



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**6 APRIL 2022**

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**Wednesday, 6 April 2022**

**MR ACTING SPEAKER** (Mr Parton) (10.00): Members:

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

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

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

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

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Barr and Mr Pettersson for today for health reasons.

## **Minister for Education and Youth Affairs**

### **Motion of no confidence**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (10.01): I seek leave to move a motion of no confidence in Ms Berry as the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs.

Leave granted.

**MS LEE**: I move:

That this Assembly expresses no confidence in the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs for failing to keep students, teachers and school communities safe.

“War zone but worse: students banned from attending school over safety fears”.  
“WorkSafe ACT bans students from school amid understaffing and daily violence”.  
Mr Acting Speaker, these are the extraordinary headlines that Canberrans woke up to yesterday. The Canberra Liberals have no confidence in the ability of the minister for education to keep our students, our teachers and our school communities safe.

The WorkSafe ACT prohibition notice issued to Calwell High School is shocking reading, Mr Acting Speaker, shocking reading. I am devastated for our teachers and school staff who are enduring these horrendous working conditions under the watch of this minister. I am devastated for our students experiencing this horror on a daily

basis under the watch of this minister. I am devastated for our parents, who rightly expect their children to be safe at school and are being completely and utterly betrayed under the watch of this minister. And I am devastated for the Canberra community who are seeing the state of education in our capital city go from bad to worse under the watch of this minister. On this minister's watch, Calwell High School has become every teacher's, every student's, every parent's worst nightmare.

This is a direct quote from the WorkSafe ACT prohibition notice: "Teachers and administration staff daily being abused, threatened, sworn at, screamed at, objects thrown at them and subject to sexualised behaviour or some form of violence from students." An example of one class collapse was where there were around 75 students with only one teacher and one learning support officer, requesting relief teachers from the directorate, only to find some of those teachers were redirected elsewhere in the ACT public school community, causing class collapse. There was an example of a staff member locking themselves in a cupboard and crying uncontrollably due to work pressures. The teaching and administrative cohort on the whole was at breaking point, physically and emotionally, due to occupational violence and staff shortages. Some teachers are working 19.5 hours per week above the maximum face-to-face teaching load due to staff shortages. If teachers put in too many reports about occupational violence, the directorate uses its compassionate transfer option to "remove the noisy vessels".

Inspectors spoke to a teacher at the school who had been assaulted by a student last week. This assault included the teacher sustaining a dislocated shoulder, breaking several teeth, sustaining welts to his lower arm and bruising to his back. The teacher was trying to protect the student assailant from assaulting another student in the school principal's office. The teacher advised that during this incident the principal was thrown across her desk.

Mr Acting Speaker, if I told you that this was a script from a Hollywood movie about some school in some disadvantaged part of the world you would not blink twice. The shocking fact is that these are just some of the issues contained in the prohibition notice issued by WorkSafe ACT to one of our schools right here in Canberra. When the minister gets up to defend the indefensible, when she gets up to defend this shocking situation, she will no doubt have a whole host of reasons, none of which are her doing. One of them will be to blame teacher shortages on COVID.

I remind members in this chamber that this is not the only or the first time that we have seen incidents at this school. As far back as 2013, almost a decade ago, and certainly long before COVID, the police were called to an altercation between students involving blades and other sharp weapons at the school. Only last year, the school was locked down after a disturbance and a young person was taken into police custody.

A shockingly violent, traumatic school environment is not the Canberra that we know and love. But this is the Canberra, this is the reality, under the watch of this Labor-Greens government and this is what is happening right now under the watch of this minister. We can only hope that this horrifying situation is not happening elsewhere in a Canberra school. But in her appalling performance in question time

yesterday the minister was not able to rule this out. We, the Canberra Liberals, know that this minister must go. Mr Acting Speaker, it is not just us who know this minister must go. The Australian Education Union says:

Regrettably the situation at Calwell High School is not an isolated incident. With the union receiving staff shortage SOS calls from school staff across Canberra on a daily basis we anticipate further interventions will and must occur.

Last year, the AEU released a shocking report on the state of Canberra's public education system. The union reported that 85 per cent of teachers believe the Education Directorate lacks the necessary resources to run the public school system, 91 per cent of teachers believe the chronic shortage of teachers is having a negative effect at their school and more than half of classroom teachers would not recommend teaching as a career. After reading the WorkSafe report on Calwell High, this comes as no surprise.

The minister will continue to blame COVID, will continue to blame the national shortages—all the usual lines—but the union have made it very clear that this is not the first time that they have raised serious concerns with this minister. These kinds of systemic issues do not happen overnight. The minister has had the education portfolio for five years—five years of incompetence, five years of failures and five years of what we now see are dangerous workplaces. This minister must be held accountable.

Sadly, this is not the first time I have raised in this chamber the serious issues of violence in our schools. In 2018, as shadow minister for education, I brought a motion highlighting the minister's failures on student and teacher safety after a two-year-long WorkSafe investigation found teachers were subject to abuse and assaults at their schools. Back then the minister said, "No-one should expect to be injured at work and nor should they be." Back then the leader of the Greens agreed and called these concerning. They of course knew all the right words to say to reassure teachers, to reassure students and to reassure parents that they were dealing with these issues.

Four years on and, instead of improving working conditions, our schools are worse and are at breaking point. The minister can try and blame COVID all she wants, but the serious, systemic issues of violence and unacceptable working conditions in our schools were there well before COVID, and all under the watch of this minister. This minister must go. If it was not bad enough to see overcrowding in our schools under this minister, if it was not bad enough to see crumbling classrooms and hazardous materials in our schools under this minister, if it was not bad enough to see bullying and occupational violence being a regular occurrence at our schools under this minister, if it was not bad enough to see chronic teacher shortages under this minister, if it was not bad enough to see serious issues of probity and procurement in the Education Directorate under this minister, we are now talking about students, teachers and school communities and their safety being at risk at their own school under this minister. A WorkSafe prohibition notice is an extraordinary step to be issued to a government school. And worse, this minister has not been up-front with parents and families—there was no mention of it in an explanation as to why their children are now banned from school.

Mr Acting Speaker, this minister must go. The Chief Minister knows it. The Labor Party know it. The Greens know it. This minister must go. Whilst I do not hold any high hopes, I implore the Greens today: you have put your political alliance with the Labor Party above the community time and again. If you do not vote for this motion, you are responsible. You are responsible for endorsing this minister's failures, her atrocious failures, to keep our students, our teachers and our school communities safe. It would be an appalling decision, an unconscionable decision, not to support this motion. How many other students, how many other teachers, how many other school staff need to be injured, hurt, abused, humiliated and assaulted before the Greens will stand up to their Labor colleagues, and stand with us to say this is unacceptable?

Each day this minister continues to be left in charge of the education portfolio is a day that compromises the safety of our students. Each day this minister continues to be left in charge of the education portfolio is a day that puts our teachers at risk. The minister has failed to ensure that we have enough teachers and the right school infrastructure to support our growing population. The systemic violence and an unsafe working environment in our schools has been the reality under this minister for five years.

If the horrific incidents that are described in the WorkSafe prohibition notice were happening in any other workplace, under the watch of any other person responsible, there would be some serious consequences. The person responsible would be held accountable and the full weight of the law and the full weight of the community outrage and disgust would come down on them. The minister must be held to no lower a standard and she must be held accountable.

The Labor and the Greens members in this chamber must draw a line right here, right now. Is the government that you are a part of going to stand there and accept systemic violence and unsafe working conditions in our schools as a reality? Is the government that you are a part of going to stand there and not take any action whilst we have teachers abused and assaulted in their workplace? Is the government you are a part of going to stand there whilst students are told not to come to school because it is not safe? Or will you stand and send a strong message to our community that this is deplorable, that this is unacceptable, and take action to stop it? If you do not take a stand, you are failing every single Canberran that has given us the privilege of being in this place to be their voice, for those who need it, when they need it most.

The minister must resign. If she does not, the Chief Minister must demand her resignation. As a society we cannot stand to one side and do nothing. We cannot unsee what we have seen and we cannot unhear what we have heard. What we have seen and what we have heard has no place in our community. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**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) (10.16): I might go through some of the work that has been happening in our ACT schools under my

leadership in this portfolio area. We have more than 50,000 students who attend ACT public schools. There are more than 4,000 teachers across our 90 public schools. Every local school is a great school. Our schools and teachers work incredibly hard to deliver a high quality education for all of our students.

The ACT government believes that every child deserves a great education and the life chances that flow from it. The future of education strategy is a 10-year strategy for the ACT to guide all parts of our education system and to support and deliver excellence and equity in educational outcomes for each and every child and young person. The vision of the strategy is to build future-focused education systems that equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding that prepare them to embrace the opportunities and face the challenges that are emerging in our rapidly changing 21st century world.

The ACT government is committed to investing in education. The most recent budget included an additional \$51 million in recurrent funding, including more than \$21 million for Chromebooks for years 7 to 12 students and \$2.8 million for internet access for students who need it, along with e-safety initiatives; \$12.5 million for early childhood education and care investment; \$11.5 million to boost the education equity fund to reach an estimated five times as many students; \$7.4 million for an additional 22 youth and social workers; \$1.5 million to trial a breakfast and lunch program; \$450,000 to review inclusive education; and \$455,000 to provide college students with free and confidential legal advice.

In addition, the government continues to invest in new infrastructure, including the expansion of Margaret Hendry School, a new Taylor high school, the modernisation of Garran Primary School and Narrabundah College, a new Strathnairn primary school, an ongoing repairs and maintenance program, the removal of hazardous materials and the installation and maintenance of modular learning facilities.

As members are aware, a national teacher shortage is impacting government and non-government schools right across the community. This is not an excuse; it is a very well-known fact. COVID has exacerbated this. We have seen this occur across all of our community, across all workplaces; not just within our school systems. In the ACT we are actively taking steps to address this, including recruitment campaigns and the establishment of the teacher shortage task force with the Australian Education Union. The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted schools over the last two years. There is no doubt that the constantly changing COVID-19 situation is making life difficult for teachers and school staff, especially in the broader context of the current national teacher shortage.

The ACT government has been working collaboratively with stakeholders, including the Chief Health Officer, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, the ACT Principals Association, the Australian Education Union, Catholic Education and the Association of Independent Schools, to produce the best possible outcomes for all of our school communities. All schools in the ACT are following a clear set of health guidelines developed by the ACT Chief Health Officer. They have key measures which include compulsory use of masks indoors for all adults and students in years 7 to 12; masks for years 3 to 6 are encouraged; arranging students and staff into groups

and keeping these groups separate through measures like staggered timetables for shared spaces and different entry points to schools—this is known as cohorting—improved ventilation in classrooms to ensure good circulation of fresh air; outdoor learning, where possible; and increased cleaning across all schools.

Government schools have also implemented COVID safety plans, updated indoor air quality plans, revised drop-off and pick-up arrangements, restrictions to visitors on site during school hours and restrictions on school events and excursions. Rapid antigen tests have been made available, free of charge, to staff and students in schools and to staff in early childhood education and care services since the beginning of the year.

Inevitably, the pandemic has also had an impact on staffing, which is why we had planned to switch to temporary remote learning where staff absences prevent normal face-to-face learning from continuing. Several public and non-government schools have moved some cohorts of students to temporary remote learning for this reason, and this strategy will continue throughout the school year.

A workforce matrix has been in place since the start of term 1 to support schools to manage staffing absences. This was developed in consultation with principals and the AEU and has supported the Education Directorate's active monitoring of the impact of COVID on each school community. There is an agreed escalation model which includes shifting to partial remote learning. Despite these challenges, we are committed to keeping our schools safe and supportive environments for staff and students. With our stakeholders, schools and principals, we have been planning for the eventuality of staffing impacts due to COVID-19.

The health and wellbeing of our staff and students has always been our top priority. The directorate has established a centralised staff relief pool, has developed comprehensive plans to support schools with higher absences and has introduced workload reduction strategies. One of the scenarios we have planned for in all schools is a switch to temporary remote learning where staff absences prevent normal face-to-face learning from continuing. While we know kids learn best in the classroom, these temporary remote learning periods are going to be necessary at various stages.

The directorate has also built a comprehensive suite of online learning materials which are tailored to year levels and updated weekly. Several ACT public schools have now moved some cohorts of students to temporary remote learning, including Macgregor Primary School, Gordon Primary School, Calwell High School and Namadgi School. I am aware of several non-government schools who have also employed temporary remote learning to alleviate workforce pressure this term. Parents should expect this strategy to continue throughout the school year, especially as we head into the colder months and anticipate further COVID-19 spikes that will impact our workforce. COVID-19 is an ongoing and often unpredictable challenge that is impacting all parts of our community and our schools are not immune. But it is a challenge we anticipated and we are prepared for. As members are aware, several schools are undertaking partial remote learning, as I said.



In term 2, school principals in ACT schools will also be able to consider additional measures, including revising the time line for teacher and school leader annual development plans and discussions, giving schools the option to opt out of school reviews this year, continuing the relief pool access, as well as rolling over enterprise agreement implementation plans. Principals will have the autonomy to choose which of these strategies, or all of them, best suit their school's needs and will most address the workforce pressures.

Members will know that the Education Directorate has been working very closely with Calwell High School for many months now. Yesterday the AEU president confirmed that things had improved at the school. However, on 24 March 2022 there was a serious incident at Calwell High School where a student and three staff members were allegedly assaulted, resulting in physical injuries. ACT Policing were called and attended the school. Staff received medical treatment as a result of these injuries. All impacted students and staff are being supported by the school and the education office.

I was as devastated and upset as anyone else was, on reading the WorkSafe report. This should not be happening anywhere in our community and should not be happening in our schools. The school's principal is currently on leave, with an experienced school principal replacing her for the remainder of the term. A student at the school has been suspended for 15 days as a result of the incident.

I understand that the Australian Education Union asked that WorkSafe ACT attend the school following this incident. I had also asked the Education Directorate to report the incident to WorkSafe but, due to the union's close engagement with the workforce, their report was received first. Either way, WorkSafe was informed and we welcome their engagement in helping us to address this matter. The WorkSafe visit took place on 31 March. Following the visit, the directorate received notices from WorkSafe ACT regarding a number of matters at the school.

The directorate will meet its obligations under these notices and is committed to working with WorkSafe ACT to implement necessary actions to ensure that their concerns are satisfied. As part of our compliance with our WorkSafe obligations, years 7 and 8 students at Calwell High School have transitioned to remote learning for the final week of term 1. Wellbeing supports are being provided to staff and students during this time.

As I said, and will say again, I want it to be very clear that these kinds of violent incidents are very rare in our public schools, but when they do occur we treat them very seriously and we have done so in this instance. Directorate executives are in place at the school, supporting the school staff and leadership team. Counsellors are on site at the school to provide wellbeing support to those staff who wish to access the service. Additional school psychologist supports are available via telehealth for years 7 and 8 students learning remotely.

The school support plan is being updated, ready for implementation in term 2. Key themes will focus on risk management approaches, teaching quality, health and

wellbeing for students and staff and pedagogical practices. Staff have been briefed on supports available and plans to address these issues that have been identified by WorkSafe ACT and the concerns raised by unions. As this place was advised yesterday, Calwell is experiencing workforce pressures and has been receiving support to manage this over recent months. The directorate and school leadership have been working closely, monitoring these absences, and the school has had access to priority relief staff.

Schools are part of their communities. Issues like violence and bullying are a whole-of-community issue requiring a whole-of-community response. Our schools engage with their communities to develop policies, plans and activities such as through the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. Everyone deserves to be safe in their workplace. The Education Directorate has a maturing safety culture that actively encourages occupational violence reporting through the RiskMan system. Its people and performance branch conducts wellbeing check-ins for incidents related to occupational violence.

Some of the ways we are working to address occupational violence in our schools include the ongoing implementation of the positive behaviours for learning whole-school approach to encouraging positive behaviours and preventing and addressing challenging behaviours; ensuring that trauma-informed practices embraced by our schools are focused on students' social and emotional learning in our schools; a suite of wellbeing initiatives for staff; investing \$10 million in our school administration system to improve our capture of real-time data and information about what is happening within our schools; listening to students and hearing their ideas and feedback about making schools friendly and welcome, such as through the student congress, which provides me with direct advice about what its members consider important; developing and delivering occupational violence learning; supporting schools with the establishment of the occupational violence and complex management team; supporting schools and students with access to school psychologists and allied health professionals, including occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers; and learning support assistants are able to access a scholarship program for a certificate IV in education support, which has a focus on building capability to work with students with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Calwell High School is a great school. I have visited this school a number of times over the last couple of years. As I said, it is a great school. The teachers are wonderful. The students I have met with over the years have warmly welcomed me to their school. It distresses me to hear of the circumstances that have occurred out at Calwell. I am committed to providing all of the supports there to lift them out of this situation and to continue their great reputation within their community as a great school.

I am committed to supporting working people in the ACT. That is why I am in this place. I am committed to making sure that Canberra kids get a great education at their local school. That is why we invest in public education. That is why we respect teachers and school staff by working in partnership with their unions and with their school communities. I commit myself to continuing to work hard to make sure that our ACT public schools can continue to be the best that they can be.

**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) (10.30): It has only been a short tenure for the Leader of the Opposition, but she is already copying the playbook of her predecessors.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Devoid of substance and ideas, they are in here moving a stunt to try and stay relevant. The government will not be supporting it. I will back my Deputy Chief Minister's record of care and compassion against the Leader of the Opposition or her team any day.

**Mr Rattenbury:** On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** Mr Rattenbury.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I note that obviously Mr Gentleman's remarks are inflammatory to the Leader of the Opposition. But, equally, Ms Lee gave a speech that many others would find inflammatory and she was heard in silence. Mr Gentleman spoke for about 15 seconds and I could barely hear him over the interjections of members of the opposition.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** I think Mr Rattenbury has got a fair point; Ms Lee was heard in silence. I would call on members to my left to keep their remarks at a low level. Thank you. Mr Gentleman.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The Deputy Chief Minister has worked closely with the Chief Minister to keep our community safe. She has worked closely with officials across government to ensure the best outcomes for families, students, teachers, staff and our community as we have spent over two years dealing with an unprecedented health emergency. She has brought her considerable talents to this challenge as well as an understanding that comes from a being parent within the public school system.

The Deputy Chief Minister has brought care and compassion to the ACT government's COVID-19 response, the same care and compassion I have seen her show throughout her career. The Deputy Chief Minister cares deeply about workers and is committed to keeping the most vulnerable in our community safe. Just look at the reforms that have helped cleaners in our schools, some of the most vulnerable and exploited workers in our community. These workers have better job security because of the Deputy Chief Minister; she has been their champion. She has been instrumental to our government's secure employment work, to help more workers get better job security, pay and conditions. I have heard from cleaners about how important these reforms are.

I have also spent the pandemic listening to our unions, the voice of our workers. They have clearly told me of the great work the Deputy Chief Minister has done, how she understood and worked hard to protect workers across her portfolio. This was not a

surprise to me. I have seen the long and hard hours the Deputy Chief Minister has put into the pandemic response. This is a deputy chief minister who held meetings late into the evening to ensure that the homeless and most vulnerable members of our community were getting the support they needed as the Delta and Omicron variants hit. She worked closely with ministerial colleagues to help and support our community sector.

This is the Deputy Chief Minister that was criticised by the opposition when schools were closed, on expert advice, to keep teachers, staff, kids and families safe. This is the same opposition that wanted to rush teachers back into the classroom when teachers and unions were concerned about safety. This is the same opposition that sat in question time yesterday and told us they could predict when people would get COVID.

None of this comes as a surprise, though. This is the same opposition that told us that the pandemic was over and ever since has acted exactly that way. This is the same opposition that backed the Prime Minister's attacks on worker safety, supporting the idea that workers should come back to work without any safe systems of work, notions that employers could disregard work health and safety and laws and, of course, that kids should drive forklifts. The Canberra Liberals simply do not understand workers. I will not be lectured in this place about workers' safety when every Liberal government has attacked and undermined the rights of workers.

As I said at the start, this motion is nothing but a stunt. The record of my Deputy Chief Minister is clear. It is simply ridiculous and untrue to suggest that she does not care about workers, teachers, families, staff and our community. The same cannot be said for the current Leader of the Opposition.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (10.35): Clearly, the accounts we are reading and hearing of the student behavioural issues and the consequences at Calwell High School are very distressing. I think the details of the WorkSafe prohibition notice—and Ms Lee has gone into some detail in repeating those in this chamber this morning—make for difficult hearing and difficult reading. I think there is no dispute over that matter. As we sit here and reflect on the impact that has on staff, and that has been detailed extensively, we universally agree that staff should not be subject to those sorts of stressors. I think about the impact on students, particularly those who are the subject of some of these behaviours and for whom it can only be very frightening to be in those circumstances. Of course, it is stressful for parents and carers across that whole school community to know that those are the circumstances in their school.

In my view, Calwell High School is a good school. It is full of committed and hardworking staff. I had the fortune to visit Calwell High School during my short tenure as education minister and go through some of the things they were doing to work with their community and their students to create a strong and thriving school in what, at times, can be difficult. There are students at Calwell High School who do exhibit some challenging behaviours, so there is a real effort needed at that school to work in that environment. I know that my colleague Mr Davis has made a number of visits to the school in recent times, by invitation, to attend formal events and to meet

the students and talk with them about their future and some of the opportunities that exist for them.

Clearly, though, despite those significant efforts, the issues at Calwell have arisen. I have touched on those, and details have been outlined to us through this motion and the comments of the union and in the prohibition notice. In thinking about the circumstances at Calwell, it strikes me that the important questions are: what has caused this situation and what is being done about it? I think that when we reflect on the cause there are obviously a number of matters. This is not something that has just happened, and it is not a single factor that has driven it. The minister has spoken about the consequences for staff shortages caused by the pandemic and, clearly, there are a range of stressors in that place. We have all observed that in recent times. Across the community the pandemic has caused staffing issues. It has put stress on workplaces, it has left people fatigued and it has left people sometimes struggling with their emotional regulation, frankly. We know the whole community is under strain from this pandemic.

I have touched on some of the social challenges that arise, particularly at Calwell High School. There will be children who are acting out. In my mind, this needs considered, long-term investment, good support mechanisms and strong public support for lifting up that community and providing the interventions that can help make a real difference. That takes a concerted effort. It raises systematic questions around: is the Education Directorate getting the measures right to respond to the sorts of circumstances that have been described in this situation? I think that when we reflect on causes, it also goes to making sure that there are enough resources in the system.

I reflect on the media release issued by the Australian Education Union after the federal budget last week in which they noted that in the recent federal budget there was a cut of \$559 million over the next three years for public schools from the federal Morrison government, whilst over the forward estimates we will see an increase of \$2.6 billion in private school investment from the federal government. When we are looking at the spectrum of issues that are around, that resourcing distortion cannot be ignored.

I have sought advice on what the specific situation has been at Calwell High School. Noting the comments about some of the medium-term issues that have been raised at Calwell, it is worth noting that since 2020 there has been a range of efforts put in at Calwell High. These include an additional deputy principal to focus on student behaviour management, wellbeing and positive behaviour for learning; human resources support to prioritise recruitment for the school and have a full staffing profile for 2022; and prioritising the school's access to the central casual relief pool.

We have employed an additional coach to support the school with a positive behaviour for learning uplift. There have been a range of capital works investments to redesign and upgrade student services, flexible education spaces, the front office and the sick bay. There is a small group program to support student and staff safety and wellbeing, as well as customised employee assistance programs and staff wellbeing programs to support staff at the school.

These are the sorts of investments you would expect to see at a school that may have identified some concerning issues. Whilst clearly there are still challenges at Calwell High, as the recent events have demonstrated, there have also been a range of improvements observed at the school since 2020. Enrolments at the school have increased over the past three years, from 380 in 2019 to 420 in 2022. We have seen NAPLAN growth across reading, writing and numeracy from 2019 to 2021. School satisfaction data in regard to school leadership indicates results the same as similar school types, and we have seen fewer school lockdowns resulting from student behaviour concerns.

There are a range of other indicators which make it clear to me that the efforts being made by the directorate, with the support of the minister, cannot simply be cast aside. These are material investments and material and objective measures of improvement. That said, we have seen that, obviously, there have been a set of disturbing incidents in recent weeks. The minister has indicated some of her responses to that. Again, from the information I have sought, we know that the government is making deliberate efforts to intervene and to improve the situation.

A directorate coordination team has been established to respond to the events at Calwell High School. It will oversee the following four streams of work: school supports and operational continuity, which will undertake operations at the school this week in line with the WorkSafe order, ensuring a focus on support for the wellbeing of staff and students; there will be a response to the regulator to the concerns identified in the prohibition order, with the intention to progress to a supportive resumption of normal school operations in a safe and orderly way; there is industrial engagement to ensure liaison and engagement with the Education Union and the CPSU, both at the local sub-branch level through to the ACT executive; and the fourth stream is communication and management to coordinate the communications material and messaging to support the school and the school community.

Once support for the wellbeing of staff and students and operational continuity of learning is in place, a review of the school support plan will be undertaken. This will occur ready for implementation in term 2 this year, with particular focus on the following key areas: school leadership structure, cohesion and role clarity to implement the next steps; strengthening the safe and supportive schools and PBL implementation on site; strengthening the pedagogical support and engagement of students in learning across all learning areas; and an assessment of the work health and safety processes at the site of the school. The flow of supports from the education support office will also be undertaken, and this will include incident reporting, RiskMan reporting and wellbeing supports.

What we see here is a range of medium-term engagements, which I have detailed, since 2020, as well as additional supports added in light of the recent incidents. This, to me, indicates that you cannot make a case that the challenges of Calwell High School are being ignored and you cannot say that this minister is not paying attention. Clearly, between the minister and the directorate, significant effort is being made and I cannot—

**Ms Lee:** It is not working.

**MR RATTENBURY:** accept the analysis that the minister has not been paying attention here. Ms Lee interjects, saying that it is not working. Clearly, it has been a difficult incident. I intended to conclude my remarks—and Ms Lee has sought to beat me to it—by stating that we need to be clear that we welcome the measures that have been taken, but clearly we are concerned by the reports we have seen and the specifics of this incident and the pressures that the school is under as a result of the pandemic-related staff shortages and the pressures that we are seeing in our community.

We expect ongoing focus and ongoing effort to be directed particularly to this school, because this is the one we are discussing today. Clearly, across the system there are pressures as well and this cannot be all about Calwell High School. We need to keep an eye on our schools across the system, but as we are debating this one today I make the point that we clearly need ongoing, focused effort here. I have confidence that the minister will ensure that that takes place, and on that basis we will not be supporting this motion today.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.45): I commend this motion to the Assembly. Obviously, my colleagues and I fully support it. We do so on behalf of the children at that school who have been bullied, threatened and subjected to violence, and the kids in the LSU who have been called “spastics” and “retards”. We do so on behalf of the parents who are sending their kids, in good faith, to an ACT public school and who have had the facts hidden from them, who had to find out about this in the media, and who were not even aware of the violence of the mobs, the attacks, the drugs, the knives and the other weapons. We do so on behalf of the teachers who have been pleading and calling out for support, who have been demanding that action be taken and who have reached a point where they, through their union, in desperation, have called in WorkSafe because their school is not safe.

The minister said that it is her job to keep the school safe. Calwell is not a bad school, but it is not a safe school. It is not us saying that; it is the WorkSafe regulator who has issued a protection order, and it is the union that has said that. If we have a minister who, despite the pleas of the union and the staff for months—and we know that this issue was first raised over nine months ago—through her actions or inactions, through her negligence, has failed to keep teachers and students safe, that is a level of failure that cannot be tolerated.

It is not a level of failure that we should accept, as members of this Assembly—and certainly not when teachers have been saying, “This school is falling apart; we need your help as it will become unsafe.” It is not a level that parents should be required to accept, when their kids are not safe. It is not a level that we should expect from a minister when teachers are not safe. There is a chasm between the fluffy words in this place spoken by the minister, Minister Gentleman and Mr Rattenbury, and the reality on the ground. Between what they say in this place about what they are doing, what is happening and their vision, and what the reality is on the ground, there is a chasm.

I heard the president of the union yesterday on Radio 2CC, and she described the situation as “horrific”. We know that the union has been pleading with this government to take action, and this government has failed. The WorkSafe prohibition notice is that failure. How can you say that this minister has done what she needed to do, and did her job, when the union has been pleading with her for nine months, you end up with the school being closed for half of the kids and there are those incidents of violence?

Let us go to the ABC Canberra Facebook page. Have a look at what it said this morning. Look at the media title: “The Australian Education Union’s ACT branch says government action has been insufficient after on-campus violence by students at Calwell High School.” That is the union saying this. Mr Gentleman said that the union loves Ms Berry—the unions all love Ms Berry. If the union are saying this then their desperation must be at such a point that they are saying that this minister was warned, this minister was told this was going to happen, and this has happened through her neglect and the neglect of her directorate to take substantive action, and teachers and students have been put at risk.

Those opposite do not think that that merits action in this place. Mr Rattenbury from the Greens is running interference, as we would expect. Mr Gentleman from the Labor Party left faction is running interference, as we would expect.

Let us hear what teachers are saying, and the difference between what Mr Gentleman, Mr Rattenbury and Ms Berry say in this place and what teachers are saying on the ground. These are the words of the Australian Education Union, representing their frustrated teachers:

The action taken by the ACT’s work safety regulator is a damning indictment on the ACT Education Directorate and starkly highlights their failure to provide a safe workplace for our members.

With respect to the directorate—and she is the minister—the union are saying that they have failed to provide a safe workplace. Imagine, Mr Acting Speaker, if this mob were in the building sector, a builder, and WorkSafe came in and said, “They have failed to provide a safe workplace.” There would be strikes. There would be action on the ground. There would be condemnation from this mob opposite. And what do we see? The union are saying that they have failed to be kept safe, and members opposite run interference for this minister and tell us that she is doing her job. She is not keeping your staff safe. They are not safe. How is that acceptable? I will continue to quote the AEU:

Since the AEU first raised safety concerns around the dire circumstances confronting staff and students at the Calwell site in 2021, the Education Directorate has continually failed to recognise and act effectively to address serious, ongoing staff shortages, oversized classes and instances of occupational violence.

The union is saying that the directorate has failed. Who is the minister? Is it the directorate’s fault? Is the union lying? Are you saying that the union is lying? Are the staff lying? Are they wrong when they say that you have failed? Let me continue:



It is the responsibility of the Education Directorate to ensure that its schools are properly resourced—

and you could equally say that it is the responsibility of the minister; that is the way the Westminster system works—

for the program they are expected to run, and for the needs of their students. They have failed to uphold this responsibility.

The union continues:

The fact that it takes a staff member to be seriously injured and the intervention of an external regulator to provide a degree of safety for the staff and students of the Calwell High School demonstrates a lack of care on the part of the Education Directorate.

The union is saying there is a lack of care from the government, and you lot are saying there is nothing to see here. The minister spent most of her speech reading out fluffy visions—nothing to do with Calwell and irrelevant to the debate. There is the dis-link, and the ability for the whole lot of you to come into this place and say, “Everything’s okay; it’s all being acted on; it’s an isolated incident.” It is an isolated incident? Even Mr Rattenbury did not get those speaking notes. At least he accepted that this is not an isolated incident. This is systemic, ongoing and long term. That is what the union is saying.

The union’s concern is that the minister and the directorate have not acted. If they had acted, we would not be in this situation. A minister that does not act, when kids’ safety is at stake, when teachers’ safety is at stake, does not deserve to be a minister in any government.

“Regrettably, the situation at Calwell High School is not an isolated case,” the union say. They are getting SOS calls from across schools. They say, “They are all too frequent when resources are further and further stretched.” The AEU’s concerns have been ignored. That is what they are saying. They have not been responded to. This is the point. We are not naive to the fact that there are issues. We are not saying that COVID has not caused problems; of course it has, and that required action. The union are saying that that action was not forthcoming. If the minister and her directorate had responded effectively and had listened to the union and done what was required, we would not be in this circumstance, but we are.

At what threshold will you hold a minister accountable in this government? When you have the union saying that action was not taken, when you have the union saying they were not listened to and responded to, and you have the safety of staff and children being compromised through that negligence, through that inaction, what is your threshold? What is the Greens’ threshold to actually hold a minister of this government accountable? Shame on you. If you are not going to put kids first, and teachers first, we will do so. We will continue to fight for children. We will continue to fight for our teachers. You lot can say your fluffy words in here, and make speeches that are a chasm away from the reality of staff and children on the ground. *(Time expired.)*

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.55): I rise in opposition to this motion and in support of the Deputy Chief Minister, Minister Berry, as an outstanding education minister. In her time as education minister, Minister Berry has presided over significant investment in Canberra's public schools, some of which she talked about today. I refer to the expansion of Gold Creek School, the expansion and upgrade of Belconnen High School, the expansion of Franklin Early Childhood School, the delivery of Margaret Hendry School, the recently announced new Taylor high school, and a range of further local investments in spaces across our schools to improve the learning environment of our students and the working environment of teachers and other staff in schools. In my electorate, Minister Berry is delivering the modernisation of Narrabundah College and the upgrades to Lyneham high, among other things.

This is the type of investment that schools across the country are calling out for, and Minister Berry is delivering it here in the ACT, as part of a Labor government. She is working hard to ensure that Canberra schools have the infrastructure in place to meet the challenges of the coming decades. Of course, infrastructure is not everything, and Minister Berry's real commitment in this place, and in her time as education minister, has been to equity. She has driven a range of initiatives that are about improving equity and outcomes for students across our school system, from early childhood education and care through to the college system.

These include things like the government's three-year-old preschool program, which is already providing 15 hours a week of free preschool to hundreds of Canberra's families. It is a vital investment in levelling the playing field for young children from families who may not have the resources that an average Canberra household enjoys.

The provision of Chromebooks, of course, to all public school students in years 7 to 12 was not only an investment in digital literacy but a vital tool in ensuring continuity of learning throughout the pandemic—something that I will come back to in a minute.

There is the recruitment of additional school psychologists, bringing the total number of school psychologists to more than 80 across the public school network. Of course, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative equips schools with resources to support and provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ+ students and people.

Minister Berry also has a clear commitment and dedication to supporting teachers and school staff. She has demonstrated this in many ways in her time as the education minister. I refer to scholarships for teachers to undertake a master of education degree, and better support for new teachers through coaching and mentoring. The University of Canberra Affiliated Schools Program partners schools with a tertiary institution so that existing teachers, and teachers in training, can continue to improve their expertise.

Through the enterprise bargaining process with teachers and their unions, Minister Berry drove a process that reached an agreement that has ACT public school teachers as the highest paid in the nation. She has worked with the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union to develop and implement a nation-leading occupational violence policy and management plan. Again, I will come back to that.

I want to talk about the role that Minister Berry has played in the response to COVID-19, because I think this is really important. I talk a lot about the fantastic role that the public health team and our frontline healthcare workers have played in responding to COVID-19, and I get positive feedback from the community about all of that. But I think what is often not well understood is that the management of the COVID-19 response in our early childhood education and care, and particularly our school sector, has been one of the most challenging things in responding to the global pandemic.

Minister Berry ensured that the transition to online learning kept students and teachers safe and connected to learning through the ever-changing circumstances of the pandemic. Mr Acting Speaker, this is really important. You often hear those opposite saying that it has been two years, as if nothing has changed over those two years. This has been a constantly evolving situation and, as Minister Gentleman pointed out, Minister Berry has been front and centre of understanding those changes and ensuring that schools are in a strong position to adapt. That included ensuring that students and their families had access to appropriate rapid antigen testing during a time of significant access challenges for rapid antigen tests, allowing the safe return to school for the beginning of the 2020 school year.

I touched earlier on the Chromebooks program. Minister Berry's commitment to equity and to that program allowed our schools to be the best set up in the country for that move to remote learning. It was there for equity, but it ensured that our schools were the best set up in the country to respond to the pandemic and to move to remote learning.

As Minister Gentleman also outlined, the opposition have never really known whether they are coming or going on the COVID response. They just seem to agree with whoever happens to be lobbying them that week, with no consideration of logic or consistency along the way. When schools are open, they want them closed; when schools are closed, they want them open. There is no consistency on that side of the table, on that side of the chamber, when it comes to responding to our schools. By contrast, the education minister, Minister Berry, has been deeply engaged in the detail, supporting our schools, our teachers, our students and their families, every step of the way in an incredibly complex environment.

As both Minister Berry and Minister Rattenbury have outlined, the issues related to Calwell High School are deeply troubling and concerning. We all, on this side of the chamber, have an absolute commitment to safe workplaces and to keeping our students, and the consumers of all of our services across government, safe. I will not repeat all of the details relating to Calwell High School, but I will make some broader points about how Minister Berry has taken a nation-leading approach in tackling the challenges of bullying and violence that we see not only across every school system in every jurisdiction but across our society.

This includes seeking expert advice from the School Education Advisory Committee on safe and supported schools. Key findings of that committee include the observation that bullying and violence is a whole-of-community issue, and the importance of

schools working with the community. As Minister Rattenbury has outlined, this is absolutely what is occurring at Calwell High School.

Another key finding is that the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework is “an appropriate approach on which to build a positive environment for all students”. This is something that Minister Berry has been absolutely driving. The expert committee noted that culture change of any kind takes time, including the implementation of positive behaviour for learning. They urge the Education Directorate to stay the course in relation to the implementation of positive behaviour for learning as an appropriate framework.

Of course, this is not the only answer, and ministers Berry and Rattenbury have outlined a range of detailed actions that are occurring at Calwell High School, in particular, and right across the system. But it is Minister Berry who has driven the implementation of the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework. It is Minister Berry who has sought expert advice and acted on it. Minister Berry takes these issues very seriously, and that is clear to anyone who has been paying attention over recent years. There is absolutely no basis for the opposition’s claims or to support their motion today.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (11.05), in reply: This minister must go. Every school in Canberra is a great school. That is the one line on which I will agree with this minister; yet it is this minister that is letting down our school system, and none more so than Calwell. It is not good enough to have her Labor and Greens colleagues come into this place and run interference when they are all, every single one of them, in complete denial about the reality, about the horrific situation, that we are seeing unfold under her very nose.

In light of the devastating, horrific and desperate circumstances that have been outlined in the WorkSafe prohibition notice, and from parents who have reached out to us, and from the Education Union begging for support, the minister cannot even deviate robotically from her talking points. The response that the minister provided was literally a robotic response of words and statistics—no heart, no empathy and no understanding. In fact, the only time that she actually got a bit personal and showed a little bit of heart was when she was talking about herself, right at the end. “Look at me; I’m committed to doing this. Look at me; I’m committed to doing that.” She has had five years, and what have we seen? Failure, after failure, after failure.

Adding insult to injury, literally, there is no acknowledgement of how serious, how devastating and how horrific these issues at Calwell high are. There was a completely disrespectful response to the teachers who are crying out for support, the teachers who are pleading for what we would assume would be a given—a workplace that is safe, a workplace where they will not be assaulted, injured, abused or humiliated every single day.

Once again, every single member in this place from Labor and the Greens showed just how out of touch they are with reality. There was complete denial of the reality of what is happening right under their nose. Her response to this motion highlights and confirms exactly why this minister must go. It is absolutely clear from her response

that this minister has no ability, no will and no heart to do anything to change the horrific situation at Calwell and, indeed, the risks that it imposes for our teachers and our students at every school across Canberra, for as long as this minister is in charge of the education portfolio.

The chivalrous Mr Gentleman, once again, continues his great work of fiction. Mr Acting Speaker, he did not even once touch on what is happening at a school in his very electorate, and the horrific circumstances there. Do you know why? It is because he cannot defend the indefensible. There was a lot of fluff about everything else, but there was nothing to show that he understands or acknowledges what is happening in his own electorate. There were just more made-up stories about a fantasy world that he believes he lives in and that he governs for.

The Leader of the Greens spoke about the improvements. He went to great lengths to speak about the improvements at Calwell since 2020. Let us recap. This is the improved Calwell High School, Mr Assistant Speaker. I give you a quote from the AEU:

The action taken by the ACT's work safety regulator is a damning indictment on the ACT Education Directorate and starkly highlights their failure to provide a safe workplace for our members and a safe school for their students.

That is the new and improved Calwell that Mr Rattenbury talks about, where teachers are abused and assaulted every day, where students are banned from their own school because it is deemed unsafe. That is the new and improved Calwell, apparently—all the improvements that were made by this government and by this minister.

How long will it take? What will it take? What will it take for the Greens to stand up to their Labor colleagues and stand with the community? The most vulnerable people are being abused and assaulted every day. He said, "It takes a long time to improve," conveniently ignoring the issues that were raised in 2013 and conveniently ignoring the systemic occupational violence that I brought to the attention of this chamber that was happening in our public schools in 2018. How long will it take and what will it take for the Greens to stand up for our community?

Mr Acting Speaker, do not even get me started on what Ms Stephen-Smith said. She cannot even get her own house in order. We see constant reports about junior doctors being bullied in the workplace. Only yesterday, the Nursing and Midwifery Federation of the ACT were absolutely scathing about what is happening, when they likened going to work to being sent to the killing fields. This is happening right here in our capital. Minister Stephen-Smith, instead of trying to defend the indefensible with this education minister, should get her house in order and protect our nurses.

This is a moment that will go down in history. Let the history pages reflect this moment when every single member of Labor and the Greens has stood in this place and said that they accept systemic violence in our schools, that they accept teachers being abused and assaulted each and every day when they go to school, and that they accept students being banned from school because it is not safe. That is the reality and the norm under their watch. This is the day that history will remember and the

community will not forget. This minister must go. If she does not resign today, the Chief Minister must demand her resignation.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Noes 12

Mr Hanson  
Ms Lawder  
Ms Lee  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton

Ms Berry  
Mr Braddock  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Ms Davidson  
Mr Gentleman

Ms Orr  
Dr Paterson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith  
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

## Petition

*The following petition was lodged for presentation:*

### **Roads—Watson—petition 8-22**

*By Ms Vassarotti, from 113 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly:  
For more than 4 years, the Management of Nipperville Early Learning Centre in Watson along with parents of children attend the Centre, have requested that a zebra crossing be installed on Gwynne Street. Despite citing numerous near-misses between small children and vehicles, often travelling excessively fast for the area, ACT Roads refuse to install such a crossing.

Senior Road Safety Engineer, Pawel Potapowicz, attended site and told a concerned community that the area is safe “because there are no statistics of pedestrian accidents there”. It is as if they need a child to be injured or killed there to justify installing a necessary safety measure. ACT Roads point out that they commissioned a study requiring 600 CARS IN A TWO HOUR PERIOD to justify the crossing. Although, the high speed of the cars, not the volume, was raised as the chief concern.

The community has repeatedly asked for a safe crossing at this location to help slow down vehicles. Please install this zebra crossing before a human toll is paid. Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the government to address community concerns and please authorise a zebra crossing to be installed on Gwynne Street between Nipperville and Watson Shops.

Further, there is a great question regarding the insufficient consultation and action by ACT Roads in addressing concerns as expressed through community outcry. This too deserves investigation and improvement.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.*

### **Motion to take note of petition**

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

### **Roads—Watson—petition 8-22**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.15): I would like to speak about the petition tabled today and sponsored by Minister Vassarotti. Road safety, especially around our schools, is incredibly important to me. It is one of my core focuses as ACT Greens spokesperson for transport, active travel and road safety. I would like to thank Rob and the other parents who have raised this issue and their concerns about this specific section of the road.

Rob's petition points out that, for more than four years, the management of Nipperville Early Learning Centre in Watson, along with parents of children that attend the centre, have requested a zebra crossing to be installed on Gwynne Street, and Roads ACT have not installed that crossing. The area is also a 50-kilometre-per-hour zone. In a lot of other high-pedestrian areas, like our schools and town centres, we have made the speed limit 40 kilometres per hour.

There are many parents and community members like Rob who have concerns about road safety in their area, including whether it is safe for children and adults to walk and cross the road where they live, shop, study or work. Everyone, especially children, should be able to walk and cross the street in their suburb.

Either I or my partner ride to school every day with our daughter, and that started when she was three years old. She used to ride to day care. She was a demon down the hills, and that grin is something that I live for. It is a really great way to start our day and it helps with congestion and the climate if we keep our cars away from that busy drop-off zone. We need to make sure that we are doing that around schools and day care, in particular. We need to create a culture where walking and riding around your suburb and in surrounding areas is the normal way to get to your local services. We need to make sure that we are not forcing people to drive.

We need transport infrastructure investment that is in line with government commitments to encourage sustainable transport modes such as those which are at the top of the transport hierarchy. At the top we have walking, wheeling, rolling, riding and using public transport. Currently, so much of our road network gives priority to private cars, which sit at the bottom. But that is what we value; that is what we are

saying is important. If we are really serious about achieving a mode shift in transport and that hierarchy, we need to shift our built environment and our road rules to reflect the priority. We need to make sure that we are valuing people outside a car. Our pedestrians should come first.

The biggest barrier for people wanting to walk, ride or catch public transport in a lot of instances is the road infrastructure. It was designed for the car. It was designed by town planners who were only interested in making it as easy as possible for a car to go as fast as possible, and they did that at the expense of everyone outside the car.

There are so many parts of Canberra which need significant upgrades to road safety, and which need pedestrian priority measures like the one asked for in this petition. We have seen a fair number of emails in my office about a lot of issues like this, from across Belconnen. I am sure we will be raising a lot more issues like this over the next term. I would simply like to recommend the petition to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Work health and safety—psychosocial hazards**

### **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) (11.18): I wish to make a statement on work health and safety. On 30 March 2021 this Assembly passed a motion calling on improvements to worker safety in relation to psychosocial hazards in the workplace. In September 2021 I was pleased to provide a six-month update on the motion, which spoke to the continued high cost and consequences of mental injuries to workers in the territory.

The November 2021 Safe Work Australia *Comparative performance monitoring report* showed that the proportion of serious claims due to mental stress in Australia had increased, with national results showing mental stress accounted for 8.6 per cent of workers compensation claims.

The effect of psychological work injury extends far beyond the workplace and workers compensation costs. Psychological injury impacts the health, wellbeing and financial security of workers and their families. I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide members of the Assembly with the final 12-month update on activities underway to support and protect Canberra's workers.

The ACT government's response to the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work*, the national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, was tabled in this Assembly in August last year. Of the 55 recommendations in the *Respect@Work* report, 12 relate directly to state and territory government responsibilities. In its formal response to the *Respect@Work* report, the ACT government agreed, in full or in principle, to these 12 recommendations. The ACT government remains committed to ongoing whole-of government development and implementation of these 12 recommendations.



In December 2021 the ACT Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee delivered its final report. The steering committee was established by the ACT government to make recommendations for future work to improve the ACT's response to sexual violence. The steering committee made wide-ranging recommendations to address and prevent sexual violence across our community, including in workplaces. The ACT government is developing a response to the steering committee's report. As part of this response we will also be considering how we support the broader implementation of the *Respect@Work* report's recommendations.

The ACT government is also committed to working with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions to respond to the recommendations of the *Respect@Work* report and to collectively progress shared actions that contribute to preventing and reducing workplace sexual harassment.

Members of the Assembly may recall that I have previously discussed the independent review undertaken in 2018 of the national model work health and safety laws, known as the Boland review. Following this review, work health and safety ministers determined to implement a recommendation made to amend the nationally agreed model work health and safety regulations to make work safety duties in relation to psychosocial hazards clear within the WHS framework.

Work continues at the national level to develop these amendments, which include the development of associated supporting materials such as a model code of practice and guidance material. The ACT government will continue to advocate for changes to the model regulations as recommended in the Boland review to improve the focus on psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

The government is also consulting with members of the tripartite ACT Work Health and Safety Council in the consideration of these issues and any proposed changes to the model WHS laws. The ACT's Work Health and Safety Council has recently established the Work-Related Violence Advisory Committee as a dedicated subcommittee to the council to advise it on matters specific to work-related violence, including matters arising in relation to psychological health. The advisory committee is anticipated to provide the council with its advice in the second half of this year, and brings together representative members to consider the effectiveness of the regulatory framework when dealing with work-related violence, and identifying industries that are significantly impacted by work-related violence, with a view to addressing those impacts.

Our work safety regulator, WorkSafe ACT, continues to focus on strengthening its capacity and capability to address this issue, having established a dedicated psychosocial inspectorate team with specific resources and specialised training. The WorkSafe psychosocial inspectorate team has completed 560 workplace visits during the financial year to March 2022.

The team has a planned schedule of proactive campaigns targeting priority industries, in line with the Strategy for Managing Work-Related Psychosocial Hazards 2021-23

that was launched in October 2021. This work also targets work-related violence and aggression and work-related sexual harassment.

In relation to the ratification of the ILO convention 190, which recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, I note that this is within the federal government's responsibility. I have taken the opportunity once again to advocate to the commonwealth for the ACT's commitment to this convention.

As I noted to the Assembly previously, each year the ACT government's *State of the Service Report* is released for the ACT public service. This report provides an account of operations in the ACT public service, including workforce profile data. The 2020-21 *State of the Service Report* for the ACT public service was tabled on 2 December 2021 and provides an account of operations in the ACT public service for the 2020-21 reporting year.

In addition to providing a range of performance metrics about the ACT public service, the report included insights from data resourced from the pilot ACT public service employee survey. Data from the pilot survey included in the *State of the Service Report* provides insights on key outcome measures of high-performing organisations. The pilot survey also explored a range of employee views on leadership, performance, workplace culture, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment. This information is being used to better understand our workforce and to inform actions for improving their workplace experience.

The pilot ACTPS employee survey data continues to be analysed and is being used to inform and monitor the ongoing performance of the ACT public service and to identify opportunities for improving workplace performance and culture. These insights will be drawn upon in the 2021-22 *State of the Service Report* to monitor and report key measures of culture and performance of the ACT public service.

Since the last update, work has also continued on reviewing existing processes and data sources for reporting bullying and harassment in the workplace. By working to improve the capture of data, which includes work to rectify workplace cultural factors that may prevent someone from reporting an incident of bullying and harassment, sexual harassment or gender-based violence, the ACT public service is better able to monitor its performance and where we need to develop strategies and implement actions to continue improvement.

By working to collect better data and enhance workplace culture to support incident reporting, the ACT public service is better able to accommodate reporting against the number of bullying and harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based violence incidences in the ACTPS in the 2021-22 *State of the Service Report*.

I am also pleased to advise members of the Assembly that the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has conducted the first stage of public consultation on proposals for reform of our Discrimination Act 1991 to improve protections under the act, including the proposal to introduce a positive duty to eliminate discrimination.

A discussion paper, summary fact sheets and a survey were released on the YourSay website in October 2021, and the directorate also conducted a number of community roundtables. Submissions closed on 30 January 2022 and a listening report is being finalised. Overall, the submissions and survey responses indicate strong public support for the introduction of the positive duty, although there were differing views on the scope and mechanisms for enforcement. I anticipate that the Minister for Human Rights will release a consultation draft bill for public consideration later this year.

Work is also continuing in the area of government procurement, building on the changes made in 2019 to ACT government procurement practices brought about by the Secure Local Jobs Code. Policy design work is underway to deliver the recommendations to further improve the safety of workers in the ACT. Existing measures within the ACT's procurement framework already require the ACT public sector to consider diversity, equality and inclusion of suppliers and potential suppliers under the Government Procurement (Charter of Procurement Values) Direction 2020. These measures include consideration of gender equity and worker safety, ensuring that entities covered by the code comply with the commonwealth Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, which seeks to promote and improve gender equality in Australian workplaces.

A crucial consideration of our tender evaluation process is that territory policy is to not enter into contracts with parties who do not comply with the Workplace Gender Equality Act, and a tenderer may be excluded from further consideration if found in breach of this act's obligations.

In addition to the procurement values, the ACT's ethical treatment of workers evaluation framework operates to ensure that the ACT government contracts with tenderers who demonstrate behaviours and business practices aligned with the charter and that remain compliant with their obligations under the Secure Local Jobs Code. The evaluation includes criteria that assess whether employment and safety outcomes for workers will be protected, which provides an important mechanism for assessing and identifying potential psychosocial hazards and their impact on worker safety.

Incorporating reporting requirements relevant to the motion to identify incidences of harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based violence continues to be complex. Work is underway to engage with key stakeholders across government to fully appreciate the complex legal, privacy and policy impacts that arise with additional reporting requirements. This will support consultation across a broader network to determine the most effective and appropriate mechanisms to respond to the recommendations within the procurement framework.

Additional reporting obligations would need to be balanced against the costs of centralising management and implementing a new ICT capability to meet the policy objective of the motion, with careful consideration given to the privacy and confidentiality aspects of the reporting mechanism.

Through this collective action across government, we will work together to bring to fruition improvements to our regulatory frameworks, our business and policy

practices to ensure the safety of all workers in the ACT and eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace. I present the following paper:

Work health and safety—Psychosocial hazards—Government response to the resolution of the Assembly of 30 March 2021—12 month update—Ministerial statement, 6 April 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (11.32): Just this morning, Mr Gentleman stood up and spruiked that the Labor Party are the party of workers, how good they are at standing up for Canberra’s workers, and yet we know that under the watch of this Labor-Greens government hardworking teachers and hardworking nurses have absolutely been abandoned.

The minister, in his statement, said:

Psychological injury impacts the health, wellbeing and financial security of workers and their families.

As if his woeful attempt at trying to defend the indefensible this morning was not bad enough, he delivered this pre-prepared speech without even a hint of irony, literally minutes after he had just voted to not protect Canberra’s teachers.

When he stands up and says that his government is addressing workplace health and safety issues without even a hint of irony, you just have to wonder what are the priorities when it comes to protecting Canberra’s workers, including our teachers and our nurses? He really should be ashamed of himself.

It is not just the Canberra Liberals that are saying it. Because, clearly, Mr Gentleman has not read the media release from the Education Union, I will remind him of part of what it says.

The action taken by the ACT’s work safety regulator is a damning indictment on the ACT Education Directorate and starkly highlights their failure to provide a safe workplace for our members and a safe school for their students. Since the AEU first raised safety concerns around the dire circumstances confronting staff and students at the Calwell site in 2021, the Education Directorate has continually failed to recognise and act effectively to address serious ongoing staff shortages, oversized classes and instances of occupational violence.

It goes on:

The fact that it takes a staff member to be seriously injured and the intervention of an external regulator to provide a degree of safety for the staff and students at Calwell High School demonstrates a lack of care on the part of the Education Directorate. Regrettably, the situation at Calwell High School is not an isolated case. With the union receiving staff shortage SOS calls from school staff across Canberra on a daily basis, we anticipate further interventions will and must occur.

These are Canberra's workers that, apparently, Mr Gentleman and his government look out for and indeed, as he says, are the party for. It is not just our teachers, though, is it, Madam Assistant Speaker? It is our nurses. I quote from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation ACT:

On the back of so many assaults and with no sign of the government intervening to provide a safe work environment, one nurse has described working at the facility "like being sent into the killing fields".

Another quote:

The situation at Dhulwa has not changed since the ANMF first raised safety and culture issues back in 2018 and it is well past the time for a significant intervention by government to keep our nurses safe.

And another quote:

Nurses and midwives across the public health system are fed up with the ACT government for not responding to their safety and workload concerns, but the situation at Dhulwa represents a particularly serious example of the government's failure to respond where there is an imminent risk of a catastrophic event.

And another quote:

The government seems content to stand by while poor governance, confused patient management, inconsistent and opaque systems of work, appalling HR practices and toxic relationships have created an environment where occupational violence has become business as usual at Dhulwa.

This is a government that is allowing our hardworking teachers and our hardworking nurses to work in an environment that is unsafe. For this minister to come into this place and read out a pre-prepared statement spruiking, apparently, what his government is doing to keep Canberrans safe would be laughable if it were not so serious. Perhaps the minister, instead of standing there blindly reading pre-prepared statements and trying woefully to defend the indefensible, could actually take stock of the reality of the horrific work conditions that are being faced by our teachers and our nurses. Shame on Mr Gentleman and shame on this Labor-Greens government.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.38): I rise to thank Minister Gentleman for his ongoing commitment to improving workplace health and safety in our fine city and, in particular, addressing psychosocial risks in the workplace.

I would like to speak specifically about some of the psychosocial risks being experienced by nurses, particularly our mental health nurses in this city. Nursing is an incredibly hard job, even at the best of times, and mental health nursing is particularly complex. Over the past two years, those pressures have only increased, with the

impacts of this pandemic on our workforce and the fact that they are serving a community who are all feeling incredibly stressed and are having a really, really hard time.

I know from having listened to friends who are nurses and midwives over the years just how hard their job is. When you are sitting with a midwife who has had a truly heartbreaking day at work, when you are sitting with a friend who is a nurse in an ED ward who is talking about the pressures of what it is like every shift, when you are listening to friends who are nurses in secure mental health facilities who have experienced occupational violence, you know that it is a really, really difficult job, and I thank all of them for the work that they are doing.

Everyone deserves to have a safe and healthy workplace. When someone has the courage to speak up about safety it is important that we listen, and I am listening. I met with nurses from Dhulwa last week and I heard and understood their concerns. Staff are feeling that they are not respected and not valued. It is important for us to address this, and that is what we would like to do. I have offered to continue those discussions about a process for how we can improve people's feelings of safety in their workplace, as well as addressing some of those occupational violence issues.

I also note the language that has been used by some in the media and that was repeated by Ms Lee today about killing fields. In a week when we are seeing news about what is happening in Ukraine and we are hearing from the public hearings of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, that kind of language is particularly strong. I would expect that it reflects how strongly people are feeling about their situation at the moment.

But I would also like to quote Margaret Atwood, who said:

War is what happens when language fails.

This is why it is so important that we are able to continue working with representatives for employees to better understand what it is that people are experiencing in their workplace and to work through a process of how we can make those workplaces safer. As long as they are able to continue working through this with us, I am confident that we will be able to find those solutions together.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.41): It is startling to me that, minutes after Ms Lee introduced a no confidence motion to the Assembly for the Minister of Education and Youth Affairs, for failing to keep students, teachers and communities safe, this Labor-Greens government have got up and given themselves a nice pat on the back for their contribution to work health and safety.

Everything is A-okay, apparently, according to the Labor-Greens spokesman this morning. Minister Gentleman, the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, voted the Canberra Liberals' no confidence motion down. His statement this morning spruiking his achievements in work health and safety ignored completely the distressing events at Calwell High School and the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit.

I challenge anyone to find anything at all in his ministerial statement resembling concern for teachers, students or parents at Calwell High School, or the nurses at the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit. I challenge anyone to find something of significance to what is actually happening in Canberra this week. Minister, this is almost a work of fiction. It was mentioned a bit earlier: are you in touch with reality? This statement proves that you are not.

**Mr Gentleman:** Point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. The standing orders call for members to direct their comments through the chair, not directly to members of the Assembly.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Orr):** Yes. Mr Cain, I request that you direct your comments to me, as the chair, not to other members of the Assembly.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Madam Assistant Speaker, the minister is not in touch with reality and I challenge anyone to pull out of this report something that resembles a concern or a solution, or even an acknowledgement of what is happening in Calwell High School or the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit.

Out of touch with reality—this is actually representative of this government. I said yesterday afternoon, in an adjournment moment, that this is the worst service delivery government the territory has had. Across the board, in health, in education, in basic infrastructure like roads and footpaths, we are seeing failure after failure. But what we are also seeing accompanying that is no acknowledgement that anything is wrong: “There is nothing to fix.”

We have got these wonderful schemes and surveys. The minister does not need a survey, as mentioned in his ministerial statement, to find out what is going on at Calwell High School. How about he goes there and sees what the workplace is like? How about he goes to the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit to see what it is like, or is he just going to wait for a survey? Where is the reality here? A reality check is needed. A government that cannot deliver real results and real protections for the community does not deserve to be in government.

I do not care how many high-sounding rhetorical statements or ministerial statements we get that “everything is okay” and “here is what we are doing”. If it is not actually dealing with what is happening in Canberra, it is both irrelevant and insulting to the people of this great city. I am astounded, really, that the minister could not even find time in a pre-prepared statement to add some sympathy for the teachers and students at Calwell High School. Does he even care about what is happening there? You could not tell from what he said this morning. You could not tell, Madam Assistant Speaker, whether he had any care at all for the nurses at the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit.

Find a reference, please. Maybe there is a little sense of sympathy and concern and real interest for Canberrans who are doing it very tough at the moment in those two places. It is not just the nurses in their workplace or the teachers and students at that school but all those families that are connected to them, and their friends. There is a

broad community of impact here. The minister could not even express a sense of concern for them, except high-sounding and general statements.

I was a teacher for just over 20 years, in both the public and the non-government sector, teaching maths and more broadly across different curriculums in three different states. I have never encountered anything resembling what we have heard about at Calwell High School. It is astounding. It is happening in the capital of this great country. It is not some disadvantaged, constantly strife-torn area of the world; it is in the capital of Australia. It is in a very prosperous city. It is a very well-resourced city. The tax base the government has to draw on is very generous and yet we are seeing a failure that I never thought I would ever hear of, not just in this city but in this country.

The lack of support and outright disinterest from this Labor-Greens government, including all those who spoke to the no confidence motion and in support of Minister Gentleman's ministerial statement, is distressing to me. Canberrans need to take note of this. Are they actually concerned with what is happening on the ground?

We saw the media release on the nurse safety issue at Dhulwa and we have got the unions, both the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and the teachers' union, expressing grave concerns about the management of our schools and the mental health unit. Normally, you would think they would be strongly supportive of this government, the Labor-Greens government, but the extremity of behaviour and concern has driven even them to express outrage. Shame on you.

The government has known about concerns at the mental health unit since 2018, and at the high school since before then as well. I cannot believe that this morning this minister had no space in a ministerial statement on workplace health and safety to accommodate some statements about Calwell High School and the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit. Shame on you, Minister. Shame on 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) (11.48), in reply: I am deeply troubled by the remarks from those opposite regarding this ministerial statement. This update is, in part, to address important reforms, including the ACT government's response to the Australian Human Rights Commission's respected national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces that was tabled in this Assembly in August last year. I am disappointed that the Canberra Liberals' position on this reflects the federal Liberal government's approach to this important issue.

**Mr Cain:** Nonsense. It reflects the concerns of Canberrans.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Orr): Mr Cain, you were heard in silence. You can hear other people in silence. Pay them the same courtesy.

Question resolved in the affirmative.



## **Courts—government support**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong-Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.49): I rise today to provide an update to members of the Assembly on the government's support for the ACT courts. Almost two years into this government's term, and two years into a global pandemic, there have been a number of initiatives and improvements progressed within my portfolio as Attorney-General to improve the ACT courts to ensure that they are appropriately and readily equipped to respond to the community's needs.

In doing so, this government has also swiftly progressed a range of reforms to support the operation and performance of the courts. I am going to speak to some of those matters today to highlight and demonstrate the ability of the executive and the judiciary to work productively together whilst respecting the separation of powers, to ensure that the ACT's justice system is resilient, agile and well placed to meet the evolving needs of the Canberra community.

The last few years have been challenging, with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic rippling across our entire community, and with these impacts also felt throughout our justice system. COVID-19 prompted immediate changes to court processes across the globe, and the ACT courts were no exception. COVID-19 led to a range of measures being quickly implemented by the ACT courts to support social distancing and reduce the spread of the virus. Where feasible, essential court and tribunal operations continued, using a range of technologies such as video and telephone conferencing. I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the courts in successfully navigating this challenging time and continuing to deliver justice services to the Canberra community.

The restrictions imposed by the pandemic led to a slowing of court operations and a slowing of finalisation rates, which inevitably resulted in a backlog in cases accumulating in the Magistrates Court, the court of highest volume. To enable the court to respond to this growing backlog, this government appointed special magistrates in 2020 to assure judicial capacity and enhance listing flexibility, and committed additional resources through the 2021-22 budget to assist in addressing the backlog of cases. The government also increased the number of acting judges, providing the Supreme Court with better flexibility and more options during the period of the Sydney lockdown. This demonstrates the government's commitment and acknowledgement of the resourcing needs of the court.

Improving court efficiency and meeting the resourcing needs of the ACT courts is a key priority for the ACT government. In September 2021, as part of the 2021-22 ACT budget, the government announced \$3.8 million of additional funding for the ACT courts for the appointment of a dedicated coroner and support staff, and for additional special magistrate resources to help reduce the backlog of cases arising from the ongoing pandemic restrictions. This additional funding will provide the ACT Magistrates Court with the judicial resources needed to manage its workload.

Critically, the resourcing will enhance the timeliness and consistency of approach in coronial matters.

Throughout 2021 and 2022 this government also supported the courts by progressing a number of key appointments. The government was particularly pleased to welcome the new Chief Justice, Lucy McCallum, who commenced in the role earlier in March. This makes Her Honour the ACT's sixth Chief Justice of the ACT Supreme Court and the second woman to take on the role.

In addition to this, the government has appointed a new resident judge for the ACT Supreme Court and two new magistrates to the ACT Magistrates Court, including one who will be the ACT's first dedicated coroner. The government also recently announced the resident judge to replace Justice Elkaim upon his retirement in late 2022, minimising the impact on the Supreme Court that might have been created from this vacancy.

These judicial recruitment processes progressed by the executive are rigorous and are conducted in strict accordance with the legislated requirements of the relevant determinations, such as the Magistrates Court (Magistrates Appointment Requirements) Determination 2009, the Magistrates Court (Special Magistrates Appointment Requirements) Determination 2015 (No 1) and the Supreme Court (Resident Judges Appointment Requirements) Determination 2015. These determinations set out the selection process and criteria for these judicial officer roles, as established by the executive and as required under their respective primary legislation.

As is the process for judicial recruitment campaigns, nominations are sought from the local legal profession, including the Law Society of the ACT and the ACT Bar Association, within the courts, from community legal centres and also from my counterparts interstate. The ACT's judicial recruitment processes continue to attract strong candidates from across the nation due to the reputation of our courts and the liveability of our city. We are in a privileged position here in the ACT of having the opportunity to choose from a high calibre of applicants for appointment.

It continues to be my priority, as Attorney-General and first law officer for the ACT, to work closely with the Chief Justice and Chief Magistrate to proactively monitor and consider the judicial resourcing needs of the courts, to make sure each component is working effectively to support an effective justice system in the territory. The government acknowledges that the ACT's coronial process is a vital part of the judicial system that deserves ongoing focus. It is one of my priorities, as Attorney-General, to continuously improve the coronial system to ensure that cases are finalised as quickly and as sensitively as possible and that the benefits to the community of coronial recommendations for public health and safety improvements are realised.

Madam Speaker, as many members will know, the parliamentary and governing agreement for the Tenth Legislative Assembly committed to exploring the establishment of a dedicated full-time Coroner's Court, a commitment I am pleased to advise has been met. As mentioned, the 2021-22 ACT budget announcement included a \$3.2 million investment for the appointment of a dedicated coroner and support staff.

In February this year I was pleased to advise that, following a rigorous recruitment campaign, the government appointed the ACT's first dedicated coroner, esteemed ACT lawyer Mr Ken Archer, who commenced in this role on 15 March. Mr Archer will be supported by additional resourcing, also provided to the Coroner's Court through the 2021-22 ACT budget, and the family liaison officer, a 2020-21 budget-funded role which is critical in providing support to families and friends of loved ones who have passed, as they progress through the coronial system. I am delighted that a lawyer of Mr Archer's calibre will lead the ACT Coroner's Court into a new era, bringing a more restorative approach to the coronial process, making it more timely, inclusive and trauma informed for bereaved families and friends involved in inquests.

However, this government's commitment in this space does not end there. To make the coronial process more timely, inclusive and sensitive to the needs of grieving families, and as a corollary to this government's parliamentary and governing agreement commitment, the government also agreed to funding in the 2021-22 budget midyear review to engage an independent facilitator to conduct a restorative coronial reform process and identify meaningful reform opportunities to the coronial process, including reforms to the ACT Coroner's Court. The government looks forward to working with the independent facilitator and other key stakeholders to ultimately bring about change to the ACT coronial system.

This government's support for efficient court operations can also be demonstrated through its commitment to progress courts law reform, such as the Courts and Other Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2021 passed by the Legislative Assembly in June last year. The act made both technical and more substantive amendments to improve access to justice and ensure the efficient operation of the ACT courts and tribunals. Each year, my directorate, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, works closely with the courts to identify legislative opportunities to promote efficiencies both within the courts and by users of the court, and will typically progress this legislative reform in the next calendar year.

The government's commitment to the operations of the courts has also been demonstrated through funding provided through the public-private partnership contract signed with Juris Partnership in October 2015 towards the new state-of-the-art law courts facility, which was completed in 2020. For me, one of the very important elements of this project is that the building respects and celebrates the heritage of the existing Supreme Court building, preserving its most iconic features, such as the marble facade, the oriental atrium and the golden commonwealth coat of arms, while now accommodating the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court, Magistrates Court and Childrens Court in the new four-storey link building.

Importantly, the new building provides enhanced justice support through additional courtrooms, hearing rooms, mediation suites, remote witness facilities, a combined custodial facility and updated jury deliberation rooms. The building has achieved a five-star green energy rating, with no shortage of natural light through the complex, an integrated heating and cooling plant arrangement and improved lighting systems which contribute to the energy efficiency of the new precinct. It is evident that the

government's investment in this space is to ensure that our justice system is the best that it can be.

The government has also progressed a number of other initiatives, including upgrading the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court room to support restorative and effective sentencing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders; funding the Drug and Alcohol Court for a further two years to deal more effectively with offending linked to serious drug and alcohol use; continuing criminal case conferencing in the ACT Supreme Court to confine the issue in dispute and improve overall efficiency; and continuing the Therapeutic Care Court for a further two years to provide intensive management and therapeutic support to parents involved in care and protection matters.

No doubt, there will be challenges faced by the ACT justice system in the coming years. The government will continue to support ACT courts to enable them to be ready to face these challenges with courage and resilience, and to ensure that our justice system is the best that it can be. The investment made by the ACT government in ACT courts, together with the key achievements I have outlined today, demonstrates the government's genuine and ongoing commitment to ACT courts to ensure that the justice system is accessible to all and protects the rights of those most vulnerable in our community. I present the following paper:

Supporting our Courts to deliver justice for the Territory—Ministerial statement, 6 April 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Disability—government strategy Ministerial statement**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (12.01): I am pleased today to provide an update to the Assembly on the ACT Disability Strategy 2021-2031. The ACT disability strategy is the ACT government's commitment to creating a more welcoming and inclusive society and improving the lives of the more than 80,000 Canberrans who identify as people with disability.

Importantly, it is a consultation which is being led by people with disability, for people with disability. It is based on “nothing about us without us”, which means that any conversation impacting the lives of people with disability must genuinely involve people with disability. This means trust in their voice, their views and their experiences to inform the ACT government's policy and initiatives.

People with disability know what needs to change, and we must listen and act so that more Canberrans can live with pride, support and dignity. Importantly, this process has been co-designed by the ACT Disability Reference Group to ensure that the consultation process has many accessible and varied opportunities for people to get involved and have their voices heard.

This includes public forums, listening surveys and kitchen table conversations so that people that you know and trust can get together to chat about what is important and share ideas. The Disability Reference Group will also have a critical role to hold the ACT government accountable in the implementation of the strategy, once it is developed, ensuring that people with disability, their families, carers and the sector have an oversight role.

The disability strategy will strengthen and support a range of other ACT government strategies and plans in progress or under development which aim to improve outcomes for people with disability, including the ACT disability justice strategy, the ACT disability health strategy, the inclusion in education strategy, ACT disability employment strategy and Canberra Health Services Disability Action and Inclusion Plan.

The ACT government is committed to co-designing the strategy with people with disability, the disability sector and the broader community. The consultation process officially launched on 31 March and will centre the voices of people with disability to deliver outcomes which benefit our whole community, not just those with disability.

By enabling and empowering people with disability to lead policy development, we can make sure that the ACT disability strategy is grounded in a wider range of information, ideas and perspectives, ensuring that the strategy best reflects local needs, strengthens people with disabilities' ownership and support for the work and ensures that people with disability can reinforce their rights at each step of the way.

Through the consultation period we will be using the disability and broader community's views to shape key priorities of the new ACT disability strategy. This includes creating a blueprint as to how we create an inclusive future, strengthening and consolidating the ACT's commitment to Australia's disability strategy, supporting the priorities of the national strategy whilst incorporating a local viewpoint which supports Canberrans with disability, and building on the achievements of previous and current ACT disability commitments.

This is an opportunity for genuine co-design. Canberrans with disability, their families, carers and the sector have been adaptive, flexible and creative to solve problems raised from climate change and natural disasters to the ongoing pandemic and economic disruption. We can all learn from people with disability, who have so often had to change the way they do things to fit in to our community.

Now is the time for us all to become more inclusive and accessible, to support people with disability, to remove the barriers they face and to create a Canberra where we can all live with pride, dignity and respect. I encourage all Canberrans to participate.

This is a significant moment for our friends, our family and our neighbours with disability to take leadership positions across every aspect of community life, which will only build a more equitable, connected and inclusive Canberra. I present the following paper:

ACT Disability Strategy—Ministerial statement, 6 April 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Sitting suspended from 12.05 to 2.00 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**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) (2.00): The Chief Minister is absent today, for personal reasons. I will take questions in his portfolio areas.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Education Directorate—Campbell Primary School procurement**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, you said you found out about the Campbell Primary School procurement issues when the Auditor-General's report was released in December last year. However, FOI documents show that you were briefed in May last year about potential issues with the procurement. Minister, when did you actually find out that there were issues with the procurement?

**MS BERRY:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. Yes, I was advised that there was an audit being conducted in Campbell. It was posted publicly online, as everyone will know. I was advised on the processes within the audit but not the details of the audit. When the audit report was released, in December, that was when I was informed on the detail in the audit report.

**MS LEE:** Minister, were you briefed on the Campbell Primary School procurement by your directorate before the Auditor-General's report was released?

**MS BERRY:** I am not quite sure what you mean.

**MS LEE:** I do not know how much clearer I can be. Were you briefed about the Campbell Primary School procurement by your directorate before the Auditor-General's report was released in December?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for that question. Of course I was aware that there was a procurement process for the Campbell Primary School work.

**MR HANSON:** I do not think it is funny, Minister. What have you done personally, as the minister responsible, about addressing these probity issues as soon as you found out—in December, or before?

**MS BERRY:** The Auditor-General conducted her report. The Education Directorate has adjusted some of its work around procurement. The government will respond to the Auditor-General’s report, and that will be tabled tomorrow.

### **Calwell High School—safety**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, what physical facilities at Calwell High School have been damaged as a result of the chaos and violence that contributed to WorkSafe ACT issuing a prohibition notice?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, are all of the safety systems, fire alarms and such, at Calwell High School currently in good working order?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I believe that they are.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, has additional funding already been provided to Calwell High School so that all damage to physical facilities and safety systems can be repaired? If not, when will this funding be provided?

**MS BERRY:** I have provided, at length, detail of the assistance and support that have been provided at Calwell High School last year, and following the incident, and in response to the WorkSafe notice. That work will continue, and I refer the member to my previous answer around safety systems. As far as I am aware, they are all in place and in order.

### **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit—safety**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, nurses at Dhulwa Mental Health Unit have reported more than 100 physical attacks in six months. They say that violence is the norm and liken going to work to being “sent into the killing fields”. The nurses union say that it has pleaded with the government to keep them safe and fear the government’s failure to respond could lead to a “catastrophic event”. The union has called on your government to conduct an urgent inquiry into violence and nurse safety at Dhulwa. How do you respond when our mental health nurses liken going to work to being “sent into the killing fields”?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for the question. It is incredibly important that when people are going to work every day that they feel safe. An enormous amount of work recently has been put into making sure that we improve safety at Dhulwa and at all of

our mental health facilities across our health system. I would hope to continue engaging with their representatives on this. He has got my number: call me maybe.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, will you conduct an urgent inquiry into the violence and nurse safety at Dhulwa, like the nurses' union has called for?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I would very much like to have that conversation with the nurses' union and I hope that they will be happy to engage in conversation with me soon.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what steps have you taken to improve safety at the site?

**MS DAVIDSON:** There have been ongoing improvements to training and support for staff, both in their ability to prevent and manage occupational violence in the workplace, in response to ongoing work that is being conducted across our health system to improve workplace safety and wellbeing for the staff who are so committed to making sure that we can achieve the best outcomes for patients in their care. That work is continuing to happen and we are continuing to engage with nurses there to make sure that their concerns are listened to and understood and that we can provide them with the support that they need for their ongoing development and wellbeing.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS DAVIDSON:** The practices are different across different health services—

**Ms Orr:** On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, it is very hard to hear with the interjections from the opposition. I would ask that we can hear the minister in silence.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** I think that is a fair call; if we can keep the noise down? Minister?

**MS DAVIDSON:** The way in which workplace procedures to reduce occupational violence are put into place is different across different mental health facilities, reflecting the different kinds of clinical care that are provided in each of those facilities. That is why it is so important that we engage with staff while we are working on improvements to how we care for people and reduce the risks to staff in those workplaces. That is what we are continuing to do.

## **Light rail—stage 2**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, what does the receipt of works approval from the National Capital Authority mean for the project to raise London Circuit?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her question. Last week the ACT government received notification that the National Capital Authority had provided works approval for the raising of London Circuit. The approval means that we can get on and commence raising London Circuit to form an at-grade intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. This will involve the staged demolition of the two bridges



that carry Commonwealth Avenue across London Circuit as well as the transfer of around 60,000 cubic metres of fill to raise the road six metres, providing a new direct connection from the city to the lake.

Two of the existing clover-leaf ramps will also be removed, with access routes via Edinburgh Avenue and Constitution Avenue channelling traffic to the city's west and east. The works will include new pedestrian footpath links and dedicated cycle lanes to make it easy for people to walk and cycle through the new precinct. The works approval also gave the green light to install traffic lights along Parkes Way westbound on Coranderrk Street to cut travel time for commuters coming from Canberra's south-west and from the north and Belconnen to the city. I am pleased to say that the procurement for raising London Circuit has commenced, and works are expected to get underway later this year in what will be the biggest change to the road network in our city's centre since the 1960s.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what benefits will this project provide to Canberrans?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her supplementary. This project is a great example of what we are working to achieve in transport right across Canberra. Spaces that work for public transport, walking and cycling just as well as they do for cars. The current intersection is one of the widest and hardest-to-access parts of the city, far away from the vibrancy that we see on other streets. We want to see the city's south become a more accessible and more activated part of the city, connected to the bustling new Acton precinct and a short walk to Commonwealth Park.

This project will turn a busy and hard-to-navigate road interchange into a more people-friendly place for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. It will support many of the additional infrastructure commitments that the ACT government has planned in the city centre, including the renewal of the Canberra Theatre precinct and the Acton boardwalk and is also a key precursor project for the extension of the light rail network across the lake to Woden. Once opened, this new intersection will also help to facilitate the release of new land for inner-city homes and new local businesses, which will support the first stage of a continuous connection from the city to the lake.

The project will also support hundreds of jobs in the construction as part of the ACT government's plan to create and protect local jobs by delivering infrastructure that is built for Canberra and built to support the city Canberrans want in the future.

**DR PATERSON:** A supplementary: Minister, how will the ACT government manage disruption during construction of this project?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question. The government has been very upfront with the community that raising London circuit and the following construction of light rail to Woden will cause considerable disruption to our road network. While early work will get underway this year, the most disruptive construction work on the project is likely to begin next year, in 2023. That is why we have been working for over a year now to prepare for this, through the disruption taskforce. But we need the community's help too. In the months to come we will be encouraging Canberrans to

rethink their routes and rethink their routine when it comes to travelling to and from the city.

This could be by travelling at a different time, using a different route or jumping onto public transport. We are supporting Canberrans to make these choices through investment in infrastructure, education and awareness raising. We are investing in more intelligent transport systems and monitoring technology like Bluetooth sensors and intersection cameras which allow us to surveil traffic flows and provide up-to-date information to Canberrans planning their journeys, and en route in a vehicle. We can make tactical interventions to help keep Canberrans moving.

We are about to open new Park and Rides at Mawson to make it easier for southsiders to connect to public transport and we will also soon commence installation of traffic lights on the Parkes Way roundabout at Coranderrk Street to help improve the traffic flow in and around the city during the construction. We will be announcing further disruption initiatives as we lead into the start of construction over the coming months, and we will also be communicating early and often.

**Ms Orr:** I have a point of order. It is on noise, again. It is very hard to hear the minister because they are directing their comments to you. When Mr Hanson and other members interject quite loudly it is very difficult for us to hear the response to the question.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** I ask that members contain themselves.

**MR STEEL:** We will be communicating early and often with Canberrans about what is coming up so that they can plan the routes and routines that are going to work for them during the construction of this important project.

### **Housing ACT—inspections**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, on 29 March it was reported that a mother was charged with neglecting her children while staying in a filthy Housing ACT home. The property was described by one person as “the worst house of squalor ever”. Someone else recalls “gagging due to the smell of rotten food and faeces” when they entered the home. The same person claims to have been traumatised by the mess and described it as a couple of years worth of accumulation of filth, with some rooms filled with piles of mess so high he could not access them. But according to Housing ACT the first signs of squalor emerged last September, when it was observed from outside the property that the curtains were completely black with mould. Minister, how did a couple of years worth of accumulated filth and literally floor to ceiling mess go unnoticed by your department?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, what responsibility do you bear for the children that you allowed to remain in this cesspool of a house for so long without it being detected?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mrs Kikkert for the question. I note that the ACT government has committed to invest \$80 million into the maintenance of Housing ACT property. I do not know the exact detail of the individuals that Mrs Kikkert is talking about, so I will take the detail of that question on notice. I might take some advice on whether or not that detail is able to be provided here publicly, in the Assembly. I will work with Mrs Kikkert's office on how that can be provided.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, how many times was this house inspected in the last three years and how many times did the housing manager actually enter the home?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

### **Play spaces—Aranda**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, I am pleased to see the Your Say consultation on the Aranda play space upgrade. I note there are four playgrounds in Aranda, and locals have asked me why the consultation is only looking at the playground in Banambila Street, which is not close to many houses. The other three are closer, and one of the others is also close to the school. Is there money available to upgrade any of the other three playgrounds as well as or instead of Banambila Street?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. At the election Labor committed to upgrade one playground in Aranda. We are getting on with that work of delivering the playground, starting with consultation with the community about the site for the playground upgrade.

The project will upgrade a centrally located, existing play space in the suburb. We want to provide a space for people of different ages and abilities. We want to hear from the community about that as well, as the design progresses. Consultation is currently open for the community to provide feedback on the play space in Aranda, and to provide their feedback on the location. As part of that, TCCS has already done some feasibility work, as you would expect, around potential sites. There are four play spaces within the Aranda community. We want to hear from the community about whether they agree with the preferred play spaces that have been shortlisted. Two have been shortlisted, which are the play spaces on Banambila Street and Jalanga Crescent.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, if the community want different playgrounds upgraded, how exactly should they tell government about that?

**MR STEEL:** As part of the consultation, we have the Your Say page. People can get in touch directly with the government via email. There is an online survey. There is also an active Q&A section. There will be a community pop-up session held tomorrow at Aranda playing fields, from 2 to 4 pm. There are opportunities to directly engage face to face with TCCS, and we have already had quite a strong response from the community, with 225 surveys completed.

Early indications from the consultation show that the preferred play space at Banambila Street playground is well used by the Aranda community—approximately 70 per cent of respondents—and more than 80 per cent of respondents to date are supportive of that location as the site for the upgrade. Of course, there is still time to have your say before 5 May. The community can come forward and give their views about where they would like to see this new play space upgrade occur.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Can you please provide an update on the consultation about the Casey recreational park?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. While it is not necessarily relevant to the original one, we are also consulting on the CRIP park—the recreational irrigated park. This will be a fantastic space for the community in Casey and the broader Gungahlin region. The concept plan has been released, because we have already undertaken consultation with the Casey community on this. That has helped to inform the development of a concept plan. We are seeking feedback on that plan at the moment. There is a Your Say page where people can give their feedback on what they would like to see—whether they agree with the designs, whether they would like to see changes to the designs before we finalise those and go into construction.

### **Public housing—disability access**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, the recent report on government services showed that only 59 per cent of those living with disability currently in public housing were satisfied with the amenity of their public housing. This is a drop of 10 per cent from previous years. Why is there such a big drop in satisfaction?

**MS BERRY:** This is exactly why the ACT government is conducting its growth and renewal program, to ensure that homes in the ACT actually meet the needs of their tenants. We have committed to an additional 1,000 renewed homes in the ACT. That will mean that people who have disabilities will be able to live in homes that specifically meet their needs—class C adaptable as a minimum—to ensure that they can age in space and that their abilities and disabilities are noted as far as their housing choices.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, how many times are houses inspected to ensure that they are up to the right standard?

**MS BERRY:** It can depend on the housing tenant's needs. Sometimes those visits will occur more regularly; sometimes they will not need to occur at all in a shorter period of time. If Mr Milligan has a specific circumstance that he wants to have investigated, if he can contact my office, we can do that.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, can you outline how the housing renewal project will make public housing more inclusive to meet tenants' needs in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for that supplementary question. It is really important that we make sure that as we build new homes in the ACT for public housing tenants they are accessible and meet the needs of individual tenants, that they replace older, unsustainable and unsuitable homes with more sustainable, affordable homes that are class C adaptable and meet the needs of our tenants. It is an important part of the Housing ACT growth and renewal program: 1,000 new homes in the next four years to replace older, unsustainable homes, and it will make a difference to Housing ACT tenants who live in those homes. Making adjustments to existing properties, including handrails, ramps and bathroom facilities is also an important part of the ACT government's maintenance program.

### **Housing ACT—renewal program**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, regarding the public housing growth and renewal program tenant relocation saga, the ACT Council of Social Service issued a media release on Monday stating that you and Minister Vassarotti had agreed to review the process by which highly vulnerable public housing tenants can receive a discretion that allows them to remain in their homes. In addition, ACTCOSS said:

We note that in the meeting on Friday the Ministers directed Housing ACT to review the arrangements for granting discretion.

In the *Canberra Times* last Tuesday, you denied that any such review has been agreed to. Minister, clearly one of these statements is incorrect and, surely, someone is lying. Can you please tell us exactly what is the truth on this matter?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Lawder for the question. Yes, there was a meeting between me, Ms Vassarotti, the Director General, Deputy Director General and two chiefs of staff of the offices with ACTCOSS, including Emma Campbell and the ACTCOSS board chair, Jeremy Halcrow on Friday, 1 April, which was the Friday just past. We had assurances from ACTCOSS at the meeting that it supports the ACT government's policy direction and the growth and renewal program.

We raised concerns around the morning's media release from ACTCOSS that it could cause—and, unfortunately, has caused—uncertainty and some confusion for affected tenants. We wanted to clarify that at that meeting we did not agree to a review of the implementation of the growth and renewal program. We did, however, agree that Housing ACT would continue to refine and better articulate processes for tenants seeking exemptions from inclusion in a program, and for the provision of on-going relocation support so that these processes can be better understood by tenants.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, how could ACTCOSS have possibly formed the clear and unambiguous view conveyed in their media release?

**MS BERRY:** I suspect that that would be a question for Ms Lawder to ask ACTCOSS.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, with your renewal program, do you think it is fair to wreck peoples' lives by uprooting them from homes they have had for almost a lifetime?

**MS BERRY:** This is the second part of a public housing growth and renewal program. We previously went through a renewal program of 1,288 dwellings, where people were assisted to move into new and more sustainable homes that better suit their needs all across the city. They were moved out of old, unsustainable, hard-to-heat, hard-to-cool, expensive homes and were worked with personally in detail to ensure that they had a choice of where in the city they wanted to live.

Some people moved from the inner-city right out into the south or the north of Canberra into the suburbs into new and different homes. Some people decided that they wanted to stay in the city, so they moved into the north and the south of the city area. This has been a really important program to make sure that our homes meet the needs of Housing ACT tenants but also that we can build even more properties that meet the needs of Housing ACT tenants. It is simply unfair for individuals to be living in a home of three or four bedrooms on a massive block when we have larger families or individuals who need homes. We have a significant waiting list. The way that we can address that is by building homes, and that is what this growth and renewal program is all about.

But I want to reassure tenants in the ACT who are being asked to move from their homes that they will be supported. I encourage them to talk with their housing tenant relocation officers—to have that conversation in the first instance, to not be fearful of that, and to understand that they will be supported before, during and after any move from their existing homes. They will be worked with individually on where they will live once they are relocated from their existing homes. This work is being supported by organisations ACT Shelter, Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service, Legal Aid, as well as the ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—detainee rehabilitation**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, can you please explain how ACT Corrective Services supports the rehabilitation of every detainee who goes through the AMC?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Corrective Services have been working hard to improve outcomes for detainees. This work has included some recent improvements to the integrated offender management framework. This has included the commencement of a new criminogenics program, EQUIPS, which works with detainees on aggression, family violence, addiction and general offending. A reintegration assessment tool ensures that all detainees exiting AMC will have their needs assessed and mapped. There is referral to the reintegration team if there is high need, CatholicCare for low needs and Yeddung Mara as culturally determined.

We have seen the introduction of designated pre-release planners to work with detainees seven months prior to their earliest release dates. There is one assigned to

women, working closely with the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot to skill up in contemporary assessment and safety management. All existing female detainees with a history of FDV will be screened using the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot risk assessment tool and, where assessed as high risk, will be referred to the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot.

So there is quite a bit going on. We also have the expansion of the peer mentoring program. There is five-minute intervention training. Train the Trainer will commence with a UK-based expert in April, aimed at improving case management and communication skills for custodial staff. Amovita International supervision and case management training for offender reintegration and community corrections staff is happening as well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** What proportion of detainees finish the EQUIPS program?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I will have to take that on notice. I do not have the detail of that in front of me.

**MS CLAY:** How does the government assist every detainee who exits AMC to reintegrate into the community?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It is through the programs that I have talked about there, and providing assistance in wraparound services for detainees. I think the crucial part is ensuring that we can find accommodation for detainees when they come out of AMC. This has been put to me through the interactions that I have had with detainees at different levels of their confinement and also from those wanting to assist detainees. The OVs have given us a good description of this as well. It seems that if there is a really good opportunity to provide good accommodation for those coming out and if there is more work put in through that process with detainees, it ensures that they can be safe in the community as they exit.

### **Housing ACT—rental rebate**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, as you would be aware, in the last six weeks several constituents have contacted the Canberra Liberals relating to their rental rebate. Each of these constituents is on a pension or Centrelink payment, and their usual rent was not deducted from their account; rather, the full market rent was deducted, leaving them with no money for a week or two. Minister, can you explain why this has occurred multiple times?

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Mr Acting Speaker, I will respond to this question, because it does sit within my area of responsibility. As you would know, a rental rebate is an ACT government subsidy that helps an eligible client to meet the cost of renting their public housing property. There has been a review of the rebate process that recommended several changes to the process to make it easier for clients and more effective for staff. In the past the process was that housing managers processed those rental rebates. To make it easier for everyone, there is now a dedicated team that processes all of the rebates received by Housing ACT. This is an important change

because it has eased the administrative workload of client service officers, housing practitioners and housing managers, and provided more time to help and support clients with other matters.

As with any change, there have been a few issues with the transition. Unfortunately, it appears that some rebate applications were missed or were sent off to an incorrect area or team for processing. There were a few instances where Housing ACT has missed the processing of the rebate, and that has been actioned as a priority. Once this was identified, the actions that have occurred have included a refund via direct deposit into a client's bank account, issuing an emergency assistance voucher for groceries or a referral and link to a community service partner who may be able to assist. We recognise that it has created stress and issues for some clients who have unfortunately been impacted by this, and we will continue to make sure that the process is working smoothly and that we respond to any issues that we identify as quickly as we can.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, how often are tenants required to fill in a rental rebate?

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Thank you for the question. I will take that question on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why are you exacerbating the cost of living crisis for these tenants by wrongly deducting from their accounts in such a heartless way?

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Thank you for the question. I really disagree that we are trying to exacerbate it. We are actually trying to make the process easier and smoother, so we can provide additional support for clients on a range of issues. It is really unfortunate that in the transition there were some tenants that were impacted. We are sorry for that impact, and we aimed to respond as quickly as we could to ensure that that impact was minimised.

### **Old Bus Depot Markets—reopening**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for the Arts. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the reopening of the Old Bus Depot Markets in Kingston on Sunday, 20 March?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. Like many of us here, I have been eagerly looking forward to the reopening of the Old Bus Depot Markets over the last 18 months. This popular Sunday attraction is housed in the former transport depot in Kingston, which has been impacted by a series of events over the past two years, including the devastating hailstorm which wreaked havoc across the facility and destroyed over 200 skylights, followed by the impact of COVID on the renovation program and the viability of public gatherings and, finally, delays resulting from the discovery of lead dust. Through it all the ACT government has worked productively with the Old Bus Depot Markets owners and stallholders to create a more functional and safer community space to realise the historical location's full potential.

The Old Bus Depot Markets successfully recommenced trading on Sunday, 20 March to resoundingly positive community and stallholder feedback, with, I believe, around 4,000 people in attendance. It has reclaimed its well-deserved position as a Sunday



tradition for Canberra locals and visitors alike. I was able to pop into the markets while the stallholders were setting up on that Sunday, but there was already a huge crowd, I can happily report, and the building was abuzz with activity.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what changes can shoppers expect from the reopened markets?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. The ACT government has invested a \$5.9 million package of building refurbishments to improve the safety, accessibility and sustainability of the former transport depot, which has now been completed. That includes the provision of a new roof, electrical system, a toilet facility and accessibility upgrades. One of the valuable upgrades is the construction of a new accessible path linking the fitters workshop to the former transport depot lower hall toilet entry, which enables hirers of the fitters workshop to use the depot toilets rather than hiring portable facilities. The depot building access system can be programmed to enable external access to the toilets without allowing access to the rest of the depot building. This is, of course, a great addition for the community events being held in the area.

The reopening of the markets on Sunday, 20 March saw the return of many familiar stallholders but also included some new faces among the fresh produce, the diverse cuisines, and the arts and crafts on offer. The event organisers also flagged new trading hours of 9.30 am to 2.30 pm in response to stallholder and community feedback.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what has been the community response to the highly anticipated return of the Old Bus Depot Markets?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. As I mentioned, the market operator reported close to 4,000 people at the site on Sunday, 20 March, which represents one of the largest attendances ever recorded at the event. The second weekend's trading was similarly strong and well-attended. The market stallholders, I am told, are very pleased to be trading once again. The site manager for the event, Richard Vagi, reported that he received very positive feedback about the refurbished building, including praise for the new, easy to use suspended power supply points for stallholders, as well as having the newly painted facade which provides an attractive entrance to the building.

The most positive feedback that has been received was about the refurbished toilets in the lower and upper halls—stallholders and visitors have commented what a difference the improvements have made—including changes to make the facilities fully accessible and providing a change table, which is a much-needed convenience for parents visiting the markets.

The lead dust remediation work is now almost complete. There are just minor works associated with the management of lead paint scheduled for completion by November. The stallholder reimbursement process is substantially complete and, when finalised, will complete this \$2.2 million package of works. The stallholders have been positive and very cooperative during this reimbursement process, which was established to

ensure reimbursement for those who were impacted by contaminated equipment or stock.

I give my sincere thanks to artsACT. We have received feedback from stallholders about the caretaking during this process, the sensitivity of staff and their attention to detail. The former transport depot is now ready for many years of market trading and other community events ahead.

**Ms Berry:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

## **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

### **Housing ACT—rental rebate**

**MS VASSAROTTI:** In response to the question about how often a rebate is assessed, generally it would be 12 months, where all income earners in the household receive at least one or a combination of Centrelink age pension, Centrelink disability support pension, veterans' service pension or superannuation. In other circumstances it is generally granted for a six-month period and regularly reviewed. Obviously, if people's circumstances change, such as a change of income, it is also reviewed.

### **Play spaces—Aranda**

**MR STEEL:** In question time I was asked about consultation on the Aranda play space upgrades. Just to correct one thing I said: the pop-up that was scheduled for tomorrow—not today—will be postponed until 27 April due to anticipated heavy rain.

## **Answers to questions on notice**

### **Question Nos 506 and 647**

**MRS KIKKERT:** Under standing order 118A, I seek an explanation from the Minister for Mental Health as to why question 647, taken on notice more than 30 days ago, has not been answered within the 30-day time frame.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for bringing that to my attention. I will find out and get back to you as soon as I possibly can. In response to Ms Castley's bringing to my attention yesterday question 506, I can assure you that it will be with you shortly. It has been working its way through the process of collecting information from multiple different directorates.

**Ms Lawder:** I have a point of order. The standing order quite clearly says that there should be an explanation, satisfactory to the member, as to why the answer has not been provided. This is not an explanation. Could you ask the minister to be directly relevant as to why the question has not been answered yet.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Lawder. Your words and your reference to that standing order should be noted, but I think in this instance the minister has provided an explanation—

**Mrs Kikkert:** On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, as per standing order 118A(c) the minister has failed to provide an answer, an explanation or a statement to my question 647, particularly since we did follow up with her last sitting about this unanswered question taken on notice. She said that she was going to get back to me at that time. This morning we checked with chamber support; they did not receive the answer.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs Kikkert. In line with that particular standing order, Minister, I wonder, are you able to provide an explanation as to why the response to the question has been so late?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Yes. Thank you very much for that. I do remember being asked about this in the last sitting period. I went upstairs that afternoon and checked on where it was at. I understood that it was working its way through the process, and you would have received it within the following 24 hours. I came back downstairs at the end of the day and provided that advice. If you have still not received it, I will follow it up and find out where things have gone wrong.

**Mrs Kikkert:** There were two questions that I raised on that day. The minister did say she was going to provide me with answers to those two questions. One of them is outstanding.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** Mrs Kikkert, we could go backwards and forwards here all day. You have it within your power to move a motion, as I understand it, to request a more detailed answer from the minister.

**MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (2.44):** Pursuant to standing order 118(c), I move:

That this Assembly note that the Minister for Mental Health has failed to provide an answer to question on notice No 647 by the due date and has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for that failure.

It is quite disappointing that the Minister for Mental Health cannot tell the chamber why she cannot explain why question 647 is unanswered. The question was about the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit, including the number of staff, the job title, the work classification and employment type, and workload. In particular, we were asking questions about how many nurses and patients at Dhulwa had been assaulted.

It is very insulting to the nurses at Dhulwa that she has not been able to answer this question, especially since today, in a *Canberra Times* article, nurses reported more than 100 physical assaults over six months at Dhulwa Mental Health Unit. That was from the unions. They have said that nurses liken working at the facility to being sent into the killing fields. We asked this question over a month ago and it seems to me that the ACT government is trying to hide some really important information that the nurses and the public deserve answers to.

**MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (2.46):** As Mrs Kikkert has quite clearly outlined, we deserve an explanation. The standing orders are quite clear that an explanation should

be provided. Saying something along the lines of “I will look into it,” is in no way an explanation. This government, shamefully, has a history of trying to hide information. An answer to a question on notice has been withheld, despite being raised last sitting. It was not just today or yesterday; the question was raised last sitting period, and still there has been no action from the minister on this matter. I commend Mrs Kikkert for trying to follow it up because, clearly, the minister has a vested interest in not releasing this information. She should be ashamed of herself. Members on the whole government side should be ashamed of themselves.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (2.47): I support Mrs Kikkert’s motion today. We read in the paper about the shameful condition that our nurses have to work in at Dhulwa. The minister should have the answer to these questions that Mrs Kikkert has raised. We found those answers through the union today. We know that the minister had these answers because the union contacted the minister about this information last week, when she had her conversations with the union. She has still been unable to answer Mrs Kikkert’s questions. It is disappointing and a disgrace. Our nurses deserve better from this government.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (2.48): Can I just seek clarification on what the motion actually is? What is the wording of the motion?

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** We are operating here under standing order 118A(c), where any—

**MR RATTENBURY:** I have read the standing order. Motions require specific wording. I am seeking to understand the wording. What is the actual wording of the motion we are being asked to agree to?

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** My understanding is—and I think Mrs Kikkert was quite clear in her simple motion—that it is seeking an explanation from the minister as to the lateness of the response to that question. That is my understanding. Is your query about the fact that this is not a written motion?

**MR RATTENBURY:** No. If the wording in the motion is to seek an explanation, are we to agree to it? I do not understand, grammatically, how it is going to work.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** The advice that I have received from the Clerk is that although this motion does not call upon the government to do anything, if it is passed it will be noted.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (2.49): If I understand it correctly, I am being asked to provide an answer to a question that was overdue and brought to my notice in the last sitting period. As I said when I came downstairs that afternoon, my understanding is that the response to that question had been signed off and should have been with the member within the 24 hours after that happened. If that has not arrived, I will find out and provide an answer for her.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (2.50), in reply: In closing, I am dumbfounded by the minister's response because I said that there were two questions that I had asked. She answered one question; however, the particular question on Dhulwa Mental Health Unit was left unanswered. We checked this morning with chamber support just in case we had missed something. They confirmed that that question has not been answered at all. The minister still needs to provide an answer, under standing orders, to our question taken on notice. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Burch for today and tomorrow for CPA business.

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

That leave of absence by granted to Mr Davis for today for health reasons.

## **Public schools—funding**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (2.52): I move:

That:

(1) this Assembly notes that:

- (a) according to Table 4A.14 in the latest Productivity Commission Report on Government Services, the ACT Government has cut real expenditure per full-time equivalent student in public schools by 3.3 percent during the period 2010-11 to 2019-20;
- (b) during the same reporting period, the Australian Federal Government funding to ACT public schools has increased by 42 percent; and
- (c) during the decade reporting period, a critical shortage in teacher shortage, resources and infrastructure has emerged in the ACT;

(2) in the Assembly committee inquiry into the Auditor-General's report on teacher quality, it was discovered that:

- (a) teacher shortages were causing many classes to be combined, putting staff at risk, with teachers fearing for their safety in classes of up to 60;
- (b) many staff did not have the time resources to do their job effectively;
- (c) many teachers spent time assisting families with accessing support for their mental health, housing problems, medical issues and other welfare concerns;
- (d) some schools do not have a school library or staff room because the space has been converted to classroom spaces while others were teaching in modified corridor spaces;

- (e) not all staff had access to the technology they needed to do their work, especially casual teachers and learning support assistants;
  - (f) many teachers were unable to attend professional learning due to staffing shortages;
  - (g) Worksafe is currently investigating an ACT school over safety and teacher number concerns; and
  - (h) these are long standing, systemic issues due to ACT Government decisions; and
- (3) this Assembly calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) stop the funding cuts to ACT public schools;
  - (b) determine and publish the exact number of teachers needed in the ACT, and the areas in which they are required;
  - (c) deliver the 400 new teachers promised in the 2020 ACT election; and
  - (d) accelerate the infrastructure program to provide adequate learning space and resources for all teachers, relief teachers and support staff.

This motion is, in many ways, is a simple one. It is to get this government to do what it should always have done—that is, to provide the right amount of resources to our frontline teachers. I think we saw the evidence today, in the quotes from the union about what has happened at Calwell School, that that simply is not happening.

Members, if you go to the latest Productivity Commission report on government services and have a look at table 4A.14, you will see that, in the reporting period of that ROGS report, this government has cut real expenditure per FTE student in public schools by 3.3 per cent during the period 2010-11 to 2019-20. That is not some random period. That is the period that is articulated in that table in the latest ROGS report. In that 10-year period, real funding, FTE, per student in public schools, has been cut by this ACT government.

Incidentally, in that same period, funding to schools has increased by 42 per cent from the federal coalition government. They are the facts. So unless Ms Berry or one of the other members here is going to say that the Productivity Commission is lying, then it is there in black and white that they have cut funding.

**Ms Berry:** I have a point of order. The member of the opposition has accused the government of lying. That is unparliamentary and he should withdraw.

**MR HANSON:** On the point of order, what I said specifically was that these are the facts in black and white and that, unless the minister or someone else is going to accuse the Productivity Commission of lying, then those facts stand. I have not said that she has lied; I said that the only way that she could prove that those facts were unreal would be to accuse the Productivity Commission of lying.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Hanson. There is no point of order.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. These are the facts. When you see the tables, facts, figures and budgets as laid out by the Productivity Commission today and over a number of years, you see where the rubber hits the road and what that means for teachers, children and parents. The stories that we have heard coming out are disturbing. A report was put out by the Australian Education Union, titled *Under-staffed, under-resourced, under-appreciated: The teacher shortage and its impact on our schools*. This was put out some time ago. The title was *Under-staffed, under-resourced, under-appreciated*, but who are they under-appreciated by?—this government, obviously. We saw that today.

The report laid out what was going wrong and the intense frustration that parents, teachers and their union are feeling with the government. Let me quote from that report:

Our members, who are in classrooms every day, overwhelmingly identify under-resourcing that appears systemic.

This is not some isolated incident. This is not some passing issue. As I said, this is a report that says that under-resourcing appears systemic. The overwhelming view expressed by 85 per cent of respondents—and these are teachers—is that the ACT government Education Directorate lacks the necessary resources to meet the demands of the public school system. Almost all—that is 98 per cent—of our school leaders who responded to the survey believe staff absences are undermining teachers' capacity to consistently deliver high-quality education. Classroom teachers feel that their students are being disadvantaged and that learning outcomes are being compromised by split or modified classes.

The staffing shortage also has a direct consequence for work safety in schools. We certainly heard about that in this morning's debate. Almost one in five respondents have experienced violence in the classroom. The minister is saying that this is an isolated incident that happened at Calwell, but the union is saying that one in five have experienced violence in the classroom. How can that be true? Someone is not telling the truth; is it the teachers or is it the minister? I think we know what the answer is.

Given what we saw a year ago at Calwell—which the minister has not responded to—there is a problem at that school; but, as I said, it is systemic. I refer to an article titled "Teachers are leaving the system in droves, but no one is listening". There was a lot of attention and comment online and in focus groups. This is a comment from a teacher. It says:

What they need is a system which gives them the resources, time and conditions which allows them to do what they love the most...teach. Since they are smart enough to know that is not happening, brilliant teachers are leaving their classroom behind.

It is a very sad phenomenon that so many teachers are leaving the system. There is another article titled "Demands are dwindling the passion: Canberra faces teacher crisis". The article states, amongst other things, that one ACT school cannot fill

current vacancies. It says, “Though she’d advertised for a replacement she still hadn’t had any applications.” A principal added that casuals were “few and far between” and that the school was unable to find relief teachers to fill the gaps “most days”.

I turn more directly to what is happening at Calwell. The Australian Education Union again said:

Our members tell us that they are scared when they’re faced with that situation, that they fear for their safety in those circumstances.

And this comes out in the Auditor-General’s report on teacher quality that was noted in this place last week at a public hearing. We heard that many staff did not have the time or resources to do their jobs effectively. The committee heard:

Not all our staff had access to the technology they needed to do their work—

How do you blame COVID on the fact that staff do not have the technology to do their work? Is that COVID as well?

—especially casual teachers and learning support assistants. Further, there is not enough devices to be able to give every staff member a device to be able to perform their work.

I do not think that the fact that they do not have the technology and the devices they need to do their job has anything to do with COVID. Some schools do not have a school library or staffroom because that space has been converted to classroom spaces, while others are teaching in modified corridor spaces. That is not new. It is not a COVID-related incident that you are expecting teachers to teach in what was a library or a school corridor. Not all staff had access to technology and many teachers were unable to attend professional learning. That list would be harrowing, but it is not all, and not by a long shot.

Let me say again the words of the Australian Education Union regarding what we have heard in Calwell:

The action taken by the ACT work safety regulator is a damning indictment on the ACT Education Directorate and starkly highlights their failure to provide a safe working place for our members and a safe school for their students.

Since the AEU first raised safety concerns around the dire circumstances confronting staff and students at the Calwell site in 2021, the Education Directorate has continually failed to recognise and act effectively to address serious, ongoing staff shortages, oversized classes and incidences of occupational violence. It is the responsibility of the Education Directorate to ensure that their schools are properly resourced for the program they are expected to run and for the needs of their students. They have failed to uphold this responsibility.

The situation raises a significant number of concerns, and these have been raised by the union. These were canvassed this morning. The minister has suggested that this is isolated, that this is a one-off, that it is rare, when we have one in five teachers saying



that they have faced assault and when we have a significant number of serious incidents coming across our schools. That indicates one of two things. Either the minister is not telling the truth, or she is so out of touch with what is happening that the teachers on the ground are saying, “One in five of us are being assaulted,” and she is saying, “No, this is a very rare and isolated incident.” So either she just does not have a clue what is going on in her own schools in the directorate, or she is simply coming in here and trying to whitewash and cover up what is going on.

Which is it? It has to be one of the two. Is it the fact that there are only isolated, rare incidents, as the minister asserts, or is it, as one in five teachers are saying, that they have been assaulted in a unit and that there are many hundreds of these incidents occurring every quarter? These are not isolated incidents, and to try and suggest that these are isolated, and are the result of the pandemic, is disingenuous. It is disingenuous and it is disrespectful to the union, but, more importantly, to our frontline teachers, who are out there working passionately, as hard as they can every day, to try and teach kids in an under-resourced environment. They are working in an environment, where, sadly, unions are saying teachers do not have enough resources and they are not being listened to by this government.

Yesterday the minister came in here and said, “This is all to do with COVID. Haven’t you been listening for the last two and a half years? Haven’t you been paying attention?” Well, it is not because of COVID that a principal was thrown across their desk. Where has the minister been for the last two and a half years, or the five years that she has been a minister? COVID was not the cause of teachers being screamed at and abused. It was not COVID that caused a teacher to hide, terrified, in a cupboard. It was not COVID that resulted in mobs of kids marauding through a school. It was not COVID that caused fires to be lit or so many drugs or weapons to be brought into the school. In many ways, the cause of it is the minister failing to listen when these concerns were raised repeatedly to her. Those concerns have been ignored.

This is a pretty straightforward motion. I hope it gets support because I am not sure, when I look at the “calls on”, that there is anything that this government or the Greens would not support. Firstly, the ROGS report makes it clear that there has been a 3.3 per cent cut in real terms over the reporting period of the decade. I am saying to the government, “Stop doing that.” I am calling on the government to stop cutting funding in real terms, because that is what it has been doing. The ROGS makes that abundantly clear. If the government does not support my motion, then I guess the answer is that they are going to continue making those cuts. Surely not!

Secondly—and again we are trying to get a straight answer on this, and I know the unions are trying to get a straight answer on this—what is the number of teachers that we need in the ACT? Where are they required, and over what time frame? Tell us what that is. The minister should have that information at her fingertips. Where is it? How many teachers do we need right now in the ACT and what is the plan over the next three or four years in terms of the number of teachers you need to fill vacancies and any growth in schools? Where is that information? It is inconceivable that this government would not know that. If the government does not know that then possibly that is part of the answer—a bit of a clue—as to why there is such a crisis in our school system at the moment.

The next thing I am asking for is for the government to deliver on its election promise. The Labor Party went to the last election and said, “We are going to have 400 new teachers.” It said:

As Canberra continues to grow, a re-elected ACT Labor government will make sure that our public education system grows with it. Deputy Leader Yvette Berry said ACT teachers were there when we needed them most—ensuring our children continued to learn during COVID-19 restrictions.

Teachers are the most single important factor to secure good educational outcomes for students. The Labor government has made sure that the public school teachers remain the highest paid in the country and a returned Labor government is committed to attracting and retaining a workforce of great teachers and other school staff. That is why we will hire more than 400 teachers.

Where are they? Where are these teachers? The minister promised them. She said that she was going to deliver 400. If you look at the number of school teachers that have resigned and the number that have been recruited, what is that figure? What is the nett number of new teachers? According to this minister it is going to be 400.

We are running out of time, are we not, members? We are now coming up to halfway through this term and this minister promised there would be 400 new teachers on the ground. I do not know where they are. As far as I am aware, they are struggling just to recruit new teachers to make up for the ones that have resigned, let alone 400 new ones. Is that going to be a broken promise? Was what we were being told about 400 teachers the truth, or was that something that they said before the election but never had any intention of delivering? We will await the answer.

The next point—my last point—is about accelerating the infrastructure program to provide adequate learning spaces. We do not want kids being taught in converted libraries, in corridors and in demountables. Accelerate that infrastructure program. I think that is reasonable. So the “calls on” in my motion are things that members should support and welcome. If government members do not support this motion today, it will be clear evidence that they are failing to support our teachers on the ground. (*Time expired.*)

**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) (3.08): We will not be supporting Mr Hanson’s motion today, but I will be speaking in defence of public schools. It is disappointing, however, that Mr Hanson continues to spend his time in this place attacking public education. Public schools have been working incredibly hard, in the middle of a national teacher shortage and an international health pandemic, to continue to provide a great education for our children.

In terms of public school funding, I can assure the Assembly that this government is making record investments in public education. I know that Mr Hanson is desperate to make his colleagues on the hill look good at the moment, but here he is not fooling

everyone. The table he is referring to in the ROGS report shows that the ACT government funding for public schools is the highest, per student, in the country, with the exception of the Northern Territory. Mr Hanson might want to go and have another look at the Gonski needs-based funding model to understand how public and non-government schools are funded.

As I said in my speech earlier today, the most recent public budget included an additional \$51 million in recurrent funding and that includes over \$12 million for early childhood education and care; over \$15 million to boost the education equity fund to reach an estimated five times as many students; over \$7 million for an additional 25 youth and social workers; and almost half a million dollars to provide college students with free and confidential legal advice.

We also funded a trial of free breakfast and lunch at schools—something members will recall that the opposition made fun of during the last election campaign. In addition, the government continues to invest in school infrastructure: a new high school in Taylor; expanding Margaret Hendry School; the modernisation of Garran Primary School and Narrabundah College; the new Strathnairn primary school; with over \$157 million invested in new and renewed public school infrastructure in the recent 2021-22 budget. This government also provided Chromebooks for every public high school and college student—another initiative that the opposition poked fun at, but which has meant that when we needed to move to remote learning, we were the most prepared in the country.

We often say that a budget is a statement of a government's priorities and values. Importantly, in our last budget, we invested almost \$6 million in additional resources for managing occupational violence and complex needs in public schools. And we will continue to do what is required to keep staff and students safe and learning. The opposition would have you believe that talking about the national teacher shortage is some kind of an excuse. It is not an excuse, but it is an important factor to understand the circumstances that schools are operating in. Schools are continuing to provide great education despite the national teacher shortage, and despite the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic.

There is no magic supply of additional teachers for us to call on. That is why we have been working with unions to identify workload reduction measures to take the pressure off schools going into term 2. That is why we have partnered with the AEU to form a teacher shortage taskforce. And it is why we continue to follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer, who has done so much to protect our community during this pandemic.

There has been discussion in this place already today about WorkSafe ACT's notices in relation to Calwell High School, including in relation to the processes around the management of occupational violence and staff shortages. The Education Directorate is complying with those notices, and we are working with WorkSafe and with relevant unions to ensure that staff and students at the school are safe. This is a very challenging time for that school community, and I want to assure them that the government is taking this seriously, and that I am taking this seriously. I will take all necessary actions to respond to the concerns.

I know from my visits to Calwell High School that staff at the school are hardworking and care deeply about their students and public education. The students at Calwell are passionate and enthusiastic about creating a vibrant and inclusive school environment. I know that they are doing it tough at the moment, and I want them to know that we will do whatever it takes to ensure that Calwell High School is a safe learning environment for all.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and to thank teachers, staff, students and families at Calwell High and across all ACT public schools for their resilience and support through term 1 as we continue to face and respond to these difficult circumstances. I would also like to thank unions, principals and the P&C Council for continuing to work collaboratively with the government to produce the best possible outcomes for our school communities in the face of these unprecedented times. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all text after “this Assembly notes that”, substitute:

- “(a) teachers and staff in ACT public schools have been working incredibly hard to deliver high quality education to Canberra families through the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) the ACT Government values their work, and recognises this by offering the highest remuneration for public school teachers in the country;
- (c) Table 4A.14 in the latest Productivity Commission Report on Government Services shows that ACT Government funding for public schools is the highest, per student, in the country (with the exception of the Northern Territory);
- (d) the ACT Government is delivering on its election commitment to hire more than 400 teachers and support staff over this term of government;
- (e) the ACT Government is also delivering on its election commitment to invest \$99 million over four years to renew public school infrastructure;
- (f) in the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT Government announced an additional 25 youth and social workers will be employed in ACT public schools at a cost of \$7.4 million over the next four years to provide early intervention and support for students and their families;
- (g) the ACT Government has invested in expanding telehealth services access to psychosocial supports in ACT public schools;
- (h) WorkSafe ACT issued notices to the Education Directorate regarding Calwell High School, and the Directorate is complying with those notices;
- (i) the routine collapsing and combining of classes, including creating oversized classes, is unacceptable and potentially unsafe;
- (j) in response to feedback from unions, the Education Directorate has introduced a suite of workload reduction strategies to help ease the burden going into term 2; and
- (k) the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion is currently inquiring into the management of ACT school infrastructure and the ACT Auditor-General’s Report No 6/2021—Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools; and

- (2) this Assembly calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) respond appropriately to the WorkSafe notices;
  - (b) consider the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students as the foremost priority when making decisions about the operation of schools;
  - (c) continue to take steps to address the work safety risks identified by staff in ACT public schools, including properly resourcing schools according to their needs, ensuring that class size limits are respected and addressing unsustainable workloads;
  - (d) report regularly and in a timely manner to unions on staff absences, including split, collapsed and cancelled classes, in a way that minimises additional reporting workload for schools; and
  - (e) continue to work with unions to ensure the safety of public school workplaces and to reduce workload for teachers and school staff.”.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.13): I am speaking today in place of Mr Davis, the ACT Greens Spokesperson for Education, who is unwell and unable to be here today. The ACT education system is facing several significant and intersecting systemic challenges that have been exacerbated over the last two years by the impacts of widespread COVID-19 infection in the community. The Greens will be supporting the amendments moved by Minister Berry today that reflect these challenges and commit the government to ongoing work with teachers, student communities and the union to manage and rectify these issues, with a prioritisation on worker safety and occupational hazards.

The issues outlined by Mr Hanson’s motion are currently before two inquiries of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, of which Mr Davis is also a member. These are the school infrastructure inquiry and the inquiry into the Auditor-General’s report into teacher quality. This work is thorough and ongoing, involving school visits, dozens of written submissions, and hours of public hearings. While it is Mr Hanson’s prerogative to deploy the evidence provided in these hearings today in the chamber, what these committee inquiries demonstrate is that these issues are being taken seriously by the government and by the Assembly as a whole. However, this work is necessarily time consuming and will be reported on later this year by that committee.

It is undeniable that our schools are experiencing significant staffing shortages, as are schools in our region and across Australia. Last year, the local branch of the AEU published a member report, which found that schools throughout the ACT are being seriously negatively impacted by teacher shortages. We know these shortages lead to grave workplace concerns for teachers, including those covered in some detail earlier today during debates. In response to the AEU’s report, the Education Directorate and the union have established the teacher shortage task force, which is the first of its kind in the country and is tasked with trying to limit the impact of national shortages here in the ACT. A necessary part of this work is the development of accurate workforce estimates and projections of the numbers, distribution and expertise of teachers across the territory—work that has been necessary for some time. The work of the task force will inevitably take time, and systemic actions to alleviate the impact of shortages will need to be implemented in parallel with the task force’s work.

Due to nationwide staff shortages, long-term and systemic underfunding of public education by the federal government, and other systemic economic and social issues, teachers these days are expected to deliver an ever-intensified curriculum and undertake a variety of other demanding roles within our schools. These roles include, but are not limited to, administration and holistic student and family support. This was reiterated by Mr Judge, the Secretary of the AEU in his appearance at the Standing Committee's inquiry into teaching quality. Mr Judge informed the committee that:

In the last couple of years, and particularly over this COVID period, what we have heard more and more, and louder and louder, is that public schools ... are stepping in where our social welfare systems fail and attempting to provide social welfare support to parents and to students.

That has been particularly acute around those issues where there is insecure work and parents are unable to take the time off when their children do have a problem. That takes up huge amounts of time. Whenever our members find themselves having to assist with housing, arrange medical appointments, or whatever the welfare need may be, mental health care support is a common one as well, that takes up hours and hours of a day, or days and days of time for multiple staff ...

It is a difficult one for our members because they know the impact that those disadvantages have on the ability of students to turn up and focus on their schoolwork. But they also know that it is not necessarily something that it should be their job to be fixing.

What Mr Judge's evidence tells us is that systemic issues of insecure work and the woefully inadequate provision of social security and welfare systems in this country are bearing down on our local public schools. While these issues impact all schools in Canberra, there is no doubt that those schools most impacted by social and economic marginalisation face compounding challenges within their communities.

The ACT government has deployed a range of measures to increase the number of social supports in our schools. These include increasing the number of youth and social workers to take this burden off our teachers and help students and their families who are experiencing these intersecting difficulties. The ACT Greens strongly support this work and are committed to advocating for increased mental health and social supports in our schools. The work of differentiating teaching responsibilities from student and family welfare should be a part of the teacher shortage task force's strategic considerations.

Given that the federal budget was handed down last week, it would be remiss of me not to mention the impact of ongoing underfunding of the public education system by the federal government. While this motion tries to hide the role of federal funding in producing the challenging systemic issues our schools are facing, it is undeniable that this is a budget that at best neglects the public system and at worst continues a direct attack upon it. The cuts to public schools' funding from the 2021-22 budget add up to almost half a billion dollars over the next three years. In contrast, private schools are seeing an almost \$2.5 billion increase over the same period. This comes at a time

when our student communities are grappling with the significant and ongoing burden of COVID-19, which we know has only deepened economic inequality.

It is worth also underscoring at this point that private schools are never subject to the same level of attack and public scrutiny as public schools. While scrutiny and transparency are core values of good governance, these values should also translate to equal concern across our entire schooling system. The ACT public education system requires significant attention, including short-term workforce management changes; increased social supports to schools whose students are struggling, particularly with the social and economic challenges that have been exacerbated by COVID-19; and also the neglect of successive years of neo-liberal governance from the federal government. This motion today has been an opportunity to highlight these issues and recommit the government to doing what is in our control to manage and improve those extremely challenging circumstances.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.20): I thank members for their contributions. Let me say at the outset that I love public schools. I am a product of a public school, Gympie State High School—a fantastic school. We would all join together in saying that we have a bunch of great schools. We would all want to commend the teachers that we have, regardless of whether they are in government schools, non-government schools or Catholic education—across the board.

You are an ex-teacher, Mr Assistant Speaker—an ex-principal. We can all look back in our lives and think of a teacher, or maybe a couple of teachers, that we knew who were transformational in our lives. The Canberra Liberals are committed to public education. If you listened to what Ms Lee said in the chamber today, and previously, and to what I have said, you would know that we are very strong supporters of our public education system.

Indeed, the motion that I have moved here today, in my view, is very reflective of that. There is no critique, no criticism, in it of our public education system. It is simply saying, “Let’s make sure that the system is resourced adequately.” My motion actually calls for more resources to be put into the public education system.

I know that this works for the Greens—they like to do it—and I think there are sections of the Labor Party as well, that try and create this quasi-class divide between government schools and non-government schools. I think that is disingenuous. I think that is unfortunate.

It is also true that, obviously, public schools—the government schools—are going to receive more attention than non-government schools. We are their major funder. We are their regulator. We hire their staff, which is not the same, obviously, as for non-government schools. If the government were to reject my motion today, they are actually rejecting a call for more resources to be put into the ACT government system.

There has been an ongoing funding debate for a while about ACT schools. It goes back to Gonski, and it goes back a long time, to when Gonski was first mooted by the then Prime Minister, Ms Gillard. The first state or territory to sign up to that was the ACT. It is a needs-based funding arrangement, as the minister would be aware. When

you look at the funding lines for education pre-Gonski and post-Gonski, and signing off on it, it meant a \$40 million cut to ACT education.

I am not commenting on, and I will not get into a broader debate about, whether Gonski is the right solution for Australia, if it has worked, if improvements can be made and so on. The reality is—and you can go back and look at those budget papers—that it meant that when the ACT signed up for Gonski, we got a \$40 million cut in education funding in our schools. It was not actually a good deal for the ACT; it was a dud deal for ACT schools and ACT students. The public schools paid a price for that.

Mr Assistant Speaker, if you go to table 4A.14 in ROGS, it makes that clear. It shows that, in the 10-year period—and it reflects that post-Gonski period—in real terms, funding has gone down per FTE, per student to student, in the ACT public school system. Real funding over that period has gone down by 3.3 per cent.

There is a price to be paid for that because that is resources, that is teachers and that is the support staff that we would expect in our schools to support our students. In every other jurisdiction—WA might be slightly lower, and the Northern Territory—funding has gone up. In New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria the real funding per student has gone up in that period. In the ACT it has gone down.

Correlating with that is the union and frontline staff now saying that they do not have enough resources. So it has not happened by accident. These are intentional, deliberate funding decisions of the ACT government that have resulted in a 3.3 per cent cut to funding.

I know that Mr Braddock wants to draw the feds into it and have a debate around that, and I am happy to do so, because that same table shows that in that same period funding for ACT students, FTE in public schools, from the feds went up by 42 per cent. At the end of the day, the feds will give us what they give us—and thank you to the coalition government for increasing funding in that period by 42 per cent. At the end of the day, this debate is about what we do in this chamber. In this chamber, decisions have been made that have cut that funding by 3.3 per cent.

With regard to Ms Berry's amendment, this is often what the government do. There is a motion being debated, and they will move an amendment that sometimes is completely separate from the motion. They will move an amendment that, to be honest, is not totally unreasonable. I am one that wants to look for compromise, for a best outcome. Although the "notes" are arguable—it is reasonable that the "notes" are arguable—I am concerned about outcomes. The outcomes in Ms Berry's amendment are to "respond appropriately to the WorkSafe notices". I support that. I want them to respond. The amendment then says to "consider the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students as the foremost priority when making decisions about the operation of schools". Yes, I do support that. That is something that the Canberra Liberals do support. The amendment then says:

- (c) continue to take steps to address the work safety risks identified by staff in ACT public schools, including properly resourcing schools according to their needs, ensuring that class size limits are respected ...



If only they were. That is something we have been calling for. That is something we want to see. That is something that the union wants to see. The amendment continues:

- (d) report regularly and in a timely manner to unions on staff absences, including split, collapsed and cancelled classes, in a way that minimises additional reporting workload for schools ...

Yes, let us do that. The amendment then states:

- (e) continue to work with unions to ensure the safety of public school workplaces and to reduce workload for teachers and school staff.

Yes, I support all of that. I propose an amendment to that. This is one of those amendments that seeks to replace all words after “That this Assembly notes that”, so it is a complete rewrite of my motion. In the interests of getting a result, I propose to amend the amendment to add the four things that I am calling for, so that we can hopefully get an agreement here that takes us to a place which we can all agree on.

All that I have asked for is to “stop the funding cuts to ACT schools”. The ROGS report statistic, in black and white, of 3.3 per cent over the decade is irrefutable. If the minister thinks that somehow there were not any cuts—I do not know how that is so, but if she thinks that is the case—that should not bother her; if she does not think she is making cuts, it will not bother her, anyway.

The next part of my amendment is to “determine and publish the exact number of teachers needed in the ACT.” That is reasonable, isn’t it? How many teachers do we need? Is that not a fair question to ask? Is that not a reasonable question to ask?

The next part is to “deliver the 400 new teachers promised”. Deliver your election promise. Again, I am asking the Labor Party to deliver on their election promise. I think that is a reasonable thing to ask, wouldn’t you say, Mr Assistant Speaker? I am asking them to deliver on a promise.

The last part is to “accelerate the infrastructure program”. They have put extra money in the budget. We welcome that, for infrastructure. Accelerate it; let us get on with it. Let us do it. There are schools out there crying for more infrastructure to be built. Let us get that program up and running. Let us get it delivered. Does anyone disagree?

I think we could have an outcome here. If you accept the amendment that I will move shortly, we will have a situation where we get what we want, the minister will get what she wants from the motion and, more importantly, despite the argy-bargy in this place, hopefully, it will mean that teachers on the ground, and, importantly, the kids that they teach, will get what they need and deserve.

In line with that, I move the following amendment to Ms Berry’s proposed amendment:

Add:

- “(f) stop the funding cuts to ACT public schools;

- (g) determine and publish the exact number of teachers needed in the ACT;
- (h) deliver the 400 new teachers promised; and
- (i) accelerate the infrastructure program.”.

Question put:

That **Mr Hanson’s** amendment to **Ms Berry’s** proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton

Noes 12

Ms Berry  
Mr Braddock  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Ms Davidson  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Orr  
Dr Paterson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith  
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

**Ms Berry’s** amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Transport—bus travel**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.37): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) rising fuel prices have placed considerable cost of living pressures on Canberrans, especially at a time when many are already suffering;
- (b) access to effective public transport is essential for our community;
- (c) increased usage of public transport has benefits for the environment;
- (d) Tasmania has made bus travel free until the end of April to help with rising fuel prices and to ease congestion; and
- (e) a Transport Canberra official noted that free bus travel is worth considering on radio on Thursday, 24 March 2022;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the interim bus timetable was implemented following the start of the lockdown in August in response to decreased demand and driver availability;
- (b) post lockdown patronage numbers are increasing on public transport in Canberra; and

- (c) the interim timetable results in lengthy delays for crowded buses, disincentivising public transport usage; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) make bus travel free in the ACT for six weeks; and
  - (b) return to the full bus timetable.

Canberrans have been through a lot in the last couple of years. It has been tough. The pandemic has been the biggest factor, but it has been coupled with extraordinary rises in the cost of living, and these are rises which are being felt more in the ACT than just about anywhere in the nation. This morning we were greeted with yet another report that shows that we in Canberra have the highest rents in the nation. We are paying among the highest rates in the country and there are a lot of people that are feeling financial pressure.

The Morrison government have come to the party with a number of big-ticket budget announcements aimed at easing the cost of living. They have certainly highlighted how much impact the high petrol prices are having on people in the suburbs. The federal government's cut to petrol excise is already starting to flow through to the various service stations in the suburbs of Canberra, which is great, and we thank the Treasurer, Mr Frydenberg, for that. But things are still tough out there, and there is no doubt that the cost of transport is still a big factor in the bottom line of household budgets in the suburbs.

The Tasmanian government has very clearly identified that high petrol prices are impacting Tasmanians. Earlier in the year they announced a five-week period of free bus travel on the apple isle. I understand that there have been some teething problems with the rollout of that program in Tasmania, but it remains to be seen whether those problems are COVID-related or not. Indeed, the head of the equivalent of the TWU in Tasmania absolutely dismisses the fact that their cancellations have anything to do with COVID.

I know that we will hear from Mr Steel on the Tasmanian experience. Again, I would point out that Ric Bean, the head of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, used some quite colourful language when he spoke to the media, absolutely dismissing COVID as a reason for driver shortages this week. I think that we should take note of those words.

Additionally, I would like to make the chamber aware that the first week of free bus travel in Tasmania—and I know that Ms Clay in particular will be pleased with this, if she was not already aware of it—resulted in a 13 per cent increase in patronage. That is pretty cool, isn't it?

The transport minister in Tasmania, Michael Ferguson, said that it was encouraging that more people were giving the buses a go, especially for those who had not caught the bus for a while, and who had never considered it before. This is genuine behavioural change. To quote Michael Ferguson, the Tasmanian transport minister:

The first week of free public bus services has shown strong results with preliminary figures demonstrating an increase of about 13 per cent ...

How many cars do you reckon that equates to, Mr Assistant Speaker? How many cars do you think would have gone off the road while people got onto buses? What do you reckon? 4,300 passengers a day, state-wide, is what we are talking about, and that is just in the first week of this rollout. I would concede that there were some problems with some cancellation of services, but that is a stunning result. A 13 per cent increase in patronage in just the first week of this scenario in Tasmania; 4,300 cars off the road in the first week. That is a staggering result.

What an amazing line in the sand for Tasmanians where the government said, “Yes, the pandemic is lingering, but it’s time to get back to normal as soon as we possibly can,” and they are doing it, just like most other workplaces are doing it. You do not see Kmart closing the doors at four, do you? They are finding a way to get on with it. For how long are we going to have an interim timetable? For how long are we, in this territory—and when I say “we”, I guess I mean them; how long is the government—going to blame COVID for the non-delivery of services?

I can see us in the chamber two years from now, and this minister and every other minister will be blaming COVID for everything that is going wrong here in the ACT. I am sure that Labor and the Greens will still be blaming COVID years from now. It is time for us to get back to the full timetable. It is time for us to throw a line of support to struggling Canberra families and cut them some slack in regard to public transport fees.

I know that Mr Steel has been quoted in the *Canberra Times* regarding the amendment that I saw 10 minutes ago. I know that the amendment was drafted a long time ago, more than 24 hours ago, so it is pleasing that I did get to see it before commencing the debate, and I thank the minister for that. The minister is quoted in the *Canberra Times* as saying that public transport fares are not all that high. I think you have to compare the cost of public transport and put the petrol price in as well. When you see the change with people getting out of their cars and getting onto the bus, that is where you will see the improvement to the bottom line of household budgets.

Ben McHugh from the directorate was on ABC Radio this morning regarding this motion. He indicated that the difference between the full timetable and the interim timetable is not significant. I note that in the amendment Mr Steel details that at some length. I would say to the minister: if your bus is missing, if the bus that you want to catch is not there, it has a significant impact on you. The impact on the consumer whose buses are not travelling is quite significant.

Apart from those things that absolutely fit its agenda, I am sick of this government coming up with reasons that it cannot do something. This motion calls upon the government to stand up and deliver the sort of services that the public would expect you to deliver, and then go beyond it and provide relief to struggling families by making the bus free.

I have had discussions with Ms Clay about this motion. I know Ms Clay; I know that there is a big part of her that would love to support it in its original form, and I do appreciate our genuine engagement on matters like this. I know that there is a big part

of her that would want to support it in the way that it appeared. I do not know whether you have heard this from Ms Clay, but she will tell you that there is a climate emergency, and Ms Clay continues to bring that to the chamber. Ms Clay knows that, whatever difficulties may be in place regarding this proposal, it will get people out of cars and onto buses. Despite the difficulties that may need to be overcome, I know that there is a big part of Ms Clay that would love to support this motion in its original form. I would say to Ms Clay: there is still time.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (3.44): The ACT government have been clear and consistent in our efforts to encourage and promote the uptake of public transport. The ACT Transport Strategy 2020 emphasises the importance of shifting away from private vehicle use to address harmful climate change; improve community health and wellbeing; reduce congestion on our roads; and support a more compact and efficient city.

We strongly agree that getting more people onto public transport is a good thing, and we recognise that Canberra families are facing real cost of living challenges at the moment because of rising petrol prices and other inflationary pressures as our economy recovers from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the impact of the Ukrainian conflict and the response of the Reserve Bank in quantitative easing, which of course pushed up many asset prices.

It is worth acknowledging that, in this context, petrol prices were back below \$2 a litre this week. That follows the federal government's decision to temporarily reduce fuel excise in the budget last week and also shifts in global oil prices. Members may be aware that Canberra's public transport pricing is already more equitable and affordable than many other jurisdictions. One of the reasons for that is that we do not impose zone-based pricing like other jurisdictions do. We have a flat fee, regardless of how far you want to travel on public transport, and that means our pricing is highly equitable.

Someone leaving Tuggeranong or Casey pays the same price as someone travelling from the inner south. We provide free off-peak travel for concession card holders travelling between off-peak hours. Also we provide concession rates for those who are travelling at peak times. An adult who takes public transport to and from work five days a week will pay a total of \$32.20, which is significantly less than the price of a tank of fuel and parking. Public transport is already a really great alternative to help reduce the costs of travelling around our city.

Thanks to weekday caps on pricing, the most a non-concession card holder would pay for five days, taking multiple trips by public transport, is \$48. Our pricing is even more affordable for school students, with five days of travel to and from school costing just \$12.20. So public transport is already very affordable; the prices have been frozen for several years already. It is a great alternative to driving and parking, paying parking fees, particularly in the city, and that is just one of the reasons that we do not agree with Mr Parton and the Liberals that free public transport for extended periods of time is the right answer to cost of living pressures or the need to incentivise more people onto public transport.

I know that Mr Parton will be disinclined to take my word for it, so it is fortunate that there are a range of external sources and recent case studies to back this up. Mr Parton's original motion mentioned that Tasmania has recently introduced free public transport for a period of time, five weeks. What his motion did not highlight is that since that announcement, Metro Tasmania has faced some very significant challenges in delivering reliable services for existing passengers and any new ones that have joined since the free fares came in.

On the third day of the free bus program in late March, 81 bus services had to be cancelled across Tasmania because of a shortage of bus drivers to run them. I appreciate Mr Parton's comments around the reasons for that, but this is something that I think has been foreshadowed by other pieces of work. It meant that commuters turning up at the bus stop would face longer wait times or cancelled trips, neither of which help to give people confidence that public transport is a great, accessible and reliable option.

One of the other external sources that I was referencing is that the Productivity Commission has recently considered public transport pricing in great detail, and in fact last year produced an extremely interesting research paper on the topic. To summarise the 214 pages of dense economic analysis, the Productivity Commission found that making public transport free can increase crowding and congestion on buses and trains, unless it is coupled with expensive increases to services, which state transport services do not have the money for when they cut all fare revenue.

Making public transport free does not materially reduce road congestion and can actually decrease rates of walking and cycling. Public transport replaces these forms of transport for short trips. The PC also found that making public transport free is:

... a poor measure to achieve social inclusion and affordability because there are other more important barriers to access and more users of public transport have few financial barriers to using it at current highly subsidised fare levels ...

They also found that the most successful free public transport initiatives have been those that offer an innovative, contained approach to fare reduction, such as the Western Australian government's lottery for free public transport for a year.

The Liberals like to, when it suits them, quote the Productivity Commission, quote numbers from the Productivity Commission's reports and recommendations, but this particular report actually does not support the motion that Mr Parton has brought on today. I would also like to quote a local stakeholder, and that is the Public Transport Association of Canberra. Their president, Ryan Hemsley, last year told the ABC:

If there is money in the budget to make public transport free, there's money available to make public transport better.

The financial impacts of COVID-19 on public transport systems around the world have been immense, and the ACT is no exception. Farebox revenue for this year is already projected to be around \$20 million below usual levels, requiring a significant additional subsidy from the ACT government to keep services running at their current levels, at their current fare structure.

Making public transport free would further reduce revenues by around \$1.2 million a month, or \$1.8 million for six weeks, which could only undermine the quality and sustainability of services in the longer term. So really what Mr Parton is talking about is cutting public transport, and we simply do not believe in cutting public transport. We support better public transport, investing in our public transport system. To return to PTCBR's point of view about what Canberrans really want, making public transport better is our very strong focus.

People want reliable and accessible public transport services that turn up on time and efficiently take them to where they want to go. That is what we have been working hard to achieve through the COVID-19 pandemic, as we have seen unprecedented changes in how Canberrans travel and huge disruptions to the availability of workers to deliver these essential services.

In August last year we put into place an interim timetable to ensure that we could continue to deliver reliable services in the face of these challenges. This interim timetable provides a good level of frequency, with most rapids running at least every 15 minutes during the day or better, and around every half an hour after 8 pm during the week. The Rapid 10 and all local services run at least every 30 minutes. At the start of term 1, 2022, we augmented this with 233 dedicated school services as students returned to the classroom and parents returned to work.

Transport Canberra's priority is to offer reliable transport services for Canberrans, both during the week and on the weekends. Cancelled services and missed trips are a huge frustration for regular public transport users and a strong disincentive for potential users to give their local bus route a try. We will not make any headway in driving a long-term shift to public transport if people do not believe that the services will reliably turn up, and turn up on time when and where they want to use them.

Like many workplaces across Canberra and Australia, Transport Canberra is continuing to experience workforce issues as a result of the ongoing impact of COVID-19. We are seeing an average of around 35 drivers per day unavailable for work at the moment, placing pressure on our remaining workforce.

While we are working towards returning to the full pre-COVID timetable as soon as possible, at present this is not possible while ensuring reliable services. For this reason, we will be retaining the interim timetable for a further period, extending into term 2 of the ACT school year. Yesterday this advice was provided to all ACT schools and to commuters via a range of channels so that people know what to expect in the weeks ahead. We will continue to monitor workforce availability, in parallel with the health situation and advice, and have identified regular internal checkpoints to review the appropriateness of continuing with interim services.

Parallel with planning for a return to the pre-COVID timetable when possible, we are continuing to find ways to encourage Canberrans to return to public transport, but in line with our ACT transport recovery plan released in April last year. Our goal is to get public transport patronage back to pre-COVID levels and then keep on growing it. We have seen a great improvement in patronage through the early part of this year,

although as of mid-March patronage was still down by more than 34 per cent on pre-pandemic levels.

We are primarily working towards this goal by investing in large-scale public transport infrastructure, building light rail to Woden, and the procurement of more than 100 new electric buses and their associated charging infrastructure. The first 12 of those electric buses will arrive this year into Transport Canberra's fleet, offering passengers a cleaner, quieter and more comfortable ride. Those are the sorts of things that, in the long term, are going to increase our patronage. That is an important step forward in our fleet and a great opportunity to encourage more Canberrans to try out and return to public transport.

We do think that there may be some limited and specific instances in which free public transport could contribute to broader community and government objectives. As the Productivity Commission has noted, free public transport promotions can work when they offer something new and innovative to the community or incentivise people to try public transport and get over the various other barriers that prevent them from using it regularly.

Members would be aware that we are anticipating a significant period of disruption on our roads from the second half of this year onwards as we move forward with major infrastructure projects like raising London Circuit and light rail. There is other public and private infrastructure occurring as well. During that disruption period we will be asking Canberrans to rethink their route and routine, finding other ways to travel to the city, travelling outside of peak times, for example, and using public transport and active travel.

As part of the suite of initiatives to help manage and mitigate the disruption, there may be a place for a brief period of free public transport to give people a chance to get familiar with their closest rapid route or to try one of our new electric buses for the first time. This is something that we will consider as part of our ongoing planning to address the disruption associated with major infrastructure delivery in the coming months and years, but it will not be in the form that Mr Parton has suggested.

So, while free public transport makes a good headline, it does not necessarily result in good quality, reliable services that can support a lasting switch away from private vehicles. We are dedicated to strengthening public transport in Canberra. We are in it for the long haul, and we are not going to cut the ability of our transport system during a time when people need it to run reliably.

That means progressively working through the unique service delivery issues that our city has. It means adding services in a sustainable way over time, like we have done in Molonglo just recently with the new route bus service that services Whitlam and goes through to both Belconnen and Denman Prospect. We will prioritise at all times the reliability of services for those who rely on them to get around day to day across the city.

I move amendments to that effect circulated in my name:



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

“(1) notes:

- (a) rising fuel prices have placed considerable cost of living pressures on Canberrans;
- (b) access to effective public transport is essential for our community;
- (c) increased usage of public transport has benefits for the environment;
- (d) Tasmania has made bus travel free until the end of April to help with rising fuel prices and to ease congestion but has since faced reliability issues with delivering services in the context of COVID-related driver shortages;
- (e) making public transport free would cost Transport Canberra approximately \$1.23 million per month, or around \$1.85 million for a six week period. This comes on top of significant revenue reductions for public transport anticipated to be in the order of \$20 million this year alone due to reduced public transport patronage due to COVID; and
- (f) the Public Transport Association of Canberra has noted that making public transport free is not the right approach for improving patronage, with Chair Ryan Hemsley stating: “If there is money in the budget to make public transport free, there’s money available to make public transport better.”;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the interim bus timetable was implemented following the start of the lockdown in August in response to decreased demand and driver availability;
- (b) the interim bus timetable continues to provide a high level of frequency—most Rapid routes are running at least every 15 minutes during the day and around every hour after 8 pm during the week, while the Rapid 10 and all local services are running at least every 30 minutes;
- (c) post-lockdown patronage numbers are increasing on public transport in Canberra but, in the week ending 20 March, were still 34 per cent below pre-COVID levels;
- (d) reliability of services is extremely important to users as service cancellations and dropped services can be very disruptive to travel plans; and
- (e) like many employers, Transport Canberra is facing COVID-related workforce availability challenges, with an average of approximately 35 drivers unavailable for work per day in recent times and unpredictable absences affecting workforce scheduling; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) consider the strategic and time-limited use of free public transport when there is network capacity to accommodate a potential increase in passengers and this is most likely to drive behaviour change, such as during the upcoming disruption associated with raising London Circuit and light rail; and

- (b) continue monitoring the delivery of public transport services in line with health advice and driver availability, and return to the full timetable as soon as is practicable.”.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.58): I rise in support of the amendments circulated by Minister Steel and to speak about Mr Parton’s original motion. I am really pleased to see Mr Parton bring on this motion. He is genuinely committed to making our buses better. I know he is. I have heard him ask questions in the Assembly and committee hearings the whole time I have been here, and I know he was doing that long before I got here. I am really, really glad to see him bring this issue forward again because it is so important to the Greens, to Canberrans and to the climate, and we are in a climate emergency. But I am not sure that this motion, while it raises the right problems, is bringing forward the right solutions at the right time.

I want to start with some general observations about the cost of transport and about our public transport here in Canberra. The cost of transport is such a big issue for so many Canberra households right now. It is significant and it is growing—even before our recent petrol and diesel price increases. When we design the city and our transport network for the private motor vehicle, we all pay more. Households pay, governments pay, and the environment pays. Even those who do not drive pay more because they have to subsidise those who do. But, of course, it is the cost of buying and owning and running a car that is the main cause of these transport pressures on the household budget.

Unfortunately, Canberra is still a pretty car-centric city. We are always going to have some cars here. My family owns a car, and I think every member in here has at least one car in their household. Unfortunately, cities choke on cars. Canberra’s congestion is growing at a rate three times faster than that of any other mainland city. Our city will not work if every adult drives everywhere they go. If everyone drives everywhere, we will all be stuck in traffic and will drive up our climate emissions further and faster than we are now.

We know that we need the fewest cars on the road possible, and that means we need really good active and public transport. This is a great time to have that conversation, because right now a lot of people are wondering whether they can afford to keep driving at all. The original motion highlights all of those problems and it does it really well, but it just has not brought forward the right solutions.

If we want more Canberrans using public transport, we need better buses. We need our buses to be frequent and reliable. We need them to take you where you need to go. On Saturdays and Sundays, we need a useful network that provides at least hourly services. We need buses to be a genuine alternative to the car.

We know the broader problems and we also know the specific barriers. We know it from surveys and data. I also know it from personal experience and from feedback from my constituents. Some of the reasons people do not use the bus are structural. These issues will not be addressed by this motion or probably by any motion on the bus network.

For instance, there are some people who absolutely have to drive for work. This includes delivery drivers and those who work at multiple sites in a day. I have family members who have worked as drivers. I used to run a business where I would sometimes work at Tidbinbilla and sometimes in Belconnen or Civic. I could get to Belconnen or Civic without a car, but I had to drive to Tidbinbilla. That was a really functional, structural element of the job that I could not change, and I could not do the job any other way.

Another example of barriers that are really hard to change is those faced by people who have mobility issues, such as those who are older or have a disability. For some of these people, driving is their best choice or maybe their only choice. That experience is different for different people. I know a lot of older Canberrans who do not have a licence and who would be housebound if they could not catch the bus or walk or get around by the footpaths some other way, perhaps in a motorised wheelchair. I also know a lot who really need more flexibuses, more and better public transport, subsidised taxis, and really, really good paths.

We have around one in seven adults with a disability who cannot use public transport and around one in six who have difficulty using public transport. We also have around one in two adults with a disability who do not drive at all. That shows pretty clearly that we need a range of options for different people and that we have some work to do.

I recently put out a discussion paper about a lot of these issues. I highlighted the need for better paths and shared paths to help us get around our city, and to help get more cars off our roads. That actually has a lot of benefits because, if we get the people off the roads who do not need to drive, we leave enough room for the people who really do need to drive and leave those car parks there for the people who really need them.

Another set of structural barriers comes from trip chaining by parents with kids, carers and people who need to run errands in all parts of the city. We have built a big, spread-out city, and often people's work, home, school, day care, shops and services are all in different suburbs. It is really hard to take the bus in one day to lots of different suburbs. It is not always feasible.

But there are a lot of barriers that we could fix by making the bus more convenient, by making it better. Here are the most common barriers I hear about and that have come up again and again in the data: "The bus does not go where I need to go. The bus takes too long to get where I need to go. The bus does not come often enough to be convenient. I can't rely on the bus to turn up on time, or maybe I can't rely on it to turn up at all."

A motion about our public transport network could address these problems. Unfortunately, this motion has not done that. It does not acknowledge the special circumstances we are in right now and it does not acknowledge the workforce problems arising from COVID. It looks primarily at ticket price. It asks for a free trial that we are just not quite ready for. It also does not provide financial relief to those who need it most.

This brings me to the specifics of Mr Parton's motion. It calls for the ACT government to restore the full timetable, but it does not acknowledge why we are running an interim timetable from COVID. We absolutely need to get back to normal services as soon as possible. In fact, we need better services, but we cannot fix the problems by passing a motion. Mr Parton has done his research. He and his adviser were really generous with their time, and I thank them for that. They showed us their data, including from questions on notice. We ran through the data ourselves and did some research. We have taken the same figures, but we have taken the opposite interpretation from those figures.

What I read is that the bus workforce is still running short due to COVID. The data on absences changes from week to week, but we have looked at it from August 2021 to February 2022. Our bus drivers are still taking as much leave now as they did at the peak of COVID. In some weeks, they are taking more leave. Transport Canberra simply does not have enough drivers, right now, to return to normal services.

Mr Parton is right to point out that COVID leave has dropped a little bit; but other types of leave have risen. The overall leave is the same or higher as it was at our peak COVID absences. Our workforce is running short. I can only speculate why annual and personal leave are up. I wonder if some drivers may have run out of COVID leave and are now using other types of leave because they are sick, or family members are sick, or because of the mental and physical health impacts of COVID or because of the mental and physical health impacts of other crises.

Some of them might be getting sick after years of running really hard through all of this difficult period of time we have been in. Some might be finally taking the annual leave that they absolutely critically need for their mental and physical health, which they have not been able to take for months or maybe years. Our drivers are frontline workers. They have just worked non-stop through multiple crises and a pandemic to get our essential workers to where they need to go. They are really tired. They have done a great job of keeping us all safe while still delivering services. We are incredibly grateful to them and we need to look after them.

I know Transport Canberra are recruiting, and they need to. They also need to recruit a more diverse workforce. We do not have many women bus drivers here in Canberra. Only around 11 per cent of our driver workforce are women. We heard some really good content from Minister Steel yesterday on this and about the efforts underway to improve this, but we need more women drivers, and more diverse drivers, and just more drivers overall.

We need a bigger, more resilient workforce before we can return to that full timetable. We absolutely want to return to normal services as soon as possible. We need to return to better services. But passing a motion is just not going to do it. I am actually really worried that we might break our people. I am worried that our drivers might get sick or might quit if we try and make them do things they cannot do.

We have seen that story play out around the country with our overworked medical staff and I am worried about reproducing that here. Even worse, I am worried that we

might succeed and push people to drive a bus when they are tired or ill or simply not up to it. I frankly cannot imagine what happens when someone drives a crowded bus on a busy road in that state. So we need to build up our frontline workforce in a long-term way and then increase our services. We cannot skip ahead to the end. We have got to do it as fast as we can but we cannot do it today.

The second part of Mr Parton's motion is really interesting. It is a free bus trial. I am genuinely unsure if free tickets will drive uptake on our buses. All of the feedback I have heard and all of the research I have seen shows that, in Canberra, the barrier to the bus is not ticket price. People want better buses, not free buses. I was very interested in that figure Mr Parton quoted—that the trial, in the first week, increased bus patronage by 13 per cent. That is a really, really interesting figure.

I did see this morning from the Public Transport Association of Canberra that the ABS found that, in Canberra, only three per cent of Canberrans think fares are a barrier. We might be a bit different here; we might not be. We are already one of the cheapest jurisdictions for public transport in the country. Most people already find the bus cheaper than driving and parking. Free bus travel may or may not increase uptake.

More importantly, will it help with the cost of living for those who need it most? I think that is what the free bus trial was probably more about. I am not convinced that it is really well targeted. We have already got free and cheap bus travel for a lot of people here. We have got one of the most progressive fare systems in Australia. It is free for a concession card holder travelling off-peak between 9 am and 4.30 pm, or after 6 pm on weekdays, and all day on weekends and public holidays. That is a permanent free service and I am really glad that we have it.

So a proper cost of living intervention for those who need it may not be more free bus travel. I suspect that a much bigger financial problem for people who need help is probably the federal income support system, which simply is not high enough to keep you out of poverty. That is one reason why the Australian Greens want income support payments lifted to \$88 a day.

If free or cheaper services would help, I would be really happy to look at the groups of people who need that most. There might be some groups who are missing out. We might find that large families with a lot of kids maybe need some more concession rates than we are offering. We might find that there are some other groups. I think that is a really great conversation to have right now. But that is not the same as a short-term free trial for everyone, regardless of whether or not they actually need the help.

This is also a reasonably costly experiment. A six-week trial would cost almost \$2 million. I did speak to Minister Steel about that and, on balance, I think it is a really good idea to have a free trial at some point. I suspect we might learn something. We will certainly find out if price actually is a barrier to uptake or if it is not, and we may end up with a better bus service. Then again, we may find out that it is actually not a problem. The problem is that, when we run a free trial, I think we need to run it at a really strategic time when it will be most effective in driving behavioural change. I do not think now is the right time.

A trial right now probably will not encourage people onto the bus. A lot of people are concerned about COVID and they will not want to mix. If it did get new users onto the bus, I am worried it could do real damage to our long-term uptake of public transport. That is because the service is not running at proper capacity yet. If we did manage to get new users onto that bus network from a free trial, and if they had a poor experience, they might be put off the bus for life. We know this from ACT government surveys. People need reliability and frequency, and we do not have that right now due to our workforce shortages.

I also know this personally. An unreliable network, even if it is free, will do more harm than good in convincing people to catch a bus. If your bus does not turn up the first time you catch it, you will not catch the bus again. You will probably tell your friends how unreliable buses are in Canberra. Canberra is a small town; these decisions matter and they last a long time.

More critically, I am worried that, as a cost of living relief measure, this motion misses the mark. I spoke earlier about some of the people who simply cannot use a bus. A lot of those people are our most vulnerable. They might be elderly, they might have a disability, they might have a really big family with a lot of kids, they might have a lot of trip chaining for lots of kids or they might be a carer with a lot of trip chaining. They might be shift-workers or people who have to drive, like at-home carers or at-home cleaners, or delivery drivers. Those people are not going to get any benefit from free bus travel. They will keep paying a lot for petrol and they will probably be wondering why they missed out.

The ones most likely to benefit from a free bus trial right now are probably those people who already regularly catch the bus. A lot of those people are in secure, salaried jobs. They are not paying extra for petrol at the moment. They are not necessarily the people who need the most help right now. I think what we need for the climate and for congestion is a better bus service long term. I think what we need to relieve cost of living pressures right now is relief that is really well-targeted to the people who need it, and I am not sure that the original motion does that.

I genuinely thank Mr Parton for bringing on this important motion and for accelerating our conversation on this. I am afraid that the Greens cannot support the original motion; but we are really happy to support the amended version, which actually does commit to returning to normal services as soon as we can, returning to a full bus network. It also commits to looking at a trial at a time when it is really, really strategic and when it would really help. The Greens will be happy to support the amended motion.

**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) (4.12): Madam Assistant Speaker, if it sounds like we are talking about something we have recently spoken about, you would not be mistaken. Public transport being free for a period of time is a suggestion in this place from as recently as November last year, in a motion from Ms Castley which was amended at the time. Ms Lawder yesterday copied a motion of

mine from last term, and today the Liberals are copying themselves from within the same term.

I do understand the intent and, like Ms Clay, I believe that Mr Parton is genuine in wanting to increase patronage. I think we are all united in wanting to have the very best public transport system possible. But what is proposed in this motion is not the solution.

Minister Steel highlighted some of the areas in the Productivity Commission's report that go to the heart of this. To assist this debate further, it is worth drawing out some of these statements. In order to save members having to read all 241 pages, the commission, in its research paper, has effectively refuted the motion. Indeed, on its first page, in the foreword, it says:

In the febrile climate of the COVID-19 crisis—

this might sound familiar—

some have been tempted by the seductive idea that zero fares would be a good way of reviving public transport. One insight from our work is that this would not be effective in achieving that goal. Instead, it would divert funds better spent on service quality, often to people with higher incomes who do not need the subsidy.

I note that Ms Clay drew out this point in some detail in her speech. Page 12 also flags, with respect to free transport—and I quote:

As suggested by global experiences, these benefits are largely illusory. Where free fares were introduced, patronage increased, but usually made little difference to road congestion and sometimes had the perverse impacts of shifting people from walking and cycling to public transport.

Mr Parton asked in his speech how many cars have been taken off the road in the Tasmanian trial, and he equated the increased number of passengers on public transport with people who are leaving their cars at home. But this is a false equivalence. As the research paper flags:

IPART modelled free public transport in Sydney, finding that demand would increase—

not by 13 per cent—

by about 40 per cent. But the reduction in car use was far less—between two and five per cent. This is because car use is far greater than public transport, so even sizeable percentage increases in public transport will not have similar percentage impacts on car use. Moreover, the proportionate effect on congestion is not equivalent to the effect on car use because some roads are not congested in the first place, the substituted travel is not all at peak, and the number of car trips and their length are different. Overall, the evidence suggests that at the low prices that already exist for public transport, free transit would usually not make additional inroads to congestion.

The paper goes on to note, as Minster Steel outlined, that free transport can result in overcrowding, which does come at an obvious cost to the consumer—not being able to get onto the bus, or indeed not having a very pleasant experience on the bus. You can see that this would be a particular issue while we are operating on a reduced timetable and when we have the experiences of the workers front of mind.

I note that the idea of free public transport is seductive and, like others in this place, I have done a lot of thinking and a lot of research about this. Again, I think that the paper has eloquently underlined what the issues are, and particularly this point:

... ‘free’ is an artful word that hides the necessity that the costs of running public transport must still be met. Unlike the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments currently have narrower and less efficient tax bases. So any additional subsidies to public transport must require cuts to other crucial spending areas or rising inefficiencies associated with greater taxes.

I do not think that is what the opposition is looking for. It continues:

Free public transport would lead to a growing gap between fare revenue and costs with the need for ever rising subsidies and the risk of underfunding of services, which is unlikely to be a tenable policy strategy.

It goes on to say:

... Melbourne ... case study suggests that the circumstances in which free fares are justified will be special. One circumstance when it is not is as a response to the massive reduction in public transport patronage associated with COVID-19.

It cannot be any clearer than that. In fact, it says:

Free fares would merely savage revenue by more and, given the low responsiveness of patronage to fares, would be an ineffectual way of increasing demand.

I think that the Productivity Commission’s report speaks for itself; it has effectively refuted the motion. This is not an old report; it was released last year, just four months ago, in December 2021. It goes into incredible economic analysis and provides a lot of other suggestions. I think that it irrevocably refutes what Mr Parton has proposed today.

I support Mr Steel’s amendment—that any consideration of this should be strategic. It has to be when there is network capacity, and it needs to be in a way that is most likely to drive genuine behaviour change, or in the special circumstances flagged in paragraph (3)(a) of the amendment.

I will finish by thanking the bus drivers, support staff and the Transport Workers Union. They have done the most incredible job in keeping our city safe and moving, in exceptional circumstances. I know that the workforce has been impacted, like all Canberrans have been, and we will continue to support them. I am a regular bus user,



and I want personally to thank them for the dedication and professionalism with which they conduct their jobs and for making every journey a pleasant and efficient one.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (4.20): I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion before the Assembly. Last month in Tasmania, transport minister Michael Ferguson declared that public transport would be free for five weeks. He stated that there were two reasons for this initiative: (1) they wanted to help families with the cost of living impact of high fuel prices; and (2) they wanted to use this opportunity to encourage people to give buses a try, so that, hopefully, many of these people would fall in love with public transport. Mr Parton's motion should achieve both of these aims as well.

Free travel and more frequent buses should attract new users to increase the overall base usage of our public transport. It will hopefully bring back long-time bus users that have fallen into the habit of driving after giving up on the chaos that has been our public transport system for some time.

A constituent of mine who has been a public transport enthusiast for 20 years related to me that the interim bus timetable and unreliability of the buses have combined to make these past months the worst public transport experience he can remember. He has largely stopped using it for the first time in his life. He now drives to and from work every day. He feels like he has been trapped between a rock and a hard place. The interim timetable has meant that it takes him longer to get to his destination than if he took a car; but, with fuel prices so high, the car is more expensive.

Combining a period of free buses and a restoration of the regular timetable is the perfect solution to get him out of his car and back onto public transport. The restoration of the regular bus timetable is the least that this government could do for bus users after their successive cuts to well-loved bus routes in the past four years. Residents in Ginninderra alone have had to endure the cuts of over 10 well-loved bus routes, including all of the Xpresso buses.

The federal government has made a move to decrease cost of fuel pressures for everyday Canberrans. It is now time for the Labor-Greens government to do the same. On behalf of our past, present and future public transport enthusiasts, I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.22): We will not support Mr Steel's amendment. Mr Steel's amendment basically says, "This would be a cracker of an idea if it was ours." Basically, he has already flagged, in his response here, that it is probably something that the government will do, and at that point they will be throwing all of the recommendations of that ROGS report out of the window. I know Mr Steel would say that that will be in response to an exceptional circumstance, and I would argue that this is in response to an exceptional circumstance.

It is in line with a lot of the ideas that come into this place, in that they are great ideas if they come from the government, but not if they come from us. I recall Mr Steel saying in the chamber, "I will not be taking advice from Mr Parton on anything." If I came into the chamber and said that it was Wednesday, Mr Steel would not take that

advice. I think it reaches a point where perhaps the public of the ACT are not being served well by having such a dogmatic response.

It takes 694 drivers, from our reckoning, based on answers that we have received in hearings, to operate the full school term timetable from Monday to Friday. We were able to achieve that in May 2021, when we had a total of 908 drivers—128 casual, 509 full time and 271 part time. That was in May 2021. But we were not able to achieve that in February this year when we had a total of 957 drivers. That is 40 more than the May 2021 figure—139 casual, which is 10 more, 556 full time, which is 45 more, and 262 part time, which is six less.

Even Ms Clay in her response indicated that the suggestion she is getting from the directorate is that much of the leave pressure is not actually COVID leave; it is other leave. To be honest, it says more about the way that the minister handles this part of the directorate than anything else. When we look at the COVID leave that was taken in February this year, the most COVID leave days that were taken in a week was 104. If these were all full-time staff, this would be about 26 drivers isolating, and even if this was all part-time staff working three days a week, this would be about 35 drivers isolating. Both are less than the additional 47 full-time drivers that would have been hired for February, when compared to last May, when we had the full timetable.

I am not sure that the minister's insistence that it is not possible for us to return to a full timetable because of COVID stacks up. I am really not sure.

I would like to quote an anonymous Greens elected member on this particular motion, who stood in the chamber somewhere in Australia this week and said:

Why do these things matter? We are in a climate emergency; we are running up against the natural limits of our environment. We cannot keep doing things the way we have done them in the past.

Another IPCC report came out yesterday. The UN Secretary General has blasted politicians in the wake of this grave climate crisis. He is calling current government actions empty pledges that put us firmly on track towards an unliveable world.

These are the words of Jo Clay from this chamber yesterday. Ms Clay went on to say:

He said that some government and business leaders are saying one thing but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. Those are not my words; those are from the UN Secretary General on the IPCC report.

Ms Clay went on to say:

I certainly do not want to be one of those politicians making empty pledges or saying one thing and doing another. We need real climate action ...

Again, I would point Ms Clay to the patronage numbers that have come through from Tasmania. I understand that perhaps it was a bit of a stretch to suggest that, with the additional 4,300 passengers, that equates to 4,300 cars off the road; nevertheless, it

does equate to quite a high number of cars off the road in quite a small jurisdiction. I would say to Ms Clay and the Greens: there is still time.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 5

Ms Berry	Ms Orr	Mr Cain
Mr Braddock	Dr Paterson	Ms Castley
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Ms Lawder
Ms Clay	Mr Steel	Mr Milligan
Ms Davidson	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mr Parton
Mr Gentleman	Ms Vassarotti	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Debate resumed from 10 February 2022 on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.32): I rise today to speak on the Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill legislates the requirement for newly acquired cats to be contained to their premises for their lifetime and all cats to be registered annually in the ACT, similar to what was legislated for dogs last year, and this will begin from 1 July.

The legislation effectively gives the ACT Cat Plan effect and aligns the responsibility of cat owners with that of dog owners. Cats are a very popular pet for many Canberrans, and I know that there are members in this place who have a cat in their family as well. However, I think we can all agree that roaming cats pose a significant threat to native wildlife, which cannot be ignored.

Cats can roam up to one kilometre from their household if they are not contained, and they actively hunt both during the day and the night, favouring animals such as frogs and reptiles that live on the ground, as well as birds. Given the close proximity that many Canberra suburbs have to nature reserves, there is a need for cat containment, to help protect threatened species and species of concern that inhabit these areas.

Research shows that cats have already contributed to the extinction of more than 20 Australian mammals. In Canberra alone, roaming cats each year are estimated to predate on 61,000 native birds, 2,000 native animals, 30,000 native reptiles and 6,000 native frogs.

The scrutiny committee raised several concerns relating to this legislation. For example, they noted concerns relating to the right to privacy, including the collection and retention of personal information, as a result of the annual registration. It is also noted that, under section 128 of the act, a cat can be seized from a residential premise without the consent of the occupier or court warrant.

The scrutiny committee also recognises that, under this legislation, not keeping a cat contained is a strict liability offence with various exemptions, such as having a reasonable excuse, controlling the cat via a harness, or being outside a declared containment area when the cat was registered or born before 1 July 2022. Many of us will remember the case in the paper, I think it was last year, of a person who wanted to walk her cat on a leash and at that time was not supposed to do that because it was a cat containment area. So it is good that this one about controlling a cat via a harness has now been addressed.

The committee notes that, by removing the requirement to establish the fault element through strict liability or placing an evidentiary burden on the defendant before an exception to the offence can be relied on, the bill may limit the presumption of innocence protected as a right in criminal proceedings.

Finally, the scrutiny committee recognises that more vulnerable members of the community may find it difficult to comply with the requirements of cat registration and containment, whether that is due to financial hardship, people living with disability and/or people living in unstable housing situations. Consequently, this bill may have a disproportionate impact on some members of the community and limit the right to equality in section 8 of the Human Rights Act.

Following concern from volunteers and members of the Canberra community, I met recently with the Canberra Street Cat Alliance to discuss this proposed legislation. Under the ACT Cat Plan 2021-31, the Canberra Street Cat Alliance would be unable to continue their current trap, neuter and release program, whereby they catch street cats, microchip, vaccinate and desex them, and then release them back into the community. Generally, this is in industrial areas. They also often feed cats in these industrial areas.

Upon meeting with the representatives of the Canberra Street Cat Alliance, I can tell there is a lot of genuine concern, care and goodwill for Canberra street cats shared by members of their organisation. I recognise that they do this work because they love cats and want to help control the street population in a way that does not harm cats or lead to their death. I can see their argument that the street cat population here in Canberra could, as an unintended consequence, grow over time under this legislation. Without a clear street cat population management plan from the ACT government, street cats may well continue to breed, particularly in business and industrial areas.

However, I note that there is also significant support for this legislation from environmental and other animal groups, such as the Conservation Council and the RSPCA. I know that there will be some people disappointed with this legislation but, for many, this legislation cannot come soon enough to protect our precious wildlife and many environmental groups would have preferred to see it legislated much earlier.

Finally, I would like to thank Jennifer from Minister Steel's office for the briefing and her follow-up responses to my queries. For the reasons I have talked about, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill today.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.38): The purpose of the bill is to introduce a requirement for newly acquired cats to be contained to the premises for their lifetime and for all cats to be registered annually in the ACT. Cat owners will be reminded annually to register their cats and that registration will be transferred to any new owner of the animal. It will be an offence to keep an unregistered cat in certain circumstances.

The minister will be able to declare an area cat containment if the minister is satisfied that cats are a threat to native flora or fauna in the area or for the welfare of the cats, if it is appropriate to do so. It will be an offence if a cat is not confined to a premise in certain circumstances. Cats will be able to leave their premises if they are on a harness and a leash. I have seen a lot of people out walking their cats in Belconnen lately. It is not something I would have imagined when I was a kid, but it is actually really delightful to see. I have a staff member who has a really gorgeous deaf and blind cat and she is often out walking her cat. So it is a different way of doing things, but it certainly works.

This is really important because these amendments to the current act help give effect to the ACT Cat Plan for the next 10 years and help ensure more responsible cat ownership here in the ACT. The vision for the next 10 years for the ACT Cat Plan is for all cats in the ACT to be owned, wanted and cared for by responsible owners. This vision is really important, because our cats live longer, healthier, happier lives when they are being taken care of by those responsible owners.

The ACT Cat Plan encourages a trap, neuter, adopt approach for semi-owned and unowned cats and, as animal welfare spokesperson, I love the idea of having people take responsibility for and ownership of those cats. It is the best possible outcome for the cats themselves. It ensures those cats are not left to fend for themselves anymore. Responsible pet ownership is even more important for our environment, for our biodiversity and for the lives of other animals, and Ms Lawder has actually set out a lot of the figures on that.

In 2020 a study was published in Wildlife Research which reviewed data from more than 60 studies on domestic cats. It was funded by the Australian government's national environmental science program. It suggested that nationally our domestic cats are killing an estimated 230 million native Australian birds, reptiles and mammals every year. That is a huge amount and we simply cannot afford to let our native wildlife go. Pet cats were also found to prey on approximately 150 million introduced animals, mostly rodents.

Cats cannot discriminate between native and non-native species, and containing our cats is the best and kindest possible way to protect those native species, particularly here in the bush capital where our suburbs are surrounded by parks, urban open spaces and nature reserves. One of our responsibilities in taking care of our bushland and taking care of our bush capital is to ensure that we are responsibly taking care of our

native wildlife and our domesticated animals. The Greens are happy to support this bill.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (4.41): I rise today in support of the Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and to talk about some of the reasons why this is important to protect our wildlife, particularly our great bird population. As minister for the environment, I felt really privileged to be able to deliver on the ACT Greens' commitment to move towards a territory-wide cat containment policy, alongside my colleague Minister Steel, when we launched the cat plan at the RSPCA in May last year. The introduction of this legislation is an important step in continuing to implement this plan.

Much of the discussion to date has centred around the importance of this legislation for cat welfare, as the vision in the cat plan is for all cats in the ACT to be owned, wanted and cared for by responsible owners, and what a fantastic vision that is. While recognising the importance of cats as companion animals, I would also like to focus on the threat that roaming cats pose to biodiversity, much like the comments that were made by Ms Lawder, and how this bill is an important step to ameliorating this damage to our native wildlife.

While we love our family cats, we do know that cats are natural predators that hunt by their own instinctive nature on native birds and animals. We know that this does have a devastating impact on our natural wildlife, which is a valued part of our bush capital. Ms Lawder has actually talked about some of the estimated impacts of roaming cats in Canberra alone.

There is an increasing body of evidence that predation by feral cats is a major threat to biodiversity in Australia. Their presence has contributed to the extinction of 22 Australian mammals, and they are believed to be a current and major threat to at least 142 species of mammals, reptiles, frogs and birds. Predation by feral cats was listed by the commonwealth in 2000 as a key threatening process, with a threat abatement plan for the predation by feral cats released in July 2015.

The commonwealth convened a feral cat task force in mid-2020 and the commonwealth Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy conducted an inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia in July 2020, producing the report *Tackling the feral cat pandemic: a plan to save Australian wildlife*. Nearby, over the border, predation by feral cats was listed by New South Wales in 2000 as a key threatening process.

This is another example of a wider national problem that we are taking local action to fix. We have a responsibility in our bush capital to ensure that our native animals are protected. The reforms to the cat containment and registration contained within this bill, implementing key elements of the ACT's cat plan, play an important role in this.

Turning now to a more local scale and the cat management in our suburbs, I would like to focus on strategy 3 of the cat plan, which is to reduce the number of

semi-owned and unowned domestic cats. This is important to minimise indiscriminate breeding and wildlife predation. It is particularly important when it comes to managing colonies of stray cats, particularly in industrial areas.

Canberra, as the bush capital, has suburbs filled with birds and wildlife, which is one of the joys of this city. Wildlife is not contained to nature reserves or the suburbs which border them, but is found throughout the city. Our industrial areas in Fyshwick are in close proximity to Jerrabomberra Wetlands, a one-of-a-kind ecosystem in the heart of Canberra.

This waterbird wonderland hosts a diverse panorama of animal life, including over 170 different bird species. Unowned cats are a considerable and urgent problem and, simply put, we cannot just allow a high density of street cats to roam and hunt in proximity to this wetland. Similarly, the areas of Mitchell and Hume are close to grasslands that are home to endangered native species, including legless lizards and earless dragons.

The bottom line is that cats that are not responsibly owned are a risk to native wildlife. The adoption and rehoming of desexed cats, rather than their release, is essential to minimising wildlife predation, as well as preventing the welfare issues for semi-owned and unowned cats. Importantly, I do not think that this presents an insurmountable problem that we cannot solve. We do not need to be pitting cat welfare against the environment. We can achieve both. In fact, these are the two pillars that are at the heart of the cat plan.

As stated in the cat plan, the ACT government is committed to working with animal care and rescue organisations to manage semi-owned and unowned cats and helping them transition to trap, desex and adopt activities. These conversations are happening right now. Given these organisations' great success to date in rehoming the vast majority of cats that they currently care for—at least 90 per cent—I am really confident that the ACT government and organisations can find solutions that align with the actions of the cat plan and build on the great work that these organisations have done to date.

This bill represents a major step forward in reducing the impacts of cats on native wildlife and takes us one step closer to making Canberra an urban biodiversity sanctuary. I would like to finally give acknowledgement that these great outcomes are built on the foundations of hard work by people that have come before me, particularly former Greens MLA Caroline Le Couteur, who campaigned for cat containment for more than a decade.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.48): I am very pleased to stand here today in support of Minister Steel and the Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill helps to deliver on the ACT government's Cat Plan 2021-31 by supporting responsible pet ownership and balancing the wellbeing of cats with the management of their impact on Canberra's environment.

I recognise the importance of cats as companion animals and the valuable place they hold in the families and homes of many Canberrans. Until my youngest developed a

cat allergy, we had two cats, but both met unfortunate ends—both hit by cars. In my particular circumstance cat containment would have saved their lives. I also had the very unusual experience of the next-door neighbour's cat being incredibly territorial; it would come through our cat flap in the middle of the night and attack my cat. Again, this is another instance where cat containment would have been very helpful.

I also recognise the extensive community engagement conducted as part of the ACT Cat Plan, which has informed the amendments in this bill. I thank the more than 4,000 people and organisations who have provided input, and I am proud to live in a city where there is generally agreement to taking proactive action for the sake of our domestic and native animals and our beautiful environment.

It is heartening to see so many Canberrans understand the need to balance our love of domestic animals and the many benefits they bring us with our passion for protecting the biodiversity of our community. Canberrans understand the value of annual cat registration and expanded cat containment. They understand that, for cat lovers and cat-free households alike, everyone can benefit from domestic cats being registered and managed responsibly.

The new annual cat registration requirements being considered today will support pet owners in the unfortunate event that a pet becomes lost, as accurate contact details can be used to reunite cats with their families far more effectively than what microchipping alone can provide. This also has a direct benefit for non-cat households.

Gradually, what we can expect to see under the annual cat registration is more tangible actions taken on roaming and nuisance cats. More cat owners will be engaged in their responsibilities through digital updates, and government will be in contact with them in the event that their cat is caught up in trouble.

Responsible pet ownership is encouraged by this bill, and of particular interest to the community is the introduction of cat containment for all cats born from 1 July 2022. This is, of course, in addition to continuing our current policy of declaring newly developed suburbs as full cat containment suburbs.

By confining cats to the household, including to completely or partially enclosed space on the owner's premises, owners will have the peace of mind that their cat will not be roaming Canberra's streets unsupervised. This is essential, as it reduces the risk of harm not only to our native wildlife but also to the cat itself.

For those whose cats love to roam and can handle a busy street, cat owners will now have the option of walking their cat on a harness and lead in any Canberra suburb, including in declared containment areas. This is consistent with the ACT Cat Plan and the current policy intent of cat containment areas, and the change to the legislation will be welcomed by many cat owners whose cats are trained to walk on a lead.

I also acknowledge that pet census data confirmed that more than half of Canberra cat owners always contain their cats to the home, recognising the benefit of their cat's health and potentially their life span. I am confident that, under this bill, this proportion of cats already contained will continue to increase.



The introduction of the amendments in this bill will ensure consistency of responsible pet ownership requirements across both cats and dogs, acknowledging the equal value of cats as pets and family members for Canberrans, as well as the equal value in managing them responsibly. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (4.53), in reply: I would like to start by thanking members for their contributions to the debate. I take this opportunity to table a revised explanatory statement to the bill.

This bill is another step forward for the ACT as a jurisdiction that cares for animals and promotes responsible pet ownership so that our four-legged friends can live long, happy and safe lives. This bill underpins the implementation of our Cat Plan and the reforms in it, particularly in introducing cat registration and city-wide cat containment for animals born after 1 July this year.

These reforms are based on best practice and are recommended by animal welfare and environmental stakeholders as being the gold standard in domestic cat management. They will ensure that Canberrans benefit from and enjoy the great companionship that pet cats provide, while better protecting our city's native wildlife from the predation of feral and roaming cats.

I will cut my remarks short. I particularly want to comment in relation to the wellbeing of cats who may be semi-owned or are roaming. The Cat Plan envisages that all cats will be owned, wanted and cared for by responsible owners. A key shift in this approach is to formalise our policy prioritising trap, neuter and adopt arrangements for animal welfare agencies that work with unowned and semi-owned cats.

We recognise that this will be a significant shift for some local organisations like the Canberra Street Cat Alliance. I acknowledge their advocacy for alternative models like trap, neuter and return that currently form the basis of their work. The ACT Cat Plan does not support the release of semi-owned or unowned cats, owing to animal welfare concerns about the release of domestic cats without ongoing care and the ongoing impacts to native wildlife.

Cats that are not responsibly owned are at risk of harm to themselves and native wildlife. Indeed, semi-owned and unowned cats have shorter life spans and higher risks of hunger, illness, injury and disease. The adoption and rehoming of desexed cats, rather than their release, is essential to prevent welfare issues for semi-owned and unowned cats, to minimise nuisance complaints and prevent wildlife predation. The ACT's Animal Welfare Advisory Council has recently provided updated advice to me in relation to trap, neuter and return schemes. This advice indicates:

TNR strategies are difficult to recommend as a suitable or effective strategy in Australia, since resources for cat control are limited and will be better spent on education, increased community awareness about responsible cat ownership, targeted desexing programs, and better laws and regulations.

The AWAC has recommended that TNR should be banned in the ACT, in line with every jurisdiction in Australia.

Desexing of cats is vital in reducing the number of semi-owned and unowned cats. The Cat Plan emphasises the importance of animal welfare agencies and others undertaking desexing as part of a trap, neuter and adopt approach. The government will work with vets, breeders associations and community organisations to increase access to affordable desexing, increase uptake of microchipping, and prepubescent desexing prior to sale, and support cat owners and breeders in meeting the requirements for prepubescent desexing.

I understand that recent discussions with animal welfare partners have indicated that approximately 90 per cent of street cats can be desexed and rehomed, as per the comments by Minister Vassarotti. This is a great outcome, if we can achieve it, in giving these animals a healthier and safer life, and more Canberrans a furry companion to share their homes with as well.

The ACT government currently operate an adoption program for stray and abandoned dogs, with a 98 per cent success rate for the rehoming of dogs in their care. There are also opportunities for Domestic Animal Services to support the increased adoption of street cats under this newer policy approach—of course, working with our partners like the RSPCA and other organisations that work with cats.

As part of implementing this legislation, once the bill is passed, the ACT government will assist animal welfare organisations, which may be operating under different models, to transition to a trap, neuter and adopt approach. We want to see more street cats find good homes with responsible owners, so we will use the next few months and years ahead of the commencement of cat containment from 1 July 2022 to work with animal welfare organisations to get the right structures and processes in place to achieve this.

We will also, of course, look with interest at the number of semi-owned and unowned cats that are on our streets, as this legislation is introduced in the months and years ahead, to get a handle on the impact of the legislation and what further measures we may need to look at.

Pets of all shapes and sizes add so much richness to the lives of Canberrans, and that goes for cats as well. This bill will help to promote the wellbeing and responsible management of Canberra's cats, in line with our successful approach in managing pet dogs. Through the reforms contained in the bill and the broader ACT Cat Plan, our hope is that pet cats will not need nine lives; they will just need one, and hopefully it will be a long, happy and safe life.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **Mr Colin Greef—tribute**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.00): I rise today to speak about the actions of my lovely friend Colin Greef. Colin is a 33-year Navy veteran who served in Cambodia. He is a JP and works every week at his local police station as a volunteer.

Colin also runs a charity and has guitars donated to him to be passed on to underprivileged kids and veterans who are doing it tough. He has had almost 200 guitars donated to him and, if necessary, he fixes them up and refurbishes them. He has already given away 150 of them, to local legatee kids, the local PCYC, an Aboriginal music group, children at the coast who lost their guitars in the bushfires, country kids who have suffered through the drought, and some centres supporting people experiencing homelessness.

As a veteran himself, it pained Colin to hear of the 13 marines killed by a suicide bomber in Kabul in August 2021. These marines were there serving their country and rescuing thousands of people, including Australians, by getting them out of Kabul for a better life. These marines were all young people, and I am sure you can all imagine the devastation their families felt and continue to feel. My friend Colin decided he wanted to do something to show their families that they were not forgotten.

A Canberra local donated a beautiful electric guitar and amplifier. With his permission, Colin set out to raise \$2,500 by raffling the guitar. With wonderful support from veterans at Soldier On, his mates from the Vietnam veterans, the local police volunteers—many who are themselves veterans—and the generous members of the Tuggeranong Liberal Party, Colin quickly raised the amount he needed. He had an artist in Sydney design 13 personal certificates and then had them printed. A local picture framing company framed them beautifully.

Each certificate was personally signed by Keith Payne, Australia's oldest Victoria Cross recipient, who was also awarded the US Silver Star for his work in Vietnam with American soldiers. Mr Rick Meehan OAM in Nowra also signed the certificates. He looks after the local veterans on the South Coast. Colin, too, signed the certificates. They contain the Tri-Service badge at the bottom and a picture of a spray of wattle. Each one has a short paragraph for each family, thanking the marines for their service on behalf of all Australian veterans.

Colin has worked with the US defence attache, who is understandably grateful for this kind gesture. The certificates will make their way to the US and the defence attache will ensure that each family receives one.

As you can probably tell, Colin is a selfless, caring person who does a lot to help other people and never asks for any recognition or praise. It is thanks to his very proud wife, Avril, that I am able to share this story with you today. As we approach ANZAC Day—and all the time—I feel it is important to recognise not only the personal sacrifice that our defence personnel make for Australia but also the closeness and shared experience of all those in the veteran community that remains long after their act of service has ended.

Colin's story demonstrates the compassion, mateship and respect that our veterans community hold for each other. To all veterans, and their families, I would like to say thank you for your service. I thank Colin for his generosity and all he does for our Canberra community. I would like to add my thanks to those 13 marines and their families for their service and sacrifice.

### **Ms Sharon Leigh-Hazell—tribute**

**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) (5.04): I rise tonight to acknowledge and reflect on the extraordinary contribution of the outgoing convenor of Florey Neighbourhood Watch, Sharon Leigh-Hazell. Sharon began Florey Neighbourhood Watch after there were several burglaries in and around where she lived and one of Sharon's neighbours, Rachel, wrote to residents to meet up and discuss what was happening. What was immediately apparent to those who did meet was that they did not know each other. They knew this needed to change, and Florey Neighbourhood Watch was born.

In just a few years, there has been so much that has occurred, and it really stopped me in my tracks thinking about it and, indeed, compiling it. There was the Facebook group and then the newsletter, which are still regular to this day, compiled by Sharon and delivered regularly by volunteers to all residents in Florey, which Sharon has helped build in a sustainable way. There have been events for community connection, contribution and celebration. These have included well-attended community forums bi-monthly at the Florey school hall, with guest speakers ranging from the local police to the Rural Fire Service. They are tightly run and give everyone the opportunity to catch up at the end over tea and biscuits.

There have been clean-up days, coinciding with Clean Up Australia Day and beyond, and tamper-free screw days where the screws used on the numberplates on your car can be replaced with ones that cannot be loosened by screwdrivers. There have been sausage sizzles and plantings for Floriade, and end of year gatherings. Memorably, there was the Fabulous Florey Community Fair Day, organised at the Florey school, with an enormous turnout, at the end of 2019. The fair involved a medley of community and government organisations, businesses and sporting groups sharing their knowledge and the way in which they enhance the community, with all the attendees. Again, it was Sharon who was behind this, with a healthy band of volunteers on the committee, but it was her vision and drive that saw it come to life.

Perhaps one of the most valuable initiatives of Sharon's was her setting up the monthly cafe catch-ups at the Florey shops. They are humble, with Sharon providing a few chairs and tables, plenty of Neighbourhood Watch information and handy items, from newsletters and lights to, more recently, masks and sanitiser. They run for an hour, anyone can join, and groups range from intimate to large enough to have to pull up several extra chairs. People enjoy coffee from the nearby Oscar's. Save for COVID, they have been held every month without fail and I have enjoyed getting along to as many as I can. They are a great way to share information about the community, to provide tips on how to look out for yourself and each other, and that vital community connection. It goes back to that very first meeting that was the instigation of the group: knowing your neighbours is a key part of helping to prevent and respond to crime.

Sharon has been a Westfield Local Hero finalist, in recognition of her efforts, and she became Neighbourhood Watch's local area coordinator—and it is not hard to see why. Tonight marks a Belconnen region Neighbourhood Watch meeting, where Florey Neighbourhood Watch and its members will have a strong presence. However, save for the cafe catch-up next week, this is expected to be Sharon's last formal event as convenor because she happens to be moving.

In just a few years Florey Neighbourhood Watch has grown into an organisation characterised by not just its neighbourliness but its effectiveness. I want to take this opportunity to put on the record my sincere thanks and appreciation for just how much Sharon has exemplified community leadership, as well as my thanks for her friendship. It is hard to imagine Florey without Sharon. There are very big shoes to fill. Thank you.

### **Active travel—e-bikes**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (5.08): This afternoon I would like to talk about some of my adventures on an e-bike in the last week. I have had an amazing week. It has been an amazing journey for me. I have previously had a pushbike, which I guess is nearly 20 years old now, and my experiences on that bike have really been limited to my fitness and my confidence, and also probably to the fact that I normally have had three little children, who are now bigger, riding along with me.

Coming into this Assembly, so much of our debate is around public transport and active travel, as exemplified by the motion this afternoon. I guess it has inspired me to understand more about active travel. I, like many other Canberrans, had never come across an e-bike before. I had no experience with an e-bike, but through this position I came to understand about the e-bike library. This is an initiative that is run by SEE-Change and Switched on Cycles and supported by the ACT government. You put your name down on a waiting list and then you wait your turn for a week to trial an e-bike. I probably put my name down about seven or eight months ago. My name came up and I was really excited to have a go.

Basically, you pick the bike up from Downer. I rode it down to the Assembly, which was quite a big deal for me. I could not have imagined riding that far but zoomed it.

I had originally planned to try commuting back to Western Creek the next day, but later that evening it was probably our last beautiful summer evening, so I was all inspired and thought, “I will give it a go tonight.” I was absolutely blown away. I still cannot believe that I rode a bike from the city to Western Creek. That is quite phenomenal for me—15 kilometres. And I loved it. It is so easy. The bikes are amazing.

The next morning, I got up and it was my attempt at commuting back. I have to say it did take me longer to get out of the door, to organise myself—how was I going to manage this? It was quite different riding in the morning, when there is lots of traffic and hustle and bustle and people were on the paths, whereas I pretty much had it to myself the evening before. I guess, again, I felt a bit self-conscious and a bit of a learner in the whole process but got through that. In this week I have tried multiple routes and I cannot explain how much this has opened up the world of Canberra and my electorate that I knew existed but that was not accessible to me.

Anyone can have a try of these e-bikes, and I really encourage the community to just log on. I am very happy to work with people who want to understand more about how to do it. I am quite inspired to buy an e-bike now. While commuting will not work for me every day—and I definitely do recognise the challenges with trip chaining and with little kids, and with work as well, so it would not be an everyday commute—it is definitely something that believe I could manage a day or two a week.

I really am keen to support the community in accessing at least a trial, because it is amazing that you can actually try it. I would never buy one of these without trying it, and a week is a fantastic amount of time to give it a go. So please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you want to know my experiences or if you need some support in putting your name down for the SEE-Change e-bike library. Thank you.

### **Answer to question on notice—question 647**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (5.13): This will be very quick. I would just like to correct the record from earlier today. On 24 March Mrs Kikkert asked me where the answers to questions 647 and 648 were and I had committed to following that up for her. I came back downstairs later that day and advised that questions 657 and 658 had been responded to. Unfortunately, I had made the mistake of writing down the wrong question numbers. I have since gone upstairs and checked for question 647, which included some quite detailed data, and that response should be with her tomorrow. Thank you.

### **Municipal services—cyclepaths**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.14): It is interesting that Dr Paterson has talked about and encouraged e-biking. Obviously, using Canberra’s bike paths would be part of that. I am not quite sure how she would feel, though, if she went to my electorate of Ginninderra and tried to use the bike paths in many parts of that electorate.

Not too long ago I visited the main route from Belconnen to Kippax in Latham that runs parallel to Southern Cross Drive, after a distressed constituent emailed me, concerned about the difficulties faced in active travelling along that bike path. Even walking and using prams would be problematic. I am actually looking at a picture from the *CityNews* on Saturday of a bike path—which is not where I went—along a major arterial road, with massive tussocks growing up in the middle and pretty much all the way along the photo. So, Dr Paterson, I would welcome your experiences in my electorate with your e-bike. Your observations would be most welcome for me to take on board.

It is disappointing that in a city like Canberra, a modern city, a well-resourced city with good incomes and a good tax base for the government to work with, we have very poorly maintained paths in significant areas of Belconnen. My own walking around with this concerned constituent showed that there were overgrown weeds on both sides of the concrete path so that, in many spots, about a third of the hard surface was actually available, which is just not good enough. Again, as this constituent mentioned to me, for families who want to use the path with strollers and prams it is very difficult. Cyclists, in wet weather, have to navigate between slippery grass and a firm surface. It is just not good enough. We have got holes in these paths. We have got raised edges as you travel down the path. There is rubbish along the underpass and a disconnected track being used by the community.

I did write to the minister, Minister Steel, highlighting the need for better infrastructure and also asking what is the maintenance plan for not just that path but the pathways in my electorate. I will be interested in the response when I get that. It really is unconscionable to see this amount of poorly maintained service in Ginninderra, particularly in west Belconnen. The nation's capital deserves high-quality infrastructure and I am baffled by the lack of maintenance and simple service delivery.

Canberrans deserve infrastructure that is well maintained, that is beautiful to look at, easy to use and accessible to as many as possible. I said this yesterday, and it does grieve me to say it again, but I believe that the service delivery from this Labor-Greens government is the worst that Canberrans have seen. I will certainly be very interested in what the minister has to say about looking after very basic infrastructure that is not rocket science to fix; it just takes a caring government that has the discipline to look after the basic needs of the community.

## **Ramadan**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (5.17): As-salamu alaykum. Muslims in Australia and around the world are observing Ramadan, a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community. I would like to extend my appreciation to Canberran Muslims for their valuable contribution to our Australian community. Their charity and compassion for community and those in need is admirable and helps to make Canberra strong, safe and prosperous.

I would like to think I stand in friendship with Canberra's Muslims because friendship is about common values—values that include protecting the earth that sustains us, and values about equality between people, whether it be on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, gender or economic equality.

Friendship is also about sharing the good times and the bad. Whilst breaking bread together is important, friendship is about more than turning up at an iftar and posting about it on social media. It is about standing in allyship, in friendship and in solidarity. Everyone has a right to live without fear of racial violence, abuse and discrimination. Racism causes personal harm and trauma. It is extremely dangerous and a real threat to our wellbeing and safety, and it impacts negatively on our society as a whole.

The othering of Muslims and Islamophobia need to be tackled by political leadership. The Greens recognise the need for anti-racism strategies to tackle racist hate at its core. This can be done through training in anti-racism and allyship; empowering communities to challenge racism and to tackle the structural causes of race discrimination; awareness raising and education in identifying and resisting far-right extremism; countering systemic bias and discrimination in organisations; collecting proper data on hate crimes and racial discrimination; and strengthening and enforcing hate speech laws.

To move on to happier matters, I would like to celebrate Senator Mehreen Faruqi, Greens senator for New South Wales, and the only female Muslim in our federal parliament. In her words, the joy of sharing home-cooked food with loved ones is even more meaningful during this time, when Muslims all over the world come together to reflect and contemplate. I look forward to trying her iftar recipe for pakoras with a mix of baby spinach, onion rings and thinly sliced potatoes in a thinnish batter made with salt, chilli, water and yoghurt.

In closing, and on behalf of the ACT Greens team, I wish everyone celebrating a peaceful and blessed Ramadan. Ramadan mubarak to you and your family.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.21 pm.**