

## Tuesday, 7 February 2023

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee.....	1
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	6
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	7
Petitions:	
Tuggeranong—skate park—petition 34-22 .....	8
Health—maternity services—petitions 42-22 and 1-23 .....	9
Ministerial responses:	
Housing—affordability—petition 6-22 .....	10
Waste—proposed waste to energy incinerator site—petition 12-22 .....	12
Courts—judicial appointments—petition 23-22 .....	14
Courts—judiciary—petition 24-22 .....	16
Crime—sentencing—petition 25-22.....	18
Stromlo Forest Park—car park—petition 30-22 .....	21
Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22 .....	22
Motion to take note of petitions .....	23
Courts—judicial appointments—petition 23-22 .....	23
Courts—judiciary—petition 24-22 .....	23
Crime—sentencing—petition 25-22.....	23
Tuggeranong—skate park—petition 34-22 .....	24
Health—maternity services—petitions 42-22 and 1-23 .....	27
Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22 .....	27
Stromlo Forest Park—car park—petition 30-22 .....	28
Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22 .....	29
Government—infrastructure and services investment (Ministerial statement) .....	30
Dhulwa Mental Health Unit inquiry—final report—government response (Ministerial statement) .....	46
Bushfires—20th anniversary commemoration (Ministerial statement).....	48
ACT Ambulance Service—staffing and working conditions—update (Ministerial statement) .....	52
Questions without notice:	
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	56
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	57
Tuggeranong—skate park.....	58
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	59
Territory rights—voluntary assisted dying.....	60
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	62
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	63
ACT Emergency Services Agency—preparedness .....	65
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	67
Stromlo Forest Park—development .....	67
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	69
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	71
Minister for Mental Health—conduct .....	72
Alexander Maconochie Centre—body scanners .....	73
Canberra Institute of Technology—fee-free courses.....	73
Supplementary answer to question on notice:	
Hospitals—emergency department waiting times .....	75

Papers.....	75
Transport—bus services—government response .....	78
Health—maternity services.....	78
Light rail—stage 2 .....	98
Calvary Hospital—theatre fire (Ministerial statement) .....	119
Transport Canberra—bus network—update (Ministerial statement) .....	124
Roads—emissions reductions—update (Ministerial statement).....	129
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	135
Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee .....	136
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	138
Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee .....	138
Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee.....	139
Adjournment:	
Australia Day—events.....	140
Women—equal participation.....	141
Türkiye and Syria—natural disaster .....	143

**Tuesday, 7 February 2023**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 12**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.02): I present the following report:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 12—*Inquiry into Planning Bill 2022*, dated 20 December 2022, including additional comments, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

The Planning Bill 2022 was referred to the committee on 21 September 2022. The committee consulted widely across community councils, environmental organisations, housing industry groups, residential associations and individual citizens, and we received 65 submissions and 18 exhibits in total and heard from 57 individuals and organisations across the two days of hearings.

The committee's report made 49 recommendations covering a broad range of issues in relation to the bill. The committee believes that, due to the significant reform of the ACT's planning system proposed in the bill, it was important for the committee to conduct this inquiry to review this piece of legislation.

The committee wishes to extend its appreciation to all inquiry participants for their engagement throughout the inquiry process and for the valuable commendations and contributions they made in assisting and informing the committee's deliberations. We would also really like to thank the staff who worked really, really, really hard on this and put in some very long hours to produce a detailed, thoughtful and extensive report under quite difficult time lines.

I commend the report to the Assembly. That is where my comments as Chair of the Planning, Transport and City Services Committee end.

I would like to add a few comments in my personal capacity as an MLA and as the ACT Greens spokesperson for planning. The Greens have welcomed this planning review and the Planning Bill but we note that there is a need for significant amendment before this bill is debated in the Assembly. It is of enormous interest to the community and to industry and it will impact the way Canberra grows and develops for decades to come.

The report demonstrates the need for ACT government to take a closer look at some specific issues. Those issues include governance, community consultation, transparency and environmental protection. The consultation needs to improve. Government needs to give people detailed reasons showing why their views were not included and needs to provide case studies showing how the new system will work. Government should also restore and improve the process of pre-DA consultation. That came through quite strongly in the inquiry.

The drafting needs to be clearer. We need to know exactly what is meant by “good planning outcome” and by “substantial public benefit”. These are key concepts in the bill.

We need stronger environmental protection. Our local protection laws here in the ACT need to be recognised, and national concepts like “ecologically sustainable development” need to be harmonised. Biodiversity and climate change also need to be better addressed.

We need a review of governance arrangements, and we need better resourcing for the territory planning authority and for ACAT. We also need to think hard about territory priority projects. I am glad the committee recommended that territory priority projects must have sufficient community consultation and that the Assembly must be held to account for them. But I made additional comments, recommending that a territory priority project should also meet all three public interest tests and should be limited to public projects and to community housing.

Once again, I would like to thank my colleagues on that inquiry. I am pleased that we have managed to hand up a report on this one.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (10.05): I rise to speak as a member of the Planning, Transport and City Services Standing Committee and, in the first instance, applaud Kate, Miona, Adam and every other staff member who assisted us in this difficult but extremely important process. I also note that the vast bulk of it at the back end certainly occurred at what is a difficult time of year to finalise documents of this complexity and magnitude, in that the final reporting date was 22 December, when most people have other things on their minds and other things to do.

It is a great privilege to serve on this committee. I think that we have proven during this term that we are extremely capable of robustly examining issues in this particular standing committee and that, typically speaking, we are good at arriving at a consensus in a really difficult portfolio area and a really difficult area of governance.

I do not think that I am speaking out of school when I say that there are a number of previous inquiries that this committee has undertaken during which I was absolutely certain that there was no possible way that we could arrive at a consensus. But somehow we managed to do so, and I think that is great. On this occasion that was not possible, although I would say of course that we were able to agree on a massive chunk of recommendations that make up the main report. It was difficult for us to get to that consensus on a lot of those. There was a lot of work and there had to be some give and take.

I certainly did not feel the need for a dissenting report but made additional comments to articulate where this committee member sat on this inquiry. The magnitude of the amendments suggested by the committee and, I think, more importantly, suggested by those who gave evidence at the hearings is such that I feel that the only way forward is to start from scratch with the drafting of a new bill, and I certainly made that clear in my additional comments.

The significant lack of reform of the governance arrangements in tandem with the new reforms means that the new system is not appropriate and not in the community's interests. In my view, the proposed accumulation of power within a single authority or officeholder and restriction of Assembly oversight risk further decreasing the community's trust and confidence in the ACT's planning system, and none of us want that to occur.

Under the proposed arrangement, the minister and the Chief Planner could justify any development as "producing a good outcome" with minimal community input and minimal Assembly or independent oversight, as long as it fits within the interests of the decision-makers.

In my additional comments, I also recommended that the light rail sections under territory priority projects should be removed and that that project should follow the same process as any other project with regard to its declaration as a TPP. I also recommended that the desired outcomes should be more clearly defined and specified in the bill. I recommended that the bill should not lessen the ability for third parties to seek reviews of planning decisions and recommended that the government amend its section 215(2) of the bill to ensure that a territory priority project is a disallowable instrument.

That is what I have to say at this stage as a member of the planning committee—and I am glad that is over!

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.09): I want to commend the Planning, Transport and City Services Standing Committee on their report, in which they made 49 recommendations. They certainly took in a wide range of submissions, and I commend the planning committee on their effort and their commitment to examine this bill.

My view on this report is that I have more concerns than I have comfort. As Mr Parton, in particular, has said and also as Ms Clay touched on: what is an outcome-based planning system? Just what does that mean? We have already started

to see what that means, even very recently with the announcement by the planning minister that the planning department will consider approving unit developments with fewer and fewer car spaces.

We already have an issue with parking in the territory with some of the unit developments, particularly around Gungahlin and Lawson, a suburb in Belconnen. We already have problems. With this government's agenda to suit the densification, the filling up, of our suburbs with apartments—even coming out and boldly saying, “Well, there will be fewer car spaces.”—we are already seeing what the outcomes of this Planning Bill will be if it is passed.

I certainly concede that the planning committee—with, again, tripartisan concerns about this bill in its current form—made 49 recommendations, with 15 of them, by my estimation, touching on the governance arrangements within this bill. This touches on the whole consultation approach that this government has undertaken. I participated in six of the eight district planning forums and I attended many community council meetings. There was grave concern about the government's approach to consultation that was part of this process.

Mr Gentleman said that governance was not an issue—not something to be considered. But we have heard significant concerns from the committee and from the broader community about what governance arrangements are to be instituted under this bill. They have grave concerns about putting more and more power in the hands of planning bureaucrats, who themselves drove the review.

I want to point this out very emphatically. We have a review process governed by planning bureaucrats, and the result of that process is that they—unelected officials—have more power over planning in the ACT. That is of great concern to me. The minister should be accountable for his planning vision and he is really handing it over to planning bureaucrats.

Again, I have to point out that this report is rather unique—in my time in the Assembly anyway—in that every single member felt they had to say something extra. The Labor member, the Liberal member and the Greens member of this committee felt they had to say something extra. So there was certainly not a harmonious approach from the committee on this bill.

It is very, very hard to resist the conclusion that Mr Parton has presented—that this process needs to start again. We had a flawed consultation process. We have a broad outcome based planning vision that we are seeing slowly rolled out already, and that is to densify the town centres and eventually the suburbs, with Mr Barr's appetite for apartments, apartments, apartments. The planning vision is driven by profit. It is planning for profit; it is not planning for people.

The government itself, in previous terms, wanted to hear from the people. The Winton survey and the Winton report said, “Well, let us find out what Canberrans' housing choices are. Let us ask Canberrans what they think.” They did not conclude with what the planning minister is laying out for Canberrans. Canberrans want housing choice. They do not want to be given a vision for apartments along all of the main roads of Canberra and high-density apartment blocks in all of the town centres. They did not call for that.

This is a government whose planning vision is driven by profit from land—and that is it. We have a significant budget deficit problem in the territory. I wonder what the government’s solution is to fix it. It is to grab as much money from land as they possibly can through the sale of land and through the ongoing tax regime. This is the outcome that we are going to see if this bill passes. It is with great reluctance that I find anything to commend in the government’s planning reform. I think there is certainly a strong case for starting again or looking at the current regime.

One of the things that I hear is: “Things just take too long. We have a system but it just takes too long to get things processed.” Again, the resourcing that is provided to these decision-makers, to these departments, needs to be re-examined and to be driven by a customer service vision of getting speedy and comprehensive answers both to developers and also to applicants who are asking for a review of decisions.

So there is not much to commend in this whole sad saga. There are more concerns out of this planning review and this bill than there is comfort. I have been reading through the report and I have been closely listening to others in our community, and I will be closely examining what is a better way forward. I do not think this bill is the better way forward.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (10.16): I was not actually planning on speaking to this report today—because I am just dealing with a whip’s matter—but I do feel that Mr Cain has put forward some interesting interpretations of how the committee report came about and the amount of decisiveness that is there and put forward what my views were. I would prefer to stand and actually put my views forward, as opposed to leaving it to Mr Cain to speak on my behalf.

I think it is fair to say—and members of the committee have said this a number of times, including in the chamber—that all members of the committee work quite collegiately on the planning committee. We are very proud of that, because we do feel that there is a good opportunity there with the three different members to come together to really work through the issues in that detailed way and to inform the Assembly, as the committee process should do.

With this report, the committee handed up a substantive report that was endorsed by the whole committee with a number of recommendations. Those were things where, in our additional remarks, we were quite clear that we might not necessarily individually have agreed with them all entirely or that, in a perfect world where we could have our own way without ever having to reach consensus or agree with anyone different to us, we might put something slightly different forward.

Nonetheless, we came to a position where all three different perspectives on the committee could be recognised, and we put that forward for consideration by the government. I think that is a testament, when you are working through something as complicated as planning. On my first day in my university course in planning, the lecturer said, “Welcome to Canberra, where everyone is a planner whether they have a degree or not.” It is one of those ones where people do have opinions and people do care about their city and those opinions do not always line up.

What we really wanted to do, and what I feel we have achieved through this committee inquiry, was to bring together those different perspectives and try to find a

way through. That is what we have put to the Assembly, and I look forward to the government's response and consideration of those recommendations.

It is true that we had additional remarks—that some of us took different positions on things. I think that is also a reflection of the fact that we come from different political persuasions within this building and have different perspectives. But I do not think it is fair to say that our additional remarks meant that we did not reach a consensus, because we definitely reached a consensus on the majority of the things before us.

I would also note that, in talking about whether we give people choices or not, it is interesting being a planner and a politician; it is two different hats. That is something that I have had to navigate throughout my time in this Assembly, because the two do not always speak to each other. In my professional position as a planner, I would not necessarily recommend what I find myself recommending as a member. The two things are different—the politics and the planning. What is drummed through us in planning school is that you need to take the politics out of it to get the good urban outcomes, because otherwise you end up with some pretty perverse and interesting requirements.

As we go down this path, it is very clear that there is a lot of politicisation of this process that wants to happen. I would actually put it out there that perhaps we need to take a step back and start looking at both sides of the coin: the politics, because we are here to represent the people who have elected us and the perspectives they bring, but there is also what the informed policy and advice tells us. We need to keep marrying those two together and finding the balance between them.

I think everyone in this place can agree that what we want is a planning system that delivers for this community, that reflects this community and that provides that choice and variety that everyone needs. There is quite a diverse response that is going to be needed there.

I might come back with my thesis on planning one day—who knows?—but, for now, I will leave my comments at that and ask Mr Cain to perhaps, in the future, speak for himself and not for me.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Report 11**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.20): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 11—*Inquiry into the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (No 2)*, dated 22 December 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

This is the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, tabled out of session on 22 December last year. The report makes three recommendations. The committee recommends that the ACT Legislative Assembly



support the bill. However, the committee recommends that the ACT government include the precondition of consent in the proposed new subsections 69(2)(a) and (2)(b) and examine an opt-out approach. The committee strongly recommends as well that the ACT government work with stakeholders on the implementation of the bill in relation to the concerns raised in the inquiry. I want to thank the other members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Mr Braddock, and our very capable professional secretariat support. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I move:

That the report be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Report 12**

**MR CAIN:** (Ginninderra) (10.22): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 12—*Inquiry into the Freedom of Information Amendment Bills 2022*, dated 2 February 2023, including a dissenting report (Mr Cain), together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety tabled today, 7 February 2023. The report makes eight recommendations and includes a dissenting report from me, making two recommendations. I will speak to that in my personal capacity as a member in a moment. The committee recommends that the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2022 pass the Assembly and that the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2022 [No 2] does not pass the Assembly; however, my dissenting report recommends that the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2022 [No 2] pass the Assembly.

I wish to speak in my capacity as a member to my dissenting report in this report. While I do support recommendations 1 to 7 in the committee report, I dissent, for the reasons stated in my report, from recommendation 8, which recommends that the second FOI bill not be passed. I think the release of cabinet documents in a timely manner—more timely than the government is comfortable with—is very much in line with the policy intent of the Freedom of Information Bill which is that it is in the public interest to see the workings of government and to see the documents and decisions that affect this very community, particularly so, where we have a single house in this territory. We do not have a house of review, nor do we have a process where bills are approved by some next stage—the numbers are all that matter. Given how simple an approach we have to legislation in this territory, I think it is very appropriate that the community be even more informed than otherwise about the workings of cabinet and how decisions are made that affect this community.

I think the FOI Amendment Bill [No 2] from Ms Lee is actually in accordance with the policy intention of the government's own FOI regime. In my report I have listed what those objects and principles are. Quite frankly, to say no to this bill is to go against the policy of the government's own FOI regime! In recommendation 8 in my report, I dissent from that. Instead, I recommend that, after considering and responding to the recommendations in this report, the Assembly pass the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill [No 2] 2022.

I would also like to make a recommendation in alignment with recommendation 2 in the report. One of the things that has very clearly come out of estimates and annual reports hearings is that the FOI timeframes are failing. It is a problem with resourcing. It is also a problem with lack of harmony of treatment of FOI applications. So I would like to add, as well, in my dissenting report, that the ACT government ensure that directorates are sufficiently resourced to fulfil their statutory and service delivery targets prior to and following passage of these bills.

In closing, and I resume my chair mantle, so to speak, I want to thank the members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Mr Braddock, for the work on this committee report—I do not know if I am breaching any protocol here—and our professional support from the Assembly secretariat. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Tuggeranong—skate park—petition 34-22**

*By Mr Davis, from 776 residents:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly:

Canberra has a 40+ year history of being a world leader in providing public skateparks, initially with iconic facilities like Charnwood bowl, Kambah halfpipe, Erindale 'banks' and the original Belconnen skatepark.

Canberra's current skate parks are always busy with families and people of all ages, genders, backgrounds and abilities, riding anything from BMX, roller skates, and (of course) skateboards. Canberra's skateparks are used for up to 16+ hours per day on every day that the sun is shining. Research has also shown that skateparks provide significant community and public health benefits. Skate-friendly public spaces with robust architecture often result in areas becoming safer by way of activation and passive surveillance.

Skateboarding and BMX-based local businesses have contributed to the local economy and supported the community. Canberra has also produced some of Australia's most talented skateboarders, and has a vibrant inclusive skateboarding scene.

Unfortunately, Canberra is beginning to fall behind in the provision and management of contemporary skateparks. There has been no new skateparks built in Canberra for over a decade and an omission of skate elements in almost all new play spaces. Tuggeranong skate park, in particular, has reached 25 years of age, much older than the original Belconnen skatepark when it was upgraded in 2011.

Modern facilities being built across Australia are leaping ahead in design and quality, with creatively designed bowls, vertical halfpipes, pump tracks and modern street and park facilities.

Our community would be stoked to see a comprehensive plan for the ongoing maintenance of Canberra's skateparks, and the construction of new skateparks and skate-friendly spaces.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the Government to allocate sufficient funding to construct a new, modern, world-class skatepark in Tuggeranong to modernise the 25-year-old facility and cater to the growing population in the area.

We thank the Assembly for its consideration of our petition and look forward to the response from the Minister.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having more than 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services.*

### **Health—maternity services—petitions 42-22 and 1-23**

*By Ms Clay, from 551 and 63 residents:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to provide a freestanding Birth Centre in Canberra.

Canberra needs a freestanding birth centre to support the wishes of Canberran women, to keep well women out of hospital, to reduce unnecessary intervention and to offer career opportunities that support our midwives.

Birth centres offer continuity of maternity care which means childbearing women receive the majority of their care from a known midwife. Continuity of care has been shown to be the best model of care for women and their babies during labour and birth, regardless of risk. Research shows that under this model of care there are decreases in rates of caesarean section, premature birth, fetal mortality, stillbirth and neonatal admission to a special care nursery. Furthermore, women love it, reporting high levels of satisfaction with their care experience.

Currently, hundreds of women each year give birth while still on the waiting list for either the Calvary Birth Centre or the Birth Centre at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that it is important for well women to be able to access maternity care outside of

hospitals. We have seen increases in women requesting antenatal and postnatal care at home, as well as interest for homebirth.

A freestanding birth centre would expand birth centre places and a home like environment allowing well Canberran women to give birth safely and supported by known midwives.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT Government to invest in building a freestanding birth centre in the North side of Canberra so as to service the needs of the women and their families in our community.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having more than 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing.*

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

## **Ministerial responses**

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

### **Housing—affordability—petition 6-22**

By **Mr Barr**, Chief Minister, dated 8 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Parton on 20 September 2022, concerning the reduction of housing costs for first home buyers.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 20 September 2022 enclosing petition No 6-22, lodged by Mr Mark Parton MLA, about the Housemate proposal and reducing housing costs for ACT resident first home buyers. This letter is the Government's response to the petition in line with Standing Order No. 100 of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The petition states that housing affordability is a source of stress to many Australians and the HouseMate proposal is a possible solution. The petition urges the Government to implement the proposal by supplying free residential land and creating affordable homes.

The ACT Government knows that housing affordability is a real issue and there are significant challenges in land availability and sector capacity to deliver additional affordable housing – this is something the ACT Government is seeking to address through the levers available at our level of Government.

We know that a wide range of factors have resulted in rising house prices. These include Commonwealth tax policy, historically low interest rates in recent years,

financial deregulation, and increasing house sizes. In the ACT, housing preferences are critical in determining the demand for and price of dwellings.<sup>1</sup>

The ACT Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth to address issues impacting housing affordability. We are also committed to and actively working towards addressing issues of housing affordability in the ACT and continue to prioritise actions to make housing more affordable – to both rent and purchase.

### **The HouseMate Proposal**

HouseMate is a proposed public homeownership system where homes would be sold at the construction cost price (estimated by Dr Murray at approximately \$350,000 on average), with superannuation funds used for deposits and ongoing repayments. HouseMate advocates that governments provide land for free (or nearly free) to eligible buyers, and only charges buyers construction and development costs.

There would be major barriers to the Territory unilaterally implementing HouseMate in the ACT, including:

- The proposal would require significant changes to Commonwealth policy and Commonwealth legislation, including amending superannuation legislation to allow trustees to withdraw contributions to pay deposits and make ongoing payments;
- The Commonwealth Government would be required to underwrite mortgages;
- The proposal recommends that HouseMate utilise the Reserve Bank of Australia to operate the financing system; and
- The proposal does not address how the cost to develop new estates would be funded.

The ACT Government remains committed to increasing the supply of more affordable homes and supporting Canberrans to access the housing market, including by considering new measures and adjustments to existing schemes to account for changing economic circumstances. The Government has a broad range of ongoing policies and programs to address housing and rental affordability, including but not limited to:

- the attraction of large-scale affordable Build-to-Rent through financial incentives;
- signatory to the Commonwealth Housing Accord and working with the Commonwealth Government to deliver the Help-to-Buy Scheme and Home Guarantee Scheme in the ACT;
- an urban infill target, ongoing consultation on planning reforms and a five year indicative land release program;
- affordable community housing land tax exemptions;
- nation-leading investment in public housing growth and renewal; and
- programs such as the land rent scheme and affordable home purchase scheme

The Government thanks Dr Murray and the petitioners for their contribution to the important topic of housing affordability.

<sup>1</sup> The ACT continues to build the biggest houses in Australia; the average floor area of a house built in the ACT in 2020-21 was 259.3m<sup>2</sup>, 1.3 per cent larger than the previous year, and well above the Australian average of 229.3m<sup>2</sup> (which reduced by 2.9 per cent from the previous year). (CommSec Home Size Report 2021)

## **Waste—proposed waste to energy incinerator site—petition 12-22**

By **Mr Barr**, Chief Minister, 9 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 2 August 2022, concerning a NSW waste incinerator located 35 km from the ACT border.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about Petition 12-22, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA, regarding a proposed Waste-to-Energy Incinerator site near Tarago, NSW.

The ACT Government structures its waste policies to both protect the local environment and for benefit of its residents. In recognition of environmental protection and management spanning across borders, the ACT Government also engages regularly and actively with the NSW Government and the local government areas that make up the Canberra Region.

The ACT's 2020-25 Waste-to-Energy Policy (the Policy) bans the use of thermal methods to generate energy from waste. The Policy is in response to the community's serious concerns that incinerating waste could create toxic emissions contaminating the local environment or compromising human health, particularly children and those with existing respiratory conditions. It also reflects community support for prioritising waste avoidance and recycling activities ahead of waste-to-energy solutions.

The Policy does allow potential energy generation from anaerobic digestion of organic waste.

The ACT Government acknowledges that waste-to-energy incinerators can remove methane and some other pollutants from the environment by burning it and converting it into carbon dioxide. It also notes industry statements on the benefits of using high temperature incineration to help avoid contaminants such as microplastics entering watercourses, compared with landfill.

Before addressing the specific points on which the petition seeks action, I wish to clarify points raised in the context and background of the petition, as understood by the ACT Government.

There is no NSW Government-initiated proposal to establish a relevant precinct, or to construct a specific waste-to-energy facility. However, a precinct has been nominated in NSW legislation that allows for the development of a waste-to-energy facility near the town of Tarago. This is understood to result from an amendment to the NSW *Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Regulation 2021*, made under the NSW *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*, on 8 July 2022 which enacted the NSW Government's *Energy from Waste Infrastructure Plan*.

The amended regulation prohibits waste-to-energy incineration unless undertaken in one of four nominated precincts, including the South Goulburn Mulwaree Precinct. This precinct could be home to a waste-to-energy incineration facility near Tarago, subject to NSW Government planning and environmental approvals.

The identification of this precinct in NSW legislation should not be read as automatic approval for construction and operation of a specific facility.

A proposal for the construction and operation of such a facility is currently before the NSW Government. The Proponent is from Veolia Environmental Services (Australia) Pty Ltd (Veolia). The ACT Government understands that an initial scoping report was prepared on behalf of Veolia in May 2021 which considered, among other matters, how a future Advanced Energy Recovery Centre (ARC) at Tarago (Woodlawn) would deal with emissions and particulate pollutants. This Report did not go into specific design detail on these matters and was also submitted to NSW Planning.

In July 2021, and in response to its receipt of the scoping report, NSW Planning wrote to Veolia to advise them of the 'Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements' (SEARs). The SEARs directly apply to the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposal and include a requirement for the EIS to provide detailed design specifications, and that it must specifically and comprehensively address issues such as air quality and human health.

The ACT Government will continue to liaise with the NSW Government on matters of shared interest, including waste management. A completed EIS was recently submitted with NSW Planning and the proposal has just been released for public consultation. The ACT Government is carefully considering the EIS proposal and will make a full assessment in relation to its responsibilities to the residents and natural environment of the Territory.

However, the ACT is concerned about initial reports of potential wind flow from the potential incinerator location, over residential areas of North Canberra. It will be making a submission to the public consultation process currently underway, outlining both the ACT's rationale for its waste-to-energy restriction, and seeking specific consideration of the potential impact on residential areas in surrounding regions.

Once the ACT Government has completed its assessment of materials currently available, we will also determine what, further action is required in relation to impact on the ACT, including a possible education and awareness program regarding the issues raised by this proposal.

For petitioners' awareness, while the ACT Government seeks to encourage reduced waste generation, and reusing or recycling wherever possible, remaining household general waste collected by ACT Government waste contractors is sent to landfill in the ACT. It is not currently feasible or appropriate to impose a ban in relation to the transport of non-Government-collected waste out of the ACT.

I thank the signatories to this petition for raising their concerns with the ACT Government. The Government will continue to closely monitor this proposed development and will actively engage with NSW as details are made available,

including regarding any potential for direct risk to human health or the environment.

### **Courts—judicial appointments—petition 23-22**

By **Mr Rattenbury**, Attorney-General, 18 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Hanson on 11 October 2022, concerning a review process for ACT judicial appointments.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 11 October 2022, regarding petition 22-23 lodged by Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA.

The petition claims a lack of transparency and due process in the appointment of judicial officers and specifically requests the Assembly call on the ACT Government to commission an independent review to investigate concerns of undue influence from non-elected bodies and persons, and political directions and influence in judicial appointments.

The petition does not refer to any particulars in relation to undue or politicised influence on judicial appointees. As such, the Government's response is in general terms.

The ACT's existing processes for appointing judicial officers and overseeing complaints regarding judicial officers are robust and designed to ensure there is no undue influence, political or otherwise, being placed on the ACT's judicial officers through the process of appointment or otherwise.

Judicial appointments are, among all Commonwealth governments, a prerogative of the Executive. While historically, and in some other jurisdictions, this prerogative is in the form of unfettered discretion, there has been significant development across Australian states and territories, and to some extent the Commonwealth, of clearer processes and criteria for appointment, and conducting selection processes at arms-length from the final decision of appointment. This is in recognition of the importance of: ensuring such processes are more transparent; promoting diversity within the judiciary; and making for stronger, more impartial court compositions.

The ACT's system of appointments reflects these important developments as can be observed from the discussion in the recent Australian Law Reform Commission report *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias* (see chapter 12 and Appendix H).

The ACT has a rigorous, robust and transparent legislative framework to facilitate judicial appointments that preserves impartiality of the judiciary and guards against undue influence of judicial appointments. The process and selection criteria for appointments to the ACT Supreme Court, ACT Magistrates Court and ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) are set out in publicly available determinations under the relevant Acts, including the *Supreme Court (Resident Judges Appointment Requirements) Determination 2015 (No 1)*,



the *Magistrates Court (Magistrates Appointment Requirements) Determination 2009* and the *ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Presidential Appointment Requirements) Determination 2016*.

Each of these provide that I, as Attorney-General, must publicly seek expressions of interest for the position by public notice and also write to key ACT stakeholders, inviting them to suggest or nominate people who are suitably qualified for appointment. Before recommending the appointment of a judge or magistrate to the Executive, I must consult with the relevant head of jurisdiction (that is the Chief Justice or the Chief Magistrate). The selection process must be based on a consideration of possible candidates having regard to the selection criteria set out in the relevant determination. The detailed selection criteria include intellectual capacity; personal qualities; an ability to understand and deal fairly; authority and communication skills; and efficiency. An explicit part of the selection criteria under personal qualities is integrity and independence of mind and objectivity.

There are also several policies in place to protect the transparency of the appointment process. The ACT Government's *Governance Principles on Appointments, Boards and Committees* are contained in a publicly available document that details the process for appointments in the ACT and includes a requirement to consult with the ACT Diversity Register.

Where there are permanent vacancies in the judiciary, these are filled through a public selection process, involving a selection panel that usually includes a Senior Executive from the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (such as the Director-General, or the Deputy Director-General), a representative from the judiciary and an independent member. The panel make assessments and recommendations in light of the selection criteria outlined in the Determinations.

These processes are described in more general terms in the various instruments governing them than I have detailed here. As such, I have instructed the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to examine where it may be appropriate to make these practices explicit rules.

Finally, there is a strong framework for dealing with complaints about judicial officers. Complaints about judicial officers (including Coroners) are undertaken in accordance with *the Judicial Commissions Act 1994* (Judicial Commissions Act). A person may make a complaint to the Judicial Council or to myself, as Attorney-General, about a matter which relates to the behaviour or capacity of a judicial officer. When a complaint is made, the Judicial Council is required to follow the process outlined in the Judicial Commissions Act for investigating this complaint. I am required to refer any complaints about judicial officers to the ACT Judicial Council for investigation.

I cannot remove a magistrate or judge from office, as judicial officers in the ACT can only be removed from office in accordance with the Judicial Commissions Act.

The ACT Government remains committed to maintaining public confidence in the ACT judiciary. On this basis, the Government will continue to consider opportunities that will further strengthen the judicial appointment process, and provide the Canberra community with more publicly available information on the process for appointing judicial officers.

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

### **Courts—judiciary—petition 24-22**

By **Mr Rattenbury**, Attorney-General, dated 18 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Hanson on 11 October 2022, concerning a review of sentencing judgements and decisions by the ACT judiciary.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 11 October 2022, regarding petition 22-24 lodged by Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA.

The petition calls for an independent review of sentencing decisions made by ACT Courts over the past five years to determine whether the *Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005* and the common law have been applied correctly, and particularly whether the purposes of sentencing have been considered properly.

The petition also seeks that the review consider:

- whether the ACT's correctional services regime is working to address recidivism;
- whether ACT correctional facilities are fit for purpose, and whether they have sufficient capacity; and
- whether correctional programs and relevant community-based services (e.g. drug and alcohol services) are fit for purpose and have sufficient capacity.

The petition further seeks a commitment to trial electronic tagging for offenders serving community-based orders, to review any effect on recidivism.

I understand that this petition reflects concerns that some sentences have not met expectations and that reoffending is a serious issue, particularly in relation to dangerous driving offences. I want to acknowledge these concerns, and that they have arisen from tragic circumstances. I also want to acknowledge that these concerns are motivated by the very noble goal of protecting people in the future. We must all work towards reducing tragic deaths on our roads.

The role of the ACT Legislative Assembly with respect to sentencing is to set maximum penalties for criminal offences that are consistent with community views and which reflect the relative seriousness of the offences.

Maximum penalties send a signal to the courts about the seriousness of these offences. However, the sentences actually imposed within the sentencing ranges available should, and do, remain a matter for the courts. The effects on victims of an offence are highly relevant, and the overriding purpose of the criminal justice system is to avoid anyone else suffering in the same way. The courts must take into account the objective nature of the offending, the seriousness of the offence, the subjective circumstances of the offender, and treatment of similar matters by courts in the past.

Imprisonment can only be considered as a sentencing option if the court is satisfied, having considered possible alternatives, that no other penalty is appropriate. This same rule exists across most other Australian jurisdictions.

Imprisonment is the most serious penalty that can be given to an offender. It should also be noted that other custodial orders are significant impositions on the life of an offender. While an offender serving a suspended sentence or intensive corrections order may be physically at liberty, their lives are still subject to strict conditions, demanding the offender address the issues causing and arising from their offending behaviour. These can be even more demanding than simply residing in prison.

Custodial sentences data available for all offences in the ACT indicates that 19% of defendants with a guilty outcome were sentenced to a custodial order, with 62% of these offenders serving that sentence by full-time imprisonment. Only South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory had higher percentages of defendants sentenced to custodial orders.<sup>1</sup> NSW, Queensland and Victoria all had a lower proportion. The ACT is also positioned in the middle in terms of how many custodial sentences are served by full-time imprisonment.

Caution must be used when making comparisons between states and territories as there are differences in offences, maximum penalties and judicial systems. However, as some of the best large-scale comparative data, it does not identify the ACT as an outlier in any clear respect.

The ACT Government recognises that an independent judiciary is essential to the proper functioning of our system of government. It is not the role of executive Government to intervene in judicial decision-making. The proper and accountable way to achieve different results from judicial decision-making is to alter the legislative framework, through the process of democratically considering legislation. Importantly, while courts administration is the business of Government, judicial officers are not, and never should be, subject to executive government override in terms of judicial decisions made within a legislative framework.

On 7 October 2022, I announced that the ACT Government will establish a law reform and sentencing advisory council to provide ongoing advice to the public and to government on ways to ensure our laws remain current and relevant.

This ongoing and dedicated body will mean not only can the present issues be reviewed independently, but other issues as they arise into the future. The Government is of the view that having a dedicated council that can undertake sustained work and proactively look at issues facing the ACT will put us in the best position on these issues, over time.

The petition also touches on other aspects of the justice system, in particular the ACT's corrective services framework and operations, and its role in reducing recidivism in the ACT. Throughout this term of Government progress has been made to improve outcomes for staff and detainees within ACT Corrective Services.

A range of factors influence recidivism and re-offending behaviour, including individual circumstances, behaviour and characteristics; housing availability; education and employment; capacity and capability of the broader human service system to support offenders to reduce offending behaviour and practices of

various criminal justice and law enforcement agencies. ACT Corrective Services also acknowledges its important role in supporting the rehabilitation of offenders and reducing recidivism.

ACT Corrective Services finalised its new Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Framework in December 2021. The IOM is a holistic ‘end to end’ service model that aims to support positive rehabilitative outcomes for offenders throughout their custodial and/or community supervision period to reduce reoffending behaviour and thereby improving community safety. As part of the graduated implementation of the IOM, rehabilitative programs offered by ACTCS for offenders both in community and custodial settings have been reviewed and a new suite of contemporary, evidence-based programs were implemented throughout the 20-21 financial year. As part of the IOM implementation, these programs will be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness, including impacts on reducing offending behaviour.

On 27 July 2022 the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety released its report from the Inquiry into Community Corrections (the Inquiry), which among a range of focus areas, included a recommendation on electronic monitoring. The ACT government is actively considering options for electronic monitoring in the ACT. A decision by Government to introduce electronic monitoring would be informed by appropriate consultation, scoping and feasibility work specific to the ACT environment.

The ACT Government response to the Inquiry’s report and its recommendations was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 24 November 2022.

The ACT Government also acknowledges the ACT Inspector of Corrective Services 2022 Healthy Prison Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre, released on 24 November 2022. Reports such as the Healthy Prison Review 2022 are an important feature of AMC oversight and promote accountability. The ACT Government will carefully consider its 63 findings and 29 recommendations and will prepare a response for tabling to the Legislative Assembly in the first half of 2023.

The ACT Government remains committed to its plan for Reducing Recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025 (2020-2023) which is underpinned by a justice reinvestment approach. The ACT Government is continuing to work collaboratively across justice and human service systems and with the local community to meet our shared goals.

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

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Criminal Courts, Australia* (24 February 2022), accessed at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/criminal-courts-australia/2020-21>.

## **Crime—sentencing—petition 25-22**

By **Mr Rattenbury**, Attorney-General, dated 18 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Hanson on 11 October 2022, concerning sentencing guidelines for reckless motor vehicle crimes.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 11 October 2022, regarding petition 22-25 lodged by Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA.

The petition raises concerns about recidivism, particularly for dangerous driving offences, and calls on the Legislative Assembly to review and consider introducing ‘Matthew’s Law’ – sentencing guidelines.

I note that it has been made clear since that the call for sentencing guidelines is not intended as a call for minimum mandatory sentences.

The ACT Government is not aware of sentencing guidelines in use in any jurisdiction in Australia. Sentencing guidelines are in place in England and Wales and they provide a ‘starting point’ sentence for offences based on an assessment of objective seriousness. Judicial officers are required to follow these guidelines and must provide reasons for departing from them in their judgments. These guidelines are developed by the Sentencing Council for England and Wales as an advisory body to the Ministry of Justice and are informed by research and consultation.

The ACT Government understands that Victoria introduced a similar approach, known as baseline sentencing in 2014, which set baseline prison sentences for the most serious offences, which included culpable driving causing death with a baseline sentence of 9 years.<sup>1</sup> Minimum non-parole periods were also introduced as part of the baseline sentencing scheme. Baseline sentences in Victoria were however abolished after less than two years of operation.

This followed a Victorian Court of Appeal ruling that denounced baseline sentencing provisions as unworkable.<sup>2</sup> The scheme was heavily criticised by stakeholders, including for removing judicial discretion, and for being cumbersome and flawed.<sup>3</sup> Before the scheme was abolished, Victoria’s Sentencing Advisory Council also noted it could have unintended effects on the rate and timing of guilty pleas for serious offending.<sup>4</sup> In 2018 Victoria introduced ‘standard sentences’ for 13 offences including culpable driving causing death.<sup>5</sup> At this stage it is unclear whether this reform has affected rates of offending.

The ACT Government cautions against the introduction of sentencing guidelines without evidence that they effectively contribute to reducing the offences being committed. While I do note the proposal is not for minimum mandatory sentences, other Australian experiences with minimum mandatory sentencing raise some issues that are relevant. The primary problem is the exclusion of judicial consideration and decision-making. Mandatory sentences remove the ability of the judicial officer, after taking submissions from all parties, to customise the sentence to the individual circumstances. They prioritise punishment over all other sentencing purposes.

Mandatory sentences also force sentences to be considered only within the dimension of full-time imprisonment. Evidence continually shows that a range of sentencing options is important, to address the particular criminogenic factors of

the individual. Where a singular sentence type is prioritised exclusively, this limits the ability of the court to sentence based on the best prospects for the individual to stop future offending. I would note in this respect that many cases reported on in relation to the campaign for these petitions have involved some stakeholders calling for imprisonment even when the prosecution has not advocated for it.

Guideline sentences, as far as they are detailed, would not exclude the ability of our courts to deliver individualised justice to the same extent. Presumably the circumstances where a guideline is departed from would be wider than the (usually very narrow) circumstances needed to depart from a mandatory sentence. As such, the lessons learnt about mandatory sentencing's ineffectiveness are not directly transferrable, but they are still relevant to consider.

Any recommendation to introduce a guideline sentencing scheme in the ACT would need to involve extensive consultation with the community, a range of experts, the legal profession and judicial officers.

An alternative to sentencing guidelines may be guideline judgements. These are Court of Appeal decisions which give guidance to judicial officers in relation to how they should sentence offenders. Legislation is in place in New South Wales<sup>6</sup>, Queensland<sup>7</sup> and Victoria<sup>8</sup> to allow for the issuing of guideline judgments. This legislation permits the Court of Appeal in that jurisdiction to issue guideline judgments of its own motion, and also permits the Attorney-General to apply for guideline judgments.

Victoria's first guideline judgment was made in 2014,<sup>9</sup> ten years after the enabling legislation was introduced.<sup>10</sup> In NSW there are eight guideline judgments currently in place, one of which relates to dangerous driving.<sup>11</sup> The objective of guideline judgments is to reduce inconsistency in sentencing for certain offences. The guideline judgments provide a starting point for legal practitioners to use on sentence, however they do not operate as a 'rule' or 'presumption', instead they are intended to be taken into account only as a 'check, sounding board or guide.'<sup>12</sup>

The ACT Government is undertaking preliminary work to understand how guideline judgments could operate in the ACT. To progress such a project, the ACT Government notes consultation would need to occur with the community, a range of experts, ACT Courts and Tribunal, as well as the legal profession and legal community, prior to any recommendation being made on introducing guideline judgments.

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

<sup>1</sup> *Sentencing Amendment (Baseline Sentences) Act 2014 (Vic)* s 16.

<sup>2</sup> *DPP v Walters* [2015] VSCA 303.

<sup>3</sup> Sentencing Advisory Council, *Sentencing Guidance in Victoria* (June 2016) p 46.

<sup>4</sup> Sentencing Advisory Council, *Guilty Pleas in the Higher Courts: Rates, Timing, and Discounts* (August 2015) p 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Sentencing Amendment (Sentencing Standards) 2017 (Vic)*.

<sup>6</sup> *Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 (NSW)*, div 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 (Qld)*, part 2A.

<sup>8</sup> *Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic)*, part 2AA.

<sup>9</sup> *Boulton v The Queen; Clements v The Queen; Fitzgerald v The Queen* [2014] VSCA 342.

<sup>10</sup> *Sentencing (Amendment) Act 2003* (Vic).

<sup>11</sup> Supreme Court of New South Wales, *Sentencing Guideline Judgements*, [https://www.supremecourt.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/sco2\\_practiceprocedure/sco2\\_sentencingguidelinejudgment.s.aspx](https://www.supremecourt.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/sco2_practiceprocedure/sco2_sentencingguidelinejudgment.s.aspx)

<sup>12</sup> *R v Whyte* [2002] NSWCCA 343 at 113.

## **Stromlo Forest Park—car park—petition 30-22**

By **Mr Steel**, Special Minister of State, dated 13 December 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lawder on 18 October 2022, concerning car park changes at Stromlo Forest Park.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan,

Thank you for your letter of 18 October 2022 about petition No 30-22 lodged by Ms Lawder relating to carparking at Stromlo Forest Park.

The ACT Government recognises the popularity of Stromlo Forest Park (SFP) as a premier sporting facility in the ACT, and that community consultation is essential when introducing changes to a valued community space. For this reason, the carpark upgrade underwent public consultation as part of the 2016 SFP Masterplan development (the Masterplan). The Masterplan identified the future needs of the park, future challenges, and as well as development opportunities. The Government continues to deliver on commitments made under the plan, with milestones including the Stromlo Leisure Centre, the planning of the Molonglo District Playing Fields, the Criterium Track Extension, the planned Carpark upgrades and event village green.

The Masterplan identified the need for a surfaced, all-weather carpark, and the ACT Government allocated \$2.866 million for its design and construction in the 2021-22 budget.

The carpark upgrades are necessary because the existing unsealed carpark suffers considerable erosion which can be hazardous to people and vehicles, has high maintenance costs and tends to encourage unsafe parking along Dave McInnes Road. The upgrades will deliver a wide range of benefits, including more accessible parking, designated car parks for people with disabilities, larger spaces to accommodate people transporting bicycles, wider alleys and no wheel stops.

The company commissioned to design the carpark undertook thorough research concerning its location and interaction with the trails to ensure the user and visitor experience is not adversely impacted. Considerable data was collected on traffic flow, parking behaviour and practical use which have been incorporated into the proposed plans. The carpark development application, including all design plans, was available for viewing and comment on the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate website, and design comments will be taken into consideration as part of the approval process.

Before and during the design of the carpark, the ACT Government has been conducting consultation with SFP users and the broader community. The proposed design was developed in consultation with the Stromlo

Stakeholder Consultative Committee (SSCC). The SSCC comprises eight key SFP user groups across different sporting interests, established to help guide major park decisions, and includes: ACT Equestrian Association; AusCycling; Canberra Off Road Cycling; Indigenous Marathon Foundation; Pedal Power; Triathlon ACT; We Ride; and YMCA Canberra Running Club. Capturing the feedback of every individual is not possible, hence the prerequisite to be a group representing a larger body of people to become a member of the SSCC.

The ACT Government also engaged with the Weston Creek Community Council and Canberra Off- Road Cyclists, with two forums occurring in September and October and attended by over 100 people in person and online.

A proposal to implement an own-source revenue paid parking model at Stromlo Forest Park, like the model already implemented at National Arboretum Canberra, has been provided to the ACT Government with support of several user groups. The Government has been considering the proposal and will announce a position in 2023.

The ACT Government will continue to listen to the breadth of views in the community on the future of Stromlo as it grows and will continue to take on board feedback about how to improve the precinct and to capitalise on opportunities for development as the park evolves.

Most recently, consultation has identified the need to identify, prioritise and plan new trails at Stromlo. As a result, the ACT Government will develop an overarching Trails Masterplan to guide development of this infrastructure over the next five years. Throughout this process, the ACT Government will engage directly with sporting groups, the SSCC and the public.

I trust this information is of assistance.

### **Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22**

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Planning and Land Management, dated 12 January 2023, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain on 12 October 2022, concerning a memorial bench at Shepherds Lookout.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

I refer to your letter of 12 October 2022 regarding petition 33-22 (the Brontë Haskins memorial bench).

The ACT Government acknowledges the request from the Haskins family and has agreed to the installation of a memorial bench at Shepherds Lookout.

On 7 November 2022, the Deputy Chief Minister and I sent a letter to Ms Haskins to advise that the government would purchase and install a bench at Shepherds Lookout. Ms Haskins has since been in contact with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to discuss the arrangements for the installation of the bench.

I trust that this Government response has been helpful and provides advice on the issues raised in Petition No. 33-22.



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

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

**Courts—judicial appointments—petition 23-22**

**Courts—judiciary—petition 24-22**

**Crime—sentencing—petition 25-22**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.29): I speak here to the three petitions by Mr McLuckie that were presented on 11 October. Members may recall that because we then moved a motion of no confidence in the Attorney-General, and there was the incident, as members will recall, where during the tabling of those petitions Mr Barr stood with his back to the petitioners, to the families, which upset those family members. Mr Barr was asked about that in question time and did apologise. I thank him for that. But he then went on and made a number of statements to mischaracterise what Mr McLuckie had called for in his petitions. I think that needs to be addressed.

Mr McLuckie has written to the Speaker, on 11 November, raising these issues as part of a citizen's right of reply. I am not sure where that process is. I am aware of it because he has put it on his Facebook page and he also copied the letter to the opposition. I want to put on the record what Mr McLuckie's concerns are because I do not know whether there will be a citizen's right to reply or not.

And it is:

Dear Ms Burch, I refer to the Hansard recorded on 12 October 2022, in response to a question by Ms Lee as to whether the Chief Minister would work with the families who had attended the Assembly for the presentation of three petitions the day before collaboratively, part of his response was recorded as follows.

This is Mr Barr speaking:

'I acknowledge that I have an in-principle objection and I will never support mandatory sentencing, or indeed a US-style approach to the appointment of judicial officers. I have been clear on that, and I would not seek to sack the Attorney-General in the terms in which the petition asked me to do, and I was very clear about that yesterday.'

Mr McLuckie goes on:

Given this is now on the Assembly record, I wish to request, as per the Assembly Standing Orders, Continuing Resolution 4, Citizens Right of Reply to the Standing Committee on Admin Procedures, to consider this submission under this resolution and request the Chief Minister formally retract this statement in the Assembly so the Hansard can reflect his retraction. By his disgraceful misrepresentation in his statement, the Chief Minister has adversely affected my reputation in respect to the Road Safety Campaign and the clear intent of the petitions.

I request that a response by the personal corporation who made this submission, (that is Mr McLuckie) in terms as specified in the report and agreed to by the person or corporation of the committee, be published by the Assembly or incorporated in the Hansard.

As per the ACT government submission to the Dangerous Driving Inquiry, I wish to advise the following. The ACT government notes that sentencing guidelines and minimum mandatory sentences are two distinct issues. It appears the Chief Minister has not consulted with his Attorney-General to understand the intent of the petition. Maybe if he had actually attended the reading of the petition to the Assembly, instead of being out in the corridor on his phone, he would realise the guidelines are not mandatory sentencing.

In regard to US style appointment, we agree, recommending a review of the current appointment process led by a politically appointed Attorney-General, a panel that may include the politically led executive in the appointment of said judicial officers is exactly my fear that we currently have a US based appointment process and does not ensure separation of the government from the judiciary. This is why the petition is asking for a review of that process.

I look forward to your response and ask for a due and unbiased consideration.

I think it is very important to understand that Mr McLuckie put in three petitions. I have not yet read the response from the government but you cannot have the Chief Minister mischaracterise what was in those petitions.

Mr McLuckie was not asking for mandatory sentencing and he was not asking for US-style judicial appointments. That record needs to be corrected.

### **Tuggeranong—skate park—petition 34-22**

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (10.34): I have a terribly embarrassing admission to make to this Assembly. Despite being this Assembly's youngest member, I am not cool. I have unfortunately had to learn the hard way, members, that I am not cool, because I have spent a fair bit of time recently with some awesome people down at Tuggeranong Skate Park and representatives of the Canberra Skateboarding Association. You know, Abe Simpson has that fantastic quote in *The Simpsons*:

I used to be with 'it', but then they changed what 'it' was. Now what I'm with isn't 'it' anymore ...

It feels very real at the moment! But I will give you the background. I came to meet a lot of the skaters, scooter riders and BMX riders in my electorate of Brindabella down at the Tuggeranong Skate Park. I came to meet them after the government made the announcement, which as local member I absolutely whole-heartedly welcome and that was the \$4.75 million investment into the Lake Tuggeranong Foreshore Revitalisation Project. I am hard pressed to find a constituent who is not excited that money has been earmarked, that work already appears to be commencing and that investment is being made into the southside.

During that process, to aid and abet the government's efforts I engaged on a community survey of my own so I could prepare a report for the minister and his

department, to give some feedback about what my constituents wanted to see in the Lake Tuggeranong Foreshore Revitalisation Project. I received a lot of feedback about the state of the skate park.

Now I have to admit to you that I have not spent much time down at the skate park prior to receiving these representations from my constituents. So I made a bit of an effort. I wore my skinniest jeans because I thought I would pretend to be cool. I went down and I had a good look at it. I was genuinely surprised, because as I said to Zac, who joins us in the public gallery today, one of the young advocates from the Canberra Skateboarding Association, “It gets worse down here every time I visit.” He nodded and said, “Yes, you will see something different every time.”

Let me just give you some of the examples of the list we made while I was down there this weekend, Madam Speaker. Now because I am getting on and I do not spend much time in the sun, I thought, “Gee whiz it’s hot down here!” Then I realised there is not a shade sail anywhere at the skate park, let alone close. So heaven forbid you just want to take a moment off your skateboard to sit down and relax. You better slip, slop, slap, if you are spending time at the Tuggeranong Skate Park. Zac said to me, “Yes, there is no shade down here.” I said, “Well I’ll find somewhere to sit.” “Well there isn’t really any seating. But that halfpipe there, you can kind of sit on that.” “All right. I’ll go and take a seat.”

Another 10-20 minutes passed, while waiting for a journalist, so I was there for a little bit. I thought: “Ooh I should’ve brought a bottle of water. It’s a bit hot down here.” Zac says to me, “Yes, there was a bubbler up the top, but it was pumping in water from Lake Tuggeranong, so they closed it off.” Now we spend a lot of time in this Assembly talking about water quality in Lake Tuggeranong. I feel bad for the Minister for Water because it is literally the only thing we ever talk about, but you certainly do not want the water in Lake Tuggeranong being pumped up to a bubbler at the moment!

So no bubbler, no shade sail, no seating. Then I went down and looked in and I saw that the concrete is starting to fall apart. It is starting to pebble. It is starting to become unsafe. There was an entire metal plate that one of the skaters showed me they could pull up the halfpipe. An accident waiting to happen. I thought to myself, “Well there is economy of scale in doing projects once and doing them right.” Canberra is a great example. We all know the GDE, right? The road so nice that we built it twice and spent three times more than what we should have to build it!

I would like to avoid that in the Lake Tuggeranong Foreshore Revitalisation Project. I would like to really commend the Treasurer to work with the Minister for Transport and City Services, who has carriage of this investment project, and see if we cannot allocate a bit more money to ensure we do the job on the foreshore once, we do it properly and it includes a complete rebuild of the skate park. The reason for that, despite the fact that I do not have a particularly strong opinion towards skating, or BMX riding or scooting—I tried to do a drop in once and it was a TikTok video waiting to embarrass me. I was about to go viral and not in a good way, Mr Barr!

First and foremost, before anything else here, I am a representative of the people of Tuggeranong. As someone born and raised in the valley, we have an impression,

a feeling, that historically we get a bit left behind when it comes to investment—shiny new things. It is the nature of being an ageing demographic I suppose. I have heard the Belconnen Skate Park was replaced when it was younger than 20 years old! The Woden Skate Park completely replaced when it was less than 20 years old! Tuggeranong Skate Park is now coming up to its 25th birthday. It is apparently getting some modest safety improvements as part of the revitalisation work. This is the challenge of trying to square peg a round hole, when you appropriate money before you ask the community what they would actually like to see down there.

So, in closing, to the Treasurer: the minister needs a bit more money. To the minister: should you get a bit more money, I would love to talk to you about how we make a great skate park in Tuggeranong.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.39): I want to speak for just a few minutes about a petition for a new skate park for Tuggeranong, the skate park which is now old enough to get cheaper car insurance! I want to thank our Greens MLA for Brindabella Johnathan Davis for presenting this petition and for providing us an opportunity today to all think about the diversity of sports and recreation facilities that we need across our community.

Now, when we think of the benefits of sports and recreation spaces for young people in particular, we often think of the physical fitness, resilience, communication and the social connection that is developed through team sports like cricket or tennis. But skating can provide all these benefits, and it is important to recognise that not all young people will enjoy the same activities or want the same kind of structure in what they do.

Street skating activates public spaces and makes them feel more vibrant and less isolating, but research by the University of West Australia's Centre for Built Environment and Health shows that skate parks are places to learn cooperation, negotiation and compromise in informal ways—in contrast to the structured roles in team sports. The result is that park skating is more likely to generate pro-social behaviours like socialising with friends, respecting others and cooperation than anti-social behaviours. If you have ever been down to your local skate park on a sunny afternoon you will have seen skaters who are having to wait their turn to drop in, who are helping each other up after a stack and giving each other tips on new tricks. My own experience is that skaters are mostly inclusive and supportive. It is non-skaters who are more likely to be exclusionary, pushing us out of public spaces and assuming that the creativity and the individual self-expression in skate culture is a negative.

If Canberra is going to be the inclusive and creative city that we all want it to be, we need skaters' ability to adapt their environment so it is a fun place to be, to make progress through practice and have the discipline to stick at a trick until the trick sticks. I look forward to seeing the government response to this petition and continuing the conversation about sports and recreation facilities that meet the diverse needs of our growing community.

Just one more thing. We really need to fix the outrageousness that Canberrans under 18 are not able to sponsor petitions. Our young people care about infrastructure, they care about democracy and they should be able to sponsor petitions too. Thank you.

### **Health—maternity services—petitions 42-22 and 1-23**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.41): I would like to have a bit of a chat about the petition brought by Ms Abbie McMillan-Maher for a freestanding birth centre in Canberra. I would really like to thank Abbie. She is a Canberra mum; she is also a business manager. She has really generously shared her stories of giving birth in our birth centres. We ran a piece the other week. I was not able to access those facilities, and we had very, very different experiences. Abbie is very passionate. She wants everyone in Canberra to be able to access the same kind of experience she had.

We have a big, big push from Canberra's women, birthing people and midwives at the moment that we need another service and that our next service should not be another one of the same. We should actually have a freestanding birth centre supported by midwives working in the really solid gold-standard continuity of care model that we know gets such great outcomes for women and their babies. I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition calling for a family birth centre.

Leave granted.

I table the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Family birth centre for the ACT—Ms Clay (2685 signatures).

This is another petition that was started in 2018 that is also calling for a family birth centre for Canberra. Between the two petitions, we have well over 3,000 people now calling for these facilities in Canberra.

I am aware that we have a really busy day on in the Assembly. One of the things that we will be doing later on this afternoon is debating a motion that will be asking the Assembly to support a freestanding birth centre and midwife-led continuity of care, and support for a whole lot of the other recommendations that we know really, really help women and birthing people and babies get the best start in life.

I am quite keen not to take up too much time this morning on these petitions, but I am really, really honoured and pleased to bring these forward from the community. This is a very strong push that has come to us from Canberra's women and from the midwives here. I am very much looking forward to this afternoon's debate. Hopefully, we will be able to progress these issues.

### **Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.44): I will speak briefly in relation to the response from Mr Gentlemen on the bench seat at Shepherds Lookout in memory of Brontë Haskins. Minister, I have a fairly simple request. As you would recall, it was on 12 October that this petition was presented in the Assembly. From the floor we had support for

this petition from both Minister Berry and Minister Cheyne, both members for Ginninderra, where the Shepherds Lookout bench would be located.

Minister, I have a very simple request. This is a very worthy memorial to Brontë Haskins and to those like her who have suffered through drugs and mental illness. Again I want to commend Janine and Peter, Brontë's parents, for bringing this to my attention—and, I will say, having brought it to the government's attention much earlier with negative responses.

At the end of my speech presenting this petition last October, I noted that the two members for Ginninderra and two ministers from the Labor part of this government supported the petition to install this bench. Minister, given this support from your government, I would just simply request: could I please be informed on the progress of this very worthy installation? Could you let me know what is going on?

Given that your colleagues have supported this and that it is not a massive project—it is a bench that is being built to be installed at Shepherds Lookout—Minister, would you inform me as to the progress so that I can be fully part of this process, having worked so closely with the parents to bring this to fruition? That is my request, Minister. I await your response.

### **Stromlo Forest Park—car park—petition 30-22**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (10.46): I would like to speak briefly about the petition about Stromlo Forest Park and the minister's response. It is very disappointing to see that the Labor-Greens government have completely ignored the wishes of many in the mountain-biking, trail-running and ultramarathon community and are going ahead with paid-parking arrangements at Stromlo Forest Park.

We all talk a lot about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, about being out and about in green spaces, in nature. Stromlo Forest Park is a fantastic resource for many, many people. That is why, last year, I worked with members of some of these groups on this petition to table it in the Assembly, because they had approached me with their concerns about what the introduction of paid parking might mean for them.

We are talking here about people who are out there for four, six, even eight hours at a time. Whilst you may argue that the fee proposed at this point is quite small, we all know that that is the thin end of the wedge and it will increase every year. I fear—and I think this was outlined in the petition—that this may mean an increase in parking in neighbouring suburbs, which will be an impost on people nearby. According to the media article I saw today, it will only raise \$238,000 a year under the current proposed amounts, which is a reasonably small amount.

I would just like to say that we on this side of the chamber are against the introduction of paid parking at Stromlo Forest Park. We would not introduce paid parking for Stromlo Forest Park. I fear that this is, as I said, the thin end of the wedge—not only that parking costs will go up there but what will this mean for other community sport and lifestyle facilities? Are we going to see the introduction of paid parking near the Tuggeranong Skate Park, for example, and at the Active Leisure Centre down at Erindale and the Lakeside Leisure Centre at Lake Tuggeranong?

People are going for health and lifestyle and therapeutic reasons to take part in sport, and we are going to charge them more and more for doing that. I fear it will also have an impact on the small business that is located at Stromlo Forest Park. Another thing that I feel is really disdainful and shows disregard for those people in the community is that the minister came out with this announcement before tabling the response in the Assembly. It shows disdain for those people who went to such an effort to lodge that petition and were waiting for a response.

On the upgrades to the car park that are required, people have said to me, “What was the problem they were trying to solve here with the upgrades to the car park?” We are very disappointed in this Labor-Greens response, with the introduction of paid parking. It is not something that we would do. We want to encourage people to be out and about in our green spaces and to take advantage of our wonderful natural and, in some of these cases, built resources. That is what we would like to see continue, without the paid parking.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (10.50): I want to speak to the Stromlo Forest Park petition. The response to the petition was submitted earlier than the announcement that I made yesterday. I wanted to update the Assembly, accordingly, that the government has made a decision based on feedback from the user groups of Stromlo Forest Park, who support the implementation of paid parking once the new car park is constructed. We have made the decision to implement paid parking, with that revenue being directly invested in the tracks and trails at Stromlo Forest Park.

It is a very busy venue: 560,000 visitors each year and growing. It is a very busy car park. The new car park will see car parking spaces grow from 316 to 509 spaces of formalised parking. It is a more efficient use of the car park, which, in its current form as a dirt car park does have issues with rutting and weather. This will make it safe. It will provide disability parking—16 spots—for the first time.

We are looking forward to working with all of the user groups but particularly the mountain biking community, who are supportive of this paid parking model, to consult on a new trails master plan over the next five years. We will be consulting midyear on finalising that. That will inform where that investment goes to make sure that this remains a premier mountain biking facility for the region and indeed across Australia.

### **Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22**

**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) (10.52): On the Brontë Haskins memorial park bench, Madam Speaker, I will table the letter I sent to Mr Cain regarding the installation:

Memorial bench at Shepherds Lookout—Installation—Copy of letter from the Minister for Planning and Land Management to Mr Peter Cain, MLA, dated 20 December 2022.

The government has agreed to install it. We are conversing with the family on the installation of that.

**Mr Cain:** What date? What date, Minister?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cain.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Government—infrastructure and services investment Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (10.52): At the commencement of the parliamentary year I will take the opportunity to outline the government’s priorities for 2023. We begin the year as the fastest growing state or territory in the nation, a position that we have held for the past decade.

The French philosopher Auguste Comte is often quoted as having said, “Demography is destiny.” This is certainly true for Canberra. Over the past decade, our population has grown from around 370,000 people to 460,000, and by 2027 is set to reach half a million people. Much of that population growth has been people aged 25 to 39. This is as a result of the incredibly strong labour market in the territory, a very strong demand for labour, the strength of our higher education sector, but fundamentally our city’s desirability as a place to live.

The government knows that this strong population growth will continue and it will be driven by three factors. The first is natural increase—that is, there are more births than there are deaths in our city each year. It will be driven, secondly, by international migration. These policy settings are made at the national level, but the ACT’s share of the national migration program has continued to increase. As a result of the Jobs and Skills Summit last year, the commonwealth made a series of announcements about both the size and composition of the migration program. In short, the territory is anticipated to see a continual growth in its share of international migration.

Thirdly, population growth will be driven by internal migration within Australia—that is, Australians moving between states and territories. We anticipate that the territory will continue to be an attractive place for Australians to want to move to, given the factors I outlined around the labour market, the higher education sector and our city’s liveability. For these reasons the government needs to invest now and plan for the future to ensure that as our population increases we continue to be one of the world’s most liveable cities.

That is why we are investing in the infrastructure and services that our fast growing city needs. This includes health care, with our network of nurse-led walk-in centres and community health centres and the expansion of the Canberra Hospital, alongside the federal government’s commitment to deliver an urgent care clinic for the city. We look forward to working closely with the commonwealth as they seek to strengthen Medicare after nine years of Liberal Party underinvestment and failure on primary health care—the principal responsibility of the commonwealth government. We are in



this situation because the Liberal Party failed to invest in primary health care at a federal level, which, with frozen Medicare rebates, led to the situation that every state and territory now faces.

The ACT government will continue to invest in education and training, including a new CIT campus at Woden. We are investing in our transport network by extending the light rail network, something that will clearly be a point of difference between progressive and conservative voices in this city. We are increasing our electric bus fleet, rolling out EV charging infrastructure right across the territory and investing in active transport, new bikeways and footpaths.

We will pursue climate action to accelerate our path to a net zero emissions future. And we will be focusing on housing, housing affordability and housing supply, because, as we all know, delivering more diverse and affordable housing for more people is an important social good and, again, a clear priority at both levels of government. After a decade of neglect from the federal Liberals, the new federal Labour government is back at the table with money and commitment to invest in affordable and social housing.

The territory government will soon release the first of a series of updates on our 2019 Infrastructure Plan. The first will focus on arts, entertainment and sporting infrastructure. As we all know, our city is welcoming and inclusive and it will continue, under this government, to demonstrate national and international leadership.

We were the first Australian jurisdiction to be powered 100 per cent by renewable electricity, delivering cheaper and sustainable energy to Canberra households and businesses. We were the first to reform our tax system to reduce reliance on transaction taxes, such as insurance duties and stamp duty, to ensure that our tax base is broadened to support future investment in government services and infrastructure.

A particular focus for the government this year will be delivering on a number of significant social policy reforms. This year we will become the first Australian jurisdiction to decriminalise the possession of small quantities of a range of illicit drugs. We will become the first to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 and then to 14.

We are further strengthening our anti-discrimination laws to ensure that, as much as possible, every Canberran has access to social connections and economic opportunities. Now that the federal parliament has voted to restore territory rights, the government has today commenced community consultation to inform how voluntary assisted dying could be established in the ACT. Many Canberrans have looked forward to this day so that they can have their say on this fundamental right: to die with dignity and support.

We will also be supporting the process of enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to parliament in the Australian Constitution. Tomorrow I will bring forward an executive motion seeking to affirm the Assembly's support for the voice referendum as outlined by the Prime Minister, following Dr Paterson's important motion last year on the Uluru statement, and seeking Assembly support for a community engagement campaign about the referendum.

I note that Canberrans have a long history of voting yes for positive and inclusive change and so I state this morning that my ambition for the ACT is that we have the highest yes vote in the country in this referendum, just like we did with the marriage equality vote in 2017 and the republic referendum in 1999.

I return to the topic of drugs of dependence. The ACT government understands that drug use is a health issue, not a criminal one. Over the past two years we have taken nation-leading action to make this significant legal and cultural reform. I want to acknowledge Michael Pettersson and the work that he has undertaken to effect real change. Decriminalising the possession of small quantities of the most common illicit drugs will provide those battling addiction with the help they need, without the shame or risk of criminal prosecution.

A central responsibility of government is ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community have access to the care and support they need to live a better life. This legislation, which will come into effect in late October, will focus on diversion, access to treatment and reducing the stigma of drug use, providing an avenue away from the criminal justice system. Whilst this is nation-leading in our country, it is not radical. It is evidence-based, it is responsible, it is progressive and it is based on expert advice. Predictably, it is opposed by the conservatives opposite.

We will continue to engage with a range of important stakeholders over the next nine months as we prepare for the scheme's commencement. This includes implementing oversight arrangements, training frontline workers and developing clear communication material, in conjunction with police, the alcohol and drug sector, policy experts and people with a lived experience of drug use. Of course community engagement will be crucial.

The territory government invests more than \$26 million each year in alcohol and drug treatment and harm reduction services in the territory, delivered by both Canberra Health Services and non-government treatment providers. This legislation will enhance our progressive and informed approach. I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing forward his bill and Minister Stephen-Smith for her work not only in refining the legislation but in preparing for the commencement of this nation-leading reform.

Harm minimisation is just one way that the government is delivering significant reform to support some of the most vulnerable and at-risk members of our community. We are also raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. In November we released a position paper detailing how this will be implemented in a two-stage approach.

This year we will introduce legislation to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 and then, two years later, to 14. This approach will ensure that we have the appropriate services in place to support children and young people who might otherwise enter the criminal justice system, whilst also making our community safer. We will be supporting these kids early, before they start engaging in more serious harm. But in circumstances of the most serious and harmful actions, the community can be assured that the criminal law will still apply to offenders 12 years or over.

Like our approach to harm minimisation, the process of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility is a significant social reform that we will deliver in a responsible, evidence-based way, in partnership with the non-government sector. I want to acknowledge the work of Minister Stephen-Smith, as well as Ministers Rattenbury and Davidson, for leading this complex but important work for the government.

Canberra takes pride in being an inclusive and diverse community. It is a recurring theme of the government I lead. We want our city to be one where everyone feels welcome, safe and respected. That is why it is so important that the territory's anti-discrimination laws are fit for purpose. The government made a commitment at the beginning of the parliamentary term to review our discrimination legislation to ensure that it protects every Canberran's right to equality. As members would be aware, last year Minister Cheyne introduced a bill to amend the Discrimination Act. This year we will debate and pass this important legislation.

These changes will better align our legislation with the Human Rights Act, promoting greater social inclusion and respect for diversity. Importantly, these laws will protect people in more situations, including some of the most vulnerable members of our community. The changes also include a significant shift away from a reactive approach to addressing discrimination to taking reasonable and proportionate steps to embed equality in all aspects of public life.

In developing this legislation the process has involved extensive consultation and feedback. The government is committed to not only identifying significant and progressive social reform but delivering it in a thoughtful and informed way to ensure the best outcomes for our community. I thank Minister Cheyne for her hard work in leading this legislative reform.

Unfortunately, voluntary assisted dying has been one area of reform that, until recently, this parliament was prevented from even debating. Thankfully, last year, with a private members' bill facilitated by the federal Labor government, territory rights were restored, repealing a 1997 commonwealth act that unfairly and undemocratically prevented the ACT and the Northern Territory from legislating in this area. Since the Andrews bill in the 1990s, every Australian state has passed legislation to enable voluntary assisted dying in specific circumstances. Now the territories can pursue this significant reform.

What we know from years of public opinion research is that most Canberrans support voluntary assisted dying. We are getting on with delivering a legislative response. That is why the government is proposing to legalise and regulate access to voluntary assisted dying, so that Canberrans are supported to make informed end-of-life choices with dignity. Today the government has commenced a public consultation process, including the release of a detailed discussion paper, to enable Canberrans to have their say on the detail of an issue we know so many care deeply about.

We will then prepare and release a listening report on the feedback received, which will inform the development of the legislation that we aim to introduce later this year. I again thank Minister Cheyne who, as members across both sides of this chamber

would acknowledge, has been a strong and passionate advocate on this important issue for many years, both as a minister and as a local member.

Crucial to the restoration of territory rights last year was the election of a federal Labor government and a more progressive Senate. I have to say it has been remarkably refreshing to work with federal colleagues who respect the ACT, who respect that this is a growing jurisdiction, that we are a self-governing jurisdiction, and that, with the commonwealth and the territory government working together, we can achieve a lot.

I am pleased that the federal Labor government has also committed to enshrining a First Nations voice in the Australian Constitution. This was one of the key actions sought in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Constitutional recognition through a voice to parliament is a significant step in ensuring that First Nations people have a voice on the policies that directly impact their lives.

The ACT government has always supported the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In November last year this was affirmed as the Assembly passed Dr Paterson's motion calling on members to endorse the statement, including the referendum campaign for an Indigenous voice to parliament. In December of last year the Prime Minister announced that a referendum would be held before the end of 2023. The ACT government looks forward to contributing to what will be a historic vote for our nation. I look forward to outlining the ACT's role in the referendum in more detail during the executive motion that we will debate tomorrow.

The government is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to close the gap. For almost 15 years our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body has been responsible for representing the needs of First Nations people living in the territory. It is currently the only democratically elected body of its kind in the country.

Established in 2008, the Elected Body supports the government to develop policies and services that meet the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The government has invested substantially in the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, including new purpose-built premises for Winnunga Nimmityjah and Gugan Gulwan and the establishment of a 10-year \$20 million healing and reconciliation fund.

A national voice to parliament is a welcome next step forward so that all Australians can "walk together to build a better future". I know Minister Stephen-Smith, as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, looks forward to working with the federal government and other state and territory governments on the journey to enshrining a voice to parliament in the Australian Constitution.

This year the government will continue delivering a range of other important reforms and projects to ensure that Canberra remains one of the most progressive and livable cities in the world. This includes planning for Canberra's future in a sustainable way. Planning reform is crucial not only to building more homes but to ensuring that Canberrans have access to more diverse and affordable housing options.

As I mentioned at the start of this speech, our city is growing. The reform of our planning system needs to deliver more housing and more housing choices for current and future Canberrans. Last year we opened consultation on the new planning bill, a draft Territory Plan and district strategies. This year we will consider feedback to the proposed planning reforms and commence the process of enacting them in this place.

There is not an endless supply of land in the territory. The things that make the ACT a great place to live cannot exist if we endlessly sprawl, and that is why we are aiming to achieve gentle urbanism, building more affordable homes to own and rent in locations where people want to live, whilst retaining our city's distinct character.

As I touched on earlier, housing affordability continues to be a national issue, requiring broad reform. We will continue to take steps to deliver more diverse and affordable housing options, including an increase of 30,000 dwellings in the territory over the next five years, from around 180,000 dwellings to 210,000. We are also investing in the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program and we will be supporting more large-scale build-to-rent projects.

Just last week we announced the establishment of a new Office of the Coordinator General for Housing to ensure a whole-of-government approach to delivering our housing objectives. The new coordinator general, who will report to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, will oversee a range of priorities, including, for the first time in a decade, being able to work with the federal government to deliver actions under the National Housing Accord and the re-establishment of the rent relief fund here in the territory.

Throughout the year we will also consider a range of new initiatives to further address housing affordability in the territory. I take this opportunity, in advance, to acknowledge Minister Berry, Minister Gentleman and Minister Vassarotti, who will be very busy across their housing, planning and homelessness portfolios in working with me, as Treasurer and Chief Minister, and engaging with the federal government in the delivery of the National Housing Accord.

It makes sense, as we increase housing choice close to major employment centres and particularly near public transport, to commit to ensuring that our transport infrastructure keeps pace with our growing population. That is why the government is investing in electric buses and light rail. Our city will need both. We promised light rail from Gungahlin to the city and we delivered it. Now we are getting on with the job of extending the network, creating thousands of jobs in the process and building a better Canberra.

Extending the light rail network is about our city's long-term future. It is going to be important for a city of half a million people in 2027, but it is going to be even more important in the coming decades, as we grow towards three-quarters of a million people and beyond. We must plan for that future now and ensure that over the years and decades ahead Canberra remains a livable city where it is easy to move around. I thank Minister Steel for his continued work, as Minister for Transport, in delivering this major infrastructure agenda.

This year the ACT government will also continue to ensure that Canberrans have access to safe and accessible abortion services. Last year we announced the introduction of free medical and surgical abortions, up to 16 weeks. This year we will deliver this important investment, because access to abortion is health care and all women should be able to make decisions about their bodies.

We are also focused on a more sustainable Canberra. The ACT continues to lead the nation on climate action as we work towards a net zero emissions future. In doing so, we are creating jobs, attracting investment and lowering the cost of living for Canberra households. We will continue to support the community through this transition.

Our Sustainable Household Scheme has delivered more than \$125 million towards sustainable household upgrades since it was established in 2021. The government is delivering the Big Canberra Battery so that the renewable energy we generate can be stored here in the territory. We are also continuing to incentivise the take-up of electric vehicles, whilst rolling out more electric vehicle charging stations across our city.

Electric vehicle registrations in the ACT doubled over the 12 months to December 2022, from about 1,500 to now more than 3,000 registrations. New car sales are showing that electric vehicles are taking an increasing share of the market. Canberrans have expressed their desire to have more options and the market is responding, but I acknowledge that it can be very difficult at the moment to get your hands on an EV. Thanks to a change of federal government and some good policy directions being implemented at a national level, the supply of newer and cheaper electric vehicles is coming to Australia, and we look forward to continuing this important and necessary transition and the ACT being the national leader in this area.

Over the next year and the rest of this Assembly term the government will be focused on ensuring that Canberra continues to be a great place to live, to work, to invest, to study and to visit. That will ensure that our population continues to grow strongly. It will ensure our place as a city where everyone feels safe and accepted and can thrive. We know that Canberrans take pride in belonging to an inclusive and caring city, and that is why we are committed to delivering the significant social reforms that I have just outlined to strengthen our community.

Exploring and delivering complex policies and legislation is not easy, and there will be conservatives who will oppose us. Some of them we look at every day in this place. But my commitment—a commitment I know is shared by every member of the government—is to get on with the job of delivering for this community, delivering the commitments that we made at the 2020 election that we were elected to deliver.

We understand that in our democracy there will always be some who do not agree with every decision that is made. That is the nature of democracy. But there can be no doubt about what we stand for and why. We will continue to outline our priorities, to deliver on our commitments and to engage with this progressive community on the issues we know they care about. It is what we promised and it is what we are delivering.

I present a copy of the statement.

Priorities for the year ahead—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**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) (11.19): After 25 years of being banned from considering voluntary assisted dying in the ACT, the long-fought battle was finally won in December last year. Today is the first sitting day since our legislative territory rights were restored. I am grateful to the many individuals, communities and organisations who gave so much for us to get here, and especially our colleagues in the federal parliament, and that the federal Labor government facilitated that vote.

It is a relief finally to draw a line under the territory rights debate and to move forward with delivering something that matters to so many, in a way that is deliberate and consultative. Today, the first sitting day of the year, and the first sitting day since territory rights were restored, it is fitting that we begin formal consultation with the community to develop a voluntary assisted dying model for the ACT.

We know that the majority of Canberrans support voluntary assisted dying. Canberrans support allowing those with a terminal illness to be able to die in a way they choose, with dignity and autonomy. Every Australian state has passed voluntary assisted dying legislation, and it is now operational in every single state except New South Wales, where it will be operational towards the end of this year.

It is time for us to catch up with the rest of the country and to determine a fit-for-purpose workable model for the ACT. My objective is that this model balances safeguards which are necessary but not unduly burdensome, that human rights are protected and promoted, especially for our most vulnerable, and that the model has the support and confidence of the health and clinical professionals to participate in it.

Over the next eight weeks, I strongly encourage the community to get involved in this consultation via the ACT government's YourSay website. The community can provide their feedback in response to the comprehensive discussion paper released today, which contains 36 questions. They can respond to one, some, all of the questions or in general terms. If they are a member of the YourSay panel, they can also complete a short survey through that platform. Everyone is welcome to provide their views. They do not need to be an expert or a particular stakeholder.

This long-awaited consultation will close on 6 April. After consultation closes, the results will be compiled, and I will share a listening report summarising the feedback and the common themes. What we hear in this consultation will inform the development of voluntary assisted dying legislation for the ACT, which I anticipate introducing later this year. After being silenced for 25 years, I look forward to hearing from the community and taking the next step in determining this matter for ourselves.

While legislating for voluntary assisted dying is a key priority for the government, and for me, as the Chief Minister noted, there is a significant body of work underway this year, as we lead the nation on progressive social reform and continue to strengthen the ACT's human rights culture. We are a leading human rights jurisdiction, and we continue to work to make sure our city is an inclusive, progressive and diverse community.

Last year I introduced legislation to modernise our Discrimination Act. The amendments refine and narrow exceptions to unlawful discrimination—in short, meaning our laws will protect people in a greater range of situations. The bill also introduces a positive duty to help shift the burden away from individual complainants, to tackle systemic discrimination and to prevent problem behaviour from happening in the first place. We look forward to debating this important legislation soon.

This year we will also create a new pathway for complaints relating to a breach of the Human Rights Act. We heard the need for this loud and clear through the “no rights without remedy” petition, and I thank Dr Paterson for her leadership on that. This commitment will complement existing avenues for raising human rights concerns by creating a more accessible pathway for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. We plan to conduct further targeted stakeholder consultation ahead of introducing that legislation later this year.

We will establish a new right to a healthy environment in the Human Rights Act—an Australian first. The ACT continues to set an example for the rest of Australia in protecting and upholding human rights, and we will consult and engage with the community and stakeholders to design the right to a healthy environment this year so that we can introduce legislation during this term.

I have spoken today about just some of the significant work being undertaken within my ministerial portfolios. We are, proudly, Australia's most progressive city. Inherent in being progressive is reflection, renewal and reform, to uphold our commitment to continue to make Canberra a more inclusive, diverse and equal community. The ACT government has the vision and the policies to do just that, and I look forward to updating the Assembly as work progresses.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.25): I rise to highlight several of the key priorities in my portfolios, in response to the Chief Minister's remarks. I think he outlined the government's overall agenda for the year very well. These are priorities that build on our previous achievements. There is a lot that has already been done in this term, and our focus for the coming year will be on getting on with the job of implementing projects, reforms, policies and other work that continue to make Canberra a better place to live.

The government, of course, is made up of two parties and, as I have said before, our policies and our vision overlap or complement each other in many constructive ways. In other ways there are different points of focus and priorities, and I always emphasise that the Greens are helping to shape and evolve this government's policies every day in ways that match our commitment to people and to the planet. We operate under a



shared parliamentary agreement, and many of the priorities that I will highlight today stem from that agreement.

In my water portfolio, in this term of the Assembly we have now established the Office for Water, to improve coordination and take a more holistic approach to water management across government. We have continued to invest in the Healthy Waterways program. That will continue to roll out this year. We will see up to 13 new wetlands and associated water quality infrastructure projects delivered, 10 of those in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment, where the government is placing a particular emphasis. We will also be undertaking a catchment planning process, working with stakeholders to deliver detailed catchment plans to guide our work into the future. I will present a detailed update on our water quality improvement work later this week.

The health of the ACT's waterways benefits the entire catchment ecosystem. It enhances amenity and it contributes to the improved health of the Murrumbidgee River, which in turn helps to improve the health of the Murray-Darling Basin. It is those connections that make this such an important area of work.

When it comes to energy and emissions reduction, this year will be about getting on with implementing a range of measures, following the release of major policies last year. This year we will continue our focus on supporting households to manage cost of living issues and work to ensure a just transition as we respond to climate change. Last year we announced new minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties, which will come into effect from April this year. I am pleased to see this reform coming after many years in the making. It will provide an important upgrade to properties that often have poor insulation and therefore are more expensive to heat and cool, and are less comfortable to live in.

Speaking of rentals, the rental relief fund that was recently announced will provide short-term relief to eligible renters this year to assist with the rental and cost of living pressure that many households are facing. The rental relief fund will be available to low income households in the private rental sector and will provide grants of up to four weeks rent, capped at \$2½ thousand. This is important support to those people who have found the cost of living pressures really difficult. Certainly, combined with improved performance when it comes to the energy efficiency of rental properties, it is delivering real economic savings for people, improving their quality of life, reducing mental stress and delivering better environmental outcomes.

We also intend to pass legislation this year to deliver a suite of significant rental reforms. Most significantly, we will be ending no cause evictions, to prevent tenants from arbitrarily being evicted from their homes without a legitimate reason. That legislation is now before the Assembly, and I look forward to seeing its passage, which will help tenants to assert their rights without fear of eviction.

Going back to energy policy, last year we also announced the ACT's pathway to electrification, which outlines our path to phasing out fossil fuel gas by 2045. This year we will see the development of an integrated energy plan to provide a more detailed outline of the implementation of that pathway. This work is critical for ensuring a smooth, equitable and efficient journey, as we prepare our city for an all-electric zero emissions future.

We also announced the zero emissions vehicle strategy last year, including a sales target of 80 to 90 per cent of new vehicles by 2030. This year we will focus on implementing the measures in the strategy so that we can continue to support Canberrans who want to switch to an electric vehicle. This will include delivering electric vehicle charging stations across the territory, offering incentives and tailored education to assist with retrofitting charging into apartment buildings, and continuing our popular fleet advisory service to help businesses transition their fleets. The ACT had the highest uptake of electric vehicles in Australia last year. We fully intend to continue that trend this year.

This year, and for the rest of this term, we will continue to drive climate action and demonstrate leadership on what is a significant issue, and one that we must critically address in this decade.

Briefly, in the Attorney-General portfolio, we have already achieved some key milestones—for example, our reforms in the coronial system, and the installation of a dedicated ACT coroner to improve the coronial process, to make it better for those who experience it, to seek to resolve matters as quickly and sensitively as possible, and to ensure that the community benefits from recommendations that flow from those coronial inquests.

The Chief Minister noted our move to deliver an increase in the minimum age of criminal responsibility, first to 12 and then to 14. I am pleased to be working with my fellow ministers on that. This will happen in a staged manner and ensure that children who have encounters with the criminal justice system will be offered therapeutic, instead of criminal law, solutions. These can help with minimising the chance of reoffending, redirecting young people towards transformative solutions and giving them a chance to modify their behaviour. Research has consistently shown that the younger the age of encounter with the criminal justice system, the higher the chance of reoffending. The reforms in this space will not only help the young people involved but also keep our community safer overall.

Of course, we have a continuing priority to reduce Indigenous over-representation in the justice system. This will take a sustained effort. I was pleased that the last budget allocated over \$11 million to a package of programs to help reduce Indigenous over-representation. These are now being rolled out, and I will continue to keep the Assembly updated on that progress.

We have ongoing work in response to the landmark report on sexual assault prevention and response. The government has already implemented some of those recommendations, and we will continue to do that during 2023.

In the gaming portfolio, we have laid out a very clear program in the parliamentary agreement, and we will continue to work on that this year. I was pleased on Friday to attend a meeting of gaming ministers from across the country, where all of the states and territories, in partnership with the commonwealth, discussed the need to work together, in a coordinated and collaborative approach, to reduce harm from online gambling. I was very pleased by the unanimity of view that that area required significant focus and deliberate government intervention.

There is much to be done this year. We are making great progress in the parliamentary agreement, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to deliver these important outcomes for our community.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.33): I rise today to respond to the Chief Minister’s statement on priorities for the year ahead.

2023 provides a great opportunity for us to ensure that we continue to be a progressive, caring and connected city. We know that there will also be great challenges for many within the community, particularly low income households, and it is our responsibility, as political decision-makers, to ensure that this community is inclusive and that we are responding to these challenges.

It is for this reason that a core priority for me, as a Greens minister, is to continue to work with colleagues around how we respond to the housing affordability crisis. This crisis has been created through the commodification of housing and looking at property as a way to create wealth, rather than a place to call home. This is a crisis that requires a response across government, which is why the recent announcement of an office of a coordinator-general looking at housing is warmly welcomed.

Within my portfolio responsibilities, this year I am looking forward to the work that is occurring in partnership with the specialist homelessness sector about how we ensure that we have a homelessness sector that helps people when they need it and facilitates people’s journey to a safe and stable home. I am quite excited to continue to work with the sector to ensure that the significant investments that we are making to deliver more services and support are meeting needs and improving people’s lives. This is an issue that will take time, resources, commitment and political will. It is one that I will continue to progress every day.

Ensuring that everyone has a decent place to call home includes ensuring that homes that are built, either to rent or to live in as an owner, are accessible climate-wise and are of good quality. This is a priority for me in the building space. We will continue to work to ensure a fast but fair transition to the new provisions of the National Construction Code, which will improve energy efficiency and introduce accessibility standards for the first time. We will progress the work to ensure that we can become world leaders in building homes that work for people and the planet.

A range of building reform projects will be progressed through 2023, including the work to improve the accountability of property developers and provide greater accountability around competency, transparency and ethical behaviour. We will be progressing this work to develop a scheme for consideration by the Assembly, following consultation that is occurring right now.

As our city evolves, we need to value our history and heritage and ensure that we have a contemporary heritage system. A priority project through 2023 is to deliver the comprehensive review into heritage that was announced last year, to identify a future model for heritage laws, framework, systems and arrangements that are fit for purpose

and reflect best practice. We want to be confident that we are appropriately identifying our heritage, importantly, including our First Nations heritage, protecting it and celebrating it. This work will be supported by an interim heritage council that is currently being recruited.

The climate crisis that we are experiencing is presenting a range of new threats and challenges, including a new biosecurity set of threats. Last year we faced a number of new threats, such as Japanese encephalitis virus and the varroa mite, for the first time in Australia. Work has commenced on reforming our biosecurity laws to deliver a system that provides modern management tools, is proactive around potential threats and responsive in emergency situations.

With the changing climate, we also need to build resilience and adapt to this change. This is one of the key drivers as we move this year to develop and finalise our food and fibre strategy, our first agriculture policy for the city in two decades. I am also excited about the work that will progress, particularly with Minister Cheyne, around introducing a right to a healthy environment as a new human right.

Climate change has also triggered an extinction crisis. This year we will continue the work to protect threatened species, ensure that common species remain common, ensure that the precious areas that make up our bush capital are connected at a landscape level, and ensure that our city remains livable for us humans and the species with which we share our neighbourhoods.

As we get into the business of the year, we recognise that this will be a year of opportunity and challenge. We work every day to ensure that the issues that matter are being responded to. We are working with and for the Canberra community to ensure that we all have access to the things that we need to live a good life.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (11.38): I rise to express support for the progressive agenda that the Chief Minister has outlined and to elaborate on some of the government's priorities for this year in my own portfolios.

The Chief Minister talked about our substantial infrastructure program. Of course, this continues in the health portfolio, delivering the Canberra Hospital expansion and the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children; continuing work on the Canberra Hospital master plan; planning for the delivery of a new north side hospital; and progressing substantial community-based infrastructure projects, including our new health centres and the Watson precinct, which includes the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Drug and Alcohol Residential Rehabilitation Service.

I want to focus on some things that will come before the Assembly, starting with the minimum age of criminal responsibility. This year the government will introduce legislation to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 years, and then to 14. Raising the age requires an alternative response outside the criminal justice system to harmful behaviours of children in this age cohort. This will be vital to ensure community safety and that the children in question are receiving appropriate support.

The goal is to keep children out of the criminal justice system and support those who are engaging, or at risk of engaging, in harmful behaviour to establish a better life trajectory. Raising the age is not, and cannot be, just a three-word slogan. It must be about building a safer and more restorative city by actively supporting our most vulnerable children and young people. That is why the government has undertaken significant work to develop a service response to support raising the age, and I look forward to progressing this with my colleagues Minister Rattenbury and Minister Davidson in 2023.

We are also delivering on our commitment to improve the extended care system for children and young people between the ages of 18 and 21 under our Next Steps for Our Kids strategy. This reform will strengthen and expand supports for young people exiting the out-of-home care system, helping them transition to independence and build a positive life.

Development of the first Next Steps for Our Kids four-year action plan is well underway. The first stage of consultation with key stakeholders commenced with a child and family services forum on 6 December and further consultation is planned for the first half of 2023.

We are already delivering on a range of actions to address the priority actions identified in Next Steps and the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way review. This work, which is reinforced through Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, will help to ensure that children and young people in the ACT are safe, strong and connected, in order to live their best lives.

Nation-leading legislation that will decriminalise the possession of small amounts of the most common illicit drugs will come into effect this October. This is an important reform that recognises that drug dependence is a health problem, not a criminal one. Illicit drugs are not safe, but stigmatising people who use drugs and making it harder for them to access supports only heightens the harms they face. The evidence on this is clear. Unlike those opposite, the government has listened to the experts calling for change. This is an evidence-based harm reduction approach that will divert vulnerable Canberrans away from the criminal justice system and towards the supports they need to build a healthier life.

I look forward to progressing the work of ensuring that service providers, frontline workers and the Canberra community are ready for this change, and I want to again recognise you, Mr Assistant Speaker, for driving this nation-leading reform.

This year the ACT government will also eliminate out-of-pocket costs for medical and surgical abortions in the ACT, as the Chief Minister has mentioned. It is vital that people wanting to access abortion services can do so in a safe, timely and supportive way. The most significant barrier to accessing abortions for people in the ACT is the out-of-pocket cost. This disproportionately impacts people who are socially and economically disadvantaged, including those who are subject to family violence that includes reproductive control.

The decision to have an abortion can be one of the most difficult decisions of a person's life and the cost of accessing services should not be a factor in this decision. That is why the ACT government is ensuring that ACT women and other people who can become pregnant can access safe and affordable termination.

The government is collaborating closely with Women's Health Matters in developing this policy and I thank them for their invaluable contribution. I also recently met with the commonwealth Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Ged Kearney MP, to discuss the ACT's initiative and how we can work together on women's health and broader public and community health challenges.

Another reform priority in the health space that I want to highlight today is a regulatory framework for assisted reproductive technology. I acknowledge Dr Paterson for her passionate advocacy on this topic. The government is developing legislation that will regulate the sector and protect the rights of donor-conceived people, which I expect to introduce in late 2023. We will also establish a central register for donor information which will ensure that donor-conceived people can access information about their donor.

Assisted reproductive technology is a key pathway for LGBTIQ+ people to start a family, yet same-sex couples face greater barriers to accessing these services, including additional costs and longer delays. In developing this new framework, the government will explore how we can reduce these barriers and make it easier for same-sex couples to become parents.

The Chief Minister is leading work to strengthen the regulation of deferrable medical interventions for children born with variations in sex characteristics so that intervention only occurs when medically necessary. People should, wherever possible, have a say on what medical interventions are performed on their own bodies. When a child is born with variations in their sex characteristics, any medical interventions that can be deferred without impacting the child's health should wait until they can decide what they want to do themselves. The ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services are working closely with the Chief Minister's directorate to implement sensible reforms to ensure that the rights of intersex people are upheld.

Finally, an absolute priority for the government in 2023 will be to support enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to parliament in the Constitution. I look forward to continuing discussions with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and my state and federal colleagues on how the ACT government can best support the yes campaign.

As Senior Australian of the Year Professor Tom Calma said, "The referendum is not a choice between improving people's lives and amending the Constitution; we can do both." Indeed, we must, because our First Peoples do hold a special place in our nation. Their sovereignty was never ceded. Their history in this land stretches back 65,000 years. Colonisation has had a devastating and ongoing impact, and the voice offers the best pathway towards truth and treaty.

ACT Labor supports all elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and we respect the advice from that deep engagement process in that voice should come first.

I hope the Canberra Liberals, as well as the federal Liberals and federal Greens, will join us in supporting the voice.

Progressive social reform is the business of Labor governments, and that is what we will continue to deliver in 2023. I commend the Chief Minister's statement to the Assembly.

**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) (11.46): I am pleased to speak briefly about some of the priorities for the year ahead in my portfolios. I also note the priority that the ACT government has placed on improving housing affordability in Canberra, and I thank Minister Vassarotti for her explanation of the work she is undertaking. Lack of affordable, appropriate, long-term housing has a very real impact on a person's mental wellbeing. While I am the minister for people portfolios, building more affordable homes is critically important to me and to all of us.

As the minister with responsibility for seniors, I am very concerned about the growing numbers of older women experiencing homelessness. As Minister for Disability and the minister responsible for carers, I know that people with disability and carers often struggle to pay the high cost of housing in this city. That is why it is so important that this government and the federal government take action on the housing affordability crisis that we are experiencing in Canberra and nationally.

I will do whatever I can to support Minister Vassarotti's ongoing work in reducing homelessness, and I thank her for the great work she has already done to increase funding to the homelessness sector, as well as leading the way in getting universal design standards into the national building code so that we have more accessible housing options well into the future.

As the Chief Minister has already referred to, the ACT government is committed to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years. To achieve transformational intergenerational change for young people at risk of ending up in the justice system and their families, it is not enough to simply change legislation. As Minister Stephen-Smith said, we need a service system that can catch young people and their families before they fall and support them to move forward to a better future. We know that incarcerating and institutionalising children causes long-term harm and significantly increases the likelihood of continuing to engage in harmful behaviour as adults. Our response seeks to make our whole community safer. It can only be achieved by working in collaboration with the community sector organisations who understand and are already working with these young people and their families. I will continue working with Minister Stephen-Smith and Minister Rattenbury to do this, and I will continue to listen to the advice I am hearing from our community sector and from young people themselves on how we can change the picture when we raise the age.

I am excited about the year ahead in the mental health portfolio. We will open adolescent mental healthcare beds at the Canberra Hospital and move the location of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to a better location. We will see the construction of the eating disorders residential centre in Coombs, which is part of an

integrated model of care for eating disorder services in the ACT that shifts the focus to earlier intervention and includes support for families of people with eating disorders.

We will continue to develop better and more efficient ways of providing mental health services for people where and when they need them. We have already seen the success of the first Safe Haven in Belconnen, and the first year of the Garran step-up, step-down service has demonstrated how well we can integrate the delivery of services by Canberra Health Services with those of our non-government service partners, Stride and Woden Community Services. Our focus will continue to be on how we can help people earlier in the trajectory of an illness. By doing so, we deliver better outcomes for people and we also reduce the pressure on our acute services.

There is much more work to be done across the portfolios for which I have responsibility, but one thing I really want to note is that all things are interconnected. We need a public transport system that meets the needs of people in our outer suburbs, where they can afford housing. We need more affordable housing across this city. We need people with disability to have inclusive and accessible education, employment and community engagement opportunities. We need mental health services that can support people as early as possible along their health journey and support them to stay in recovery for longer.

As we emerge from the impacts of the past three years, we need to find joy in the world around us and in each other. We need to care for country and care for each other. This is the work that we look forward to progressing in 2023.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Dhulwa Mental Health Unit inquiry—final report—government response**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.50): I rise to speak about the government’s response to the inquiry into the legislative, workplace governance and clinical frameworks of Dhulwa Secure Mental Health Unit final report, which was tabled in the Assembly on 1 December 2022. I will refer to it as the Dhulwa report.

The Dhulwa report is the outcome of the inquiry that I called for in May last year. I am indebted to Ms Barbara Deegan and her team, as well as staff groups, patients, carers and advocates, for their work and input to the inquiry.

Dhulwa belongs to a class of mental health facilities that are called forensic mental health services. I understand that the term “forensic” has other meanings for some different professional groups, but in mental health circles “forensic” means the treatment of mental illness in people who are either involved, or at risk of being involved, with the criminal justice system.



Dhulwa's natural counterparts in other states and territories are places like Wilfred Lopes Centre in Tasmania, the Forensic Hospital in Sydney and Thomas Embling Hospital in Melbourne. These sorts of services have to live with and manage an ever-present element of risk. They also have to balance a number of competing priorities, such as the security and safety of clinicians and staff, as well as ensuring that the service delivered is a therapeutic one. This is complex and difficult work.

The Dhulwa report makes it clear that, over recent times, Dhulwa has not got that balance right. The Dhulwa report does not make for particularly easy reading and calls for improvements across a number of domains and from a number of perspectives. In a place where transparency and integrity are spoken about a lot, I would like to make it very clear that we recognise that Dhulwa has not been operating as well as it should. We are confronting that, and we will fix it.

The Dhulwa report makes 25 recommendations. Key areas identified for improvement include governance and assurance; clinical care and service delivery; workforce, training and support; work health and safety; and leadership, workplace culture and engagement. The government has agreed to all 25 recommendations without equivocation and work has already started on implementing them.

As people would expect, Canberra Health Services has been consulted about the report, to ensure that the implementation of the recommendations is timely, achievable and sustainable. While the time lines for the implementation of some recommendations and subactions have been extended and others brought forward based on this advice, the ACT government is committed to delivering a complete implementation of all recommendations by 1 March 2024.

These changes will take commitment, effort and integrity to address, rather than additional spending on more buildings or additional staffing. The result that we will deliver is a safer facility for patients and staff, with better clarity of purpose and the skills, training and leadership required to deliver such a complex service.

Yesterday I announced the appointment of an independent oversight board. I am grateful to the members of that board for taking on this role and the spirit in which they have already engaged with my office in wanting to make long-lasting improvements to the mental health care provided at Dhulwa, and the safety of consumers and staff. The board will meet approximately quarterly and will report to me on its deliberations and findings in relation to the implementation of the recommendations. I will then, in turn, update the Assembly through ministerial statements at appropriate junctures.

In appointing the independent oversight board, we are ensuring that the process has sufficient rigour, independence and expertise for me as minister and the community to be assured that the recommendations have been implemented, and to ensure that they stick. The board comprises Australian and international experts on forensic mental health facilities, representatives of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Carers ACT, the Mental Health Consumers Network ACT and the Health Services Commissioner.

Canberra Health Services will attend all meetings and the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy will also be invited to attend meetings, given the subject matter of the inquiry's report. Should any member of this place require any information over and above this, they are always very welcome to contact my office. I am always happy to have respectful conversations with any member on the complexities, nuance and importance of modern mental health services. I commend the government response to the Assembly. I present the following papers:

Inquiry into the Legislative, Workplace Governance and Clinical Frameworks of Dhulwa Secure Mental Health Unit—Final Report—Government Response—

Government response, dated February 2023.

Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Bushfires—20th anniversary commemoration 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) (11.55): I want to make a ministerial statement on the 2003 fires and our responses. On 18 January 2023 we marked the 20th anniversary of the 2003 Canberra bushfires, a tragic event in our city's history that destroyed 500 homes, injured and displaced many people in our community and claimed four lives. I would like to begin by expressing my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the four Canberrans who tragically died and to recognise all of those who still experience trauma from this tragic event.

I would also like to thank all of the volunteers and the staff who were involved in 2003 and who supported the Canberra community to recover in the years that followed. I thank the families, friends, partners and workplaces of volunteers and all emergency services workers, whose support enables them to contribute to the continued protection of our community.

Many of the first responders from 2003 still wear their service uniforms proudly. Twenty years ago, they served our community with distinction. They have continued to do so each and every day since and are always there when Canberrans need them the most.

I had the honour of attending a commemorative event at the ACT Bushfire Memorial at Stromlo Forest Park on 18 January to mark the anniversary. I also want to acknowledge many of my colleagues in this place who also attended the event. Community members were invited to pay their respects by visiting the memorial

throughout the day, where rosemary was available in remembrance. The community were also welcomed to observe the official commemorative event at the memorial that evening, which was also livestreamed for those who could not attend in person. It was a day of reflection, to remember the lives that were lost, the homes and properties that were destroyed and those that were displaced by this devastating disaster.

I would like to thank all of those who assisted in the organisation of the commemorative event. It provided an opportunity for the whole Canberra community to pay their respects and to reflect as we remembered the victims and empathised with those that still experience trauma from this event.

During the disaster of 2003 and the following recovery period, Canberrans have displayed incredible resilience, strength and community spirit. As a city, we were, unfortunately, tested again during the 2019-20 bushfires, which are still fresh in our minds. The lessons learned since 2003, and the significant improvements to better prepare and respond to bushfires and natural disasters in the ACT, were evident in the response to the 2019-20 bushfires.

The safety of the ACT community is always our top priority, and the community should be confident knowing that the ACT government is better prepared for an emergency than ever before. Our emergency services bodies, warning systems, operational technology, capabilities and governance arrangements lead emergency management practice at the national level.

More technology and communication channels, including social media, are at our disposal than ever before, which means our monitoring is better and we can notify the community much faster. Surveillance, mapping and prediction technology has advanced considerably, and we are working closely with our bordering jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Internally, the ACT government has strengthened its emergency response capabilities through creating whole-of-government and directorate-specific emergency response teams and emergency plans. These teams plan for events such as mass evacuations and road closures, and disseminating public information and refuge sites for evacuations.

The journey of protecting our community is an iterative process, and we build on this work year on year as we continuously evaluate, learn and improve. The lessons learned from 2003 resulted in a better emergency response in 2019-20. Similarly, the lessons learned from 2019-20 will result in a better emergency response the next time our city is challenged with a natural disaster of this magnitude.

The government is acutely aware of the threat that bushfires present to our city. This is a threat that will become increasingly challenging because of the climatic changes that global warming is bringing. We will continue to make the investments needed to deal with this as our city grows.

The ACT community can be assured that they live in one of the safest cities in the world, with well-funded, well-resourced and well-governed emergency services. However, what will be equally critical in our response to the next major emergency incident is the extent to which Canberrans themselves prepare for such events. The ESA has developed a range of educational resources to help support the

community to prepare for an emergency. These resources allow the community to download, complete and store their emergency survival plan from any digital service and, importantly, share it with family and friends. The resources are available at [www.esa.act.gov.au](http://www.esa.act.gov.au).

In closing, once again I would like to express my sympathies to the victims and those impacted by the 2003 bushfires. I would like to commend all ACT government directorates for the work they have undertaken to ensure that they are prepared to protect the community of the bush capital. In particular, I thank the volunteers and staff of my portfolios—the ESA, the Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Policing—who continually answer the call to protect our community. Together we will continue to ensure that Canberra remains well prepared for emergencies into the future. I present the following paper:

20th Anniversary of the 2003 Bushfires—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**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): When almost 500 homes were destroyed in the Canberra bushfires of 18 January 2003, an entire city changed forever. Two hundred homes were lost in the suburb of Duffy alone. But it is not just buildings that were changed by the fires; four lives were lost on that day, and their families and friends will forever mourn their loss. Almost 500 people were treated at hospital, including 49 as inpatients in Canberra hospitals, and several were transferred to Sydney hospitals. More than 5,000 people were evacuated to emergency relief centres and more than 50,000 residents lost access to electricity or water during the 10-day state of emergency. Many people lost pets who were loved parts of their family. In the burning of more than 400,000 acres of land, much of it in our national park, millions of animals perished.

When so many people experience trauma, it changes individuals and communities. We exist not just as individuals; we are interconnected to other individuals and we are made more than the sum of our parts through those relationships. When we lose members of our community, when they suffer injury or loss, we all feel it and we are all changed by it. We know that those impacts were felt across our community for many years.

Having strong, supportive relationships with family, friends and community before disaster strikes is important in our ability to adapt to the way our lives change as a result of disaster. It helps us to learn from our experience and prepare for similar situations in the future. It also helps us to manage how we respond to events that might bring back painful reminders, as some Canberrans would have experienced during the smoke and heat of the summer of 2019-20.

When we talk about community recovery, our focus is not on the restoration of a pre-disaster state but on greater community resilience. This means having the ability

to understand and adapt to what has happened, to better prepare for future disasters, to create a stronger sense of place and belonging within the community, and foster a stronger and more diverse economy and a more economically and socially integrated community.

In the aftermath of the 2003 fires, community recovery groups grew organically from local streets. A few creative individuals started organising and others joined in. They organised bushwalks to see the recovery of their natural environment and informal gatherings to provide an understanding space for people to be in and acknowledge their shared experience. Even when the fires were not the focus of the event, people found that just knowing they were with others who shared their experience was helpful in their recovery.

Workers in some government agencies recognised the value of community-led recovery activities in 2003 and attended some of the events themselves. It meant that they could hear more directly from community members and understand their experiences and needs.

In this moment of reflection on what we went through as a community 20 years ago, it is important to recognise that our ability to recover was community-led. There were things government did to support that recovery, and the bushfire recovery centre is recognised as playing an important role in that recovery, but it was the community that knew what would most help their friends, their family and their neighbours.

Canberra in 2023 is different in so many ways than it was in 2003. It is the kindness and connection to each other during the fires and in the years after that has made us who we are as a community today, and every day I am thankful for the Canberra community that I am part of.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (12.05): Those of us who were in Canberra in 2003 remember where they were or what they did during that time. I did not get to see our skies turn black. I was supporting a friend in the emergency department with an asthma attack brought on by the smoke. There were no windows for me to be able to see what was happening outside, but I cannot forget the prickle of the hairs on the back of my neck when the medical staff started planning the daunting task of evacuating the hospital due to the risk of bushfires.

I would like to thank, for their actions then and ongoing, the people that comprise the emergency services in the ACT. Through their commitment, dedication and selfless courage, they manage to keep us safe and to be able to face the threat of bushfires, which is ever-increasing due to climate change.

We must continue to learn the lessons from previous bushfires because we will face increased instances going forward. 2003 was merely a precursor to what happened in the 2019-20 bushfires, and I shudder to think what may happen going forward, in terms of future bushfires. Therefore the onus is on us to learn our lessons and work together as a community to ensure that events like these manage to bring us together as a community and ensure that we are resilient communities regarding such events.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACT Ambulance Service—staffing and working conditions—update**

### **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) (12.06): I rise to extend the ACT government's sincere thanks and appreciation to ACTAS staff, our frontline crews and their families for their work, resilience and commitment, particularly throughout the pandemic and the recent holiday season. As Minister for Police and Emergency Services, I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the frontline personnel and volunteers across government who made themselves readily available and worked around the clock throughout the Christmas and New Year period to keep our community safe.

As our city continues to grow, the demand for ambulance services is increasing. Our paramedics continue to do an excellent job of delivering prompt and professional care to Canberrans in need. Despite the challenges over the past few years, and ongoing increases in demand, our paramedics and staff within ACTAS continue to serve our city with distinction. We have the best paramedics in the country. Because of the hard work of ACTAS, Canberrans have Australia's fastest response to any priority 1 incident. Our city also leads the nation, with 95.1 per cent of all calls for an ambulance to emergency triple-0 answered within 10 seconds. Often in the most dire emergencies—what is termed priority 1 incidents—time is a factor in saving lives and helping with recovery. Thank you again to our paramedics for working hard to ensure the wellbeing of this wonderful city.

Although the ACT has continued to record some of the best response times in the country, the ACT government recognises that more can always be done to support our paramedics. We acknowledge the concerns raised by staff and union representatives on their time lines. Being a paramedic has never been easy, and the past few years have increased those challenges. We have been working with ACTAS and the Transport Workers Union to invest, reform and build capacity within ACTAS. While the work will always be imperfect, I am confident we can continue building a better service that continues to care for our community.

A more recent focus of the work has been in organisational reform, such as implementing a new roster and better workloads, along with continuing efforts to increase the number of paramedics and improve health and wellbeing. I am acutely aware that the recruitment of more frontline paramedics is an essential step towards creating a robust, healthy and modernised ambulance service within the ACT. That is why we have invested more than \$50 million since 2020 to deliver additional paramedics, call takers, operational support positions, vehicles and equipment. These investments have helped. More is needed, and that is why this government continues to build on the substantial investments made in previous budgets.

As announced in the 2022-23 budget, the government has committed over \$27 million in recurrent funding over the next four years and almost \$3 million in capital funding

over the next two years to help deliver additional frontline personnel, including intensive care paramedics and triple-0 call takers. These investments will also support further reform of the ACTAS organisational structure to improve operational performance and service delivery, enhance long-term staff wellbeing, provide professional development opportunities and maintain ongoing vehicle expenses so that we can continue to have a nation-leading ambulance service.

In response to paramedic shortages in all jurisdictions, ESA is working hard to ensure that recruitment activities remain a top priority. As I have mentioned previously, continuous recruitment cycles have commenced and are ongoing for the foreseeable future. This means that as one recruitment window closes, a new one will open. Additionally, graduate paramedic recruitment is now programmed to maintain a merit list of up to 12 months. It is hoped that these efforts will see an increase in the number of paramedics in the service, helping to both cover attrition and increase the overall number of paramedics.

However, as I have noted, there are recruitment challenges. Nationally and globally there is a shortage of paramedics, and every service is seeking to grow its staffing complement. Notwithstanding these challenges, as I have said, every effort is being made to recruit. Just recently, in mid-January, a further four lateral paramedic recruitment rounds commenced, and in the following months there will be another two groups of graduate intern paramedics commencing with ACTAS.

Because of the efforts across ESA, we welcomed seven new paramedics in November last year. These individuals joined ACTAS through the graduate paramedics internship program. This program provides new paramedics with additional supervision and training on their way to becoming fully qualified independent practitioners.

It was also fantastic to see ACTAS host a series of graduation ceremonies in December 2022 to recognise 56 members who joined the service across the last three years, catching up on events previously cancelled due to COVID-19. ACTAS has also welcomed an additional seven non-emergency patient transport officers. NEPT officers undertake an arduous training program across 12 months to gain their nationally recognised qualification. This is a huge achievement, and we congratulate everyone involved.

I also want to extend my congratulations to paramedics who have gained their authority to practice. It is important for us to remember that to become a fully qualified practitioner, paramedics must complete a three-year university degree, followed by 15 months of on-road training and assessments as a graduate paramedic intern.

Supporting paramedics also means investing in the back of house. We want our paramedics caring for Canberrans, so these enabling roles help to recruit, procure service vehicles and provide mental health and wellbeing support. These are only some of the examples of enabling services that our frontline members receive and deserve for the service they are providing to keep our community safe. We also are investing in these roles.

Investing in our people is also being undertaken along reforms to modernise ACTAS, and the ACTAS modernisation and sustainable service plan is tracking well. The five-year plan focuses on addressing three key elements, including sustainable service delivery, modernisation of the organisation, and staff development and wellbeing.

Phase 1 of the plan laid the groundwork for modernisation and transformative change in ACTAS. This included the introduction of alternative models of care, specialised equipment and training, and secondary triage.

We have now entered phase 2 of the plan. The ACT community can be assured that frontline paramedics are receiving increased levels of support through additional administrative, management and specialist positions. This phase of the plan will see the creation of various positions to strengthen management structures and specialist capabilities. These include a bariatric capability; extended care paramedic capability; public notification app management for cardiac arrest; additional triple-0 communication centre call takers; the implementation of a clinical support officer role in frontline operations; managers and management relief; remote area response capability; a project support officer; and enabling and administrative support.

The purpose of introducing and expanding upon these specialist and management capabilities is to facilitate optimum support for current and future frontline paramedics. By doing so, I am confident that this will help to mitigate risks and reduce the overall pressure related to surge demand for ambulance services, while improving workforce conditions.

Having done shiftwork myself for 11 years, I deeply empathise with our frontline paramedics who are experiencing fatigue due to long shifts, particularly those through the night. While your resilience to push on and get the job done is admirable and greatly appreciated, I want to reassure you that the government, including ESA, ACTAS and the TWU, are all here to ensure that your safety, health and wellbeing comes first. We have received the message “We are not triple okay” loud and clear, and the ESA, ACTAS, the TWU and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate are doing everything they can to work alongside frontline paramedics to implement a new roster as soon as feasibly and safely possible, with the aim of introducing it by 1 July 2023.

As a result of research, consultation and insights gained through a number of workforce surveys conducted by the ACTAS transformation and capability development team, this rostering system will be the first of its kind in Australia. It has taken time, but that is because it was important to work with staff and the TWU, and also to learn lessons from other jurisdictions.

The new roster is designed to address the operational demands of the growing ACT community; increase training and development opportunities; improve wellbeing support for paramedics by combating fatigue; and further promote better work-life balance. As I am sure we can all appreciate, the implementation of this roster reform is complex and requires strategic support, management, administration, communication and training, which will be coordinated by a joint management working group. Ultimately, while an immense body of work is in motion to deliver the roster in a timely manner, rushing change that is not well thought out may risk



people's lives and safety. This is why we are committed to implementing the new roster as quickly but as safely as possible for all parties involved.

The government is also responding to frontline paramedic health concerns, particularly with regard to fatigue management, physical and psychological injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. We also recognise that even the most resilient emergency services personnel, including our paramedics, can be affected by trauma related to their work. This is why there is a dedicated employee assistance program, through Converge International, combined with the additional ESA welfare support pathways, which include peer support officers and chaplains who can be contacted any time in relation to any personal, professional or service-related stressors. PSOs also step further and check in on our paramedics within 72 hours of a job involving but not limited to multiple fatalities, the death of a child, exposure to gruesome sights, occupational violence or danger to personnel, and/or behaviour exhibited by an officer indicating distress.

All ESA personnel across the agency are always encouraged and reminded to reach out at any point if they need assistance. While the new ambulance roster will help to reduce workloads during periods of high fatigue risk, I have been advised that ACTAS management is also working on establishing a human performance working group that is dedicated to strengthening paramedic-specific injury and fatigue prevention policies and frameworks. This group brings external subject matter experts, frontline paramedics and management together, to help research, define, mitigate and monitor both the short- and long-term physical and psychological risks associated with fatigue. I look forward to seeing further work in this area as the year unfolds.

Working groups such as these are fundamental when facilitating change to further support our frontline crews. A recent and outstanding example is the development of the 2022 occupational violence framework and associated training packages, which help paramedics to recognise the risk of exposure to violence while responding to a medical incident. The framework guides paramedics to identify, report and implement strategies to minimise and manage this risk. This means our paramedics are better protected if they experience an incident or interact with a community member who is threatening, abusive and/or inappropriate.

As with any employee who joins the ACT public service, paramedics are required to report any incidents or accidents that occur within the workplace. Such events include situations that can affect the mental health of a person or that result in acute physical injury or a physical injury that has developed over time. These reports enable ACTAS management to immediately and confidently assist any injured personnel; escalate matters, if required; and identify key or recurring hazards within the workplace so that they can be addressed.

We will continue to do everything we can to prioritise the health and wellbeing of not only our paramedics but all frontline staff and volunteers across the ESA. It is important that the government sets a good example of industrial policies and practices that respect our staff and offer conditions that attract and retain quality personnel. I strongly believe this process is in place. This progress report that we are doing now shows the extent of our shared commitment to resolving the concerns that have been raised by paramedics and meeting this expectation, moving forward. I would like to

thank everyone involved for their engagement and I look forward to continuing to work with you on these important matters.

Our ambulance staff can often be unsung, modest heroes of the emergency services world. They do an amazing job, but they also need our help and the help of our community. We can help ACTAS by reminding constituents to call triple-0 only when you or someone else is seriously injured or in need of urgent medical help in an emergency. This advice is consistent with all ambulance jurisdictions across Australia. If it is something less urgent, consider whether it is appropriate to see a GP, reach out to a family member or contact Healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for expert advice and reassurance 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If we work together on delivering that essential and timely message, in combination with the work currently being undertaken by ESA and ACTAS, I am confident we will see positive change for our frontline paramedics and the community. Let us all join together today and every day, where possible, in thanking all our ambulance personnel for their inspiring and outstanding efforts in keeping us all safe.

I present the following paper:

Paramedic—Shortages and Working Conditions—Assembly Resolution of 1 December 2022—Update—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Sitting suspended from 12.22 to 2.00 pm.**

### **Questions without notice**

#### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, on Monday 30 January you told the *Canberra Times* that a staff complaint about your behaviour had not been discussed with you, only to confess the next day that indeed it had. Minister, why did you not tell the truth when the media first asked you the question?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you, Ms Lee, for the question. I provided my answer to the *Canberra Times*. They published it. I am not going to comment on individuals, out of respect for everyone involved.

**MS LEE:** Minister, is this the only complaint, formal or informal, that you are aware of regarding your behaviour?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Yes.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how can the people of the ACT trust you to fix the problems in the mental health system when you cannot manage your own office?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I am fully committed to my portfolios and delivering on the important work that is being done. I think the Canberra community will be able to relate to the pressures of the last few years and really respect the work that we have done to address the issues that have been raised. I want to be open with the Canberra community about this and assure them that my team and I are committed to delivering the best outcome for our city.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, in the last two sitting weeks of 2022 you gave contradictory answers regarding your knowledge of safety concerns at the Adult Mental Health Unit in the Canberra Hospital, which you then had to correct. This year you had to issue a correction to the press about your awareness of a formal complaint against you. Why do you have such difficulty accurately responding to questions about what you know?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you. I have provided information and answers to those questions as they have been asked and, where necessary, have corrected any issues that have arisen.

**Mr Cocks:** On a point of order: I am asking the minister to go directly to the question of why she is having such difficulty. She is referring to other statements that have not been made in this place. I ask her to be direct and answer the question of why she has such difficulty answering questions about what she knows.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Davidson, you have one minute and 25 seconds left to answer.

**MS DAVIDSON:** When I have been asked questions, I have provided answers to the best of my knowledge. Where it has been necessary, I have provided further information when asked.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, are there any other matters on which you need to correct the record to clear the air?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Not that I am aware of.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, how can Canberrans trust you to fix the mental health system when you constantly have to correct the record about what you do or do not know?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I was saying earlier, I am fully committed to my portfolios and delivering on the important work that is being done. I think the Canberra community will be able to relate to the pressures of the last few years and really respect the work we have been doing to address the issues raised. I want to be really open with the Canberra community about this and to assure them that my team and I are committed to delivering the best outcomes for our city.

### **Tuggeranong—skate park**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as the Treasurer. Chief Minister, on Wednesday, 8 June last year you took a question directed to the Minister for Transport and City Services related to the Lake Tuggeranong Foreshore Revitalisation Project, specifically, about the community campaign for a brand new skate park. In response you said:

I am always partial to a good skate park upgrade, but I will not make an announcement of policy in question time. I will raise the matter with Minister Steel when I next get the opportunity to discuss this project with him.

Can you confirm that you remain partial to a good skate park upgrade and that you have in fact raised this predilection with the minister?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Davis for the question and for his comedic delivery in relation to it.

**Mr Hanson:** He is a joke all right!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members.

**MR BARR:** Mr Hanson, inside 10 minutes in the first question time of the year you have started as you concluded 2022 and, in fact, as you behave all the time in this place.

**Mr Hanson:** Is this a commentary on me, is it? Answer the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson.

**MR BARR:** The government has, and will continue to, invest in skate park improvements. Minister Steel has a particular project budget associated with improvements in relation to Lake Tuggeranong and its foreshores. That project, as I understand, is currently fully committed within its allocated budget.

Of course, as Mr Davis indicated in the second part of the quote, question time is not where government policy is announced, but we do have ongoing budget rounds, so the government will respond to the petition that was lodged this morning within the timeframe the government has to respond. The matter will remain under active consideration in future budget announcements.

**MR DAVIS:** Chief Minister have you entertained the possibility of increasing the budget for the Lake Tuggeranong Foreshore Revitalisation Project so that Minister Steel could include a new skate park as part of the project?

**MR BARR:** Expanding already procured projects can be done but generally a good capital works practice is to have designed and fully scoped the nature of an expansion before adding budget. I would need to understand through a business case in the budget process what is meant by a new skate park as opposed to a refurbished or

improved existing facility. There will be different levels of complexity and different budgets associated with building something new versus improving the existing infrastructure. All those questions, as I said in my answer to the first question, will remain under active consideration and the government will look at these sort of infrastructure investments as we do each budget round.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Chief Minister, are you concerned to learn of the current lack of seating, shade sails and bubblers at the Tuggeranong skate park?

**MR BARR:** I am certainly aware, Mr Braddock, that demand for shade sails, seating and bubblers at this particular facility in Tuggeranong, together with other public amenity around the city, is increasingly being desired, as we see the impacts of climate change on our community. Whilst I am sure this is a very high priority, there are of course other projects and other priorities that need to be weighed up. That is what the annual budget process is about. The government will look at the range of issues. This is not the only petition nor the only area of Canberra that is seeking such infrastructure improvements. The government remains committed to delivery of suburban upgrades. We have a very strong program that Minister Steel is leading through his portfolio and we will consider this together with hundreds of other projects that we fund every year in the budget process.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MR COCKS:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, an article in the *Riotact* entitled “Greens Minister’s toxic workplace” describes your office as:

... a toxic and dysfunctional workplace marked by high staff turnover, backbiting, complaints being ignored and communication breakdowns.

I have also heard from local families who have had dealings with your office and felt communications with your office had broken down and that you would ignore or not reply to their concerns. Minister, how did you allow a toxic workplace in your office to lead to families being excluded and ignored?

**MS DAVIDSON:** My office has undertaken a range of practical measures, including professional development for staff in stressful frontline roles, consistently backfilling vacant roles while staff are on leave and better internal processes for information flow from the directorates to help with decision-making.

I am really proud of my team and I can confidently say that it is a supportive and happy workplace. Ministers’ offices should be setting an example in healthy workplace culture, and that inevitably requires ongoing changes, improvements and reflections. Our office is working collaboratively and effectively in its responsibilities to my electorate, as well as my portfolios.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order: Madam Speaker, the minister continues to read prepared lines that are not direct to the question. The question was about how she allowed a toxic workplace in her office to interfere with her communication and interactions with the public and with constituents. I would ask the minister to be direct to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** To that area of the question, Ms Davidson.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you. I will continue explaining to Mr Cocks how my office works to ensure that we are responding to constituent questions, which is to say that our office is working collaboratively and effectively in its responsibilities to my electorate, as well as my portfolios.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, the minister is not being directly relevant. She is just reading pre-prepared notes that are not relevant to the question. I ask that you ask her to be directly relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can you be more specific in responding to the elements of the question that you were asked, Ms Davidson.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Yes. I was asked a question that went to my office responding effectively to constituents' concerns that were raised with me. I am explaining the processes that we use to ensure that we do respond to those things. *(Time expired.)*

**MR COCKS:** Minister, will you apologise to those families who were excluded and ignored?

**MS DAVIDSON:** To the best of my knowledge, we have been responding to concerns raised by constituents and we will continue to do so.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, how are the vulnerable people who you are supposed to support through your portfolios supposed to trust you to help them when your own office has been described as toxic?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I believe I have already answered this question twice in good faith. I refer Mrs Kikkert to my previous answers.

### **Territory rights—voluntary assisted dying**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Human Rights. Minister, the voluntary assisted dying discussion paper was released earlier today. Can you please outline the government's approach to this important reform?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. As we know, the majority of Canberrans support voluntary assisted dying. They support allowing those with a terminal illness to die in the way they choose, with dignity and with autonomy.

The ACT government supports Canberrans having that choice as part of a range of quality end-of-life care options. That is why today we have commenced consulting with the community about how to approach and how to regulate access to voluntary assisted dying. We are asking about what the eligibility criteria and appropriate safeguards should be, how the process should run, the role of health professionals and health services, and how best to monitor and ensure compliance with the scheme.

While we have the benefit of existing legislation and experiences in the Australian states, each jurisdiction is at different stages of implementation and, like the ACT, each jurisdiction has its own unique characteristics. Through this consultation, we are looking to learn and draw from other jurisdictions' experiences, while developing a model which reflects our own community's values and expectations.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how can people have their say on what voluntary assisted dying should look like in the ACT?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The ACT government is genuinely open about what our voluntary assisted dying model should look like. We are undertaking a thorough consultation process so that Canberrans have a range of opportunities to provide their feedback in a way that suits them. A YourSay panel survey has opened today. It is a short and accessible way for the community to guide us on how they want to be engaged and informed on voluntary assisted dying. Anyone who signs up to the panel before the survey closes on 14 February can participate in the survey.

At the same time the community and stakeholders can provide their feedback by responding to the comprehensive discussion paper we have released. We have proactively reached out to over 200 health bodies, community organisations and related industry groups to seek their feedback. We have also invited a range of health and industry professionals to roundtables, to deep-dive into how a model could operate.

Anyone can provide their feedback by emailing or uploading a submission or by leaving a voicemail on the YourSay conversation website by 6 April. Importantly, the community can respond to as little or as much of the discussion paper as they wish, in general or specific terms. I encourage Canberrans to go to the YourSay website and to provide their feedback during this consultation period.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what are the next steps for implementing voluntary assisted dying in the ACT?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. Just 10 weeks ago, we were not even able to consider voluntary assisted dying for ourselves in this place. Since the federal parliament lifted its ban in December on the territories making laws about voluntary assisted dying, we have used the summer period to refine and finalise our consultation process.

Consultation will be open for the next eight weeks, closing on 6 April. We will prepare and release a listening report on the feedback provided during the consultation. What we hear in this consultation process will inform the drafting of the legislation. Knowing what the community thinks voluntary assisted dying should look like in the ACT will help to craft that legislation and a model that reflects community values and expectations.

I plan to introduce legislation in the second half of this year, and we anticipate that a committee would then review the legislation. Should the legislation pass, just like in

other jurisdictions, there would be a period of implementation. We have waited for too long to be allowed to have this conversation, but now, after 25 years, it is finally here. I am looking forward to hearing from the Canberra community about our approach to voluntary assisted dying in the ACT.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MR COCKS:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, you just said that you were unaware of constituents being excluded or ignored, yet only yesterday, despite your assertions, my office had a call from a constituent who has absolutely given up on receiving a response from your office. This person is in severe distress and a very bad situation. The constituent is worried that the next correspondence they receive from any official channel will be to tell her that her husband has passed away.

Minister, why are vulnerable members of the public being ignored or turned away from your office?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for raising this matter with me. I think I know which constituent you are talking about there. We do sometimes receive contact from constituents who are seeking help to make sure that they are getting the right information from services in ways that are aligned with proper process, and we always ensure that that is passed on and that people are connected up with the people they should be talking to.

Sometimes people find that a difficult process to go through, and many of the people that we are providing services to in this community are going through a very difficult time. We always endeavour to do that with empathy and to make sure that they are in contact with the correct services to be able to help them with their inquiry.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, the fact is that this person has given up on ever receiving a response from your office. Does this demonstrate that the culture in your office remains dysfunctional and that Canberrans cannot depend on you in their hour of need?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As you mentioned earlier, this is a person who is talking about services that are being accessed by another member of their family, and as you alluded to in your question earlier, you are talking about someone who is contacting us about services that another member of their family is accessing.

We do everything we can to make sure that people are connected up with services in a way that follows correct processes about the way that information needs to be shared. That is something that services undertake very seriously and do everything that they can to provide people with the information that they are able to share with them.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what will it take for you to acknowledge your failings so that you can serve the people who need you in the ACT?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I was saying earlier today, our office is working collaboratively and effectively in its responsibilities to my electorate as well as to my portfolios. My



chief of staff, my team and I have worked really hard to ensure a positive work culture where we all work hard and enjoy our jobs and feel supported in the workplace.

My team are excited about everything that we are going to be able to achieve this year together. We are looking at a really huge year, progressing with long-overdue voluntary assisted dying legislation. As Minister for Youth Justice and Justice Health I am looking forward to the ACT leading the country in raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and keeping kids out of prison. It is going to be a big couple of years, and my team and I—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. The minister continues to try to avoid questions about her behaviour and about her office. She is now embarking on some exploratory exposition around the government's general priorities. I ask her to be specific to the question and to tell us exactly—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Cocks, you have raised your point of order. You may not like the answer. I think the minister responded to Ms Castley at an early part of her response. She does have 40-odd seconds to continue. It may be frustrating, but it is within order.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the functions and culture of your office were the subject of an independent review, commissioned by the Chief Minister and the Leader of the ACT Greens, which identified a number of failings. Minister, when you were appointed to your portfolios after the 2020 election, what support did you receive from the Chief Minister to establish and set up your office and office processes?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I believe you will find that a lot of that information is actually in the report, which is accessible. So I would suggest reading that there. The report does make six recommendations for further improvement, with a clear indication that these recommendations should be implemented across all ministerial offices.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, a point of order on relevance: the question was very specifically about what support the minister received from the Chief Minister to establish and set up her office and her office processes. She is providing a completely different answer to what would be a different question. I do not really understand what she is talking about. Can you ask her to be directly relevant?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** To the point of the question, Ms Davidson.

**MS DAVIDSON:** I am not sure that, in the two minutes allocated, I could cover all of the details of the support that was provided, which is why an internal review report is a good place to go to, to read about that.

My ministerial office was set up during a pandemic. It was very busy, and I was a newly elected MLA holding responsibility for multiple health related and essential portfolios that were particularly impacted by the spread of COVID and lockdowns, which no-one was expecting to happen. We all worked very hard to support our

community and, as you can imagine, it was a quite stressful time for all of us. I acknowledge that this, combined with a lack of established processes, led to some teething issues.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, you asked her to be directly relevant and she is not being. The question was on what support she had.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You have raised your point of order. She has made reference twice now that she considers that the support provided is articulated in the report. Again, you may not like the answer, but it is within order.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Going back to the further recommendations that are made in the report, there are six recommendations, with a clear indication that they should be implemented across all ministerial offices. Those recommendations have been accepted. *(Time expired.)*

**MR COCKS:** Minister, did the level of support to establish your office, which was identified in the review, reduce your effectiveness as a minister?

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I was saying earlier, we all worked very hard to support our community from my office during that initial period during the pandemic when the office had been newly set up.

What we wanted to do with this internal review was look at how a new minister's office is set up and learn from it and improve. As an organisation that has been through rapid growth, setting up multiple new offices, it would be expected that there would be structures and processes that needed to change. The ACT Greens in the Assembly have already put in place some of those changes and are working on others.

**Mr Parton:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to be a broken record, but just on relevance. The question was very, very clearly: did the level of support to establish your office, which was identified in the review, reduce your effectiveness as a minister? I just cannot hear the minister getting to that point of the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think she is replying within the scope. Again, you will be sharing a level of frustration with her response, but she is talking about the support that was provided and how her office responded.

**MS DAVIDSON:** As I was saying earlier, there were quite a few lessons learnt in the process of setting this up. We have been working through the process of implementing the recommendations from the review already. The Chief Minister and Minister Rattenbury are jointly implementing a response that is being progressively rolled out across all ACT government ministerial offices.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why does your mental health portfolio have a much lower priority for this government than the tram?

**MS DAVIDSON:** I do not believe that that is reflected in the increased funding for mental health that has been provided through successive budgets in this place during

the term of this Assembly. It is clearly a high priority. We are very committed to ensuring that we continue to roll out effective mental health services for people in our community.

As I talked about this morning in my response to the Chief Minister's statement about priorities for the year ahead, we will be increasing the number of services provided to people in the community to support their mental health wellbeing and at an earlier stage, so that people do not reach the point where they need inpatient stays in hospital. We want to be able to provide people with the support they need closer to home. That means more services delivered in the community, such as Safe Haven in Belconnen and the step up step down services, which provide residential care but closer to home and in a less acute setting than you would find as a hospital inpatient.

All of these kinds of constant improvements and increasing the number and diversity of services that people can access will help us to provide people with the right care at the right time.

### **ACT Emergency Services Agency—preparedness**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, in 2003 hundreds of families in my electorate of Murrumbidgee were impacted by catastrophic bushfires.

Minister, how has the ACT government responded to the devastating 2003 fires 20 years on?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question and her ongoing interest in emergency preparedness. There have been some significant improvements in operations and capability to manage emergencies since the 2003 fires. The ACT government and ESA have remained committed to continually improving services to the community, and we have seen this commitment in action.

Lessons have been learned from the past, and the ESA has grown into a more cohesive and collaborative organisation. The government has strengthened the ACT's legislation and policy to improve the safety of the territory and the surrounding region. The Emergencies Act, under which we operate, is now viewed as best practice nationwide. Under the Emergencies Act, ESA is required to prepare a strategic bushfire management plan every five years, providing a strategic framework to protect the ACT community and reduce harm to the physical, social, cultural and economic environment of the territory.

In 2013, we provided a new headquarters for ESA, and we have and will continue to make significant investments in fire trail upgrades; new vehicles and equipment; new stations and station upgrades; communication technology and sciences to identify risk, including the special-intelligence helicopter; the aerial firefighting capability; and in implementing platforms to work with other Australian and international emergency services under reciprocal arrangements.

The ACT is better prepared for emergencies than ever before, with our polices, warning systems, operational technology capabilities and governance arrangements

leading emergency management practice at the national level. I will keep working with emergency services volunteers and staff to build on this progress year on year as we continuously evaluate, learn and improve.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what technology and other changes have been made to bushfire response and preparedness?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The ACT government and the ESA are always open to incorporating new science and technology to improve our firefighting practices and operational work. Currently, we have three aerial assets on standby at the Hume helibase. One of these helicopters is the FB 100 light helicopter with the special intelligence gathering capability. It allows for real-time streaming and spatial data collection during fires and emergencies. It also has infrared cameras that send critical incident information back to the incident management teams and incident controllers as necessary, allowing real-time information and situational awareness. With aerial assets such as this on standby, we are better prepared for the next emergency response, as demonstrated on Sunday by our teams responding to the fire on Mount Ainslie.

Additionally, the ESA has ongoing partnerships with research institutions and non-government organisations that are working to advance technologies and practices in this space. The ACT Rural Fire Service are also collaborating with research partners in trialling fire detection cameras, lightning sensors and improved fire prediction modelling. More technology and communication channels, including social media, are at our disposal than ever before, which means our monitoring is more effective and we can notify the community much faster.

These capabilities and technologies all enhance our preparedness and situational awareness. They are also ensuring that our community remains well protected and we are able to respond effectively to all emergencies. As technology and science evolve, the ESA and our emergency response will continue to evolve with it.

**MS ORR:** Minister, why is the government adopting an all-hazards approach to emergency management?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her interest in this important topic. Our approach to emergency management in the ACT is frequently reviewed and is done through our annual planning cycles and our robust evaluation processes following incidents and events. The 2021 review of the operation of the Emergencies Act 2004 found that the ACT's emergency management response arrangements were of a high quality and reflected best practice. An important change following this review was the adoption of an all-hazards approach to the emergency preparedness and response.

The territory faces risk from a broad range of hazards, including severe storms, heat events and flash floods. Climate change is also increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, so that is why we have transitioned the ACT's Bushfire Council into the Multi Hazard Advisory Council to advise the minister, myself, and the Emergency Services Agency on the risk facing the territory across all natural hazards, rather than just bushfires. The changes made give the council the flexibility

to vary its membership, as required, to address the changing risks faced by natural hazards, and ensures that we benefit from expert advice across a range of sectors to better protect Canberra.

While we cannot escape the realities of climate change, the ACT government will continue to plan and prepare for the consequential risks that it brings by implementing a holistic, all-hazards approach to further improve our preparedness and response to all emergencies.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MS LEE:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the *Final report: inquiry into the legislative, workplace governance and clinical frameworks of Dhulwa secure mental health unit*, which you commissioned, highlighted the dysfunction between different levels of the workforce and bears a stark resemblance to the findings of your review into the Minister for Mental Health's office. To what degree did the problems in the minister's office contribute to the problems in the secure mental health unit?

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker I think that is one of the more absurd questions that has been asked in this place. I do not think there is any connection. Any inference that has been made in that question is offensive and should be withdrawn.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, will you continue to support a mental health minister whose behaviour so clearly detrimentally impacts the mental wellbeing of those around her?

**MR BARR:** Again, Madam Speaker, the insinuation in that question is quite offensive and makes a series of accusations about the minister that are unfair and reflect pretty poorly on the Leader of the Opposition.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, how do you expect the mental health system in the ACT to be fixed when the minister does not seem able to run her office properly?

**MR BARR:** As the minister has acknowledged, there were some challenges in her office. She has sought to address them. A review was conducted. Recommendations have been made and they have been accepted. The minister understands her responsibilities under the ministerial code of conduct.

**Ms Lee:** Does she?

**MR BARR:** Yes she does. In spite of what I consider to be some quite unsavoury personal attacks that have come from questions but more so in interjections across the chamber today, the minister retains the confidence of her party and of the government and of me.

### **Stromlo Forest Park—development**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Special Minister of State. Minister, on 20 October the Assembly passed my motion stating that the government would engage in further consultation with all users of Stromlo Forest Park at each stage of the master plan

implementation, including the existing car park project and event space proposal. The next day the development application for the car park was lodged with the planning directorate, and the comment period closed a month later. Minister, what consultation were you able to conduct in the day between passing the motion and submitting the development application?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I am happy to provide the specific dates and times of the consultations. It is important to note that consultation has been occurring for a number of years at Stromlo Forest Park. From the development of the master plan the government acknowledged that there was a need to consult as part of the development of that plan. That goes back as far as 2009, including the public release in 2010. It was then refreshed in 2014 and endorsed by government in 2016. At each stage of the process there was direct consultation with user groups, the general public and the mountain biking community, with two comprehensive reports to government prepared in 2009 and 2016.

As part of that master plan there was of course the vision that set out formalised paved parking around the Stromlo Forest Park village. That is what the government has subsequently funded, acknowledging the need for that car park. In formalising the car park we have provided safe access from a work health and safety point of view but also increased the number of spaces in that car park in providing disability car parking access as well.

We have been undertaking consultation with the community and user groups about the car park that included public forums with the Weston Creek Community Council and the Canberra Off-Road Cyclists group late last year. Community feedback has already been provided and has been incorporated into the design, which has seen changes such as wider and longer car park spaces to support users to unload and load their bikes. I can announce that we will also be having two further consultation sessions about the paid parking that I have announced this week, which will be occurring in the coming fortnight. That information is on the Stromlo Forest Park website.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what changes have been made to the physical design as a result of additional consultation?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. In addition to making changes around having wider and longer car parking spaces to support users, we have added additional drop-off zones to support access to the park. The community has had the opportunity to provide comment on that development application. The government has received several comments and these have been worked through, as per the planning process.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

I will keep the community and the Assembly updated as we progress in delivering this project. I am really pleased that we are continuing to get on with other projects as well at Stromlo Forest Park, with the criterium track extension being finalised this week. Asphaltting has been occurring with Capital Asphalt, which will enable a triathlon to

run on the weekend, enabling the new connection between the leisure centre to be used to enable them to undertake their running and cycling legs.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, will the government extend the consultation period on the outstanding development application to allow for further consultation?

**MR STEEL:** There is a statutory process. I have already said that we will be undertaking some consultations now on the implementation of the paid parking arrangements. That will occur over the coming fortnight. All of the funding that comes from the revenue from the paid parking model, similar to the Arboretum, will go directly back into improving the venue.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

That includes new tracks and trails. We have heard from the mountain-biking community very clearly, particularly those that have been using it now for some time, that they want to see new, interesting, challenging tracks and trails. We will be consulting with them about the development of a new five-year trails master plan for Stromlo.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

That will be used to inform where that direct investment from this new revenue stream will go, this permanent funding used for Stromlo Forest Park that will make sure that it remains a premier cycling facility and a premier recreation facility for user groups.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, I remind everybody that interjections across the chamber are unparliamentary, to see if we can cease that or minimise those.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the report of the inquiry into Minister Davidson's office suggests that the minister did not receive appropriate support when she was appointed to her position. Indeed she was unwilling or unable to confirm otherwise in previous answers just now. You have been Chief Minister for nearly a decade and a minister since 2006. What responsibility did you have, as Chief Minister, in providing that adequate support? Why did you not know how to support the minister without waiting for an inquiry into the failings?

**MR BARR:** Of course, new members to this place receive a baseline level of induction that is undertaken by the secretariat within the Office of the Legislative Assembly in relation to their responsibilities as members of this place. In addition to that, those who serve in the executive are provided information that includes the ministerial code of conduct; the cabinet handbook, which outlines the processes associated with the operation of cabinet; information on governance principles around appointments, boards and committees; an Assembly process handbook; information on developing legislation and working with the Parliamentary Counsel's Office;

guidance on caretaker conventions; and a more recent development in relation to the budget process, which is information on wellbeing impact assessment templates and resources.

We also provide information in a series of whole-of-cabinet briefings and discussions, which Minister Davidson participated in, around the budget process and how that works. There was, of course, information and support provided in the establishment of the minister's office by way of staffing resources as well as information provided in relation to the enterprise bargaining arrangements, the number and level of staff and the sort of information that is provided routinely to non-executive members. Then there is an additional layer of information provided to support executive members.

I believe there is a strong framework, but the review did identify that there are some further areas that can be strengthened. Certainly, my experience is that the support provided in 2020 was significantly more than I received in 2006.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, what aspects of the list that you just went through are within your responsibility as Chief Minister to provide? Do you accept that you failed to provide adequate check-in for a new and inexperienced minister in the critical mental health portfolio during a critical time for our community?

**MR BARR:** All of the things I have listed, together with numerous others, are provided by my directorate, my office and me, as the leader of the government. I have a responsibility to ensure that all of those machinery of government information packs are updated and are available to ministers and ministers' offices. The role of chief of staff within a ministerial office is obviously very significant. My chief of staff supports other ministerial offices; so, too, do other members of my office.

I also, though, understand the extreme and steep learning curve that comes from being both a new member of this place and a new member of the executive at the same time. It is challenging; there is no doubt about it. The minister has acknowledged some challenges and difficulties. That is what led to the commissioning of that piece of work, and the recommendations that have been provided have been accepted and implemented. I am sure the minister has learnt from this experience, understands her responsibilities under the ministerial code of conduct, and understands that it is important to learn from challenges. We all have them. The line of questioning implies that there has never been an issue on your side of politics. Frankly, as we know, and the evidence is very clear, that that is not the case. This is a challenging working environment.

**Ms Lee:** Answer the question.

**MR BARR:** You do not get to tell me that, Ms Lee. You do not get to tell me that. I will answer the question as I see fit, in accordance with the standing orders. *(Time expired.)*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, with a level of civility please.

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, for how long were you aware of concerns within the minister's office and what action did you take, other than commissioning the review?



**MR BARR:** I will take the exact dates on notice, in relation to when we first became aware of issues. There is a formal process under the enterprise bargaining agreement in relation to staff being able to raise issues. The response from me and the leader of the Greens was to commission this review. Issues were raised. The minister has acknowledged that. That is not contested. The question now is that lessons have been learned, that the ministerial code of conduct be adhered to and that the recommendations of the review are being implemented.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MS LEE:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the report into the inquiry into Minister Davidson's Office does not seem to address much of the substance of the complaints about the minister's behaviour. What were the terms and the ambit of the request for the inquiry? Are you aware of any complaints about the minister's behaviour which could indicate a breach of the ministerial code of conduct?

**MR BARR:** The ministerial code of conduct is clear in relation to the behaviour expected from ministers. I have not been made aware of any allegations, other than those that the opposition have raised in the media last week, that there have been any breaches of the ministerial code of conduct.

In relation to the terms of reference for the review, Minister Rattenbury and I sought to address specific issues that were raised as well as have a holistic look at questions around support for the executive, hence the recommendations that came through that review. But nothing was off limits for the reviewer and all matters were considered and canvassed, and people were able to speak confidentially to the reviewer.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, what formal investigations into the minister's behaviour have you undertaken, or are you willing to undertake, to assure yourself that there is no breach of ministerial code of conduct and that she is fit to hold her office?

**MR BARR:** There have been no suggestions of a breach of the ministerial code of conduct other than that that was alleged by the opposition in the media last week.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order. Madam Speaker, on two occasions the Chief Minister has suggested that the opposition has raised these issues. The issues came to light through an FOI from the *Canberra Times*, not from—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cocks. It is a point of order; not a debating point. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To Mr Cocks, go and read the comments of your leader and you might find the answer to that particular question and where that inference has come from.

The matter has been the subject of a review. The minister has responded to the issues that have been raised. The minister definitely understands her responsibilities in relation

to the ministerial code of conduct, and the matter has been resolved at this point. Should anything else arise, I would need to respond. Nothing else has arisen at this point.

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, how can the people of Canberra have trust in the minister when there are such serious concerns and problems raised about her performance and the management of her office?

**MR BARR:** Concerns have been raised. The minister has sought to address those. I and the leader of the Greens party have commissioned a review to examine all of the issues. That review has made recommendations. Those recommendations have been accepted.

The minister is aware of her responsibilities under the ministerial code of conduct and continues to have the confidence of her colleagues and the government. The issues are real and raised legitimately. The issues were real and were raised legitimately and have been addressed. The minister has apologised on the public record.

**Mr Hanson:** Has she?

**MR BARR:** The minister has apologised. It is on the public record. The community can have confidence in the minister. Minister Davidson works incredibly hard and is passionate and committed to her portfolio responsibilities. She, I imagine, will achieve more in this place than you lot combined.

### **Minister for Mental Health—conduct**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, we now know that formal complaints were being made about the Minister for Mental Health's conduct at least as far back as 2021. It is now 2023. When and how were you first made aware of concerns about the minister's conduct?

**MR BARR:** As I said earlier, I will take on notice the date on which I was first advised of these matters and those concerns. My response has clearly been outlined in answer to the series of questions that have been asked today.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, why have concerns about the operations, the dysfunction and the toxicity in the minister's office and about the minister's conduct been kept secret for so long?

**MR BARR:** There are due processes and respect for those who have raised issues for them not to play out in this fairly crass and gross political hit-job that is being undertaken here by the opposition. So, out of procedural fairness, in accordance with the enterprise bargaining agreement and accepted standards of workplace laws and operations, these issues are necessarily dealt with through the processes that were followed. But information, particularly as it relates to reviews of the operations of executive offices, are of course subject to freedom of information laws. In that context, as this information was FOIed, it became public.

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, are there any other ministers who have been subject to similar complaints that you are aware of?

**MR BARR:** Not to my knowledge, no.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—body scanners**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, there are two body scanners installed at AMC, which were purchased for through a fast-track procurement process and installed in the middle of 2022. Can you please provide an update on the use of those scanners?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Yes, the body scanners have now been installed. They will become part of operations at AMC once the necessary licensing and associated regulatory approvals have been provided. I understand that is on the way. We will wait for these scanners to come online. While we do that, considerable effort has been made to reduce the number of searches during my tenure as minister. I want to commend the commissioner for his leadership that has helped empower staff to make some changes that better protect detainee welfare.

Some of the new policies and procedures have been enacted that continue to protect the safety of detainees and staff. It has also resulted in fewer searches, which is a good thing. As a result of the changes in practice over the past 18 months, strip searches in general have been reduced by almost half, and I am hopeful that when the new scanners come online, ACTCS will be able to reduce the number of searches even further. As I noted in this place last year, Corrective Services continues to explore further ways to reduce those searches as well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, when do you anticipate the scanners will become operational?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** In the not too distant future. We are just waiting for those licensing and regulatory requirements to come through, so I do not think it will take too much longer. Of course, the searches currently will continue to provide safety for both detainees and staff at AMC.

**MS CLAY:** How has ACT Corrective Services minimised strip searches?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I will not go into the operational situation at AMC. It is up to the commissioner and his staff to go through how operational requirements occur to provide safety for staff and detainees. But, at the moment, I will say that the searches occur lawfully under the Corrections Management Act, and we do those mainly on entry to AMC to make sure there are no prohibited items, and for the welfare of the detainees and the staff.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—fee-free courses**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the government's fee-free TAFE initiative and how it will support Canberrans to upskill?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her question and her interest in vocational education and training. Last month I was very pleased to join the federal minister, Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Skills and Training, at CIT Bruce to announce that enrolments are open for fee-free TAFE at CIT. Fee-free TAFE is a jointly funded initiative between the commonwealth and the state and territory governments, which will inject here in the ACT \$16.5 million into the skills and training sector.

The fee-free TAFE initiative is about removing barriers to study or training, setting up students for employment in industries where their skills are in high demand. We are seeing that right across the economy, with the December figures coming out for unemployment at under three per cent. This is a very good thing and sees more people employed, particularly those who have found it hard to get into the labour market. What this will mean is that we can support more people to get into the labour market and to meet the challenges right across a range of different industries. It is vital that we support people locally to obtain the skills they need to fill job vacancies. Fee-free TAFE is another way that we are delivering on *Skilled to succeed: skills and workforce agenda for the ACT government*. The ACT government is committed to ensuring Canberrans have the right skills for in-demand jobs now and into the future.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how many fee-free training places are available and how many enrolments has CIT received to date?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. The fee-free TAFE initiative will deliver around 2,500 fee-free training places immediately through CIT in 2023. This includes 840 fee-free places in the care sector; 600 in hospitality and tourism; 400 in technology and digital; 50 in construction; 40 in sovereign capability, including space trades; and 600 in other priority sectors including foundation skills.

Since enrolments opened earlier this year, CIT has seen significant demand for these fee-free places. As at the 6 February this year over 350 students have enrolled for fee-free TAFE places. We have also seen 771 applications and 726 unique inquiries to the CIT. This shows that there is quite significant demand for these places which is great to see. The highest number of enrolments to date have been in the skills areas that are in the highest demand in the workforce, including cybersecurity, early childhood education and care and community services.

I was delighted to join with Minister Stephen-Smith to launch the community sector careers gateway earlier today. That will be another way that people can engage with jobs in that sector as well as getting involved in training.

CIT expects enrolment numbers will continue to increase significantly in the coming weeks. I encourage eligible Canberrans to visit CIT's website to see what the fee-free training opportunities are and consider enrolling this year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what are some of the fee-free courses that will be available? How will they help address skills shortages?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary. A total of 46 qualifications and pre-apprenticeships are fee-free at CIT to eligible students. CIT has begun taking those enrolments particularly for the highly popular Certificate IV in Cyber Security.

There is no doubt with the prevalence of cyber incidents and cyberattacks that we have seen over the last few years that this is something on people's minds and we need more people working in this industry that is in high demand. The demand for cybersecurity graduates has never been higher. In the care sectors, CIT will offer the Certificate III in Individual Support and Certificate IV in Ageing Support, helping to meet workforce needs in aged care which is only going to grow over time. The Diploma and Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care will also be available fee-free to meet the needs of our early childhood education and care sector. Particularly as federal Labor gets on with its increased subsidies for childcare, there has never been more need for more training in this space. A variety of courses have been made available in hospitality and tourism including Certificate III in Hospitality, Certificate III in Commercial Cookery and the Responsible Service of Alcohol qualification. A fee-free TAFE will also see the delivery of dozens of short courses including CIT's nation-leading course on the installation and maintenance of electric vehicle charging stations, providing the workforce the ACT needs to make the transition to a zero emissions future.

A full list of courses is available on the Skills Canberra website. Fee-free TAFE is providing skills Canberrans need to support vital and emerging needs across the ACT economy.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answer to question on notice Hospitals—emergency department waiting times**

**MS LEE:** Under standing order 118A, I seek an explanation from the Minister for Health as to why the question taken on notice on 23 November 2022 regarding the amount of money spent on reviewing emergency departments has not been answered.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I can advise that I have signed the response to that particular question. It was not on the list provided to me earlier today, but I did receive the draft response today, and I have signed that off. I apologise to those opposite that there has been a delay. There has been a significant delay with a number of the questions on notice, particularly those that required information from Calvary. I have signed off a number without that data from Calvary, in order to get those onto the public record. This was one of those questions as well, because it referred to reviews of both emergency departments.

## **Papers**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Acting Speaker—Instrument of appointment—Mr Pettersson, dated 9 December 2022.

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Reports—

No 9/2022—ACT Emergency Services Agency cleaning services arrangements, dated 14 December 2022.

No 10/2022—2021-22 Financial Audits—Financial Results and Audit Findings, dated 16 December 2022.

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended—Correspondence—

Bill—Inquiry—

Corrections and Sentencing Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 7 December 2022.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Discrimination Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 7 December 2022.

Gaming Machine (Club Refuge) Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 7 December 2022.

Professional Engineers Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Acting Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 12 December 2022.

Residential Tenancies Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 7 December 2022.

Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, dated 8 December 2022.

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act—

Pursuant to subsection 12(5)—ACT Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2021-22, dated 18 November 2022.

Pursuant to subsection 19(4)—ACT Climate Change Council Annual Report 2021-22, dated 25 July 2022, together with a statement by the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction.

Standing order 191—Amendments to:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Bill 2022, dated 8 and 9 December 2022.

Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, dated 8 and 9 December 2022.

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, dated 8 and 9 December 2022.

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 21(1)—Auditor-General's Report No 5/2022—Procurement and contracting activities for the Acton Waterfront Project—Government response, dated February 2023.

COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, pursuant to subsection 3(3)—COVID-19 Measures—Report No 17—Reporting period 1 October to 31 December 2022, dated February 2023.

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee—Report 5—Inquiry into Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Natural Gas Transition) Amendment Bill 2022—Government Response, dated February 2023.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 7—Inquiry into the West Belconnen supercell thunderstorm—Government response, dated 6 February 2023.

Public transport workforce and timetables—Assembly Resolution of 4 May 2022—Government response, dated February 2023.

**Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Adoption Act—Adoption (Fees) Determination 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-257 (LR, 8 December 2022).

Building and Construction Industry Training Levy Act and Financial Management Act—Building and Construction Industry Training Levy (Governing Board) Appointment 2009 (No. 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-265 (LR, 22 December 2022).

Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act—Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measurement Method) Determination 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-258 (LR, 8 December 2022).

Court Procedures Act—Court Procedures Amendment Rules 2022 (No 3)—Subordinate Law SL2022-19 (LR, 19 December 2022).

Heritage Act—

Heritage (Council Member) Revocation 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-259 (LR, 7 December 2022).

Heritage (Council Member) Revocation 2022 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-260 (LR, 7 December 2022).

Heritage (Council Member) Revocation 2022 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-261 (LR, 7 December 2022).

Heritage (Council Member) Revocation 2022 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-262 (LR, 7 December 2022).

Motor Accident Injuries Act—Motor Accident Injuries (Premiums and Administration) Amendment Regulation 2022 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2022-18 (LR, 8 December 2022).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-256 (LR, 5 December 2022).

Public Health Act—Public Health (COVID-19 Management) Declaration Extension 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-267 (LR, 22 December 2022).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Denman Prospect) Determination 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-254 (LR, 1 December 2022).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Exclusion of Road Transport Legislation (Summernats) Declaration 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-264 (LR, 19 December 2022).

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act—Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Maximum Fares for Taxi Services Determination 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-252 (LR, 24 November 2022).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable—Ambulance Levy) Determination 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-263 (LR, 12 December 2022).

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—

Waste Management and Resource Recovery (Fees) Determination 2022 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-255 (LR, 1 December 2022).

Waste Management and Resource Recovery (Processing Refund Protocol) Determination 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-266 (LR, 22 December 2022).

Workers Compensation Act—Workers Compensation (Fees) Revocation 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-253 (LR, 24 November 2022).

### **Transport—bus services—government response**

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.07): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Public transport workforce and timetables—Assembly Resolution of 4 May 2022—Government response.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Braddock**) adjourned to the next sitting.

### **Health—maternity services**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) Maternal Health Matters describes respectful maternity care as focusing on the factors that support human health and wellbeing: care that does no harm and is culturally sensitive, unbiased, valued by the woman or birthing person and their community;
- (b) respecting the woman or birthing person's choice is central to maternity care as care must be culturally safe and appropriate;
- (c) a “continuity of care” model ensures that a woman or birthing person knows their maternity care provider(s) and receives care from the same provider, or small group of providers, throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and the postpartum period;
- (d) “midwife-led continuity of care” is defined as care where “the midwife is the lead professional in the planning, organisation and delivery of care given to a woman or birthing person from initial booking to the postnatal period”;



- (e) the 2016 Cochrane Review of studies comparing midwife-led continuity models of care with other models of care, demonstrated that midwifery-led continuity of care for low and high-risk pregnancies was better for maternal outcomes, including fewer interventions or instrumental births, less likelihood of experiencing pre-term birth, lower risk of stillbirth and higher likelihood of having a spontaneous vaginal birth. Midwife-led continuity of care is appropriate for all pregnancy risk levels, is cost effective and improves satisfaction for both women and birthing people and health professionals;
- (f) midwife-led continuity of care improves workforce wellbeing and is a sustainable way forward for the midwifery workforce. Quantitative research comparing the emotional and professional wellbeing of midwives providing continuity of care and those not providing continuity of care found Australian midwives providing continuity of midwifery care reported lower levels of burnout, depression and anxiety and higher levels of professional identity and autonomy. Midwives working in care models providing fragmented care are at greater risk of psychological distress. Work environments where midwives are supported and facilitated to work to their full scope of practice provides the best outcomes for women and birthing people and midwives;
- (g) ninety percent of newly graduated midwives want to work in a continuity of care model and anecdotal evidence suggests they are leaving midwifery when they are unable to, further exacerbating the midwife shortage. A 2022 integrative literature review acknowledged that midwives graduate with the skills to undertake midwifery group practice and continuity of care models, and should be supported to work in these models to retain them in the profession;
- (h) midwife-led continuity of care and Birthing on Country models of care are important for Indigenous women. Birthing on Country is a metaphor for the best start in life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies and their families, and is a continuation of thousands of years of knowledge and practice, which provides holistic maternal, child and family health care that embeds cultural integrity and safety during pregnancy, labour, birth and postnatal care;
- (i) Birthing on Country models co-designed by stakeholders have been shown to drastically improve outcomes for women and babies, and a 2021 paper published in *The Lancet* recommends that the widespread scale-up of Birthing on Country models should be prioritised;
- (j) *Maternity in Focus: The ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032* recognises that continuity of care is valuable for all women and birthing people but is particularly important for those experiencing vulnerability, those living with a disability, or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Having a known care provider supports these women and pregnant people to build trust and comfort within the public health system, providing connection to supports and advocating for individual needs;
- (k) despite institutional attention to the importance of culturally appropriate care, culturally and linguistically diverse women and birthing people in Australia are less likely to access continuity of care, have poorer pregnancy outcomes and lower satisfaction with pregnancy care than women from the general population; and

- (l) vulnerable women and pregnant people, including detainees, need additional support to prepare for parenthood in order to reduce poorer childhood developmental outcomes and intergenerational trauma;
- (2) further notes:
  - (a) the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Maternity models of care in Australia, 2022* data reported that the ACT provides whole duration of maternity period continuity in 38.1 percent of pregnancies, the third highest in the country and above the national average of 31 percent;
  - (b) the ACT Government has committed to increasing midwife-led continuity of care to 50 percent by 2028;
  - (c) the *Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025* outlines 21 goals with 58 actions including specific actions to:
    - (i) expand midwifery-led continuity of care particularly to improve access, increase equity and improve outcomes;
    - (ii) work with consumers and community-controlled organisations to co-design a Birthing on Country model of care;
    - (iii) build capacity and confidence in women, pregnant persons, and families to meet the challenges of pregnancy and parenting to make informed decisions and to advocate for their individual needs through relationships built on mutual trust; and
    - (iv) identify opportunities to increase optimal care and wrap-around supports;
  - (d) birth centre birthing requires the support of midwife-led continuity of care. Demand for places in the current continuity of midwifery care models far exceed the availability of places with approximately 30-40 women unable to access this preferred model of care each month and in November 2022 there were approximately 350 women and pregnant people on the waitlist ranging from six to 36 weeks pregnant;
  - (e) Canberra women and midwives have been calling for a freestanding midwife-led family birth centre located separately to a hospital for over 30 years. In the 1980s, ACT for Birth lobbied for a freestanding birth facility;
  - (f) there is an acknowledged international shortage of midwives, and recruitment and retention of midwives in the ACT to improve maternity services is essential;
  - (g) the ACT Government has continued to invest in the midwifery and broader maternity workforce through a dedicated workforce planning resource, building safe work environments through the *Towards a Safer Culture* for nurses and midwives program, co-designed health and wellbeing initiatives and a system-wide culture improvement program to support recruitment and retention of midwives in the ACT;
  - (h) COVID and the ongoing use of birth centre rooms at the Centenary Hospital being used as isolation rooms has shown that there is a great need to have well women and pregnant people able to birth away from hospitals;
  - (i) while Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service provides some antenatal and postnatal services, there are no Birthing on Country models of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and

- pregnant people that offer midwife-led, culturally safe continuity of care with all hours of availability;
- (j) the petition tabled this week calling for a freestanding birth centre gathered over 600 signatures; and
  - (k) the Change.org petition run in 2018 calling for a freestanding birth centre in Canberra gathered over 2,680 signatures;
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) review the 50 percent access to midwife-led continuity of care by 2028 target during implementation and update the Maternity in Focus Plan to include a target of 75 percent of women and pregnant people to have access to midwife-led continuity of care by 2032;
  - (b) establish the maternity reference group as outlined in Maternity in Focus to include practicing front line midwives and midwifery academics, to provide oversight of reform implementation, identify future collaboration opportunities and communicate about the Maternity in Focus plan to the broader community;
  - (c) in the context of northside hospital and health services planning, collaborate with the maternity reference group and the University of Canberra to conduct early design and feasibility before August 2024 to establish a co-designed midwife-led freestanding birth centre, located alongside or fully separate to the new northside hospital;
  - (d) collaborate with the maternity reference group and the University of Canberra to investigate the feasibility of a northside women's health and early childhood hub that encompasses the care continuum for the mother-baby family unit from pre-conception care, with midwife-led continuity of care, gynaecology services, maternal and child health services, multidisciplinary early intervention advice and support services (eg, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nutrition), education classes, social work and support workers, and early childhood care and education. The early childhood hub would also be a site for Canberra Institute of Technology and University of Canberra students learning and research focused on holistic maternity care and early childhood;
  - (e) collaborate with the maternity reference group, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders, and Indigenous midwives and academics to develop and implement an ACT specific, culturally appropriate and culturally safe Birthing on Country midwife-led continuity model of care; and
  - (f) further note that Ms Clay welcomes the opportunity to remain involved in considerations by the Government which relate to the tabled freestanding birth centre petition, and other calls in this motion; and
- (4) also calls on the ACT Government to improve existing maternity services by:
- (a) continuing to implement all actions in the *Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025*;
  - (b) as set out in the *Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025*, expanding access to the Public Home Birth program by fully implementing all agreed recommendations and progress agreed-in-principle recommendations from the May 2019 home birth trial review;

- (c) optimising use of the current birth centres in the ACT and finalise review of the eligibility criteria for the birth centre at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to allow more women and pregnant people to access the midwifery-led continuity of care program;
- (d) as set out in the *Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025*, implementing the system-level changes required to support endorsed privately practicing midwives to provide continuity of care within our public maternity system;
- (e) including in the ACT maternity data dashboard set out in the *Maternity in Focus: First Action Plan 2022-2025*, data on birth outcomes and caesarean rates of all models of care to enable informed choice on maternal care options;
- (f) as part of continuity of care, investigating options to increase care with a known midwife to six weeks postnatal care alongside an ongoing consumer reported outcomes survey post birth at 12 months postpartum to review the experiences of services to identify gaps;
- (g) as set out in the *Maternity in Focus: The Public Maternity System Plan*, embedding the Respectful Maternity Care Charter into health services and review training for all health professionals who may work with maternity consumers as part of their orientation, and as an annual competency;
- (h) building on existing successful public maternity, childhood and parenting programs in the ACT that provide strong support to vulnerable women and pregnant people, and families such as those delivered through the Canberra Health Services Maternal and Child Health service and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service;
- (i) as part of this expansion, supporting more vulnerable groups to access these resources by increasing outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse communities for perinatal education;
- (j) offering Circle of Security classes to people who are parents/parents to be who are detained at the Alexander Maconochie Centre; and
- (k) providing an update to the Assembly on progress of all items in this motion by the first sittings in November 2023.

Birth is not an illness, so why force us into hospital? Today I am really pleased to bring forward a package that will support women and birthing people to give birth somewhere other than in a hospital. This is about choice. When implemented, this package will mean we are giving more people more choices. They will be able to choose to give birth at home, in a hospital ward, in a hospital birth centre or in a freestanding birth centre.

I believe we are very lucky and privileged to be joined today by a baby who was born in a freestanding birth centre, although not one in Canberra, because we do not yet have one; but we will soon. Women and birthing people will be able to choose to do this with a known and trusted midwife that they have been seeing throughout their pregnancy. Not all of those choices are currently available to people in Canberra.

I want to have a quick check-in about language, firstly. I will be talking a lot about women in this speech, but I actually understand, and I fully respect, that not everybody who gives birth identifies as a woman. I use the phrase “women and birthing people” sometimes. Please, whenever I say “women”, take it as read that I am using that in a really inclusive way.

I also want to note the length of the motion that I have circulated. It is really long. The first version actually had footnotes, too, which we were not allowed to include. I will not apologise for the length and for the amount of research that has gone into this. It contains a lot, and it has been a long time coming. It actually reflects the length of the campaign for a freestanding birth centre here. It reflects the long campaign for better choices and for more support for women and birthing people. This call is often felt, to a lot of people involved, to be like a long, long labour.

Canberra currently has two birth centres inside our hospitals, but we do not have a freestanding birth centre. It is a gap in our services. It is a choice that people in Canberra do not currently have. The birth centres in our hospitals are fantastic services. They are also really popular. Hundreds of women are giving birth inside our hospitals each year while their names are on the waitlist for the continuity of care and for the services in that birth centre.

The unwritten waitlist is actually much longer. A lot of women do not sign up because they know that they will not get in. The joke is that you need to call the birth centre as soon as you conceive, and possibly during, which I think makes for a lot of funny phone calls by some very determined women. We clearly need more services, but we do not need more of the same services. It is time that we had a freestanding birth centre.

This morning I tabled two community petitions calling for a freestanding birth centre. These petitions had well over 3,000 signatures. I would like to thank Abbie, who was the sponsor for those petitions. I would also like to acknowledge that we are joined by a lot of women and babies who are very supportive of this motion. Sarah, Kelly, Abbie, Kai, Mariah and Marie, baby Evelyn, baby George and a lot of other people have joined us today. Thank you for that.

I went to the Canberra Birth Centre’s 30th birthday party last November, and I was struck by how many women I met who were campaigning for a freestanding birth centre back in the 70s. They are strong and patient, and I think they are pretty happy today, because I think they will get what they have been asking for.

We actually had calls for a freestanding birth centre long before that. I will read out this quote: “Childbearing is not a disease nor an illness and if Canberra can lead the way by showing how it should be treated the example will leave a marked effect throughout the commonwealth.” Dr Marshall Allan said that. He was a director of obstetrical research at the University of Melbourne, and he wrote that in a letter of support for a freestanding maternity hospital that was separate from a general hospital. He wrote that back in 1929.

We have known for nearly a hundred years that Canberra needs a freestanding birth centre, because the place where you give birth matters. The evidence supports it.

What does that evidence tell us? A freestanding birth centre gets better outcomes. The further you are from a hospital, the more likely you are to have a safe and supported birth that does not need an intervention. Being outside a hospital does not increase the risk for low-risk mothers and birthing people; it supports low-risk mothers and women to give birth without interventions.

There is a cascade of intervention that happens in hospitals. It happened in my birth. I will circle back to that later, if there is time. If that cascade of intervention never begins, birth is much more likely to progress without unnecessary interventions, and that matters. That means fewer episiotomies, fewer forceps and fewer unnecessary caesareans. The better the birth, the more likely it is that the mother and baby will have a great start to life. They are more likely to bond, they are more likely to breastfeed and they are more likely to enjoy one another's company.

A freestanding birth centre will also relieve pressure on our hospitals. Our maternity wards are bursting at the seams. The two hospital birth centres are full and oversubscribed. We have 30 to 40 women missing out every month on our continuity of care models. They are great models, but we do not have enough of them.

The Chief Minister this morning talked about how Canberra is growing. We have more births than deaths each year. We have had a massive growth in population of people aged 25 to 39. These are the people who are having babies. We need to invest more in this space.

A birth in a freestanding birth centre is also cheaper for the government than a hospital birth. That is not the main reason to set up a freestanding birth centre. We want the best care we can get for women and birthing people and for our babies, not the cheapest care. But it is another benefit. A freestanding birth centre means healthy people can stay out of hospital. This is important at any time. We need hospitals to look after people who are not healthy. COVID has shown us how important this is. We do not want healthy women, healthy birthing people and their babies, newborns, around a pandemic.

A freestanding birth centre is good for the profession. Midwives want to work in freestanding birth centres. We have a national and global shortage of midwives. Our midwifery workforce is in real distress, and this is a really sustainable way forward. Midwives want to work in a freestanding birth centre where they can support women and where they can practise their profession in the way that they have been trained. They know it is better for women and birthing people, and this is how they want to do this. They will remain in the profession for longer, they will serve well, they will have a better life and we will not have retention problems if we provide the environment that the midwives, the evidence and the people of Canberra are asking for.

A freestanding birth centre will not suit every woman and it will not suit every birth, and that is okay. This is just another choice. It is a choice that women have in New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. Closer to home, it is a choice that women have in Townsville and Mackay. But right now it is not a choice that we have in Canberra and it is time that that changed.

This motion is not just about a freestanding birth centre. It actually picks up on quite a lot of the recommendations that we know will support birth, and there is a lot in it. It is quite long. It represents a huge amount of work by many people who have been working in this field for a long time. The implementation of this package will have a massive and tangible impact on women and birthing people and babies and their outcomes.

I am calling for an increase in midwife-led continuity of care. The government has set a target for this in the *Maternity in Focus* package, and it is fantastic to see that support. We are asking for that target to be reviewed upwards. We have asked for at least 75 per cent of women to be offered this by 2032. I will be honest: the Greens would like this to be offered to everyone. We have had some really good chats with the health minister and she has done some very careful workforce modelling, and we understand that 75 per cent is a good and ambitious target.

Continuity of care is really important. It gives you a known midwife, and that is so much better for women and birthing people. We are much more likely to have a positive birth experience if we have this. If we have a known midwife, the person who we have been working with during our pregnancy, the person who we trust, we get better outcomes. It can reduce premature births by up to 25 per cent.

I had a midwife during my pregnancy. I saw her once every three weeks, I could not call her out of hours and she was not at my birth. I really wish she had been; it would have been fantastic.

We have also asked for the government to include frontline midwives and midwifery academics in the maternity reference group. It is important that our policymakers are talking to midwives, as well as to the hospitals. We are calling for the government to work with the University of Canberra to examine a north side hub to offer all of the support services that women and children might need, from pre-conception right up to the age of five.

This is a great idea from UC. It could include things like physio, nutrition, occupational therapy, social work, education classes and early childhood education. It would also link in the UC students who are training to become our future workforce. I am really excited to see what comes out of that.

We are asking the government to talk to midwives and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and community members to develop an ACT-specific birthing on country model of care. Birthing on country is a metaphor for creating a space for Indigenous women to birth in a way that is culturally safe for them. This works really well with continuity of care because it looks different for every individual.

When we were working on this paper, I heard a beautiful story from one woman. She gave birth in a hospital, but she was able to make that more culturally safe because in her birth plan the first words that she wanted her baby to hear were those in her language. She got everyone in the room to be quiet as she gave birth; then she spoke to her baby in the language of her ancestors. This is a fantastic cultural connection and this is the kind of model that we can have more of.

Winnunga is a great service. It has a midwife, but we need more consultation and investment and we need continuity of care and culturally safe options to be available for everyone who wants them, with 24/7 access.

We are calling on the government to implement the recommendations of the public home birth trial from 2019. We have a few recommendations on home birth that we have not yet quite connected up. We want to make sure that women on the north side, in Belconnen and everywhere on the north side, can access this, and we want to make sure that it is available for first-time mums. A public home birth model is a really good fit to go with our freestanding birth model.

We have asked to embed the respectful maternity care charter into training for all medical staff who may care for women and pregnant people. We know that feeling safe and respected during labour and birth, when you feel so vulnerable, is so important.

We have asked the government to share some data on caesarean rates for different models of care. This is really important. This means that women and birthing people will be able to have access to accurate data. They will be able to make prior informed choices about different outcomes. That helps women to exercise the choices that they have.

We have asked for more outreach to happen to vulnerable communities to help them access maternity and parenting resources and education. It is especially important for vulnerable women and birthing people to be well supported. We are asking for circle of security training for parents and birthing people and mothers in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. It is a fantastic evidence-based program and it will help to reduce intergenerational trauma. It could improve outcomes for the next generation, and it will help people right now.

It has been a lot of fun to work on this motion. We have really enjoyed it in my office. Every single meeting begins in the same way. We always share our stories. When I am talking to a midwife or somebody who has had a birth, we always jump straight into our own births.

We found, when we were talking to people about the petitions, that it is of interest to everyone. We had a group of teenage boys who initially walked past and said, "Birth, that's not for me." They came back and we started talking about the issues. These teenage boys all decided that it was very important that we have a freestanding birth centre.

I was talking to a man from New Zealand who caught his son. His son was six foot four and was standing next to him, so he must have caught him well. He obviously had good hands. He said he was quite surprised when he came to Canberra. He had his first son in New Zealand in a freestanding birth centre and it had been a de-medicalised, quite natural process. When he arrived in Canberra, his next two children were born in a hospital.

It has been a really beautiful, unifying community issue. This is strongly driven by the community. This has come to us from non-political people who are just after this



service. I have had great conversations with the health minister. She is enthusiastic about this. She has done great work in the *Maternity in Focus* package, and this is the next logical and obvious step, so we are very excited about this.

I will speak briefly about an amendment that Ms Castley has circulated. She has asked us, instead of progressing with getting the design of the freestanding birth centre by August next year, to delay everything and send it off to a committee. I am afraid that I do not agree. I welcome any committee looking at these measures. Any committee can self-refer at any time. Perhaps one of Ms Castley's committees would like to do that. There was a comprehensive committee inquiry into birth in 2020. That was only three years ago. The evidence has not changed since then. We are simply trying to implement the recommendations that came out of that prior committee, and I am very reluctant to delay what we need now. We need all of these measures now. We have done all of the research, we have heard from the community, we have heard from the midwives, and we have looked at the evidence on this.

If a committee would like to look at this, that would be absolutely fantastic, but we will not be supporting an amendment today that will block all of the progress and that will stop us having a freestanding birth centre. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.23):** The demand for maternity services in Canberra is growing, and I believe Canberra parents deserve the best help and care when going through their pregnancy and childbirth. I welcome everybody here today. It is so wonderful to see so much support and willingness to come to the chamber. We do not have many visitors.

I have had two kids myself and, let me tell you, it was way before continuity of care was even a thing. With my first child, I think at every antenatal appointment I saw somebody different and ended up having a caesar. It is daunting having kids. I truly believe we need the best care possible.

I would like to move the amendment circulated in my name. I am sure you have all got a copy. It is just one amendment, and it is very simple, and it is to refer a freestanding birth centre to the health and community wellbeing committee for a formal inquiry.

When this 4½-page motion was foisted on me yesterday, I went about going through, line by line, 27 notes and 17 different "calls on" just to try to understand exactly what this was trying to convey. Do I need to stop and move the amendment?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Cain):** You need to move your amendment.

**MS CASTLEY:** I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after (2)(k), substitute:

“(3) refer the feasibility of a co-designed midwife-led freestanding birth centre to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing, for an inquiry and report to be tabled by the final sitting week of 2023.”.

At the end of the process of going through 27 notes and 17 “calls on”, I had more questions than answers. That is the reason for my amendment today. I believe that moving this to a formal inquiry—although there was one done in 2020; we acknowledge that—spearheads it into a really focused and formal inquiry, which is something that I believe gives this important issue the justice that it deserves.

I want to talk on a few of the quick points that came up for me. As I said, after going through it there were more questions for me than answers. In the World Health Organisation recommendation on midwife-led community care models, it is recommended for pregnant women in settings with well-functioning midwifery programs. I note that the 2016 Cochrane review makes the finding that most women should be offered midwife-led continuity of care. However, it goes on to say that further research is needed.

Just last year, in August, the *Canberra Times* published an article titled “Canberra midwives raise alarm about maternity health services”. Underfunding and neglect have meant that Canberra midwives have been trying to do the best that they can in a really broken system. Midwives in the article say that they “held grave fears as a result of staffing, cultural and organisational issues across the capital’s public hospitals”. The midwives also talked about chronic understaffing and how this is affecting care. That is one of the areas that I am concerned about and why I believe that an inquiry is important.

The motion talks about the maternity reference group multiple times. However, the members of this reference group are unclear. We have other reference groups, and details about all of those members and the minutes of those meetings are available publicly, but over the past 24 hours I have been unable to find the list of members or the minutes for this group.

I believe that an inquiry would open that up to the public and to other stakeholders to be involved, and all of Canberra will be able to see what goes on in that inquiry. Public and stakeholder awareness is crucial for making decisions on care in the ACT. That is why this motion calls on an inquiry. Certain stakeholders need to be included and let me be clear that if frontline midwives and midwife academics are not included in the maternity reference group, then that should be fixed.

Referring a freestanding midwife-led birthing centre to the committee does ensure that, as I have just said, all Canberrans are able to see it—it is not done behind closed doors. Also, I am asking the committee to write a report on its feasibility. The concerns I have here relate to the article. Does the ACT have enough staff and resourcing to provide this service? If so, great. If not, the inquiry will explain more to us about how we can get there.

There needs to be further information for us. That is why the Canberra Liberals have put this amendment out today. We believe these things are really important. That is why this amendment is important to us. This motion is so technical and so detailed, and we need more clarification. Such important issues do require an inquiry. That is all I have to say on this motion today.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.28): I want to start by acknowledging everyone who is in the gallery today. I think this turnout really reflects the level of enthusiasm that there is in the ACT community for midwifery-led continuity of care models and the birth centre.

I also, as I have mentioned before, along with Ms Clay and Ms Davidson, attended the 30th anniversary dinner of the birth centre. There was a lot of conversation there about what a difference it has made in the experience of women and pregnant people having babies in the ACT, and what a difference it has made to midwives to have the opportunity to work in continuity models and in the birth centre. I want to recognise both those who have had their babies through this experience and those who have not been able to, because they have been on a waitlist, and those midwives who work in this model.

Of course, it is not the only model of care for pregnant people, and not everyone is going to choose this model even if it is available to them. I do want to emphasise that very early on in Ms Clay's motion—it is a very long motion—(1)(b) notes:

... respecting the woman or birthing person's choice is central to maternity care as care must be culturally safe and appropriate ...

We are, as Ms Clay has indicated, committed to expanding midwifery-led continuity of care access in the ACT; but we already have 25 per cent of pregnant people birthing at Centenary who access continuity, which, by my calculations, if they are right, is about 72 a month at Centenary Hospital alone. We have also worked to expand access to continuity at Calvary Public Hospital.

As Ms Clay's motion notes, our *Maternity in Focus* strategy has already committed us to ensuring that at least 50 per cent of pregnant people have access to a midwifery-led continuity of care model by 2028. We are really proud of that commitment in *Maternity in Focus*, the ACT public maternity system plan for 2022-32 that I released last June. That plan was released following extensive consultation with stakeholders, including consumers, frontline staff and academics. It really does take a system-wide approach to bring together an extensive range of national and local publications to guide the principles of woman-, person- and child-centred care within our maternity services.

In terms of the evidence base that this builds on—and this goes to the point of Ms Castley's amendment, which Labor will also not be supporting today—*Maternity in Focus* responded specifically to the inquiry into maternity services in the ACT that was conducted between September 2018 and June 2020. It was a very thorough inquiry into maternity services by the Legislative Assembly committee and included three recommendations that specifically went to the opportunities to expand midwifery-led continuity of care and opportunities to expand additional places for midwifery-led continuity of care birthing to occur, including homebirth and birth centre expansions. I would really encourage Ms Castley to have a look at that inquiry.

*Maternity in Focus* also responds to the National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan, the Safer Baby Bundle, which provides information for women and pregnant

people on how to reduce their risk of stillbirth, as well as education for health professionals to reduce perinatal mortality and stillbirth; the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2019 and beyond; the 2019 *Woman-centred care: Strategic directions for Australian maternity services*—that is, the national maternity strategy; and the evaluation of the publicly funded homebirth trial in the ACT.

That is a lot of information and evidence that we brought together in developing *Maternity in Focus*, and the plan is therefore very ambitious. The first action plan 2022-25 outlines the ACT government's ambitious 21 goals, with 58 actions to create the foundation to evolve the public maternity system and deliver the government's commitment to provide care when and where people need it. As I said, the first action plan is grounded in evidence. It is grounded in best practice; consolidated consumer and stakeholder voices; experts in the service; and, of course, our incredible staff, particularly midwives.

I will direct the Assembly to the ministerial statement I made on 3 August last year that outlines the work that the ACT government has committed to over the 10 years of the plan, some of which is laid out in Ms Clay's very long motion, but there is even more in the whole plan. In the 2022-23 budget the ACT government invested \$12.1 million to realise the *Maternity in Focus* actions and provide additional funding to public maternity services.

As I said, it commits us to having access to midwifery-led continuity of care for at least 50 per cent of women and pregnant people by 2028, and we have worked with Ms Clay to think about what a further target beyond that could look like. Ms Castley has spoken about some of the workforce challenges that we currently face in midwifery. This is not an ACT problem alone. There is, nationally and internationally, a challenge in attracting and retaining midwives. That is why it is so important that we continue to expand continuity of midwifery care in the ACT to retain our fabulous midwives.

It is why, as Ms Clay's motion speaks to, we need to think about how we enable new graduates to go straight into working in continuity models. At the moment that is not possible. That is something that definitely needs to be looked into. At the birth centre 30th anniversary there were some tough words for government and our health services, but there were also some words of truth for the profession itself and a recognition that there is more to do to think about how new midwives are supported into this fabulous profession and sustained and looked after.

In the work that we did with Ms Clay—and I want to thank Ms Clay, her office and my office for the detailed consideration—we settled on a target of 75 per cent of women and pregnant people having access to midwife-led continuity of care by 2032 as an appropriate target. ACT Labor understands the evidence and the value of midwifery-led continuity to our community and to our workforce into the future. We have been committed to this model of care for some time and we will continue to look for ways to optimise our services to support more women and pregnant people to access continuity, should they choose this model.

I go back to that issue of choice. Whenever I think about this, I think of two friends of mine who are very good friends with one another, one of whom is an absolute

advocate for homebirth and would be totally an advocate for a freestanding birth centre and midwifery-led continuity of care. The other one was medical model all the way—a very well informed consumer of health services—but that was her choice. I think we do need to respect that choice. I know I have heard that from others as well.

Obviously, there is a lot of evidence to support the value of midwifery-led continuity of care, and so some of the work around ensuring that women and pregnant people and parents-to-be have really good access to information about the evidence is a key point that Ms Clay made in her speech as well.

Ms Clay, I have just signed a response to the question that you put on notice in relation to caesarean rates. Unfortunately, it will not have all the information that you asked for, because we simply do not have that data, but the implementation of the Digital Health Record will help us to really be able to dig into more of that data and information. I recognise that our caesarean rates probably do need some work.

The ACT does already have the highest proportion of births in the public system that are supported through midwife-led continuity of care and that is because we are a progressive jurisdiction. I think at this point it is important to differentiate between continuity and birth centre. We sometimes hear that the birth centres are oversubscribed, noting that we do, in fact, have two hospitals that deliver birth centre models. At the birth centres themselves, the physical infrastructure is not oversubscribed. The continuity model is. It is important to recognise that these are not the same thing.

It is also important to recognise, and I do, that as we expand access to continuity we will need the physical spaces in which these births can take place, be that homebirth or be that in a birth centre. Our focus has really been on addressing some of the issues around expanding homebirth to the north side, to people who are having their first baby, and it is frustrating for me, as it is for others, that some of the challenges, including insurance challenges, we have not been able to resolve at this point, but we are working very hard to do that.

I also do recognise that there is a difference between a freestanding or alongside birth centre model and one that is embedded in a hospital. Ms Clay has talked eloquently about the evidence relating to the type of care that is provided, depending on whether someone is giving birth in a hospital or in another setting and the degree of medical intervention that occurs that is less when you are further from a hospital—less unnecessary intervention.

Here is some data. Currently, the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children can accommodate up to about 3,800 births a year. That does include about 1,000 births through the Midwifery Continuity of Care program, including homebirth. In 2021-22 Calvary Public Hospital extended midwifery-led care to a further 120 places each year, enabling 360 women and pregnant people to access this model. That is now almost 1,400 births a year that can be supported in the ACT through this model of care. So we are continuing our investment in that, towards our target.

Through our work on the north side hospital and north side health services design, we have a real opportunity to conduct early design and feasibility for a co-designed,

midwife-led, freestanding or alongside birth centre. That really means it is freestanding, outside of the hospital setting, but on the same campus as the hospital itself. We know we need to redevelop the north side hospital completely, so this is a really great opportunity to have a look at how we give effect to our commitment to midwife-led continuity of care.

We are also very happy to investigate the feasibility of a women's and early childhood hub as we continue to work on the ACT Labor election commitment to delivering new walk-in health centres or health hubs. I know that working with the University of Canberra will be important, but we already have commitments to new hubs in north Gungahlin, in the inner south, in south Tuggeranong and in Ms Clay's own electorate in west Belconnen. West Belconnen already also has a fabulous child and family centre where maternal and child health services are delivered.

I think our existing child and family centres provide us with a really good opportunity to think about how we better integrate care across community services and health, right across that spectrum from early pregnancy or even before that, right through early childhood. That idea is actually reflected in ACT Labor's election commitment to the development of a child and family network, building on our fabulous child and family centres in west Belconnen and also in Tuggeranong and Gungahlin.

I have been talking a lot to both ACT Health and Canberra Health Services, and their community-based teams, including the community paediatrics team and Maternal and Child Health Services, as well as to the Community Services Directorate. I am very pleased to have just recently got that responsibility, in the Administrative Arrangements, for child and family centres. It is bringing those projects together to ensure that we are delivering really joined-up services for parents, new parents-to-be, including things like Circle of Security, which is something that we very strongly support.

In relation to Ms Castley's amendment, as I said, we will not be supporting it. Plenty of work has been done. Recommendations have already been made through a very thorough Assembly review and I do not see that members of the Legislative Assembly, fantastic as they are, really have the expertise to undertake a detailed feasibility study of this model of care. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (3.43): I thank Ms Clay for bringing forward this motion today and for her team's efforts to continue the work of the many Greens MLAs before us, including Amanda Bresnan, Caroline Le Couteur, Deb Foskey and Kerrie Tucker, in supporting access to birth choices.

I will be speaking today in support of Ms Clay's motion, and not supporting Ms Castley's amendment. It is great to hear Minister Stephen-Smith's support for progressing the work towards more birth choices in the ACT. Ms Castley's amendment will slow down that work, and one thing I can assure you of, Mr Assistant Speaker, is that we are here to get on with the job and make sure that people in this city have the best choices available to them.

Women and midwives have been advocating for birth centres in Canberra for decades. The current birth centre at Canberra Hospital was the result of a campaign dating back to 1981.

I have some history with the birth choices movement in Canberra, having been a convenor of Friends of the Birth Centre; ACT Branch President of Maternity Coalition, now known as Maternity Choices; and Deputy CEO at Women's Health Matters, working on information resources for birthing women and focus groups that were commissioned by ACT Health on changes to maternity services.

During the time that I was advocating for better maternity care in Canberra, Senator Katy Gallagher was Chief Minister, Treasurer and Health Minister all at the same time, and yet she still made time to hear from us. By comparison, Zed Seselja, who was a Liberal MLA at the time, would not even return my phone calls.

Last weekend I was digging around in some old data and I came across a recording of an interview that I did with Adam Shirley on ABC Canberra radio about 15 years ago, when we were at risk of losing our existing Canberra Birth Centre during the design of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

I am very pleased that the hard work of so many volunteers and midwives at that time meant that we kept our birth centre, with its natural birth philosophy. That ongoing advocacy has seen the implementation of home birth trial programs, a birth centre at Calvary Hospital and many other programs and services that improve the choices for new parents in our community. Now it is time to take the next steps in supporting better choices for birth in Canberra.

When we advocate for improved birth choices and support for new parents, it is not just about clinical health outcomes. Midwifery care is about truly being with woman—it is what the word “midwife” means—in one of the most powerful life moments and supporting that transition to becoming parents.

This shift in thinking from a medicalised view of birth to a natural birth philosophy is why some families in Canberra would like to have the choice to birth in a freestanding birth centre, not on a hospital campus. I very much appreciate Ms Clay's explanation of why this is an empowering choice for people who are pregnant and considering their birthing options.

I would like to speak very briefly on one particular aspect in this comprehensive and carefully thought-through motion: expanding access to Circle of Security classes to people in the Alexander Maconochie Centre who are parents or parents-to-be. Becoming a parent is not just about the physical process of giving birth; it is about becoming a person with a different focus and responsibilities, and that means developing new skills and understanding about our role and our connection to the little ones who are dependent on us.

Circle of Security is a program that helps parents understand and enable a strong attachment between parent and child. This contributes to young people developing a sense of security, which is vital to healthy childhood development. Parents who are in

the prison system need extra support to develop that strong attachment with their children, because of both the reduced amount of time that they have with their children and because the parents themselves may be suffering the ongoing impacts of childhood trauma or other challenges of their own.

Everything is interconnected. If we want children to grow up healthy and happy, we need to support parents to be healthy, too. Providing access to support for parents and parents-to-be in AMC creates opportunities for their children to have a better start in life, and it strengthens the capacity of those parents to maintain strong family relationships that will help them transform their lives once they leave the prison system. I look forward to doing what I can to better support parents in AMC, and I support this motion today.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.48): I wanted to stand in support of this motion today and support and thank Ms Clay for all the work that she has done on this. I would also like to thank Minister Stephen-Smith for the work over the past few years in evolving the ACT maternity care system and the commitment of the ACT government to delivering best practice.

I went through the birth centre at the Canberra Hospital with three babies but, unfortunately, not one single baby was actually born in the birth centre. I have experienced the midwife-led continuity model of care and I cannot speak more highly for the midwives and doctors at the Canberra Hospital who supported me and thousands of other Canberra women through the pregnancy and birth process.

Babies and the idea of supporting women through pregnancy and birth and the midwives that cared for me so inspired me that, in 2018, I started studying a Bachelor of Midwifery at the University of Canberra. I have a passion for seeing women empowered through their pregnancy and births, and the choice in models of care is a critical part of that process. Unfortunately for me, life, three children and a full-time job running a research centre did not easily facilitate a bachelor's degree. I do hope that maybe one of my daughters will one day become a midwife. That is my intention for them, anyway.

So, instead of life taking me that way, I am here today and I am really proud to support this motion. I think it is really important that we see an increase in the services and the range of services that we offer women, to improve choice and outcomes for women and babies. I very much support this motion, and I do not support Ms Castley's amendments to the motion.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.50): I want to speak today as a proud dad who was incredibly privileged to go through the birth centre on two occasions. I want to thank Ms Clay for the hard work that she has put into this motion, and I do want to thank Ms Castley for her engagement on this as well, because this is something that is really important to get right.

The value that the birth centre provided to my family was immense. My daughter's birth in 2011 in the old birth centre, in that home-like environment, was so empowering for my wife and for myself. The support that we had was incredible.



The experience of my son's birth a couple of years later in the new birth centre was not as smooth, sadly. There was a point when we thought we would not bring him home, but he is here because of an amazing midwife. But when that big red button was pushed on the wall and to see people come running for you is amazing.

Making sure we have the system right and making sure that everyone who has an interest in this is heard is really valuable, because, in that period between 2011 and 2014, I kept hearing stories of how midwives' views were not heard; that the people providing care were not the people who were allowed to lead the implementation of the new birth centre.

So I do just very quickly want to support the amendment, because it is important. It is critical to get this right so that everyone gets to take home their child at the end of the day and so that everyone feels as empowered and supported as we did, because this form of care for us was absolutely amazing. That is why we need to get it right for everyone in the future.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.52): I just wanted to take this opportunity to rise and speak in support of Ms Clay's motion. Personally, I have a lot to be thankful for: for the midwives and the support they have given myself, my then-wife and our children.

I would ask you to please not take this personally, but I have probably spent more time in the presence of midwives than I actually care to, whether that be in terms of the long hours whilst waiting to give birth to our stillborn son or the long weeks that we spent at the special care nursery, where it was the midwives who actually helped us through that very challenging period.

So I would like to say thank you from a personal level for all the work that you do in support of individuals. I would also like to say as a representative that I am very grateful for the support that midwives provide to the Canberra community and to all families. I think everyone in the Assembly would express that gratitude.

I support this motion because it is good for women. I also support this motion because it is good for families. I also support this motion because my seat of Yerrabi has a booming population with a high degree of young families, all having lots of babies. It has taken over as the nappy valley of the ACT. I would welcome the ability for the constituents of Yerrabi to be able to access services like this in the near future.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.54): In closing, it has been lovely to hear some different points of view today. I think that is great. I did think that this would be one of those motions that would be tripartisan. It is a community call that we are seeing here. It is a community call that has been going on for 50 years, and we have a huge weight of evidence.

We had a two-year committee inquiry from 2018 to 2020. If we started a second committee inquiry now that might not finish until the end of the term. It would probably be 2025 or 2026 until we could circle back again to implement the recommendations made. We do not need to delay what is so obvious and so necessary and what we need now.

It is great to hear the health minister talk about all of the north side health service planning that is going on. There is a lot happening in this space, and it is really important we make sure that such a necessary and obvious thing as a freestanding birth centre can be included now while we are planning and building those facilities. It is really, really important.

It is really important that we have it midwife-led co-designed. I am quite excited to see that we have in this motion that by August next year we will be seeing some early designs for that. So that means it will not be too long before Canberra's babies, Canberra's women and Canberra's birthing people can access this other choice.

Of course, we need to get it right. That is why we are using so much evidence. That is why the motion—which was not drafted by the health department; it was just drafted by my office—is so long and there are so many footnotes. It is because this is a really well-understood and really well-studied area.

We have extended the membership of the maternity reference group, which has already been established from the *Maternity in Focus* package, to make sure that we have more practising midwives in that group. This is how we will make sure that the implementation of the freestanding birth centre and all of the other measures are done in the best way, and this is how we will give Canberra's women and Canberra's birthing people the choice that they need.

I also just want to pause again and talk about the midwives. The midwives have been asking for this for a long time. They know they want more continuity of care. They know that women need this. They know that they need to be able to offer this model of a freestanding birth centre, which is so well established in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Townsville and Mackay. None of this is new, and they know how to do it.

They also know that if they offer this model as another choice for people who want to use it, it is good for those people. It is also good for the midwives. This is going to make a much better operating environment. They will be able to co-design this area. They will be able to operate and control this area. They will be able to make sure that this model is delivered in the way that birth centres are meant to be delivered, and that is so important.

It will actually help with our midwife retention. At the moment we know that many women and people come out of midwifery and they want to work in this kind of model. If we offer this kind of model, I do not personally think that we will have any trouble staffing a freestanding birth centre. I think people will be falling over themselves to try to work in this kind of model. I think it is a really good idea.

We need to get this right. Of course, we need to get this right. That is why we do careful work on the implementation. I, of course, welcome consultation. I welcome any parliamentary committee that wants to look at this, which a committee can do at any time. We do not need to block an entire motion and stop progress. We do not need to put a stop work on this entire motion in order to do that. Any committee can look at this at any time.

Perhaps a committee of three parliamentarians might have something to add. But, personally, I feel that the weight of evidence from midwifery, from academics, from practising midwives, from the medical field and from a lot of people who have been looking at this for a long time has probably taken us as far as we need to go in the scoping work, and it is really just time to deliver it.

I am very pleased that it certainly does sound like this motion will be passing today. I think that is fantastic news. I think it is very positive to see all of the progress we are making to support maternity services and to support birthing options. Personally, I am excited that women will be able to have a choice that I did not have, and a choice that I would have benefited from, frankly.

I received great services from our Calvary public health system, but I did not have a birth centre and I did not have a known and trusted midwife. If I had had some of that continuity of care, I think I probably would have had much better outcomes.

We have also heard a lot in the media in support of this motion. We have heard from Abbie, who is a Canberra mum and a business manager who has had three experiences with the birth centre, and she has got three gorgeous babies as a result. We have heard from Kai, too, who is a very well-established practising midwife. I really enjoyed listening to how she responded to some of the questions about, “How do you make sure that a freestanding birth centre operates safely?”

It is very interesting when you talk to a practising midwife who understands these models. It is very simple to do. Our midwives are very well trained. They actually are qualified and trained to use almost all of the interventions that would ever be needed. What happens when we have a freestanding birth centre with good continuity of care is that we need fewer interventions in the first place. It is much, much less likely.

But, of course, sometimes it might be necessary. The midwives and the way that that freestanding birth centre is constructed means that almost everything you need is right there. In the very rare incident that a woman needs to transfer, there is a quick hospital transfer to do a caesarean. This is a very good way we will make sure that we have another option.

For anyone who does not want to choose this option, that is great. We will still have birth centres in a hospital and we will have hospital wards and we will have home birth options. There are a lot of different choices here.

It is very positive when you have a chat to somebody who understands this field to hear why these models work so well in other places, why they are so well established and why this is such a normal and natural thing and the most logical way for us to extend our north side services. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Before I bring this to a close, I also would like to thank and acknowledge the visitors in our gallery and thank you for taking an interest in the proceeding of the Assembly. I wonder if those of you who are midwives would like to raise your hand. Thank you so much for the skill and care you provide to families at such an important time—and just in case Ms Lee needs some assistance.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 15

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Cocks  
Mr Hanson  
Ms Lawder  
Ms Lee  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton

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

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

Amendment negatived.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

## Light rail—stage 2

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.06): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) to date, the Labor-Greens Government has refused or failed to disclose to Canberrans the total cost or delivery date for Stage 2 of the tram;
- (b) conservative estimates indicate that Stage 2 of the tram will cost Canberrans over \$3 billion with a delivery date likely to be after 2034;
- (c) more cost effective and sustainable public transport options, such as electric buses, have been delivered in other cities in Australia and globally since Stage 1 of the tram was completed;
- (d) the Labor-Greens Government has failed in the delivery of essential government services in health, education, policing, housing and city maintenance, and diverted funds from these services to the tram project;
- (e) the ACT Auditor-General's Report No 8 of 2021 found that the business case for Stage 2A of the tram was seriously flawed, and should be reviewed and updated;
- (f) the Labor-Greens Government has refused, and cannot or will not guarantee, that the same methodological flaws are not present in the business case for Stage 2B; and
- (g) the National Capital Authority believes the necessary approvals for Stage 2B will not be granted for many years; and

(2) calls on the Labor-Greens Government to not proceed with Stage 2B of the tram.

Today I call on this Labor-Greens government not to proceed with stage 2B of the tram. It has become increasingly clear, and it was once again confirmed last week with the release of the Productivity Commission's annual *Report on Government Services*, that despite the rhetoric, despite the spin from Labor and the Greens, Canberrans are paying a steep price for this government's political deal to proceed with a tram at all costs.

Last week's *RoGS* data once again confirmed what the Canberra Liberals have been calling out for years. The Labor-Greens government is failing at almost every hurdle, on every metric, on every essential government service that Canberrans expect and deserve.

We have the longest emergency wait times in the country, with thousands and thousands of Canberrans not being provided with essential health services within the clinically recommended time frames. There are the real cuts by the ACT government in education funding over the past decade, resulting in a teacher shortage crisis; violence and bullying in our schools; and toxic and hazardous materials in our classrooms.

There are fewer public housing dwellings than a decade ago, with over 3,000 vulnerable Canberrans waiting for years to have a roof over their heads. And there are the highest rates of long-term homelessness in the country, despite this government continuing to throw money at it to go away.

We have the smallest police force and lowest funding for police per capita in the country. Our police are not even adequately resourced enough to respond to property crimes, despite years of our police officers, the AFP, the police commissioner and the Canberra Liberals calling desperately for support and resources. We have the highest Indigenous incarceration rates in the country. That is a shameful indictment of the utter and complete failures of this Labor-Greens government in outcomes for our Indigenous Canberrans.

This is a government that has failed Canberrans. This is a government that is failing Canberrans.

What we do know is this: we know that this government is good at spin, and we know that this government is good at gaslighting the community. But the reality is that thousands of Canberrans are not able to access world-class health care when they need it. The reality is that thousands of Canberra's teachers are at breaking point, facing a chronic teacher shortage. Thousands of Canberra's students are learning in classrooms whilst toxic and hazardous materials are present.

The reality is that thousands of Canberra's most vulnerable are living a life of uncertainty as to whether or not they will have a roof over their heads. The reality is that thousands of young Canberrans do not know if they will ever have the opportunity to live in their own home. The reality is that our city, our nation's capital, the heart of Australia, is not the city that we used to be so proud of, when we all see the long-term neglect of our grass not being mown, our footpath cracks not being fixed and our roads littered with potholes.

The reality is that this Barr-Rattenbury government has made the very deliberate and very calculated decision to divert millions and millions of taxpayer funds from these essential government services to pay for the tram. Canberrans will not be fooled. All of these issues with the essential government services that I have just outlined are the direct result of deliberate choices and deliberate decisions made by Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury to cement their political alliance, which has seen devastating results for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Conservative estimates put the price tag of the tram stage 2 at over \$3 billion, with a delivery date beyond 2034. How much more neglect can our hospitals, our schools, our police force and those on public housing waiting lists take?

This government's steadfast refusal to publicly release the business case for stage 2 of the tram only confirms what we are all saying and thinking. They cannot or will not give us accurate information on how much it will cost and when it will be delivered because they know it does not stack up. It is not feasible, and it is a policy that is not based on good public transport outcomes.

They cannot and will not give us the information because, despite the opaqueness of their budget, the fact is that there are more millions of taxpayer funds that will inevitably be taken from essential government services in health, education, community safety, housing and basic municipal services so that Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury can continue to hold on to their political power at all costs.

Canberrans have a genuine choice in the 2024 election. My vision for Canberra for the future generation is one where we prioritise support for our teachers, our healthcare professionals, and police and emergency services on the front line; one where our young Canberrans have the genuine opportunity to live in their own home; one where our most vulnerable are supported; and one where we take pride in our capital city. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (4.13): The government will not be supporting the motion that Ms Lee has brought to the Assembly today. I have said it before, Mr Deputy Speaker: governments are often criticised for not thinking beyond the next election, not planning ahead and not putting in place the long-term policies to address long-term challenges. Our government cannot be criticised for that because we are putting in place forward-looking, confident and progressive policies and a progressive and forward-looking vision for the ACT. There is no greater example of that than light rail. It is crucial infrastructure to meet the challenges of a city that is growing faster than ever anticipated.

Recent population data has shown that the ACT is the fastest growing jurisdiction in Australia. We all know that. With more people living and working in Canberra, it is vital that the government finds new ways of efficiently moving our larger population around quickly, easily and sustainably, to avoid the same problems of congestion that other cities face.

Revised population projections further support the need for long-term, future-focused investment to expand our city's first mass transit system in light rail. Stage 1 of light

rail has already been built and has exceeded expectations. The introduction of light rail from the city to Gungahlin has increased patronage on public transport compared to the previous rapid bus routes, and has supported significant urban regeneration along the corridor, including the development of more housing to accommodate more people.

The frequent, comfortable and reliable services provided by stage 1 of light rail have been embraced by Canberrans on the north side, and we want to extend those same benefits to residents of the south side. The government's vision is to extend the light rail line to the south side to create a central mass transit spine all the way from Gungahlin to Woden. It is part of a city-wide light rail vision.

This means that all Canberrans will be able to travel to key destinations, including employment centres, north to south along the line in a single trip. The line will be integrated with rapid and local bus services, and in the future additional light rail lines are planned to other town centres and destinations.

An integrated public transport network is key to delivering on our vision for a connected, sustainable and vibrant city. This will build on the existing bus fleet. We already have rapid bus routes, including articulated buses that run from the city to Woden, and we are already transitioning the fleet to electric buses. We have more than 100 electric buses arriving in the coming years and we are progressing major works to augment the grid to support hundreds more being charged.

The *Australia State of the Environment* report last year rated Canberra as the best city for access to public transport, with 65 per cent of dwellings being situated within 400 metres of public transport with a reasonable service. This is a system that we want to build on by expanding the existing mass transit component of our integrated transport network so that more Canberrans can access the light rail service.

Buses will continue to play an important role in providing services to the suburbs and will closely integrate with other forms of mass transit like light rail, but buses alone will not deliver the mass transit system that Canberra needs. Buses are also impacted by traffic congestion and disruption, unless they operate on a dedicated busway, which has subsequent impacts for the road network, as it requires a lane of traffic to be removed.

By comparison, light rail operates on its own dedicated right of way, its own track with intersection priority, and does not impact adjacent road traffic as much. Light rail achieved a 99.9 per cent service availability in last year's annual report. Electric buses could never achieve that level of availability and reliability when they are so easily impacted by road traffic and congestion.

Light rail is delivering a genuine mass transit system for Canberra. The light rail vehicles can comfortably hold 207 passengers and are designed with a maximum capacity of up to 276 passengers. This is around four times the number of passengers that can be carried on a standard bus, and nearly three times the capacity of articulated buses, which can hold around 109 passengers.

However, the capacity of light rail vehicles can be further increased by an additional 50 per cent through modular extensions to the vehicles and potential future

modifications, which were anticipated, to the stops. It is important to have longer-lasting, high-capacity light rail vehicles delivering frequent and reliable services with a dedicated track with intersection priority. This will support the densification of our city as we move towards a population of 500,000, now as early as 2027.

The Liberals have clearly stated that they would deny south siders the benefits of light rail and the same quality of life as those Canberrans living on the north side. This motion is, again, a confirmation of their conservative position.

In the most recent light rail customer satisfaction survey from September 2022, passengers were asked how they would have travelled if they could not use light rail. Only 43 per cent of passengers said they would choose to use bus services, and nearly the same amount, 40 per cent, would have instead used a private car or rideshare. This is consistent with another survey result from 2021 which identified that over 43 per cent of light rail passengers had not used public transport in the ACT before light rail commenced operations.

The Liberals also have not considered or acknowledged the loss of over 6,000 jobs that would be created through delivery of the stage 2 project, or the hundreds of people that would have already purchased homes in Woden and made those investments based on the proximity to the future light rail corridor, and the benefits that they will receive when that light rail connects to Woden. It would have seemed like a pretty safe investment, given that all parties had previously committed to delivering light rail to Woden at the last election. I am sure that those south siders would be disappointed to hear of the Liberals' betrayal in abandoning this project and their promise. If the Liberals cannot be trusted to deliver on this commitment, what else will they give up on when it all gets too hard?

It is disappointing that our long-term vision for transport continues to be opposed by the small-thinking conservatives in the Canberra Liberals. At the same time as population data underlines the need to invest in transport infrastructure, the Canberra Liberals have backflipped on their support for light rail or any other mass transit system, given that they have even ruled out supporting so-called "trackless trams".

This means that under their leadership there would be no mass transit system here in Canberra. The Liberals have no plan for public transport other than to oppose it. They criticise how long it will take us to build this important, complex infrastructure for our growing city, but they would never build it—ever.

Their position also ignores the fact that work has already begun to extend the mass transit line south, with light rail vehicles ordered and work underway to raise London Circuit to enable stage 2A, with the extension to Commonwealth Park. This will provide a more people-friendly interchange for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

The 2A extension will provide stops at key destinations in city west, city south and Commonwealth Park, running wire free. These are stops that people will use from Gungahlin, Dickson and Braddon because this is an extension of the benefits of an existing network.



Once the work on stage 2A has progressed, we will shift our focus to stage 2B. We will be systematically working through each of the milestones with our technical design partners on board to deliver light rail to Woden in this decade. This will involve light rail moving from Commonwealth Park over Commonwealth Avenue bridge and through the parliamentary triangle to Woden. We are working to deliver the original bridge designer's conception of an inset bridge for light rail in between the two existing bridges on Commonwealth Avenue, which also reflects Griffin's intended light rail route across his lake.

Whilst we have always said that there will be complex planning, environmental and heritage work necessary for the 2B extension, early work has begun on realising the heritage and landscape design aspiration for Commonwealth Avenue, together with the National Capital Authority.

This will be followed by the development of an environmental impact statement, development approval and works approval, with public consultation at each stage. This extension will also require a licence agreement for national land use, referral to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories with a potential inquiry, and approval from both houses of parliament, should it move through, close to Parliament House. This is all in addition to the development of a final business case, procurement, construction and commissioning, ahead of operations commencing.

This is a complex project with various stages of approval, and that is why we have committed to constructing stage 2A to Commonwealth Park while we obtain the various approvals for stage 2B to Woden. We have been up-front about that for years. It is why we split the projects in half in the first place, so that we could get on with the work on 2A while we continue the work on 2B.

This is obviously too challenging for the Canberra Liberals, so they have abandoned light rail. They have backflipped on their promise. Not only have they given up on the project, but they have also given up on Canberra having any form of mass transit system.

They have just discovered electric buses, but we have already committed to transitioning our zero emissions bus fleet. We started that transition back in 2016. In reality, their "vision" for Canberra's public transport network is to do nothing.

The Liberals have accused the ACT government of refusing to disclose the cost of light rail stage 2. However, the ACT government has committed to continuing to release the business cases and contracts for future stages of light rail, most recently in the November sitting. We are happy to commit to it again, because we have done it on all of the previous projects.

Our vision for Canberra is to have a mass transit system linking the town centres, integrated with zero emissions buses to serve the suburbs. It is a vision that grows more compelling as our population increases. It contrasts with the Canberra Liberals, who have no vision for the city, confirmed again by this motion. We have proven as a government that we can continue to invest in all of the important things. It is what

governments have to do. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We invest in education; we invest in health. Schools and hospitals: we are building a new hospital in Woden and we are looking at a new one on the north side; we are building new schools. We are investing in more doctors; we are investing in more nurses and midwives.

We are supporting more affordable housing. We are investing in community services. We are also investing in transport services because that is what we need to do to make sure that, as we grow, our city remains a great place to live. We will get on with the work systemically to deliver each milestone of our plan to deliver a long-term transport infrastructure system that our city needs.

Our forward-thinking transport policies will ensure that, as our city grows faster than ever, our city remains a great place to live. The government will not be supporting Ms Lee's motion, which continues, again, the long line of motions that the Liberals have brought into this place trying to obstruct the light rail project. This is the first motion for them of 2023 and I am sure it will not be the last. We will continue to fight their lack of vision right until the next election.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.25): I would like to thank Ms Lee for providing a reason to discuss the importance of light rail to Woden, but I do strongly oppose her motion. As a local member for Murrumbidgee, I want to highlight the importance of stage 2B of light rail to the local people and my electorate.

There is a lot of community support for and excitement about the extension of light rail. We know that the ACT is the fastest growing jurisdiction in Australia, according to the 2021 census. With more people living and working in Canberra, it is vital that the government finds new ways to efficiently move our larger population around quickly, easily and sustainably, to avoid the problems of congestion that other cities face.

We know that key to supporting population growth is having the right infrastructure in place. The ACT government is getting on with the job of delivering a properly planned public transport network that will serve our community for generations to come. An integrated public transport network is key to delivering on our vision for a connected, sustainable and vibrant city. This vision is in stark contrast to the Canberra Liberals' vision. Ultimately, I do not know what that is and neither do Canberrans.

Stage 1 of light rail has already been built and has exceeded expectations. We know that light rail stage 1 from the city to Gungahlin has increased the use of public transport when compared to previous rapid bus routes. It has also supported significant urban regeneration along the corridor. The frequent, comfortable and reliable services provided by stage 1 of light rail have been embraced by Canberrans on the north side, and I cannot wait to see those benefits for the residents of Murrumbidgee and the south side of Canberra.

Light rail to Woden will bring significant social and economic benefits to Woden and will contribute to addressing the challenges of climate change. We need a cultural

shift away from the use of cars and towards environmentally friendly options like active travel and public transport. I would like to thank the minister for his sustained work on the light rail project, and I look forward to working with him in the future. It is time to stop playing games and it is time to get light rail to Woden. Thank you.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.27): I rise today to speak in support of Ms Lee's motion, because it outlines the Labor-Greens government's failure to prove that light rail stage 2 is a cost-effective project that will improve Canberra's public transport system. She has outlined the Canberra Liberals' position eloquently, and I am not going to repeat the points that she has made. What I am going to talk about here is the cost of this project to constituents in my electorate, to people who use our road network and to anyone in the future who might want to use our road network. In fact, it goes even broader than the ACT, with some funding reallocated around the city to the country or rural areas of the ACT.

With regard to the tram, it is no secret that the tram coming to Tuggeranong is a long, long way down the track, so to speak. It is a long way down the track. We have never been told when it might come, even if it might come. Labor and the Greens have been struggling to provide a time line for the completion of stage 2. We have heard from federal bureaucrats that stage 2A will be delivered in January 2026, but the government have been very coy about the time frames. They certainly cannot provide an answer as to when it will arrive in Tuggeranong. For the next few decades Tuggeranong residents will rely on buses, active travel and private vehicles to move around Canberra—for decades yet to come.

If 2A might be delivered in 2026, what might that mean for the future? It can be quite the journey to get from Tuggeranong to the city via our current public transport network, and time constraints often mean that south-side residents do not necessarily use the public transport network.

Labor and the Greens love to talk about active travel, yet we hear time and again about the poor condition of footpaths and even of bike paths, which is making active travel very hazardous for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition to that we have this Labor-Greens government's least favourite form of transport, which is cars. We know that the Greens hate cars, for example.

In October last year we heard from Senate estimates that funding for several previously announced road projects had been scrapped—projects that added up to a total of \$85.9 million—that had been allocated to road projects in the ACT. What a coincidence that the exact same amount of \$85.9 million was reallocated to stage 2 of the tram in the October federal budget. It was revealed that this Labor-Greens government had been consulted about this matter and they volunteered this road project funding to be reallocated to the tram extension. These were projects that Minister Steel had previously welcomed, had previously said were fantastic. All of a sudden he talked about them as pork barrelling. What a backflip that was. What a backflip! It is a wonder that he did not hurt himself, the backflip was so enormous.

We read in the *Riotact* on 31 October last year the headline, "Budget diverts Parkway funding to light rail and Tuggeranong is not happy". Tuggeranong is not happy,

and this is what I hear from constituents in Tuggeranong. I will quote from that *Riotact* article:

A disappointed Tuggeranong Community Council President Glenys Patulny said the South West Corridor project for the Tuggeranong Parkway, including between the Cotter Road and Glenloch Interchange, should have been kept to alleviate the pressures that light rail construction would bring to the whole road network.

Ms Patulny said the cut was short-sighted and the Federal and ACT governments had not taken a big-picture view of the whole road system.

She said there would be more and more pressure on the Parkway as the population of the Molonglo Valley grew and as disruptions increased from first light rail stage 2A to Commonwealth Park and then Stage 2B when it progressed towards Woden down Adelaide Avenue.

“These are things that could have a big effect, not just now but into the future, but more when the tram comes online,” she said. “There’s going to be more and more pressure on this Parkway and it needs to be up to scratch.”

Ms Patulny said it wasn’t just about catering for more cars because an extra lane on the Parkway could also be used for electric buses.

She said the Parkway was the most direct route into the City from Tuggeranong and the road served three regions—Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Molonglo.

But that money, that \$85.9 million, is gone. There was funding other than the parkway funding. Another one was improvements to safety and Emergency Services vehicle access on Boboyan Road of \$5 million—something that, again, the transport minister was happy to talk up publicly when it suited him. Also, there were Kings Highway upgrades to Pialligo Avenue of \$30 million.

That money, that \$85.9 million which has gone towards the tram, is not new money. It was taken from somewhere else, from roads, from roads that could have helped us for decades to come, the decades in which Tuggeranong will be waiting for the tram to arrive. I am sure you have all seen that meme of the skeleton sitting on a park bench waiting for the tram to arrive in Tuggeranong. It is always popular in Tuggeranong.

The proof here, again, is in the pudding. When push comes to shove, this government prioritises its pet project over investing in Tuggeranong roads, over benefiting Tuggeranong residents, once again neglecting Tuggeranong residents, once again demonstrating its contempt for anyone who lives in Tuggeranong.

I would like to thank Ms Lee once again for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is an important motion because it highlights what else could have been done, such as these important road projects, which are not just this year’s or next year’s projects but projects for decades to come, which now are not going to take place. I commend Ms Lee’s motion to the Assembly.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.35):** The question Canberrans are asking is: what are this government's priorities, a tram or a functioning hospital system? Why does the government prefer a \$3 billion-plus vanity project to a functioning health system?

**Mr Hanson:** Good question.

**MS CASTLEY:** Look, it is a great question and many Canberrans are asking it. Let us talk about health just for a few minutes, because when we talk about health it is failure after failure. The ACT government is failing badly. Why is this? It is simple. It is draining money from our health and other critical government services to pay for the tram. I note that Dr Paterson said something along the lines of, "The key to population growth is having the right infrastructure in place." The question is: what infrastructure do Canberrans want? I have to tell you, we hear that they actually want a functioning health system.

Government figures obtained under freedom of information show that over 80 per cent of outpatients are waiting longer than clinically recommended for appointments. Tens of thousands of Canberrans are living in pain every day, with debilitating conditions, waiting for treatment. Some of these patients are forced to pay for their surgeries privately, to go across the border, to move states.

**Mr Hanson:** Shame!

**MS CASTLEY:** What a shame. They do not want to live in pain, sometimes for hundreds of days, to receive their surgery. It is tragic that Canberrans are forced to take such drastic action because this Barr-Rattenbury government has failed to fix the major issues in our hospitals. A brief to the minister from the CEO of Canberra Health Services said:

The overarching issues that have led to the build-up of long wait for outpatient lists include staff availability and recruitment issues; clinic space availability; mismatch between demand and capacity; dated models of care, systems and processes—

—dated models of care, systems and processes—

manual and non-intuitive administrative requirements to maintain the waitlist; inability for systems to talk to each other and provide a holistic view of patients' care; and siloed working patterns.

All but that first factor are within the government's and this minister's control. All are fixable if this Labor-Greens government would prioritise public hospitals over trams. The minister's department said in 2021-22 that Canberra Health Services has decided that outpatients is not a priority area for active focus, given other priorities. Even now it says that there is not a specific target to demonstrate an improvement in outpatient waiting times.

Incredibly, the minister could not say how many people are currently on the waiting list and she could not even tell us when she would be able to tell us that. Information on wait times at Canberra emergency departments is also unavailable. Look at the website. You will see that the number of patients waiting at the hospital, and at

Calvary, the average wait time, average treatment time and total time spent waiting are all not available.

Last week the Australian Medical Association's 2023 report into the hospital logjam and hospital performance around the country showed that in 2021-22 Canberra Hospital was the worst performer on the eastern seaboard for urgent presentation to ED, with only 32 per cent of cases handled on time. Thirty-two per cent! AMA President Professor Walter Abhayaratna said the ACT persistently lagged behind other Australian jurisdictions and showed little sign of changing. He also noted that the ACT had been the worst performer for category 3 ED presentations, which are recommended to be seen within 30 minutes. We have been the worst in the country since 2012-13, and the 2015-16 data is not available.

On elective surgery the AMA has reported that in 2021-22 only 49 per cent of semi-urgent and 64 per cent of non-urgent patients received treatment within the clinically recommended time frame. Yet this Labor-Greens government, what do they want to do? Spend \$3 billion on a tram which is going to double the existing bus commute between Civic and Woden. How is that helpful when we have patients waiting in pain?

It is worth noting that this government has so far failed to disclose the total cost of the extension and that \$3 billion is a conservative estimate. If you live in Canberra's southern suburbs, what do you need more: a tram to Civic which will double the current bus commute time and saddle you and Canberra businesses with more charges and more debt, or a functioning Canberra Hospital that is capable of looking after your family when they need it most? It is clear that this government cannot handle both.

Last week's Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services* once again showed that the ACT remains the worst performing jurisdiction for emergency wait times.

**Mr Hanson:** Shame!

**MS CASTLEY:** Shame. In 2021-22 the ACT had the lowest proportion of people leaving the emergency department within four hours, at 52 per cent. This is down from 57 per cent the year before. For all triage categories, including emergency, urgent, semi-urgent and non-urgent, the ACT was again the worst performer, with only 48 per cent of patients treated within the national benchmark waiting time—the same figure as a year earlier. The national average was 64 per cent.

These statistics are abysmal and show that the minister has failed. Every year that the Barr-Rattenbury government has managed the health system it has performed worse than the national average, owing to underfunding since that 2012 budget that Mr Barr first handed down. It is embarrassing. Importantly, it is having a real impact on Canberra's health outcomes.

Canberra should have the best performing public hospital in the country. That is what the Canberra Liberals believe. But each year we see more failures and each year we hear new excuses from the health minister about what she is going to do to fix this.

Even last week on radio she said:

I think it is a fair criticism to say that we have tried a lot of things in our emergency department that either have not been sustained or we have not seen the impact of those yet.

To which the response was:

Or worked out as you had wanted, Minister?  
Yes, they have not worked as we had wanted.

I mean, come on! The statistics tell us that the health system is in perpetual crisis. Patients tell us their horror stories. We hear from nurses. They stormed the Assembly last year, explaining how bad the culture, the conditions and the care for patients were, telling us they needed to wear incontinence pads because they did not have time to go to the toilet, petrified they would find people in a bed in the corridor dead as they would go to lunch.

We are hearing serious concerns in the paediatric department. Our permanent paediatric emergency department is not running at full capacity. It is open; it is closed; it is open; it is closed. We know that children have died in the past year. We know that patients are waiting longer for hip replacements. There are serious concerns over people with hernias. All of these things are constant stories that come through our office.

Rather than prioritising our hospitals, the Barr-Rattenbury government is set on spending more than \$3 billion for a tram from Civic to Woden. Imagine what some of that funding could do to help our hospital system. The choice is clear: a tram or a functioning health system. With this government it is clear that it cannot be both. I support Ms Lee's motion today.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.44): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise in support of Ms Lee's motion. She has articulated the case very well, as have you—and I look forward to hearing you speak, hopefully, on this motion at a later stage today—and Ms Lawder. We have just heard about the state of our health system, but that is not the only thing—it is across the board. We hear from those opposite that they are progressive. “Progressive” is their buzzword for the day. I think we are playing bingo on how many times they can say “progressive”. I wonder if what they mean by “progressive” is that we are going to progressively get worse health outcomes, we are going to progressively have fewer police and we are going to progressively have fewer teachers. On every aspect, the only progress that I see from this government is going backwards.

If they think that everyone out there is just so hunky-dory and so happy with everything that is happening with their schools, their roads, their health system and the rates that they are paying that they now want this tram, they are wrong. I am out in Murrumbidgee a lot, Mr Deputy Speaker, as you are in Brindabella, and I listen to what people say, and they do not want a tram down there. It is abundantly clear. They do not want to see high rise all down Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen. They do not want their direct buses like the R7 from Coolemon Court cancelled. That is what is going to happen, because that is what happened up in Gungahlin.

They have seen what happened up there, and they do not want that happening in Murrumbidgee. They do not want to have to take a bus to Woden, to get off a bus, to get on a tram to go into the city on a tram that is going to take twice as long as the existing bus. They understand this. They are educated people. They have watched this debate for quite a while. They have seen what happened in Gungahlin. They do not want their roads clogged for a decade. I drove in from the south side this morning and it took me twice as long as it has ever taken me—fact. There was no congestion problem. You have got your tram. You have done that with 2A, which you were saying was going to fix something. All you have done is create a congestion problem. The tram is creating the problem; it is not fixing anything. They do not want their schools, their health system, their police and their core services slashed to pay down this vanity project.

I will just back up what Ms Castley is saying on health. It has not happened by accident. There was a plan in 2011 to rebuild the Canberra Hospital under the Capital Asset Development Plan—\$800 million. The first phase was a \$375 million rebuild of the tower block. They put \$41 million into the budget in 2011. What then happened was there was an election in 2012 and the Greens went to the table and said, “No, we want a tram; we do not want a hospital.” They then ripped the \$41 million out of the budget, they transferred the \$375 million that was due to rebuild the Canberra Hospital, and that was the exact amount that was the first down payment on the tram.

When we asked about this in estimates and annual reports, as we do, the then health minister, Simon Corbell, said, “Well, we are just going to crisis-manage the hospital. That is our plan for the next decade. We are going to crisis-manage the hospital.” In 2016 we said, “No; we want to fix the health system.” It was quite clear you cannot do both. Quite clearly you cannot do both. Then this government, on the eve of the election, on one A4 piece of paper said, “No, no, no; we will fix the hospital, too. We will, we will. We will rebuild it.” Where is it? Now, years later, because of your tram—because of the Greens ripping the money out of Health and putting it on the tram—we do not have a rebuilt Canberra Hospital. If that had happened, we would not have the deaths, the delay and the pain that we are seeing in the Canberra Hospital. It is a direct result of the decisions you made to prioritise your “progressive” tram over the health needs of Canberrans.

Of course they say, “It is really popular. Everyone loves the tram down south.” Well, let us see—do they? The last time we had a debate similar to this—I do remember similar debates like this in 2016—what happened in Murrumbidgee? The Liberals got a 42.8 per cent vote and Labor was 34.49. Where were they? Lagging behind. The Greens squeaked over just about 10 per cent. So their combined vote was only two per cent higher than the Liberal vote. It was a wet, little limp, damp vote. People do not want it. They do not want it in Murrumbidgee.

What about Brindabella? What happened in Brindabella? Liberal, 42 per cent; Labor, 33.6; and Greens, five per cent. That is how much they like the tram in Brindabella—five per cent. The combined Greens-Labor vote was three per cent less than the Liberal vote.

I say that because it shows you that the people of Murrumbidgee and the people of Brindabella, when they had a choice and were asked, “Do you want your health



system? Do you want education? Do you want rates to be fair? Do you want a police service that has actually got enough people? Do you want that or the tram?”—they made it very clear. So I do not want to hear this nonsense that people down in Murrumbidgee want the tram. The people in Murrumbidgee do not and the people in Brindabella do not. It is very clear exactly what they think.

As shadow minister for police and education, in particular, I look at the tram and then I look at our schools and I look at the stress on our schools. Remember when Mr Barr shut 23 schools and then he said, “Because we shut 23 schools, the remaining schools will all be hunky dory and we will build schools when we need them.” But let me tell you what the union said about that:

Our members, who are in classrooms every day, overwhelmingly identified under-resourcing that appears systemic as the problem. 98 per cent believe it is undermining teachers’ ability and capacity to consistently deliver high quality education. 97 per cent of classroom teachers feel that students are being disadvantaged and their learning outcomes are being compromised.

That is the teachers’ union. That is what teachers are saying. They do not have enough resources, because you know where the resources have gone, don’t you? What about principals? This is a recent report about principals’ workloads, their “crushing workloads”, and that is a quote from another report: “To fulfil the ever-increasing requirement made by the directorate on schools, principals work excessive hours at the cost of their health and wellbeing,” and the principals have said that they do not have enough resources to properly run their schools. You know where the money has gone. A new “progressive” tram. That is where it has gone.

What about police? We are going to have a couple of debates about police this week. We have had the Chief Police Officer come out and say he does not have enough police to do his job. Based on the latest report on government services, we have the lowest number of police per capita in the country and the lowest spend per capita. We are not getting the convictions. We are not getting the court finalisations. We are not getting the clearance rates.

Last year the ACT was the only jurisdiction in Australia to record a negative average annual growth in real recurrent expenditure, and there are fewer police now on the ground than there was a decade ago. The population has grown by 70,000 and the number of police has gone down. Where has the money gone? Where did it go? I think we know: down the rabbit hole of your tram.

So teachers say they do not have enough resources, principals say they do not have enough resources and the Chief Police Officer says he does not have enough resources. We know the debacle in our health system. Ms Castley has laid it out. Across almost every area of policy in this government, frontline workers are screaming out that they do not have enough resources. But to keep the Greens-Labor agreement cosy—and we saw it today with the questions on Ms Davidson; they will back each other no matter what—and to keep this government on the tracks, they will spend billions of dollars and rip it out of other areas that desperately, desperately need it.

I commend Ms Lee for the decision that she has made, leading the team, and that the team has made collectively, to say that we are going to put Canberrans first. We are

going to put Canberrans first, because it is quite clear that this government—by ripping the money out of the health system, ripping it out of roads and ripping it out of everything to put it on the tram—is far more interested in just making sure they keep the Greens on board with this government ahead of anything or anybody else.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.54): To be or not to be is the big question that we are facing today. I, like my friend Mr Hanson, applaud Ms Lee for bringing forward this motion, because it is so desperately important for the future of our city.

Stage 2B of the tram is reckless ideological fraud, and this is the thing: everybody—Dr Paterson gives me that look and shakes her head, but you know the look I am talking about, Madam Speaker—in this chamber knows that that is the case. The Greens know it but they do not care. They do not care.

I would say—and I think this is a strong statement—that it would be a dereliction of my duty as an elected member of this place to just look the other way and allow this to happen without trying to stop it. If I were to allow this extreme expenditure to proceed at a time when this government is absolutely failing in the delivery of such essential bread and butter components of government, it would be negligence to the extreme on my behalf.

As the cost of this project continues to balloon—and let us be honest about it—the single biggest reason that there has been no government response to my assertions of a \$3 billion price tag is that that is an extremely conservative figure. It is an extremely conservative figure. We all know that it is going to cost more than that. Three thousand million dollars. It is difficult for mere mortals to even comprehend that figure.

I have said in the media before that the government does not know where it is getting the money. You cannot jack up rates that much. You cannot cancel enough road projects. You cannot install that many 40-kilometre speed cameras on major arterial roads. You cannot install enough paid parking areas at recreational facilities to cover that cost. You cannot cut enough police numbers. You cannot slash health services. You cannot cut back on teachers enough to cover \$3 billion.

So how will they pay for it? They will do all of the above. They will keep gouging wherever they can. They will keep shifting money from where it is needed to where it is not, and then they will just borrow the large chunk that is not covered by increases in rates and charges for hardworking Canberrans. They will just borrow it.

The forward estimates, of course, do not include this \$3 billion. That magical pie graph of government spending that the government puts out on all of the rates notices does not include this spending. The total debt number for the government included in the forward estimates—it is like \$15 billion—does not include this spending. It does not include it. This is over and above, so they are just going to borrow more. It does not matter how much it costs, because it is not their money.

They have to do it. In terms of the Labor part of the agreement, it is a part of the power-sharing agreement with the Greens. This is Labor: “We know it is silly, but we

have to. We have to. It is a part of the agreement.” It would not matter what it was going to cost. It would not matter if stage 2 ballooned out to \$6 billion. There is no threshold cost.

This extreme and reckless position needs to be recognised by the voters of Canberra. The people of Canberra should know that they are going to be paying for this for the term of their natural lives and that their children will have to pay for it for the term of their natural lives. We will never pay this debt off.

Additionally, there must come a point where the financial people say, “Enough is enough. You cannot have any more.” We will get to the end at some point. And it is not just the debt; it is the interest payments. This is going to be a financial burden for the entire city for such a long time.

Just because you said that you are going to do this does not mean that you have to do it. Things change, and things have changed in regard to this project. New Zealand Labour promised to build a light rail line in Auckland in 2017. They have spent millions on the preparation of that project. But, if the headlines from the past fortnight are anything to go by, this progressive Labour government in New Zealand is about to step away from it.

You heard right: New Zealand Labour is set to can the tram. In recent days the newly appointed transport minister refuses to say when questioned, as he is incessantly by the media, that he supports the project. It appears that he has fallen into line with the Auckland mayor, Wayne Brown, who has said that “the case for light rail in Auckland is lighter than ever”. This is the mayor of Auckland, who is sensible enough to say, “You know what? The cost benefit on this does not stack up. It would be wonderful for us to have light rail but the opportunity cost of that spend is too great.”

Wayne Brown, the mayor of Auckland, said in a recent op-ed, I think about a week or so ago in the *New Zealand Herald*, and I quote him directly:

We need to refocus on the most pressing priorities, and rein in projects that are not immediately essential.

That is from the Auckland mayor. It sounds sensible to me. He closed by saying:

While I remain sceptical about the economic case for Auckland light rail, I look forward to working with the incoming Prime Minister and his team on an agreed broader transport plan, and the big issues that families and businesses in Auckland are facing.

That is his focus. This is what elected members should be doing.

I would also point out that the Auckland version of PTCBR put out a press release just four days ago, and Auckland’s equivalent to Ryan Hemsley said:

The Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) is calling for Michael Wood, the Minister of Transport, and now Auckland, to cancel the light rail project immediately.

He went on to say:

Using light rail trams as a main public transport link to our largest International Airport always has been a terrible idea, with the only supporters being highly paid light rail consultants, the Labour and Green parties and now even they are wilting at the costs ballooning to potentially \$30+ billion.

That is from New Zealand's answer to Ryan Hemsley.

Mr Steel spoke exceptionally well earlier.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR PARTON:** No; I thought he spoke well, Mr Hanson. He suggested that this was all about showcasing the progressive credentials of the government and that somehow the Canberra Liberals are opposing it because we are “so” conservative. You have no idea how conservative we are.

So I am assuming that this means that New Zealand Labour has been infiltrated by conservatives. Is New Zealand Labour full of small-thinking conservatives or is it just us? Of course, it does not mean that that is the case. It is about dollars and cents and it is about common sense. It is about common sense and it is about priorities.

Mr Steel says that this motion is about denying the same quality of life for Canberrans on the south side. I find it bizarre that he can come into this chamber and say that this is a motion that is about quality of life—because it is about quality of life. That is exactly what it is about. It is about health care, it is about policing, it is about education, it is about basic city services, it is about mental health. It is about quality of life. That is why this government should not be proceeding with this project and it is why the Canberra Liberals, under the leadership of Elizabeth Lee, will not be proceeding with this project.

Mr Steel also suggested that he split or the government split the project into 2A and 2B because they are so transparent. Mr Steel is about as transparent as that wall back there. He is about that transparent. He knows that the project was split into 2A and 2B because there is no possible way that you could have sold the whole thing, because it does not stack up. It does not stack up.

He also suggested in his speech today that we would be getting to Woden in this decade. In the words of Darryl Kerrigan, you would just tell him he was dreaming. Mr Barr, in public statements in the past, has indicated that we would get to Woden by 2025. Clearly that is not going to happen. That is not going to happen.

We are sick of the smoke and mirrors, we are sick of the reckless spending, we are sick of Canberra going backwards because of this obsession with this project, and I commend the motion.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (5.03): I think it is important for the record, for *Hansard*, into the future to

acknowledge that Auckland's light rail project is very, very different and includes a major tunnel project and undergrounding light rail for quite a significant portion of the rail, which is a very, very different project from that in the ACT.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.03): The ACT Greens will not be supporting the motion put forward by Ms Lee on light rail. It is getting late in the day, and I am not going to go into the detail of every point in the motion, because we have debated those points in this Assembly many, many, many times this term. I will refer anyone who wants to hear our previous comments on Liberal light rail motions to have a look at the *Hansard* records for 7 October 2021, 10 November 2021, 7 June 2022, 22 November 2022, 24 November 2022 and 30 November 2022.

I have also discussed my support for light rail stage 2 on 21 April 2021, 12 May 2021, 25 November 2021, 30 November 2021, 13 October 2022 and 18 October 2022. I have asked a lot of questions on notice and in committee hearings to make sure that we have public information and adequate scrutiny. It is getting really, really tiring to hear the same arguments being run and essentially the same motion being run over and over again.

There has been a lot of energy in here during this debate and it is great to see that energy. I would really rather see more of that energy getting directed into an alternative transport policy. I think Canberra would benefit from seeing a different policy vision instead of this endless chain of opposition to the aspect of our system that is working.

I am also very interested in the timing of this motion. Mr Parton is very well aware of the new bus timetable which started up last Monday, on 30 January. The Canberra Liberals are very well aware of this. It is quite strange to us in our office that this week, instead of talking about that bus timetable, we are talking about a Canberra Liberals motion on light rail, which we have effectively already talked about so many times before.

I have been an elected representative here for only a couple of years, but I have been a member of Canberra's community for my whole life. I remember complaints when Network 19 came in. I have actually heard more complaints about the current network changes at the moment. I think that is the area we should be looking at. The current network changes have affected people. I am not sure why we are talking about light rail instead of that.

There are a lot of aspects of our public transport system that could do with more attention right now and that actually do need greater resourcing and greater focus. These include network changes, access to our buses, electrification and the state of the footpaths that people use to get to the bus stop. Any and all of these issues could do with more attention.

We could do with more buses and we could do with more drivers. In 1989 our bus fleet had 451 buses and in 2022 we have 459. We have almost the same number of buses now that we had 30 years ago. I think this is really, really worth attention. We have a growing population and we need to invest more in those services. We have a greater urban footprint to cover and more people who need to use it. Why do we not have a conversation about that? But, instead, what we are talking about is light rail.

Light rail is one aspect of our public transport system at the moment that is a raging success. We know that people love it. People are using it. The patronage numbers are very high. We also know that it is a really great part of a sustainable city. Most cities have light rail. Most cities have light rail and heavy rail. Canberra needs this type of service. We were built to have this type of service, and it is really good to see that we are finally getting this service.

The benefits of light rail, that certainty of the fixed infrastructure, the high frequency and the unrivalled reliability of light rail mean that those people who are using it love it. And it means that people who have never used public transport before in Canberra are happy to try it and, once they start, they keep going.

The only complaints I have heard about light rail are that patronage is so high sometimes people have to wait for the next vehicle to arrive. That is the kind of success that we are having from light rail. We can get 200 people on each light rail vehicle and that is showing us that we actually need more light rail and we need to hurry up and build the rest of our network as quickly as we can. This is the way we are going to move a lot of people around a growing city, and this is the way we are going to move to a more sustainable transport system.

We know how urgent it is that we move to that sustainable transport system. We understand climate change. I am not going to waste the Assembly's time by talking more about that. We understand it. The IPCC and every city planner and every transport expert around the world is telling us that we need more public transport and more active travel. We need greater investment in these if we are to progress in a sensible way, if we are going to make a more sustainable city and if we are going to provide people with options.

We also know that we need less congestion on our roads. Anybody who has looked at planning and transport and anybody who has talked to anybody who works in those fields understands that more roads will not fix congestion. What we need is to give people great options so that we do not have to drive everywhere that we need to get to. We need more affordable transport options and we need great options for people who cannot drive or for people who do not want to drive.

In the Greens we are strong supporters of our public and active transport system, and I am really glad that we are talking about public transport in here. I think that is a very important debate to be having. But I am a bit disappointed that we are not discussing something new or that we are not discussing a different vision.

We Greens have a vision for Canberra. We know what a sustainable city looks like. A sustainable city looks like a city with zero emissions transport. It looks like a city where you can get to where you need to go without being stuck in traffic. It is a city that will have a great light rail network with very frequent and reliable buses, and electric buses that connect into that. It is a city that will have great footpaths and bike paths. It is a city that will have so many really useful, affordable and sustainable options to get around the city.

Unfortunately, we are not seeing a different vision in this motion; we are simply seeing more of what we have discussed at length for the past decade. So the ACT Greens will not be supporting Ms Lee's motion.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (5.10), in reply: I thank my colleagues for their contributions to this debate. The Canberra Liberals did commit to this and announced it in early December, but it was an opportunity to allow every member in this place to have this discussion. Ms Clay repeatedly said, “We have had this,” and that she is sick of hearing it. I will tell you what I am sick of repeating and that is talking about the absolute and utter crisis that is happening in our hospitals.

I will tell you what else I am sick of talking about and raising: all of the feedback that we are getting from students and teachers and parents about the teacher shortage that is having a huge impact not only on workloads for our teachers but on their mental health. I will tell you what else I am sick of talking about and raising again: the utter despair that our frontline police are facing because they have been let down by this Labor-Greens government chronically underfunding and under-resourcing them for years and years.

I will tell you what else I am sick of raising all the time: the fact that this government has absolutely let down the hopes and dreams of young Canberrans who may wish, who may dare, to continue to dream that they might one day live in their own home. I will tell you what else I am sick of raising: the unacceptable Indigenous incarceration rates that have happened under the watch of this Labor-Greens government.

If you are going to preach about, “I am sick of talking about transport,” how about those issues? What about those issues that are absolutely devastating some of the most vulnerable Canberrans? We have to raise this because this is a government that is continuing to fail some of the most vulnerable Canberrans in our community. The Canberra Liberals will not let them down and we will not forget the forgotten Canberrans.

I think Ms Clay is also forgetting that she is a member here, just like each of us. Whilst I am very grateful for the gratuitous advice, she does not dictate the agenda that the Canberra Liberals sets in this Assembly. They have plenty of opportunity themselves, as the Greens, to bring forward motions if she wishes to. Let us get realistic. It is all good to come in here and say, “I am sick of this.” Then you set the agenda, when it is your turn, and we will happily debate it.

What I would suggest is that perhaps Ms Clay focus on some of the Greens' election promises and why they are failing to deliver a home for all. They are doing really well in that space, are they not? The housing ministers have utterly failed some of our most vulnerable Canberrans who do not even know whether they are going to get a roof over their head. They said loudly and proudly: “A home for all.” Where is that focus? Where is the delivery of that promise? I suggest: perhaps focus on that, Ms Clay, on behalf of the Greens.

Mr Steel tried to put this argument where he said, on the one hand, “You are all conservatives,” and on the other hand, “It is a broken promise.” Let us talk about

broken promises. It seems that this Labor-Greens government has no problem breaking promises left, right and centre when it comes to essential services like health, like education, like housing, like community safety and like basic maintenance of our urban services.

Let us just take, for example, health and the Canberra Hospital expansion, the rebuild of the Canberra Hospital that Mr Hanson talked about. What about all of the issues that Ms Castley has outlined? Every single time we hear, “Yes, we promise to bring down ED waitlists. Yes, we promise to bring down the waitlists for outpatient surgery. Yes, we are going to fix the culture in our hospital system. Yes, we are going to deliver on a gynaecological cancer unit. Yes, we are going to do something about the paediatric ED.” The list goes on, and that is just in health.

This is a government that absolutely knows how to do the spin, knows how to gaslight the community. If you are going to talk about broken promises, Mr Steel, you might want to look first at you. Perhaps you have forgotten, but you are the one who is in government. You are the one who is able to make decisions. Do not preach about broken promises without looking at what you and your government are failing on.

He also said, “You know what? I am happy to commit again to being transparent with the cost and the time frame.” It is very easy to be transparent when you are committing to nothing, when you have no tangible time frame, when you have no tangible outcome. It is very, very easy to commit. There is no tangible time frame as to when he will announce it, not even a commitment that he is going to announce anything before the next election. It is very easy to say, “You know what? I will commit to being transparent.” We could all do it. It is very easy to commit.

Finally, can I say this? Mr Steel said, “We are a government that can walk and chew gum at the same time.” I know that he is blinkered and I know that he is in denial, but this is next-level delusion. Have a look at the data that was released by the Productivity Commission only last week: failure on almost every measure. Ms Castley went through a lot of this in the health space.

When you look at the fact that the ACT has the worst emergency department wait times; when you know that there are fewer public housing dwellings than we had a decade ago, with over 3,000 people on the waitlist; when you know that we have the smallest police force and the lowest funded, per capita, in the country; when the ACT has the worst and lowest conviction and clearance rates and the highest incarceration rates for Indigenous Canberrans, then you know that this government, on any objective measure, is an utter and abject failure.

For this minister to stand in this place and say, “We are delivering it all and we can walk and chew gum at the same time,” shows that his delusion is greater than even what I thought. That is absolute disrespect and a disservice to the Canberra community, who will not be fooled and who will not be taken as fools by this Labor-Greens government.

The Canberra Liberals are going to stop the tram from Civic to Woden because we know that the Canberra community deserves so much better. We want to focus on supporting our teachers, our healthcare professionals, our police and emergency



services on the front line. We want our young Canberrans to continue to be able to dream that perhaps they can afford to buy their own home. We want to take pride in the city, our nation's capital, because we know that basic local services, which are deemed too unsexy for that side, are important for the pride of our city. We are here for the Canberra public and the Canberra community, and we are committed to ensuring that we do not proceed with stage 2B of the tram. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lawder  
Ms Lee  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton

Noes 15

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

Question resolved in the negative.

## **Calvary Hospital—theatre fire Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (5.22): At approximately 12.30 pm on Tuesday, 6 December 2022 a piece of equipment caught fire in theatre 6 of the operating theatre complex at Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce, which I will refer to as Calvary for the rest of the statement. At that time a staff member was setting up the theatre and immediately activated the emergency response system. Fortunately, no surgery was underway in that theatre at the time and the staff member was not physically injured.

Around 30 patients in the vicinity of the theatre were impacted, and all staff, patients and visitors in the vicinity were immediately and safely evacuated. The fire was extinguished quickly. However, the spread of acidic smoke, activation of the sprinkler system and other fire suppression responses meant that there was significant damage to the Calvary theatre complex in the Xavier Building of the Bruce campus. Damage from the fire, including smoke contamination, led to the immediate closure of all seven theatres and the sterile stock room.

A number of campus services were closed briefly while staff and patients were evacuated. The emergency department reopened by the end of the day on Tuesday, 6 December 2022. Patients who presented to the ED during the afternoon and were

assessed as requiring transfer to Canberra Hospital were stabilised as necessary before being transferred. Calvary also went onto maternity bypass, due to the lack of access to theatres.

Over the December period, teams at Calvary, Canberra Health Services and the ACT Health Directorate had an immediate focus on emergency management, with patient safety and staff wellbeing front of mind. This included ensuring continuity of services for maternity and some of the highest priority elective surgery patients. All patients who were booked for surgery were contacted by telephone as soon as possible and advised either of postponement or alternative arrangements. A total of 106 elective surgical sessions were cancelled at Calvary between 6 December and 17 January 2023.

The territory-wide surgical services team at CHS sent 1,200 letters to category 1 and 2 patients whose elective surgery was likely to be impacted. Category 1 elective surgery is clinically indicated to occur within 30 days, while category 2 patients are semi-urgent, to occur within 90 days. Separate letters were also sent to surgeons to advise them of the impact on hospital operations. Of the impacted patients, 14 requested to defer their surgery until after Christmas. All 14 patients have either now had their surgery completed or have their procedure booked.

Between 6 and 9 January 2023 three theatres reopened: one on 6 January and two further theatres on the 9th, one of which is being used temporarily as a sterile stock room. To ensure that these theatres were safe for operations, new high-efficiency particulate-absorbing—or HEPA—filters were installed, the facilities were disinfected and environmental air testing was conducted. This work takes time, to ensure the highest levels of safety for patients undergoing surgery.

Work is underway to bring a fourth theatre back online by March 2023, which was impacted primarily by water damage. The time frame for reinstating the remaining three theatres, which were more significantly damaged from a combination of fire, water and smoke damage, is unknown at this stage but is expected to be some months. A firm time frame will be determined following the insurance assessment and further work on options.

Elective surgery through the Calvary theatre complex will continue to be heavily impacted, with more than half of the theatres offline. Calvary, CHS and the Health Directorate are working through detailed planning to increase capacity across all providers in the territory and are analysing the medium and longer term impacts. I am being regularly briefed on the impacts that the Calvary fire is having and will continue to have on elective surgery as the teams consider all options for reaching our elective surgery targets.

This is an incredibly difficult time for staff and patients who have been impacted by the fire, which has come on the back of a number of years of disruption, with the bushfires and the significant impact of COVID-19. While theatres were closed, many category 1 elective surgeries were redirected from Calvary Public to private hospitals—Calvary Bruce Private and Calvary John James—where possible and appropriate under subcontracting arrangements. This ensured that category 1 elective surgery patients—those with the highest need—received the care they required. While all theatres were closed between 6 December and 6 January, a total of 12 category 1

patients were diverted to Calvary John James and 84 category 1 patients were diverted to Calvary Bruce Private for surgical procedures.

Staff from the public hospital supported operations at the private hospitals. Four staff routinely attended Calvary Bruce Private to support public theatre sessions, while anaesthetists provided support for these sessions. Public theatre staff also worked at Calvary John James for public sessions as required. To ensure that further surge capacity could be utilised, all public theatre staff received orientation training for the operating theatres at Calvary Bruce Private Hospital. Some public theatre staff also received orientation training for Calvary John James Hospital. However, I acknowledge feedback from staff that working in a new and different theatre environment at short notice has been difficult and stressful. I want to acknowledge the commitment of all these staff in working through these challenges to support their patients.

Currently, teams across Calvary and CHS are continuing to identify dates for rescheduling category 1 and 2 patients whose surgery was scheduled to be conducted at Calvary. Category 1 patients are being prioritised in line with their clinical urgency. I understand that this is a distressing time for many in our community and I would like to assure the public that our health services are working incredibly hard to minimise the impact on individuals who need those essential surgeries.

The emergency surgery load continues to be high at Canberra Hospital, and theatres are operating for extended hours to manage the workload. While the theatre closures at Calvary have had some impact on Canberra Hospital emergency surgery, much of this work would normally have been directed to Canberra Hospital in any case.

Regarding the impact on maternity services, during the period that Calvary was not able to support birthing, labour and birthing services were redirected from Calvary to the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, with the exception of elective caesarean sections, which were redirected to Calvary John James. This decision was made as maternity services require immediate access to theatres in case emergency caesarean sections are required. While all theatres were offline, it was not considered clinically safe to operate a birthing service at Calvary.

To safely support this significant change for Centenary Hospital staff, some people who birthed at the Centenary Hospital were transferred to Calvary once it was clinically safe to do so. During this period, Calvary increased its postnatal maternity bed capacity from 18 beds to 26 beds to support transfer to Calvary after birthing and alleviate the increased workload on maternity services at the Centenary Hospital. Calvary continued to provide antenatal support, foetal monitoring and the general assessment of maternity patients, as well as maintaining its special care nursery.

Maternity staff from Calvary also supported the responses at the other hospitals. Midwives who volunteered to work at Centenary Hospital received orientation training, and all midwives received orientation to Calvary John James to ensure that they could provide support as needed. Three midwives per day were rostered on at Centenary Hospital, with their agreement. Calvary obstetric registrars also worked at Centenary Hospital as needed. For all elective caesarean sessions at Calvary John James, a public midwife, paediatrician, obstetrician and obstetrics registrar were provided.

Those requiring transfer during this time were supported through a combination of both ambulance support and the individual's own transport, where suitable. Ambulance Service Australia was contracted to provide a dedicated patient transport vehicle for transfers to and from Calvary. This arrangement was in place from 14 December through until 10 January. There was no workload impact for the ACT Ambulance Service. CHS and the Health Directorate have been working with Southern New South Wales Local Health District to divert maternity and surgical activity, including non-time-critical emergency surgical patients from the surrounding New South Wales catchment to other New South Wales sites, where it is clinically safe to do so.

As I am sure many of us here can imagine, this has been a tough time for all affected staff. Workload impacts have been high at both CHS facilities and Calvary. I recently visited Calvary to look at the extent of the damage in the theatre complex and to speak with the staff who work in theatres and maternity services. They went through an incredibly traumatic experience. I would like to thank them for their quick thinking during the response to the fire and for their dedication to bringing services back online as quickly as possible for our community.

I am assured that significant supports have been provided to affected staff at Calvary, including critical incident debriefing, supported paid time off work, and support from the Employee Assistance Program. That support remains ongoing for both individuals and groups, and I encourage Calvary staff to access this support as and when they need it. As part of making sure staff continue to feel supported and safe to raise concerns, Calvary has also engaged regularly with unions representing affected staff, including the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation.

Midwives at both of our public hospitals who were asked to work extra shifts or longer hours were provided with an allowance, whether they were undertaking those shifts at Centenary Hospital, Calvary Public, Calvary John James or Calvary Bruce Private. For public hospital staff who were required to travel to another facility for their shift, travel was undertaken during work hours or they were paid for additional travel time to the facility.

In speaking with some of the nurses, medical officers, midwives and managers at Calvary, it was clear that everyone responded to the situation swiftly and with great care for their patients and one another.

I was heartened to hear that the implementation of the Digital Health Record meant that care could continue to be provided across our two main public hospitals, including during the evacuation of patients. One of the managers in the special care nursery at Calvary spoke to me about the ability to evacuate the babies and still be able to see their patient record on a device, which supported the ongoing provision of care. The Digital Health Record also supported the transfer of people accessing maternity services between Calvary and Centenary Hospital, which previously would have required scanning each page of a paper record. This meant care was safer for

patients during a stressful time, although I also recognise that midwives have experienced other challenges with DHR implementation.

From our operating theatre staff, I heard loud and clear about the ongoing impact of the fire. They told me that the operating theatres are their home, their colleagues are like family, and they are committed to delivering the best outcomes for all members of our community waiting for elective surgery. Sadly, there have been incidents of members of the public calling the staff at Calvary about their elective surgery and speaking with them in a manner that has been very distressing. As during the pandemic, we recognise that individuals will understandably be very anxious, but we also need people to be mindful of the way in which they speak with our healthcare workers, who are doing their best to bring services back online as quickly as they can.

Incident response planning will continue until full theatre capacity at Calvary Public is operational. CHS, Calvary and the Health Directorate are working collaboratively to ensure that patients receive timely and safe care and the infrastructure at Calvary is restored as soon as possible.

Preliminary assessment has indicated that the source of the fire was an electrical fault with a piece of equipment in the theatre. Further investigation is underway. I hope to be able to provide the Assembly and the people of Canberra with further advice on that soon, along with more detail on the implications of the fire on our health services.

The Health Directorate, in conjunction with Calvary and CHS, held a workshop on 31 January to discuss all reasonable options to mitigate the impact of the closures and deliver on elective surgery waiting list targets. This might involve, for example, scheduling additional sessions at both public and private providers, including on Saturdays, where this can be resourced. Other options being considered include utilising other private hospitals and day hospitals, and greater use of interstate capacity and diversion where it is clinically appropriate. We will look at all opportunities to meet our elective surgery targets in the medium term. The team undertaking this work is committed to ensuring that the community receives the best care in a timely way.

I am sure that I speak on behalf of every member of the Assembly in expressing again my sincere appreciation and thanks to the territory's health workforce for everything they have done and for their continued hard work during this difficult time. I present the following paper:

Impacts of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce Theatre fire—Ministerial statement,  
7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Transport Canberra—bus network—update Ministerial statement**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (5.36): I am pleased to provide an update to the Assembly on Transport Canberra bus services and the work that Transport Canberra is doing in 2023 with its workforce to support services to the Canberra community, as I know that this is of interest to the Assembly.

In 2023 the ACT government is continuing to deliver the most comprehensive and future-focused infrastructure improvements to Canberra's public transport system in our city's history. This involves the construction of major transport infrastructure, including the raising of London Circuit, light rail stage 2 and building the new public transport interchange in Woden. The National Capital Authority is also planning to undertake major works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

The ACT government has been planning and preparing for the period of construction on these major projects to manage the disruption on our road transport network. This disruption not only affects private vehicles but also our public bus fleet that runs on our roads. Planning has therefore included how we prepare the public transport network for this period of disruption and how we promote the role of public transport in moving people efficiently around the city during this period.

Some construction impacts have already been felt in late 2022, with the closure of the southern end of London Circuit. However, it is anticipated that the next phase of construction during the first half of 2023 will be more disruptive to the traffic network, with lane closures anticipated on Commonwealth Avenue. The impact of these construction impacts has been modelled to inform transport planning.

This planning and preparation has resulted in the need to update the bus network and timetables now; particularly as work begins on the CIT Woden Campus project, a new temporary bus interchange in operation, the next phase of raising London Circuit and to accommodate improvements based on community feedback.

That is why the ACT government announced in October that the bus network and timetables were being updated from the start of term 1, 2023. As I told the Assembly on 11 October:

These changes will be accompanied by adjustments to the timetable that account for the time delays we expect through the network as a result of construction work on major infrastructure projects. Those accommodations will be made in the timetable and they will be fully utilising the full number of buses we have in the Transport Canberra fleet and the full number of staff, including extra staff we have onboarded as a result of recruitment processes to make sure we can deliver a full timetable for Canberrans.

I said it would be a different network and timetable than people had experienced before but that it would be one that reflects the situation and environment we are now in. I also committed to release the timetable adjustments by the end of term 4.

Madam Speaker, bus timetables were provided to school communities in the week commencing 5 December 2022 and were published on the Transport Canberra website on 12 December. We notified schools before the summer holidays and to ensure that the timetables were available for the broader community to view. Further communications on the new network and timetable change were undertaken in January 2023 ahead of the changes being implemented. The government has also been communicating with all road network users to rethink their routine as construction ramps up on major infrastructure projects, including encouraging public transport users to be aware of related bus timetable changes, which began on 30 January.

A key principle guiding Transport Canberra in setting the 2023 public transport timetable is reliability. To ensure reliability, it is imperative that Transport Canberra accounts for increased journey time for buses in the timetable resulting from construction works on major infrastructure projects. The new timetable has been designed and planned to factor in additional journey time expected for buses moving through the city during the raising of London Circuit works and during works around Woden associated with the construction of CIT Woden and the new public transport interchange, including the use of the new temporary bus interchange.

Additional travel time has been scheduled into bus routes to offset disruption caused by the construction of these major infrastructure projects. As a result, bus drivers will not be able to drive as many kilometres or provide as many trips within the same time period as they had previously. An oversimplified example of this is that a bus driver may have previously been able to deliver 10 trips within their shift; however, because more travel time is needed for each trip to offset anticipated disruption impacts, the same bus driver may now be able to deliver only nine trips in the same shift. Unfortunately, it is a lot more complicated than that, but I hope that helps to explain the challenge. We are utilising the same resources, but they cannot go as far because the travel time is slower.

Transport Canberra determines how much extra time needs to be scheduled into each individual bus route. This is determined in consultation with drivers and union representatives and takes into consideration relevant travel time and patronage data. In some cases, routes with high patronage levels will need a longer journey time as the buses will be stopping for more passengers more frequently.

This agreed journey time is scheduled into Transport Canberra's bus network scheduling system, known as HASTUS, which then determines the best possible bus route timetables with the maximum utilisation of available drivers and buses. This software also takes into consideration additional factors such as the scheduling of driver breaks, access to driver facilities and connections with other bus and light rail services to minimise transfer time.

Our decision to prioritise reliability will ensure that customers continue to confidently use bus services that are scheduled and are not waiting for buses that do not arrive. Although all available fleet and drivers have been utilised as part of this timetable, longer journey times have resulted in some unavoidable reductions in the frequency of some services and span of hours, with some local services having to be reduced to hourly off-peak frequency.

However, Transport Canberra has prioritised maintaining service frequency during peak periods when most customers travel. These frequent peak services ensure that public transport remains a great alternative for Canberrans during the disruption period, when we are encouraging Canberrans to rethink their routine and use public transport to help manage congestion on our roads. Rapid routes will continue to run at least every 15 minutes between 7 am and 7 pm, with the exception of Rapid 10, and the last Rapid route services will be commencing between 10.30 pm and 11 pm.

More than 70 per cent of local routes will continue to run at least every 30 minutes between 7 am and 7 pm, and almost all of the local routes have the last services commencing between 10 pm and 11 pm. All changes to the bus network were based on data-informed decisions, with the Transport Canberra bus scheduling team heavily scrutinising network patronage data. These were customer-focused decisions that were sensitive and responsive to the needs of customers who rely on public transport services to travel between home and work or school or leisure activities. Not making allowances for disruption on the traffic network would have jeopardised our network reliability. That would have been misleading to public transport users and would have eroded Canberrans' trust in the public transport network as we try to recover patronage following COVID-19.

Transport Canberra has now introduced the new bus network and timetable that commenced 30 January, which will support this period of construction by managing the impacts of disruption. The timetable ensures bus services are scheduled at levels that are responsive to when passengers travel the most. Recent patronage data identifies that approximately half of all weekday bus boardings take place during peak periods between the hours of 7 am and 9 am, and 3 pm and 6 pm. By prioritising service frequency during these times, we have ensured that capacity is available for commuters, as well as school students. Approximately 90 per cent of weekday boardings on the bus network occur between 7 am and 7 pm, and by far the majority of boardings occur prior to 10 pm. On average, 0.2 per cent of all bus boardings are made on weekdays after 11 pm, which is only one in every 500 boardings.

As construction ramps up later this year on major infrastructure, the reliability of the network will continue to be a focus. We will be monitoring the impact of the most disruptive period of works over the first half of 2023 and will consider how we can deliver improvements and increase weekday off-peak frequencies at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of network amendments, a range of changes have been made to add services into Lawson and improve service in Amaroo and Cooleman Court. A number of school services have had adjustments to better meet school bell times, and changes have been made in Fraser West, Denman Prospect, the city and Woden in response to customer or resident requests for changes and operational requirements. These refinements are consistent with Transport Canberra's approach to continual improvement and meeting community expectations. Adjustments have also been made with the new Turner bus layover becoming operational.

Transport Canberra has planned for the changed traffic conditions around Vernon Circle and the introduction of the temporary Woden bus interchange, to address the



disruption that we are expecting to see as people start coming back to work and school following the summer break. Changes to the bus network are outlined in detail on the Transport Canberra website, so I will not outline those further here.

Disruption associated with the construction of major infrastructure projects is the main driver of changes to the timetable, not staff or bus availability. However, Transport Canberra has continued to significantly focus on recruiting staff to support the delivery of transport services. The ACT government is actively pursuing activities to recruit more drivers to drive buses for Transport Canberra, with a goal to recruit above the minimum required driver numbers. This approach will ensure the ongoing reliability of the network and allow for future bus network service improvements, particularly on weekends.

As with many industries across Australia and internationally, the recruitment and retention of suitable bus drivers has been impacted by a tight labour market and the effects of COVID-19 on training programs. This challenge has been compounded by the long lead time it takes to attract, select, train and onboard new bus drivers. It takes approximately four months from the time applications close before a successful candidate may be offered the opportunity to train to become a bus driver with Transport Canberra. This is because each candidate must pass background checks and assessments, including the validation of qualifications to ensure that they are suitable to work for the ACT government, as well as demonstrate their ability to be trained to drive a bus safely and perform good customer service.

In this time, a candidate's suitability is assessed by way of literacy and numeracy testing, psychometric assessment and formal interview, followed by referee and police checks and medical assessment. From there, a prospective candidate must then undergo four weeks of bus driver training, where graduation is dependent upon the successful completion of all necessary competencies demonstrating safe operations of a bus. Once a trainee graduates, only then may they be allowed to drive passenger services for Transport Canberra without the supervision of a trainer.

Continual reviews of the recruitment process are undertaken to ensure that the process is both effective and efficient. Transport Canberra has responded by expediting processes and has been successful in shortening the time between application and drivers graduating and delivering services. Throughout 2022, Transport Canberra undertook three recruitment campaigns to attract and train new bus drivers: the first in April, the second in July and the third in November. Transport Canberra set a target to onboard 60 bus drivers during the period May to December 2022. Despite the challenges of recruitment in the current labour market, as at the end of December a total of 70 drivers had been successfully recruited to work for Transport Canberra. This is a pleasing result and exceeded expectations, given the present labour market conditions and the time it does take to recruit, train and onboard a new driver.

Efforts to ensure ongoing reliability of the Transport Canberra network saw the last recruitment round close on 15 January 2023. Transport Canberra hosted an information session and a "come and try day" in December to help appeal to and attract a more diverse and broad pool of potential applicants. Both the information session and "come and try day" event were fully booked. Encouragingly, the latest recruitment round attracted 207 prospective applications. Transport Canberra will be

continuing to attract new recruits in subsequent campaigns during 2023, and during this recruitment we will continue to look at new ways to attract a diverse workforce.

To support this, Transport Canberra has commenced the creation of a gender equity action plan. This plan will outline steps Transport Canberra will take to increase the percentage of women employed as bus drivers. This plan is being developed in consultation with the Transport Workers' Union. Transport Canberra continues to identify ways to attract women to our workforce, including into driving positions. As of 22 December 2022, 11.38 per cent of our current commuter driver workforce identify as female, and this is not high enough and something that we are trying to improve. Whilst this percentage has not significantly changed in recent years, the ratio has kept pace with increases to the total workforce.

The 2022 recruitment campaign has focused on women. Efforts to ensure that advertising of the recruitment campaigns appealed to women included undertaking a focus group with women to inform the messaging and approach to attract applicants. Marketing imagery featured women driving Transport Canberra buses in paid social media posts and Google advertising, as well as across ACT government communication channels. The Transport Canberra website included profiles of women at Transport Canberra, and HerCanberra included an editorial on the recruitment efforts. Women working for Transport Canberra participated at evening information sessions to the public and the "come and try day". The ACT government will continue to look for new ways to attract a diverse range of employees and work towards equalising our gender representation.

Transport Canberra remains committed to working towards increasing weekend local bus services to an hourly frequency, starting with Saturday services. As part of enterprise bargaining negotiations, opportunities to address weekend reliability, as well as different categories of employment, are being explored and discussed. Given that the enterprise bargaining process is still in progress, I am not able to provide further detail on outcomes arising from the engagement between the ACT government and employees and their representatives at this time. However, I look forward to keeping the public updated later this year once this process comes to a conclusion.

The ACT government is delivering the most comprehensive and future-focused investment in public transport infrastructure in Canberra's history. We are committed to delivering to Canberrans a high-quality, integrated public transport. We are making future-focused investments now to build a better public transport system for the future and to help us to avoid the traffic gridlock issues which we see in so many other cities.

We understand there will be a transition period while the community adjusts to the temporary disruption associated with the construction of major infrastructure. That is why we have been asking the community to rethink their routine. It is why we have made changes to the timetable to deliver reliable bus services. It is why we will continue to monitor the traffic and service impacts of this temporary period of construction: to help keep Canberrans moving, minimise disruption, and ensure we have the workforce to deliver quality transport services now and into the future.

I present the following paper:

Transport Canberra workforce and bus network timetable update—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Roads—emissions reductions—update Ministerial statement**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (5.53): An integrated public transport network is key to delivering on our vision for a connected, sustainable and vibrant city. It is why the ACT government is making long-term, future-focused investments to improve Canberra's public transport network. We are achieving this through extending our mass-transit system, but also by making sure that that is integrated with zero emissions buses.

The ACT Zero-Emission Transition Plan outlines the ACT's pathway to reducing public transport bus emissions and achieving a 100 per cent zero emissions bus fleet by 2040 or earlier. With this plan the ACT government is taking nation-leading action to transition our city's bus fleet to zero emissions, including delivering the infrastructure, investment and the skills needed to make the transition operationally successful.

I want to provide an update to the Assembly on the procurement and delivery of electric buses, the impact of the replacement of old buses and the actions Transport Canberra is undertaking to manage the impact of this in the interim. I will also update the Assembly on the work underway to ready Transport Canberra to accommodate these zero emissions vehicles, including the installation of enabling infrastructure, and the work that is being undertaken to upskill Transport Canberra staff so they are prepared and ready to operate and maintain our new fleet of battery electric buses.

A key objective of our plan is procuring a zero emissions bus fleet. The Zero-Emission Transition Plan outlines a fleet transition strategy to move from older, disability non-compliant, polluting buses to new zero emissions buses. The first phase of this transition outlined in the plan involves replacing the Renault PR100.2 series buses, the oldest buses in the Transport Canberra fleet that are due for retirement, with leased zero emissions and low emission vehicles. The plan also sets out further programs of the transition, which sees the replacement and retirement of other ageing buses, including compressed natural gas, or CNG, buses.

To kickstart the transition, the ACT government announced in June 2021 that in the short term we would lease 34 buses, including at least eight battery electric buses and

low-emission diesel buses, whilst beginning the procurement to buy 90 battery electric buses. In February 2022 the ACT government announced the preferred suppliers for the 12 leased zero emissions electric buses. They were Yutong VDI and Custom Denning. Contracts were then finalised for the procurement of a short-term lease of eight battery electric buses with Yutong VDI on 6 October 2022, and a variation was signed on 27 October 2022 increasing this to 12 leased battery electric buses.

I am pleased to confirm that all 12 buses arrived in Australia on 12 December, ready to undergo the commissioning and registration processes. Some of these electric buses—four as of today and six by the end of this week—are already on the road picking up passengers. This has allowed us to retire some of the old Renault buses from the fleet, as they are being replaced one-for-one with the new vehicles. The remaining electric buses will progressively be put into service following essential Transport Canberra commissioning and registration processes, which are expected to be completed in the coming weeks.

Transport Canberra has also progressed to the later stages of the procurement of 90 battery electric buses after approaching the market in a two-stage procurement process in 2022. Evaluations of market responses are now underway and are on track to be completed in quarter 2, 2023. The exact timing of the delivery is subject to the procurement outcomes, which the government will announce when finalised.

In parallel with the procurement to lease the first 12 battery electric buses, Transport Canberra finalised the short-term lease of 26 low-emission diesel buses in early 2022, with buses contracted for delivery by the end of 2022. This contract was intended to enable Transport Canberra to immediately retire the orange Renault PR100.2 series buses, which predate emissions standards and are not compliant with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport under the commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992. As the buses are leased, it is intended that the low-emission diesel buses will not remain in the fleet in the long term, with the delivery of electric buses in coming years supporting the transition away from fossil fuels.

I can now advise the Assembly that the delivery of these 26 low-emission diesel Scania BusTech buses has been greatly impacted by international supply chain issues and parts availability. Updated delivery schedules provided by the main contractor, Scania, advise vehicles are now expected to be delivered progressively from February 2023, with all buses expected to be in service by mid-2023. I can confirm that the first bus has now been delivered and will be put into service this week.

A range of challenges and external factors have impacted the supplier's ability to meet contractual agreements and caused these delays. In the Australian diesel bus manufacturing sector, most buses produced for the local urban bus market are built in two stages. The first is the manufacture of the chassis, which can happen locally or overseas. The second stage is building a body onto the chassis, which is usually undertaken locally in Australia.

In the case of the current contract, the bus chassis producer, Scania, was contracted to manufacture 26 Euro VI diesel chassis in Sweden and then deliver them to Adelaide,

South Australia, where the bodies would be built and fitted by body bus builder BusTech. When the ACT government initially awarded the contract on 28 March 2022, all 26 low-emission diesel buses were expected to be delivered from their manufacturing plant in Adelaide to the ACT between July 2022 and November the same year, well in advance of the deadline for all vehicles to comply with disability standards. However, substantial and compounding delays have emerged that have led to the vehicle delivery schedule being pushed back on multiple occasions. This is something that has been evidenced across many project time lines nationally and internationally over the past two years and is not unique to the ACT. I am referring to supply chain delays, scarcity of materials, labour absence through sickness or shielding from potential infection, and, of course, the availability of skilled workers. Whilst all the chassis were delivered by Scania to BusTech on time, supply chain issues have impacted production of the buses in Adelaide.

The need to vary the original contract for the provision of the 26 diesel buses was first identified on 6 June 2022. It was at this point that the ACT government became aware that increased costs to supply the raw materials to support the manufacturing process, as well as the wider supply chain delays within the bus industry, were affecting the delivery and scheduling of these services. Additional detail and a complete breakdown of costs was provided to TCCS on 17 June 2022. This provided confidence and evidence to proceed with a variation to the original contract on price and delivery time frames. The additional price request supported the completion and delivery of the ordered vehicles against the contract. At this time, Transport Canberra also requested that BusTech, the manufacturer of the bus bodies, pursue an arrangement whereby the buses could be manufactured at both their Adelaide and Burleigh bus building facilities to help buffer against further delay.

Under the revised delivery schedule, the first bus was expected to be completed at the BusTech Adelaide manufacturing plant on 15 September. However, further supply issues emerged in the sourcing of major steel components, as well as delays in the delivery of critical air-conditioning parts. Because of this, and especially due to delayed air-conditioning components, progress on installing and assembling the bus bodies had to be paused. This was because components of the bus bodies, as well as delayed air-conditioning components, had to be assembled all together. These critical parts were required in all 26 vehicles and subsequently meant that the delivery dates for all 26 vehicles were again delayed.

Separate to those issues, external glass and internal 24-volt body electrical harnesses, which were expected to be fitted during a critical point in time in the manufacturing of the vehicles, were delayed by manufacturing capability problems, which again prompted further delays and adjustments to the delivery schedule.

At the final stages of manufacturing the first completed bus, another issue was identified. The quality of the paint finish on the first completed bus was found to be substandard because of a manufacturing defect involving the fibreglass panels fitted to the bus. The panels were required to be replaced on the first bus, and it was subsequently repainted. The defective fibreglass components that had already been delivered for other buses also needed to be replaced, which created further delays. The issues with the defective fibreglass have now been resolved with the supplier.

I was first briefed on the manufacturing delays in October 2022. Despite all previous delays, it was still expected that buses would arrive within quarter 1, 2023. However, I was advised of Transport Canberra's intention to write to the Human Rights Commissioner requesting a short-term extension to the commitment date for 100 per cent compliance of the bus fleet, in case it was required. The exemption was only requested as a contingency in case the leased diesel buses could not be delivered by February 2022, as the full fleet was required to deliver the term 1 bus network.

The supplier has now advised Transport Canberra of a number of separate events that have each triggered a delay in the ability to complete the manufacture of the 26 buses. This has resulted in the delivery schedule being adjusted. I can now update the Assembly that the most current advice from the supplier is that the vehicles are now expected to be delivered from February through to July 2023.

An important part of the process of receiving newly manufactured buses is for the supplier to build an initial bus against the original specifications agreed within the contract. This first completed bus is then inspected by Transport Canberra, usually at the supplier's manufacturing facility, to ensure that it meets the required specification. Transport Canberra have had numerous inspection dates scheduled by the supplier, with flights and accommodation booked and staff ready for the inspection, but these have all been cancelled at short notice due to the vehicle not being ready. These last-minute cancellations by the supplier occurred in the months of August, September, October, November and December 2022.

On 30 November 2022, I told the Assembly that the first low-emission diesel bus had been completed at the Scania factory in Adelaide and that Transport Canberra staff were going to visually inspect it. However, I was subsequently informed by Transport Canberra that the manufacturer cancelled this inspection at short notice, as they identified the fibreglass panel defect, following the final paint finish.

I can now update the Assembly that Transport Canberra inspected the first completed vehicle on 19 January 2023. That vehicle was delivered to Transport Canberra on 2 February and is progressing through the necessary inspection and commissioning activity. Transport Canberra will continue to manage the supplier within the parameters of the contract—ensuring, where required, that contractual mechanisms are enacted to ensure robust contract management.

Whilst the ACT government had put in place from this year the fleet transition plan to support the procurement of accessible buses to meet the disability access requirements, this has been impacted by the delays to delivery of replacement diesel buses. Transport Canberra will replace the non-DDA compliant Renault fleet progressively as new vehicles are delivered. The government is committed to providing all Canberrans with reliable bus services at the present service levels and to looking at improvements later on in the year.

The updated network and timetable from 30 January 2023 utilises all buses in the fleet, which is 456 vehicles. To deliver these services, there will be times when we need to operate the remaining Renault buses until they are progressively replaced as the new vehicles arrive. Transport Canberra has been in touch with the Human Rights

Commission to seek advice on how to best manage the impact of these delays, which are outside of our control—specifically, how to minimise the impacts of continued use of the old Renault buses which do not comply with disability standards.

Transport Canberra will continue to work with the commission to provide updates as we work to provide a fully accessible and compliant bus fleet as quickly as we can. While a total of 93 per cent of our city’s buses are already compliant with disability access requirements set out under the Disability Discrimination Act, unfortunately the old orange Renault diesel buses will continue to be used on the bus network for a short period to maintain services for the community until the replacement buses arrive.

To support people with a disability while the replacement buses arrive, Transport Canberra has updated its website to identify when the Renault buses are being replaced. Transport Canberra is also sharing information via social media and engaging with community and stakeholder groups, such as members of the Transport Canberra and City Services accessibility reference group. Canberrans are encouraged to use the Transport Canberra journey planner and NXTBUS to identify the type of bus running on a given service and to check if it is accessible. Transport Canberra will work with affected customers to ensure that specific buses are allocated to services where compliance is critical. Customers can contact Transport Canberra to request that a specific service be provided with an accessible bus.

As I noted earlier, the ACT government is receiving the Yutong VDI E12 battery electric buses, which are currently undergoing the necessary final commissioning and registration processes—for those that are not already on the road. When ready, those buses are being put into service and replacing the Renault buses as soon as possible. That same approach will be applied to the Scania low-emission diesel buses as they are delivered, meaning the community will gradually see fewer and fewer Renaults delivering bus services on our roads.

Procuring battery electric buses is only one element of our broader plan to transition to a zero emissions public transport network. We have also been working to ensure that we have the infrastructure we need to house, charge, maintain and operate these vehicles. The current planning in relation to the stabling of battery electric buses is that the initial 12 Yutong VDI leased buses will be accommodated at the Tuggeranong depot. The ACT government is completing internal electric works at the Tuggeranong and Belconnen bus depots to increase electrical capacity, to enable more flexible charging arrangements in the short term.

In relation to the infrastructure needed for the fleet of electric buses beyond the initial 12, I can now update the Assembly that the ACT government has made a decision to charge our growing electric fleet not only by building the new Woden depot but also by bringing forward the retrofitting of the existing Tuggeranong depot. The 90 battery electric buses, which we are in the process of buying, will be housed at the new Woden depot that is being constructed, which is currently expected to be finished around the end of 2024, and the Tuggeranong bus depot will also accommodate those buses, which is expected to be connected next year following major grid infrastructure upgrades.

In January we announced in the 2022-23 midyear budget review that we will invest \$26.3 million over three financial years to complete the critical electrical infrastructure works that will provide the depots with the energy capacity required to charge and operate up to 300 battery electric buses. The installation of these high voltage cables, which will span 11.9 kilometres, will supply the new Woden bus depot with capacity to charge up to 100 buses and upgrade the Tuggeranong depot to charge up to 200 buses.

This work involves augmentation of Evoenergy's electrical distribution network by connecting the two bus depots via two new dedicated 11 kilovolt underground feeders from Evoenergy's Wanniasa zone substation, to help manage maximum demand of up to 12.2 megavolt amps at Tuggeranong and 5.1 megavolt amps at Woden. Initial advice from Evoenergy is that these grid augmentation works will be completed sometime next year, dependent on lead times for the supply of critical electrical components. Works to increase the capacity in the electricity supply network supplying power to the Woden bus depot will occur simultaneously to ensure sufficient power is ready and available to charge battery electric buses as soon as construction finishes.

As part of transitioning to electric buses, we also need to support people by investing in skills and training. The ACT government is delivering on our commitment to introduce nation-leading electric vehicle training through the Canberra Institute of Technology, which is supporting Transport Canberra's employees to upskill on this new heavy vehicle technology, as well as the entire ACT automotive industry. CIT's automotive team has worked in partnership with industry and Transport Canberra to guarantee CIT delivers training of the highest standards in terms of safety and quality and using the latest technology, thus ensuring that ACT Transport Canberra's staff are ready to safely service and maintain the ACT's first zero emissions bus fleet.

CIT's EV training lab is equipped with the latest state-of-the-art simulated training systems, which allow students to learn safely on high voltage electric, hybrid and fuel cell systems in a controlled environment. The nature of electric vehicles means automotive technicians will be introduced to high voltage electricity, which requires awareness and a thorough understanding about safely working with high voltage systems and the way these electric vehicles are operated, serviced and repaired.

The Statement of Attainment Depower and Reinitialise Battery Electric Vehicles course and the Battery Electric Vehicle Inspection and Servicing Skill Set course allow those Transport Canberra automotive technicians currently in the workforce to acquire the skills required to be able to work on electric vehicles safely and confidently. Training of the Transport Canberra workforce as part of this permanent introduction of zero emissions technology into the fleet is well underway at CIT. The initiative has been well received by Transport Canberra workshop staff, with 38 staff completing the statement of attainment and eight staff completing the skill set course. Staff will also undertake manufacturer-specific training as and when additional electric buses are procured and arrive.

The ACT government has led the way in Australia in developing this training, which will be further developed in 2023. CIT will be offering one of Australia's first certificate III apprenticeship courses in automotive electric vehicles technology, with



enrolments expected to commence in term 2. We remain committed to upskilling all relevant staff members to work with electric vehicles through funded training supported by CIT, as well as new qualifications and competencies. We will also be supporting new apprentices joining Transport Canberra's workforce, who will be provided with this nation-leading training to provide them with the required skills to work on electric buses.

The ACT government is committed to taking leadership in our ambitious plan to transition our public transport network to zero emissions. Global events and COVID-19 are each impacting prices and supply chains across the energy, manufacturing, construction and transport sectors in Australia. In turn, these are impacting the delivery time frames for buses, including the 26 low-emission diesel buses we are leasing. However, we remain committed to transitioning our fleet to clean, quiet, comfortable and accessible buses integrated with light rail and running on 100 per cent renewable energy.

We will continue to work to build the supporting infrastructure and energy supply which supports a successful transition, and we will build the new skills to support people in this transition, to protect jobs and grow our economy. I am confident that the plans we are taking will support improved public transport services for Canberrans. I look forward to updating the Assembly as we deliver on our zero emissions transport plan for Transport Canberra.

I present the following paper:

Zero emission transition plan for Transport Canberra update—Ministerial statement, 7 February 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 25**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.15): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 25, dated 31 January 2023, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN:** Scrutiny report 25 contains the committee's comments on 10 bills, 14 pieces of subordinate legislation and seven government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I would like to thank OLA

again for their professional secretariat support and legal advisers, Daniel Stewart and Stephen Argument. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee Report 6**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (6.16): I present the following report:

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Inquiry into Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill 2022*, dated 23 January 2023, including a dissenting report (Ms Castley), together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I would like to thank the committee support team for all of their hard work on this one, and thank those people who did put submissions in. That is all I have to say as chair. I would like to speak as a member, if I can.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Castley.

**MS CASTLEY:** The Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill received many submissions, and I have a few comments to make based on the submissions that I read and received.

The bill is the result of the ACT Labor-Greens governing agreement, not the product of sound economic or workplace policy. It expands portable long service leave into hairdressing, beauty, accommodation and food service industries.

These industries comprise a large segment of the Canberra economy, including barbers, as well as beauty, electrolysis, make-up, nail care, skincare and tanning services; hotel, motel and resort operations; holiday house and flat operations; serviced apartments and youth hostels; caravan parks and camping ground operations; cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services; and pubs, taverns, bars and clubs. The government has foreshadowed extending portable long service leave in time to real estate, travel agency and retail industries.

This bill will impose the additional direct financial cost of a new, immediate quarterly liability on business. Instead of recording contingent long service liabilities arising after five years of service but payable after seven years of service, employers in these industries will now have to register with the ACT Long Service Leave Authority and be forced into a new quarterly PAYG regimen.

They will need to register each new employee with the ACT Long Service Leave Authority, calculate their quarterly earnings, multiply these by the variable

contribution rate and remit this money to the authority. These employers will also become subject to an inspection and enforcement regimen under the act.

This bill will impose substantial new administrative burdens. Portable long service leave schemes have been estimated to impose four times the cost burden imposed by general long service leave laws in Australia. The purported benefits to industry outlined in the ACT government's consultation paper—compliance problems reduced, greater cost stability and tax benefits—are risible.

There has been no apparent regulatory impact assessment or study supporting this bill or rigorous analysis of its purported benefits to the economy or employees. The government has not even established that involuntary labour mobility is a feature of the industries to which they wish to extend portability. Mobility in these industries is voluntary, rather than associated with the nature of these industries. Indeed, employment is often casual or transient.

Neither has the government explained what will happen to the money from quarterly long service leave payments for the large number of employees who will not stay in these industries long enough to qualify for long service leave or who transfer to different occupations entirely.

The government says that the bill does not have an ACT government budget impact. But it will create a new revenue stream for the ACT government at the expense of small businesses and require more staff, including more inspectors, at the ACT Long Service Leave Authority.

As noted by the Canberra Business Chamber, the consultation paper circulated in 2022 provides no evidence of analysis of what benefits will flow to employees or the benefit to employers or the economy. Instead, it provides a vague and generally incomplete list of the possible advantages or disadvantages of extending the scheme, with no empirical evidence base to demonstrate a benefit to employees or the precise benefits to employees.

Indeed, the consequences for some employees could be dire. And opposite to the bill's purported intent, the Australian Hair Dressing Council says the bill will see salon owners close their businesses or employ fewer staff, especially apprentices. The portable long service leave will encourage employers to become sole traders. Indeed, some employers may be reluctant to hire workers with accumulated entitlements, as these employees would be more likely to request protracted leave close to their commencement date.

The Productivity Commission concluded in 2015 that the costs and complexity of portable long service leave schemes outweigh any community benefit. The government has not made out any case to the contrary.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Report 10**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.21): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 10—*Inquiry into the Sexual Assault Reform Legislation Amendment Bill 2022*, dated 7 December 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety tabled out of session on 7 December 2022. The report makes five recommendations.

The committee has made a recommendation that the ACT government include a specific reference to people with disability in care relationships and residential settings in the proposed legislative changes, to make relevant and admissible prior family violence between parties, in line with their response to the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe, and heal* report.

The committee has also made a recommendation that the ACT government monitor and evaluate the impact on perpetrators from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The committee also recommends that the ACT government amend the explanatory statement to include an explanation of the terms “victim” and “victim survivor” and the context in which they are used.

Finally, the committee recommends that, after considering and responding to the recommendations in this report, the Assembly pass the Sexual Assault Reform Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

I want to again thank the secretariat for their support to our committee, and the committee members, Dr Paterson and Mr Braddock. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (6.23): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

I wish to inform the Assembly that during the reporting period 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022, the committee considered no statutory appointments.

I now table a schedule of the statutory appointments considered during this period:

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee—  
Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to  
31 December 2022.

### **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.24): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

I wish to inform the Assembly that during the reporting period 1 July to 31 December 2022, the committee considered a total of 13 statutory appointments. These appointments and re-appointments were to the following bodies: Architects Board; Animal Welfare Advisory Committee; Tree Advisory Panel; City Renewal Authority Board; and ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board

I now table a schedule of the statutory appointments considered during this period:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of  
Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2022.

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.25): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, relating to referred bills.

The Professional Engineers Bill 2022 was referred to the committee on 1 December 2022. The committee notes that there has been broad consensus and positive feedback from community, industry and key stakeholders during the consultation phase. The committee considers that an inquiry would not add anything further to the topic. For this reason, the committee has resolved not to inquire into this bill.

### **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

**Australia Day—events**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.25): As we would all understand, Australia Day means many things to many people. At the moment there are some debates in the Australian discourse as to what it should, could and can mean.

As a local member, and also in my shadow portfolio responsibilities, I do try to get around to my constituents during Australia Day events. Perhaps for the first time for me, my first Australia Day event was on the Sunday before Australia Day, where the Multicultural Association of Canberra, perhaps very wisely, chose to have their Australia Day lunch and cultural events on that Sunday at the Jewel of India, Manuka restaurant.

I want to commend Nishi Puri for bringing together many different parts of the multicultural community to celebrate the fact that they have called Australia home and they are proud to be here.

The evening before Australia Day was a time to reflect with members of the Indigenous community at the Change the Heart Service at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Led by Aunty Jean Phillips, a senior Aboriginal Christian leader, it is a movement that connects Christianity with the acknowledgement of the Indigenous perspective and cultural history. There is much to reflect on and to consider as we move forward with our Indigenous colleagues.

The day itself commenced with a concert in Gungahlin with the Federation of the Chinese Community of Canberra. I would commend Mr Gu Hao for his efforts in putting together something on a very, very, warm morning. It did not take long to get very hot. It was a delight to speak to the group and to share with one of the Yerrabi MLAs as well during that concert.

Around lunch and early afternoon, it was a delight just to join my family for a barbecue at our home and also to briefly catch up with some of our local Ginninderra electorate branch members at a local park to thank them for their support of we Liberal members in Ginninderra.

On my way down south to the Southern Cross Club, I was able to briefly call into the MARSS Glebe Park display for the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services Australia Day. It was lovely to see different pavilions set up and a concert running. I commend Dewani Bakkum again for their effort as CEO of the MARSS organisation.

Of course, the Africans are known for celebration. Indeed, the celebration of African Australians event at the Southern Cross Club was really tremendous to attend for about an hour or so down at the Southern Cross Club. I commend Charles Koker again and thank him for the opportunity to say a few words to that assembled community.

The evening finished at the Notaras Multicultural Centre with the Federation of Chinese Community of Canberra. It was really humbling and delightful to hear five eminent Asian Australians speak of why they chose to call Australia home and to settle in Canberra.

The theme that I got from our multicultural colleagues was that they love this country. They have reasons for calling Australia home—with its imperfections, certainly, that need addressing. The overwhelming feeling of those meetings was one of appreciation and thankfulness.

I continue to look forward to a very busy year engaging not just with the multicultural community but also with the organisations throughout our city that help contribute so much to our successful multicultural society.

### **Women—equal participation**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (6.30): I rise today to talk about the very real gender discrimination that still occurs to this day.

As members in this place will be aware, I have had a particular focus this term on progressing initiatives that support women's equality. I have pushed for more women to be memorialised through our public arts and place names, and I am encouraged to hear these calls being met with the commissioning of a statue of Susan Ryan and the potential co-naming of the suburb Spence to include Catherine Spence. I also introduced the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Bill, which I look forward to debating shortly in the future.

Last sitting year, I was proud to see my motion on menstrual and menopause policies pass this Assembly, and I have had many people reach out to me to say what a difference this will make and how grateful they are that we, as an Assembly and a government, are working on issues such as these.

In progressing this work, I was under no illusions that there would be, to put it politely, unhelpful commentary. Today I want to highlight just some of the unhelpful commentary that I have received following the passing of my motion on menopause and menstruation support.

People commented to me, mostly on social media. Here is one quote: “What about the man flu? Oh, please, where will this BS end? They cannot take a sick day? Is there anything I do not want business and taxpayers to fund? Ridiculous.”

Another one was:

Oh, FFS. Kept out of the workforce because of their reproductive roles. You say that like it is a bad thing, when motherhood is the most important thing any woman can do in her life. This is our nation's future, and yet you speak of it as if being a working drone in an office someplace is way more important. I guess we are doomed if this is what politicians really value.

Another quote: “Great initiative. Next step would be a support program for men affected by the menstruation of their work colleagues. Any thoughts? What about the men? We are all equal, are we not? This blows gender equality in the workplace totally out of the water. Is it now gender equality with differences?”

Another one: “Menstrual leave that will help people who menstruate become more employable.” I believe that one was sarcastic.

Another one: “I was just a cranky 65-year-old man until I read this and realised I actually identify as a permanently menopausal woman. What rubbish is this. Get off my feed. Getting desperate for a cause??? Cranky chick leave?”

And another one: “Come on ladies, this has been an uncomfortable situation for all women from day one, so wake up and stop feeling sorry for yourselves. Just think of all the unfortunate people that have been flooded and have lost everything. Are they thinking of whinging females with natural problems?”

And yet another: “This is why men used to be the breadwinners, so that women had the comfort and privacy of their home.”

Anyone reading these comments can see the gender discrimination inherent in them. I rise today to speak of these comments to make the point that, when we talk about the shame and stigma that underpins women’s inequality, it is not a hypothetical. It is comments like these and the shame and the stigma that comes with them that leads to discrimination, because it shuts down the conversation and, in turn, the reform that leads to overcoming these barriers for the full participation of women in our society.

As I have said before, we must overcome this shaming and the stigma it creates, because creating a society where women are not disadvantaged because of their gender is important. When the voices of women can break through the wall of discriminatory perceptions, which we know there is a real need to do, then addressing the things that actually make women feel very uncomfortable within their life and stop their full participation can happen.

I know that women will speak up, because as much as we have received these comments we have also received a lot of support. It is evident from comments such as the following: “Great initiative. I asked for support and flexible work when going through the worst period of hormonal changes. Though I asked, putting my natural shyness aside, it was completely ignored at work. It was such a shame. I know women who have been hiding their pain because they had no sick leave,” or, “In some roles, regular access to toilets is an issue that can be very trying sometimes.”

There were lots more and people sharing many personal stories with me, which I will not read into the *Hansard* because they are so personal.

The women’s rights movement has achieved a lot, but there remains a lot still to do, and I for one look forward to continuing to do my bit. But to all the people out there who want to speak up for equality but do not feel empowered to do so, I say please do, because I think you will be surprised by how much support there is when you break through that wall of noise.



## **Türkiye and Syria—natural disaster**

**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) (6.35): I wanted to speak briefly this evening as an MLA and as Minister for Multicultural Affairs to send my deepest sympathies and my condolences to the people of, and to those who have lost loved ones in, Türkiye and Syria as a result of the devastating and unfathomable tragedy the earthquakes have wrought there.

I, along with the rest of the world, have watched in horror and with anguish at the catastrophic impacts caused by multiple earthquakes to the region. The number of persons who have been lost beggars belief—now estimated to be around 4,000.

My heart goes out to all those who have been especially affected by the significant loss of life and livelihoods and, indeed, the extraordinary loss and destruction of history and buildings—but, especially, it is the loss of people. Of course, I wish a speedy recovery to the many, many people who were injured.

I welcome the Australian government's swift and meaningful response to provide an initial \$10 million in humanitarian assistance to those affected, which will be delivered through Australia's Red Cross and Red Crescent partners and humanitarian agencies. This support is intended to provide targeted support to those who are in the greatest need.

This will be an incredibly difficult time for Australians and, of course, Canberrans who have family in the region. In echoing the Prime Minister earlier today, Australians in need of emergency consular assistance should contact the Australian government 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on 1300 555 135 or, if they are outside of Australia, on +61 2 6261 3305.

I know that there will be Canberrans who are directly impacted by this evolving tragedy. We also know that there are Turkish and Syrian vendors and performers scheduled to participate in next week's National Multicultural Festival. Canberra is a strong and resilient community and, in the face of this heartache and this destruction, our message is that please know that we stand with you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.38 pm.**