be the Chief Commissioner of Police or an officer of at least inspector rank authorised in writing by the chief commissioner. They must be satisfied that the institution holds the documents and that those documents may assist with the investigation, and they must turn their mind to how reliable the information in front of them is. The chief commissioner must keep a record of every application, every notice issued and every document produced, and the chief commissioner must report to the Attorney-General every year on how many notices were sought, how many were issued and the kinds of offences they were issued for as well as any other relevant information requested by the Attorney. Evidence obtained under a notice will be admissible on the same footing as evidence obtained under a search warrant and the ordinary rules of evidence will apply. I do note that powers like these already exist in the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia.

Katherine COPSEY: You have put these amendments into this bill in particular. Why have you not restricted the offences to those related to serious organised crime, money laundering, fraud or serious financial offending?

Jaclyn SYMES: A production notice can be issued in relation to any indictable offence or offence prescribed by regulation. Enabling additional offences to be prescribed ensures that the production notice scheme remains responsive to evolving criminal activities. This has been a topic of conversation with Victoria Police and the courts, to land on that position.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, what evidence has the government produced? I know you have just spoken about discussions, but this is, as you have just noted, a really sweeping power. What evidence has the government produced that existing investigative powers are inadequate across all indictable offences?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Copsey, the concerns that have been raised about the current system are in relation to operational delays experienced via the current search warrant process. I asked a similar question in the briefing, and effectively this process is not designed to replace the warrant system with this application process; it is not to necessarily expand an application process because the warrant system is not doing its job. It is just timely, and it is the suggestion that some investigations are actually being compromised because people move quickly in relation to particularly cryptocurrency, and the evidence disappears. So it is responding to modern methods of crime. It is not designed to be a catch-all fishing expedition.

Katherine COPSEY: I am concerned that this is coming in the form of an amendment to a bill which it is not related to – it is out of scope. What analysis has been done on the impacts of this and its interaction with Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, particularly the right to privacy?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think I will just spend some time talking about the differences between the two frameworks, because there is an existing way to obtain information through the warrant process. They aim to streamline investigations and remove administrative barriers in the application process. The production model diverges from the existing search warrant framework mainly in procedural aspects, not in relation to the purpose for which the information is sought. The key differences are that production notices may be issued by Victoria Police while search warrants under the Crimes Act are issued by a magistrate at the application of a police officer supported by evidence on oath, affirmation or affidavit. Production notices will apply to indictable offences, as we talked about, while search warrants under the Crimes Act are typically limited to indictable offences and certain summary offences expressly provided for in legislation. Production notices will enable Victoria Police to specify how and in what form the requested documents are to be produced, while search warrants under the Crimes Act require Victoria Police to physically attend a financial institution premises to collect the documents and in fact to search when they are there. Production notices will impose clear timeframes for compliance.

A statement of compatibility is not required for a house amendment. This relates to the right to privacy, but the advice is that it would not be incompatible with that right as the policy is reasonably justifiable. As I have indicated, the information that is obtained will be treated the same way as if it had come via a warrant.

Katherine COPSEY: I just want to understand in practice how this would work. Would a person whose financial records are accessed and provided by the financial institution to police be aware at any point that the financial institution has had this notice served on them and had to comply with it?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, Ms Copsey. It is the same consistent practice with the current process of warrants.

Katherine COPSEY: Why should police be able to secretly access private financial information without a judicial warrant?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Copsey, I took you through the reasons that we are proposing this amendment.

Katherine COPSEY: This is an extraordinary power that is being granted. Why has the government chosen as a threshold only that the information may assist in the investigation of a suspected offence? That is astonishingly low.

Jaclyn SYMES: The issuing officer needs to be satisfied that the financial institution possesses or controls a document or information requested and that the document may assist in the investigation or prosecution of an applicable offence stated in the application. The officer must have regard to the reliability of the information set out in the application. Ms Copsey, as I have indicated, this is consistent with New South Wales policy and similar to other states and indeed the Commonwealth. It is why we have included a range of safeguards in relation to applicants being required to identify the exact scope of the documents or information to be produced, mitigating the risk of financial institutions releasing too much private data. The records that have to be kept have to be ticked off by the Chief Commissioner of Police. They have to be reported annually to the Attorney-General. This is something that we will be monitoring closely. In relation to record requirements, the chief commissioner must record all applications. They must record each production notice issued. For each production notice served, they must record how and when it was served, and there must be a description of each document produced in compliance, or purported compliance, with a production notice. There remain quite stringent requirements for people that apply for these things. The chief commissioner obviously takes full responsibility in relation to letting them proceed, and the records have to be thorough and reported on.

Katherine COPSEY: Why has the government given the power for entirely new entities or classes of entities to be added through regulation to this already extremely broad power?

Jaclyn SYMES: Just to keep pace with the way that people can be remunerated. As I indicated in my summing-up, these laws were largely written to respond to requests for warrants that would go in and search filing cabinets. This is now a world where currency is quite often transacted through online measures. We have got cryptocurrency. It picks up betting apps. We want to be agile to be able to adjust to any of the platforms that enable money to be transferred.

Katherine COPSEY: I am still not really understanding why search warrants are not the appropriate mechanism to retain in relation to this information, I must say. Why has the government introduced this major new coercive power through late amendments? We were only offered a briefing this morning, which I was unable to go to due to a prior engagement. Why is the government doing this through amendments? Why have you not brought this through as a standalone bill? It clearly is not entirely related to the subject matter of this bill.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think that is probably more of a statement than a question, but we are wanting to be responsive to the way organised crime is evolving in this state. As I have indicated, this is not new in Australia and is very consistent with other states and complementary to the purposes of the substantive bill, which is about responding to organised crime and the recruitment of young people. We know the ability to identify those recruiters is often by following where the money originated from.

Katherine COPSEY: I understand that, Minister. However, the scope of the powers that are granted by this amendment is not limited to organised crime. It is not limited to any particular class of offences. They are all indictable offences where it may assist the investigation. It is a frighteningly low threshold to meet, to be frank. When did the government decide that it was going to pursue this amendment?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Copsey, I know that we have missed one another in our committee stages, but I have always been consistent in that government goes through a range of processes when it is looking at policy reform. These types of issues have been raised for years. These types of issues were raised with me when I was Attorney-General.

Katherine COPSEY: Therefore why was it not introduced as part of the principal bill when you introduced it to the lower house?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not in a position to take you through the timing of the process except to indicate that these are issues that have been on the radar for some time. It has become an increasing burden and barrier for criminal investigations, according to Victoria Police. We committed to support these additional powers for Victoria Police to combat new types of crime. We committed to ensuring that we would do that this term, and the announcement was in late July.

Katherine COPSEY: The speed at which this has been foisted upon the chamber is worrying. What consultation has the government taken specifically on these production notice provisions? I would like to know, for example, have you consulted the Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar, community legal centres, Liberty Victoria or any privacy experts in relation to these amendments?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am advised that there have been discussions with the Magistrates' Court and Victoria Police, and we are committed to working closely with stakeholders to implement these reforms and monitor their impact, including identifying any necessary adjustments.

Katherine COPSEY: Mr Davis had a useful suggestion: has the Victorian information commissioner been consulted in relation to this?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that advice on me.

Katherine COPSEY: I will leave my questions there. I understand the stated intent that the government is putting forward in bringing these today to the chamber, but I am very concerned that what has been put before us is far broader than the targeted powers the government has stated that they want to bestow. Plus, there is the fact that this can be broadened through regulation. I do not think it is appropriate for something of this weight to be done through a last-minute amendment to a bill. I think, should the government wish to actually progress something of this nature, they should bring it as a standalone bill. I feel like this is the type of change that actually could benefit from real scrutiny rather than being rushed through at the last stage, so I would urge others in the chamber to oppose the government's amendments today.

David LIMBRICK: Warrantless search and seizure powers are fundamentally incompatible with Western free societies, and the Libertarian Party has a long tradition of opposing this type of power; therefore we will oppose it. We do not accept the government's position that because there are new types of crimes that require faster responses we should abandon the principles of Western civilisation.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (29): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, 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, Richard Welch

Noes (9): Katherine Copsey, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Amendments agreed to.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 2 (21:51)**Jaclyn SYMES:** I move:

3. Clause 2, line 6, omit “This Act” and insert “(1) This Act (except section 7A)”.
4. Clause 2, after line 7 insert –
 - “(2) Subject to subsection (3), section 7A comes into operation on a day to be proclaimed.
 - (3) If section 7A does not come into operation before 21 December 2026, it comes into operation on that day.”.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 3 to 7 agreed to.**New clause (21:52)****Jaclyn SYMES:** I move:

5. Insert the following New Clause to follow Clause 7 –

7A New Subdivision (33) inserted in Division 1 of Part IIIAfter Subdivision (32) in Division 1 of Part III of the **Crimes Act 1958** insert –**“(33) Production notices****470A Definitions**

In this Subdivision –

applicable offence means –

- (a) an indictable offence against the law of Victoria; or
- (b) any other offence against the law of Victoria that is prescribed or that belongs to a class that is prescribed;

bank means –

- (a) the Reserve Bank of Australia; or
- (b) an ADI; or
- (c) a person who carries on State banking within the meaning of section 51(xiii) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth;

building society means a society registered or incorporated as a building society, co-operative housing society or similar society under an Act or the laws of another State or a Territory;***financial institution*** means –

- (a) a bank; or
- (b) a building society; or
- (c) a credit union; or
- (d) a body corporate that is a financial corporation within the meaning of section 51(xx) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth (or would be if it had been incorporated in Australia); or
- (e) a provider of a registrable virtual asset service within the meaning of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 of the Commonwealth; or
- (f) a casino operator within the meaning of the **Casino Control Act 1991**; or
- (g) a wagering and betting licensee within the meaning of the **Gambling Regulation Act 2003**; or
- (h) an entity that is prescribed or that belongs to a prescribed class;

issuing officer means –

- (a) the Chief Commissioner of Police; or
- (b) a police officer authorised under section 470C;

production notice has the meaning given by section 470B.

470B What is a *production notice*?

A *production notice* is a notice requiring a financial institution to do either or both of the following –

- (a) to produce to a police officer one or more documents that –
 - (i) are possessed or controlled by the institution; and
 - (ii) contain information in respect of an account that an entity holds or keeps with the institution; or
- (b) to compile one or more documents from information that –
 - (i) is possessed or controlled by the institution; and
 - (ii) is in respect of an account that an entity holds or keeps with the institution.

470C Chief Commissioner of Police may authorise police officer to be issuing officer

The Chief Commissioner of Police may authorise in writing a police officer of or above the rank of inspector to issue production notices.

470D Police officer may apply for production notice

- (1) A police officer may apply to an issuing officer for the issue of a production notice directed to a financial institution if the police officer believes on reasonable grounds that the financial institution possesses or controls information, or one or more documents, that may assist in the investigation or prosecution of an applicable offence.
- (2) The application must –
 - (a) be in writing; and
 - (b) identify the financial institution; and
 - (c) identify the documents sought to be produced, including by identifying –
 - (i) the account in respect of which the production notice is to be issued; or
 - (ii) the entity that holds or keeps that account; and

Note

See subsection (3).

- (d) state the applicable offence the investigation or prosecution of which may be assisted by the documents; and
- (e) state the grounds on which the applicant has formed the belief required by subsection (1), including –
 - (i) the grounds for believing that the financial institution possesses or controls the documents or information referred to in that subsection; and
 - (ii) the grounds for believing that the production referred to in that subsection may assist in the investigation or prosecution of the applicable offence stated in accordance with paragraph (d); and
- (f) set out the facts, matters and circumstances on which the application relies; and
- (g) specify the period of time that the applicant proposes for the financial institution to have to comply with the notice; and

Note

See section 470E(6).

- (h) specify how, in what form and to which police officer the applicant seeks for the documents to be produced; and
 - (i) if a form is prescribed, be in that form; and
 - (j) if additional material is prescribed, include that material.
- (3) Without limiting subsection (2)(c), identifying the account, or an entity that holds or keeps the account, for the purposes of that provision may involve –
 - (a) stating an account number; or
 - (b) stating a name in which the account is held or kept; or

- (c) stating an address, an electronic address or a unique identifier associated with the account or the entity.

Examples

- 1 A residential or business address used by the entity.
- 2 An email address used by the entity.
- 3 An internet protocol address used by the entity.
- 4 If the account concerns cryptocurrency, a unique identifier, known as a wallet address, that is used by the entity.

- (4) The police officer is not required to give notice of the application to any person.

470E Issue of production notice

- (1) On an application under section 470D, an issuing officer may issue to the applicant a production notice that –
 - (a) concerns every document identified in the application; and
 - (b) is directed at the financial institution identified in the application –
 if satisfied of the matters set out in subsection (2) in respect of each document.
- (2) The matters of which the issuing officer must be satisfied in respect of each document are that –
 - (a) the financial institution either –
 - (i) possesses or controls the document; or
 - (ii) possesses or controls the information from which the document is to be compiled; and
 - (b) the document may assist in the investigation or prosecution of the applicable offence stated in the application.
- (3) In determining whether to issue the production notice, the issuing officer must have regard to the reliability of the information on which the application relies.
- (4) A production notice must –
 - (a) identify the financial institution to which it is directed; and
 - (b) identify each document that is to be produced, including by identifying –
 - (i) the account in respect of which the production notice is to be issued; or
 - (ii) the entity that holds or keeps that account; and

Note

See subsection (5).

- (c) specify, in accordance with subsection (6), the period within which the institution must comply with the notice; and
- (d) specify how, in what form and to which police officer the documents are to be produced; and
- (e) state the effect of sections 470H and 470I; and
- (f) if a form is prescribed, be in that form; and
- (g) if additional material is prescribed, include that material.
- (5) Without limiting subsection (4)(b), identifying the account, or an entity that holds or keeps the account, for the purposes of that provision may involve –
 - (a) stating an account number; or
 - (b) stating a name in which the account is held or kept; or
 - (c) stating an address, an electronic address or a unique identifier associated with the account or the entity.

Examples

- 1 A residential or business address used by the entity.
- 2 An email address used by the entity.

- 3 An internet protocol address used by the entity.
- 4 If the account concerns cryptocurrency, a unique identifier, known as a wallet address, that is used by the entity.
- (6) The period specified in accordance with subsection (4)(c) –
 - (a) is to begin on the day that the production notice is served on the financial institution; and
 - (b) must be no less than 5 days and no more than 28 days.
- (7) A production notice may be issued in respect of a financial institution that is not located in Victoria.

470F Service of production notice

- (1) As soon as practicable after a production notice is issued, the Chief Commissioner of Police must ensure that the notice is served on the financial institution identified in the notice.
- (2) A production notice is to be served –
 - (a) by delivering the notice personally to the registered office of the financial institution; or
 - (b) by sending it by post to the registered office of the financial institution; or
 - (c) if the financial institution has given Victoria Police an electronic address that is to be used for receiving production notices, by sending the notice by electronic communication to that electronic address.
- (3) A production notice ceases to have effect if it is not served within 3 months after it is issued.

470G Police powers in relation to produced documents

- (1) If a document is produced to a police officer in response to a production notice, any police officer may do any of the following things –
 - (a) inspect the document;
 - (b) take an extract from the document;
 - (c) make a copy of the document;
 - (d) take the document.
- (2) An extract taken or copy made under subsection (1) is to be retained by Victoria Police.
- (3) A document taken under subsection (1)(d) is to be retained by Victoria Police for as long as is reasonably necessary for the investigation or prosecution of an offence.
- (4) The Chief Commissioner of Police must ensure that a document –
 - (a) that is taken under subsection (1)(d); and
 - (b) the retention of which is no longer reasonably necessary for the investigation or prosecution of an offence –is returned to the financial institution that produced the document.

470H Financial institution must comply with production notice

- (1) A financial institution that has been served with a production notice must not, without reasonable excuse, fail to comply with the notice.
Penalty: Level 5 fine (1200 penalty units maximum).
- (2) A financial institution that has been served with a production notice must not, in purported compliance with the notice, provide a document that –
 - (a) is false or misleading in a material particular; and
 - (b) the financial institution knows is false or misleading in a material particular.Penalty: Level 5 fine (1200 penalty units maximum).
- (3) An offence against subsection (1) or (2) is a summary offence.

470I Offence to disclose existence of production notice

- (1) Subject to subsection (7), a financial institution on which a production notice is served must not disclose the existence of the notice to any person (including the holder of the account to which the notice relates) except –
- (a) to a police officer in accordance with the notice; or
 - (b) to an employee, officer or agent of the institution for the purpose of ensuring the notice is complied with; or
 - (c) to a legal practitioner for the purpose of obtaining legal advice or representation in relation to the notice.

Penalty: Level 5 fine (1200 penalty units maximum).

- (2) Subject to subsection (7), a person to whom the existence of a production notice is disclosed in accordance with subsection (1) must not –
- (a) while the person is of a kind referred to in subsection (1)(a), (b) or (c), disclose the existence of the notice to any person except another person of that kind for the purpose of –
 - (i) if the disclosure is made by a police officer, the performance of the officer's duties; or
 - (ii) if the disclosure is made by an employee, officer or agent of the financial institution, ensuring that the notice is complied with or obtaining legal advice or representation in relation to the notice; or
 - (iii) if the disclosure is made by a legal practitioner, giving legal advice or providing representation in relation to the notice; or
 - (b) when the person is no longer of a kind referred to in subsection (1)(a), (b) or (c), make a record of, or disclose, the existence of the notice in any circumstances.

Penalty: 240 penalty units or imprisonment for 2 years.

- (3) An offence against subsection (1) or (2) is a summary offence.
- (4) Nothing in subsection (2) prevents the disclosure by a person of a kind referred to in subsection (1)(a), (b) or (c) of the existence of a production notice –
 - (a) for the purposes of, or in connection with, legal proceedings; or
 - (b) in the course of proceedings before a court.
- (5) Nothing in subsection (2) prevents the disclosure by a police officer of the existence of a production notice for the purposes of a report under section 470M.
- (6) A reference in this section to disclosing the existence of a production notice to a person includes a reference to disclosing information to the person from which the person could reasonably be expected to infer the existence of the notice.
- (7) It is not an offence against subsection (1) or (2) to disclose the existence of a production notice if the existence of the notice has been made known in any proceedings in open court.

470J Protection from liability

The following do not incur any civil liability for any action taken or document produced in response to a production notice –

- (a) the financial institution identified in the notice;
- (b) a person who is an officer, employee or agent of that financial institution acting in the course of that person's duties as an officer, employee or agent.

470K Admissibility in criminal proceedings

If a financial institution produces a document in response to a production notice, neither the production of the document nor any information, document or thing obtained as a direct or indirect consequence of the production of the document is admissible against that institution in any criminal proceeding other than a proceeding against that institution for an offence against section 470H(1) or (2).

470L Chief Commissioner of Police to keep records

The Chief Commissioner of Police must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the following records are kept –

- (a) a record of each application for a production notice;
- (b) a record of each production notice issued;
- (c) for each production notice that is served, a record of how and when it was served;
- (d) a description of each document produced in compliance or purported compliance with a production notice.

470M Annual report to Attorney-General about production notices

- (1) The Chief Commissioner of Police must submit a report to the Attorney-General in respect of each financial year that includes the following information for that financial year –
 - (a) the number of applications for production notices that were made during that year;
 - (b) the number of production notices issued during that year;
 - (c) information about the different kinds of offences (as determined by the Chief Commissioner) in respect of whose investigation or prosecution production notices were issued during that year;
 - (d) any other information that relates to production notices and that the Attorney-General notifies the Chief Commissioner, in writing, is required to be included in the report.
- (2) The report must be submitted –
 - (a) as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year to which it relates; and
 - (b) no later than 3 months after the end of that financial year.
- (3) The Chief Commissioner of Police must advise the Attorney-General of any information in the report that, in the Chief Commissioner's opinion, should be excluded from the report before the report is laid before Parliament because the information, if made public, could reasonably be expected to –
 - (a) endanger a person's safety; or
 - (b) prejudice an investigation or prosecution; or
 - (c) compromise any law enforcement operational activities or methodologies of Victoria Police.
- (4) The Attorney-General must –
 - (a) exclude information from the report if satisfied on the advice of the Chief Commissioner of Police of any of the grounds set out in subsection (3); and
 - (b) cause a copy of the report to be laid before each House of the Parliament within 12 sitting days after the day on which the Attorney-General receives the report.”.

New clause agreed to.**Clause 8 (21:53)**

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

- 6. Clause 8, line 27, after “**Criminal Activity**” insert “**and Production Notices**”.
- 7. Clause 8, page 5, line 12, after “**Criminal Activity**” insert “**and Production Notices**”.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to.**Clause 9 (21:53)**

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

- 8. Clause 9, lines 15 and 16, omit “the first anniversary of its commencement” and insert “21 December 2027”.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Long title (21:54)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

9. Long title, after “activity” insert “, to further amend that Act to establish a new process for requiring financial institutions to produce documents that are relevant to certain offences”.

Amendment agreed to; amended long title agreed to.

Short title (21:54)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

10. Title, after “Activity” insert “and Production Notices”.

Amendment agreed to; amended short title agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments, including amended long and short titles.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (21:55): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (21:55): 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 has agreed to the bill with amendments.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (21:55): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region sporting facilities

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:56): (2715) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place. Last Tuesday I had the opportunity to visit the Hughes Park pavilion in Croydon North, which was recently upgraded thanks to \$1.3 million in funding from the Carroll Labor state government and Maroondah City Council. As part of these upgrades the Hughes Park pavilion has received more accessible change rooms for women and girls, along with upgraded umpire facilities and a brand new first aid room. For clubs like Croydon North Football Club and Croydon North Cricket Club, these upgrades are important to the wellbeing of their members not just now but in years to come. It is, however, essential that we continue to fund these clubs so that clubs like Croydon North and their communities can benefit from these modern facilities. The action I seek from the minister is to provide me with further insights into any

upcoming opportunities that sporting clubs in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region may be able to access to upgrade existing facilities.

COVID-19

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (21:57): (2716) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to immediately table the completed independent review of Victoria's pandemic management laws, as required under section 165CX of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. Victorians would well remember the extraordinary powers contained in the pandemic management legislation passed by this Parliament in 2021. Those laws provided extraordinary powers to government, including the power for the Premier to make a pandemic declaration and for the health minister to make pandemic orders affecting the lives, livelihood and freedoms of all Victorians.

When Labor introduced these extraordinary pandemic powers in 2021 it told Victorians there would be safeguards, transparency and accountability. In fact the then health minister specifically described the statutory review as a final safeguard and promised Parliament that its report would be published and tabled. That safeguard is now being tested. Section 165CX requires the minister to arrange that review and for the resulting report to be laid before both houses of Parliament, but curiously it is vague about a deadline. Rather than set a date, the report is to be published 'as soon as reasonably practicable after the review is completed'.

The minister appointed Jared Heath and Dr Paula O'Brien, yet almost five years after these laws were passed the report has still not been tabled. My office has asked the parliamentary library to locate it. There is no record of the report in the tabled documents database or the library catalogue. I am going to call into effect that curious section 'reasonably practicable' now, because I have been contacted by a Victorian who has also been pursuing its whereabouts. That person strongly believes the review has been completed and the report finalised with the office of the Minister for Health to facilitate its tabling before Parliament. They have now been stonewalled.

In June 2021 I brought my own pandemic bill to the Parliament. The irony is that my bill was about transparency and accountability. It was the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Greater Transparency and Accountability) Bill 2021, and it was about giving Victorians the right to see the advice and evidence used to justify some of the longest and harshest lockdown restrictions anywhere in the world.

These extraordinary pandemic powers remain on Victoria's statute books. Victorians therefore have every right to know what the independent review has concluded about their operation and whether changes have been recommended. With an election now less than 100 days away, there should be no question of this report remaining behind closed doors. The action I seek is for the minister to comply with the intent and requirements of the act and table the completed pandemic management review before this Parliament without further delay.

Corrections system

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (21:59): (2717) My adjournment this evening is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the government to develop and implement an urgent whole-of-government plan to end deaths in custody in Victoria. On Sunday 16 August a 37-year-old man died shortly after he was taken into custody. During their interactions with him, Victoria Police deployed nonlethal tactical options. At some point after this, the man became unresponsive and could not be revived. A man is dead, and his family and his loved ones deserve answers. It is important we do not prejudge what occurred. The circumstances of his death must be thoroughly and independently examined, including through the coronial process. I also want to acknowledge the recent and incredibly tragic passing of 18-year-old Tarsha Golightly at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre very soon after she had been transferred there from Victoria's youth justice system. I note that the coronial investigation into her death has also commenced. Two deaths in very different circumstances but both

within Victoria's criminal justice and custody system. Together these and all of those who have gone before should force us to ask a much broader question: what is this government actually doing to prevent and end people dying in the custody of this state?

A serious prevention response means reducing unnecessary incarceration and remand. It means making sure police cells are used only for short-term detention, not as substitute prisons. It means addressing dangerous conditions in police cells and in prisons. It means proper physical and mental health care from the moment someone enters custody, particularly with attention to people who are young, Aboriginal, unwell or otherwise vulnerable. It also means implementing coronial and Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations and transparently tracking whether those recommendations have actually been delivered. I note that we do not forget that Veronica Nelson's coronial inquest explicitly recommended an urgent review of Victoria's implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and it recommended urgent bail reform, which the government has now gone some way to undoing. Attorney-General, this crisis is ongoing. People continue to die in the custody of this state. I urge you to lead the work across government and urgently establish a comprehensive plan to stop deaths in custody in Victoria.

Hume Tech School

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (22:02): (2718) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. Our Labor government knows that investing in education is the absolute best way to set our community up for success. No matter their background or where they grow up, every child deserves a world-class local education and the chance to get ahead. That is why we have worked so hard to build over 100 brand new schools right across Victoria, making sure local families have modern classrooms close to home. It is also why we stepped in to protect and expand free TAFE, so people can train for the great, rewarding jobs of the future. That same commitment to our community is why the opening of the new Hume Tech School at Kangan Institute's Broadmeadows campus is such welcome news. This new facility gives more than 20,000 local students access to hands-on, high-tech STEM learning right in our own backyard. We know that so many of the jobs of tomorrow are going to be in science, technology, engineering and maths. Instead of just reading about things in a textbook, students will be able to get practical learning with robotics, renewable energy systems and advanced manufacturing. On top of that, the government is making sure that free transport is available so students can travel to and from the tech school without cost being a barrier for local families. This is all part of our \$116 million investment into STEM learning right across Victoria and will give our kids the best possible start. Families and students across the north are really excited about the new opportunities that places like these bring. The action that I seek on behalf of aspiring students of the Northern Metropolitan Region is for the minister to provide information on what free courses are available to local students at the new Hume Tech School.

Clarkefield development

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (22:04): (2719) My question is for the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is for the minister to return planning authority for planning scheme amendment C164, a large housing development in Clarkefield, to the Macedon Ranges shire. Rushed and uninformed decisions make bad decisions, and Labor's Minister for Planning is attempting to rush through a highly contentious planning decision that will dramatically change the hamlet of Clarkefield forever and have serious knock-on effects throughout the Macedon Ranges, all without proper public consultation. Clarkefield is a tiny hamlet, with only a few hundred residents living in farmsteads spread throughout the area. Unlike for the Macedon Ranges shire, the minister and her department have no expertise in understanding this area or the broader ramifications this development would have. A developer has applied for planning scheme changes and a planning permit that will take farmland next to Clarkefield train station and subdivide it into 2500 lots, with some lots as small as 84 square metres.

The terrific Liberal candidate for Macedon Kate Kendall has met with residents and affected stakeholders, who are alarmed by the proposal and say the development is totally inappropriate for the

Macedon Ranges. The shire is famous for its heritage villages and spacious country feel. It has a unique character and charm, which is often the reason people choose to live there. If this development goes ahead, it will squeeze 6000 new residents into a high-density suburb that is out of character for the area. This will produce a huge increase in traffic in the area, which local roads and intersections are not ready to handle, and the state government has failed to commit to upgrading surrounding arterial roads. It will also put massive pressure on train services that are already overcrowded. Locals tell me it is hard to get a seat on the train now, and I have heard stories of mothers with prams being left stranded at the station because there is no room.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council does not support the proposal in its current form and has identified numerous problems with the analysis and report submitted by the developer. Council says the proposal is premature because strategic environmental infrastructure, governance, drainage, housing and community safety issues remain unresolved. The Department of Transport and Planning wrote to council on 1 May this year, giving them just one month to make a submission on the proposal before it closed on 1 June. This was not nearly enough time for council or the wider community to read the documents and properly consider the complex proposal. This planning development should not be rushed, and Labor must stop fast-tracking projects for big developers against the objections of local communities.

Cannabis law reform

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:07): (2720) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the Attorney to make cannabis cautioning the law. Possession of cannabis for personal use is a low-level offence that should not automatically result in arrest. This is the principle that Victoria Police itself recognised when the Victoria Police manual was updated in September 2024. Victoria Police clearly think caution, and not arrest, is the appropriate course of action for minor possession of cannabis for personal use. Let us be frank: they have far more important things to do than arrest people for a joint. Arrest is serious, and arrest can have long-lasting consequences, affecting a person's employment, education, housing and future opportunities. It can also have broader impacts on families and communities, increasing the risk of ongoing disadvantage and of involvement with the justice system, where a health or diversion response would be much more appropriate.

We have had 25 organisations across the legal, drug and alcohol and health sectors write to the Attorney, calling for cannabis cautioning to be made the law. The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, UnitingCare and others are urging the government to legislate cannabis cautioning. These organisations work every day with people affected by drug policy, the criminal justice system and health inequities. They understand the real-world consequences of criminalising people for minor cannabis possession. A clear, consistent law means fairer outcomes for Victorians. It would reduce unnecessary arrests for personal possession of cannabis and give Victoria Police the certainty that they need to respond consistently on the front line.

It is time our laws focused on harm reduction, not unnecessary criminalisation. Every unnecessary cannabis possession charge places extra pressure on police, legal aid, the courts and the justice system. Instead of wasting time and resources on low-level offences, the Carroll government needs to be focusing on serious crime. By legislating cautioning we can free up valuable police resources to focus on serious crime and community safety while preventing people from carrying the lifelong consequences of a criminal record for conduct that is better addressed through a health and harm reduction approach. Therefore the action I seek is for the Attorney-General to legislate the cannabis cautioning scheme so that no Victorian is unnecessarily criminalised for possessing cannabis for personal use.

Electricity infrastructure

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (22:10): (2721) My adjournment matter is for Minister for Energy and Resources Jaclyn Symes. VNI West is critical to Victoria's future energy network. The action I seek is an update on how VNI West will deliver reliable, affordable energy while creating jobs and investment across western Victoria.

Rural and regional health services

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (22:10): (2722) My adjournment matter for the Minister for Health concerns the shocking state of rural and regional health care. A *Herald Sun* investigation published last weekend asked 142 doctors across regional Australia about the greatest problem facing their communities. Thirty-two were Victorians, including 10 in western Victoria. The message was simple and unequivocal: country patients are waiting too long, travelling too far and in some cases suffering permanent harm. Eleven of the Victorian doctors named attracting or retaining doctors as their greatest challenge. Another 10 nominated access to specialists or doctors generally. So two-thirds identified the same fundamental failure – not politicians, but clinicians working in the field, directly quoted and with their names and towns included.

The consequences are significant. In Portland Dr Bradley Borges reports that a child can wait almost 2½ years to have their tonsils removed, with no ENT specialist between Portland and Ballarat. In Casterton Dr Loretto Maxwell says the visiting radiology service simply stopped. In Birregurra Dr Jared Kilday has endured 18 months of failed recruitment and had to shrink the area from which his practice accepts patients. There is simply no excuse for this. Labor might try to blame Medicare, but public hospitals, specialist clinics, elective surgery, public imaging, ambulance and public psychiatry are state responsibilities. Worse, these services have been actively squeezed. In 2024 Labor tried to collapse 76 health services into 12 networks, while small rural services were directed to find savings of up to 10 per cent a year for three years. Labor retreated on forced amalgamations only after a community revolt, but that retreat did not restore a single service. The minister responded to these doctors with a statewide staffing headline and a political attack. A press release number does not deliver anything for my electorate – not an ENT specialist to Portland or a radiologist to Casterton.

The action I seek is for the minister to meet the 10 doctors from western Victoria and publish a response to the service failure each has identified, including firm actions and timelines to improve recruitment, restore lost services and reduce the waits and travel imposed on country patients. As I have said before, failing services create a vicious circle in regional communities. Without doctors, young families will not come. Without families, schools and businesses cannot find staff and the town slowly declines. Regional health care is therefore vital for not only individual patients but the survival of the whole community.

Road maintenance

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (22:13): (2723) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to reverse the extraordinary decision to respond to Victoria's crumbling roads by selling off more of the state's maintenance capacity. Victoria's roads are in a poor state, particularly in regional Victoria, and as a regional MP I spend a lot of time travelling on them. I know how difficult it can be driving on roads covered in potholes. I spent the last few days travelling across western Victoria. I have been to Colac, Warrnambool and Melton, and no matter whether I took the main highways or the back roads, every road was riddled with potholes. Potholes damage cars. They cause crashes, they make long regional journeys more stressful and tiring and they certainly do not fix themselves. Reports found a 28 per cent increase in potholes across Victoria in the last year, and in some areas such as Warrnambool reports were that they had increased by 149 per cent.

We have a pothole problem, and this government's response is to privatise capacity to fix them. SprayLine has been part of Victoria's public road maintenance system for decades. The government's

argument is that this work can be provided by the private sector, but the issue is not whether private contractors can do the work. The issue is, when you remove the public option, you become dependent on private contractors and the prices they charge, and you lose the skilled workforce as well as the equipment. That matters because Victoria has a huge road network and there will always be more maintenance work than there is money available to do it. We should know from decades of privatisation experiments gone wrong that it is expensive and hard to rebuild public capacity once you have sold it off. Further, privatising road maintenance does not deal with the broader system change that we need to prevent it in the first place. As I have previously said in this place, fixing regional roads is a lot like health care: for a long-term fix you have to try and prevent the issue in the first place. Firstly, we know more vehicles mean more wear and tear, heavier vehicles cause significantly more damage, and this government has spent decades thinking more road infrastructure is a fix while neglecting regional rail infrastructure. It is really quite simple: more roads plus more cars and freight mean more potholes; more passenger and freight rail mean less money spent on building roads and less potholes.

We also need to consider climate resilience. The Environment and Planning Committee's climate resilience inquiry recommended supporting betterment when infrastructure is rebuilt and funding local government to deliver climate-resilient designs. The lesson is practical: when a road repeatedly fails, rebuilding it to exactly the same standard can simply lock in the next repair bill. Betterment should be standard practice, but privatising road maintenance will take us in the wrong direction, because there is no incentive for a private company whose business is filling potholes to prevent them. Victorians are sick of this Labor government selling off its responsibilities and leaving them to pick up the bill for the consequences, and I would urge the minister to reverse this backward decision.

Melbourne tourism

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (22:16): (2724) My adjournment matter is directed towards the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment in the other place. We can all be very proud of the recent announcements that Melbourne is the number one ranked city in Australia for overnight and interstate visits. Tourism plays a vital role in our economy, creating jobs and economic growth. People come from all across the country, because Melbourne offers what other capital cities cannot offer. We are the sporting capital, we are the major events capital, we have the fastest growing night-time economy and we are the gateway to tourism throughout regional Victoria. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update as to what the government intends to do to ensure that Melbourne remains the most attractive destination in Australia for interstate tourism over the coming months and years.

Roxburgh Park train station

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (22:17): (2725) My adjournment is for the Minister for Police, and it concerns a shocking story we saw today of a 30 per cent increase in crime at stations where PSOs have been cut by this Labor government – at 119 different stations. I want to put to you a stat: 215 per cent. That is how much crime has increased at Roxburgh Park train station in my electorate – it is incredible – with 17 assaults and 38 offences. At Coolaroo, there was a 37 per cent increase in crime incidents at Coolaroo train station – another train station where PSOs have been cut. The government has moved Roxburgh Park train station up to a category 3 train station, which means there will be roaming PSOs at Roxburgh Park station. I have gone down there after 5 pm. I have asked multiple people who use Roxburgh Park train station daily if they have recently seen a PSO or PSOs at Roxburgh Park train station. No-one has seen them. So I would really put the question to the government as to whether PSOs are actually being deployed to Roxy train station, because my community deserve to know.

I have spoken to several constituents who since the so-called redeployment of these PSOs have not seen them and feel unsafe walking to their car or walking from Roxburgh Park train station to Roxy Village. Our number one priority as a government is to make the community feel safe, to make sure

people are safe, and that clearly has not happened with a 217 per cent increase in crime at Roxburgh Park train station. Thankfully, the good people of the electorate of Greenvale and Roxburgh Park do not have to wait long, because if they vote for Jim Overend, our candidate for Greenvale, they will be able to elect him. He has got a clear plan and a policy to put PSOs back on Roxburgh Park train station and back on Coolaroo train station so that we can keep our community safe. So the action I seek is for the minister to increase their presence at Roxburgh Park train station and review the category of Roxburgh Park train station for PSOs.

Data centres

David ETTERS (Western Metropolitan) (22:20): (2726) My adjournment is for the Premier. Six councils over the last four weeks in the western and northern suburbs have called for a moratorium on the approval of new data centres or the expansion of existing ones. There is a universal view from council and residents that neither the regulation nor the social licence exists for these environmental vampires to be unleashed. These concerns have been fuelled by the government's refusal to release any sort of documentation on their approval process. This is evidenced by their refusal to release the sustainable data centre action plan, which this chamber has instructed the government to release.

The objections of council and residents groups to these billion-dollar developments are understandable given the speed with which these centres are being pushed through planning application processes with little or no public consultation, sustainability planning or even a convincing economic case. Increasingly, the Department of Transport and Planning development facilitation program is being used to bypass local government scrutiny of these projects. In the case of Hobsons Bay City Council, officers have noted that DFP application processes were deficient in many areas, including limited supporting material provided at the pre-application stage, no sustainability management plan being submitted, amenity concerns that were not responded to and insufficient time in the 14-day notice period to properly assess the development. Created to drive industry and alleviate the housing crisis, the DFP is now little more than a tool to embolden developers and remove vital stakeholders from conversations on major developments they will be forced to live with for generations. Communities have valid questions, like how much water and electricity will these centres use, where will it come from, and who will pay for it? Residents do not want to be picking up the electricity tab for local data centres, as has happened in other places such as Ireland.

Premier, AI is an important question for our entire population, but unregulated data centres are abhorrent and utterly devoid of social licence. The government's decision to do these approvals in the shadows is in and of itself morally bankrupt and politically stupid. So the action I seek is that the Premier approve a moratorium on data centres until a comprehensive regulatory framework premised on extensive community, local government and stakeholder consultation has been developed and adopted.

North American wildfires

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (22:23): (2727) My adjournment matter tonight is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that I seek is an update on how our firefighters and emergency services personnel are supporting our international friends as they respond to devastating fires facing their communities. Our first responders know what it means to face a bushfire. They know the heat, the danger, the exhaustion and the uncertainty that comes with facing off against a fast-moving and often unpredictable fire. Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone regions in the world, but sadly, we are not alone in facing these serious risks. When those overseas need help, Victorians are always there to answer the call. Now, as fires continue to threaten communities across North America, almost 100 Victorians have travelled to their aid, principally in the United States and Canada, taking on critical roles including incident management, air operations, sector command, taskforce leadership and field safety. Victoria has got some of the most experienced and capable firefighters and emergency services personnel in the world, and they have taken their skills and knowledge, developed from fighting some of Victoria's most devastating fires, to keep people safe on

the other side of the globe. They do so supported by their families, their workplaces, their friends and the wider emergency services community, and their efforts now are strengthening our international partnerships, sharing expertise and standing alongside our friends when they need it. We have seen this solidarity reciprocated during our own bushfire emergencies when we make the call. I am sure that I speak for many here in asking the minister to provide an update on the efforts of these brave Victorians and to extend to them our support.

Road maintenance

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (22:25): (2728) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I have got an exciting update for the house. A few weeks ago I raised the matter of roads and particularly the Western Highway, and I noted that there were huge signs that were saying 'Storm damage'. The update I have got is that the signs have been taken down because there was no storm in the first place. But instead of actually fixing the roads, what has replaced these 'Storm damage' signs? Yellow caution signs, and there are more of them actually.

I was driving along the Western Highway over the weekend, and it was like playing *Mario Kart*. It is seriously that bad. I was going left and right and dodging potholes all the way across the highway, and I was very lucky that there was not too much traffic. But in times when there is huge traffic I know people are forced to hit potholes as opposed to hitting a car in another lane. That is how bad it is. We are not just talking a couple of centimetres; we are talking about huge, gaping potholes right on one of Victoria's highways. This is not a back road, this is a highway. And this is not just an isolated incident. It is not just on the Western Highway; it is on the Sunraysia Highway, it is on the Pyrenees Highway and it is on so many state-managed roads it is getting insane. No wonder people are inflicting damage on their vehicles. They have got no choice. They either drive into a pothole or drive off the road. We are not talking a couple of hundred bucks here and there; we are talking about thousands of dollars worth of damage, where tyres are getting blown up and rims are getting buckled. That is how bad it is. It is costing thousands and thousands of dollars. You worry about the safety of people on the roads, and you think of all the people, like schoolkids on buses, trucks, commuters, motorbikes, cyclists. Everyone who uses Victorian roads is putting their own life at risk every single day.

Ironically, it is scam week this week. Well, I think any road user would have to be looking at the road thinking, 'What a scam this is. Where is my taxpayer money going? It looks like it's going to buying coffee machines or pot plants. It's certainly not going into the roads.' The action I seek from the minister is to go and fix the roads – look at them and put some money into them – because clearly it is going anywhere else but our roads.

Voices for Special Needs

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (22:28): (2729) The adjournment matter I have is for the attention of the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to meet with representatives of Voices for Special Needs and affected Latrobe Valley families, with a view to establishing an independent review of historical child safety complaints and concerns involving Victorian specialist schools and how they were handled. In July, only a month ago, in this Parliament the Premier apologised to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in Victorian government schools. The Premier said:

We failed to protect you. We failed to listen when you tried to disclose or explain what was done to you.

He went on:

For too long, silence protected perpetrators and institutions instead of children.

Those words resonated deeply with a number of families in Latrobe Valley who have spent years seeking answers about safety concerns involving students with disability. Many of the children at the centre of those concerns were among the most vulnerable in our education system. Many were non-verbal. Many relied on parents and carers to advocate for their safety and wellbeing. Importantly, families are not asking the government to prejudice allegations. They are asking for the truth. They

want to know whether concerns raised over many years were properly investigated, whether complaints were handled appropriately and whether vulnerable children received the protection that they were entitled to. They want transparency. If mistakes were made, concerns were overlooked or systems failed these vulnerable children, those failures should be identified and addressed.

Voices for Special Needs have raised these concerns, and I in this place over many years have called for action, have called for referrals to the Commission for Children and Young People and have asked them to speak at education inquiries, and yet these good families still feel that they are overlooked, unheard and not taken seriously by this government for what they feel so aggrieved about. Premier, your apology recognises that people affected by abuse have the right to be heard and treated with dignity and respect. The principle should extend to those families with children with disability who cannot speak for themselves. Therefore I ask you to meet with Voices for Special Needs and the affected families in Latrobe Valley and seek to establish an independent review of these processes. These families seek truth, accountability and confidence that every child attending a Victorian specialist school is safe, respected and protected.

Maiden Gully Primary School

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (22:31): (2730) My adjournment is to the Minister for Children. It was great to visit Maiden Gully Primary School recently. Over 550 kids are currently enrolled at the school. Maiden Gully and Marong nearby are in a growth corridor on the edge of Bendigo, and with increasing population growth, enrolments are projected to climb. It was timely to look around the school during recess while students were outdoors playing; they filled the school grounds, and it was evident that every part of the land was being used. I was shocked to see the library off limits and undergoing repairs due to water damage to the building. A teacher's foot had gone through the floor, and now the site is sealed off due to black mould. Parents have raised concerns that the fast-track company engaged to do the repairs has in fact been the opposite, and I could see hundreds of books piled up, soon to be thrown out due to damage. The school grounds are still filled with portables.

A new building with classrooms, described as stage 1 at the time, was officially opened in November 2023. At the time the *Bendigo Times* newspaper reported that:

The project was part of a bigger goal to add six more classrooms to the back end of the new block.

The member for Bendigo West Maree Edwards said:

... now that the first part is complete, planning can start on the stage two.

That was nearly three years ago, and I would appreciate an update from the minister on the progress of the additional classrooms that were to be added.

The school has an endorsed master plan that the school council has advocated for for over 10 years. Parents have raised concerns that instead of progressing these plans to upgrade poor facilities in need of modernisation, the government is ignoring their concerns and ploughing ahead with plans to add a kindergarten on the school grounds, despite the existing land constraints and increasing enrolments. With space available at nearby kindergartens, parents have asked the department to explore alternative sites within the area that may better support the delivery of a kindergarten. Maiden Gully Primary School has five kinder programs already in its vicinity: Jenny's Early Learning Centre, Maiden Gully; Village early learning centre; Shine Bright, Maiden Gully; Shine Bright, Marong; and the Marrungi Wayaparra kinder in Marong. There are also over five kinders at Kangaroo Flat nearby and another four or more in Eaglehawk.

As the school library is in urgent need of repair, current portables are waiting to be replaced and space on the school grounds is already constrained, I ask that you listen to the concerns raised by the school council and work together to prioritise existing plans to upgrade the school facilities for the benefit of current and future students, families, staff and the wider community. There is currently a great deal of

development activity around the school – including the supermarket precinct, plans for a new intersection and roadworks – and the Maiden Gully Progress Association are working closely with the community on plans for the future, but I would appreciate your support to address these concerns.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:33): (2731) My adjournment matter is for the Premier. Most people understand that the SRL is a completely failed project. Steve Bracks says it is unaffordable and that the airport rail should have been done first. Steve Conroy, the Labor luminary, said that it is literally ‘a dog of a project’ that the former leadership committed to and that ‘It’s sabotaged the budget going forward’. Right now the project is swallowing 20 per cent of the entire Victorian infrastructure budget at the price of essential needs locally and across the state.

The only reason it has been tolerated locally in Glen Waverley is that the local Labor member John Mullahy promised that, when complete, there would be benefits of interconnectivity and a guarantee that lost parking would be replaced. Businesses have been hanging on, hoping and believing in that promise. But suddenly after eight years the Labor government say that the SRL costs too much and savings must be made – and no promise is safe. Any normal human being hearing the suggestion that there will be a review of costs would think, ‘Okay, right, we’ll find savings in materials. We’ll reduce construction costs by making it more efficient. We’ll reduce complexity.’ But they have not done any of that, because that would have actually involved something approaching honest intellectual effort. No, instead, this cack-handed, lame-duck, eight-weeks-from-caretaker government simply said, ‘You know what, instead of doing the hard work of reviewing the project delivery properly, we’ll just throw Glen Waverley under a bus. That’s easier,’ and that is what it has done.

The promised new car park should have already been built and operational. Instead today they will find out that it has actually been scrapped. Those promises were made by the SRL, the Labor government and the Labor member for Glen Waverley John Mullahy. They have broken their word to dozens of businesses, hundreds of employees and thousands of Glen Waverley locals. I have had calls from businesses today – many calls. The traders association is taking many, many calls. The Glen Waverley community, especially the business community, are not going to forget this. Glen Waverley has had to put up with year upon year of disruption, financial losses, damaged businesses, road closures, crime, potholes, shoddy services and compulsory acquisitions, including of an active church and an RSL. But now, frankly, your reputations are trashed. They are going to make sure you pay a price for doing this. The action I seek from the Premier is to confirm what consultation was done with Glen Waverley businesses before they cancelled the car park and the station connections – and to tell the truth.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (22:36): There were 17 matters this evening. I will make sure that they are referred on to the appropriate ministers for a response.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (22:36): Ms Crozier asked me to review an answer from Minister Stitt. I think it was close to the last question in question time. I did say at the time that I was concerned about the degree of detail being asked for, but having reviewed it, I think the minister would be happy to help, and I will reinstate that question for a written response. Given the lateness of the day, instead of what is prescribed in the standing orders, I will request that it be delivered in two days rather than one.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 10:37 pm.