



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**9 FEBRUARY 2022**

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**Wednesday, 9 February 2022**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (10.00): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.  
Yanggu ngalawiri, dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.  
Nginggada Dindi dhawura Ngunnaawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are gathering on Ngunnawal country.  
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male, and Ngunnawal country.

Members, I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

## **Petitions Ministerial responses**

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

### **Government—complaint resolution—petition 32-21**

By **Ms Cheyne**, Minister for Human Rights, dated 8 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Dr Paterson on 23 November 2021, concerning the enforcement of people’s rights under the ACT Human Rights Act.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2021, regarding petition 32-21 lodged by Dr Marisa Paterson MLA. The petition requests that the Assembly enable a complaint about any breach of the *Human Rights Act 2004* to be made to the ACT Human Rights Commission for confidential conciliation, and if conciliation is unsuccessful, enable a complaint about a breach of the Human Rights Act to be made to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) for resolution.

The ACT has a proud human rights record, being the first State or Territory in Australia to introduce a legislative charter of human rights and the first to include a stand-alone cause of action for a breach of human rights obligations by a public authority. Since the introduction of the Human Rights Act, the Government has continued to review and improve protections in the Act. This Government is committed to building and strengthening the culture of human rights across the ACT and welcomes the interest of the community in these issues.

The ACT Human Rights Commission can currently investigate and conciliate complaints about a wide range of matters, including discrimination, health

services, services for older people, abuse and neglect of vulnerable people, services for children and young people, services for people with disability, and the charter of rights for victims of crime. In considering complaints where the respondent is a government agency or other public authority, the Discrimination, Health Services and Disability and Community Services Commissioner can consider the human rights obligations of those organisations in seeking to resolve complaints and in making recommendations for service improvements.

The Government is currently undertaking work on a number of priority areas relating to human rights, which were commitments made in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Legislative Assembly. These priority areas include a commitment to review the *Discrimination Act*; and considering the introduction of a right to a healthy environment into the Human Rights Act. The Government is also committed to establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner to better protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The Government's view is that expanding access to remedies under the Human Rights Act merits consideration, and may contribute to the human rights culture in the Territory. The Government notes, however, that proposals put forward in the petition to expand complaints mechanisms under the *Human Rights Act* would have financial implications and require more detailed policy consideration.

The Government welcomes the referral of this petition to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety into this issue, and the potential consideration of these issues by the Committee.

### **Housing ACT—Gordon—petition 44-21**

By **Ms Vassarotti**, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services, dated 8 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lawder on 10 November 2021, concerning antisocial tenants in Gordon.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter dated 10 November 2021, regarding petition 44-21 lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA. The petition calls on the Government to:

Immediately remove the tenants from our community.

The concerns outlined in the petition are noted.

The ACT Government (Housing ACT) is the largest social landlord with a portfolio of approximately 11,500 properties. The vast majority of social housing tenants successfully sustain their tenancies. For those tenants who require additional support, Housing ACT works closely with a range of community agencies to provide these supports.

The Government does acknowledge that where there are ongoing breaches of a tenancy agreement that it can have significant impacts on the community. As a

landlord, Housing ACT is required to manage tenancies in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, which outlines the responsibilities of tenants and the processes that need to be followed for addressing tenancy issues.

Community members are welcome to use the range of tools available to highlight and seek resolution to issues. In the first instance, they are encouraged to contact Housing ACT. For members of the Assembly, it would be preferable to engage via the Minister's Office rather than publishing personal information.

### **Motion to take note of petitions**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

### **Housing ACT—Gordon—petition 44-21**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (10.02): I rise today to ask this place to consider the context in which petitions are brought forward during the remainder of this government. Paragraph 94 of the standing orders outlines the requirements for petitions. I would ask the Assembly to consider the requirements even further and whether a petition is the most appropriate mechanism to seek resolution in some matters.

The Community Services Directorate works tirelessly to support members of the community through the provision of public housing and specialist homelessness services working towards a home for all. The vast majority of social housing tenants successfully sustain their tenancies, and a well-defined process exists within the Community Services Directorate for the management of complaints from the community. When escalation does occur, the Community Services Directorate is required to follow a process outlined under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, just like any other landlord in the ACT, and this can take time.

I would also remind this place of the need to protect information, including the identification of land that is utilised for social housing. This ensures the integrity of the whole-of-government responses in achieving resolution for the community. The government does acknowledge that, where there are ongoing breaches of a tenancy agreement, this can have significant impacts on the community. The Community Services Directorate works closely with other government and non-government agencies in an attempt to provide a positive outcome for all involved. When members are attempting to assist constituents in resolving issues, I would really ask people to please contact our office to see how we can assist with that process.

This government is committed to a home for all within the Canberra community, and I would again ask that the Assembly consider whether a petition is the best way to resolve complex, sometimes very complex, matters.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **COVID-19 pandemic—emergency services support Ministerial statement**

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.04): Over the past two years we have seen some very challenging situations for communities worldwide in dealing with the COVID-19 health pandemic. The pandemic has impacted all aspects of life, including the health, education and livelihoods of our community.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend all staff and volunteers across the ACT government who continue to work to support our community through these uncertain and challenging times. Their resilience and determination have been a source of hope throughout the pandemic.

One of the areas of government that have been key to our response to COVID-19 in the ACT is the ACT Emergency Services Agency, for which I am proud to have ministerial responsibility. Our ESA staff and volunteers are a well-trained, highly competent and flexible workforce, prepared to adapt to any situation to ensure the safety of our community. Since the onset of the COVID-19 health pandemic, members from across the ESA have supported ACT Health and other areas of the ACT government with the provision of contact tracing, compliance checks, welfare support, at testing sites, the delivery of goods to vulnerable members of the community and other planning tasks that have supported the whole-of-government efforts to manage the public health impacts and consequences of the pandemic.

More recently, through the ACT Health Directorate, the ESA has been supporting the ACT government to prepare and deliver rapid antigen tests to schools across Canberra, in line with the back to school plan for the ACT. The tests, alongside other health measures, support students and staff to identify if they have COVID-19 as soon as possible so that the necessary precautions can be put in place to keep our school communities safe. Volunteers from the ACT State Emergency Service, the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT community fire units, ACT Fire & Rescue historical society and our newest members from the ESA, Canberra City Pipes and Drums, have joined ESA staff members to reconfigure bulk RATs into packages for delivery to our schools.

The ESA has set up a reconfiguration and distribution hub at the ESA training centre at Hume to support the operation. Expected to continue over the next few weeks, volunteers and staff have been distributing approximately 20,000 RAT packages per day. The ESA has the operational capacity and resources, including volunteers, staff, and spaces, to undertake a task of this size quickly and efficiently. Working in collaboration with ACT Health and ACT Education, the individual RAT packages were delivered by the ESA and ready for all Canberra schools to use in their first week back.

The ESA has now commenced deliveries of RAT packages in support of our Community Services Directorate to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our

community receive the support they need. The ESA Commissioner has given me her assurance that the ESA's team of teams will continue to provide necessary support to ACT Health and all other areas of ACT government, where required, to keep our community safe and enable the effective response we have seen to date for the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Canberra community can also be reassured that the Emergency Services Agency will not be interrupted, and we remain well prepared to respond to all emergencies. All of our ESA personnel, including our firefighters and paramedics, are continuing their business as usual to support the community, working 24/7 to respond to calls for assistance.

In closing, I would like to pass on my sincere gratitude to not only the volunteers and staff of the ESA and ACT Health but all directorates and agencies across the ACT government for their outstanding professionalism and dedication during this trying time for our community. I present the following paper:

ACT Emergency Service Agency support to assist the ACT Government COVID-19 response—Ministerial statement, 9 February 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (10.09): I rise to support Minister Gentleman and acknowledge the contribution of the ESA in the response to COVID-19. As mentioned yesterday, COVID-19 has had significant economic impacts on Canberrans, as well as health effects.

The Canberra Relief Network was established by the Community Services Directorate in response to the first COVID lockdown in 2020, as we saw that some people in our community were experiencing financial difficulties which led to a need for food relief. CRN provided hampers of non-perishable foods and other key goods such as nappies and hygiene products, working with key community partners including Canberra City Care, Canberra Region Community Services, Communities@Work, Community Services#1, Companion House, Gordon Community Centre, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, Holly Cross Tuckerbox, MARSS Australia, Mustard Seed Uniting Food Pantry, Red Cross, St James Uniting Church, St John's Care, St Paul's Ginninderra Anglican Church, the St Vincent De Paul Society, the Pantry at Watson, Tuggeranong Uniting Church, UnitingCare Kippax, the University of Canberra Food Pantry, Wesley Uniting Church and Woden Community Service.

I would like to thank the dedicated staff in the Community Services Directorate for their long hours and creative thinking in overcoming tricky logistics issues to make the CRN such a success; Volunteering ACT, who demonstrated great empathy and care in taking calls from Canberrans in need at the CRN's connect centre; ESA staff and SES volunteers who managed deliveries during the initial stage of the lockdown;

and Disaster Relief Australia, whose volunteers include many Defence Force veterans, who managed deliveries for a significant period during the 2021 lockdown. The success of CRN was also made possible through the generous support of Woolworths, as our grocery partner, to help us keep running costs low.

In November 2021 CRN was announced the winner for the ACT in the government award category at the Resilient Australia Awards, and the ACT government's Community Resilience and Crisis Response Team was highly commended. CRN was also a finalist at the National Resilient Australia Awards.

In addition to this support, ESA have been helping the ACT government with the packing and distribution of rapid antigen tests to in-home disability support and aged-care workers. These workers are not covered by commonwealth offers to supply tests and have had great difficulty finding a reliable supply of RATs in the private market. Our approach in not just covering the cost of tests but supplying the tests directly to service providers has been with the aim of care providers being able to focus on what they do best, rather than having to spend time and money finding scarce public health resources that keep their workers and clients safe.

The ACT government and ESA have already distributed more than 12,000 RATs to disability support and aged-care providers, including self-managed NDIS participants. Importantly, the cost of these RATs provided by the ACT government is not coming out of the NDIS plans of individual people with disability.

Testing for an infectious disease is a basic primary healthcare need, and reducing the risk of transmission to people with disability and older people at greatest risk of complications from COVID is a public health good. With ESA's help, we have been able to meet these needs faster and more effectively than if we had relied on each provider competing on the private market for these resources. I acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the ESA in meeting crucial community needs. As Minister for Disability and as minister responsible for seniors and for CRN, I say thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Senior Practitioner Act—update**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (10.13): Today I table the update on the implementation of the Senior Practitioner Act 2018. Last year I sought an administrative amendment to delay the review of the act until after its fifth year of operation. When this amendment was approved, I committed to providing the Legislative Assembly with an interim update in February 2022. The act commenced on 1 September 2018 and created the new role of Senior Practitioner, as well as providing a formal framework for the reduction and elimination of restrictive practices.

This legislative framework in the ACT is unique in that it provides oversight of restrictive practices not only for those in receipt of disability services, including



National Disability Insurance Scheme participants but for children and young people in schools, education and care and child protection. This legislation provides added safeguards for vulnerable people who may be subject to restrictive practices. The reports made to the Senior Practitioner inform practice discussions and research and allow the Senior Practitioner to tailor education, support and compliance activities to individual providers and the people they provide services to.

The interim update of the Office of the Senior Practitioner includes an update of the activities and data available to the OSP from commencement on 1 September 2018 until December 2021. The highlights of the achievements to date include 12 seminars, day-long professional development activities for providers, with each day a different topic, welcoming different researchers and practitioners from across the country; the development, with stakeholders, and publication of formal guidelines on positive behaviour support plans and positive behaviour support panels; providing the secretariat function for 88 panels to consider and authorise 220 positive behaviour support plans—of this total, 13 positive behaviour support plans were not approved; leading a project co-funded by the commonwealth to help address a shortage of appropriately skilled positive behaviour support specialists; the provision of 80 information sessions focused on increasing awareness of the act; the launch of the ACT restrictive interventions database system, ACTRIDS, in June 2021 and the onboarding of providers—to date, this is 158 service outlets; and the development of fact sheets and easy-read versions regarding restrictive practices and how to reduce their use. During the third quarter of 2021 the OSP commenced a monthly newsletter that is sent to all providers, with updates from the OSP, links to the latest research and a way to provide best practice advice and support to the sector.

To further inform the work of the OSP in implementing the act, the OSP engaged Adam Beaumont from *withpurpose.solutions* in September 2021 to undertake an independent, high-level review. He reported on the regulatory tools and powers available to the Senior Practitioner in the context of contemporary regulatory practice and the act and how key regulatory tools and powers are being embedded into operational regulatory practice.

Work still underway includes continued collaboration with the Education Directorate to jointly develop case studies that explain restrictive practices within the context of schools; completing the onboarding of all providers onto ACTRIDS; and implementing the recommendations from the independent review, including the development of guidelines on reporting and enforcement.

The report also highlights the work the Senior Practitioner has done to further awareness and understanding of restrictive practice through education and support. I welcome the finding that, despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Senior Practitioner has improved the understanding of the infringement of human rights that occurs when there is an over-reliance on using restrictive practices.

The work to reduce and eliminate the use of restrictive practices is still relatively new. There is considerably more work to be done in educating and supporting providers, families and carers and the community in how to consider alternatives to restrictive practices. The evolving work of the Senior Practitioner to implement the act is key to

achieving this goal. It will not always be possible to eliminate the need for restrictive practices, but their use should be as a result of a considered, planned approach, with the aim of being for the shortest time possible and the least restrictive alternative possible in the circumstance. This work is critical in upholding the human rights of those who are subject to restrictive practices. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

*Senior Practitioner Act 2018*—The interim update on the implementation, dated February 2022.

Senior Practitioner Act—Update on the implementation—Ministerial statement, 9 February 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Government—economic update and the year ahead Ministerial statement**

Debate resumed from 8 February 2022, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (10.18): I would like to add my support to the Chief Minister's motion outlining the big agenda our government has ahead of us in 2022 and to flag some of the important ways that we are building a stronger local economy through the portfolios that I have responsibility for.

Public sector investment has provided a lifeline for our local and national economies during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is exactly the role it should play. Strong government investment protects and creates jobs and helps smooth major shocks that would otherwise do lasting damage to our economy. As the Chief Minister has noted, we are not out of the woods yet with COVID-19, and that is why we need to continue to deliver our economic agenda of building a big pipeline of public infrastructure works that will see us invest even more in Canberra throughout this year.

Building light rail to Woden is one of the projects at the centre of our infrastructure agenda and will support over 6,000 jobs during its construction. Light rail is making Canberra a better connected, more sustainable and vibrant place to live. Stage 2 to Woden will provide more convenient and reliable transport options for people on the south side, help prevent future traffic gridlock and cut transport emissions for a cleaner environment. We have got the early works for this important project underway right now with essential utilities, like the relocation taking place while our roads have been unusually quiet due to COVID-19.

In the next few weeks we are looking forward to an outcome from the National Capital Authority on the works approval for the raising of London Circuit. This project will better connect the city with the lake, activating a pretty unloved part of the CBD in the southern end, and enable the delivery of light rail by creating an at-grade intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. As the light rail project continues to ramp up through this year, it will create many new jobs and provide a great boost for our local construction industry.

Down at the Woden end of the light rail project, there is a lot happening in that town centre. We are delivering a brand-new CIT campus, integrated with the new light rail ready public transport interchange—projects that will make a huge contribution to the ongoing renewal of Woden town centre.

In addition to creating more general construction jobs, we are making sure that this particularly contributes to apprentice and training employment in the territory. The construction of CIT Woden will have minimum requirements for the employment of women in construction roles, as well as targets for engaging and employing apprentices and trainees. Just as many of our major projects do, including the hospital which has up to a 30 per cent ratio of apprentices and trainees employed on that project, this will ensure that at the CIT we have a minimum number of apprentices and trainees that are undertaking work. That is really important because this is a project that is designed to support students in their training.

These are just a couple of the big headline projects that are underway as we ramp up our infrastructure agenda this year. But there are so many others: the John Gorton Drive extension and bridge over the Molonglo River, duplication of William Hovell Drive and the construction of a major new off-road shared path as part of that project; significant safety upgrades to the Monaro Highway; new active travel infrastructure in Kambah, Coombs, Chifley and O'Connor; local shop upgrades for Evatt, Macquarie and Lanyon, in addition to the works already underway at Kaleen, Duffy and Campbell; playground upgrades in Ngunnawal and Aranda are also on the agenda; and new and upgraded waste facilities to help Canberra continue our transition towards a zero emissions future.

We have a huge program of infrastructure projects, big and small, that will help to contribute to our economy by creating jobs. And that is going to provide an important boost for many of the firms directly in the construction industry but also in the wider economy, as people can move around more easily, spend more time at their refreshed local shops and grow their businesses in great places like the revitalised Woden town centre.

We understand that one of the things which underpin the growth of our economy and local businesses is a skilled and trained workforce. We know many businesses have been having a hard time finding the right people, particularly in the last few years, and we recognise the important role that government needs to play in boosting the availability of skills and training. That is why we are investing very strongly in our training system to support local industry and Canberra job seekers in 2022. This year we will invest a record \$126.3 million in vocational education and training through

CIT, our public TAFE, our User Choice Australian apprenticeships program, our skilled capital subsidy programs supporting trainees, and other initiatives that support vulnerable Canberrans to connect with training.

Together with the Australian government, we are also jointly investing in free training through the JobTrainer initiative over the next 18 months. The second round, which has already kicked off, will fund up to 2,500 additional, fee-free training places for priority cohorts and in areas of skills need. We have already seen strong interest and uptake in these places, with several hundred Canberrans already signed up to benefit just six weeks into this year. This investment through JobTrainer builds on the more than 16,000 new and continuing students we expect to support in 2022 through our broader training programs as well.

There is a lot of exciting stuff happening across Canberra as we work to deliver more and better infrastructure for our growing city, while skilling up local workers to take on the many new jobs this will create. I know that we are all optimistic that 2022 will not feature the same disruptions as the two years before it. But regardless of what the year ahead holds, Canberrans can count on our government's commitment to keeping our local economy strong and growing through public investment that builds for our future and makes sure that we have the skills that we need to support that growth.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (10.25): I would also like to speak to the Chief Minister's economic statement, with specific reference to some of the ways in which my own portfolio areas are supporting the ACT economy in the year ahead. Across all my portfolios the ACT government is investing heavily to support the ACT economy through some of the most challenging years for the Canberra community. I want to take this opportunity to talk about some of these key investments that I am responsible for.

The ACT government's significant budget investment in school infrastructure will ensure that we can continue to build new schools where they are needed and that our existing schools have the capacity and facilities to support teaching and learning for all students. We are committing new funding to capital works over the next four years which will help build the new primary school at Strathnairn, in west Belconnen, complete the new Taylor High School and upgrade existing schools as the demand for public education continues to climb.

Education not only underpins our economy; it is the foundation stone of our culture and our society. What happens in schools happens in our community. Equity in schools will flow beyond school gates into our lives. The ACT government has committed more than \$100 million over the next four years to roll out a series of initiatives to ensure equitable access to a great public education, regardless of a student's background or circumstance.

Equity initiatives include more than \$46 million over the next four years to provide funding for increased student demand and need; more than \$21 million over the next

four years to ensure all years 7 to 12 students have access to a Chromebook; \$12.5 million over four years to continue the ACT's nation-leading, 10-year plan for early childhood education, Set Up for Success; a new \$11.5 million Future of Education Equity Fund to replace the high school bursary scheme, reaching an estimated five times more students; 25 extra youth and social workers, at a cost of \$7.4 million over the next four years, to provide early intervention and support for students and their families; \$1.5 million for a two-year trial to provide 1,500 vulnerable students with access to free breakfast and lunch three days a week throughout the year; \$450,000 over the next two years to work with young people with disabilities, their families and the broader community to review how public schools deliver inclusive education; and \$445,000 to provide free and confidential legal services to public college students.

These initiatives will help make sure that Canberra's children and young people, regardless of background or circumstance, are better able to engage in school life. To ensure that every Canberra child has access to a great local school, the ACT government has committed significant capital expenditure for new and expanded schools. Key infrastructure projects include \$118 million to expand the Margaret Hendry School, which will provide an additional 600 places for preschool to year 6 students and the construction of a new high school at Taylor, which will provide 800 places for students in years 7 to 10; \$19.8 million to provide new modular learning centres to increase capacity at ACT public schools; \$9 million to plan for the future school infrastructure projects in Gungahlin, Woden, Belconnen, Molonglo, the inner north and the inner south; \$2.5 million to plan and design new or expanded schools in Strathnairn, Narrabundah and Garran.

When talking about supporting the ACT economy, it is important that we talk specifically as well about the contribution of Canberra's women in the ACT's workforce. This government has committed to women's economic participation and supporting women to achieve secure paid employment. The ACT government continues to run the women's return to work grant program, administered by the Office for Women, providing one-off \$1,000 grants for women who have been out of work for more than six months. Each year, with these grants this government supports between 150 and 170 women facing additional barriers to returning to the workforce. This support has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ACT government also provides \$80,000 annually to support the women's participation grants. In 2020-21 this grant program funded projects focused on women's participation in the workforce.

In housing, as I outlined yesterday, the ACT government is also overseeing the biggest investment in public housing growth, renewal and maintenance since self-government. In the 2021-22 budget the ACT government also allocated \$80 million over three years specifically for public housing repairs and maintenance. This funding supports the delivery of a range of maintenance services, including domestic and family violence-related repairs and security upgrades such as the installation of security doors and window locks; and disability modifications, including the installation of grab rails or ramps.

This funding supports the employment of many Canberrans and engages trades contractors to support Canberra's economic recovery through the continued support of the trades sector and its suppliers. The maintenance program will be managed in parallel with the growth and renewal program to ensure high-quality public housing, while growing available public housing stock.

The Growing and Renewing Public Housing program supports the work of the ACT housing strategy, further supporting Canberra's economic recovery through continued support of the construction industry and its suppliers. To continue the progress of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program, the 2021-22 budget has allocated approximately \$19 million, which will add to the overall revenue capacity to undertake the large 2021-22 program.

In 2021-22 the program will invest a total of \$171 million in new dwellings, including expenditure on assisting 156 public housing households to relocate to allow for sale or redevelopment of properties; building a strong pipeline of work in progress, with over 800 dwellings in the design, planning and construction phases of the program; demolishing 91 properties so that new homes can be built on their sites; purchasing 22 land sites from the Suburban Land Agency to build new homes on; constructing 116 new dwellings; and purchasing off the plan at least an additional 69 dwellings.

In sport and recreation, the ACT government is also progressing a number of key investments. In our sporting infrastructure we are supporting local clubs and the community, with the ACT boasting the highest sporting participation rate in the country. The 2021-22 budget provided funding for the construction of the Throsby Home of Football. Pending DA approval, construction works for the Throsby Home of Football project are anticipated to commence in 2022. Work is continuing on the Phillip district enclosed oval. Consultation with key sport stakeholder groups is currently ongoing, with Territory Plan amendments due to be released soon.

Grevillea Park dragon boating, the new home for dragon boating in the ACT, is progressing, with design plans near competition and works approval applications due to be completed in the first half of this year. The estate development plan for the Gungahlin tennis facility is currently being progressed, in consultation with Tennis ACT, and is ongoing.

As you can see, there are currently a lot of things happening to support the ACT economy across my portfolio areas. More importantly, the government's investments will also work to support the future of the Canberra community and its wellbeing through the implementation of some key measures: more support for our students and more spots for kids to attend public schools; more support for women to return to work, contributing to and benefitting the Canberra economy; more homes for Canberrans who need them most; and more facilities for Canberrans to participate in sport and recreation across the ACT.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (10.34): I would like to thank the Chief Minister for his

comprehensive economic update. It was also really good to hear Minister Steel talking about active travel infrastructure which will support our ongoing age-friendly city plan and community recovery.

As the Chief Minister has outlined, economic recovery is critical for the ACT and the funding of services that we all rely upon. As Minister for Mental Health, I understand the protective benefit that financial security has for people's mental wellbeing. Not worrying about the rent, buying the new school uniforms or being able to put some money to one side helps protect our mental health.

In addition to economic recovery, we need to think about social recovery. The Chief Minister has outlined some of the economic challenges and opportunities that we face, but it is worth remembering that the pandemic has not just left economic damage; it has dramatically changed all of our lives. We have all missed things: long-planned holidays, family births, family funerals, social lives. Of course we need to make an economic recovery, but we also need social recovery. Social recovery is crucial to our communities and our lives as Canberrans.

Social recovery does not mean going back to how things were before the pandemic as though it never happened. So-called normal life prior to the pandemic was not as inclusive or as equitable as some in our community needed. In rebuilding our social connections and strengthening community resilience, we have the opportunity to create the Canberra we want to see and to build a better normal.

I have said in this place before that we need to progress to a place where people can do the things that matter to them and are able to pursue their interests and ambitions, where all people feel connected and valued in their local community and can contribute in a way that matters to them. This is the social fabric of our community.

As we repair that social fabric in the wake of COVID, we need to look at how we make social recovery something that we think about before the next crisis is at our door—because we know that, with our changing climate, there will be hard times in our future, including bushfires, smoke, heatwaves, drought, storms and pandemics. To be ready for a future with a greater degree of uncertainty and risk, we must be a government that listens to feedback and is a genuine partner in community solutions.

Government is not always the answer to every problem, as shown by the many great things that our community sector and the Canberra business community have done over the past two years to support those who needed it most. However, government should always be there as a community leader, providing a reliable shoulder to lean on and facilitate connections. Government may not be the expert in every area of service delivery, but we do not just check out and leave it to the private market to ensure that we have essential services for the public good.

The ACT government is supplying rapid antigen tests to in-home disability support and aged-care workers and to NGOs who deliver essential services such as domestic and family violence crisis and homelessness services. We are not just offering to reimburse privately sourced tests that are almost impossible to find or looking to take it out of people's NDIS plans, as the commonwealth government has said it will do.

The ACT government worked with community sector and business partners to deliver food to people's homes when they were in financial difficulty during lockdown. We delivered new mental health services such as Safe Haven and an eating disorders clinician within CHS to meet increased needs for mental health support. We provided additional resources to Canberra's community sector so that they could provide updated COVID information to people who may not read news websites or social media and to deliver a safe place to stay and essential goods to people in need.

As the responsible minister, with the Community Services Directorate as the lead agency, I commit to leading a process where we develop a shared understanding of what good social recovery looks like and developing consensus on what is required when and where. I mentioned two of our recent mental health initiatives: Safe Haven and the eating disorders clinician. While we increased our investment in the mental health and wellbeing of Canberrans by more than nine per cent in the most recent budget, we have plans to deliver much more throughout 2022.

We also know that maintaining good mental wellbeing requires having appropriate, accessible, affordable long-term housing. For people with ongoing mental health needs, finding a home can be a major challenge. This is why the ACT government is investigating models of care for supported accommodation for people with mental health conditions, including our ongoing discussions with MyHome in Curtin and ongoing negotiation with the commonwealth for people who need housing covered in their NDIS plan.

Building on the recent passage of legislation in the Carers (Recognition) Act, we will deliver the final report on the ACT carers strategy first action plan and work with the community to develop the second action plan. One of the things I am most looking forward to over the next six months is the co-design of ACT's disability strategy, led by people with disability, including members of the ACT Disability Reference Group.

While people with disability and their carers continue to experience greater levels of social isolation and stress as a result of the ongoing pandemic, working on the ACT's disability strategy builds hope and resilience and puts radical love into action. We will take a strengths-based approach to making Canberra even more accessible, inclusive and proud of our diversity.

I also look forward to working with Minister Rattenbury and Minister Stephen-Smith on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The success of this important change, which has the transformational capacity to end intergenerational cycles of trauma and lives spent in the justice system, relies on putting in place the right services for children and their families so that harmful behaviours do not occur. For example, this means continuing work on supports for complex cases that involve mental health, alcohol and other drugs, trauma, and disability in young people.

I also look forward to seeing the outcomes of the pilot of the functional family therapy youth justice program, providing support to young people and their families to improve relationships and change harmful behaviours. This work will help more young people reach their potential, be healthier, have better family and social



relationships and make our community safer for everyone. This is the kind of government we are, because this is the kind of Canberra we are. We take care of each other, and together we are stronger, safer and ready to respond to our ever-changing world.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.40): I rise to speak in support of the Chief Minister’s outline of the ACT government’s priorities for the year ahead. Entering our third year of this global health pandemic, it is clearer than ever that COVID-19 will continue to present new challenges for community and business. What we have learned is that Canberra continues to demonstrate itself as one of the most educated, resilient and community-minded cities. With this as our foundation, the ACT government is committed to delivering on our economic recovery plan.

Cultural and creative activity is increasingly recognised as an important component of economic growth, with national activity growing to over \$100 billion in 2018-19, an increase of over 27 per cent over the previous 10 years. As is well recognised, we are home to a strong arts and creative industries sector, with a wide spectrum of activity encompassing visual arts and craft, design, fashion, music, literature, theatre, film, games and more.

Canberra has the highest cultural participation rate of any jurisdiction in Australia, with Canberrans spending approximately \$71 per week on arts and culture, higher per capita than any other capital city. We know that most ACT residents feel the arts have a big or very big impact on their sense of wellbeing and happiness. And this is even more important now as we move through the pandemic.

Creative and cultural businesses, which constitute almost 11 per cent of all ACT businesses, are growing at the strongest rate in the nation, similar to our very strong growth rate of new businesses. Canberra has the highest creative intensity in Australia, meaning the proportion of people working in creative occupations across all of Canberra’s industries.

An immediate priority, of course, is the government supporting the recovery and resilience of the arts and creative sectors. We are doing this through our targeted and ongoing arts funding programs. Recently I was pleased to announce a further \$500,000 to Amp It Up! to support our live music venues.

Each year over \$10 million is provided to support Canberra’s leading arts organisations to provide programs, services and infrastructure to support and develop the arts in the ACT, as well as activities that strongly engage with the ACT community. These organisations provide employment and career pathways for artists and arts workers and support a diversity of activity and access opportunities for the ACT community.

We have several new projects underway to support the infrastructure so that these fantastic institutions that we have are fit for purpose. Members may be aware that

some of these include the \$2 million having been allocated in the most recent budget for the upgrades to the Tuggeranong Arts Centre theatre space. This new project will commence this year and will provide work for local project managers, contractors and suppliers.

In October I also released my statement of ambition for the arts, aiming to make Canberra Australia's arts capital, and it will be the framework to guide the development of an arts policy and an arts organisational funding model. As a first step to realising this ambition, we announced more than \$13 million in additional funding in last year's budget to provide support to local artists, arts organisations and cultural facilities, some of which I just mentioned.

We also recognise that creative and cultural sectors go beyond simply music, dance, theatre and visual art, and to better understand the wider creative industries and their contribution to social and economic wellbeing we have commissioned a research project jointly funded with the University of Canberra. It is data based and empirically led and it will identify the creative industry growth areas for us. But of course we have already seen that growth in the ACT.

We have demonstrated potential in television series and feature film productions, with successes like *Secret City*, *Total Control*, *Blacklight*. Screen Canberra is the primary channel the government uses to develop and grow the screen industry in the ACT and it does have a track record of building local screen industry capability. We have committed continued operational funding for Screen Canberra so that it can deliver on a range of priority initiatives. That includes the Screen Investment Fund and the Screen Attraction Fund. The Screen Investment Fund is expected to generate up to \$30 million in local screen production. And that means jobs. The Screen Attraction Fund is aimed at attracting large national and international productions that can demonstrate they will be spending over \$2 million in the ACT.

As members are aware, in January 2021 Hollywood came to Canberra, with the production of Liam Neeson's *Blacklight* injecting approximately \$2 million into the ACT economy and providing employment for roughly 100 Canberrans. It is set for its cinematic release in the coming weeks, and Canberra will be presented on the world stage as a great option for big budget productions.

We have also invested in future production infrastructure by contributing more than \$800,000 to the Academy of Interactive Entertainment and their new state-of-the-art facility for film and virtual production, meaning that Canberra is a great place to develop capability and production.

As restrictions continue to ease, our beloved events calendar for this year is filled with a range of COVID-safe activities. Our budget provided over \$10 million for expenditure in the delivery and support of major and community events. To support the events sector, last year we undertook a review of the Events ACT application and funding processes to make it easier for applicants to apply. This resulted in the streamlining of the application and funding categories. We also continue to work with successful applicants who have secured funding to ensure that we are flexible to the COVID situation and its changing requirements. Members may be aware that we

worked very closely in Tuggeranong recently regarding that as well. Ultimately, we want to support the safe delivery of as many events as possible.

We continue to deliver an annual program of events featuring major events that focus on attracting interstate tourism and its subsequent economic uplift, while community events are designed to bring Canberrans together in celebration. Community events delivered by the ACT throughout the summer have included a focus on providing increased economic opportunities for local businesses and for artists.

An expanded artistic program for New Year's Eve provided jobs for 42 local artists, as well as opportunities for local hospitality businesses to leverage off the central fireworks displays. With support from the commonwealth economic stimulus funding, Australia Day in the Capital's extended program included the engagement of a local event management company and a local marketing agency to support the delivery of the two-day event.

Planning for Canberra Day includes opportunities for our multicultural community groups impacted by the cancellation of the National Multicultural Festival. We have received, pleasingly, many applications from community vendors, community groups, multicultural businesses, diplomatic missions and, importantly, performer applications. All infrastructure and participation costs of the multicultural community have been waived for the event to ensure maximum revenue-generation opportunities for those communities. I hope to see all members of this place supporting our Canberra Day celebrations and, indeed, all community events this year.

Finally, I just want to quickly update the Assembly on some of the work being undertaken by the Better Regulation Taskforce. Last year it commenced its 2½-year program of work to understand how our regulatory landscape can be changed to make it easier to start, run and grow a business in the ACT. It was announced as part of our response to the pandemic, and its aim is to help drive Canberra's recovery from COVID-19 and support long-term economic growth by putting in place best practice regulatory settings. It is an acknowledgement by this government that recovery is being led, and will continue to be led, by business and in partnership with us. An agenda to put in place better regulation is challenging but it is essential. The task force's remit is not limited to exploring the regulatory instruments themselves but also many elements of the regulatory process, from administrative procedures to guidelines, website materials to regulator posture.

There has been plenty of consultation undertaken over the past year, and we are so pleased that businesses have embraced this process with us and been candid in their experiences so that we can improve it for everybody. We have commissioned a legislative review, and that is going to ensure that further in-depth work can be targeted to the priority areas.

We have also been working closely with the commonwealth government on a range of reforms under its deregulation agenda, including modernising business communications and overlapping regulation. Many of the themes are consistent with ours.

The ACT is in a strong position to improve its economic outlook, and I look forward to supporting the ACT government's priorities for the year ahead through my various portfolios.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.51): It has been a hard few years. We have had a series of major shocks, climate disasters, a COVID pandemic and economic impacts, including rising house and rent prices. These conditions do not affect everyone equally. What we are seeing is a growing gap between rich and poor, not just in Canberra but nationally and globally. This has worried the Greens for a long time.

The ACT government has done a really good nation-leading job with its climate policy and its public health approach to COVID. But there is an opportunity here for the government in these challenges: we can change our economic settings and we can do things differently. We can rethink our strategy for all of our budgeting decisions and we can have a focus of looking after everyone, addressing inequality and taking care of our environment.

I want to start by talking about the arts sector. I have spent a lot of my life running a small business. This pandemic has been a particularly difficult time for small business. Some sectors have been affected much more than others. Even before COVID, the increasing casualisation and the trend to the gig economy has affected many workers, who typically have less negotiating power in the workplace. It has had a particularly big impact in the arts. Painters, writers, sculptors, singers, musicians and actors—many of them relied on marginal incomes and a mix of incomes and gig work before COVID, and COVID has made it worse.

Much of the commonwealth funding was based on the fact that if someone did not earn much money it did not matter if they lost it. Some of the ACT government support fell foul of that too. My experience is that the less money you earn, the more important it is that you preserve that. Many in this sector do not register for GST, they do not stick to one primary occupation and they do not have salaried positions or an easy way to prove their lost income. They scrape together income from multiple sources, but that does not mean they are not in business. They pay tax, they register ABNs and they are members of their professional associations. This is how the business of arts is done.

Those in performing arts in particular have been hard hit by losing audiences and tours due to COVID and the soft lockdown, at the same time as many lost their secondary income in hospitality. Amp It Up! is a fantastic funding program and I congratulate arts minister Cheyne on it. I would like to see more long-term certainty in our funding for the arts. We need jobs, not just gigs. I would like all of our government business support to consider how it can assist the arts sector. We also need to finalise some of those longstanding problems so that when we are ready to rebound we can do that quickly. It is time to get the entertainment precincts set up properly to give our venues and artists certainty and bring life to our city.

It is also time we put a genuine gender lens on the budget that filters every decision through the consideration of its impact on women. Women are over-represented in

many of our underpaid groups, including the arts, education, retail, hospitality, early childhood education, health and aged care. They work fewer hours, in less secure jobs, and in sectors dominated by casualisation. They have also suffered a second blow from COVID, with higher rates of domestic and family violence, and a third blow, with higher caring duties during lockdowns.

Our budget is great for the construction industry, but not many women work in that industry. We do not just need to build physical infrastructure for our recovery. Our people are our assets. There are many more jobs to be created per dollar spent in arts, health, public service and education than there are in construction. I would like to see more money put into new, ongoing FTEs and programs in these sectors.

We have a budget with a women's statement at the end that tells us how it helps women. We need a budget that actually has every decision filtered through a gender lens for all our policies and programs. Our directorates need training, support and reporting to make sure they do this well. The Chief Minister tells us that this year's budget will have a gender lens built in as part of the wellbeing framework. I really look forward to seeing the implementation of that and seeing how it is working.

We also need to support new business models that look after people and tackle the big problems we are dealing with. It is great that we have rising wages and more jobs, but a lot of people miss out on those. There is a mismatch between jobs and those who need a job. I have conversations all the time in Belconnen with those who want skills or work but cannot find them. Often they are at either end of their career; they are older or they are younger. We need to do more to ensure training and support for people in Canberra who are out of work.

Despite the ACT's gross state product per capita being over \$100,000, a single Canberra age pensioner earns just over \$25,000 per annum. A single person on JobSeeker earns a little more than \$16,000. A full-time minimum wage earner is on just over \$40,000. I know these are commonwealth responsibilities and we have limited control over them, but they are the reality that many Canberrans live with. If we cannot directly raise those incomes, we need to make sure our policies and programs support people who are living on them. We should consider how we can lower the cost of living for those in our city earning the least, possibly by expanding schemes like rates assistance and concessions on bills. We should look at how we can shift more of our tax burden to those who can afford to pay it, like big companies and the wealthiest in society.

I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that has just put \$100 million into public and social housing, but I still see missed opportunities in some of our programs. Some business models are better at looking after people than others. I went to a fascinating forum this week on co-ops. Co-operative structures return all their profits to members. We have good support for co-ops in our parliamentary and governing agreement, but we have not yet delivered on that support. These business models are delivering amazing results right here in Canberra and they are looking at major social and environmental problems.

Pre Power, which is in the renewable energy space; the Food Co-op, which is a member-owned supermarket; the housing co-op; and the artist co-op, Trove, are all dealing with major problems. We cannot solve the problems we have by using the same thinking that created those problems, so it is a really good idea to support these new ways of thinking.

I also want to pause and have a chat about the circular economy and our just transition during climate change. Our economy, at the moment, is based on confidence and spending, and spending is up. That is great for the bottom line, but it actually does not help our environment if it represents junk spending. It does not help if it is creating products we do not need and generating waste and emissions that our natural systems cannot cope with. It does not help if it is going to big national and international corporations and sending profits out of our community.

Our economy is based on assumptions that we know are false. We have declared a climate emergency. We know that our resources are running out. We cannot endlessly consume as if the act of consumption were somehow worthy. All consumption is not equal. Some of it provides what we need in a truly sustainable way. Some of it meets no real needs and destroys the planet.

We talk about climate change and a circular economy, but we need to actually build a circular economy. We need jobs in renewables, recycling, health, education and higher education and the arts—those fields that meet our needs and create a lot of green jobs but do not strip the planet of resources or add more pollution.

I am really proud of the fact that our climate policy is built on making a just transition to a safer climate. Those who suffer first, and suffer the most, will be those who are most vulnerable in our society. We need to make sure we are looking after everyone, not just those who live in comfortable houses. We are doing a really good job on that in some areas—our 100 per cent renewable electricity is a fantastic achievement—but we are missing opportunities in others.

As well as looking after Canberrans today, we have a duty to look after future generations and the environment. We must put a climate filter on everything we build and everything we do. We need to ask: will this make climate change better or worse? Will it help us adapt to what is already locked in? Will it help everyone in our society reduce emissions and adapt to increasing temperatures and climate disaster or will it leave some people behind? Does it use up resources and create pollution, or is it part of a circular economy?

I really hope we start running our budget as if lives depend on it, because they do. We need to filter all of our decisions to make sure we do not miss opportunities. We need to consider our impacts on the climate, inequality, gender and the environment alongside economic settings. Our wellbeing framework is good, but it needs work to make sure it is critical to our budget decision-making and we need to ensure that we are genuinely implementing it.

For each item in our upcoming budget and for all of the decisions that shape our fiscal settings, I would like to pose some basic questions. How will this money help those

sectors who need it most? Will it create jobs in areas that tackle our big problems, like the environment, health and education? Will it help women and sectors dominated by women? How will it reduce emissions and help us adapt to the climate change disasters that we are regularly experiencing? I can break all of this down to one question: what do our children think of the choices we are making? I really look forward to ongoing discussions about the next budget with the community and with government.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.00): The Chief Minister yesterday outlined the priorities ahead for the government—managing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to deliver, along with helping our economy and Canberrans to recover. The last few years have been the most challenging time for our city. It has been difficult for everyone, but it has shown the nation that our city is a community united in supporting each other.

I thank all Canberrans for their efforts in working with our public servants to keep our city safe and continuing to look after each other. We could not have navigated the past few years without our public service. They are the best in the country and our success in tackling the bushfires and COVID-19 is a testament to them. I extend my thanks to all our officials, from those working in directorates to those on the front lines. Each of you has been integral to our success and is crucial for our recovery.

I am privileged to be able to work with many of our front line staff, be it our police, paramedics, firefighters, park rangers, correction officers, WorkSafe officers, planners and ecologists, and volunteers as well. I acknowledge staff across my portfolios, staff in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate; the Justice and Community Safety Directorate; the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate; the Emergency Services Agency; ACT Corrective Services; WorkSafe ACT; and ACT Policing.

Staff across these agencies are also crucial for our economic recovery. If there is a lesson the pandemic has taught us, it is that we need safe and secure jobs. To achieve this, we need to continue to sustainably grow our city while increasing efforts to protect workers. Improving our planning system is a critical reform I intend to deliver this year.

Over the past few years, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate has supported the government's pandemic response and has also worked with me to progress the ACT planning system review and reform project. Over the past two years, we have worked to understand what changes could create a better planning system for Canberra. This has involved benchmarking our planning system against other systems around the world, consulting with the community, and technical work to explore options for an improved system for the ACT.

Canberra is growing each year, and the ACT government is carefully planning for this growth and the economic opportunities which come with it. A modern planning

system is important to deliver on our vision of a livable and sustainable city. We want a system that is clear, easy to interact with and understand and which encourages participation in planning.

The reformed planning system will be focused on livability, prosperity and the wellbeing of the residents of the ACT. We will be putting people at the heart of the planning system. This means recognising and protecting those aspects of the city that make it an attractive place to live, managing sustainable growth and development without compromising the ACT's valued character. It also means a planning system which continues to facilitate a strong economy in the territory, attracting and creating jobs and the right kind of investment.

The reform of the planning system will encourage investment in the territory by setting clear strategic planning direction that identifies and supports opportunities for investment, reducing the complexity of legislative processes and providing flexible assessment pathways and design guidance for planning outcomes.

Land use planning can do much to continue the growth and diversification of the ACT economy. The ACT planning strategy establishes strategies and actions to plan for the continued growth and diversification of the ACT population and economy. The strength of the ACT economy rests upon its workforce and the high-value services they provide. Actions in the 2018 planning strategy are aimed at improving productivity, livability and sustainability that will help to attract and retain the ACT's most important resource, its people.

While Canberra already has a strong base in the administrative and professional service sectors, we also need to continue to enhance our competitiveness in developing our knowledge and innovation industries. This includes building on sectors where we have competitive advantage—tertiary education, research and technology, health care and professional services—while also growing and attracting new and innovative sectors, such as renewable energy and space.

Through the reformed planning system, with a new planning act, a new Territory Plan and district level planning, we can position ourselves to take up opportunities to grow and diversify our economy. The reformed system will encourage investment by being clear on the types of outcomes we want to achieve across the city. Planning provisions in the new system will enable this investment, rather than impose barriers. A more flexible, people-focused and sustainable system will mean investors and developers can be innovative and creative in their approach to development, leading to better outcomes for our people.

This is an exciting time for planning in the ACT as the directorate continues this important work to build a planning system that responds to the needs of Canberrans and positions us as an innovative and diverse city. The planning reform is one part of the puzzle. A city that attracts jobs and provides the lifestyle we cherish is important, but we also need to ensure that those jobs are safe and secure.

The ACT government is committed to providing secure and, where possible, ongoing employment. We recognise the adverse social and financial effects that insecure work



has on working people and their families. At the start of this term, we committed to maintaining the size of the public service, keeping essential services in government hands and ensuring that public money is used to promote safe and fair jobs.

Our commitment to promoting secure jobs extends across the community. We introduced and are currently strengthening the Secure Local Jobs Code. It is a matter of principle that any business seeking public contracts should meet the highest ethical and employment standards. The Secure Local Jobs Code ensures that the purchasing power of government promotes fair, safe and secure employment in the private sector.

In the public sector, our commitment to secure employment and high-quality services for Canberrans is equally strong. The government is working to meet this commitment by building on our existing commitments to secure employment that are enshrined in our enterprise agreements. These new developments are captured in two distinct pieces of work that, together, make the secure employment package.

The first piece of work is the continuation of the secure workforce conversion process. This is a joint union and government process to examine the use of insecure work in the ACT public service, with an updated process to incorporate the new requirements of the commonwealth Fair Work Act, where casual employees can request conversion to permanent employment in certain circumstances.

The second piece of work is currently being designed—the implementation of an insourcing framework which will evaluate the insourcing and outsourcing of government work. The insourcing framework will evaluate whether services or works required by a public sector entity should be provided by the public sector or by an external provider. The government's commitment to insourcing demonstrates the value we place on our public service and on secure employment. The insourcing framework is being developed to have a sophisticated approach to analysing proposed government outsourcing of services or works. It will not simply be a matter of deciding on the lowest cost option. Instead, under this new framework, a decision about insourcing will consider how the whole community can be better supported by the public service.

The government is incorporating the wellbeing indicators into the insourcing framework. This will see us well placed to embrace new directions on work design, work-life balance, for example, and strategies that harness potential and broaden our perspectives on how the ACT public service works. Secure work makes it easier for people to get bank loans and to buy a home. It means they can take leave when they are sick or need to look after their loved ones, without putting their job at risk. It means they can have the confidence to spend money to support the ACT economy, boost growth and create even more jobs. *(Extension of time granted.)*

We have learned many things during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the risks to both workers and the economy that insecure work brings. We also better understand that women, young people and people from a migrant background are more likely to find themselves in insecure work. We are committed to providing certainty in uncertain times wherever we can.

The government recognises that a COVID and post-COVID world requires a strong commitment to secure jobs and, through initiatives such as the Secure Local Jobs Code, the secure workforce conversion policy and the insourcing framework, we will deliver on this commitment through meaningful action.

As part of the government's commitment to driving secure employment, we are focusing not only on public sector employees but on all workers in the territory. I have spoken before in this place about the benefits of good quality jobs—jobs that are healthy, safe and secure. We know that people who believe their work is insecure experience significant detrimental effects on their mental health and we also know that the poorest quality of work is comparable to unemployment as a risk factor for poor mental health. This is concerning.

The government has a strong and progressive reform agenda promoting secure employment for the territory. Since 2019 the Secure Local Jobs Code reforms have used the government's procurement power to encourage a high ethical and labour standard amongst our contractors. From 27 November 2021, all labour hire providers must be licensed to operate in the ACT. Labour hire workers are particularly vulnerable, due to the nature of labour hire working arrangements. The new licensing scheme ensures that licensed operators demonstrate their history and ongoing compliance with workplace laws and standards. We now have 674 labour hire providers licensed in the ACT as of 4 February this year.

As a government, we have also committed to reviewing the scope and coverage of our portable long service leave legislation. Long service leave is an important workplace entitlement that supports worker wellbeing and productivity. It is an increasingly important entitlement as globalisation and other factors have increased the level of workforce casualisation, short-term agency work and outsourcing.

It is also important that our workplaces are safe. Safe workplaces are secure workplaces. Unsafe workplaces affect not only workers but also their friends, family and the broader community. All businesses and employers, in carrying out their work, must protect the health and safety of workers in the workplace. This obligation arises under our work health and safety laws.

Our WHS obligations not only address the physical health of our workers but also, and importantly, protect them from psychosocial hazards in the workplace. The impacts of psychological injuries go beyond the cost of a workers compensation claim and affect productivity, staff turnover, workplace culture, the resources required to manage and respond to complaints and litigation, reputational damage and negative impacts on workers' health and wellbeing—just to name a few of the impacts. Each year around 7,200 Australians are compensated for work-related mental health conditions, making up around six per cent of all workers compensation claims. Approximately \$543 million is paid in workers compensation for work-related mental health conditions annually.

Safety in the workplace, of course, is everyone's responsibility. It is important that our work health and safety laws continue to effectively protect health and safety in the

workplace, and we have committed to doing exactly that. Last year the suite of compliance tools of the work safety regulator was expanded to include a WHS offence for industrial manslaughter. This was an important step in providing a cascading set of offence categories to better deter poor safety practices. We expect that work occurring at the national level will lead to changes to the model WHS laws to put a stronger focus on dealing with psychosocial risks as well.

Mr Assistant Speaker, these are some of the things that I will be progressing across my portfolio. These initiatives are in addition to supporting Corrective Services staff, detainees and helping reduce recidivism as well. I look forward to working with the Chief Minister and my colleagues to deliver for all Canberrans. I commend the Chief Minister's statement to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021**

Debate resumed from 10 November 2021, on motion by **Mr Steel** and **Mr Gentleman**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.16): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting the bulk of this bill, but we have grave concerns about one of its clauses. I will make a few opening remarks and I look forward to debate during the detail stage.

The bill amends the Government Procurement Act 2001 and the Government Procurement Regulation 2007. In summary, it enables the Secure Local Jobs Code Registrar, or their public servant delegate, the power to enter the premise of a certified entity and inspect records, the premise being where the business is undertaken or where records are kept.

The bill enables the registrar to suspend or alter the conditions of an entity's secure local jobs code certificate if they have reasonable grounds to suspect noncompliance. It raises the threshold for the requirement of a labour relations training and workplace equity plan for the construction sector from \$25,000 to \$200,000 and allows information sharing with other responsible enforcement authorities.

The bill includes additional decision review provisions for complainants about the compliance with the code. These changes are proposed to be made in response to a review of the code completed by the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council in January 2021. The balance of this bill will be supported by the Canberra Liberals and I look forward to debating a particular clause during the detail stage.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella-Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.18), in reply: I am pleased to close the debate on the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021 today. The bill supports the government's

commitment to ensuring that we only engage with businesses that meet the highest ethical and labour standards. The ACT government is leading the nation in our commitment to secure employment. When the Labor government introduced the secure local jobs code back in 2019, it was the first of its kind. Now other states are doing similar work, based on what we have done in the ACT.

The amendments ensure that our procurement practices remain in a nation-leading position as we strive to support workers, particularly those in industries where insecure work and poor employment practices are common. The changes we are making today support a more robust procurement process and will enhance the overall operation of the secure local jobs code. The amendments to the code will provide strengthened powers and regulatory options for the registrar. The registrar will be able to effectively monitor compliance with the code to ensure that it continues to support secure local jobs in the ACT and to set an example for other jurisdictions.

We have made these changes on the recommendation of the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council. In late 2020, the council undertook a review of the operation of the code and delivered their recommendations to the government. The review included 10 recommendations to further strengthen the code and its effectiveness in supporting secure local employment. The amendments here stem directly, of course, from three review recommendations, which focused on strengthening the act and the government procurement regulation.

The bill gives effect to the advisory council's recommendation in several ways. It amends section 22S of the act to, firstly, enhance the secure local jobs registrar's powers to obtain information or documentation to improve compliance with the code obligations and make determinations, and it provides the registrar with appropriate inspection and entry powers to undertake investigations into noncompliance with the code obligations.

These changes will mean that the registrar will be equipped with the power to effectively monitor compliance with the code. Authorised officers will now be able to enter the premises of a code-certified entity performing territory-funded work to inspect, examine, ask questions or gather information about their compliance with the secure local jobs code. This will assist in cases where noncompliance is suspected or has been reported to the registrar. These changes will also strengthen the registrar's engagement with relevant regulatory authorities to ensure that entities are complying with workplace laws. Information and documents obtained from an investigation will now be shared with regulatory authorities responsible for administering a workplace law if noncompliance with workplace laws is found whilst conducting compliance activities under the code.

The bill additionally provides significantly strengthened powers for the registrar to suspend or place conditions on a code-certified entity's certificate if they have reasonable grounds to suspect failure to comply with the code. This power is critical to ensuring that repeatedly noncompliant companies are not rewarded by receiving contracts with the ACT government. The registrar's ability to temporarily suspend code certification while an investigation is underway and cancel when appropriate is

an essential mechanism for ensuring that ACT government agencies do not repeatedly contract with noncompliant entities while potential issues are being investigated.

The bill also adjusts the current settings to submit labour relations training and workplace equity plans. The bill amends section 22G of the act so that a plan must be submitted for territory-funded construction work with a value of \$200,000 or more instead of \$25,000. This change will reduce the burden on businesses tendering for lower-value works contracts with the territory. The threshold will remain at \$25,000 or more for security, cleaning and traffic management procurements.

The amendments also seek to place greater focus on compliance with commitments in labour relations training and workplace equity plans for tenderers that have previously engaged with the territory under a contract for territory-funded work when submitting their tender responses for new contracts. The bill also makes an adjustment to include rights of appeal for complainants. Currently, the act only allows for code entities to appeal a ruling against them with no right of reply or access for the complainant. This legislation changes this to give them equal rights to appeal a decision of the registrar.

I also want to foreshadow a minor and technical amendment which I will be moving at the detail stage. If agreed, this amendment will defer commencement of the bill to 1 March 2022.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the measures in this bill will strengthen the code. There was also significant funding allocated in the 2021-22 budget to support and grow the secure local jobs code branch and respond to the administrative, governance and resourcing recommendations from the review.

I am extremely pleased that the secure local jobs code will continue to grow and strengthen under this government. I was incredibly proud to be part of the government that introduced the code back in 2019. I will be disappointed if the Canberra Liberals do not provide tripartisan support for the bill; but I think, as we have heard, they are going to support it. When we introduced the bill last year, my office, along with Minister Steel's office and our officials, provided a briefing on the bill to the opposition. This was an opportunity for those opposite to engage with the bill.

The bill will have a real impact on workplace safety. If there is an enduring lesson of the pandemic, it is that our economy and society must be built on safe and secure jobs. I talk about secure jobs a lot in this chamber, but that is because I am part of a government that cares about workplace safety. We know that secure jobs are safe jobs.

Secure jobs mean that people can manage debt and plan for the future. It means they can get loans and take time off to care for their families. The pandemic has shown us how important a safe workplace is. It is important not just for workers and their families but also the wider community and the economy. Everyone benefits from safe and secure jobs.

This bill today is just one way that this government is keeping workplaces in the ACT safe and providing opportunities to expand the benefits of secure work in the community. The government wants to work with businesses that treat their workers

with dignity and respect. The ACT community expects us to use our significant resources to support the values of safe and secure jobs and ensure that businesses are following workplace laws. The bill before the Assembly today will continue to support the implementation and monitoring of the secure local jobs code. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

### **Detail stage**

Clause 1.

**MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (11.27):** I missed my opportunity to participate in the in-principle stage of this debate so I will jump at this moment. I will speak very briefly. I believe that we have an obligation in this place to advance the cause of working people, and that is why I am so pleased to speak in support of this bill. Primarily, industrial relations are the remit of the commonwealth; that does not render the Assembly entirely powerless.

In 2018, I was proud to be a part of a government that voted for the secure local jobs code; and I was even prouder to see it come to fruition in 2019. The Secure Local Jobs package was introduced to ensure that the ACT government was using our purchasing power as a tool to better protect workers in business and organisations that tender for territory-funded work. The secure local jobs code was created to ensure that we, as a government, live up to the expectations of our community to ensure that when we contract in industries that are vulnerable to insecure work, we award contracts only to businesses that meet the highest ethical and labour standards. This will become more and more important. Since the code came into effect, we have experienced drastic changes in the labour market that have highlighted just how dangerous insecure and casualised employment is. Now more than ever, it is important that we as a government do our bit to protect workers.

I welcome the amendments proposed under this bill that have arisen from the recent review. These amendments are intended to make participation in secure local jobs easier for both businesses and the government. One of the weaknesses of the code that was highlighted in the review is the lack of inspection and entry powers that would allow the registrar to investigate noncompliance with the code. This bill aims to fix this issue, as well as to provide the registrar with new powers to suspend an organisation's secure local jobs code certificate if they suspect that the organisation is noncompliant.

In the ACT, we so often lead national policy changes. The Secure Local Jobs package is another example of where we have led the way in protecting workers. Because we are pioneering these changes, we often need to review and improve the structures we have set up to make this city a better place. The amendments proposed in this bill do just that. They build on the excellent work that was undertaken in the last term of government and improve the systems currently in place. Our government can make a

real difference to the lives of workers in this city by ensuring that those businesses contracted by the territory comply with the highest workplace standards. Our government is committed to improving the lives of workers in this city, and these amendments will help us achieve that goal.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (11.29): I take a leaf out of Mr Pettersson's book to talk to this bill. The Greens will support the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021 with the included government amendments. The Greens support the secure local jobs code, which uses the ACT government's purchasing power to support secure, local jobs in the Canberra region, protecting and promoting local jobs and the rights of Canberrans at work.

This bill will strengthen the operationalisation of the code so as to continue to drive safe and secure jobs for Canberrans, encouraging suppliers to meet the highest standards relating to pay, employment conditions, superannuation, the health and safety of their workers and the payment of tax, in line with both the code obligations and workplace laws. I note the issues raised in the legislative scrutiny report No 11 in relation to this bill and I am satisfied that the Special Minister of State has been able to address these in his response.

It is important that we use our significant buying power to look to protect workers in the ACT and ensure good safety and good project outcomes. Government contracts should be awarded only to businesses that meet the highest ethical and labour standards. So, in summary, the Greens will be supporting this code.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (11.31): I rise to discuss the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021. I thank the Special Minister of State for bringing forward this bill and affirming the importance of the highest ethical and labour standards within ACT government procurement. The amendments in this bill will ensure that the Secure Local Jobs Code Registrar will have the power to enter the premises of a code-certified entity performing territory-funded work to inspect, examine, ask questions or gather information about their compliance with the secure local jobs code.

A law that cannot be enforced has very little value in the real world, and these amendments will help in enforcing the secure local jobs code. The ACT government should be a model employer, and it is important for the government to show leadership in the procurement space. In addition to what is included in this bill, the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the Tenth Assembly includes an agreed executive reform to "implement a whole of government policy that government services will not be contracted out where they could be performed by public servants". This agreed commitment is important to retain and protect the expertise of the ACT public service. It is our view that a strong public service is important in the design and delivery of good outcomes for people in the ACT. In-sourcing is one way to ensure the strength of our public service and the health and wellbeing of our workers in the ACT.

Alongside this, we recognise that the community sector has an important role in the ACT, especially in the human services areas within my portfolio responsibilities. Across mental health, disability, seniors, veterans, carers, volunteering and community recovery, the ACT community sector is an important service delivery partner. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the combined work of the community and public sector in the ACT has been essential. The Canberra Relief Network, delivered jointly with Volunteering ACT, is a great example of this collaborative work for the benefit of our community. As we continue to look at ensuring that the ACT government is a leader in best practice procurement, I look forward to working with my government colleagues to ensure the strength of our public and community sector workforce.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.33): Pursuant to standing order 182A(b), I seek leave to move an amendment to this bill that is minor and technical in nature.

Leave granted.

**MR GENTLEMAN**: I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name and table a supplementary explanatory statement to the government amendment [*see schedule 1 at page 196*].

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 10, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 11.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.34): The Canberra Liberals will be opposing the insertion of section 22SA into the Government Procurement Act 2001, being clause 11 of the bill. This section gives the Secure Local Jobs Code Registrar the ability to suspend an employer's certificate or impose or amend conditions on the certificate if the registrar has reasonable grounds to believe that the employer has not complied with the secure local jobs code. As both Minister Steel and Minister Gentleman would be aware, the registrar already has, under division 2B.4 of the act, the powers to make decisions with respect to a complaint about an employer's compliance with the code, or in response to the registrar's own investigations into an employer's compliance with the code. Such powers already exist.

Following such a complaint or own-motion concern, the registrar can conduct an audit and request information, following which, if non-compliance is found, the certificate



can be cancelled, suspended or have conditions placed upon it. The conduct of such an audit and request for information are currently determined under guidelines contained in two disallowable instruments: DI2018-287 Government Procurement (Secure Local Jobs Audit) Guidelines 2018 and DI2018-288 Government Procurement (Secure Local Jobs Complaints and Noncompliance Investigation) Guidelines 2018.

In other words, there is already a thoroughly constructed regime in the act to ensure that an employer is complying with the code. The exercise of the current audit powers involves engagement with the employer, who has the right to reply to the registrar's concerns and produce evidence in support of their position. This is in accordance with the well-established principles of natural justice. However, proposed 22S1 is an example of executive overreach and does not include a right of reply from a suspect employer, which is a breach, in my opinion, of natural justice.

The registrar, as I have said, already has powers to audit a holder of a certificate, under division 2B.4; and the addition of a power to suspend or place conditions upon a certificate if there are "reasonable grounds" to suspect noncompliance is unnecessary and excessive. Employers should not be in such a position of such uncertainty that their certificate will be cancelled because the registrar believed they have reasonable grounds to suspect noncompliance, especially when the employer has no opportunity to respond.

It is particularly distressing that this new power—this new sword over the heads of currently compliant employers—is being introduced during a time of COVID in our community, when employers have been seriously affected by COVID restrictions. This is not the time to make them even more nervous about being able to complete a government contract, let alone the fact that the mere insertion of this power is a denial to an employer of the right to reply to reasonable grounds to suspect noncompliance. Minister Gentleman has said that the bill will enable the registrar to have power to monitor compliance with the code, but there is quite a strict regime already in place. While we support the strengthening of that audit regime, insertion of this clause, section 22SA, is executive overreach and not considerate of an employer's right to respond to concerns about their compliance.

As I come to a close, I want to thank senior Treasury officials, the registrar himself and ministerial advisors for their briefing in mid-November last year, and I urge my fellow members in this Assembly not to allow the insertion of this unbridled, unchecked and unfair provision into the act. Thank you.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.40): I find it striking that Mr Cain thinks that strengthening workplace safety could be excessive—quite extraordinary. The section applies if the registrar has reasonable grounds to suspect that an entity that holds a secure local jobs code certificate may have failed to comply with the code; and the registrar may, for a stated reasonable period, suspend the entity's certificate or impose or amend conditions on the entity's certificate.

The government has high expectations of those that we do business with because the community has high expectations of us. It is our duty as a government to ensure that public funds for government contracts are being spent ethically; and this is why we have a secure local jobs code. We need to make sure that the registrar is empowered to take action against noncompliance. This was one of the key recommendations from the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council when it reviewed the code. To balance this power, the clause states that any action or sanction from the registrar must be reasonable.

There are several steps available to the registrar, including imposing extra conditions or changing the conditions of a certificate. Where there are serious concerns about the conduct of a business, the registrar will have the option to pause the secure local jobs code certificate. We do not want businesses with unsafe and unfair work practices to be awarded government contracts. It is no secret that the Canberra Liberals have hated the secure local jobs code since it was introduced in 2019. At every opportunity they have tried to stop it; sometimes it has been because they do not like the requirements that it puts on businesses, and other times because it talks about collective bargaining. Today, it seems that it is because they do not want unfair and unsafe work practices to be stopped.

Today shows just how conservative and right wing the Canberra Liberals remain. Like the federal Liberals, the Canberra Liberals remain rooted to a laissez faire approach to industrial relations and worker safety—the same approach taken by the Prime Minister, which has wrecked our economy. Our economy is built on healthy and secure workers. This clause supports this. So, no wordsmithing from Mr Cain will hide the fact that the Canberra Liberals remain anti worker and anti safety. Even a global pandemic has not changed their minds about the importance of a safe and healthy workforce. How disappointing.

Question put:

That clause 11 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 4

Mr Braddock	Mr Gentleman	Mr Cain
Ms Burch	Ms Orr	Mr Hanson
Ms Cheyne	Mr Pettersson	Mr Milligan
Ms Davidson	Mr Steel	Mr Parton
Mr Davis		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Remainder of bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

## Leave of absence

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Stephen-Smith for today due to ill health.

**Sitting suspended from 11.48 am to 2.00 pm.**

## Ministerial arrangements

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (2.01): Madam Speaker, the Minister for Health is unwell and will not be present in question time. I understand that there is a question to be directed her way, so I will endeavour to assist members with that question.

## Questions without notice Municipal services—footpaths

**MR HANSON:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, a freedom of information request for the community path priority list was released in February 2021. An updated one was released in November. One of the decision notices states that the list is updated daily, yet the top 72 listed paths in the February FOI are exactly the same as the top 72 listed paths in the November FOI, indicating none of these paths have actually been built. Minister, have any of these priority paths been built?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member. I will take the detail of the question on notice. What I can say is that our government has a very significant \$77 million investment in active travel. This is a significant amount of money that is being spent on new shared path connections as a particular priority because they support the trunk routes, and large numbers of cyclists and walkers in particular, connecting different regions of Canberra.

We also undertake footpath upgrades. Those are ranked, as Mr Hanson has alluded to, on the footpath priority list. There may be a request from the community that comes on to that list from time to time, and it is ranked accordingly and prioritised for action. We have undertaken a significant amount of work, particularly during the pandemic, on the screwdriver-ready program, to get on and deliver on many of those projects. I am happy to come back to the chamber to provide some information on the footpath projects that we have delivered, which have been significant.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, can you come back with the reason why the 72 footpaths listed in February are exactly the same as the 72 listed in November and explain why the footpaths haven't been upgraded if they are a priority?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I am happy to provide some information about what we are doing in relation to the upgrades.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, when can the residents living along these priority paths expect proper footpaths?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. Of course, we take the feedback on board and that feeds into our future program. The government also has a range of priorities in the active travel space. Looking forward, part of our transport strategy is to go out and consult further and strategically with the community about what particular cycle and active travel links they would like to see through the development of a Canberra cycle network map and multimodal network plan later this year. That is going to inform the future investment of infrastructure money into the projects that really matter in terms of supporting that shift to active travel. We are really looking forward to having that conversation with the community. I encourage all members to put forward their ideas on those pieces of work.

### **COVID-19 pandemic—vulnerable people**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the minister responsible for social recovery, Minister Davidson. I have been contacted by a number of my constituents who have been subjected to a shadow lockdown due to their heightened risks of COVID complications and related anxiety. We also know that mobility data and businesses are reporting what has been described as an economic shadow lockdown. What is the government doing to support vulnerable people to be safer in their engagement with their communities and to rebuild their social connection?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for the question, and thank you for acknowledging those in our community who are experiencing a hidden lockdown. People with disability, including those with mental health conditions; older people; carers; people who are immune compromised; and families with new babies or who are pregnant, are all having to stay in isolation at the moment because of the case numbers we are experiencing in the community. That is a lot of people who are affected. We have 80,000 people with disability in this community, 50,000 Canberrans who are aged 65 years or older, 50,000 carers, around 6,000 births each year, and around one in five people with a mental health condition. There are also thousands of health and emergency services, community sector and care workers who are isolating more than they would otherwise to reduce the risk of community transmission.

We have had lots of community engagement to work with organisations and care providers who can help us understand the impact on those most at risk. That includes webinars and roundtables with disability, seniors and NGO organisations so that we can listen to their feedback and understand what they are experiencing, and we have responded to that. We have already distributed more than 12,000 rapid antigen tests to disability care providers. We have provided priority vaccination for care workers, for people with disability and for their carers through the Access and Sensory clinic at Weston. We are providing food relief through the Canberra Relief Network and supporting community food relief services.

We are providing support for PPE access for aged-care and disability care organisations, and we are providing resources to community organisations to provide

targeted information to people who are in at-risk groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our multicultural community, seniors, people with disability and others who otherwise might miss out on information about how they can stay safe and how they can remain socially connected. We have also provided resources to support NDS in workforce management for the disability sector—(*Time expired.*)

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, what is your vision for a full social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Gosh! I only have two minutes! The research shows that what works best is where social recovery and community recovery is community-driven but government-supported. So what we are doing is some cross-directorate work led by the Community Services Directorate to work with the community to design a plan that can also be a template for future crises. We know that this will not be the last time that Canberra goes through some really difficult experiences and needs to recover as a community afterwards. So we will be working with the community and across all directorates to make sure that what we are doing is really genuinely community driven but is well supported by government.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what support and encouragement are we giving to community groups to support their roles in rebuilding connection and ending isolation?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I did mention in my earlier answer that we have provided some support to community organisations to get information out to people who are at risk of missing out on that information at the moment. That includes people in our at-risk communities with disability, seniors, the multicultural community, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and people experiencing homelessness. Quite a bit of work has been put into making sure that those community sector organisations that have relationships of trust with those communities can get the right information to them at the right time.

We also, though, have a range of grants that are available to organisations in the community that can help. So funding has been made available through seniors and veterans grants, which closed for applications on 1 February, and there will be a specific focus on how organisations receiving that grant funding can enable better community connection and reduce social isolation for those people. Disability inclusion grants also include funding for organisations that are making their on-line services more accessible, and that will help people to stay connected if they are in isolation because of their disability. Those grant applications close on 14 February.

There is also the technology upgrade fund, which supports more NGOs to work effectively in a largely digital world—such as upgrades for hardware or software, getting their staff trained or providing equipment to people who are at risk of digital exclusion. So, for people who are having to stay at home more at the moment, the ACT government is doing quite a lot of work to try to keep those people socially connected.

**Roads—accident black spots**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, you have been well aware of a number of dangerous intersections in various parts of Canberra for quite some time now, and I am sure we all welcome the recent federal government funding to assist in getting these fixed. In Tuggeranong, these intersections include the Tharwa Drive-Lawrence Wackett Crescent intersection and the Norman Lindsay Street-Tharwa Drive intersections. In relation to the former, of course, we did petition you to get a move on there. Minister, given your access to a large capital budget, why have you waited for a federal bailout before doing something about these life-threatening hazards?

**MR STEEL:** We have not. We actually proposed to the commonwealth that they upgrade these intersections, as well as some rural roads in the ACT and a number of other projects for which they have not come forward with funding. So it was us that put up those proposals. I am very pleased to see that the commonwealth have accepted some of those—just a small number, including some of the intersections that Mr Parton mentioned.

One of the really unfortunate things, though, is that, in doing so, the commonwealth have decided that certain roads in the ACT are not rural roads. They think that they are urban. One of those, of course, is Boboyan Road—one that has been raised in here. We proposed further funding to upgrade that road. Unfortunately, the federal government have the view that this is an urban road and should accordingly be funded with less funding. That is unfortunate because this is clearly and patently not an urban road. It is largely unsealed and it services a small number of rural landholders, but it does need an upgrade.

I put it to those on the other side of politics to have a conversation with the minister responsible, the Deputy Prime Minister and minister for infrastructure, about getting our fair share of funding for road upgrades in the territory.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, when will you actually complete the rectification of these dangerous intersections, and all the others for which federal funding has been received?

**MR STEEL:** We have not received the funding. We will, hopefully, see in their upcoming budget where they have put that money, in terms of the profiling over the forward estimates and beyond. Typically, these projects from the federal government often have been funded way down the track. So we will need to have a look at the profile that has been proposed before we commit to getting on with these projects.

We were the ones that put them up. We want to get on with delivering safer infrastructure under our road transport strategy, under our road safety strategy. We are prepared to get on with it, and we will, of course, try and work with the commonwealth to deliver the important connections, the important infrastructure, that Canberrans rely on.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, will you be waiting for more federal funding before you act on other dangerous intersections and widespread potholes on Canberra's roads?

**MR STEEL:** No. In fact, we have a big program of investment in intersection upgrades around the territory. We have the recently completed intersection on Kuringa Drive. Feasibility has been underway at Hume Circle, to improve that one, which has often been in the top 10 worst intersections in Canberra. We put forward at the election a range of different intersections that we said, on the Labor side, we wanted to see upgraded in this term of government, and we will get on and deliver those. But from those opposite, there has been complete radio silence; no commitments, and they cannot deliver.

### **Roads—Gungahlin**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the minister for transport. In 2019 then TCCS traffic engineer David Kim stated, "We're currently working on the design studies to develop a few options for improving the line of sight at the intersection of Gungahlin Place and Efkarpidis Street." Last year, in your response to my question on notice, you said, "A consultant has been appointed to identify improvements at the intersection." How much did your government spend on the design studies and how much have you spent on the consultant?

**MR STEEL:** That is a very specific question, Madam Speaker. I am happy to take that question. What I can say in relation to this intersection is that the government is considering what the outcomes of that consultant's report are around further improvements to that particular intersection in relation to safety. Some minor changes have already been made to improve lines of sight at the intersection and we will look at the further more substantial upgrades that have been recommended through the consultancy.

In addition to that, in the last budget we also committed funding for feasibility for further improvements around Gungahlin town centre with regard to traffic. I know that my colleague Suzanne Orr has been consulting with the community widely about some of those intersections as well. We are looking forward to the community feedback feeding into future upgrades not only at that intersection but also other intersections to improve pedestrian safety, in particular to make sure that we have improved active travel connections through the town centre as well as making sure that vehicles can continue to access the growing town centre of Gungahlin.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why has your government hired a consultant to advise on the intersection two years after the design studies were complete?

**MR STEEL:** The community have said that they want us to look at further work on the intersection, so we are looking at what can be done to further improve that. We are undertaking feasibility work across all the roads in Gungahlin. Traffic modelling will be occurring as well to make sure that, as the town centre grows, we can ensure that the traffic network is providing a good level of service for Gungahlin residents.

We take an evidence-based approach to managing our road traffic network. We are informed through a number of different means—our in-house engineers, traffic consultants, modelling both microscopic and mesoscopic, and strategic traffic modelling that will be undertaken in Gungahlin—to help inform future investments, because those investments should be evidence based when we are using public money.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, when will your government actually fix this dangerous intersection?

**MR STEEL:** We have already made improvements, and I refer the member to my previous answer.

### **Planning—sustainability and growth**

**MR PETERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, how is the government, through planning, delivering a sustainable and livable Canberra?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The government is delivering a sustainable and livable city by maximising our social and natural assets, reducing emissions and providing a range of housing choices. We are carefully balancing our need to build homes for all Canberrans and to protect our environment. Protecting the natural bushland around Canberra is critical to a sustainable and livable Canberra. It enables people to live healthy lifestyles and is home to protected flora and fauna. Our planning strategy is designed to prevent encroachment into this bushland. We do not want endless urban sprawl, which leads to disconnected communities, congestion and higher emissions, as we have seen in other jurisdictions.

*Mr Parton interjecting—*

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, there is no need for the two of you to make up for the number who are not in the room at the moment.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Concentrating 70 per cent of our development in our town and group centres, along major transport corridors, means that we can reduce emissions and have people living close to jobs, shops, services and public transport. The remaining 30 per cent of our development is planned for carefully chosen greenfields locations. Canberrans have told us that they want a range of different housing options so that they can find a home that suits their stage of life. Greenfields development is an important part of providing housing choices and contributes to the ACT being an attractive place to live. Before choosing a greenfields site, we look at the environmental options, transport infrastructure and planning issues. We want to make sure that people living in our newest communities can still enjoy easy access to jobs, shops and services even while those areas are under development.



**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how will the planning review help grow jobs for Canberrans?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The planning system review and reform project will deliver a planning system that facilitates a strong economy in the territory, attracting and creating jobs and investment. The reform of the planning system will encourage investment in the territory by setting a clear strategic planning direction that identifies and supports opportunities for investment, reducing the complexity of legislative processes and providing flexible assessment pathways and design guidance for planning outcomes. Land use planning can do much to continue the growth and diversification of the ACT economy. The ACT planning strategy establishes strategies and actions to plan for the continued growth and diversification of the ACT population and economy. Through the reformed planning system, with the new Planning Act, the new Territory Plan and district level planning, we can position ourselves to take the opportunities to grow and diversify our economy. The reformed system will encourage the right type of investment by being clear on the types of outcomes we want to see achieved across the city. The planning provisions in the new system will enable this investment, rather than impose barriers.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, will you rule out developing west Murrumbidgee, and why is it important to listen to expert advice?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The ACT government has already ruled out development in west Murrumbidgee. This is nothing new. There is nothing secret at all; we have made that very clear. I have often encouraged people in this place to go and read the ACT planning strategy. Development in west Murrumbidgee is explicitly ruled out in the ACT planning strategy, which was released in 2018 and is available on the EPSDD website.

We heard very strongly from my local community in Tuggeranong about their opposition to development in west Murrumbidgee. You would remember, Madam Speaker, that experts backed up that view. Not only does west Murrumbidgee have significant environmental values; it is also a poor development location for infrastructure, transport and planning reasons.

The government is developing a planning system with people at its centre. That supports the government's vision for a livable and sustainable city. We are moving towards net zero emissions in the city as well. We are listening to the experts, and it is time that the Canberra Liberals did the same. We know that they won't, because Zed remains their leader—

**Mr Hanson:** Does he? I don't think he's in this chamber.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Yes, he does—in all but name. The Canberra Liberals continue with the same old, tired Zed policies, like developing in west Murrumbidgee.

Unlike the Canberra Liberals, we are committed to greenfields sites for Canberra's growing population where development is sustainable. Our investigations into the

western edge are looking at this very question. We will take environmental, infrastructure, transport and planning considerations into account. I look forward to seeing what experts have to say about the location of our newest communities.

### **Planning—western edge**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, the ACT Greens have asked a lot of questions about future development on the western edge. The whole area contains significant ecological values and really precious spots, like Bluetts Block, that contain many threatened species. There is a block abutting Bluetts that likely has the same ecological values and threatened species as Bluetts, and I was shocked to hear recently from the community that that block was sold off and an application made for an exemption from the environmental impact statement. We have been repeatedly told here that western edge investigations are ongoing and that environmental assessments are being done very carefully, so I am now confused. Can you tell me exactly which blocks form part of the total western edge investigation area, and can you publicly release a map clearly identifying the blocks that are in the western edge investigation?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Clay for her interest in future development for the city. To provide greater certainty about where future greenfield development may occur once Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley are developed, the ACT planning strategy 2018 identifies the need to investigate the land to the west of Canberra's metropolitan area—that is, the western edge. It is approximately 9,800 hectares in area and includes land generally bordered by the Murrumbidgee River and the existing urban areas of Belconnen, Molonglo Valley, Western Creek and Kambah. The investigation area includes Mount Stromlo.

We already know that the western edge contains significant environmental values and, as such, only parts of the western edge would be suitable for any development. Over the last couple of years the government has completed a range of preliminary background investigations that are necessary to provide a complete and informed picture of the environmental issues associated with the area. That mapped area of the western edge is on the EPSDD site. I will get the link for Ms Clay.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, how many blocks in or abutting the western edge investigation area are currently up for sale and how many have been sold off in the last five years for development?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I am not aware of any that are currently up for sale. When it is a private enterprise, they could be.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, what will you do to ensure that the environmental values on this piece of land and all blocks on the western edge are carefully examined during the planning process?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** That is a very important question. This is the work that is ongoing with our environmental experts in planning and EPSDD to ensure that all of

those values are kept into the future. These are long-term studies. Many of them are already recorded, but we continue to do this work.

### **Suburban Land Agency—sales**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, according to sales data in the ACT land and property reports, in the last two financial years the Suburban Land Agency sold only 62 per cent of its targeted number of single residential blocks. Minister, what steps are you taking to improve your performance in the delivery of single residential blocks?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Hanson for his question about blocks being sold by the government's Suburban Land Agency in the ACT. I remind Assembly members that over the last two years COVID has had a significant impact on the sale and development of land in the ACT. However, the Suburban Land Agency had more land available for purchase than it had had in a decade at the end of 2019 and 2020. Land for 400 dwellings was available over the counter. Those blocks sold very quickly, which was the opposite of what we thought would occur, given the situation that we faced with regard to the health pandemic. The Suburban Land Agency is continuing to develop land at the pace that it has done in the past, and will continue to make land available for purchase for Canberrans and other people who want to live in this beautiful city.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, we are over halfway through the financial year. Can you advise how many of the current financial year target of 631 single residential blocks have been listed for sale or sold? Are you including private sector and joint venture sales in those figures?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice. There is quite a lot of detail required there.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, are there any other delays in the delivery of blocks for sale for this financial year? If so, what are the reasons for these delays?

**MS BERRY:** I am not aware of any delays. However, as I said, COVID has impacted land development, as well as building work, across the country. As I said, I am not aware of any delays at this stage. Land is being developed ready for sale at the same rate as previously.

### **Housing—strategy**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, yesterday the government rejected a motion calling for an urgent review of your housing strategy and for community housing providers to have a greater role in addressing the shortfalls. These calls reflect the deep concerns expressed by major community groups such as ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter over the housing crisis and also calls made by the Canberra Liberals on this issue. ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter welcomed these calls in media releases. Minister, why does this

government continue to reject a sensible and pragmatic call to address the housing crisis, as advocated by ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter?

**MS BERRY:** I reject the premise of that question.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, do you think that the reactions very clearly expressed by ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter before and after we debated this motion are unsound or misguided?

**MS BERRY:** No, Madam Speaker, I do not. Mr Parton would do well not to try and verbal me and put words into my mouth.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, have you or your staff contacted ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter to discuss their extraordinary media releases?

**MS BERRY:** We work regularly with ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter on issues concerning housing affordability in the ACT. I am not aware of anybody in my office speaking with ACTCOSS or of ACTCOSS getting in touch with my office concerning their media releases before or after. As I said, we always welcome discussions with ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter. They are important partners in our housing strategy, in its development, delivery and review.

### **COVID-19 pandemic—Check In CBR app**

**MS CASTLEY:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health, which I will direct to the Chief Minister. On Monday the Minister for Health announced that the government would wind back check-in requirements, with the Check In CBR app to be used in a smaller number of venues like nightclubs, schools, bars and organised events. While the changes will take effect from 11.59 pm this Friday, the Minister for Health said it would be several weeks before automatic notifications would be sent to users who had attended a higher risk setting. Chief Minister, were the government's changes based on advice from the Chief Health Officer and, if so, what was that advice?

**MR BARR:** Yes, they were. The advice is what has been announced.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, why is your government mandating check-in at bars and restaurants but not at aged-care homes caring for those most vulnerable in Canberra?

**MR BARR:** I will get a more detailed explanation from the Chief Health Officer on that specific point, but a full risk assessment was undertaken. Factors that influence that are whether a venue has its own visitor log and sign-in requirements that would mean, effectively, that having our sign-in would be a double sign-in requirement. I think that would be a potential explanation in relation to aged care, but let me get the fine detail from the Chief Health Officer and we will provide that to Ms Castley.

**MR PARTON:** Why isn't the system ready to send automatic notifications from midnight Friday, given that that is when the new check-in requirements begin?

**MR BARR:** I understand that the detailed technical work necessary to re-tool the app is still ongoing. The Chief Health Officer's view was that it was appropriate to make the changes around reducing the number of check-in venues and not wait for that technical work to occur.

### **Emergency services—funding**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, the recently released *Report on Government Services* shows that the ACT has, in the reporting period, spent significantly less on the ACT's SES organisation—in fact, the lowest in 10 years. Minister, how has this reduced spending impacted on service delivery, especially during the recent storms?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Hanson for the question. I can say that the SES have been operating incredibly effectively, particularly over recent weeks, with the storms in the ACT. In regard to funding, we look at the operation of the SES in surges. They put requests to us for infrastructure—vehicles and those sorts of things—in a time line. Vehicles are leased in a time line as well. When those leases are completed, new leases begin and there can be fluctuations in the expenditure for the SES. We continue to support them. We have increased funding for ESA, and some of that funding goes to support the SES, as well. As I said, I congratulate the work of the SES over recent weeks. They did an amazing job, with the assistance of all of the ESA structure, to support Canberrans during that storm season and will do so in the continuing season.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, is there anything specifically that has caused you to reduce the long-term funding—particularly, the reduction of \$2.3 million to \$1.5 million in the last year? Is there anything specific that you have cut out of the SES?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, can you explain why you have chosen to spend less on the SES in this period than in the last 10 years?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** As I mentioned in answer to the first question, it fluctuates in response to need and requests from the service. We continue to support them as they make requests for those needs.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—transitional release centre**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the transitional release centre at the Alexander Maconochie Centre is an important part of government strategy to build communities, not prisons, in order to reduce recidivism. Can you please provide an update on the transitional release centre and how it is being utilised at the moment?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Braddock for the question. The TRC has been chronically under-utilised for some years. This was evident when I took over the portfolio. I had a chat to Mr Braddock, through my office, and explained that this is

not good enough. We want to make it better. Under my direction, corrections are doing quite a bit of work to fix this. We are working through that process now. We will be able to update Mr Braddock as that work continues to go through.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, I understand that the transitional release centre is being used to help the prison response to COVID. How many people are actually utilising the transitional release centre now?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Apart from the COVID numbers, I do not have the specifics in front of me as to how many people have used the TRC. As I said, it has been under-utilised. We want to make sure that the transitional release program is better utilised, and that is the work that AMC are doing at the moment.

**MS CLAY:** Noting that it is under-utilised, what are your plans to change eligibility for the transitional release centre?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. It is a piece of work that Ray Johnson and corrections are working through at the moment, with the assistance of other directorates as well, to see if we can bring up the utilisation of the centre. It is a continuing piece of work. We are looking particularly at whether there is an opportunity for women to use it more frequently than has occurred in the past. That will be one of the key attributes of this work.

### **Canberra Day—multicultural communities**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, how is the government enhancing the involvement of Canberra's multicultural community in this year's Canberra Day celebrations?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. We are a proudly multicultural city and we are committed to fostering an inclusive community that celebrates diversity. We celebrate that over 170 languages are spoken in the ACT and that one in four households speaks a language other than English. It is who we are, and that is why, across government, we are focusing on actions that support our multicultural communities.

Acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 and the rescheduling of the 2022 National Multicultural Festival, I am pleased to share that \$400,000 allocated to the festival in the 2021-22 budget is now supporting the participation of multicultural organisations in local events presented by Events ACT, such as Canberra Day 2022. Over \$177,000 of National Multicultural Festival grant funding will also be distributed to support eligible applicants with funding to assist in participating in these events or to help organisations to deliver their own activities outside of these events.

The ACT government is waiving all infrastructure and participation costs to ensure maximum revenue generation opportunities for the multicultural communities who participate in Canberra Day. The Community Services Directorate and Events ACT are currently assessing those applications.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what proposals have come from the multicultural community to enhance Canberra Day?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. The expression of interest for participation in Canberra Day closed just last week. I am very pleased that a range of applications from multicultural community organisations were received. This includes applications from more than 20 multicultural group stallholders, eight multicultural businesses, two diplomatic missions and over 45 performer applications.

As for the grant funding, letters of offer have been sent to 65 eligible participants, representing a diversity of multicultural organisations and projects. Those applicants will be published on the festival website by March 2022. I look forward to the contributions that they will make right across the city, across the year, and especially with our new format for Canberra Day. I look forward to updating the Assembly once that has occurred.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what insights came from the involvement of the multicultural community at January's Australia Day events?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary question. Australia Day 2022 successfully delivered on the National Australia Day Council's key pillars of "reflect, respect and celebrate" in a new format event that championed Indigenous and multicultural communities. These communities are at the heart of our national identity and are crucial to the meaningful programming and delivery of Australia Day events.

I am pleased to say that Events ACT applied for and were successful in receiving a National Australia Day Council iconic events grant for \$750,000 to support and expand the delivery of the event by the inclusion of a new Indigenous component on the evening of 25 January, ahead of the 26 January event. An expression of interest for multicultural participation was also undertaken with the National Multicultural Festival stakeholders for inclusion in the annual event for the first time.

Together, these efforts resulted in the participation of 46 Indigenous performers over the two days, including five elders and their family members, as part of the Welcome to Country; 20 multicultural performance groups programmed throughout 26 January; and just shy of 10 multicultural vendors who operated in Commonwealth Park on the day as well, even though this was still in the middle of the school holiday summer period and obviously in the middle of the pandemic. I am pleased to say that we estimate that the final attendance number was 6½ thousand.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions on notice Alexander Maconochie Centre—transitional release centre**

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I can add some further information to Mr Braddock's earlier question and advise that Corrective Services considered using the transitional release centre for COVID-related accommodation, if required. This was not required, and

I advise that Corrective Services intends to recommence using the centre for its intended purpose. I understand that there is currently one detainee whose transitional release centre application is likely to be finalised soon, and several other detainees who have applications in train.

### **Emergency services—funding**

**MR GENTLEMAN:** In relation to the question on SES revenue, my advice is that there was a 93 per cent revenue decrease for ACT SES. This was because a one-off accounting adjustment and an award of a federal government grant to the ACT SES both occurred in the 2019-20 financial year. Normal ACT SES income remains consistent.

### **Community sector—facilities**

**MS ORR (Yerrabi) (2.43):** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) community facilities and the services that are delivered through these facilities are a fundamental pillar in supporting and strengthening our community;
- (b) the ACT Government, through the ACT Property Group, holds a large portfolio of community facilities of varying age, functionality and location;
- (c) the demand for community facilities and the services supported through the provision of facilities is increasing in the ACT, particularly in areas of recent rapid population growth such as Gungahlin; and
- (d) the ACT Government is undertaking an assessment of ACT Property Group's current community facilities and that the findings of this work could be used to inform future planning and identify opportunities for renewal and growth of community facilities;

(2) calls on the ACT Government to support emerging and existing community facility needs through the ACT Property Group Portfolio by ensuring that future review work addresses the following priorities:

- (a) assessing the location and accessibility of community facilities across the ACT;
- (b) the quality of the facilities provided;
- (c) the type and range of facilities provided;
- (d) growing the community facilities land and floor space available; and
- (e) keeping former schools as community facilities; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to engage with the community services sector to develop community facility demonstration projects as part of a broader strategy:



- (a) that demonstrate innovative approaches to growing the space and facilities available for community services in the ACT; and
- (b) amongst these projects, address the difficulty community service organisations have in finding accessible and modern accommodation in town and group centres, including growing regions like Gungahlin.

Today I wish to draw attention to the important role community places and spaces have within the ACT. Community places and spaces in their simplest form are buildings where people go and where things happen. But to run with the simplest understanding of what these facilities provide us is an underestimation of the value we get from them. These places and spaces are where we, as a community, come together; where we support each other; where we work together to bring about change; and where we enliven so much of our community. So when we talk about these places and spaces, what we are really talking about is how we build and support our community.

The ACT government, through the Property Group portfolio, holds a significant number of community facilities and, true to what I have just said, in the simplest form they are just buildings; but when you look at what is happening at these places, they are so much more than that. Take, for example, the Holt community facility, which is home to many things, including Roundabout Canberra. Roundabout collects preloved infant items to package into baby bundles of essential items for the families of newborns. The bundles include everything from clothing to car seats, bassinets, nappies and books. Working with local charities and services, Roundabout makes sure that families with a newborn have everything they need to support the needs and safety of the infant. It is a thriving initiative which keeps growing as more and more people seek not only to donate items but to get involved in sorting, packing and distributing the packs. If you talk to the volunteers at Roundabout, it becomes apparent pretty quickly the sense of fulfilment they receive from contributing to the initiative and the community that they have built around it.

In the Flynn community facility, you will find the NeuroMoves gym, a specialised gym that offers a holistic, innovative and evidence-based exercise and therapy service for people living with a neurological condition or physical condition. The gym provides a space where people living with a neurological disability can come and receive specialised exercise and therapy supports. Much like Roundabout, the NeuroMoves gym has also given rise to a community around it, which is evidenced by the lively conversations that happen in the kitchen after workouts.

Both of these organisations have given rise to these communities while being housed in ACT Property Group portfolio facilities. They are not the only ones. Over in Pearce at the Pearce Community Centre, there is a hive of activity. Sharing Places provides a place for people with disability to come during the day, providing participation in the community; social and civic activities; and the development of daily living and life skills. Sharing Places has even opened its own cafe, which services the community centre and provides an opportunity for participants to learn hospitality skills. In the middle of the Pearce Community Centre there is a community garden, providing a space where all users at the centre, along with people in the surrounding area, can come to grow vegetables and other plants, enjoy picnics and, again, build community.

These are just a few of the great things happening in the community buildings managed by ACT Property Group. There is also the Volunteering ACT hub in the Griffin Centre in the city, providing a space where Canberrans can get information about services, find volunteering opportunities and connect with community. The Weston Community Hub supports a range of advocacy groups that work tirelessly to support and advocate for us. I could go on and on. All of these places and spaces enable our community members to come together, to support each other and strengthen our bonds. But they are more than just a place. It is no secret that our community here in Canberra has been growing, and I often talk about my own electorate of Yerrabi and the rapid population growth and change that we have seen in recent years. To put it in perspective, I grew up in my electorate. At the start of my 40 years, only three of its suburbs existed in a region that has now well over 19,000 families—71,000 people.

We have seen growth and change in other parts of Canberra too, and in line with the population growth and change, our community has also grown and changed. It is time to take a good look at the places and spaces we provide for our community to come together so that we make sure we are providing the best support we can. For this reason, I am very glad to bring this motion today, calling for these places and spaces to be renewed and grown.

I understand that the minister has already been looking at the portfolio and undertaking an assessment of the current building stock and its condition. I applaud this work and call on him to take it further, to use this initial work to identify unmet needs and new opportunities, to go beyond asset management and start looking at what unmet or new needs we have, how we can best meet these across our city and where we need to place them, and to look at what needs we already meet and whether the facilities we are providing are still fit for purpose.

In undertaking this work, I call on the minister and ACT government to also commit to improving the quality of the facilities, growing the current land and floor space and keeping the former schools, where so many of our community hubs are located, in action. In looking to renewal and growth, I call on the minister and the ACT government to work with the community sector and community groups to shape any plan and, most importantly, to identify new and innovative ways, through demonstration projects, that we can shape the places and spaces that shape our community.

One option I would like to put on the table is a specific focus on Gungahlin and the provision of office space for community service providers. Throughout my time as the Member for Yerrabi, I have consistently heard from our community sector partners about how difficult it is for them to find office accommodation and spaces to run their programs and services that is accessible and affordable in the Gungahlin region. ACT Labor has committed to constructing a community centre in the Gungahlin town centre and the ACT government has committed funding in the most recent budget to progressing the design. I am confident that this community centre will go a long way to providing the place and space that our service providers need as they seek to support our community.

Office-based accommodation, however, provides a slightly different role, and having dedicated facilities would complement the community centre we have already committed to. Office accommodation provides community service organisations with the space they need to plan their programs and coordinate their business and regulatory obligations. As the need for services has grown with our community, so, too, should the places we provide for them. Property Group has a long history of assisting our community service partners by providing office accommodation at community rates, giving them the that certainty they need to get on with the great things that they organise. Anyone who has listened to past debates in this place will also know that there is an appetite from the Gungahlin community to see more office accommodation in this town centre, making a project to support our community sector and grow the office footprint in Gungahlin a win-win. I look forward to working with the minister and seeing what can come from renewing and growing the places and spaces where our community comes together.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (2.51): I thank Ms Orr for bringing this motion before the Assembly today, and acknowledge her ongoing interest in and good connections with many of the community services that are tenants of ACT Property Group properties, owned by the ACT government.

Community facilities play a really important role in the social fabric of our city. They provide places for people to come together, learn from each other, access support and services, and feel connected to the community. The ACT Property Group currently manages 238 territory-owned commercial buildings, government office sites, community or multipurpose buildings, and leisure facilities. Of these, almost 70 per cent are classified as community-use buildings.

These facilities span a diverse range of properties and types of accommodation, from community hubs delivered in former school sites to office accommodation, regional community centres and freestanding halls. These facilities are distinct from the ACT government's public housing property portfolio, which is managed by my colleagues Minister Berry and Minister Vassarotti.

Property Group is currently landlord to 219 different community tenants of whom a large proportion are on peppercorn lease arrangements. The ACT government is proud to be able to provide a home for groups which deliver services and supports directly to the community, including child care; disability support organisations; social services and mental health providers; arts organisations; health and wellbeing organisations; and those supporting Canberra's new migrants, amongst many. Ms Orr touched on a couple of the fantastic community organisations and fantastic community facilities that we have.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, we have provided rent relief for many of these tenants, helping to reduce their costs so that they could focus on supporting our community through these very difficult times. Since April 2020, we have waived over \$5 million in rent across the Property Group portfolio, and \$13 million across the ACT government.

We have also regularly invested in improving, upgrading and expanding these facilities. In the 2021-22 ACT budget, we are continuing to deliver upgrades for the Tuggeranong and Mount Rogers community centres, as well as funding temporary community facilities at Coombs for the next five years, until we build more permanent facilities, which we have also committed to as part of a combined community centre and library. Ms Orr mentioned that we are also looking at building a new community centre in Gungahlin. There is more that we can do in this space as we meet the needs of our emerging communities.

Key community partners like ACTCOSS have noted that many parts of our community property portfolio are ageing, and increasingly not meeting the current expectations of tenants, particularly in terms of things like thermal comfort and energy sustainability.

As our city grows there will be an ongoing requirement for more community spaces to keep up with our communities' needs. Gungahlin is certainly one of those, and I appreciate the focus in Ms Orr's motion in that regard. Molonglo, of course, is another one. We are looking forward to the Denman Prospect community centre opening in March, in my electorate of Murrumbidgee.

We also need to look at areas where community service needs are growing, as more people call those areas home, in existing areas where there are demographic changes occurring. That is why we are undertaking a review and assessment of current Property Group facilities, to gather some baseline data about their location and concentration across Canberra, the current building quality, and their expected future life span. We have recently commissioned an assessment, starting with the regions of Woden and Belconnen, of areas for future work. It will review in more detail the tenants of these community facilities—who they are, what they need, and how well our current portfolio of properties meets that need.

This is the first step in delivering a forward plan for the growth and renewal of community facilities in the coming years. Based on feedback from our tenants and community groups, we already know that the portfolio is not meeting community requirements in some important ways. For example, community facilities spread out across the suburbs are not co-located with other services in and near our town centres or in areas well serviced by frequent public transport, in some circumstances. That can be challenging for service organisations which deliver supports like services to help people to remain in their homes, mental health services, disability services and family services. Big halls and old classrooms often are not the best-designed spaces for doing office work or sensitive casework.

As we work towards Canberra being a zero emissions community by 2045, the environmental performance of our community facilities also needs to be addressed. Many of our current facilities have older and inflexible gas heating, ventilation and cooling systems, and poor insulation, making them less comfortable for tenants, expensive to run and more polluting than alternative new facilities.

With many properties constructed in the 1970s and 1980s to meet Canberra's growing population, maintenance is an ongoing issue, and one that we know can create some frustrations for rent-paying tenants. We will explore how we can deliver community facilities differently and better in the future. Our aims are to provide suitable, comfortable and sustainable facilities for a diverse range of current tenants, while also continuing to expand the community facilities and space available across Canberra to provide a home for more groups and organisations as our city grows.

The government's successful public housing renewal program undertaken in recent years provides one possible live model for this work. By looking at our public housing portfolio as a whole, and at how we could better meet the needs of tenants, in housing we have been able to replace 1,288 of our oldest and least fit-for-purpose properties with new, comfortable, modern and adaptable homes that will be a great place for those people to live. That was achieved by relocating old, high-density public housing, concentrated in a few places, to lower-density regular homes across the suburbs. There may be more value in exploring a process like this, possibly in reverse, for our community facilities.

We want to consider opportunities to bring facilities which are often spread out across our suburbs and not accessible, into closer, accessible centres that are in proximity with our group centres and town centres and that might make them easy to access and better co-located with complementary services and facilities.

There are opportunities for co-investment with community organisations, for those that have the ability to do so, and not-for-profits in new facilities. We know, for example, that there is high unmet demand through the land release program by community organisations who want to purchase new community facilities land, but there is often a shortage of supply of the type of land that is suitable—for example, for sporting facilities, places of worship, childcare centres, aged-care facilities and the like. We want to talk with the community sector to understand their appetite and capacity for exploring these types of models and whether there are models that we can look to interstate or overseas for inspiration. The sector may have ideas that are well suited to these types of demonstration projects, and it will enable us to test and trial the new approaches that Ms Orr's motion calls for.

In undertaking this work, we are considering options to renew and grow our community facilities. It is important to recognise that our existing properties do have some important characteristics beyond their use by community groups. Some of these facilities are located at former school sites. These are, of course, very sensitive. They serve as important community hubs; and they may be needed in the future to deliver schools again, if the demographics change in a particular suburb and as we work to make Canberra a more compact and sustainable city.

We agree with Ms Orr's motion, in that we should not be looking first at those school sites that are community hubs. Those need to remain in community and public hands. We also recognise that local communities often value green space and amenities around those community facilities. This will be an important consideration and conversation as we explore opportunities in the future.

The needs of community organisations are diverse, and there will be no single type of property that will suit everyone. Replicating a model like the Griffin Centre, like Ms Orr mentioned, in Gungahlin or Molonglo may work for some office-space organisations; for others it will be different. What is needed may be a hall, a kitchen for hosting large events, or a refurbished classroom for teaching and sharing knowledge.

We want to maintain a diverse property portfolio that can meet all of the needs, while also better responding to changes in how community services are delivered today. We will be working on this over the coming year, while looking closely at the information that comes through the assessment being undertaken at the moment. We will be engaging with community sector stakeholders to develop a way forward. I have already really appreciated the constructive conversations that I have had with groups like ACTCOSS about this work, and we will be doing a lot more of that.

Ms Orr's motion points in a good direction, in emphasising the value of the projects as part of a broader strategy. I look forward to keeping the Assembly and community updated on this work as we consult more broadly with Canberrans and the tenants of Property Group properties about the future of our community facilities in Canberra.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (3.01): I rise to speak in support of Ms Orr's motion and to speak about the potential co-benefits of this approach to both protect and breathe life into Canberra's heritage buildings, while at the same time supporting the community sector. Heritage is to be protected as a legacy for the community, and the community should be at the heart of our heritage protection. However, community groups are limited in the role that they can play, hindered by a lack of facilities.

I would like to share a recent example of a fantastic innovation in this vein, and to share a priority of mine as Minister for Heritage. I was delighted to attend, along with my colleague Minister Cheyne, the opening of the Australian Capital Theatre Hub—ACT Hub—at the heritage-listed Causeway Hall at the end of last year. This beautiful hall was converted into a multifunctional performance space, and will host an eight-show season, classes, workshops and various special theatrical events throughout the year. The hub will also focus on providing development opportunities for emerging directors and designers. One of the co-founders, Everyman Theatre's Jarrad West, said:

To be able to take up residency in Canberra's oldest purpose-built community entertainment venue is a delight. We're excited to have been entrusted with stewardship of this historic building, and look forward to celebrating its 100th birthday in the future.

To me, this is a fantastic example of delivering both community and heritage benefits, and an exciting example of thoughtful, adaptive re-use. A priority of mine, as Minister for Heritage, is to investigate options, amongst ACT government facilities, for a single hub to bring together people who care about our heritage, and also to hold

meetings, store materials and to share those with the Canberra community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank groups such as the National Heritage Trust and the Canberra & District Historical Society for their tireless efforts in capturing, collating and sharing the stories of Canberra's past.

This motion by Ms Orr presents an exciting pathway forward to brush dust off some of our beautiful, older and under-utilised ACT property service buildings, and invite the community into these spaces to create a more vibrant city.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.03): I rise in support of Ms Orr's motion, and I thank her for bringing this important matter of community facilities to the Assembly's attention. The community sector is a vital part of the ACT's social and economic fabric. It promotes the health and wellbeing of Canberrans through promoting physical activity and exercise; learning and mental stimulation; social connections and relationships; and maintaining and sharing of culture.

Canberra's many and diverse community sector organisations also support social inclusion, provide essential services for people in need, and make an invaluable contribution to justice and equity through their advocacy for marginalised groups. This work does not happen in a vacuum; it happens due to the diligence and dedication of hardworking Canberrans, many of whom rely on the provision of a physical space to come together.

Our community centres and facilities are an essential enabler for all of these activities. A lack of facilities has a direct impact on the capability of these organisations to deliver services. I would like to take this opportunity to thank ACTCOSS and their member organisations not only for the work that they do, but also for their advocacy for improving the facilities available to community organisations in Canberra.

The Greens have long been strong advocates for strengthening the quality, quantity, accessibility and affordability of community facilities across Canberra. As Ms Orr's motion notes, a large number of those facilities are owned by ACT Property Group.

ACTCOSS have told us that the current community hubs are old and decaying. Others have described their facilities as run-down and dated. A comprehensive program to maintain and upgrade all of the buildings in the portfolio is now urgent, and I welcome the news that the government is undertaking a review across the board to start addressing these gaps.

We, the Greens, have a particular concern that many of these government-owned buildings that are leased to community organisations are in urgent need of upgrades to improve energy efficiency. These upgrades will ensure the safety and wellbeing of community sector workers, contribute to the whole-of-government efforts to reach net zero by 2030 and provide a more comfortable environment for venue users—a clear win-win.

Naturally, as Canberra grows and densifies, we must also increase the range and number of facilities available. Community services are already feeling the pinch, with the lack of facilities being a major barrier to delivering the services that Canberrans

need, particularly in the Gungahlin district. It is clear that we must not rely on the market and private landlords letting at market rates. Rent continues to rise faster than funding, and our mutual goals of social inclusion and justice are not for sale.

That being said, many opportunities already exist. The Greens have long advocated for improving the community use of schools, with more accessible and affordable arrangements across the board. Also, community clubs often have underused facilities that could be made more available, facilitating social integration and cross-sector partnerships.

Now is the time to cast a critical eye over our existing buildings, and to think of creative and innovative ways in which the government can support the community sector to sustainably occupy those spaces. Commercial areas often have vacancies that are close to public transport and where people live and work, offering excellent opportunities for government to facilitate subsidised tenancies.

Programs around the world have demonstrated the possibilities for enlivening central hubs with judicious government intervention and incentives for privately owned buildings, such as covering public liability insurance, supporting social enterprises and offering tax relief.

New suburbs appear to present a particular challenge, with community facilities apparently a low priority in the development hierarchy. This results in long delays and under-serviced communities, adversely affecting the building of social cohesion and social networks in recently developed areas. This particularly affects newcomers to Canberra, including refugees and migrants, and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who also happen to make up a significant proportion of the population in these suburbs.

Some steps are being taken to remedy this in Gungahlin, where I am waiting for news that the new community multipurpose centre has been built, as promised under the parliamentary and governing agreement. These new buildings can also provide an essential service as refuges for Canberra citizens during heat and smoke events, which will become more frequent with climate change.

Also, as I mentioned before, there is no reason to wait until a new building is complete to offer opportunities to community organisations. There may be such opportunities in existing buildings that have vacant areas. One example is Gunners Place, the interim youth space that is jointly run by the multicultural youth hub and Northside Community Service, in the Gungahlin town centre, demonstrating how existing spaces can be used, either as an interim or permanent solution to community needs.

I particularly appreciate Ms Orr including the need to engage with community services as an essential part of addressing the difficulties they have in finding suitable accommodation. I firmly believe that the community sector has expertise and valuable insights to offer and should be included as active partners in public policy development processes, including planning for unmet and future accommodation needs.



Tenants have often spoken to our office about how professional and responsive the team at ACT Property Group generally are. It is important to foster a relationship of mutual respect and collegiality between community services and the ACT Property Group, a condition that is made much easier if both sides have adequate resources and clear expectations of equity and inclusion. In this way, everyone can work together to work out what kind of community facilities are needed, where, and the amenities required.

Among the broader communities there is also a fantastic opportunity in the promised neighbourhood democracy program, within the parliamentary and governing agreement. This will empower local communities to decide how to allocate funds within their suburbs for what may be facilities or other upgrades that they need for the organisations that serve them. I look forward to seeing this particular initiative progress during this term.

To summarise, the Greens want the community sector to be able to occupy buildings that are energy efficient, comfortable, accessible and affordable, whether managed by ACT Property Group or other landlords. I urge my colleagues to fight for the investment and the imagination to make sure that this happens. Ms Orr's motion is a significant step in the right direction, and I commend it to the Assembly.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (3.11): I thank Ms Orr for raising the issue of community facilities and the important role they play in bringing people together.

It was particularly nice to hear Ms Orr talk about the Pearce Community Centre, where I previously worked in a community organisation. I was on the Pearce Community Centre committee when they were planning their community gardens. The little street library there is a really good place to sit with a coffee that has been made by the Sharing Places baristas, and they will soon have a liberty swing for people with disability, too.

All Canberrans benefit from accessible, quality community facilities in their local area. They offer services that support common needs, such as parenting groups, peer support meetings, sports, and a place of employment for many of the ACT's community sector workers. It is also important to note that community facilities are integral to the inclusion and participation of people in our community who access specialised non-government supports.

As the minister with responsibility for disability, seniors, veterans and mental health, I recognise the many essential services that take place in community facilities. Disability access and inclusion are integral to ensuring that everyone can benefit from our community facilities. The ACT government Disability Inclusion Grants program provides an opportunity for community groups, organisations and small businesses to apply for financial support to enable the organisations to become more inclusive and accessible for people with disability.

While it is not restricted to organisations in community facilities, the grants can be used to address attitudinal, communication and physical barriers to access and inclusion, with the aim of enabling groups to implement things like assistive technology and infrastructure modifications that provide increased opportunities for people with disability to participate in community or social groups.

Members in this place will also know of my history in the community sector. I have worked in some of those former schools that have been turned into community facilities. One of the richest parts of this experience is the way that these community hubs bring organisations together and foster connections between different organisations and the people who access them. There is also a place for specialised community facilities that are fit for purpose, such as for disability services, sports halls, and theatre and the arts.

I am particularly excited to see how this motion will impact on my electorate of Murrumbidgee. My constituents in Woden Valley and Molonglo are particularly vocal about having indoor community sports facilities where people can gather to connect, play, celebrate and learn. It was a privilege to sponsor a petition for an indoor multipurpose sports facility in Woden last year, and I am looking forward to hearing the minister's response.

People in all parts of Murrumbidgee have talked to me about the kinds of things they could do if only there were more accessible, appropriate community facilities in their area. Older Canberrans in Molonglo Valley are looking for somewhere to meet and connect socially; table tennis players are looking for spaces to play; and the Molonglo Valley Community Forum are looking for large meeting spaces. In Woden there are many sports and recreation groups looking for space, including badminton, basketball, skaters, dance groups and many others, as well as community groups in need of meeting rooms. In Kambah there is also a need for more spaces for community sports and community group meetings than existing facilities can accommodate.

Ensuring that Canberra has a spread of accessible, quality community facilities is integral to maintaining our rich community inclusion and participation. Community facilities help to shape intergenerational and cross-cultural connections and make good use of our city's infrastructure. They are important spaces for the work of our community and non-government partners.

For as long as I have lived in Canberra, I have accessed services and organisations in our community facilities, and I commit to supporting and growing their important presence in our city.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (3.15): I thank Ms Orr for bringing this motion before the Assembly. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting the motion. Our support should come as no surprise. The issues addressed in this motion are ones that my Liberal colleagues and I have been raising for some years.

In the 2015-16 annual reports hearings, I asked the minister about the high and growing demand for access to community facilities, and specifically asked what plan

the government had to address this demand in the future. The minister responded that the government strategy was to encourage community groups to “utilise existing community facilities”. In other words, those opposite had no plan for either the present or the future.

Later that same year, in budget estimates hearings, the government admitted that it was receiving increasing requests for facilities that could not be met. In November 2017, in response to a question that I had put on the notice paper, the minister confirmed that community groups were being denied requests for events and meeting spaces, owing to unavailability. Still, nothing was done.

Ms Orr’s motion twice mentions Gungahlin in the context of its population growth and lack of community facilities. I note here that, in his inaugural address to the Assembly in 2016, my colleague Mr Milligan raised these same issues. On that occasion he stated that Gungahlin needed better local amenities, including improved social amenities. He specifically mentioned a town or district hall and a focus on facilities for the growing youth population. In the five-plus years since, he has been a tireless advocate for these kinds of facilities in his electorate of Yerrabi.

Similarly, my colleagues Mrs Jones and Mr Hanson have been labouring to secure a community centre for the thousands of residents who have been moving into Molonglo Valley over the last nine years. True to form, this government’s response has been much foot-dragging, and there is still no community centre.

Likewise, I note that, in February 2019, Ms Orr moved a motion calling on the ACT government to explore the feasibility of establishing a dedicated community centre in the Gungahlin town centre. Frustrated by endless exploring and no action, Mr Milligan successfully amended that motion to, instead, call on the government to commit to a dedicated community centre in Gungahlin. In doing so, he summed up the situation in this way:

Every single resident in the outer north knows about the pain associated with this government’s poor planning. They build houses first and then try to retrofit infrastructure.

He also said:

We do not need a scoping exercise to understand that there is a lack of meeting rooms and spaces, halls and venues for local community groups, let alone a range of other community assets.

Six months later Ms Orr was named as the new minister with responsibility for community services and facilities, making her responsible for some of the things that she had been asking for, and is again asking for in this motion. Considering her expressed concerns, we could have seen significant improvements in this space over her 13-month tenure. Instead, today’s motion calls on all of us to acknowledge that demand for community facilities in the ACT continues to outstrip supply, resulting in difficulty for community organisations in securing access to suitable facilities.

In July last year the ACT government advertised a tender for an experienced service provider to undertake an analysis of current ACT Property Group community facilities within the Belconnen and Woden region, and recommend options to inform ACTPG's management of and investment in community facilities. The wording of Ms Orr's motion today suggests that this review has now been downgraded to a mere stocktake which "could"—note the word "could"—"be used to inform future planning".

Of course, there is no guarantee that this will happen; and, although past performance is not necessarily an accurate predictor of the future, we all know what this government's past performance looks like when it comes to making sure that Canberrans have reasonable access to suitable community facilities. This failure is nowhere more apparent than in those parts of the city with booming populations but no, or virtually no, facilities.

This motion calls on Labor and the Greens to engage with the community services sector to help them find their way out of this completely avoidable and highly foreseeable planning mess. Frankly, I hope that it works because something needs to be done. I therefore commend this motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Climate targets and commitments Paper**

**Ms Lawder**, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 11 November 2021, presented the following papers:

Climate targets and commitments—

Copy of letter from ACT Liberal Leader, to the Prime Minister, dated 20 December 2021.

Letter from the Prime Minister to the ACT Liberal Leader, dated 14 January 2022.

## **ACT Policing—resourcing**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT government has underfunded and under-resourced ACT Policing for years;
- (b) the latest Report on Government Services from the Productivity Commission shows that the ACT has the lowest:
  - (i) number of police per capita in Australia;
  - (ii) funding per person for police in Australia;

- (iii) clearance rates for property crime in Australia; and
- (iv) satisfaction of people who had contact with police in Australia;
- (c) the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia to record a negative average annual growth rate in real recurrent expenditure from 2016-17 to 2020-21; and
- (d) last year, ACT police stopped taking calls from the public in person for certain crimes and moved to online reporting; and
- (2) calls on the ACT government to:
  - (a) increase the number of police to at least match per capita levels with New South Wales by 2024; and
  - (b) adequately resource ACT Policing to re-establish face-to-face crime reporting and investigation.

Last year in this place I moved a motion warning about and condemning the underfunding, under-resourcing and undervaluing of our police by this government. I warned of the toll it would take on our police and on our community. This year's *Report on Government Services* proves every single one of those points to be correct, as measure after measure shows that support from this government is the lowest in Australia. Last year in this place I said:

... despite the fact that we have this increase in population and an increase in complexity, we have got fewer police now than almost a decade ago. In terms of per head of population that number is decreasing as well. Not only have we got fewer than other jurisdictions but we have fewer than we did previously.

Sadly, we still have the lowest number of operational staff per 100,000 in Australia—219. New South Wales, by comparison, has 244, and the national average is much higher. On funding, I said:

In terms of dollar amounts, we have the lowest amount spent per capita in Australia.

Again, that is the case. The new report shows that the ACT's recurrent expenditure is the lowest of any police service in Australia. On clearance rates, I said:

Across the board, on the indicators reported on by the Productivity Commission, we are way behind other jurisdictions in terms of their clearance rates.

That, too, is confirmed in the current report. This year, while there have been some improvements, there have been very concerning figures relating to clearance rates for property crimes. The latest *Report on Government Services* shows that the ACT records cases of motor vehicle theft at seven per cent clearance, other thefts at 4.8 per cent, and unlawful entry with intent at just 3.8 per cent clearance. That means 93 per cent of motor vehicle thefts in the ACT are not cleared within that period, the lowest rate in Australia; 95 per cent of other thefts remain uncleared at that mark, the lowest rate in Australia; and 96 per cent of cases where a person unlawfully enters a property with intent remain uncleared, the lowest in Australia.

The Australian Federal Police Association, in response, says this is not an indication of poor policing, and I agree. The AFPA says it is an indication of “overstretched and overworked officers”. That was the case last year, and it is the case now.

We are still the lowest in the nation on all of those measures—resourcing, recurrent expenditure and clearance rates—and the situation seems to be getting worse, because now the community is really seeing the impact of that. The new report proves that. The new outcome that has been highlighted in the latest report—satisfaction of the public with their interaction with police—is now the lowest in the country.

The new ROGS report shows that those people who had contact with the police in the latest 12-month reporting period rated their satisfaction with the interaction at 77.6 per cent, which is well below the national average of 81.9 per cent, and the worst of all jurisdictions. This is not some general dissatisfaction; it is not some sort of generic survey. This is about people who had interaction with the police.

This is not just some quirk of our jurisdiction. The Greens come into this place, try to find excuses, and say that we are a different jurisdiction; it is different. What is your excuse? What is your excuse for the lowest rate of satisfaction of residents in the ACT regarding interacting with the police than anybody else in Australia?

We cannot argue about having unique jurisdictional characteristics. Australians are Australians, and Australians here in the ACT, interacting with their police, say that they have the lowest satisfaction rate in Australia. Let me be very clear: that is not a criticism of our police. That is a direct result of our police being spread way too thin on the ground.

One of the other statistics that is really disturbing is that we were the only jurisdiction in Australia to report a negative average annual growth rate in real recurrent expenditure from 2016-17 to 2020-21. I have not just made that figure up; that is one of the reporting lines in the ROGS. In that period every other jurisdiction had positive growth in real recurrent expenditure. We had negative growth.

We reduced the amount in real terms that we spent on police. Every other jurisdiction increased what they spent on police. And now we have the lowest satisfaction rate in Australia. Well, who’d have thunk it? It is pretty obvious what is going on, and the claim by the government that they are supporting police, against those statistics, is false. It cannot be true. Indeed, that is what the AFPA is saying.

We have been calling on them to respond and, sadly, they have not. Worse, they have been told that we are going to online reporting. That was one of the more controversial issues from last year. I am sure that many offices received correspondence; certainly mine did. This was reported widely. I will quote from the media, from the ABC of 1 December. The article was headlined “ACT police will soon no longer attend most home break-ins as reporting moves online”. The article reads:

Canberrans who have had their homes broken into may no longer be visited by a police officer—instead, they will be asked to report the crime online.

That is because of a lack of resources. The minister is trying to spin it another way and say, “No, it’s just improvements in policing and efficiencies,” and so on. That is not what the CPO said, members. Let me quote what he said. On the radio, the Chief Police Officer said:

Resources are tight, as they are in every sector, so we find this is going to be more efficient.

We will be less responsive—

I repeat: we will be less responsive—

to some of the property crime than we have been in the past.

We already have the lowest clearance rates for property crime in Australia—car theft, break and enters, other theft. We have the lowest clearance rates in Australia. Now we are going online and the Chief Police Officer said it is because of resources and “we will be less responsive”. He continued:

Over the next 12 months, ACT Policing would be introducing an online reporting system in place of having an officer attend a person’s home.

Instead of having a police officer attend, you put something online. My understanding from his answer in question time yesterday was that the minister said this has not started rolling out yet. What I would say is: don’t go down that path. Give the police the resources they need to do their job so that they do not have to do what the Chief Police Officer said and be less responsive—less responsive to already the worst clearance rates in Australia.

I again reiterate my support for ACT police. I reiterate my support for their association and the work that they do. This is not about our great police; this is about resources. It started when this government, this Labor-Greens coalition government, cut \$15.36 million out of ACT Policing in the 2013-14 budget. That is a massive cut out of an organisation that is already struggling with population growth and complexity in our system.

The *Canberra Times*, on the release of this latest ROGS, reported:

The consistent issue of policing numbers in the territory was again highlighted by the report, which revealed that the ACT has the lowest number of operational staff per 100,000 people at 219. NSW, by comparison, has 244 operational officers per 100,000 population.

The Australian Federal Police Association has consistently raised the issue of inadequate policing numbers as an issue, pointing to how this places undue stress and demand on frontline officers ...

It does, and that was before we had Omicron, before we had the protesters rolling into town. This is noted in the latest reports, which state, in regard to police:

... numbers have been stretched even thinner during the pandemic. The problem has been exacerbated lately as more staff have had to be stood down and quarantined due to COVID Omicron exposure or close contact.

The toll that this lack of support is taking on our police is chronic and fast becoming overwhelming.

I have raised these matters before, but it is important that we keep in mind not just the statistics but the real impact this has on victims of crime and the real impact this is having on our police. Let me quote from the AFPA:

Our members are burnt out. We are concerned about the welfare of our members. Our members don't have the opportunity to take time off or mental health days and spend time with their families, like a general public servant would, purely because they are spread thin on the ground, and they have such a strong camaraderie that they do not want to take leave knowing that taking leave will leave their mates on the road ... thinner ...

This mob come into this place and talk about support for workers. Where are they supporting these workers? I know that the AFPA does not donate to the Labor Party or the Greens; other unions do. I hate to think that that is any part of it, or that the membership of the CFMEU influences the support for some workers over others. But where is the Labor Party support for the police? Where are the Labor Party standing up and saying, "We won't allow this to happen to our workers"? No; they are happy to just throw the police on the scrap heap. The question is: why? If it involved some of the other associations or unions in this town, I am sure many members of the Labor Party would come in here and bang their fists on the table.

According to reports during the year, 50 police officers have been redirected from criminal investigations—some of them serious matters involving organised crime—due to COVID pressures. For example:

Break-ins at Canberra homes and businesses over the coming weeks of lockdown may not receive police attendance due to the resourcing pressures exerted by Covid-related duties.

That was in the *Canberra Times*. Here is another one:

They are stressed. They are tired. Policing is a dangerous profession and the last thing we need as an extra element of danger is the fatigue factor, and like I said, the members are the last people who will put their hand up and say I'm feeling fatigued or they're feeling stressed, because they are so professional, they do want to serve the community and get the job done.

A relief or some reprieve would be good, because what they are currently doing will probably work over a short period of time, but as you know, over a sustained period of time, things can go pear shaped quickly.

That was the AFPA again.



My motion is pretty simple. It calls for two things. It says, “Let’s give the resources, let’s get the numbers up, so that we’ve got enough police to do their job.” Let us get a level that is equivalent to that in New South Wales. Why should we have more police per capita in Queanbeyan than we do in Canberra? I do not think that that makes any sense at all. And let us make sure that we do not go to online reporting. The Chief Police Officer has made it clear that they are going to be less responsive and that this is because of a lack of resources. Let’s not do that.

If that has not rolled out yet, as the minister said, let us not go down that path, because it is quite clear that the community is already frustrated. Those people that have had contact with Policing over the last 12 months have the lowest satisfaction rate in Australia. Let us not make that worse. Can you imagine what those satisfaction levels will be when you are told, “The police aren’t coming. Just put your report online”? When your house gets broken into, Mr Assistant Speaker, the police will not attend; you just log it online. How will that affect the satisfaction rate?

The only winners out of this are criminals. The only winners are the people out there that want to do break and enters, people that want to steal your car and people that want to steal from you. They are the only winners out of this. They will be looking at those ROGS figures and thinking, “Brilliant. We can commit a crime in this town and, 97 per cent of the time, we’re not going to get caught.”

If you look at the statistics in other jurisdictions, those statistics are much better. The clearance rates for property crime in other jurisdictions are much better, and the question is: why? A significant element of that has to be the fact that our police are spread so thin that they simply cannot respond. That is the advice that I am getting from the Australian Federal Police Association. I quote again from the AFPA:

I would argue that ACT Policing have been under-resourced for some time. The frustration coming from the membership at the moment is that ACT Policing is, let’s face it, a pretty light on police force by Australian standards, by worldwide standards.

It would be good to see Minister Gentleman inject a hundred or so police officers into ACT policing. 200 to get us in line with the minimum standard that is set across Australia in terms of numbers per hundred thousand. It’s times like this that you see the minimum numbers would be really useful ...

The AFPA are not saying, “We want rolled gold here.” They are saying, “We want the minimum number to do the job.” At the moment it is evident from the statistics, from the AFPA, from the frontline police officers themselves, that we are below minimum numbers.

I commend our police, who are being let down by this government, who are being let down by this minister, and who are out there doing an incredibly difficult job. They have had to cope with the pandemic, the bushfires, and out-of-town protests from a whole bunch of ragtag people that seem to come to this town, from Extinction Rebellion to the latest anti-vax mob. Let us give them the support that they deserve. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.37): As I have previously stated in this Assembly, the ACT Greens believe that everyone has a right to live in a safe, peaceful community, free from crime, free from fear of violence. We do not believe this goal would be met through increasing the size of the police force. This is one of those situations where it is tempting to respond to a difficult, complex problem with easy, common-sense solutions. The trouble here is that the assumption does not stand up to scrutiny. A more boots-on-the-ground response is simple, easy to understand but not what is required. There is a very strong evidence base for this statement, which I encourage Mr Hanson to acquaint himself with. The evidence shows that increased police numbers do not necessarily reduce crime and, in many cases, unless carefully deployed, can lead to further criminalisation.

Following the evidence trail, the ACT government should continue to pursue justice reinvestment processes to address the systemic causes of crime, for the benefit of the whole community. To do this, we need interagency coordination to address the social and economic circumstances that increase people's risk of both committing a crime and becoming a victim of crime. By addressing the social determinants of crime, we stop people becoming involved in crime. By policing more, we simply repeat the mistakes of the past.

This focus was supported by the deputy commissioner in his comments to the justice and community safety committee last year, when he said:

It is also important when we do this, responding to community problems, that we do not look at it just through a policing lens. It is important that we use services across all ACT directorates to solve the problem.

Through my experience, sometimes it does not actually start out as a justice problem; it might start out as a health problem or a housing problem or even an education problem. So we have to work with everyone to address the issues and come together to find a solution. To be frank, I think that the best solution in most instances is not justice; it is something previous to that.

Often what is needed is peer support, restorative justice, social workers, drug and alcohol counsellors and rehabilitation programs. These are the evidence-based paths to reduce crime, reduce recidivism and increase community safety. In particular, we should prioritise investment into programs for people exiting detention, to support their transition back into the community and to reduce the rates of recidivism.

Our Building Communities, Not prisons Program aims to do exactly that. This program aims to support and enhance the work of ACT Policing and all the other institutions involved in the justice system in a holistic way and focuses on prevention. It is why I am so eager to hear the latest developments for the Justice Reintegration Centre, which will support detainees transitioning back into the community, to reduce their recidivism. This will be done through trauma and relationship counselling, alcohol and tobacco and drug rehabilitation, skills and job training and other forms of individually tailored assistance.

The point of justice reinvestment is to make sure that our money is invested in programs and in approaches that we know reduce crime, not blindly saying that we need more police. We must work to target and solve the problems people have in their lives which lead them to interacting with the police in the first place. This means we work together as a community to build support around those in the justice system, because we know that this reduces crime.

As I have already commented in response to Mr Hanson's similar motion about 12 months ago, we do need ACT Policing to be well resourced and skilled, to have close relationships with the ACT's diverse community and to be able to respond to the community's diverse needs. To again quote the deputy commissioner:

... to get the right culture in the organisation we probably need to change who we recruit and who we employ in the AFP. Therefore, we need more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees; we do need more people that come from other linguistic backgrounds; and we need people that have disabilities. We need to represent the community that we police.

This means we need to think about the change in the character of the police force rather than just its size.

Similarly, I would be interested to understand what investments could be made in upgrading the information systems used by ACT Policing. This would not only reduce the burden on individual police officers but could potentially facilitate cross-service support, for example through mental health, housing and drug and alcohol services. I will leave that question in the able hands of Mr Gentleman and his team.

For now, the Greens support the investments being made into the prevention-focused and citizen-centric police services model. We support evidence-based policy that will ensure that the ACT continues to be a safe place to live, while addressing the injustices experienced by vulnerable Canberrans. It is for these reasons that the Greens support the amendment proposed by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.43): I would like to begin today by expressing the ACT government's sincere thanks and appreciation to ACT Policing for continuing to keep our community safe in these challenging and uncertain times. When I reflect on the many extraordinary challenges our community has faced over the past few years, I am inspired by the professionalism, dedication and commitment demonstrated by ACT Policing to support our community.

During the devastating 2019-20 bushfires and the destructive 2020 hailstorms, ACT Policing immediately responded to support the community. Members rolled up their sleeves and worked tirelessly, facing adversity and rising to each and every challenge. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, ACT Policing officers have done the same, going above and beyond to support the community, often in difficult circumstances.

They have continued to demonstrate high levels of commitment and dedication and have always remained in a strong position to provide community policing to the territory.

Despite these challenges, our police are continuing to do an excellent job, ensuring that the incidents of crime remain low and are responded to quickly when they do occur. That is why it is extremely disappointing that the opposition are trying to score political points by degrading the service of our hardworking officers yet again.

Year on year Mr Hanson and the Canberra Liberals disregard the excellent results our police continue to achieve and disrespect our officers in the process, but it is clear from the 2022 *Report on Government Services* that Canberrans are not buying their scaremongering. The ROGS data demonstrates that ACT Policing continues to enjoy the trust and confidence of the community. Canberrans feel safe, with one of the highest levels of perceived safety in both the home and public places, with high perceptions of safety at home, walking in the neighbourhoods and travelling on public transport. Despite what the Canberra Liberals claim, Canberrans can be assured that adequate police resources have always been available to support and protect our community and always will be.

As the opposition well knows, police numbers in the ACT cannot be easily compared to those in other jurisdictions which cover a much wider geographical area, and Mr Hanson need look no further than his own committee report for this clear advice. Let me quote from page 53 of the JACS standing committee on estimates and the budget report, citing evidence from the Chief Police Officer:

We talk about police numbers all the time. It is very difficult to compare the territory with any other jurisdiction in the country because our population is fairly compacted to a fairly small part of the territory. I always hear people talk about the numbers of police in a place like Tasmania. The fact is, it is three hours between their biggest cities—here it is literally 10 minutes and I can move patrols around very quickly.

Nonetheless, the ACT government has injected record funding into ACT Policing, and the workforce continues to grow and welcome new members. I am proud to report that 98 recruits graduated and have joined ACT Policing in the past financial year, delivering on the government's commitment to grow police numbers across Canberra.

If the Canberra Liberals are so concerned about police numbers, why did they vote against our record investment in ACT Policing in the 2019-20 budget that delivered more than an additional 60 members? Why have they voted against our budget measures that have supported police ever since? Unlike those opposite, the ACT government has a strong record of investment in our police and will continue resourcing ACT Policing as Canberra grows. In the 2021-22 budget alone we are investing over \$9.7 million to improve accommodation for our police and emergency services in Gungahlin; \$4.2 million to meet the growing and increasingly complex workload associated with forensic medical services; \$6.6 million to replace ACT Policing's radio core communication system; and over \$11 million for expanded enabling services to support operational capacity.

We do not just talk about supporting our police officers to score political points; we actually do it. Yet again the Canberra Liberals are scaremongering for their own political advantage, while failing to stand up for our police when it actually counts. They must apologise to ACT Policing for their continued attack on our hardworking officers, particularly with regard to the rollout of online reporting.

It is important that Canberrans have a range of ways to engage with ACT Policing and reporting crimes and, despite what Mr Hanson may say, ACT Policing are not changing how they respond to crime but are exploring a range of modern ways that community can report incidents, crimes and other matters. This will be in addition to the current triple-zero and police assistance phone lines, and it will be a gradual rollout over the next 12 months. It will be another way for the community to engage with police, complementing the methods already available.

ACT Policing anticipate that people could self-report incidents such as vandalism, minor property damage and minor burglaries where there is little evidentiary material, and other matters. This would be similar to online tools already available to allow people to report historic sexual assaults and minor traffic collisions.

So I urge Mr Hanson to stop misleading the public about what the introduction of online reporting means and to instead support ACT Policing to do their jobs. Our police deserve better and so does the Canberra community. While Mr Hanson trots out his stale and failed law and order campaign, I will continue to work with the Chief Police Officer to support our officers to keep the community safe.

I reflected in question time on how the Canberra Liberals have not changed. This motion is another example. It is the same, tired old things because that is what Zed tells them to do.

In closing, I once again offer my congratulations and gratitude to all police officers for their ongoing service to our community. Together we will ensure that Canberra remains a safe city.

I move:

Omit all text after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

- “(1) extends its thanks and appreciation to ACT Policing for continuing to keep our community safe in these challenging and uncertain times;
- (2) recognises the ACT Government’s strong record of investment in ACT Policing, including in the 2020-21 Budget, which contained:
  - (a) over \$9.7 million to improve accommodation for our police and emergency services in Gungahlin;
  - (b) \$4.2 million to meet the growing and increasingly complex workload associated with forensic medical services;
  - (c) \$6.6 million to replace ACT Policing’s radio core communication system; and

- (d) over \$11 million for expanded enabling services to support operational capacity;
- (3) notes the ACT Government's record investment of \$33.9 million in ACT Policing in 2019-20;
- (4) acknowledges that police numbers in the ACT continue to grow, with 98 new officers graduating in the past financial year;
- (5) notes that the latest Report on Government Services from the Productivity Commission shows that:
  - (a) ACT Policing continues to enjoy the trust and confidence of the community; and
  - (b) Canberra residents feel safe with one of the highest levels of perceived safety in both the home and public places;
- (6) notes that ACT Policing is exploring a range of modern ways the community can report incidents, crimes and other matters. This will be in addition to the existing reporting arrangements that include Triple Zero (000), police assistance phone lines (131 444), along with attendance at police stations;
- (7) notes the following evidence provided by the Chief Police Officer to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety's inquiry into the Annual and Financial Reports 2019-2020, Appropriation Bill 2020-2021 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2020-2021:
 

‘We talk about police numbers all the time. It is very difficult to compare the territory with any other jurisdiction in the country because our population is fairly compacted to a very small part of the territory. I always hear people talk about the numbers of police in a place like Tasmania. The fact is, it is three hours between their biggest cities—here it is literally 10 minutes and I can move patrols around very quickly.’; and
- (8) calls on the ACT Government to continue resourcing ACT Policing as Canberra grows, in line with an evidence-based approach.”.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.50): I thank Mr Hanson for bringing this motion to the Assembly. However, I do not support the motion. I welcome and support Minister Gentleman's amendment.

The ACT government has committed, and continues to commit, significant holistic investment in community safety. I want to acknowledge that we have a police force that work day and night and deserve enormous credit for the role they play in keeping our community safe. Compared with other Australian jurisdictions, the ACT is a comparatively safe place in which to live. We owe that to the strong social support, education and health systems and dedicated police force that we have.

I find Mr Hanson's motion to be disingenuous and severely lacking in argument and evidence. Mr Hanson makes no argument about why he views New South Wales as the panacea of police numbers, let alone any mention of community safety outcomes. Perhaps it is because it is a Liberal state government. I do not know; that is my speculation.

I have reviewed the Australian Productivity Commission's 2022 *Report on Government Services*, and specifically policing, that Mr Hanson has quoted. In 2020-21 New South Wales had 244 operational staff per 100,000 people in the state. We had 219, so that is 25 less per 100,000. For non-operational staff New South Wales had 23 per 100,000; we have 31. We have eight more non-operational staff per 100,000 than New South Wales.

Overall, if you add these numbers up, in terms of a direct state comparison of full-time police staff, the ACT has 17 fewer positions than New South Wales per 100,000. This is not the hundreds of missing police that Mr Hanson states. Mr Assistant Speaker, to give you some context beyond the mere numbers alone, it is worth pointing out that we only have a few hundred thousand people and all are concentrated in one distinct area. New South Wales has a city of millions of people and a vast geographic landscape.

Mr Hanson also points out the recurrent expenditure on police services since 2016. If Mr Hanson actually looked at the figures, he would see that the investment in New South Wales is not in the numbers of police. In fact, New South Wales has had an increase in recent years, from 2016, of five police per 100,000 residents. In the ACT over the same period we have doubled that number. We have seen an increase of 10 per 100,000 in Canberra.

Again, let us look at the Productivity Commission's numbers, this time in terms of police responsiveness. The Productivity Commission states that the responsiveness of police to calls for assistance is critical to the effectiveness of police services. The New South Wales Police Force reports the number of urgent—imminent threat to life or property—response calls, and the percentage attended was 75 per cent within the targeted time of 12 minutes. ACT Policing report response times for priority 1 critical incidents are 80 per cent within 10 minutes. I know which jurisdiction I would rather live in. In the ACT you will get a police officer to a critical incident two minutes faster than anywhere else in Australia.

Perhaps Mr Hanson's motion is all about politics. If Mr Hanson genuinely wanted to see an increase in police resources and an increase in community safety, he would not trot out the same motion and the same lines over and over again. He would look for new arguments, for innovation in policing and for evidence-based community safety initiatives. But Mr Hanson does not do that. Instead, he puts forward the same rhetoric, and I see how this rhetoric plays out in our community. Mr Hanson and I live in the safest part of Canberra, yet that is not the perception on the ground. Mr Hanson fuels perceptions for political gain. He plays on people's fears, and this significantly undermines the work that police do in our electorate of Murrumbidgee.

I am proud to be part of a Labor-Greens government where the issue of community safety is genuine and broad, with its focus on diverting people away from the criminal justice system and reducing recidivism. I am proud to work with a minister who is supporting and innovating our ACT police force. Thank you, Minister Gentleman, for your leadership in this area.

Programs and models in the ACT, such as the community-based police services model, the proactive intervention and diversion team, and the Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response program—PACER—are all excellent examples of the government's commitment to community safety and to delivering long-term, meaningful outcomes.

As this Assembly knows, I am a strong supporter of the ACT's community-based police services model. I believe that it is through programs such as this that we will see a reduction in crime. This model ensures that we have a more visible, proactive and connected police service, one that has strong relationships with our community and is trusted and approachable.

The model combines approaches across technology, equipment and resources to deliver a long-term strategic investment in ACT Policing and in our community. Its effectiveness is proven in countries that include Scotland and is based on principles of proactive action rather than being reliant or predominantly focused on a reactive or response-oriented approach. These latter approaches require greater numbers of police. However, I am more interested in tackling root causes and looking to bring an end to systemic issues of crime within our community than just dealing with crime as it occurs.

PACER is yet another excellent example whereby ACT Policing direct staffing resources effectively to achieve a community safety outcome. It benefits those in our community who are most vulnerable, particularly those with mental health concerns.

Where police would traditionally be the first responders to a mental health call-out, the PACER program provides a paramedic, clinician and police officer all working together to attend call-outs which require a mental health response. I congratulate the ACT government on looking for root causes and finding innovative solutions which are cost-effective and provide more robust, holistic and long-term outcomes.

I look forward to seeing continued positive outcomes for the various proactive community-based policing services in action. I also want to see investment in youth and social welfare programs, and community and sports facilities, to get to the real heart of crime prevention. I commend Minister Gentleman, ACT police and all emergency services staff on the critical work they do in our community.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.58): The opposition will not be supporting Mr Gentleman's amendment because it does away with the evidence and ignores the frontline workers and what they are saying. We will not. The contribution from those opposite illustrates the problem—the way they have their heads in the sand and cherry-pick the evidence.

I think the comments from Mr Braddock were bizarre, to say the least. He asserted that my call for more police was an easy, common-sense solution. I would agree with Mr Braddock. He rejected it. He said we should not be doing easy, common-sense solutions. He thinks we should be doing something else. Some of the things he listed actually were very worthy. I do not disagree with many of the initiatives that he proposed. On top of that there is this easy, common-sense solution.



Let us go with some of the initiatives that Mr Braddock talked about. I commend them. Let us also go with what he has described as the Jeremy Hanson easy, common-sense solution, because easy, common-sense solutions are what we should be about in this place.

He also suggested that more police will often lead to more crime. I have to say I have never heard that from anyone, ever. If Mr Braddock has evidence that more police on the ground is going to lead to more crime, I would be fascinated to see where that evidence comes from. It is certainly not what the chief officer says to me when he appears before committees. It is not what the AFPA are saying. Certainly, I do not get that from police where they come to me and say, "You know the problem with crime? There are too many of us police officers around here. If we had fewer police then that would solve the crime problem we have in Canberra." If an MLA comes in here and thinks that the solution to crime is fewer police officers, that adding more police officers can lead to more crime, I think we get a sense of the problem of the Greens' position on law and order.

He also says we need to change the character of our police force. If there ever was an attack on the character of our police force, perhaps that is it. You think that the more cops you have got on the ground, the more crime you have got and that the problem is the character of our police force. I would never assert that and I would hope that those opposite in the Labor Party would not.

Mr Gentleman and Dr Paterson seem to think that the problem here is the Canberra Liberals raising the issues that are highlighted in the ROGS report. If we report on the fact that we have now got the lowest satisfaction rate in Australia from people who had interaction with the police, that is because of us, apparently. You have a direct interaction with the police, you report that that is the lowest satisfaction rate in Australia, yet somehow it is not that we have not got enough police and it is not the government's fault. Somehow the opposition is to blame. Apparently, we are out there scaremongering. The view is that this is politicising the issue, that this is rank politics that is being put forward by us and that we should apologise.

If there is someone that should apologise, it is Minister Gentleman and, I have to say, Dr Paterson because they suggest that what is being said here is rank politics and politicising the situation. My case is built on the quotes from the AFPA, the Australian Federal Police Association, the representative body of police, who are workers. I know that the government does not like to think of them as workers, but they are workers. It is the AFPA, their union, that say they do not have enough workers. Somehow those opposite think that is rank politics. If I am quoting the AFPA and you say that that is politicising it, that that is rank—whatever other slur you want to put on that—what are you saying about that? Why do you hate the AFPA so much? Why do you condemn them? Why do you say that they are just trying to politicise the situation for standing up for their members?

If it was the head of the CFMEU you would not say that. If any other union came into this place or said publicly, "Our workers are tired; our workers are overstretched. We do not have enough workers. Please give us more workers," you would not be out

there saying, "Is just politics; they are politicising it. No, you have got enough members. You have got enough." The Labor Party are saying they have got enough. The Greens seem to think they have got too many. The Greens want fewer police, it would seem, from their position.

Let me quote the AFPA. Let me quote what their union is saying here. "They are stressed; they are tired. Policing is a dangerous profession and the last thing we need as an extra element of danger is the fatigue factor." As I said, the members are the last people who would put their hand up and say, "I am feeling fatigued or stressed," because they are so professional and they do want to serve the community and get the job done. Hear, hear! They are professional; they do want to get the job done. I support their association; I support what they are saying. The words that you have said in this place, Dr Paterson and Mr Gentleman, are a direct attack on the AFPA and, through them, the police on the frontline who are saying how stressed they are.

I have not met police out there who, when I chat to them, say, "You know what, Mr Hanson? There are too many of us. Mr Braddock is right. That is why we have got crime in this town. There are too many of us. We want fewer police, because we are not stressed at all. We are not putting in any overtime. We are not stressed because of COVID and the fires and the protesters from out of town. We do not worry about the lowest clearance rates in Australia." Of course they do. They are frustrated and they are tired. If you listen to the AFPA, comrades, what they say is, "Our members are burnt out and we are concerned about the welfare of our members." They are.

Mick Gentleman is not. Dr Paterson is not. Mr Braddock is not. The AFPA is and we are. "Our members are burnt out. We are concerned about the welfare of our members." What is the response from this lot? They say, "It is just politics. There are enough police." Mr Braddock says there are too many police. That is their position.

"Our members are tired, worn out and getting sick of having to do too much overtime just to make sure that there are enough officers on duty." That is what their union is saying; that is what their association is saying. But, no, that is just politics, is it not? You just dismiss that as politics. How disgusting! If the Liberal Party came in here and said something like that about workers you would be, rightly, offended. You would be, rightly, putting out press releases; you would be demanding a retraction. But you are quite happy to come and say that about the police association and about the police.

"Listen to the experts." We always hear that, don't we, Mr Deputy Speaker? Listen to the experts. Is the Chief Police Officer an expert? I would say he is an expert. We are agreeing? Resources are tight. What we find is that we are going to be more efficient but we will be less responsive. Under this government, because resources are tight, he said, "We will be less responsive to some of the property crime than we have been in the past." That is what the Chief Police Officer is saying. You have got the union saying, "We do not have enough on the ground to do our job and we are burnt out, we are stressed and we are fatigued." You have got the Chief Police Officer saying, "Resources are tight and we are going to be less responsive."

When you turn to the evidence in the ROGS report, you see that the clearance rates for property crime are the lowest in Australia; the funding is the lowest in Australia; the number per capita is the lowest in Australia; we are the only jurisdiction that, over the last four years of the reporting period, cut police funding in real terms and every other jurisdiction increased police funding in real terms; and the satisfaction rate for those people who interacted with police in the last 12 months is the lowest in Australia.

You might try and wash it away. You might try and say it is all politics, but listen to the experts, listen to what the Chief Police Officer said. Listen to what the AFPA is saying, listen to what police on the front line are saying and look at the evidence as it is presented in the ROGS report.

I commend my motion to the Assembly and I commend the work that our police do in very difficult circumstances. I commend their representative body, the Australian Federal Police Association, who work tirelessly on their behalf. I condemn this attempt by the government to wash it all away, to move this very poor amendment, as it is written, to try and dismiss as politics this real issue for our community and for our frontline workers. In doing so you diminish yourself. Never let it be said that you are the party of workers again. If you are not going to support your frontline workers, your police, then shame on you.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 4

Mr Braddock  
Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Mr Davis

Mr Gentleman  
Ms Orr  
Dr Paterson  
Mr Pettersson

Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Kikkert  
Mr Parton

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Women—period poverty

**MS ORR (Yerrabi) (4.12):** Today I am taking the opportunity to update the Assembly on my efforts to tackle period poverty, of which 15 per cent of people who menstruate

here in the ACT have experience. Late last year I spoke in this place about period poverty, both defining the term and describing its pervasive stigmatic nature. I also encouraged members in this place to consider not only following Scotland's lead in legislating free access to period products but also good hygiene facilities and relevant educational resources.

In December 2021 I released an exposure draft for my Period Products (Access) Bill which will, in fact, set in place requirements for the ACT government to provide period products free of charge at designated and accessible places across the ACT and make information on menstrual hygiene freely available. Through the initial public consultation, I cannot understate the level of engagement with and positive response to the draft bill by the community. I am going to quote a few of the comments on the draft, posted to my Facebook page by Canberrans, which I am particularly encouraged by. Mohammed said:

This is a unique idea ... I fully support it. These products are in high demand and charities in the ACT including Helping ACT donate it but as the products are quite expensive it is challenging to cater for them. It will be an ACT first legislation if passed. Great to know. Very humane. Looking forward to your update.

Jenny-Ray said:

Heck yes!!! I know some other countries have made period products free ... and I always wished we could follow their lead.

Edwina said:

Thanks for pushing this bill so hard. You've brought periods to the forefront of my mind. The other day I was ordering myself a menstrual cup and was asked if I wanted to donate to period poverty. I would have previously not donated but your bill reminded me of the need for this. You forget or ignore how much of a burden periods are because we're encouraged not to talk or think about them. I actually like talking and hearing about periods!

Finally, Lea said:

Fantastic idea ... people shouldn't have to go without food or their bills to buy period products.

In addition to these, my office has received some very insightful emails from compassionate residents across Yerrabi and the ACT which I would also like to share. One resident wrote to say:

Your Bill, to make products freely available and access to hygiene disposable and washing facility is human and progressive, a wonderful initiative.

Another said:

I'm so glad to hear about your Period Poverty initiative, it's such a great idea! I [am a teacher] ... and over the last few years our students have made significant

contributions to the Share the Dignity Campaign. Period Poverty is an issue that they feel strongly about. I teach Legal Studies and can see the potential for the Period Products (Access) Bill to not only be a great case study, but to also be a way of encouraging girls to engage with our political system ... Hopefully [the survey] will still be open into February next year, enabling us to encourage students to complete it. I will continue to follow this with interest.

I am quite happy to advise that we have put out a survey to start to capture some of the reasons why people feel stigma in talking about periods, and it is open for everyone to do. Another commenter wrote:

I would like to say thank you for alerting me to this bill. In Australia, I was not aware that this was an issue with social benefits being available to those who are in poverty. In India, Period time for women has connotations and the conditions you describe are worse there than here.

There have, of course, been many other nuanced suggestions and also shorter messages in support of the bill, all of which I am sincerely grateful for. I plan to continue consulting on the draft bill until the end of March. I will review all the feedback and make any necessary revisions, with the intention of progressing the bill further by the middle of the year. I look forward to keeping the Assembly updated as this work continues.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 4.16 pm.**

## **Schedule of amendments**

### **Schedule 1**

#### **Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021**

Amendment moved by the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety

**1**

**Clause 2**

**Page 2, line 5—**

*omit*

1 January 2022

*substitute*

1 March 2022

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