DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

9 April 2025

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Wednesday, 9 April 2025

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

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

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

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

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

ACT Youth Week 2025
Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.02): As Minister for Children, Youth and Families, I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge ACT Youth Week, a 10-day celebration of young people in our community aged 12 to 25 years.

This year, ACT Youth Week runs from 10 April until 20 April, providing the community with an opportunity to create a platform for young people to express themselves. It is also a time to celebrate, have fun and highlight the positive contributions they make to our community every day.

The ACT government has partnered with various businesses across Canberra to deliver large-scale free events for young people. These events are designed to be accessible to young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in these types of activities.

This year, with the support of ACT youth services, we have distributed 675 free tickets to events, including: a visit to the National Zoo and Aquarium, including a BBQ; watching a movie at Hoyts in Belconnen and Tuggeranong; 10-pin bowling at Zone Bowling; burning off some energy at Bounce trampoline park; playing minigolf at the Yarralumla Play Station; and ice skating at the Phillip Swimming and Ice-Skating Centre.

Mr Speaker, last year's ACT Youth Week was a huge success, with over 600 young people attending free events through youth organisations and services. Young people told us how much they enjoyed the activities on offer. Community partners, including Gugan Gulwan and Northside Community Service, praised the smooth organisation of the 2024 events and the strong support provided to young people. That feedback

helped shape this year's program.

One of the key ways the ACT government supports Youth Week is through the ACT Youth Week Grants program. These grants enable individuals, schools, and ACT community groups and community services to develop and deliver their own unique activities. This includes projects that strengthen community ties such as arts-based initiatives, youth forums and sporting activities. The grants also support events promoting diversity, creativity and skill development.

In addition to the ACT Youth Week Grants, the government also provides Youth InterACT grants and scholarships to help young people create innovative projects in their communities and to support kids to attend sport or art events and activities, access courses or purchase tools needed for study.

This is my first Youth Week as Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and it will be a privilege to attend some of the upcoming events and connect with young people. On Saturday, I am excited to experience the results of one ACT Youth Week grant-funded program, the 12 Hour Theatre Project organised by the Canberra Youth Theatre. This is a fantastic opportunity to witness young artists come together to create and perform a new piece of theatre in just one day.

On Monday, I will join young people at the zoo. Later that evening I will head to the multisport and fitness week for youth, organised by United Muslims of Canberra, where young people can try new sports and fitness activities in a supportive and inclusive environment.

I encourage all members, as well as the entire community, to explore the exciting opportunities available to young people in Canberra during ACT Youth Week. It is a chance to connect, learn and have fun while raising awareness around issues affecting young people. Further information, including a full program of events can be found on the Our CBR website.

I would like to acknowledge the role of the ACT Youth Advisory Council, which has provided valuable feedback to help shape the 2025 ACT Youth Week program, and the ongoing work of the government in policy and service development. The council reflects the diversity of young people living in the ACT, with members representing young people who identify across the gender spectrum and within the LGBTQIA+ community; young people with disabilities; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and those with different levels of education and employment status.

Looking beyond Youth Week, this year the council is also preparing to host the ACT Youth Assembly on Tuesday 27 May. The assembly will bring young people together to share ideas and to provide their thoughts on issues important to them. I look forward seeing firsthand how young Canberrans actively contribute to shaping the future of our community.

The ACT Youth Assembly is structured to maximise youth engagement, allowing young people to discuss issues that matter to them most and to suggest solutions and influence decision-making processes. These suggestions will be put forward to me in

an Assembly report, which I look forward to receiving.

Once again, I want to acknowledge the immense contribution our young people make in shaping the city they want to live in. I hope everyone takes the opportunity to celebrate the young people in their lives and has a great time during ACT Youth Week this year.

I present the following paper:

> ACT Youth Week 2025—Ministerial statement, 9 April 2025.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.07): Today, the start of Youth Week focused on recognising the voices, influence and potential of the young generation. I recently took on a work experience student, Nakato Katabazi, who has written this speech for me to read.

The week is about recognising that youth from ages 12 to 24 are not just the future; they are also the present, and their voices matter now. I, too, am a young person who has the power to be a voice for the younger generation. Through my involvement in the Greens, I have worked to highlight what we need more of in the political space, such as real representation and a real connection with those who are often overlooked or ignored. I speak with and for the youth, not just about them, because I resonate with them.

Youth Week is not just about throwing events but honouring the ideas, perspectives and efforts of young people. Their voices should never be seen as an afterthought. Too often they are just disregarded, pushed aside or talked over; but that must change because, whether we like it or not, young people are the voice of tomorrow. They are the next generation of leaders, workers, teachers and change-makers; therefore, their ideas, their concerns and their solutions need to be heard now.

This week highlights something deeper, a government initiative that recognises the importance of youth engagement. The ACT government is working to create real opportunities for young people to express their views on community issues and, more importantly, making sure those views are taken seriously. Youth week highlights the increased effort the government has put into the involvement of youth in shaping policies, making sure meaningful results are shown for their participation.

Youth Week started as a small celebration, and it has now grown into a national movement that is celebrated all across Australia. Here in the ACT it is not just a week on a calendar but a platform of empowerment. From Thursday April 10 to Sunday April 20, the 2025 ACT Youth Week will feature a range of events designed to celebrate youth culture, to support and engage, and to build a more inclusive future.

One of the key ideas behind this week is ensuring that the government hears directly from young people about issues that impact them most, whether that is education,

mental health, climate change, housing or equality. It is about creating real chances for youth to shape the future that they will inherit.

Events across the week are awesome, from college to university, and they include: a program that includes assisting young people from Pasifika, migrant and refugee backgrounds in understanding their higher education options; Canberra Youth Theatre, which is hosting the 12 Hour Theatre Project; the Sunset Festival at Eddison Park; the Melanesian Film Fest day; an African youth drum and dance workshop; community sports events at Multicultural Hub ACT and UMC; and, lastly, six days of free activities at the Belconnen Youth Centre and gallery.

All of this information can be found on the ACT government website, which is very helpful. These events are not just fun but are a platform for creativity and expression. They are safe spaces where young people can show who they are and what they believe in. Likewise, taking on a work placement of a 16-year-old girl who has very insightful ideas in topics and discussions—not just affecting youth but feedback in general—highlights the importance of the voice of youth.

Let's continue to uplift and empower the youth of Canberra and across Australia. Let's support voices like mine and my community's and ensure that Youth Week is not just a celebration but a call to action, because the voice of youth is not just important; it is essential. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Policing—strategic asset management plan—order to table documents

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.12): I move:

> That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services to provide the Assembly with:
>
> (1) any documents relating to and including the strategic asset management plan of ACT Policing facilities;
>
> (2) any documents relating to and including the 20-year Master Accommodation Plan by JLL Australia;
>
> (3) a list of any inquiries, reviews, reports and other initiatives which have been commissioned by the ACT Government regarding the Canberra City police station;
>
> (4) a list of contracts, including associated cost for maintenance and repairs of the City Police Station; and
>
> (5) a list of contracts, reviews, inquiries, reports and other initiatives on a new city police station.

It will be news to no-one in this place that for a long time our police officers have been forced to work in dangerous conditions. I am not just talking about the physical dangers that cops fighting crime face every day; I am talking about the decaying, squalid and dangerous conditions at police stations and watch houses across Canberra.

For years, Canberra's police have been subjected to substandard, even squalid, conditions that put the safety and wellbeing of police staff at risk. We have all seen the headlines: gas leaks, water flooding, toxic lead contaminants and diesel particulates, raw sewage leaks, evacuations and relocations. It is the never-ending story that desperately needs to come to an end.

I am still hearing reports that despite the quick plumbing fixes at the city police station, staff are still enduring disgusting, stinking, raw sewage odours in their workplace. No-one should be forced to work in conditions like that, and it is hardly surprising that the Australian Federal Police Association has said that they are willing to explore legal action to protect their workers if that is what it takes. But it should not have to come to that.

We need greater transparency over what action has been taken and will be undertaken to provide ACT police officers with safe and fit-for-purpose worksites. Last year, we saw the ACT Auditor-General's report stating that nearly half of all the current police infrastructure assets owned or leased by the ACT government required immediate or imminent renewal or replacement. The city police station was built in the 60s and has been described by former Chief Police Officer Neil Gaughan as not fit for purpose. Considering the flooding and the sewage contamination, I would have to agree.

We are often told by the government that work is underway and progressing, but rarely do we see the evidence of that. Safe facilities matter, not just for the health, wellbeing and morale of the staff that occupy them, but, importantly, they also matter for members of the Canberra community who rely on local policing services, because ensuring that police have a safe work environment means police can get on with the job of keeping the community safe. In the complex and rapidly shifting environment they must operate in, we can afford nothing less.

While these documents will not fix the problem, they will shine a light on the actions being taken or not being taken by the government to keep the community safe by delivering a safe and fit-for-purpose workplace for our police. Our police and the Canberra community, who relies on police services, deserve this level of transparency.

I want to thank the Greens and members of the crossbench for their support in obtaining these documents today, because it is so important that we secure more transparency for a safer Canberra. I also want to thank the government for, I understand, their support for my motion, and the opposition is happy to accept the extension of the timeframe to deliver it within 30 days.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.15): I rise to speak in response to Ms Morris's motion, and I also move the amendment circulated in my name:

> After paragraph (5), add:
>
> "(6) not withstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided within 30 business days.".

This amendment will provide extra time for police to extract the information requested.

I would like to clarify that the leak identified on 7 April is extremely small in size, restricted to the basement and not impacting business at the city police station. Plumbers attended that same day and are rectifying the issue as we speak.

I will also note that this motion is rather ironic in that it does put a significant impost on ACT police resources. In the last sitting, the Chief Minister discussed the production of documents in this way and the role of the executive extensively, as did Minister Stephen-Smith, so I will not prosecute that debate again, but there are appropriate channels under FOI laws which should be taken to seek this type of information.

I do have a strong commitment to transparency and will update the Assembly and the Canberra public on updates from the broad range of infrastructure projects whenever possible.

As talked about yesterday, police infrastructure is a key priority for the government. Significant investment has already been made to develop the Strategic Asset Management Plan, which outlines a clear pathway to keep ageing infrastructure online while new infrastructure is built. It identifies and quantifies the extent of asset renewal required.

The SAMP outlines a structured approach that will stabilise infrastructure at key ACT police sites to maintain operational effectiveness, mitigate deterioration and reduce reliance on costly reactive maintenance. The SAMP program is a pragmatic and cost-effective solution to ensure continuity of service while infrastructure is constructed. The ACT government is strongly committed to working with ACT police to see a new headquarters and city police station as a priority. Several procurement model options are currently being considered.

The 2023-24 budget allocated $3.823 million over two years for a comprehensive feasibility study and business case for the new ACT Policing headquarters and city police station, as well as assessing police infrastructure needs for Woden and Molonglo. JACS have been developing the early feasibility work, as we discussed yesterday, for a Molonglo police station, including consideration of operational linkages with the Woden police station and long-term policing infrastructure requirements for the region. Once the feasibility work is completed, the project can progress to the next stage of development. Further detail around timeframes and site selection will be developed as part of the detail stage.

In the recent budget review, an additional $9.658 million was included to support the ACT Policing enterprise agreement. This follows on from the historical $106 million from the 2023-24 budget to recruit and train 126 new police officers, and ACT Labor went to the last election with a commitment to increase this to 150 police officers by 2029.

The ACT government is absolutely committed to ensuring ACT police have appropriate and renewed infrastructure so that they can do their very important work

for our community. Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.19): The Greens will be supportive of Ms Morris's motion today in the interest of transparency about the Civic police station. We will also be supportive of the amendment moved by Dr Paterson, in terms of it being a realistic assessment of the timeframe required in order to provide these documents.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—non-executive members—reporting requirements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.20): I move:

> That this Assembly resolves that consistent with reporting requirements for Executive Members:
>
> (1) non-executive MLAs will publish, on the Legislative Assembly website, each quarter, information on their externally sponsored and Assembly related and funded travel commencing from the start of the 11th Assembly;
>
> (2) non-executive MLAs will publish, on the Legislative Assembly website, each quarter, their diaries setting out all reportable meetings, events and functions attended by non-executive MLAs that relate to their responsibilities as Members commencing from the start of the 11th Assembly. This does not include personal and family matters; electorate or party political matters; media interviews or recordings; any scheduled meeting or event that the Member did not actually attend; or any information which might disclose personal details about an individual, affect a court case, or disclose information about security, public safety, or law enforcement; and
>
> (3) the Speaker will table a breakdown of non-executive staffing expenditure for the current and last four financial years, including staffing expenditure per non-executive office (including his own), staffing expenditure per pledged resourcing arrangement, and any other staffing expenditure within 28 calendar days.

I have moved this motion this morning to close several loopholes in accountability and reporting that exist within this place. I do so with a view that all members should be held accountable to the same standards as the executive are held accountable in this place.

The elements of the motion are threefold. Firstly, it is around increasing the frequency of travel reporting for non-executive members. Currently, on the Legislative Assembly website, every six months a report is published in relation to Assembly-related and funded travel, commencing at the beginning of each six-month period. Members can go onto the Assembly website and see that report.

That captures an element of travel for non-executive members, but it does not capture

externally sponsored travel. There is a requirement, under item 12 of the declaration of members' interests, to list free or concessional travel that has been undertaken where the cost, or part of the cost, was met other than by the Assembly. That includes another person, organisation, business, interest group or foreign government or its representative.

There is a requirement to update that information according to the rules associated with members' declarations of interest, but it is not consolidated at a single point for both the public and the media to get access to it, so I think that consolidating that information and reporting quarterly rather than six-monthly or in an ad hoc way would align with executive travel reporting and would put every member on a level playing field in relation to their travel arrangements.

Let me be clear about this. This is not an exercise in shaming members for travelling. We do see that occur occasionally in relation to executive travel. I am not in the business of doing that, but I think it is only fair and reasonable that members are held to the same level of accountability, and that is what we seek to do in paragraph (1) of this motion.

In relation to the publishing of diaries for reportable meetings, events and functions that relate to members' responsibilities as members, this would be, again, consistent with the quarterly reporting that ministers undertake. It would not include personal and family matters; electorate or party-political matters; media interviews or recordings; scheduled meetings or events that the member did not actually attend; or any information which might disclose personal details about an individual, a constituent or a court case, or disclose information about security, public safety or law enforcement. These are exactly the standards that apply to ministerial diaries, and these are published on a quarterly basis.

I say to members that this is an important transparency measure. But I make a personal observation that I would say three factors have significantly reduced the amount of nefarious lobbying of ministers. The first has been the ban on political donations from the development sector. The second has been the publishing of ministerial diaries, and the third has been the introduction of the Integrity Commission.

Those factors have combined to significantly reduce the sort of lobbying that the community is rightly concerned about. If I can be brutally honest with members, it will make their lives easier to have these accountability measures. Mr Speaker, when you point out to the individual who wants to get in your ear about something, "That's fine, but you must come in for a meeting that will be published," it is remarkable what that does. Combined with the presence and existence of the Integrity Commission, it makes our role as members easier to have those accountability mechanisms.

I could not recommend this more strongly to members who are concerned about ethics and integrity in how they undertake their roles. It does not stop interest groups or organisations seeking to appropriately lobby members, but there is nothing quite like the transparency of saying, "This meeting will be published," to sort out who is legitimately coming to talk to you about an issue of public policy and whose lobbying efforts might not be, perhaps, as pure, if I could put it that way. I strongly recommend to members that this opportunity be taken up and that it be done in a consistent way,

exactly as ministers have been reporting for nearly a decade.

Finally, I note that there has been a lot of interest in the breakdown of expenditure, shared arrangements, pledging arrangements and the like. The government not only publishes information in annual reports and in the budget papers around the executive budget, but, as a result of requests from the Assembly, there has been an increased level of reporting in that regard. Again, I see no reason why that information should not be available publicly across all of the arrangements in this place, and paragraph (3) of the motion goes to that point.

There is already some information available publicly in annual reports; there is information around an instrument that I am required to provide to members in relation to salary caps, as part of staffing arrangements for non-executive members. This simply seeks a further level of information, through you, Mr Speaker, as, if you like, the minister for the Office of the Legislative Assembly. It is a straightforward request. We provide an extended timeframe for it to be provided.

I conclude by making these points. There has been an amendment circulated by the Leader of the Opposition. I note that this circulation, a matter of minutes ago, is the first time I have seen it, so I am not sure that is in the good faith that one would expect. We have put this motion on the notice paper and engaged with various members to refine and to be clear about the information that we are looking for.

It may be that I will call for an adjournment of this matter before final consideration, given that I have only just seen this. It was literally handed to me as I stood up to speak. I do not think that reflects the type of good faith that we should be having in these debates. I foreshadow a potential move to adjourn the debate to be able to properly consider the amendment from the Leader of the Opposition.

Going to the substantive point, members should have nothing to fear from each of the elements in this motion, and I think that it should be supported by the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.28): I move:

> Omit all text after "That this Assembly", substitute:
>
> "(1) notes that:
>
> (a) information about non-executive entitlements are published both as disallowable instruments and in the Annual Reports of the Office of the Legislative Assembly, which is appropriate; and
>
> (b) information about executive staffing entitlements are not published in the same form or to the same standard, which undermines transparency and accountability;
>
> (2) further notes that:
>
> (a) the Assembly has called for the Integrity Commissioner to undertake an inquiry into lobbying and for the Government to ensure appropriate funding be provided for this work; and
>
> (b) the Government has failed to provide the Assembly with any assurance that the funding has been or will be provided in this year's Budget;

(3) directs the Chief Minister to:

(a) publish information on executive staff expenditure, in a format consistent with the Assembly's reporting of non-executive staff expenditure, in all future Annual Reports of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate;

(b) make a statement in the Assembly immediately after this motion, and if appropriate funding for the lobbying inquiry will be provided in this year's Budget;

(c) if no decision has been made, the Chief Minister's statement must include the day (or days) when the decision will be made and, once such a decision has been made, the Chief Minister must provide the Speaker with a statement outlining the decision and the funding to be provided, which the Speaker must make available to MLAs; and

(4) calls on the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to consider holding an inquiry into any findings or recommendations of the Integrity Commissioner's inquiry into lobbying once it has reported and, as part of that inquiry, consider issues regarding the accessibility and detail of the diaries of executive and non-executive MLAs; consistent with Latimer House principles.".

I thank the Chief Minister for moving this motion. I was a little surprised, as I suspect many members were, when I first read the motion. It was so different from what we normally see from Labor, or from the Chief Minister, that I wondered whether possibly the member's name was wrong or had been wrongly appended. But it seems that this is the work of the Chief Minister, and it is different from the usual motions we see because it actually seeks greater transparency.

This is a word which is generally beloved of Labor around the country, but a word that ACT Labor seem to have forgotten after so many years in government. Of course, Labor have forgotten many things in their time in government—not just the priorities and values of the community, but their own principles and values, too, and none more so than their commitment to transparency. We, of course, welcome Labor's renewed embrace of this principle. We want more transparency, and we want Labor to want more transparency.

The motion is also different because it calls for the publication of information that is already public. If the Chief Minister wants to know my staffing entitlement, I encourage him to look at the disallowable instrument which he made six months ago. If his own regulations are too legalistic for him to interpret, he could consult the *Canberra Times*, which publicly reported it. I am sure Jasper would happily make the article available if the paywall is an obstacle.

Alternatively, if the Chief Minister wants to know how much I actually spent, he can consult the Assembly's annual reports. It is all there, in black and white—the spending of every non-executive member. Of course, the spending of executive members is not recorded there or anywhere else, and it took two motions of this Assembly to flush out that information; and, even then, the government failed to comply in full. Apparently, there are limits to Labor's embrace of transparency.

This motion is different, too, because of its errors. I am known to make mistakes and

the occasional typo. Sometimes, my grammar is a little like the Assembly wi-fi: it goes missing in action. So I do not hold these errors against the Chief Minister. After all, to err is human, and we in the opposition forgive the Chief Minister for these mistakes. But it is certainly uncharacteristic of Mr Barr to move a motion riddled with basic errors and to have to issue a correction just 24 hours later.

Finally, the motion is different because it calls for non-executive members to publish their diaries and disclose the names of those they met. Presumably, this includes the meetings with stakeholders who have concerns with government policy—the names, dates and times we met with surgeons on the brink of resigning from the health system, the police officers struggling to bear the workload of community safety, the teachers and principals afraid of their safety, the public servants who have witnessed unethical decisions, and the whistleblowers who have seen unlawful administration.

Is this really what the Chief Minister expects from the opposition and the crossbench? Can he point to a single example of any democracy anywhere in the world where opposition members must report all of this to the head of the government? Can he explain how this is consistent with parliamentary privilege or the Latimer House principles? My understanding of those principles is that the executive is accountable to the parliament; it is not that the parliament is accountable to the executive.

I would have expected the Chief Minister—indeed, all ministers and members—to have understood this basic point, and it concerns me that they do not. I acknowledge that his revised motion attempts to walk back some of these concerns, but it is astonishing that he attempted to secure this information in the first place. It is completely incompatible with our democracy here in the ACT, a democracy that the Chief Minister should seek to protect and enhance.

In so many ways, this is a very different and very unusual motion from the Chief Minister. It is a motion that feels like it has been rushed, a motion that is the work of a harried and irrational mind, a motion that some might call unsophisticated. That, of course, would be unkind, just as it would be unkind if Labor members were to reflect on this motion, on this ham-fisted attempt to make some kind of vague point about something, while wanting the names of who is meeting with me and with every other member of the parliament, and wonder whether the Chief Minister might be getting a little past his prime.

After more than a decade as Chief Minister, he is resorting to the kind of cheap, empty tactics of a child playing checkers rather than a grandmaster playing chess. It is a bit sad. But the adults in the room—clearly, not those on the opposite side of the chamber—know that we can do better than this. We know we can be better than this, and my amendment seeks to do exactly that.

It points the Chief Minister to where he can access the information he has sought about staffing. It reminds Mr Barr of the lobbying inquiry, which has been agreed to by every member of this Assembly. More than just reminding him of the inquiry, it insists that he makes a statement about the funding of that inquiry, which should be a straightforward matter, given that he and his government supported the call for the inquiry and the call to fund the inquiry. Those of us in the opposition look forward to that statement with bated breath.

Most importantly, my amendment seeks the same consistency that the Chief Minister sought by requiring executive staffing to be disclosed on an annual basis, as already occurs with non-executive staffing. I hope and expect that the government will support the amendment, as it delivers on the standards of consistency and transparency that they have now embraced.

I would like to thank members across the chamber who have helped to work through this amendment. It has taken some time to pull it together, and we really appreciate the work that our officers have gone through. I commend my amendment to the Assembly and, once again, thank the Chief Minister for the motion and the opportunity he has presented to the Assembly today.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.35): I am glad Mr Barr updated his motion yesterday, because the original motion was unclear in its policy intent and had errors. It was not to the standard that I would expect from a member who has such extensive experience in this place, or seniority in the government, and I was surprised to see that he was willing to put his signature to that piece of work.

The revised motion contains some much-needed clarity on policy intent, and it applies a common test to the diaries, but it is not without its issues, and I will go through those now. Looking at paragraph (1), relating to work-related travel, I have no issue with transparency of members' travel. Members travelling should be prepared to demonstrate to Canberrans why that is a suitable use of funds, whether it be to Singapore, the Isle of Man or Malta.

There is a page on the Office of the Legislative Assembly's website regarding members' ethics and accountability. As the Chief Minister mentioned, it includes the declaration of members' interests and reports on non-executive members' travel. This system dates back to 2009—interestingly, when Mr Rattenbury was the Speaker.

These reports detail all Assembly-funded travel that match the information that Mr Barr is seeking in paragraph (1) of his motion. But I do note—and I agree with him—that it does not include externally funded travel, because this appears in a separate section of the declaration of interests, and on the same page. That is because this type of travel is classified as a gift from those external agencies who provided the said travel.

A quick check reveals examples of previous members who have reported such gifts in their part of the declaration of interests. Therefore, all the information that Mr Barr is seeking in paragraph (1) is already in the public domain. The only question is about the need for consolidation and a timeframe for said reporting.

Mr Barr has called in this motion for three-monthly reporting. The current timeframe for non-executive member travel reporting is six-monthly. The timeframe for reporting externally funded travel as a gift is 28 days. So we have here some confusion as to which timeframe is appropriate—six months, three months or 28 days—and whether we wish to apply that to every element. Whilst Mr Barr is seeking more frequent reporting on one hand, on the other hand the timeframe for reporting externally funded travel will actually be longer.

I have no major issues either way as to what is the appropriate timeframe, but I note that this is the first time we have heard a call for three-monthly reporting of travel by non-executive members. If the government feel that this is an appropriate period of time and wish to see this applied to both Assembly-funded travel and externally funded travel, I am very happy to give that consideration, and I recommend that they raise that with admin and procedure, as the committee that would have to deal with the administrative process in order to make that happen. However, as part of the demonstration of why it is required, it needs to take into account how little non-executive travel actually occurs. It is not like the average non-executive MLA is travelling to Singapore three times a year.

Let us look at paragraph (2), which I suspect goes to the heart of what Minister Barr is actually seeking and does not already have, which is the publication of non-executive diaries. Fortunately, the revised motion now aligns the carve-outs with those that are utilised by ministers as part of their diaries. I will not go into detail in quoting the exact nature of those carve-outs; but, if my understanding is correct, those carve-outs were designed for the capture of ministerial business, to the exclusion of local members' business.

If I am reading between the lines of this motion, he wants to pick up the activity of a local member scrutinising the government and ensure that it is released into the public domain. It unpacks a range of questions about the proper scope of diary publications. Front of mind for me is ensuring we do not put whistleblowers who approach their elected representatives at risk.

As much as the government may hate whistleblowers, they have an essential role in our democracy. Whistleblowers will need to have their privacy protected, so as to prevent possible vindictive and vengeful retaliation from the government. This applies to more than just individuals, who I note under the current carve-outs may be exempt, but that has to be clarified. This also includes those non-government organisations and community groups who are reliant on government funding and grants, and who are afraid of retaliation if it is disclosed that they are talking to other members of this place.

I have had many conversations with community groups where they are afraid of unilateral and retaliatory action if they express views that annoy the government. I am sure it is a conversation that many other non-executive members in this place have also experienced.

If the Chief Minister wants to know which community groups have the temerity to talk to their elected representatives, it unpacks some potentially unhealthy implications for democracy. What safeguards should be put in place to ensure such individuals and organisations are not impacted? The phrasing of Mr Barr's motion is such that it may disclose the personal information of whistleblowers who have decided to approach their elected representatives. I hope it is not the intention to silence the whistleblowers or to scare them away from coming forward, but it could be the effect of the words as written in the motion.

There is also an issue of how we should handle matters that are committee-in-

confidence, and that is something that would need to be explored and understood in passing this motion. Again, I support in principle this increased transparency, but we need to be clear on what we are calling for and see that adequate safeguards are in place to ensure the effective operation of our democracy.

I am worried that the motion is missing the point as to why we currently ask for the publication of ministerial diaries. It is to help prevent the negative effect of lobbying on our decision-makers. It is to get people to think twice before meeting with a lobbyist that they would not want to be seen with, and the same applies to the lobbyist themselves. Any lobbying that occurs is theoretically forced into the open. That said, we know there are concerns with how this regime works, to the point where the Integrity Commissioner stated his interest in undertaking an inquiry into lobbying. The Assembly resolved its support for such an inquiry on 4 February this year and called upon the Labor government to fund it. I reiterate the need for the ACT government to fund this inquiry. I hope that, with greater understanding, we can identify any weaknesses in our current systems, including the transparency around both ministerial and non-executive diaries, and how these should be addressed.

I am speaking today as an individual member who also happens to be a member of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders. I would be very happy to examine how we can improve transparency around both ministerial and non-executive diaries once that inquiry is complete.

Paragraph (3) of the motion relates to staffing expenditure. What Mr Barr is asking for on non-executive staffing expenditure is already published in the annual reports of the Office of the Legislative Assembly, and in more detail than Mr Barr recently provided for the executive. He also seems to misunderstand how non-executive staffing budgets work, even though he signs the determination on what they are. Specifically, the concept of a shared resourcing arrangement does not exist, and it had to be edited out of the motion and substituted with our pledging system.

For those who are unfamiliar with the system, every employee has to be attached to an MLA, and pledges given and received between MLAs serve to account for an MLA employing someone who may work across multiple offices. For example, Miss Nuttall's whip's clerk works primarily for me, but Miss Nuttall pledges funding to me for the equivalent of one day a week where I direct him to work to her tasking. We do not have a pool of shared resources that help to make any office's allocation look smaller than it actually is. It is hard to imagine that today's motion was intended as anything but a tit-for-tat response for the order of production of documents regarding executive staffing.

Going to Ms Castley's amendment, it highlights the existing transparency schemes for non-executive members, with which the Chief Minister was clearly unfamiliar when he drafted the motion, and I have just described them. It reaffirms the Assembly's support for a lobbying inquiry by the ACT Integrity Commission and calls the Chief Minister to account on the need to act on that resolution by this Assembly in support of that inquiry. It also asks the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to examine and make recommendations on the transparency of all members' diaries once we have the Integrity Commission's expert advice. The Greens will be supporting the amendment.

In wrapping up, I wish to reaffirm that Labor has control of the executive. However, the non-executive members here today do form the majority in this chamber. We are open to transparency, and we will embrace it. However, we need to make sure that what is passed protects our whistleblowers and our democracy, and we are committed to continuing to do that.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.44): If you do a Google image search—I might try it now: "Hey Google, what does a tit-for-tat dummy spit by the Chief Minister look like—

Mr Pettersson: A point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker. Mr Parton is using a prop.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Parton, could you refrain.

MR PARTON: If I were holding my phone—and I could say my hand is effectively also a prop, but I cannot remove it—and I said, "Hey Google, what does a tit-for-tat dummy spit by the Chief Minister look like in the form of a motion on the notice paper?", my phone would probably come up with an image of this motion. If I asked, "What does a two-can-play-that-game dummy spit look like?", that is what it would come up with.

I was not sure whether to speak to this, but I do not understand. I have listened to Mr Barr, so I have a somewhat deeper understanding of what he is trying to achieve. I note that the motion we see before us today has been amended by the Chief Minister since its original iteration, because it called for non-executive members to publish information on their work-related travel each quarter, full stop. That was extremely ambiguous. The current motion calls for non-executive members to publish information on their externally sponsored and Assembly related travel, and I am still lost as to what the Chief Minister is trying to achieve.

As has been pointed out during this debate, non-executive members do not have any travel allowance. Any Assembly related travel is already reported extensively on public-facing portals that already exist. What are we doing here? When you try to break down the exact definition of "externally sponsored" travel, what does that mean? Does that mean work-related travel paid for by any individual entity other than the Assembly? Is that what it means?

Here is another prop for you. This is a draft of my graffiti management report. It is nearly completed. It has 7,000 words. It will be going to the relevant government minister, it will be going to the relevant shadow minister, it will be going to the Leader of the Opposition and to the Leader of the Greens, if he wants it, and it will be going to the two independents. You want to talk about externally sponsored travel and diary lists? Then let's do it.

I am a non-executive member. I travelled to Sydney to meet with Blacktown City Council, City of Sydney, Mosman Council and Hornsby Shire Council. I did so on 26 February this year. I left Canberra at 5.15 am in my car and I got back home at 9.30 pm. I can list all the members of those councils that I met with; I can list all the

tolls, which were quite extensive given the zigzagging of the city that I undertook; and I can probably submit my petrol, which cost well over $100, and parking at various locations in Sydney, which cost $50.

I travelled to Wollongong on 12 March to meet with Simon Grant from the Wonderwalls project to see what they were achieving. There were no tolls or parking costs, but it cost me around $100 in petrol. I travelled to Melbourne to meet with Yarra City Council, Melbourne City Council, and the president of the upper house of the Victorian parliament. My plane tickets cost $554. I paid for them. I am happy to submit those costs as externally sponsored, Assembly related travel. The costs were on me; I paid for them.

The Grand Prix weekend in Melbourne was not well planned, so my accommodation cost me over $400. I paid for it. SkyBus cost me $40. I did a lot of walking in Melbourne—brisk walking—but I had to get a taxi from Carlton to Richmond and then from Richmond back to the city, so that was another $80. My trip to Melbourne was extremely beneficial in drafting this particular prop, Mr Pettersson, and, additionally, for potential changes to the standing orders in this place. In total, my Melbourne trip cost me well over $1,000. Subsequent to that travel, I personally put together this 7,000-word prop. The trip was essentially the equivalent of a committee inquiry; it is just that there was no committee, no secretariat to pay to conduct the inquiry and prepare the report, and no travel for committee members, because I paid for it all.

Mr Barr comes to this chamber and says, "I want to create a level playing field." I do not know that it is. I am not sure that it is a level playing field or anything like it, and that it ever really can be, because that is not the way that parliaments work. We would like it being a little more level than it is, in many aspects, but it is not. Making an assumption that those of us opposite operate in the same way that the government operates is wrong, and probably quite dangerous. I pride myself on being a hardworking local member of this place. I pride myself on going above and beyond to provide solutions, advocacy and support for the people who voted for me, because that is what we are supposed to do. And I am personally happy—but I do not know where this is going to end, because we have all sorts of amendments—to provide every single detail of that process for the whole world to see. But I just do not understand what we are seeking to achieve.

Ms Cheyne: Madam Assistant Speaker, I seek your advice, if not your ruling, about an amendment that has been circulated. I appreciate that you may need to seek some advice, because I certainly do not know what the answer is, and I suspect this is what has been happening around the chamber. My read would be that, in usual circumstances, under standing order 140, Ms Castley's amendment would be ruled out of order. However, then there is Mr Emerson's amendment—which, in the way that it has been circulated, does not do this, but I understand the intention—which would bring back Mr Barr's motion and then add Ms Castley's motion after Mr Barr's motion, and that would mean it is not out of order. Mr Emerson's amendment does not do that, but that seems to be the intention.

MR SPEAKER: Could I get an understanding: are you raising—

Ms Cheyne: I am seeking your guidance, Mr Speaker, now that you are back: is this in order, in the order that it has been presented?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Duncan and I will have a brief chat and we will come back with more shortly.

Ms Cheyne, in reflecting on your concerns about whether Ms Castley's amendment is in order, I assume that you are referring to standing order 140 and, in particular, that the most important rule relating to amendments is that they must be relevant to the question upon which they are moved. My view is that, because paragraph (4) of Ms Castley's motion states:

> calls on the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to consider holding an inquiry into any findings or recommendations … into lobbying …

and:

> consider issues regarding the accessibility and detail of the diaries of executive and non-executive MLAs …

the amendment is related to the original motion, so I am happy for it to proceed.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.54): I did not intend to speak today, because I actually did not think this was going to be debated. I thought this was going to be a straightforward process—that we would all agree that increased accountability is a good thing and increased transparency is good for public trust in our democracy. It has been remarkable to me to see the teeth-gnashing, misdirection and the concern-trolling that has existed in this debate, and to hear people saying they support something and then spending far longer talking about the reasons they do not support it than simple lip service as to why they do support it. It is always very obvious and transparent when that happens. I respect that sometimes it is not easy to say what you truly think about something, but on this issue it is fundamentally important that people truly understand the question that is being put and the concerns and delaying tactics that we are seeing.

Mr Braddock made a very good observation—that all of the transparency measures we have in place right now are for the accountability of decision-makers. It is right to observe that those in the executive make a lot of decisions. That is true. That is the structure of our system of government—that those in the executive make a lot of decisions. But it is not okay to gloss over the very important decision-making that this chamber and the legislature also has.

This could not have come at a more pertinent time. Just yesterday, we had to debate in this place an attempt of this chamber to interfere in independent planning processes. That would be a remarkable intervention. I have spent enough time in this place with the members involved and I do not suspect that there is something suspicious or sinister going on behind the scenes. But, to be very clear: if the precedent in this place is that members came forward to try to block individual DAs and there was no

accountability of the decision-making or lobbying that might have gone on behind that, that is remarkable. If this parliament wants to run government, then it should hold itself to a higher standard.

The executive holds itself to a high standard in the ACT, and rightly so. I am very proud of the high standards we hold in the ACT Legislative Assembly in general, but, more importantly, the ACT executive too. Around the parliaments of the commonwealth, the ACT is normally lauded for our very forward-thinking approach to integrity. This is an important opportunity for us to go further. If we are going to continue on the path that we have set, where this chamber is going to try to govern outside of the executive, then we need improved and increased transparency.

I am aware that there is a lobbying code of conduct. It is attached to the standing orders. I am going to be very honest: I have been in this place for a bit over eight years and the amount of attention and discussion about it has been absolutely minimal. I would largely attribute that to it being, for the most part, completely unenforceable and completely reliant upon individual members to come forward and talk about breaches of it. I am not aware of any of that happening, and I pay attention in this place. I kind of rely on fellow members to say, "Trust me. I have not broken the code of conduct. I have not met with a lobbyist."

When it comes to lobbying, there is an important conversation to have, and it is very clear that the government is in support of an inquiry into lobbying. We think that there can be improvements, which is why we think reforms like this are important—to go beyond just "Trust me, bro" and, instead, actually put in mechanisms for accountability, because at the moment there is no accountability.

The reason I say that is that, as much as I am embarrassed to admit this, I have spent far too much of my time skimming through declarations of members' interests. It is always good fun checking where someone's investment property is, the tickets they got to a charity ball or where they bought stocks. It is always interesting to learn about the lives that we all lead. As embarrassing as it is, I wish I had better things to do with my time. What I have observed over many years is that there are certain things that I would have thought would have popped up in members' declarations—things that I have seen about town and overseas trips that I am aware of that have not appeared on people's declarations. They might simply have been oversights. I have great faith in my fellow members and I always try to assume the best, so I assume they probably were oversights, but I suspect that there are a large number of declarations that are not entirely accurate. As a reporting mechanism for the trust and faith in our democratic system, to rely on members declaring these things with no accountability and no process beggars belief to me. If we want transparency and accountability, we need to rely upon more than just "Trust me, bro."

It is clear to me that there have been some attempts to obfuscate the original intent of the motion, to try to pick at the little nuances that might have been worded better. I appreciate that, in debate, all is fair in love and war, but to me it is very clear: it is appropriate for members, when they are being lobbied, to be transparent about that. The individual mechanism of it is worthy of consideration and debate, but it is very clear to me today that there is actually not much interest from the non-executive. I have spent most of my time in this place as a member of the non-executive, which is

why I am surprised by this response. It is seemingly so controversial for members to grapple with the idea that the decision-making processes and the people who are attempting to influence them should be brought out of the shadows. It should be straightforward.

It is very telling that the amendment has been brought forward by Ms Castley. The request is for a committee to "consider" inquiring into these matters. There is no time limit; there is no time to report back. This is as soft and noncommittal as you could possibly have in an amendment. Normally, the opposition are red-hot keen that something has to be done and it has to be reported back by a certain date, but it is very telling that, when it comes to accountability for them, there is none of that certainty and clarity.

Once again, I did not expect to speak today, but I have been completely surprised by the way this debate has played out.

Mr Braddock: A point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Pettersson seemed to be making the assertion that members had failed in their responsibilities to fulfil their declarations of interest, which would be a breach of the code of conduct for members. Under the code of conduct for members, isn't he also under an obligation to report such failings to fulfil our ethical responsibilities?

MR SPEAKER: I will examine the exact orders around that, but I note your concern, Mr Braddock.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.03): Many of the people who voted for me to become a member of this Assembly told me they were doing so because they wanted more transparency and accountability from their elected representatives. This really is one of the primary reasons people vote independent. There has been a lot of noise made by the crossbench and the opposition recently about ensuring government decisions are made with maximal transparency. Community members expect to be provided with the information needed to be sure that taxpayer resources are put to good use. To the credit of many members of this Assembly, multiple positive steps have been taken to start upholding that expectation. However, there has been pushback from some members, speaking against motions and then supporting them on the grounds that the level of transparency expected by our community, as communicated by some of the motions that have been passed in recent months, creates an unreasonable imposition on the government.

How delighted I was, then, to see the Chief Minister himself join those calls with his motion—to see Mr Barr's act of retaliatory transparency and escalation in the Assembly's growing transparency arms race. What a race to find ourselves in! How encouraging it is to see the Chief Minister position himself as the Assembly's new transparency warrior—his first step, perhaps, towards independence. I hope this is a sign of things to come.

I hope this means the motion I will move tomorrow on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy will be welcomed with open arms. Perhaps, with the Chief Minister's new mandate for transparency at all costs, we can reach a point where handover briefings do not need to be sought through questions on notice,

freedom of information requests or committee inquiries but are published voluntarily shortly after each election and with minimal redactions as appropriate. I hope this motion means we will see less pushback on future attempts at increased transparency in this Assembly, noting that, to quote the Chief Minister this morning, members should have nothing to fear. I hope members will no longer be told to revert to submitting FOI requests but will be encouraged to seek information through the Assembly's mechanisms that are available to us.

I am also supportive of the intent of Ms Castley's amendment and her remarks regarding the impending lobbying inquiry, which I too eagerly await. As such, I have circulated an amendment—clumsily, as Ms Cheyne points out—that seeks to have Ms Castley's amendment passed, not instead of but as well as Mr Barr's motion. We can all get what we want. Let's pass it all.

Mr Braddock and Ms Castley have pointed to issues with Mr Barr's motion. To me, these seem to be technical in nature and can be resolved. I am also reassured by Ms Castley's call for the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to consider this suite of matters. I hope the committee does so and reports back to the Assembly on the best way to provide our community with an appropriate level of transparency, without unnecessary duplicate of processes that may be created by the passage of this motion, as had been indicated by the remarks of various members during this debate.

In the meantime, personally, I am happy to accept a somewhat clumsy set of arrangements that maximise transparency around how and why decisions are made or not made in this building, especially insofar as it sets a clear precedent and commits all members of this Assembly, including the executive, to a very high standard of transparency on an ongoing basis.

Regarding the judgement by you, Mr Speaker, on the amendment that I have circulated, I can see the point that Ms Cheyne makes. I understand the Clerk has the capacity to make some minor amendments to reflect the intent of an amendment and get the wording right before the amendment is moved. I understand others intend to, perhaps, adjourn the debate.

MR SPEAKER: I am trying to get an understanding, Mr Emerson. You are not moving the amendment at this stage?

MR EMERSON: I will move the amendment if the issue that Ms Cheyne has pointed to is essentially able to be resolved by the Clerk, because I think the intent of the amendment is clear.

MR SPEAKER: Are you waiting for further input from the Clerk's office or are you moving the amendment?

MR EMERSON: I will move the amendment if you are able to clarify. You might need to seek advice.

MR SPEAKER: We are all adults here. You have made clear in your speech that you seek to have everything on the table with regard to the original motion and the

amendment. I think we are happy to go with that. Perhaps you will want to actually say, "I move".

MR EMERSON: I move the amendment to Ms Castley's amendment circulated in my name:

> Omit "Omit all text after 'That this Assembly', substitute", substitute: "After paragraph (3), add".

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.07): I will speak briefly now, which will perhaps buy some time in relation to a couple of the matters and a potential adjournment to consider other elements that I understand may be moved.

It might also assist in that process if I do go to elements of Ms Castley's proposed amendment, particularly in relation to the government's consideration of funding the Integrity Commission in relation to a lobbying inquiry. Mr Speaker, I can advise the Assembly that the government is yet to make a decision on that matter, principally because through you as the Speaker the Integrity Commission will put forward their proposal. Together with any other proposals that come from officers of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Speaker, you will then bring that forward and we will have a scheduled date before the Expenditure Review Committee to consider those matters. That date is yet to be determined, because we are still at the early stages of the budget process.

The budget is 24 June. So to answer point (c) in relation to Ms Castley's amendment, a decision will be publicly announced as part of the budget on 24 June. Mr Speaker may have some early indication in relation to those matters, as he will be engaged, in his role, with the Expenditure Review Committee. The process for the budget is that the Expenditure Review Committee will make a recommendation to cabinet and cabinet will then need to affirm the recommendations of the ERC. That happens later in the budget process. So for the absolute formality of when a decision will be made, it will be made in June and it will be announced publicly, of which the latest possible day is budget day, 24 June. So having made that statement, I hope that will clarify for Assembly members the process from here in relation to those elements of Ms Castley's amendment.

I will get the opportunity to speak again multiple times in this debate, it would seem! In relation to Mr Emerson's proposed amendment, I appreciate the intent, also the humour associated with some elements of his contribution and also some of the theatrics. I anticipated those. But what I have found amusing, in totality, is everyone's general in-principle agreement around the need to do more here but then all of the specific objections. None of that was unexpected. I would also point out to members that I foreshadowed this in a previous sitting. So this is not new. I pointed this out previously, in relation to the debate about lobbying. I mentioned it last year prior to the election. Now I am not so arrogant as to think that everyone listens and pays attention to everything I say—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: We will get a snide little interjection along the way. Thank you,

Mr Hanson. It is good to see some things never change in this place!

I am asked specific questions by the media or by the opposition in relation to these matters and have been telegraphing this for months—for months. So it is not a new issue. As I observed when moving the motion, having been in this place for nearly two decades, I reiterate the point that there is nothing to fear from this. In fact, it will make every member's job easier.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: We will get all of the narky interjections, and we have just heard a few there. We will get all of that, and that is fine. The substantive issue here is that if you want to stamp out nefarious lobbying, this is a very good way to do it, but not just this alone. I will conclude my remarks on Mr Emerson's amendment at that point. I appreciate the intent of what he is endeavouring to do, and I think there is good reason to proceed down that track. I have already addressed the key points that Ms Castley wants in her amendment.

Ms Castley: No, (3)(a), and number (4).

MR BARR: I am happy to publicly state for (3)(a), that is something the government will consider. In relation to point (4), I pick up on the point Mr Pettersson made that a further amendment to this to actually outline times, dates and processes for these Assembly related inquiries—although the issue, of course, is that every member of that committee, the Standing Committee on Integrity and Statutory Office Holders, is conflicted out, because it relates to their own reporting requirements. So there is a bit of a challenge there.

Now I am not proposing that the executive conduct an inquiry into it, but we have got an issue here! So it is certainly reasonable that we seek advice, and that the parliament seeks advice on that matter. You could imagine your reaction if the government said, "We will have an inquiry into the matter and we will look at it ourselves with no other input." I mean, come on.

This would be a good step forward. I think we will adjourn this matter, after this speech, and have an opportunity to resolve it in a positive way.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Tough**) adjourned to a later hour.

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Pettersson, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.15): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. This is a bill designed to support and improve workers' rights and entitlements, as well as progress minor and technical amendments intended to enhance the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of ministerial advisory bodies as well as afford flexibility to businesses regarding the long service leave portable scheme.

The amendments contained within this bill represent another step this government is taking to streamline workers' compensation payments and afford flexibility to businesses. Work health and safety matters are ever emerging and evolving. Canberrans deserve to experience healthy, safe and supportive workplaces and understand their workers' rights and entitlements. It is also important that the ACT government continues to ensure that ACT legislation remains current, relevant and contributes to national consistency. In this respect, I am delighted to inform the Assembly that this bill amends the Workers Compensation Act 1951 by extending permanent impairment payments to those suffering from work-related silicosis as part of a workers' compensation claim under the ACT private sector scheme.

In providing access to statutory permanent impairment payments, our ACT scheme is somewhat archaic. It relies on naming specific injuries or illness types to be able to access this lump sum payment. Lump sum payments that recognise the permanent impairment and nature of workplace injuries are an important part of our compensation framework. The ACT's private sector workers' compensation scheme provides workers with compensation entitlements and other supports in the event of work-related injury or illness, ensuring access to essential services such as medical treatment, rehabilitation assistance and financial compensation including weekly compensation and lump sum permanent impairment payments. However, in the case of those suffering from and diagnosed with silicosis, they have not been able to access permanent impairment lump sums simply because the disease is not mentioned in the ACT's scheduled list of diseases eligible for a lump sum.

As a nation we have banned engineered stone because of the serious risks of exposure to silica dust and the devastating nature of silicosis. The amendment in this bill will support injured ACT workers who suffer from this terrible and permanent disease. Respirable crystalline silica, or silica dust, poses a significant health hazard to workers when airborne as it can be easily inhaled deep into the lungs, leading to a range of respiratory diseases. Silicosis is a serious, irreversible lung disease that causes permanent disability and can be fatal. Silicosis may continue to progress even after a worker is removed from the initial exposure to silica dust.

Accordingly, national action to ban engineered stone benchtops, slabs and panels under work health and safety laws has been undertaken by all jurisdictions. Currently, under the ACT's private sector workers' compensation scheme, those suffering from work-related silicosis are not able to receive payments for permanent impairment under the statutory claims pathway but may pursue a common law claim to receive compensation for non-economic loss. This amendment will streamline access to permanent impairment benefits under the ACT private sector workers' compensation scheme in relation to accepted claims where there is a silicosis diagnosis. This will

ensure that the statutory benefits pathway remains contemporary and provides an appropriate level of compensation for workers who experience silicosis as an alternative to a lengthy common law pathway. It will also bring the ACT in line with other jurisdictions in their recognition of the need to provide affected workers with lump sum compensation.

The bill also progresses technical amendments that will ensure the efficiency of ministerial advisory bodies, specifically by amending the Government Procurement Act 2001 and the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2020. The Government Procurement Act 2001 establishes the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council, and this bill will see the registrar, who serves as an ex-officio member, take up the role of chair. As a non-voting member, it is appropriate for the registrar to chair the council, noting there are three appointed members who represent employees' interests and another three appointed members who hold qualifications or experience to support the council's functions. The registrar in the capacity of the chair will ensure the effective running and governance of the council. The Labour Hire Licensing Act 2020 establishes the Labour Hire Licensing Advisory Committee. Due to the technical wording of the legislation, the Labour Hire Licence Commissioner is unable to be appointed as the chair. Similarly, as a non-voting member, this bill will see the Labour Hire Licence Commissioner act as the chair of the committee and ensure the effective governance and running of the committee.

A minor technical amendment is also made to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 in respect of the Work Health and Safety Council. Currently, a member of the council may not be reappointed as a member if they have already served a consecutive eight-year term. Acting members are regularly used to ensure the council may run where substantive members are unavailable while ensuring the balanced representation of interests for both employer and employee groups. This amendment provides the clarity that an acting appointment does not count towards the legislated maximum term of a member. This is to ensure that those who hold relevant expertise in work health and safety matters have the opportunity to be appointed as a substantive member where they may have previously been appointed as an acting member but not had the opportunity to engage and contribute as a voting member of the council. Relevant government policies will continue to apply when making appointments to the council.

Finally, the bill will make two technical amendments to the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act 2009. The first amendment is to ensure the provisions regarding minor levy increases made by the governing board are operating as intended. Currently, the governing board may increase levies by no more than 40 basis points within a 12-month period. The technical amendment removes any confusion in relation to the timing of when the 12 months commences, ensuring that any change to levy rates are able to be communicated to affected industries well in advance.

The second amendment to the portable scheme is an adjustment to provide flexibility to businesses regarding the information they provide the authority in their quarterly reports. This is particularly relevant where business may not report on an accrual basis but rather based on pay periods. This amendment introduces a new definition for the meaning of the word "quarter" to include a period as agreed between the registrar and an employer. This amendment is intended to provide flexibility to business in what

information they provide to the authority in respect of a quarter where a pay period may traverse two quarters. This amendment would support business without the need for them to expend further resources to provide reports that adhere to a traditional quarter.

The bill achieves several things across my portfolio as Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations by establishing additional compensation supports for silicosis, clarifying governance matters for ministerial advisory bodies and providing flexibility to ACT businesses engaging with the portable long service leave scheme.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Dr Paterson, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.24): I move:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. This bill will introduce three amendments to the Gambling and Racing Control Act 1999 and the Gaming Machine Act 2004. Two of these amendments will support the independent Inquiry into the Future of the ACT Clubs Industry, once underway, by expanding the purpose for which a gaming officer may use and share information obtained under a gaming law and implementing a two-year pause on payments into, and grants out of, the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund.

The amendments to the information sharing provisions will provide legislative support for information required for the development of robust advice on gaming and related policy matters to be shared with authorised recipients. This bill contains two amendments to enable more robust policy development and advice on gaming and other related policy matters.

The bill will refine the safeguards to disclosing information under section 31(2). The bill will allow the commission, or an authorised officer, to provide a complainant with information, only if the information complies with the following safeguards: the complainant has a legitimate interest in the information; the information given would not unreasonably prejudice another person's privacy or other interests; the information given does not deny another person procedural fairness; and the information given does not adversely affect the conduct of the investigation. The amendment is drafted specifically to give the commission, or authorised officer, discretion on the kind of information disclosed to the complainant. However, there is

a requirement that any information disclosed should comply with the safeguards legislated.

The bill will also amend Section 37(d)(ii) of the Gambling and Racing Control Act to expand the purpose for which a gaming officer may use the information they obtained under, or in relation to, the administration of a gaming law. This will allow for the information to be shared for the purpose of advising or assisting an administrative unit, the minister or any other minister, including the ACT executive, about policy matters or the operation of a gaming law. The expansion of the information sharing provisions will provide the necessary legislative basis to allow government agencies to collaborate on information required for the development of robust advice in gaming and related policy matters. Further, the bill will amend division 11.3 of the Gaming Machine Act to implement a two-year pause on payments into, and grants out of, the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund. From this point on, I will refer to it as the DSSF.

The bill will insert a new section 163H(4A), which will pause the mandatory payments that club licensees contribute to the DSSF for a period of two years. The bill will insert a new section 163I(3) to prohibit the director-general from making a payment out of the DSSF for any applications made during the two-year pause. The intent of the suspension on payments into, and out of, the DSSF is to allow the inquiry to take its course as it will consider matters related to transitioning the club's industry from a broad and comprehensive perspective. This scope will include consideration of current settings related to assisting club revenue diversification, including a comprehensive consideration of the financial and social contribution made by the club's industry to the region's economy, government and community. This will inform a cost-benefit analysis and assist in evaluating and developing government policies. It is appropriate to ensure the DSSF is paused while the inquiry looks into these matters and until the findings of the inquiry are known.

Community clubs continue to be an important part of the Canberra community, as they have been for many years. They are a major local employer and a strong supporter of community support and cultural events. This government is committed to continue to reduce gambling harm in the ACT while supporting a sustainable and robust clubs sector. That is why the government is facilitating an independent inquiry into the future of the clubs industry. Work on establishing the inquiry is well underway and it is expected the inquiry will consult widely with ACT clubs and other interested stakeholders to produce a draft industry transition plan for the government's consideration.

The ACT government also has a strong agenda for improving harm minimisation measures. I remain steadfast in my commitment to reduce the number of poker machines over the next 20 years so there are no more than 1,000 machines by 2045. I also remain committed to the full implementation of cashless gaming with a full suite of harm minimisation measures including mandatory pre-commitment, breaks in play, and a modernised self-exclusion scheme.

In conclusion, this bill contains important amendments to the Gambling and Racing Control Act and the Gaming Machine Act to enhance information disclosure provisions and to assist with conducting a comprehensive and well considered inquiry.

I thank the members of the Assembly for their consideration of this bill.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

> That leave of absence be granted to Ms Berry for this sitting day due to illness.

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 4 March 2025, on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.31): This bill amends the Crimes Act 1900 and Spent Convictions Act 2000 as part of a tranche of reforms related to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14, which, under the current legislative scheme, will commence on 1 July this year. The bill is a significant bill; meaning that it is likely to have significant engagement with our human rights and requires a more detailed rethink in relation to compatibility with the Human Rights Act. It is anticipated that this act will commence on 1 July this year.

The bill forms part of the reforms to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility which were effected through the Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. As members would be aware, while the Canberra Liberals during that term and that debate—and I was pleased to present the case on behalf of the Canberra Liberals—supported raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12, we opposed the rush to 14, which the government is clearly committed to continuing. The position we presented then—and, I am pleased to say, the position we present now—is that there is a requirement for time to be spent on reviewing the impact of raising the age to 12 before we just automatically make it 14 in July this year.

It is my view that this government has not demonstrated sufficient consideration of the impact of raising the age to 12, and we need to take a pause. In particular, as I will touch on briefly and shortly, we need to consider the impact on policing and the exercise of their powers in our community to keep our community safe. I do not believe this government has given sufficient consideration to the policing of the community in rushing through this bill.

The primary goal of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility is to reduce young people's involvement in the criminal justice system, decrease recidivism and encourage diversion strategies while maintaining community policing functions and safety. That is obviously the government's goal. In principle, we have no problem with trying to keep young people and adolescents—in fact, everybody—out of the criminal justice system. The government certainly does need to do more on working

with our community to make sure people find a better path for life than criminal activity—but that is a whole other discussion and debate.

The bill amends the Crimes Act to clarify the application of police powers with respect to a young person under the age of 14. The powers affected include the preventative action powers of police acting under a warrant and without a warrant; the stop and seizure powers of police acting under a warrant; the stop, search or detain powers without a warrant; and the discretionary power to transport a person under 14 years of age to their parent or other appropriate agency, after stopping, searching or detaining them.

The bill inserts a new provision to increase the threshold from "reasonable suspicion" to "reasonable belief". The bill proposes the powers exercised by police will be proportionate—which sounds fine in theory—and well adapted to achieve the dual purpose of limiting the contact of young people, under the minimum age of criminal responsibility, with the criminal justice system and protecting community safety.

It also amends the Crimes Act 1900 to expand the prohibition of specified types of information related to youth offences from being put before a court during a proceeding. A "youth offence" is currently defined as an offence against a territory law committed or allegedly committed by a person when under the age of 12. The bill expands this to prevent disclosure of an offence against laws of the commonwealth, state or other territory—supposedly, to allow equal application of the law across borders. As I will comment on soon, that is clearly not going to be the outcome of this bill.

Concerned stakeholders have reached out to us, the Canberra Liberals, and expressed concerns about the lack of clarity in the legislation regarding police powers to stop, search and detain individuals under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The introduction of a high threshold, such as "belief" now rather than "suspicion" overcomplicates the use of police powers and creates practical concerns for law enforcement in managing urgent situations. Just imagine how many things a police officer stopping an act of violence, an act of theft or dangerous behaviour has to consider? This just unnecessarily burdens our policing with more things to have in mind in exercising their powers in keeping the community safe in an instant in time. This bill does not consider the demands that are placed upon our police, our wonderful police, who are there to keep our community safe and to stop and prevent criminal activity.

The bill also introduces additional considerations for the police in considering the best interests of the child. It is just not clear how police are going to be judged on whether they have appropriately addressed the best interests of the child. Is this going to discourage people wanting to be part of our policing in the ACT? How many things will this government continue to burden our police with as they seek to keep our community safe?

The bill also mandates additional procedural steps, such as involving Indigenous child protection bodies in all cases. That could again create unnecessary red tape. This needs to be more closely examined. I welcome the input from my colleagues Ms Morris and Ms Barry in this debate with their particular focus as well. The ACT

Law Society expressed some concerns about this bill. Obviously, the government would be well aware of those concerns and yet is committed to moving forward, nonetheless.

In terms of trying to make this more uniform across jurisdictions, from July this year, the age of minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT will be 14 and in New South Wales it will be 10. It would not bother me if New South Wales made it 12, but it is 10. In the Northern Territory it is 10, in Queensland it is 10 and Victoria will be 14 as well. Who follows who in this case? Victoria and the ACT seem to be in a bit of a competition in placing the most demands on our police, with the sense of "Aren't we doing a wonderful job of looking after our youth?" But the very opposite may well eventuate.

The minimum age in New South Wales is 10. In New South Wales, for example, the threshold is lower and more practical for police to perform their duties—reasonable suspicion versus reasonable belief. Are we going to see criminals in New South Wales activating 12-, 13- and 14-year-olds to go to the ACT and conduct criminal activity? Is that what we are going to see here—because in New South Wales they would be caught up in a different approach while in the ACT there would be a more lenient approach? Is this going to be a practical outcome? I hope it is not, by the way. But, if you are someone in New South Wales thinking, "What can we get away with in the ACT?" the temptation will be to use children, adolescents, to perform acts that would be criminal in another jurisdiction but not in the ACT. That is a real risk and that is a real worry. Again, using children in that manner obviously exposes them to further harm—being used as a device for criminal activity by others in other jurisdictions.

The ACT wants to introduce a seriousness threshold, which includes consideration of whether the person is under the age of 14. How do the police know this? How do they know that they can take someone into custody without a warrant, for example? The adolescent might say, "'Hey, you cannot do that; I am under 14." What are the police going to do in that situation? It is actually putting demands on our policing that I do not think this government has considered adequately enough in its rush to signal its virtue.

So, unsurprisingly, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this bill. I thank Ms Morris and Ms Barry, knowing the concerns that they will be raising in their contributions to this debate to show that this government has more interest in a message than in an outcome—the outcome being: what can we really do to prevent adolescents and children from becoming part of criminal activity? What should this government be doing? It should be doing more. Also, what about our police? How many burdens will this government continue to place on our police, so that they have to think: "Am I doing the right thing here? Am I going to be disciplined or, even worse, because I made a call but, apparently, I made the wrong call?" How about considering our police and the many, many burdens already on them without adding to that?

This is a rush to change without proper support and without a proper look at ways to actually stop people starting a life of criminal activity, no matter what their age. It is also a rush to send a message of virtue, without proper consideration of the increasing demands that are going to be placed on our police force when this becomes our law in

July this year. As I said, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting this bill. I look forward to my colleagues' contributions.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.43): I am very concerned about the concerted efforts of this government to do what seems to make Canberra a less safe place. Every Canberra child and every Canberra family has the right to be safe in their community. That is why as lawmakers in this place we should always pursue community safety as an overarching and guiding principle of the criminal justice system.

Instead, this government—and the one before it—is pursuing a strategy which I believe is compromising the integrity of the criminal justice system. It is weakening the power of the institutions that are established and designed—with appropriate safeguards and protections in place—to keep us safe. In doing so, I am concerned that this government is inadvertently creating a generation of victims and also a generation of perpetrators, who have become trapped in a cycle, enslaved to their own misdeeds.

When a young person encounters the criminal justice system, we should view it for what it is. It is a cry for help. Often it is our police officers on the frontline who are the very first people to respond to that distraught cry for help. It is our police officers who are the ones who must interact and deal with that outward destructive display of human suffering. I think all of us in this place would agree that young people do not grow up with great desires and ambitions to live a life of violent crime. For those of them who have found themselves on that path, it is usually because something at some point has gone horribly wrong in their lives. When that manifests itself in antisocial, dangerous or criminal behaviour, we need to ensure that our police are appropriately equipped to respond to the situation.

That is why I am concerned about this bill. What I fear it will do is weaken the ability of our police to respond to a young offender in their very hour of need. I fear that this bill will make police powerless. I am concerned that weakening police powers and raising the threshold from which they can be used from "reasonable suspicion" to "reasonable belief" will only create confusion and put police in an incredibly difficult situation where they cannot be sure of how they can lawfully respond.

Police will be powerless to act, because they will need to make a judgement at the scene of a crime on the age of an alleged offender and have reasonable evidence at hand that the alleged offender has committed an offence before they can step in and contain the situation. If their judgement is wrong, then it is the police officer who becomes the offender. I am concerned that this is going to strike fear into the hearts of our officers who, afraid of litigation, will err on the side of doing nothing in response to an urgent situation.

I want to thank the government for providing the opposition with a briefing on this bill. However, regrettably, this briefing has only amplified my concerns. For example—as Mr Cain touched on—what happens if an alleged offender who appears to be older than 14 lies about their age and insists that they are only 11? What is a police officer lawfully permitted to do in that situation? The response that we got in our briefing was confusion. Then there was hesitant agreement that perhaps the police would be required to revert to the higher threshold of "reasonable belief". Then there was confusion about where you draw the line between "reasonable suspicion" and

"reasonable belief".

If the legal minds behind this bill are not entirely confident about how these laws would apply in practice, then how can a police officer—who is the one who is actually on the ground, in the heat of a distraught moment—have confidence that they are operating within the law? Confusion will breed doubt, doubt will breed inaction and inaction will leave that alleged offender without anyone to respond to their cry for help.

I am also concerned at the very short timeframe before these laws commence—fewer than three months. Given the confusion and uncertainty embedded in just about every line of this bill, it is going to take police officers, law enforcement and the legal fraternity quite some time to understand how they will actually be applied in practice. I do not believe that three months is reasonable or adequate for such a task, especially when you factor in the legitimate concerns around the availability of therapeutic services.

It was only one month ago when Labor, the Greens and the Independents voted down an opposition amendment bill which would prohibit convicted child sex offenders from working in legal services that directly relate to children. They said that three months was not sufficient time to educate the legal profession on the law, even though the proposed law placed the burden of responsibility on the convicted offender, not the legal profession. It was a very simple amendment. The amendments that we are debating today are not simple. There is doubt and uncertainty and great concern from stakeholders about how they will be applied in practice—concerns that even the government cannot answer. There are legitimate concerns that diversionary therapeutic services are not available and ready for the transition.

These laws should not be rushed, because the consequences of that will be manifold. Police will be too afraid to do their job, and that is to keep the community safe. Young offenders will continue in their self-destructive downward spiral without any meaningful interventions from authorities, and it is the community who will suffer the consequences of their anti-social behaviour—the assaults, theft, invasions and vandalism. It will be the innocent members of our community, going about their business, who will be left to pick up the pieces of unaccounted behaviour.

I will just make one more point before I close. This bill and the laws that preceded this amendment bill to raise the age of criminal responsibility have spared no thought for the young people who will now become the targets and prey of organised crime. I am concerned that adult criminal syndicates will prey on young people and recruit them to their operations, to be the hands and the feet of their criminal activities. I have met with members of the community whose businesses have been targeted by youth offenders who have been hired by organised crime. I have also heard from law enforcement who are concerned that young people will be recruited to traffic drugs and illicit substances because those conspirators know that children under the age of criminal responsibility will be less likely to encounter resistance from authorities.

As Mr Cain has said, we need to review the impact of raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 before we push on ahead with raising it to 14 and before we rush through laws like this, which only create confusion. We need to be very cautious of

the many vulnerabilities that this amendment bill may create. I fear that all of these vulnerabilities, when combined, will make Canberra a much less safe place, including for our children. I implore all members of this Assembly to vote against this bill.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.52): I thank the government for introducing this bill and, in doing so, I wish to take the opportunity to briefly express my strong support for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT to 14 years. I am glad further consideration has been given regarding how best to give effect to this change.

Incarceration of children should only ever occur as a very last resort when all other options have been exhausted. These reforms, importantly, retain the ability for children aged 12 and 13 to be held criminally responsible for the most serious of charges. The fact is that very few children are actually sentenced to detention in the ACT. Tragically, the majority of children held in custody are on remand before they have been found guilty or not guilty, many of whom are subsequently acquitted or sentenced to a community-based order. By holding these children on remand, we are unnecessarily entrenching them in cycles of incarceration and reoffending that might otherwise never have occurred.

In my recent visit to Bimberi, I was surprised to learn that 24 out of 26 children in custody there were on remand. Only two had actually been convicted. The evidence on this matter is clear: incarceration does not rehabilitate children. Instead, it sets them up for a life of further incarceration. We also know that disadvantaged children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are disproportionately incarcerated. So I am very pleased that the ACT government is leading the way on these reforms in Australia and taking positive steps that will help to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

But we are not going to resolve youth crime if we continue to use incarceration as an easy fix, rather than proactively addressing criminal behaviour through evidence-based wraparound rehabilitation and diversion support programs. I have already flagged in this chamber that I remain concerned that the government is not doing enough to ensure these programs are available. I am worried that insufficient planning and funding for such supports has preceded the introduction of these reforms. I fear that without an urgent injection of funding to support children who will now be diverted out of the criminal justice system, youth re-offending rates will increase and this reform could become a scapegoat.

I note that the government's justification in 2023 for raising the age first to 12 years before progressing to 14 was so that it could have time to put in place appropriate therapeutic supports for children diverted out of the criminal justice system. I know that some such supports have been put in place, but the waitlist to access supports such as those provided by PCYC, for example, are close to 500 children, right before we are proposing to raise the age again. To that end, I implore the government to take more urgent action to do what it committed to doing back in 2023: to increase funding to services that support and rehabilitate children who are coming into contact with or at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system and to ensure that these reforms are successful.

A local Aboriginal leader told me:

> Raising the age is an important step. We shouldn't be treating our vulnerable children as criminals, but it won't fix everything. Vulnerable, suicidal children are still processed through the system in environments that are built for and are currently housing adults. The high rates of First Nations children in prison means it is vital they have access to culturally safe therapeutic support.
>
> The government stopped funding for Interview Friends, people who can be called to support those in custody, which is so vital for First Nations children. The high rate of deaths in custody is never far from our thoughts. I am aware that because the government stopped the funding, First Nations leaders now offered unpaid support to be on call 24/7 for the Watchhouse and any young person in need, if they are arrested or needing an Interview Friend or cultural supports. Community leaders ask that this funding resume so that cultural support is provided to our very vulnerable young people who are brought into custody.

We have a duty to guide children in Canberra toward an alternative path forward and to break the cycle before they become entrenched in it. So I hope the government takes appropriate action to ensure these reforms can create as positive change as possible for our community.

I know the MACR reforms follow international pressure by 31 United Nations member states who called on Australia to raise the age and bring the ACT in line with recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to establish 14 years as the minimum age of criminal responsibility. It aligns with the advice of legal, medical and psychological experts who have long identified that children are being locked up for behaviours explained by their immaturity, disability, trauma and reduced capacity to anticipate in full the consequences of their actions due to their age. This is a tragic outcome, and I am proud that the ACT is leading the charge to reform the system and provide children with an age appropriate response.

I want to applaud the members of this Assembly for the work they did before my time in this place to bring us to this point. I sincerely hope that the rest of Australia can follow this precedent and heed the calls of our UN member states to find a better way forward for our kids.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.57): I too rise to speak to concerns which have been raised by my colleagues Mr Cain and Ms Morris. I want to pick up on a comment Ms Morris said: that, when a young person engages in offending, that behaviour is usually a cry for help. As a mother of two teenage children and a teenage daughter who is consistently active with her peers, I have often been called on to intervene when there is such a cry for help and offer advice. So I understand those circumstances.

We on this side have really serious concerns that this proposed legislation is being rushed and does not allow sufficient time for ACT Policing to train and implement a new and untried administrative approach. We hold serious concerns that our vulnerable young people may be inappropriately managed.

Listening to the response provided during the annual report hearings and concerns that

have been raised with me by several stakeholders, I am specifically and seriously concerned about whether therapeutic support programs which underpin this policy will be in place and well established from 1 July 2025. In the briefing that we received from the minister's office, it was identified that the ACT Police are particularly concerned about the availability of out-of-home supports. Stakeholders have also raised with me that therapeutic supports across child and youth protective services are already under considerable stress and have an overstretched workforce. As a result, children and young people are already not getting the supports and assistance they need to protect them from harm and diverted from anti-social behaviour. There is a risk that the already overburdened therapeutic supports arrangement could be overwhelmed by increased work from 1 July.

There are also two sections of this proposed legislation that refer to the provision of advice to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, or the public advocate. The first instance is section 9, relating to the issue of search warrants under section 1942, which provides that, if an officer decides to issue a warrant under this section, they may direct the person applying for the warrant to give notice before the warrant is executed to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner or public advocate.

I am concerned by the broad discretion implied in the language of the legislation. Clearly, it appears that the intent of this legislation is to embed the roles of the commissioner as an advocate in the decision-making process in relation to the management of children and people under the age of 14. I recognise that it is a tension between the intent and the potential operational needs of police in giving effect to this warrant. However, my concern is that the legislation provides no real guidance to the issuing officer about the circumstances where the giving of that notice would be appropriate or not. I spent a short stint as a defence solicitor, and I understand how, where there is uncertainly, it can affect the application of legislation. It is possible then that the intent of this legislation may be lost in practice where there is no real guidance.

Similarly, the changes in section 252A(e) require that, when a person is detained by police and they are taken to an appropriate person or agency, the police officer must, as soon as practicable, give written notice about the matter to the First Nations children's commissioner or public advocate. I am concerned that the provision of notice occurring only after the child has been placed may be inconsistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This principle requires:

> … the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives, external to the statutory agency, in all service design, delivery and individual child-protection case decision-making. At the individual level, this includes case decisions at intake, assessment, intervention, placement and care, and judicial decision-making processes.

It is not clear to me that these important placement principles are being adequately reflected in the proposed legislation. It is therefore my view that a better option would be to get the settings right rather than rush the decision when serious questions remain unanswered. There is no rush to this legislation. After all, the changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility will come into effect on 1 July, regardless of our

consideration of this bill.

Speaking of rushing, the Therapeutic Support Panel report, dated March 2025, notes that the "TSP is still in a developmental and implementation stage" and needs "increased awareness" and "system readiness". The report also notes that "it is difficult to make firm conclusions regarding TSP and the implications for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility". This is the government's report. In essence, what the report is saying is that we do not know for sure the effects that these key diversionary mechanisms would have on this very important legislation.

I am also concerned that the government, in its explanatory memorandum for this bill, states that the bill is needed as most police powers do not expressly require consideration of the age of the person suspected of committing the offence. I am not persuaded that this issue in and of itself justifies the urgent attention that the government says this bill requires. I have no doubt that the police are aware of the change in the age of criminal responsibility and that sensible operational decisions would be made when the changes come into effect to ensure that persons under 14 will be treated in accordance with the law.

I strongly recommend that the focus of the government should be on getting the therapeutic support processes in place and consulting more broadly on the proposed changes to the police procedures to ensure that vulnerable children and young people actually get the support that they need to divert them from anti-social behaviour and help them become positive contributors to our society. I do not think I can stress enough the importance of this issue. As I have mentioned previously to some members in this place, children and young people matters are the hill I will die on, and it is really important to me that we are getting the settings right. Like I always say, we are the last line of defence for these children, and it is important that we give their matters as much consideration to reduce recidivism and to reduce reoffending for these children when they do get to that age where they can be charged.

Debate (on motion by **Miss Nuttall**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.04 to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): As members would be aware, the Deputy Chief Minister is absent from the Assembly today, so the same arrangements as yesterday in relation to questions will apply today.

Questions without notice

Commissioner for International Engagement

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Prior to the Chief Minister's recent trip to China, any mention of Taiwan was removed from the web pages of the Commissioner for International Engagement. Chief Minister, were you aware that material was scrubbed from government web

pages, and were you involved with this decision?

MR BARR: No and no.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, were any representations made to the ACT government from any foreign governments regarding use of the word "Taiwan"?

MR BARR: It is a very broad question; not that I am aware of—

Mr Cain: Take it on notice then!

MR BARR: but I will take it on notice. Yes, I will take it on notice, Mr Cain. Thank you for answering the question for me!

Mr Cain: You're most welcome!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, that is enough!

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, did the Commissioner for International Engagement make any representations to you or the government about references to Taiwan.

MR BARR: None to me. I will check. Because "the government" is quite a large entity, I will need to check with the commissioner as to whether he has discussed any of these matters with anyone else.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. On several occasions, I have sought to know how much revenue is being forgone by the territory as a result of the botched rollout of MyWay+, and the minister has been unwilling to confirm if this is occurring. I have now heard reports that the buses used in peak periods and on the busiest routes are more likely to have functioning validators than vehicles used on less busy routes. Minister, are these reports correct?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I have provided some information on notice, which I believe has gone through the MyWay+ inquiry, regarding a few things. I refer, firstly, to patronage levels, which, of course, are reflected in fare revenue. It shows that patronage levels are coming back to around the same level as they were last year. That is really good to see, and we expect that MyWay+ will continue to encourage more people to use public transport, which will have a positive impact on revenue.

The decision that I made to slightly delay the implementation of MyWay+ in November last year also had an impact on revenue. I have provided some information on notice as well. We have some information showing around $4 million worth of forgone revenue associated with that transition phase between the old system and the new system. There is some information that I have provided, so I reject the premise of Ms Castley's question.

Of course, there has been hardware installed on buses that are not due to retire. We

have been very clear from the very beginning of the rollout last year that we would not be installing that hardware on buses that are going to be retired. Yes, there has been active management of the use of those buses, where possible, on routes that are less busy, so that limits the amount of fare revenue that may be forgone.

Some of those shifts often have multiple different bus routes associated with them, so it will not be possible on all occasions to limit the use of those buses for some of the rapid routes, but there is certainly an intention to do so.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will you provide the Assembly with information about forecast and actual fare revenue for this financial year?

MR STEEL: When the financial year has ended. I have been very clear about that. We are still going through this financial year. We will, of course, report on that, as we would usually do, and there will be opportunities for the opposition to ask questions in estimates about the forecast actuals for this financial year and impacts on revenue.

Generally speaking, in cities around the country and around the world, there have been impacts on revenue in recent years associated with changed travel habits during COVID-19, and that is still the case. We are still coming out of that period. That has affected budgeted and forecast revenue over recent years, and that still continues, although there is, of course, a changed environment, with the rollout of MyWay+.

It is worth noting that that has included a changed approach in relation to compliance. We are taking an educative approach during the transition to the new system; so we are not undertaking hard compliance that would particularly be undertaken, for example, on light rail vehicles by Canberra Metro, in handing out warnings and infringements. That is because we are giving the people of Canberra time to adjust to new ways of paying for public transport, and we acknowledge that that will have an impact on revenue. Over time, as people become used to it, we will move back to undertaking further compliance activity, as is appropriate.

MR COCKS: Minister, is it true that fare revenue could underperform forecasts by more than $10 million this year?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, we will report on that once the year has ended, and I provided feedback on that in the previous answer. I also note that some of the forecasting was around pre-COVID revenue targets. In cities like Canberra, public transport systems are still recovering patronage compared to prior to COVID-19. That has impacted on revenues and budgeted revenues as well.

Canberra Health Services—fees for service

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. In your ministerial statement yesterday, you said that CHS is working with specialists who undertake fee for service to phase out this way of paying medical professionals. Minister, can you confirm that the CEO of CHS is holding discussions with medical professionals to retain the fee-for-service model?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, I can, because the two things are not inconsistent. We

are talking about phasing it out over time. There are two things that I have said consistently in relation to this matter. Firstly, we wanted to have productive collaborative conversations with our senior clinicians about how we can deliver a more efficient and effective health system, and the changes to visiting medical officer contracts over time were part of that conversation. Secondly, anyone with an existing contract would retain that contract for the life of the contract, and anyone whose contract was expiring within the next six months would have that contract extended while these conversations were underway. So both things are true. We are, over time, phasing out fee-for-service contracts. But the CEO of Canberra Health Services is also having very productive conversations with a range of specialist groups, which I am really pleased to say now includes orthopaedics, about how to structure those contracts going forward to ensure that we can deliver the most efficient and effective health service for Canberrans.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why are you on the one hand claiming that you are phasing out the "outdated" fee-for-service model, yet the CEO is negotiating with medical professionals to keep it?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Castley to my previous answer.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, do you really know what is going on in your health portfolio when you are saying one thing and your CEO is saying another?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I also refer Mr Milligan to my answer to the first question. As I said from the very start, existing contracts will be maintained, and I was encouraging our visiting medical officer workforce to engage in productive conversations and collaborative conversions with the leadership of Canberra Health Services. We want to work together to deliver an efficient and effective health system. That is exactly what is now happening. Also, I note for the record, as I have before, that the vast majority of our visiting officers are already on sessional contracts. In fact, a minority are on any kind of fee-for-service contract. If it is going to deliver a more effective and efficient service to retain some of the fee-for-service arrangements—at least for a period and at least for our existing clinicians—we are open to that conversation. We have always been open to conversation.

Margaret Timpson Park

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. On Monday, Labor's MP for Fenner, Andrew Leigh, announced that a re-elected federal Labor government would provide $1.5 million for upgrades at Margaret Timpson Park at Belconnen. I also note that ACT Labor made the exact same promise during the 2024 election. Chief Minister, who is actually going to pay for the upgrades at Margaret Timpson Park? You, or the federal government?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne, are you going to take this one?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, I can Mr Speaker, although the question is about a federal Labor Party election commitment. Yes, if the election goes in Labor's favour, then I expect them to deliver on that election commitment and to pay for it.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, if federal Labor are going to pay for the upgrades to the park, does that mean that you will now use the $1.5 million you have saved to help pay for, say, the continued operation of Burrangiri respite centre?

MS CHEYNE: This is capital funding that is for new projects within the City Services portfolio. It is subject to a budget process, just like any commonwealth funding that we get is further subject to a budget process. I am not going to engage further in hypotheticals.

MR CAIN: Minister, over the next four weeks, which other ACT Labor election policies will be funded by federal Labor, in order to try and save this government money and prevent any further ACT budget blow-outs?

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you look keen.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker—

Mr Cain: Why the change? Could we not have the same minister?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, have you finished your question?

Mr Cain: Well, no I have not actually!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, Mr Cain—enough!

MR BARR: Perhaps for Mr Cain's benefit, the executive can determine who will answer questions. The initial question related to a project both in Ms Cheyne's portfolio and her electorate. In relation to future announcements from federal Labor, that is a matter for them. Once the federal election is concluded and we know who the government of the day is, there will—

Mr Cain: You can tell us what you know surely—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, Mr Cain.

MR BARR: There will be a process through our budget where we will seek to understand all of the future commonwealth government's commitments and their impact on the territory. Look, I would be very pleased if the federal Liberal party would make any commitment to Canberra other than cutting jobs! It remains to be seen what further commitments will be made during the campaign by either potential party of government.

United Ngunnawal Elders Council

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The United Ngunnawal Elders Council is a long-established Aboriginal body providing advice to the ACT government in relation to heritage and connection-to-land matters for the Ngunnawal people, comprised of representatives nominated by each of the Ngunnawal family groups. Minister, is there a review of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council underway?

MS ORR: I think I am going to take that on notice. There is a review of the elected body—the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—but the United Ngunnawal Elders Council is not actually a government function. There is a little bit of autonomy there in the decisions that they make, so I can seek some advice—

MR SPEAKER: Are we clear on the question, Ms Orr? Do we need Mr Rattenbury to repeat it?

MS ORR: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: If it is helpful, I am specifically asking about the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, UNEC. It has been put to me that there is a review underway, and I am seeking the minister's advice on that.

MS ORR: I am going to take that on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: As a related question: have United Ngunnawal Elders Council members been consulted on the terms of reference for this review—if it is taking place?

MS ORR: I will take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is it also the case that the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—the only democratically elected voice to government in Australia—is also under review, and what is the process of consultation for this review?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my first answer, where I said that yes, with the elected body there is a review going on, in consultation with the elected body. I think this is always good to have in any organisation after it has been operating for a period of time, just to make sure that it is still operating with the best of its functions and to its greatest capacity in realising what we want to do.

But I have been somewhat at arm's length from the review, because it has been, very much, steered by the elected body. I am quite looking forward to the recommendations they bring on how we can continue to realise the potential of what is, essentially, our Voice to government and to the parliament.

Crime—domestic and family violence

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Domestic and Family Violence. The domestic and family violence report, published in 2023, highlighted the increase in deaths from domestic violence since 2016. Your government has clearly known about the increasing prevalence of domestic violence in our community. So why has it taken 12 months since the Assembly passed the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Act to let the community know that this critically important legislation will be delayed?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have been trying to work

through the implementation of the information-sharing scheme. Over the past few weeks, it has become very apparent that there is still work to be done on that before I could have confidence that the scheme would be up and running in full effect. Ultimately, a decision was made. I believe that, to proceed with the commencement of this act at this time would put the safety of women and children at risk in the ACT and so it is best to delay the commencement and actually see full implementation when it is ready.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why have you waited until now, just weeks before the legislation is due to commence, to announce an 18-month delay?

DR PATERSON: Because work was underway. It was really an assessment of what work had been completed and where the stages of work were at. Ultimately, it was deemed that the scheme was not ready for implementation, in order to keep the community safe.

MS BARRY: Minister, why do victims of domestic and family violence have to wait another 18 months for greater support?

DR PATERSON: I want to assure the Assembly and the community that I have received assurance regarding the current information-sharing legislation and schemes and the family violence assistance program, which actively shares information between different government agencies and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. I have also had consultations with the Canberra Rape Crisis Service. All of those services and agencies have confirmed to me that current arrangements are appropriate until the scheme is up and running and the training has been conducted. We are also revising the risk assessment framework, which also requires training. That will include coercive control—which we debated here in the Assembly a few weeks ago—and we know the importance of that being included.

So, rather than notify an instrument that we would then have to come back and notify again in a few months time and have to run all the training again, it is absolutely appropriate that we commence all this work that still needs to be done in order to keep the community safe.

Federal government—infrastructure funding

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you please share with the Assembly any recent infrastructure announcements made by the commonwealth and what they mean for the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for the question. The Albanese Labor government has been delivering real outcomes for Canberra, with major investments in transport infrastructure to support our growing population, reducing congestion and improving our quality of life. It is a long-term commitment to building a more connected, accessible and liveable city, backed by nearly $60 million in new commonwealth funding for projects in the ACT in the 2025-26 budget alone. This funding will deliver on vital road links within the ACT, including the Monaro Highway and Gundaroo Drive, as well as further funding of $25 million for the stage 2 upgrades to the Barton Highway, completing duplication across the border into the ACT, providing better and

safer connectivity with surrounding regions.

These investments mean safer roads, more reliable travel times and expanded options for active transport. This adds to substantial ongoing federal support for light rail, cycling paths and active transport, ensuring Canberrans have safer, smoother and more connected journeys.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you provide any further detail on the specific road projects in the ACT supported by these commonwealth announcements?

MS CHEYNE: The recent infrastructure commitments help complete and progress key road upgrades across Canberra. This includes $30 million to finalise stage 1 of the Monaro Highway upgrade, delivering safer intersections and new lanes, and $20 million to progress stage 2 planning, covering upgrades at Mugga Lane, Tralee Street and Isabella Drive. The $3½ million for Gundaroo Drive supports the completion of that road's duplication, following a number of issues which increased time and cost for that project.

We welcome the federal government's recognition and support for projects designed to reduce travel times, to support freight movement and to improve safety for local communities and communities in Canberra's north and south.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the additional funding from the commonwealth's Active Transport Fund improve walking and cycling infrastructure in Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary question. The commonwealth's Active Transport Fund is investing $8½ million in Canberra to extend and improve walking and cycling infrastructure. This includes $5 million to extend the Garden City Cycleway connecting North Ainslie and Majura primary schools with the new 3.15-kilometre shared path. Stage 1 from Braddon to Ainslie will be completed in May 2025, with the final connection from Torrens Street to the Lonsdale Street intersection to be completed later this year, with work commencing on stage 2 in 2026. Another $3½ million will deliver the Hall Village Main Route, a 2.3-kilometre community path linking Gold Creek and Hall.

These projects are designed to deliver safer, more accessible infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians, to reduce traffic pressure and to support the ACT's shift towards cleaner, more active modes of transport.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The MyWay+ inquiry has heard evidence from two individuals who acted with integrity and came forward stating that they had accessed other Canberrans' personal and payment information in MyWay+. I understand that there is now a third person who is in the process of coming forward. This is contrary to the ACT government's repeated claims that no such access occurred and that no evidence of such access exists within the logs. This is now a question of credibility for the ACT government. Minister, why should Canberrans trust the ACT government's word on the reliability of the accessed

records, and why should Canberrans believe that malicious hackers did not exploit the same IT vulnerabilities?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. The government has provided a quite comprehensive response to those two individuals on the issues that they raised through both Australian government and ACT government agencies. Those responsible disclosures were taken seriously, and the issues that were identified were addressed immediately. Steps were taken within hours to address the issues that were raised. If there has been a third responsible disclosure made, that should be treated responsibly. Mr Braddock should make the ACT government's Chief Information Security Officer aware of that immediately, if that has been brought to his attention, in order for that vulnerability to be assessed and, if required, action taken to address that and close the vulnerability, if it still exists.

We have provided advice—the Director-General of Transport Canberra and City Services has written to the MyWay+ inquiry secretariat, and I believe that submission was published as part of the submissions to the inquiry—outlining the process for responsible disclosure that we follow, and encouraging committee members and members of the Legislative Assembly to comply with that. If Mr Braddock has received information or is aware of a vulnerability, can I ask him to please responsibly disclose that, so that it can be assessed through the appropriate channels, as the other two matters were, and closed down immediately.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will you correct the record and admit that Canberrans' personal and payment information was in fact accessed in an unauthorised manner?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have already put on record an answer to that, and we have addressed that issue. If Mr Braddock has evidence that we are not aware of, he should bring that forward and present it to the government, as part of the responsible disclosure process.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, beyond the "expectations" and "disappointment" with NEC on MyWay+ that we heard from you yesterday, what are you actually doing to hold them to account for shoddy compliance with their contract?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I mentioned in question time yesterday, there are a range of terms of the contract which relate to the delivery phase of the contract, and we are holding NEC to account in making sure that the contracted items are delivered within that phase, and that they continue to improve a range of different things when it comes to disability standards and their compliance and conformity with those at a high level. We have already seen a range of functionality that has rolled out over the last few weeks and months in relation to items which have addressed some of the key issues that have been raised since "go live" in November. We are continuing to work with them and hold them accountable regarding meeting those requirements.

In relation to cybersecurity, which is what I assume Mr Rattenbury's supplementary question relates to, when those issues have been raised, they have been dealt with immediately. Cybersecurity is an ongoing risk for any IT system. The cybersecurity threat environment is evolving and changing, and we all need to remain vigilant and

have continued vigilance around addressing those matters. If there are new issues that have come to light, they need to be raised immediately and responsibly.

Housing affordability—Rent Relief Fund

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. The government's Rent Relief Fund provides emergency assistance for renters and low-income earners who are experiencing financial hardship to catch up on rent arrears, relieve some pressure and prevent eviction. It is administered by Care ACT, who were recently informed that the program's funding would be discontinued in the upcoming budget. They were told the decision had already been made and not to bother including the Rent Relief Fund in their budget submission. Was any modelling undertaken to determine the impacts of this decision on our already unacceptably long social housing waitlists, and, if so, could you please explain to renters under financial pressure how that modelling justifies this decision during a cost-of-living crisis?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I think most people in this place understand that the Rent Relief Fund was established in April 2023 as a short-term program to address cost-of-living pressures that had arisen during and after the COVID-19 lockdown periods. The ACT government then extended funding twice, with a total allocation of more than $3 million provided towards grants and $640,000 towards Care's administration costs. Care has done an absolutely fantastic job and, in respect of that, I indicated to them that the program was unlikely to continue past its current end date, noting that this was subject to budget processes, of course, and again stressing that this was a short-term program.

We know that, thanks to several progressive, compounding and effective legislative reforms to rent in the ACT, we are now one of the most, if not the most, affordable jurisdictions. Equally, a large number of programs remain available for support and through which renters can seek assistance. In particular, I reference the Tenancy Assistance Program that is run out of Woden Community Service. It provides tailored wraparound support that stabilises tenancies and mortgages and focuses on early intervention and prevention.

MR EMERSON: Will the government reconsider its decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund, given the potentially disastrous impact on some members of our community who most need our support and on our social housing waitlists?

MS CHEYNE: As I have said, there are already a considerable number of programs available. The Rent Relief Fund was considered to be an extraordinary, short-term, discrete and time limited program at the time, but there are other programs and supports available and clear on the ACT government's cost-of-living assistance page. I refer anyone who believes that they are under financial stress or in any sort of housing instability to, before it escalates, approach the Tenancy Assistance Program to get wraparound support and intervention.

MR RATTENBURY: Is the decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund a sign of things to come for vulnerable Canberrans in the upcoming budget?

MS CHEYNE: No.

Roads—regional roads

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, I refer to your colleague, Minister Steel's, motion back in 2022 calling on the commonwealth government to reclassify regional roads which are not in Canberra's urban footprint as regional in order to qualify for the commonwealth government's 80:20 funding split. I have had correspondence from Smiths Road residents who have advised me that the current condition of this road is dangerous, and it has been dangerous for awhile. They would prefer the road fixed, irrespective of which government pays for it. Minister, have you had any luck getting the commonwealth Labor government to reclassify these roads as regional?

MS CHEYNE: These conversations are ongoing. I have received, I expect, the same representations that Miss Nuttall has. Of course Smiths Road and its interaction with the border does mean that we do need to engage several different levels and areas of government across several jurisdictions. I will take the direct question itself on notice because I want to make entirely sure that I have the latest detail of where those conversations are up to.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, if we do not secure 80:20 funding, how long will the residents of Smiths Road have to wait before they receive the necessary safety upgrades?

MS CHEYNE: I think that is couched as a hypothetical, Mr Speaker.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, in the meantime, how do you ensure the accessibility of Smiths Road to emergency vehicles?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock. My understanding is that there has been some investment in Smiths Road by Roads ACT relatively recently, but again, my memory might be dicey on this, so I am going to take it on notice and look to come back to the chamber quickly.

Lanyon Marketplace—works

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. As part of the government's upgrades to Lanyon Marketplace, a bench—which has been fondly referred to as "Benchie McBenchface" by yours truly—was installed directly across a walkway, blocking shoppers from accessing a popular shortcut into the shops. Roughly two weeks later, the bench was removed after community uproar, which included a running competition to name the infamous bench and a public event to collectively step over the bench. RIP, Benchie McBenchface!

Minister, how much did it cost to erect and then remove the bench?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that specific question, Mr Speaker, on notice. I appreciate you are very interested in that answer, too, Mr Speaker.

MS MORRIS: Minister, now that the bench has been removed, does the government

consider that the upgrades to the Lanyon Marketplace are now complete?

MS CHEYNE: It has not just been about the bench, Mr Speaker. As you know, we have undertaken some further changes, particularly as a result of Ms Tough's representations to the ACT government and a walkaround that was conducted with her.

What I would say is that with this process for the Lanyon Marketplace upgrades the communication was not at the standard that I expect, and it was certainly not at the standard that this chamber—or, indeed, the community—expects, particularly when there was a variation applied to the design that was not shared with me, my office or the community, but it was shared with Lanyon Marketplace owners. That really did not meet expectations.

In terms of completion, I need to double-check if there is anything further that we have planned. Again, I want to be accurate, so I will come back to the chamber.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, if the government cannot install a park bench in the right location, how can Canberrans trust that the government will get the budget on track?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, the government did believe that it was installing the bench in an appropriate location. You would know that it was near an area that has a tree—and the thing that allows the tree to grow! Effectively, the government had been seeing that if people were using that as a walkway it was not ideal for the tree. It was relatively narrow. I believe that the bench was put there with good intent as this was not the most appropriate route for people to be taking—not realising that this is a very popular route, as it turns out. Thus, the bench has been moved. I would note to Mr Milligan that there are good intentions behind these decisions. It was not nefarious.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health. Burrangiri provides 4,500 bed-nights per year and is fully subscribed, with wait times up to six months for respite in aged-care facilities. What have you done to address the shortfall in respite capacity that will result from the closure of Burrangiri? Where have you secured the same amount of bed nights to ensure that the community is not left on long waiting lists for respite?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will not go through the background to all of this again in terms of the reason that the decision was taken and when it was taken with regard to Burrangiri, which relates to both the physical condition and the requirement for maintenance of the facilities and also the ending of the contract with the Salvation Army coming together. I have been clear previously that we had considered alternatives to ACT government funding of respite care, which is clearly a commonwealth responsibility.

Yesterday I pointed Ms Carrick and other members to the fact that CarersACT runs a carer gateway specifically to work with carers to identify both emergency and planned respite care. We are also working with CarersACT—and committed through the

election to work with CarersACT—to find land for them to build a new purpose-built respite facility, which they have clearly indicated would not require ongoing operational funding from the ACT government, clearly indicating that funding for this service is available through aged-care and National Disability Insurance Scheme programs.

What I can say to Ms Carrick is that, as a result of the Albanese Labor government's investment in aged care and its reform of aged care, after a decade of neglect of aged care, there are new aged-care facilities scheduled to open in the ACT in the next 12 to 18 months, including the new aged-care facility due to open in Aranda in the middle of this year and a new aged-care facility due to open in Wright before the end of this year. Those brand new aged-care facilities can be expected to increase the availability of respite care through residential aged care in the ACT.

MS CARRICK: What analysis have you done to determine how much it will cost the government to provide beds in aged-care facilities and in the hospital, when people cannot move through to respite due to the long waiting lists?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do need to clarify in relation to my last answer that I am not putting words in Arcare's mouth that they will specifically provide respite care, but that the pool of residential aged care in the ACT is expanding as a result of the Albanese government's reform of and investment in aged care. After a decade of neglect, we are seeing the first significant investment and expansion of aged-care facilities in the ACT and around the country, under this government, and some of them are due to open very soon.

In relation to people who are in hospital waiting for discharge or who are potentially going to be in hospital, as I have also indicated, Canberra Health Services already runs a step-down service for people who are ready for discharge from hospital but are not able to go straight home. One of the options that we considered in terms of the use of this more than $1.8 million of funding a year was to transfer some of that funding to Canberra Health Services to enable them to expand that service availability.

Members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, that service availability is something that I detailed in my response during the previous debate on Ms Carrick and Ms Castley's motion. If we were going to fund additional respite capability or step-down from hospital capability, that would be the mechanism that we would do it through. But this is very clearly not only a responsibility of the commonwealth government but also an activity that is funded under My Aged Care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are you planning to more Arcadia House's services to Burrangiri?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not know if the freedom of information request has come out yet, but that is one of the options that we are considering for Arcadia House and for the Burrangiri facility. But no decision on that has been made, and I could not tell you whether the Burrangiri facility will be an appropriate site for what is currently the alcohol and drug service at Arcadia House on the North Canberra Hospital

campus. That is potentially one future option for the site.

But what I can assure both Mr Emerson and this Assembly is that the decision in relation to Burrangiri was taken after I received advice that the facility was going to have to shut down for a period of time anyway to undertake significant maintenance and refurbishment work in relation to things like electrics, heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

So, yes, Mr Emerson, Burrangiri is one of the potential identified sites for the relocation of the Arcadia House service, but it is not the only site. I await further work being done in relation to where the most appropriate relocation of that service is. I also note that any relocation of that service is likely to be a short-term, temporary solution while further work is done in relation to a long-term solution for Arcadia House. It is very unlikely that the Burrangiri facility would be an appropriate long-term solution for that. But, again, I will not be able to receive further advice about that until that site is vacant and someone can get in and do the work on understanding the options for future use of that site.

Economy—economic indicators

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, what were the changes in the key economic indicators for the ACT in the federal budget?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The federal budget handed down by the Albanese Labor government highlighted the strong fundamentals of the Australian economy and reflects the strong local ACT economy as well. Australia's economic outlook, like ours, remains resilient, despite global and local challenges.

The federal budget outlined that nominal GDP is expected to grow by 4¼ per cent this year and nominal GDP growth is then expected to slow to 3¼ per cent in 2025-26. This pick-up in economic growth is offset by moderation in domestic inflation and a sharper fall in the terms of trade.

All Canberrans will welcome the updates in the federal budget, which expects headline inflation returning to the RBA's target band, and it is now expected to be 2½ per cent through the year to the June quarter 2025, a quarter of a percentage point lower than forecast in December.

Unlike the experience of other advanced economies, under a Labor government Australia has been able to achieve a substantial moderation in inflation whilst maintaining a low unemployment rate, and Canberrans are experiencing significantly low unemployment at 3 per cent and a continued and sustained wage growth as well, with some of the best results in the nation. But, of course, this is directly under threat at the election with the potential return of a coalition government that slashes public sector jobs, which will have flow-on effects to the private sector and employment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, how is a reduction in inflation likely to benefit Canberrans?

MR STEEL: The budget handed down prior to President Trump's tariff frenzy shows a reduction in inflation, with the market now likely to experience further interest rate cuts based on the market expectations. Despite the uncertainty, this is good news for Canberrans with a mortgage, who can expect to see rate relief helping with cost of living.

This will be supported with direct cost-of-living measures that the federal Labor government has announced, like boosting Medicare and energy bill relief. Lower inflation will support lower household prices and reduction in input costs for construction, a major focus of both of our governments in addressing the housing crisis. It will also provide more certainty for business and confidence in the economy overall.

Across the Australian economy, business investment remains at decade high levels, supported by resilient business balance sheets and strong capacity utilisation. And while growth is expected to moderate, the level of investment will remain elevated. In the ACT, we continue to see strong growth in our own Gross State Product and State Final Demand as well. This growth does face risks and may be seriously jeopardised by challenges in the global economy, particularly those from populist policymakers overseas, but it is also at risk from the election of a coalition government.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what were the major risks identified to the economic indicators?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. The escalation of global trade tensions has contributed to significant market volatility and made the international outlook more uncertain. Tariffs and other trade barriers predicted in the federal budget, and implemented since the budget, weigh on global growth and also adversely affect demand for key Australian exports, domestic business confidence and investment.

At a local scale, these risks are compounded by Peter Dutton's consistent but incoherent attacks on Canberra and the public service. Mr Dutton has retained his central promise to cut 41,000 Canberra based public servants. And let's not forget he started the year promising only 36,000 cuts, and then it got even higher. He is now promising to cut around 15 per cent of all jobs in the Canberra economy. Now that he has finally had his pollsters convince him that directly attacking workers' rights and targeting women in the workforce might be bad for his political chances, he has pivoted to telling voters his cuts will be "just like Howard"; a time when Canberra home values dropped dramatically, as thousands of Canberrans lost their jobs and the local economy crashed.

Planning and development—Belconnen

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. Two apartment towers with 297 units are proposed for 44 College Street in Belconnen. How many public homes will be required to be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am not aware of any public homes as part of that development. As I have previously discussed with the member,

and in question time as well, the ACT government, through our housing supply and land release program, will identify around 15 per cent for affordable and social homes, as part of the program each year. That is the way that we support the supply of more affordable homes. We have a commitment that we took to the election to support 5,000 affordable, community and social homes, including public housing, of which 1,000 will be public homes to 2030. We are looking forward to getting on with delivering that commitment.

MS CLAY: How many community homes will be required to be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I am not aware of any, as part of that particular development.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what types of affordable housing will be built in this development?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and confirm whether any affordable dwellings are being provided as part of that development.

Taxation—reassessments

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance.

I have been advocating for constituents slugged with retrospective reassessments of stamp duty exemptions and tens of thousands of dollars in bills by your government. This includes domestic violence victims who are experiencing significant distress as a result of the process, the long wait times and your lack of response. This includes people for whom I requested your urgent response because I held serious concerns for their welfare. These constituents have still had no response after months and I still hold serious concerns for their wellbeing. Minister, why have you left vulnerable people, who are already traumatised as a result of domestic violence, hanging in limbo with no response for months?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. The decisions and work of the Commissioner for ACT Revenue are independent from that of the minister. I can assure Mr Cocks that my office has been working very closely with the revenue commissioner. If there are individuals who have not heard back from the Revenue Office or my office, I would encourage Mr Cocks to please draw those individual matters to my attention. We have been trying to make sure that people have received information, but the decisions that are made in relation to these matters are not decisions for the minister, and some of these matters are quite complex. Changes are being made in the broad that would mean that individual decision-making in relation to waivers and the like would not be required, and the revenue commissioner has been keeping me and the Treasurer informed of that process.

It was my understanding that we had informed Mr Cocks of that process. I am very happy to offer him a briefing in relation to the work that the revenue commissioner is doing. I can assure Mr Cocks that my office has been working closely with the ACT Revenue Office to understand the individual matters, but the actual decision-making is not a responsibility of the minister. Like Mr Cocks, I would like these matters to be

resolved as quickly as possible, but I am not a decision-maker on these matters.

MR COCKS: Minister, when was the last time you were personally briefed by the directorate on the individual situations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice. As I indicated, one of my staff has been very closely engaged with the Revenue Office in relation to some of these matters. I generally get a written briefing when it comes up in relation to correspondence. I have not been personally briefed by the revenue commissioner in relation to individual matters, because my office has been working through that with the Revenue Office. I have received a number of policy briefings and, of course, in relation to correspondence, I sometimes receive information in relation to individual matters as well. I also regularly request such information. I will take the question on notice to advise Mr Cocks on when I was last briefed on one of those individual matters.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you immediately pause the government's retrospective stamp duty reassessments and interest program to ensure the wellbeing of all those impacted?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have no legal authority to do such a thing, so no. I also note, in relation to the questions on notice that have been provided, that a very small proportion of Home Buyer Concession Scheme recipients have received a notice of reassessment. This process of integrity in the tax and concession regime is really important. Were assessments to pause and then be recommenced and, subsequently, people were found to have incorrectly claimed a concession, their interest bill would actually be larger after the pause and recommencement of those considerations. Firstly, I do not have the authority to do it, and, secondly, it may in fact be harmful to some individuals.

I completely understand and I sympathise with the point that Mr Cocks is making. I have actually previously raised these issues on behalf of my own constituents as well, both in the last term of government and since becoming minister, and my office is working very diligently with the Revenue Office to try to resolve these issues as quickly as possible. Some of them have a level of complexity, and, again, I am not a decision-maker in these matters.

Taxation—reassessments

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance. In your recent responses to ministerial representations regarding land tax and conveyance duty reassessments and objections, and again today, you have stated that you lack the authority to intervene in decisions made by the revenue commissioner. Minister, what formal advice have you received regarding your capacity to intervene—or not intervene—in revenue matters?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

MR COCKS: Minister, have you advocated on behalf of any of the constituents facing reassessments totalling tens of thousands of dollars, including those whose welfare I have specifically raised with you?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Certainly, my office, at my direction, has advocated on behalf of some of these individuals and, as I have indicated in response to previous questions, there is a systemic change I expect to flow through the system and it will address specifically some of the issues that Mr Cocks has raised on behalf of constituents. Mr Braddock, I acknowledge, raised one of these matters with me directly the other day as well, in relation specifically to people who have separated but not formally divorced, and prior to purchasing a home they have claimed the home buyer concession on the basis that they have separated but they have not actually formally divorced, and that is considered differently. There is some work underway in relation to those matters. I will take on notice to provide an update to the Assembly in relation to that work as well, because that has been a result of advocacy both from other members of this place, but also from me and my office to address that issue.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will you table the advice you have received concerning your powers, or limitations, in relation to the revenue commissioner's decisions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I suspect that the advice is largely verbal advice in discussion with the revenue commissioner but I will take on notice the extent to which I have received written advice in relation to that matter.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice
Lanyon Marketplace

MS CHEYNE: I have some answers about the Lanyon Marketplace works. Yes, they are considered to be complete. However, TCCS are finalising the location of "Benchie McBenchface", or whatever it is called; it has many names. I believe there was a competition, Mr Speaker, and I hope you made good on your prize money! They are finalising the location for the bench seat to be relocated. They are also working on a new mural which, of course, requires some consideration regarding where and who. We welcome any further feedback or suggestions from the community and, like all feedback and suggestions, they will be considered and implemented where we can.

Legislative Assembly—point of order—Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (2.59): I would like to address a point of order raised by Mr Braddock earlier today. Mr Braddock's point of order related to whether an MLA believed that another MLA had failed to fully declare everything that they should declare in their declaration of interests. Mr Braddock, in his point of order, suggested that that MLA should be compelled to report their belief that the other MLA had failed to fully declare.

Upon checking as to whether that form of reporting is included in our standing orders or protocols—whether there is a compulsion—members are not compelled to report such a belief, but they are free at any point to raise the matter with the Commissioner for Standards. That is the situation.

Paper

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following paper:

> Planning Act, pursuant to section 77—Planning (Watson) Major Plan Amendment 2025—Notifiable Instrument, dated 7 April 2025, including associated documents.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2025

Mr Cocks, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.01): I move:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I introduce the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2025. This is a practical, values-driven piece of legislation that responds to a growing problem, and one that we have seen play out clearly over the past six months; that is, put simply, the lack of timely, transparent reporting to this Assembly when major financial decisions are made by the executive.

This bill is about restoring the basics of good financial management—transparency, accountability and the proper role of the Assembly in overseeing the use of public money, in particular in relation to the use of the Treasurer's advance and the capital works reserve.

Provisions such as the Treasurer's advance and the capital works reserve are not unreasonable tools to manage budget overruns when things go wrong or when something unexpected happens. They are there to protect the territory against the risk, for example, of a government shutdown due to unforeseen events.

That said, the provision of a Treasurer's advance is a privilege that should not be abused. Frankly, a money-spending provision that provides a single minister, however trustworthy, with such a high degree of flexibility and discretion about how it is spent provides the greatest incentive and opportunity for misuse or, in the worst scenarios, corruption. Where those risks exist for an executive, it is imperative that the legislature has the greatest degree of oversight and the community has the benefit of the greatest degree of transparency. When it comes to transparency and oversight, timeliness is critical.

Currently, when the Treasurer uses the Treasurer's advance or the capital works reserve to allocate tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars, members of this place may not hear about it for months. These decisions are only reported through quarterly financial statements, circulated up to 45 days after the end of each quarter, potentially 135 days after a decision was made.

That is far too long. In that time, decisions involving huge sums of money are made, acted on and spent without scrutiny, and without even the basic courtesy of notice to

this chamber. That might be convenient if a government wanted to manage headlines, but it is not good governance, it is not good for a democracy and it is not good for the community. It is definitely not good for the ACT, which is facing the worst deficit in its history.

There is a very specific problem with respect to the budget. The final quarter of a financial year is the period when it is most likely that a project or portfolio could run out of money and require support from the Treasurer's advance; but, under the current reporting mechanisms, the Assembly would have no visibility of that occurring until well after the budget has been presented and passed, and no opportunity to ensure that the government corrects course when something is going off the rails.

This bill proposes a simple fix. It requires the Treasurer to provide the Speaker with a copy of any authorisation made under either the Treasurer's advance or the capital works reserve within five business days. The Speaker must then circulate the authorisation to all members of the Assembly as soon as practicable. That is it. There is no significant administrative or reporting burden and no interference with the Treasurer's powers; just basic transparency, and basic respect for this Assembly and the community.

Let us be clear about what triggered this issue becoming apparent in the first place. The development of this bill was triggered by a budget that, within months of an election, fell apart. It responds to a budget review that revealed hundreds of millions of dollars in unbudgeted costs—costs that the government had to scramble to cover with emergency funding.

We now know that, in the months after the election, the Treasurer authorised tens of millions of dollars in emergency health funding using the Treasurer's advance. That money was never part of the budget that the government took to the people. Instead, we were presented with spin that said that things were under control when they were not, and spin that said finances were sound when they were not.

The Canberra Liberals support a flexible financial framework with appropriate safety nets. Budgets must be able to respond to change, but flexibility should not mean secrecy. Transparency should not be optional. It is a cornerstone of good governance. It protects public confidence. It supports scrutiny and it helps this place to function in the way it was designed to function.

The Treasurer's advance allows the government to allocate up to $80 million in public money outside the budget process. That is not pocket change. That is a serious power, and the Assembly needs to know—it deserves to know—when that power is used. This bill does not interfere with that power, but it does shine a light on it at the right time, not five months later.

The urgency of this step is clear when we look at what is happening with this government's approach to budget management more broadly. In the past month, we debated a second appropriation bill for this financial year, and in it we saw more than $330 million in extra health spending. On top of that, the government is creating a new $20 million central reserve fund, a slush fund by any other name, and that is supposedly to give itself even more flexibility just in case it has to spend more than

$80 million before the end of the financial year.

Let me be clear. That will give the Treasurer access to $100 million in discretionary spending before they even need to return to this chamber, yet the only reporting requirement means that we will not see the detail of how that money is spent until quarterly statements in August. That is not good enough and, frankly, as I have already pointed out, it incentivises bad behaviour. If you have a government that is willing to manipulate assumptions, delay disclosure and stretch the truth on budget forecasts, it is not hard to imagine a scenario where the intended safety nets are abused.

This bill is one small but important step in rebuilding essential checks and oversight. It will not fix the government's overspending. It will not undo the $12.8 billion in debt that this territory will be carrying by 2027-28. But it will help to shine a light on decisions as they happen and force those in power to explain what they are doing when they are doing it. That is central to how accountability works. That is central to how we protect public trust in this chamber, and that is central to how we begin to restore proper standards of financial management in the ACT.

This bill is modest, but the principle behind it is significant. It says to the government, and specifically to the Treasurer: if you are spending large amounts of public money outside the budget process, you will be called on to justify that expenditure and you will be held to account—not in a quarterly report, not months down the track, but immediately. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Crime—anti-consorting laws

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) all Canberrans have the right to be safe;

(b) the ACT has the smallest police force per capita in Australia;

(c) according to the ACT Policing 2023-2024 annual report, there are various major challenges and demands putting pressure on local policing including police resourcing and organised crime;

(d) the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia without anti-consorting laws;

(e) according to the ACT's Chief Police Officer, Scott Lee, the ACT's legal environment gives outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCG) the "right" to hold their annual meetings in Canberra;

(f) three recent annual OMCG meetings involving the Rebels, the Comancheros and Hells Angels required a significant diversion of police resources to monitor the events;

(g) according to ACT Policing, the three OMCG events cost ACT Policing $409,771 to monitor, and required the attendance of 361 police officers

over eight days; and

(h) successive ACT Chief Police Officers and the Australian Federal Police Association have supported anti-consorting laws as a preventative measure to dismantle and disrupt organised OMCG crime in Canberra; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) place community safety as the overarching principle in crime prevention and policing policy;

(b) ensure the community's right to safety takes precedence over the "right" of convicted bikie gang members to associate;

(c) give police preventative tools to fight serious and organised crime to keep the community safe and reduce pressure on police resourcing; and

(d) with respect to (2)(a), (b) and (c), introduce anti-consorting laws to disrupt, dismantle and prevent outlaw motorcycle gang activity in Canberra.

We are often told by those opposite that Canberra is a welcoming and inclusive city; and, gee, they were not kidding about that. They really were not kidding. This is a message that has been heard loud and clear by organised criminal syndicates around Australia, and even internationally. We are the most welcoming and inclusive jurisdiction in Australia when it comes to organised crime.

The ACT's permissive legislative environment has become a beacon of opportunity for outlaw motorcycle gangs seeking to engage in criminal activity, peddle their illicit trades and recruit members to their movement, all at the expense of hardworking Canberra families and police.

It was not always this way. Since 2009, we have seen the number of bikie gangs in Canberra grow, and an inter-gang war erupt in our suburbs. We have seen public shootings, firebombing, targeted killings in local restaurants, machine guns and night-time raids. We have seen bullets fired into homes next to childcare centres, and we have seen a young Canberra child put out fires with a garden hose while an injured family member lay bleeding next to them.

All of this was once unheard of in Canberra, before New South Wales introduced anti-consorting laws. At the time my colleague Jeremy Hanson warned what would happen if the ACT did not follow suit. In a press release issued on 25 May 2009, Mr Hanson said:

> The ACT would risk becoming an oasis for bikie gang members if we fail to follow New South Wales's lead on legislation …
>
> The community needs a guarantee from the Government that they will stay in step with any changes of New South Wales law and prevent the ACT from becoming an oasis for bikie violence.

Unfortunately for Canberra, Mr Hanson was right. In the past 12 months, we have seen outlaw bikie gang members from the Rebels, the Comancheros and the Hells Angels all descend upon Canberra for their national runs.

OMCGs have been identified by law enforcement around Australia as having high levels of organised dealings in methamphetamine production and distribution, gun trafficking, money laundering, assassinations and violent crime. These are crimes of the most serious order, for which the ACT government has rolled out the welcome mat.

Macquarie University criminologist and former undercover operative Dr Vince Hurley told ABC Canberra last week that when these gangs roll into Canberra, they are not coming here to go to church! He said:

> They're not here in our home to spread peace, love and rainbows.

No; I am afraid it is much more sinister than that. Dr Hurley said:

> They get together to work out their criminal enterprise, whether it be involved in drug trafficking, drug supply, kidnapping, planning homicide, money laundering, home invasions, firearm trafficking, blackmail.

He went on to say:

> So, the reason they get together is on the pretext of some social event, and they call it a national run and then they mix business with pleasure, but it's mainly business. Canberra … not having any consorting laws is a haven for them to get together without fear of the authorities.

Our welcoming and inclusive Canberra, in the words of this criminologist, is a haven for bikies to get together without fear of authorities. I do not believe this is the welcoming and inclusive Canberra that Canberrans signed up for. In our city, outlaw bikie gang members know their rights. They know that the ACT's permissive legal environment gives them the right to descend on Canberra to plot and scheme crimes of the most serious nature with the least resistance.

Even the ACT's own Chief Police Officer, Scott Lee, has acknowledged that that much is true. The Chief Police Officer, in response to my questions in annual report hearings, said:

> Within the ACT they can congregate and they can associate. That is part of the legislative framework that we have here. There is an environment that allows them to do that lawfully, and, as is their right, they do that …

"As is their right," the Chief Police Officer said. ACT Labor's welcoming and inclusive Canberra is apparently so human rights compliant that criminal outlaw bikie gang members have the right to get together to organise serious crimes like kidnapping, murder, drug trafficking and blackmail, all under the nose of our police, who are powerless to do anything about it. That is why here in Canberra we have the country's most expensive babysitting service in Australia.

By blocking anti-consorting laws, the ACT government has denied police the powers to prevent these national runs from happening in the first place. Police have no authority to dismantle, disrupt and prevent outlaw bikie gang members from getting

together to do business. All they can do is divert considerable police resources away from community policing to keep a watchful eye on the congregated outlaw bikies.

For the past three annual bikie gang meets, their national runs, Canberra families paid $409,771 for 361 police officers to babysit bikies. Canberra families, struggling with the cost of living or struggling to get a police presence after their homes or local shops have been robbed, are forking out hundreds of thousands of dollars so that their local police can babysit bikies.

Our welcoming and inclusive city is being taken for a ride. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are profiting off Canberra ratepayers because this government for years has refused to implement anti-consorting laws. The Rebels, the Comancheros and the Hells Angels use these national runs in Canberra to advertise their illicit businesses and recruit members.

The *Canberra Times* has today reported that a promotional video of the Comancheros' meeting in Canberra last year, in September, has had almost 300,000 views. That is extraordinary. The video has been filmed across Canberra at our iconic locations, like the eagle defence monument facing Kings Avenue Bridge. The video depicts scores of patched outlaw members of the Comancheros proudly gathering together in outward displays of strength and intimidation. Police have no legal recourse to disrupt it, to dismantle it or to prevent it from happening in the first place. Sadly, this government have proven that they could not care less. They could not care less whether bikie violence flares up in our community, in our suburbs and in our homes.

Another report in the *Canberra Times*, published literally only a few hours ago, had the headline "Public servant accused of decade-long abuse linked to bikies, drugs". This man, accused of more than 50 family violence allegations, allegedly told his ex-wife—

Ms Cheyne: A point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Cain): Ms Morris, take your seat. A point of order?

Ms Cheyne: I believe that Ms Morris is referring to a case that is currently before the courts, so she is in breach of continuing resolution 10.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I think there was a reference in the *Canberra Times* this morning to this matter.

Ms Cheyne: It does not matter.

MS MORRIS: I am referring to a publicly available *Canberra Times* article.

Ms Cheyne: It does not matter.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I might get some advice.

MS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, can you stop the clock, please?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I thank the Clerk for their assistance. Ms Morris, the standing order does mean that you are not able to refer to a matter that is currently before the court. That is advice to you going forward.

MS MORRIS: I find it unbelievable and astounding that the government is so determined to champion the rights of outlaw bikie gang members ahead of the rights of the community, victims and people at risk of bikie violence. When every other jurisdiction in Australia has taken action against outlaw bikie members congregating to conduct their business, the ACT government has worked tirelessly to ensure bikies can enjoy the right and the freedom to assemble in Canberra. This is a perversion of justice, and it is a course that has been undertaken by the government despite multiple ACT chief police officers endorsing anti-consorting laws as a necessary tool for police to disrupt, dismantle and prevent bikie activity in Canberra.

When talking about the need for anti-consorting laws, former ACT Chief Police Officer Justine Saunders said, "If there's something that keeps me awake at night, it's gangs in Canberra," yet the ACT government is unwilling to do anything that might interfere with the rights and freedoms of bikies. Once again, our police are thrown into the front line and tasked with keeping our community safe with no backing whatsoever from the government.

My motion seeks to correct this perversion of justice. All Canberrans have the right to be safe, and that is why we need to ensure that community safety is placed as the overarching and guiding principle in crime prevention and policing. This is not, and should not be, considered a controversial, political or ideological statement. It is a community expectation and part of the social contract. One of the most fundamental duties of government is to keep the community safe, and that is why we sincerely hope and expect to receive the support of all members of this Assembly for this call.

By doing this, we can restore the balance of justice to ensure that the community's right to safety takes precedence over the right of convicted bikie members to associate. Rather than continuing down the path of a permissive legislative agenda that necessitates reactive policing, the ACT government should return to a model of policing that focuses on disruption and prevention.

Not only will this keep the community safer, but it will reduce pressure on scarce police resources. Canberra has the smallest police force per capita in Australia. We do not have enough active police officers out on the beat, so we cannot afford to use the scarce police resources that we have wastefully—for example, by diverting 361 police officers to babysit bikies over eight days at a cost of $409,771.

Anti-consorting laws achieve each of these objectives laid out in my motion. Over the years, the government have offered a range of excuses as to why they could not possibly introduce anti-consorting laws. They have said the laws would be draconian, and that they would be ineffective and not human rights compliant. They seem to be working quite well in other jurisdictions, so I see no reason why they would not work here. In fact, we have the evidence of a former Nomads OMCG member, who has credited anti-consorting laws with saving his life. This bikie member wrote:

> … best thing to happen was the consorting laws cause that was the start for me to change my life style and my friends which led me to reflect on life on boring nights and I realised a lot and knew this was a blessing in disguise, these new laws preventing me seein' my crew …

In previous Assemblies, Mr Hanson has worked very closely with the Human Rights Commission to alleviate human rights concerns. At the end of that process, which resulted in the Canberra Liberals building protections and safeguards into draft legislation, the former ACT Human Rights Commissioner, Helen Watchirs, said the Canberra Liberals' anti-consorting laws had addressed all the human rights considerations that had caused issues in previous versions of the legislation. The former commissioner said that these laws were better than other jurisdictions.

It is time for the government to move beyond human rights as an excuse for inaction. There are ways and means that will allow us to get this done with appropriate safeguards and protections in place. We have an opportunity in the chamber today to put outlaw bikie gang members on notice and to send a strong signal that their nefarious, harmful activities are not welcome here in Canberra. In doing so, we will give police preventive tools to keep the community safe and to ensure that the community's right to safety takes precedence over the right of convicted bikie members to associate. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.26): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

> Omit paragraph (2)(d).

I thank Ms Morris for bringing forward this motion and for the opportunity to affirm to the chamber, the community and ACT Policing that we will continue to ensure that police have the resources and necessary, appropriate and proportionate tools—legislative and otherwise—to help prioritise community safety and prevent, disrupt and respond to serious and organised crime in the territory.

The law enforcement challenges posed by outlaw motorcycle gangs are complex and multifaceted. The response needs to be nuanced, proportionate, well-adapted and evidence based. No Australian jurisdiction has developed a comprehensive fix to these issues, and that includes those with anti-consorting laws. It is one of the reasons that I am not convinced that anti-consorting laws are the answer.

We are a human rights jurisdiction. It is something to be proud of. There are many rights that Ms Morris does not refer to that she enjoys every day. But, despite how Ms Morris kept framing it, a human rights jurisdiction is not an excuse; it is a framework. Taking a human rights approach to organised and serious crime does not mean we are soft on crime. The Human Rights Act protects freedom of association, but it is absolutely incorrect and irresponsible to frame this right as prevailing over the community's right to safety and security. I think this is the third week that I have had to say this, but there is no hierarchy of rights. Rights are not being championed above any other rights. The wilful stress that we are is dangerous and is probably having a perverse effect to what Ms Morris intends. I would ask her to reflect on that language.

Rarely are human rights protections absolute. Rights can be limited. Laws and policies can restrict human rights in a way that is reasonable and justifiable, but anti-consorting laws need a lot of work to be reasonable and justifiable and to have a legitimate purpose. One of the issues is that they put a focus—indeed criminal liability—on whom the person is associating with, rather than a person's actual criminal conduct. We know that in other jurisdictions they have been used to unjustly—intentionally or not—capture some of the most vulnerable people in our community, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, homeless people and women.

Anti-consorting laws focus on one small element of criminal activity. They usually target low-level criminals and bikie members, not the leadership and the powerful members who are pulling the strings and profiting from organised crime. Further, the structure of outlaw motorcycle gangs makes it difficult for police to gather criminal intelligence and prove associations, which undermines the operational intent of anti-consorting laws. Most of the jurisdictions that have anti-consorting laws have a carve-out if those persons wish to meet with a family member. And guess what? Many people are family members who are involved in these activities. So anti-consorting laws, if we were to adopt those of other jurisdictions, are not going to prevent them gathering together, especially in a small jurisdiction like the ACT.

A review that the government previously commissioned found that such laws are largely ineffective in combating organised crime and that the enforcement of anti-consorting laws demands significant police time and resources for little output in changing sentencing outcomes. In 2023, Ms Morris said that laws in other jurisdictions are working well. Are they? In 2023, the New South Wales Law Enforcement Conduct Commission found that anti-consorting laws increased the risk of young people entering the criminal justice system and had a significant adverse impact on marginalised communities. So introducing anti-consorting laws would have a disproportionate adverse effect on the wider community. It could result in other serious and unintended consequences for our criminal justice system. It could increase police resources with little change in outcome. It is not something we can support.

While the government maintains its approach of not supporting anti-consorting laws, we have supported, and we will continue to support, other measures that are consistent with our human rights framework and also support police operations to prevent, disrupt and respond to organised crime. The approach in the ACT has been to address the criminal behaviour of these gangs and their associates. For example, the government introduced legislation to disrupt criminal gang activities and provide police and the DPP with additional tools to combat the profit motive of organised crime. That legislation, in 2019, created a new graduated sentencing regime for specified offences committed in connection with, or while a person is associated with, a criminal group. The act further introduced new affray offences with tiered penalties and increased maximum penalties for specified offences committed in connection with a criminal group or committed by a person associated with a criminal group. It also amended liquor laws to allow the Chief Police Officer to apply to a magistrate for an exclusion order that prohibits a person who has previously engaged in violent activity in any licensed premises from entering or remaining in licensed premises.

The Confiscation of Criminal Assets (Unexplained Wealth) Amendment Act 2020 allows authorities to apply for an order to seize the property of a person connected to serious criminal activity where the person cannot show their wealth was lawfully acquired. The evidence shows that criminal asset confiscation action is a powerful and effective mechanism to disrupt serious and organised crime by targeting the profit motive and preventing reinvestment of funds into further criminal activity.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge how much we value ACT Policing, its workforce and their families. Minister Paterson and I, and the broader government, recognise that these people put their lives on the line every day. While some in the community may reflect on police chases or whatever it might be, and it certainly gets a lot of community attention for whatever reason, those are inherently dangerous activities. We recognise that there are risks in that job every single day. We recognise it and we value it, and we value the critical role that ACT Policing has in keeping our community safe.

In that vein, there is a reason that my amendment to Ms Morris's motion removes only 2(d). While we cannot support anti-consorting laws, I reaffirm my commitment and the government's commitment to support ACT Policing with the laws and tools that assist them in protecting the community and ensuring community safety and their own safety. Minister Paterson and I have already had many discussions about what these might look like. I have also had discussions with the AFP Association, as well as with the Chief Police Officer and others within the leadership team. Those will continue in earnest over coming months. There is more to do in this space and we look forward to doing it.

I commend my amendment to the chamber.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.35): I thank Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and acknowledge the validity of her concerns. It is a problem that Canberra is Australia's location of choice for outlaw bikie gangs to gather. It is a problem that they can do this so easily, because the ACT is the only jurisdiction that does not have anti-consorting laws. It is also a problem that significant policing resourcing has to be directed towards the management of these gatherings when it is so desperately needed elsewhere. I thank Ms Morris for bringing that to light.

In my electorate, I regularly field calls for increased police presence in Oaks Estate, Watson, Dickson, Civic and elsewhere. We simply cannot afford to use our limited policing resources inefficiently. With that said, the potential for anti-consorting laws to have unintended consequences in the ACT, as has been seen in other jurisdictions, cannot be ignored. The Law Enforcement Conduct Committee review of consorting laws in New South Wales found that they have disproportionately targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Instead of targeting serious organised crime, they have been found to be used by police to target kids drinking in parks and people catching up for coffee after attending a methadone clinic. I assume all of us in this place can agree that this is not the intended outcome of Ms Morris's motion. The review also found that the laws have been largely ineffective in addressing bikie gang consorting. Instead, it pushed criminal interactions further underground, making it harder for police to monitor and respond to these gatherings.

If there is a way to roll out carefully crafted legislation that addresses these bikie activities in a very targeted way, and in a way that does not risk targeting marginalised Canberrans or people who are working hard to turn their lives around, I would be keen to explore those opportunities with Ms Morris. I would hope the Assembly, too, would consider those opportunities closely and not take a dogmatic stance on either side of this debate. We need to acknowledge the complexity of this issue and the risk of inadvertently criminalising vulnerable people who could then become entrenched in the criminal justice system.

I am not comfortable pushing the laws that have demonstrably had serious unintended consequences in other jurisdictions, so, as it stands, I will support the Attorney-General's amendment to Ms Morris's motion. It calls on the government to ensure police have the necessary tools available to fight serious and organised crime but will not commit this Assembly to introduce broad-ranging anti-consorting legislation.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.37): I rise to thank Ms Morris for bringing forward the motion. I support her in her endeavours to get rid of the scourge of bikie violence and the road trips that we see happening by bikies in Sydney. Before I start, I will make clear to Mr Emerson that the legislation that was tabled in this place in 2019 did address the concerns that he raised. They were addressed in New South Wales. The model that we used was based on New South Wales legislation. We addressed the concerns that were raised by the New South Wales Ombudsman and others. We worked very closely with the ACT Human Rights Commission to make sure that the laws that were tabled in this place by the Canberra Liberals in 2019, and again by Ms Lee later, addressed all those issues. The human rights concerns were addressed. As Ms Morris said, the Human Rights Commissioner said that it was model legislation.

So there is a way to do this. You can table those laws to make sure that they achieve the balance of being effective and addressing human rights issues. We have not ignored human rights. We are not oblivious to them. We do not want them to be used against vulnerable communities. That is being used as a shield by those opposite when they say the laws will be misused. Those issues have in fact been addressed by the way the legislation was written, as was confirmed by the Human Rights Commission. Many of the excuses that those opposite have used have morphed over time, but I would say that their opposition has been reasonably consistent.

One of the most frightening things about these laws goes back to 2009. I found a photo of myself in 2009—how I looked without any grey hair or beard! To be frank, I would not recommend it! It would probably scare a few bikies away! In March 2009, the Canberra Liberals called for anti-consorting laws, or anti-bikie laws, as we called them then. We were backed by the AFPA. The president then was Jon Hunt-Sharman. A media report on 31 March 2009 stated:

> The ACT Opposition says it has received a letter from the Australian Federal Police Association, agreeing with their calls for tougher organised crime laws.

The report stated that we wanted "legislation similar to that being considered by New South Wales". It went on to report that we said:

> Unless we act on these issues, we risk becoming an oasis for organised crime syndicates. We have become a haven.

That is what we warned, and what have we seen? Since that occurred, we have seen an explosion in the number of bikie gangs here in Canberra and a range of incidents. As Ms Morris outlined, we have seen bikies from across Australia seeing an opportunity to come and operate in the ACT. That is exactly what we warned against. We have repeatedly warned that, if we do not have anti-consorting laws, the bikies in the western suburbs of Sydney and elsewhere will say, "Hey, there's an opportunity. Let's go to Canberra and operate there." You see it on the front page of the *Canberra Times*. In the *Canberra Times* you will see the photos. They are taking the mickey out of us. The Comancheros and other bikie gangs are taking the mickey out of us because they know that our laws are inconsistent with those in New South Wales, and that is the problem. We need to bring in laws to deal with organised crime and bikies. They need to be consistent, because organised crime groups will find the gaps. They will find the opportunities, and they are doing that here.

After Mr Hunt-Sharman left the AFPA, the new president, Angela Smith, said:

> I've been calling for these laws since I became president just over 18 months ago and I just don't understand the reticence of the ACT government. It doesn't make any sense. It is the last part of the suite of resources we need to battle outlaw motorcycle gangs.
>
> I've been going on like a broken record. We're an island in New South Wales. We've become a safe place to operate.

If you do not believe me, ask the Comancheros. They are saying it. How many people looked at their video? Was it thirty thousand?

Ms Morris: Three hundred thousand.

MR HANSON: Three hundred thousand. Thank you, Ms Morris. Three hundred thousand people looked at that video. Don't you think this is sending the wrong message to the community and the rest of Australia—the fact that we have our doors open to organised crime and bikie gangs to come here? As the *Sydney Morning Herald* said:

> The ACT needs anti-consorting laws now before someone dies.

It is not just the police association saying it; it is also chief police officers. A 2017 article was titled "Canberra's lack of anti-gang laws attracting bikies", and that is still the case. In the article, the then CPO, Justine Saunders, warned:

> Canberra has become attractive to bikies because it does not have the same anti-gang laws the rest of the eastern seaboard does …

That was the Chief Police Officer. Ms Cheyne thinks she knows better than various chief police officers. The Chief Police Officer said, "It's a preventative tool." The article quoted the Chief Police Officer saying:

> "I believe that's a factor in the decision to come here and undertake their activities …

Before that, the previous Chief Police Officer, Rudi Lammers, said state and territory colleagues had raised renewed concerns with him that the ACT was becoming a safe haven for outlaw motorcycle groups. The article said:

> Assistant Commissioner Lammers had heard the arguments against consorting laws and, in his view, those arguments were flawed.

It was not just the police association and chief police officers but also a former Attorney-General of this place: Mr Simon Corbell. Remember him? What did he say? He put out a discussion paper on anti-consorting laws. He said:

> … the changes would help police to respond more effectively to outlaw motorcycle gang activities, which commonly include violence, drug trafficking and money laundering.
>
> It will give the justice system improved capabilities to prevent and target crime at an individual level, where it has been shown most effective and disruptive to organised criminal activity.

He also said:

> … because the fact is that this is a small number of people but with a very disproportionate impact on the level of organised crime in our community …

He said that organised crime has costs and impacts and that there is also a risk that the ACT's lack of anti-consorting laws was making it a visiting place for bikies. Mr Corbell, where are you? Come back, Simon. We miss you. What did he say? He said that there was a risk that the ACT's lack of anti-consorting laws was making it a visiting place for bikies, including gang leadership. When the mob opposite say, "No. That's not happening," they are flying in the face of every other jurisdiction, presidents of the Australian Federal Police Association, chief police officers and a former ACT Labor Deputy Chief Minister and Attorney-General.

Why are they resisting this? Those opposite have said, "They're not human rights compliant." We have addressed those issues, and they are the best laws in the country. Then they said, "They will be used too much," and then they said, "No. They're not effective." So they will be used too much and then they will not be used enough; they are human rights compliant, but then they are not. What is their argument? Maybe it is that they looked at what happened to Mr Corbell when he went for preselection after he announced that he was looking at these laws.

Mr Cocks: What happened?

MR HANSON: What happened? Oh, dear. The Left faction of the Labor Party and members of the CFMEU did not like it, did they? They said, "No. We're going to move on from Mr Corbell." He lost his job. Why? Because we know that the CFMEU do not like these laws, and you lot do what the CFMEU tell you to do. We know that. The CFMEU do not like these laws and they tell you what to do. And they told

Mr Corbell what he could do: get a new job. Dr Paterson loves her job. She does not want to lose her job.

Why would the CFMEU not want these laws? Let me go to some recent articles. One from the *Canberra Times* was headed: "Bikies targeted in administrator's CFMEU clean-up". In the *Age*, an article was headed: "CFMEU deals put union in bed with bikies and the underworld". One in the *Saturday Paper* was headed: "Ice-ravaged bikies', rats and money grabs: Inside the clean up at the CFMEU". What else do we have? "CFMEU in 'cycle of lawlessness' after bikie and organised crime infiltration, probe finds". Another one was: "Criminal elements still influential in CFMEU construction division, report finds".

Why don't we need anti-consorting laws here? We do. Ask the chief police officers over literally decades or ask the Australian Federal Police Association. Give Simon Corbell a call. I have his number if you want it.

Mr Rattenbury: When you go motorbiking together.

MR HANSON: We could. I could bring my motorbike. At least we won't be arrested for consorting, will we! We know that much. *(Time expired.)*

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.47): I would like to rebut some of the things that were said.

Mr Hanson: Give it a shot.

DR PATERSON: Give it a shot—yes. We have not seen an explosion in OMCG activity here. We do not have our doors open to organised crime. As the Attorney-General said, we have a whole raft of legislation to address organised crime. Mr Hanson just read out all those headlines from Victoria, which has anti-consorting laws, so clearly the legislation is not doing its job down there. Further, Mr Hanson referenced his 2019 laws. He said that they were aligned with New South Wales legislation.

Since 2019, New South Wales legislation has been reviewed by the Law Enforcement Conduct Committee. As Mr Emerson said in his speech, they reviewed the use of anti-consorting laws by New South Wales police from February 2019 to February 2022. That is just two years ago. Police issued 16,000 warnings to 2½ thousand people. Most of those warnings were in relation to less serious offences and were given by general duties police officers, not specialist officers targeting organised crime. Four and a half thousand people were subject to consorting laws, and 42 per cent of those people identified as Aboriginal. So close to half of all the people who received a warning or were named in a warning through consorting laws were Aboriginal. This is evidence that suggests that these laws are really problematic and can be used to target groups of the community that are not organised criminals.

I would like to raise some important points regarding the runs that Ms Morris referenced. The runs are planned and that allows police to prepare for them when they

enter the territory. Police prepare their teams to appropriately respond to and monitor these groups. This notice also aids in assessing the size of the activity and police can allocate resources to respond. Police proactively target outlaw motorcycle gang activity, members and associates during their national runs. Vehicle checkpoints are conducted during these operations, allowing police to gather intelligence on all the people involved. Having this highly visible police presence, not only as these groups enter but also during the entirety of their stay, increases community safety, as police have oversight of all activities being undertaken by these groups.

In February this year, ACT police monitored members of a motorcycle gang that met in Canberra. A dedicated vehicle checkpoint was established in Narrabundah on 1 February. More than 40 motorcycle riders and vehicles were engaged. Compliance and defect checks were done on vehicles and motorcycles, and driver licence statuses were assessed. Also, drug and breath tests were conducted. Police issued 10 vehicle defect notices and 16 traffic infringement notices, and, at the same time, two drivers were identified as drug driving. No arrests were made for other criminal behaviour.

I reiterate the Attorney-General's views and thank ACT Policing for the important work that they do. We are really keen to work with them to support reform and measures that they think would be appropriate to tackle organised crime.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.51): This motion raises an issue that has obviously been canvassed in this Assembly a number of times, as members have touched on. It calls for the introduction of anti-consorting laws with no additional detail about that legislation, including possible defences. Laws which are generally based on the premise of preventing people who have convictions associating with each other. That is the central premise of anti-consorting laws.

In my view, Ms Morris is misinforming the community if she suggests that these laws would be targeted to address any issues she imagines we have with OMCGs here in Canberra. Evidence shows that anti-consorting laws are not proven to be an effective measure to combat organised criminal groups. In reality, these types of laws often cast a much wider net, capturing families and groups of vulnerable people who are not necessarily part of OMCGs but who might have a historical criminal conviction. This can split up families and communities and exclude people from prosocial supports and employment. We have seen gut-wrenching examples in other jurisdictions where people with a disability have been unfairly targeted by police under the guise of anti-consorting.

There is also the reality that anti-consorting laws are likely to have significant limitations on an individual's human rights. People should be charged for the crimes they commit, not the people they associate with. Police already have the power to arrest people for offences around weapons, human trafficking, drugs or whatever else it is that are issues of concern, as Ms Morris has outlined, around OMCG members engaging in during their runs to the capital. I recall a few recent articles—actually, I was trying to remember the details, and the minister has just helped me with this. The recent run saw very few, if any, charges being laid by police and, even then, they were, as the minister has just outlined, issues around vehicle defects and the like.

It is worth reflecting on the history of this debate in the Assembly—because, as Mr Hanson so graphically outlined, it has had a long history. In 2016, the ACT government released a discussion paper on consorting laws for the ACT. It provided a comprehensive overview of serious and organised crime in Australia and the way that consorting laws might be used to frustrate that type of criminal activity, with a focus on outlaw motorcycle gangs. Eight submissions out of 10 opposed the introduction of consorting laws, querying whether they were necessary and raising concerns about their efficacy and compliance with human rights.

In 2019, the ACT government commissioned an independent review of the effectiveness of ACT police powers to target, disrupt, investigate and prosecute criminal gang members. The report was tabled in the Assembly on 20 February 2020. Recommendation 6 of that report was that the ACT should not implement anti-consorting laws. The review found that such laws are largely ineffective in combating organised crime and that the enforcement of anti-consorting laws demands significant police time and resources for little output in sentencing outcomes.

The ACT is a small jurisdiction and many OMCG members have family or employment links to each other. Other jurisdictions have defences in their legislation which mean that members of those kinds of links would not be committing an offence by consorting with one another. As the defence would likely be available to most OMCG members in the ACT, if we were to follow what the other jurisdictions have done, the purpose of the legislation could well be undermined.

The ACT government has consistently looked to introduce effective, evidence-based legislation and strategies to address organised crime. For example, the government introduced the Crimes (Disrupting Criminal Gangs) Legislation Amendment Act 2019, which created a new graduated sentencing regime for specified offences committed in connection with or while a person is associated with a criminal group. The act also introduced the new affray offences with tiered penalties—and I believe the Attorney-General referenced these earlier. In addition, the government introduced the Confiscation of Criminal Assets (Unexplained Wealth) Amendment Act 2020, which allows authorities to apply for an order to seize the property of a person connected to a serious criminal activity where the person cannot show their wealth was lawfully acquired.

Members may recall that there was also legislation in 2018 called the Crimes (Fortification Removal) Amendment Bill, which formed part of a range of measures the government took to tackle OMCG-related violence. The legislation assists police to disrupt OMCG activity in Canberra by authorising the Chief Police Officer to apply to the Magistrate's Court for an order that the occupier of a premises remove fortifications. The definition of "fortifications" was targeted to ensure that only premises which have been fortified to prevent police access were impacted. To grant an order, the court must be satisfied of certain things, including that there are reasonable grounds to believe the premises have been or will be used in relation to a fortification offence, defined as an offence punishable by five years imprisonment or more. This ensures that the scheme is aimed at disrupting serious organised crime, including offences related to the manufacturing, supply and control of drugs.

The bill also created new offences in relation to fortifying premises, making it an offence to fortify a premises where the person knows the premises are connected to the fortification offence and intends that the fortification will prevent the uninvited entry to the premises or part of the premises. It is also an offence to replace or restore a fortification which has previously been subjected to a fortification removal order.

They are some of the offences that have been put in place that target specific actions related to organised criminal gangs. I think that is a far better approach. There have also been a number of considerations of firearms prohibition orders. They are measures the Greens support. But, at this stage, the ACT has not moved to implement that legislation.

There has been some discussion today around examination of other jurisdictions, and I touch on some of these points from our own research. In 2016, the New South Wales Ombudsman reported that anti-consorting laws in New South Wales were used more for non-OMCG activities than OMCG activities. This goes to the issues of targeting. The New South Wales Ombudsman also reported that New South Wales anti-consorting laws had negatively impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children, young people and homeless people.

In 2023, the New South Wales Law Enforcement Conduct Commission reviewed the operation of anti-consorting laws in New South Wales and again found that that they risked increasing the number of young people entering the criminal justice system and that there was an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issued with consorting warnings. The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission also found that consorting warnings were often used to target drug possession and other less serious offending. It recommended an amendment to state that the purpose of anti-consorting laws is to prevent serious criminal offending.

The Greens are not opposed to introducing legislation that will impact on the operation of OMCGs in the territory, and our support for the various pieces of legislation I outlined before clearly demonstrates that. All those new pieces of legislation I spoke of the Greens supported. However, the legislation must be crafted in such a way as to address the actual issue. The sad reality is that anti-consorting legislation extends beyond outlaw motorcycle gang members and covers too many other people. It captures young people drinking in a park; it covers people meeting for a coffee after an NA or AA meeting; and it impacts people with a disability who do not understand who they can or cannot interact with, when they have always been allowed to see that person before. These are the sorts of consequences that are just unfair. They are unjust and they reflect the fact that these proposed laws do not effectively target the sorts of concerns that Ms Morris and others who advocate for these laws are outlining.

On that basis, the Greens will be supporting Minister Cheyne's amendment today. We believe it reflects both the concerns that this Assembly shares for organised criminal behaviour but rejects the blunt measures that have been advocated for that are shown to be ineffective in targeting the issues of concern and have consequences for people who are not supposed to be targeted by that legislation.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.01): It will probably come as no surprise to anyone

here, but the opposition will not be supporting the amendment put forward by the government. While I should be heartened to see that (a), (b) and (c) of our calls-on have survived your amendments—because previous opposition attempts to introduce these principles have been rejected by the government—I am not; because, at the first opportunity that you have to act on these principles, you have stumbled, you have faltered and you have reverted to your old ways by omitting section (d), and the reasons that you have given for doing so are ones that we have already countered. The Canberra Liberals have worked very closely in previous Assemblies with the Human Rights Commission to address the very issues that have been raised, to the point where the former Human Rights Commissioner has said that the ultimate laws that were drafted addressing those concerns were better than in any other jurisdiction. So we cannot accept this amendment, because we cannot take you at your word that you will actually uphold the remaining calls-on that you have left in the original motion.

By removing any action to introduce anti-consorting laws, the message that the ACT government, with the support of the Greens and Mr Emerson, is once again sending to organised crime and to OMCGs is that Canberra is open for business—that, if you come to Canberra, our city, your right to congregate, conspire and plot your crimes will be protected; the ACT government will protect your right to do just that. That is something that we on this side cannot in good conscience support. We cannot support the recklessness of a government who opens the doors to organised crime in Canberra, because, if we were to do so, it would be the Canberra families who pay the ultimate price of that and it would be the police who are the ones who are left to deal with the mess.

Question put:

> That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15		Noes 8
Andrew Barr	Marisa Paterson	Chiaka Barry
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury	Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Ed Cocks
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Jeremy Hanson
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Deborah Morris
Suzanne Orr		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Tuggeranong—NBN Co coverage

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the:

(a) critical and increasing importance of reliable and high-speed internet connectivity for the residents and businesses of Tuggeranong;

(b) commitment made by the NBN Co, in response to question on notice number 1534 in early 2024, to deliver fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) connectivity to the Tuggeranong suburbs of Bonython, Calwell, Fadden, Gordon, Kambah, Monash and Wanniassa by the end of 2025;

(c) inconsistent nature of the rollout in Tuggeranong where in:

(i) some suburbs, most houses have been upgraded to FTTP, but a few have been overlooked; and

(ii) other suburbs, most houses have not been upgraded to FTTP, yet some have;

(d) announcement from the Albanese Government to fund the upgrade of Australia's remaining national fibre-to-the-node (FTTN) network to FTTP through an equity injection of up to $3 billion, including 21,744 premises in Tuggeranong; and

(e) rollout of the National Broadband Network is a responsibility of the Commonwealth Government;

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) actively engage with NBN Co to monitor the progress of the FTTP rollout in Tuggeranong;

(b) facilitate any necessary support and collaboration with NBN Co to ensure timely completion of the project; and

(c) ensure that there is no unnecessary red tape which might delay the NBN Co rollout of FTTP; and

(3) calls on the NBN Co to:

(a) adhere to its commitment to deliver FTTP connectivity to the Tuggeranong suburbs of Bonython, Calwell, Fadden, Gordon, Kambah, Monash and Wanniassa by the end of 2025;

(b) maintain transparent communication with the ACT Government and the residents of Tuggeranong regarding the progress and any potential challenges;

(c) provide regular updates to the public on the status of the FTTP rollout in Tuggeranong; and

(d) ensure that the infrastructure and services provided meet the highest standards of quality and reliability.

I rise today to address a matter of critical importance to the residents and businesses of Tuggeranong: the need for reliable and high-speed internet connectivity. Our world is, for often better and sometimes worse, going digital at Moore's law speed. Thus, access to fast and reliable internet is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is the backbone of our daily lives and underpins our economy, education, health care, and social interactions.

The motion I move today reiterates the urgency of upgrading our internet infrastructure and calls for concerted, synchronised efforts from the ACT government, the federal government and NBN Co to ensure that the residents of Tuggeranong are not left behind. For businesses, it is essential for operations, customer engagement and competitiveness. For students, it is a vital tool for learning and accessing educational resources. For families, it is a means to stay connected with loved ones and access essential services.

Fibre-to-the-node, FTTN, does not deliver the performance that a modern broadband network would. It is significantly worse than fibre-to-the-premises, FTTP. The inconsistent nature of the FTTP rollout in Tuggeranong is very concerning to many residents. In some suburbs, most houses have been upgraded to FTTP, but a few have been overlooked. In other suburbs, most houses have not been upgraded to FTTP, yet some have. For instance, I know of a street in Tuggeranong with 50 houses on the south side and two houses on the north side. Only one side of that street has FTTP, and it is not the south side. This patchy rollout has left many residents without the high-speed internet they need and deserve and has created frustration and uncertainty. I have lost count of the number of conversations I have had with constituents that are unhappy, at best, about the poor quality of their internet.

The Albanese Labor government has recently announced an equity injection of up to $3 billion to fund the upgrade of Australia's remaining national fibre-to-the-node network to fibre-to-the-premises. This investment from the federal Labor government will deliver an upgraded, fast and reliable internet service to 21,744 Brindabella premises. This is, without doubt, the biggest funding commitment to Tuggeranong, if not the Canberran community, without the Parliamentary Triangle, ever made by a federal government. Across Canberra, this announcement will deliver improved speeds and fewer interruptions to an additional 97,000 homes and businesses by December 2030. Ninety-four per cent of premises in the ACT will finally have gigabit capability. This will double the number of premises that are currently gigabit capable.

This is a wonderfully welcomed commitment from the Albanese Labor government. It will benefit residents and businesses in Tuggeranong and beyond. It will benefit them in ways that we genuinely cannot imagine today. It is a commitment to Canberra that only a federal Labor government would make. It is emblematic of the commitment to Canberra in the Australian parliament that only a federal Labor government has.

I am not sure, considering their recent announcements, that a Dutton-led coalition government would make an investment like this for Tuggeranong and for the ACT. After all, it was a federal coalition government who destroyed the rollout by shifting from the original fibre-to-the-premises NBN plan to a multi-technology mix approach. This was a grave mistake. The Turnbull government's short-sighted decision to rely on outdated copper infrastructure has led to slower internet speeds, increased costs to taxpayers and ongoing technical issues.

I recognise that the rollout of the NBN is a responsibility of the federal government. Nonetheless, there is a lot at stake for the people of Tuggeranong, and it is essential that the ACT government continues to engage with the NBN Co to monitor the progress of the fibre-to-the-premises rollout. The ACT government should do all it

can to facilitate any support and collaboration with the NBN Co to ensure the timely completion of the project. This includes reducing any unnecessary red tape that might delay the rollout.

In March 2024, in response to Mr Cain's question on notice, No 1,534, the NBN Co, through the then Special Minister of State, made a commitment to deliver internet speeds of up to one gigabit per second to the Tuggeranong suburbs of Bonython, Calwell, Fadden, Gordon, Kambah, Monash and Wanniassa by the end of 2025. This commitment was a step forward in addressing the digital divide and ensuring that all residents have access to high-speed internet. This motion calls on the NBN Co to adhere to their commitment and to deliver FTTP connectivity to the Tuggeranong suburbs I just mentioned by the end of 2025. To my knowledge, not one of these suburbs has been completed. So there is a long way to go.

I know that there have been a number of hurdles the rollout has faced in Tuggeranong. The use of backyard power poles is one of them. After extensive investigations and trials, I understand that the NBN Co has concluded that building underground will be the most efficient and cost-effective delivery option for the majority of the fibre rollout. This will be a disruptive build, but it is a build that will be worth the disruption. As such, and as it progresses, the NBN Co must maintain transparent communication with the ACT government and the residents of Tuggeranong regarding the progress of the rollout and any potential challenges. They should provide regular updates to the Tuggeranong community on the works in their area and how that may impact them in the short term.

The successful rollout of fibre-to-the-premises in Tuggeranong and the ACT more broadly requires significant collaboration and cooperation between the federal and territory governments. The Albanese Labor government's significant investment in upgrading our national broadband infrastructure is a testament to the importance of federal support in achieving these sorts of upgrades in Canberra. It is these significant upgrades, like faster and more reliable internet, that can get done when federal Labor and the territory Labor governments work together.

The motion I am moving today highlights the critical importance of reliable and high-speed internet connectivity for the residents and businesses of Tuggeranong. It calls for concerted efforts from the ACT government, the federal government and the NBN Co to ensure the successful rollout of fibre-to-the-premises internet in Tuggeranong. By working together, we can address the digital divide and ensure that all residents have access to the high-speed reliable internet they need and deserve. I urge all members here to support this motion, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.17): I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I am happy to support it and to provide an update on the government's engagement with NBN Co, following the federal government's very welcome announcement.

The vision for reliable, affordable, high-speed internet was an essential building block for the modern Australian economy. There is no doubt that families and businesses want high-speed internet at an affordable price, and that the National Broadband

Network has been integral in delivering that. The problem, of course, was that not every Australian had access to it, including a disproportionate number of households and businesses here in Canberra. It was a major oversight of the former federal government. That is why we warmly welcome the announcement from the Albanese government and their ongoing commitment to build the national high-speed broadband network.

This is a major commitment—$3 billion to upgrade Australia's remaining national fibre-to-the-node network, with the NBN Co contributing more than $800 million to the project. The investment will see more than 620,000 homes and businesses across the nation benefit, with more than 95 per cent of premises having the option to upgrade. Here in Canberra, nearly 100,000 homes and businesses have been identified as eligible—96,000—which will increase the territory's speed capacity from 50 per cent in December 2025 to 94 per cent by late 2030.

Many Canberrans have active NBN accounts through fibre-to-the-node connections, where the existing copper phone internet network from a nearby fibre node is used to connect their home to a box in their street. Under the upgrades announced, people with fibre-to-the-node connections will be upgraded to the faster and more reliable fibre-to-the-premise connections, where a fibre optic line is run from the nearest available fibre node directly to a home or business.

As we have heard, the change should deliver 18 times faster internet speeds than the average broadband connection, while existing NBN customers who benefit from upgrades should experience fewer instances of dropouts or lower speeds. These upgrades will provide access to the fastest upload and download speeds available on the NBN network. Both for homes and businesses, these faster speeds mean more people and devices can be online simultaneously, with minimal disruptions.

After extensive investigations and trials, it is proposed that most territory connections will be underground, providing the most efficient and cost-effective delivery option for much of this fibre rollout. The territory government has already raised with the NBN the need to minimise disruption as this essential work continues and to ensure that the community is well informed on the progress of the rollout.

I can advise members that government representatives have met with the Combined Community Councils—that takes in the eight community councils in the territory—connecting them with NBN and Evoenergy to discuss improving FTTP services for Canberra residents. I have also had the opportunity to meet with the new NBN Co's CEO, Ellie Sweeney, and we committed to working closely together to ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to this very significant infrastructure upgrade across our city.

This will include the establishment of an industry steering group, bringing together expertise from across ACT government and the private sector, including NBN. The group will facilitate joint planning and communication exercises, and minimise disruption caused by civil works. There will be disruption; there is no doubt about that, but it is important disruption because the outcome will be so much better for Canberra households and businesses.

I am also pleased to see the School Student Broadband Initiative extended through to June 2028—an Albanese government-initiated scheme that provides 30,000 qualifying families with school-age children with a free NBN service and has done so since 2023. NBN Co has indicated that there are around 200 Canberra families who are accessing services under this national scheme, and I am very pleased to see that it has been extended.

In closing, the government is very pleased to support this motion today. We are committed to working with NBN Co in a coordinated way to closely monitor project progress and to create efficiencies in the delivery of this infrastructure where we possibly can. The government also fully intends to support NBN Co to communicate early and often with the community and to facilitate support for those who are impacted.

I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion forward today, for his advocacy on behalf of constituents, particularly in Tuggeranong but indeed across the entire city. This is something that is long overdue, and something for which we have been calling for some time. I am pleased that the federal government recognise this need and have tasked NBN Co with this major infrastructure delivery. The scale of it is very significant. It is one of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken in our territory, and it will be of great benefit to our community for the long term. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.23): I rise today to speak in support of this motion. Of course, we support high-speed, reliable internet for the people of Tuggeranong. That is a given. I agree with Mr Werner-Gibbings that internet access is not a luxury. It is critical infrastructure for modern life. It affects our ability to study, to work, to run a business and to stay connected. But let us be clear: while we support the motion, we also see it for what it is. This is a motion about a federal issue, brought to this chamber by a Labor backbencher hoping to draw attention away from years of local neglect in Tuggeranong.

While it is convenient for the member to focus on a commonwealth rollout, what has been completely ignored is the ACT government's own record—a record of two decades of neglect and underinvestment in Tuggeranong. Where is the same passion when it comes to suburban maintenance in Tuggeranong? Where is the same urgency when our shops are run-down, our footpaths are cracked, our playgrounds are outdated and our local services are stretched thin?

This motion talks about high-speed internet, and we recognise that that is very important and that it matters. But what good is it if you cannot afford to keep the lights on, if you cannot get a GP appointment in your local area, or if your kids are walking to school through graffiti-covered laneways with discarded injections and broken lighting? Time and again, Tuggeranong residents have seen themselves relegated to the bottom of the government's to-do list.

It is not just internet connectivity that has been painfully patchy in Tuggeranong; it is the absence of ACT government investment in Tuggeranong. It is infrastructure. It is basic care for suburban upgrades. Where is the Tuggeranong ice rink that was promised by this government at repeated elections? Where is the duplication of

Athllon Drive? We are all waiting for the local government to take note of Tuggeranong in those areas and deliver on their election commitments.

The motion makes a series of notes about the rollout of the NBN—something which we all know is being handled federally. While I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of funding, let us not kid ourselves by thinking that this is a local Labor success story. I note that the federal Liberal Party has also committed to investing $3 billion to improve access to telecommunications and deliver further NBN upgrades across Australia. That commitment is clear, and we will hold the federal Liberal Party to it. But this is a commonwealth responsibility and, conveniently, Mr Werner-Gibbings's motion waits until the very end to quietly acknowledge that fact—almost a footnote.

Why isn't this motion focused on serving local needs, and focused on what the ACT government could and should be doing—cutting red tape, fixing local services and showing up for Tuggeranong families who have been doing it tough while this government looks away? For years, Tuggeranong families have been calling out for decent roads, safer playgrounds and upgraded shops. Cracked footpaths are left to worsen. Election commitments have not been delivered. Families just want safe places for their kids to play, small business owners are trying to breathe life into ageing precincts, and residents are simply asking for a fair go. They are all met with silence from the ACT government.

Today, they want us to applaud this government for suddenly noticing Tuggeranong, because of a commitment that the federal government has made. While we support this motion—of course, I welcome better internet connection for Tuggeranong, because we desperately need it—I will not sit quietly and let the government pretend this is anything more than a diversion. It is a distraction from their longstanding refusal to invest in Tuggeranong, and a smokescreen for their long track record of putting our community last.

Yes, we do support this motion, because better internet access is important, and Tuggeranong families deserve nothing less. But this is not a local Labor success story. This is a federal responsibility, long overdue and conveniently timed. If the government really wants to support Tuggeranong, it could start by delivering some of its very longstanding election commitments. We have been waiting for some of them for more than a decade. It could start by fixing what is in its own backyard—our roads, our parks and our local services. Frankly, I think Tuggeranong has waited for long enough.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.29): I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion to the Assembly. The ACT Greens will be supporting it today. The NBN is a public good, a universal service that provides broadband in a way that is accessible to all Australians, regardless of where they live. This includes Canberrans. My colleague Miss Nuttall will speak about the benefits that this motion will bring for the residents of Tuggeranong, but I will cover it at a higher level.

The Greens have fought for Australia to have universal public access to the internet. The last time there was a minority federal Labor government, the Australian Greens protected the NBN from being sold off in order to keep it in public hands. The calls in

the motion to hold NBN Co to account for delivering NBN connectivity to Canberra suburbs, maintaining communication, monitoring progress and ensuring infrastructure is of high quality and reliability are all calls that the ACT Greens support.

As highlighted in Mr Werner-Gibbings's motion, this is, in fact, the domain of the commonwealth government. The most direct ways to provide representation would be through the elected representatives in the Australian parliament. A Labor MP is currently elected to represent this part of Canberra in the House of Representatives. I am interested to hear how ACT Labor over the years has worked with their federal colleagues to deliver NBN to Canberrans reliably and quickly and, in particular, to the Tuggeranong Valley.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.30): I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is often a sentiment that Tuggeranong is left behind—the older section of the ACT that has to wait until things are falling apart to get a new paint job. I have seen it firsthand with the promise of an ice rink, on which construction has not yet started. Members joke about whether the light rail will get to Tuggeranong in my lifetime. To be clear, it should, and ASAP. And just this week another Tuggeranong service, the Tuggeranong Interchange Co-op, moved into voluntary administration.

While I do see the effort to challenge this stereotype—we should all be challenging this stereotype; again, I welcome this initiative from Mr Werner-Gibbings and our new representatives of Brindabella—what I have observed time and again is the lack of follow-through when it comes to Tuggeranong's infrastructure. In fact, if we do want to challenge this stereotype, we do so by following through on promises for Tuggeranong.

Mr Werner-Gibbings mentioned Bonython, Calwell, Fadden, Gordon, Kambah, Monash and Wanniassa. Certainly, I have heard from a number of people in these suburbs that their internet is not reliable. That is not good enough.

This is not necessarily about getting two ping for our e-athletes so that they can get the crown dog, although it is known in Tuggeranong that we win those, ping advantage or otherwise. In all seriousness, in some ways we are so constantly reminded of how much we rely on the internet that we almost take it for granted. As Ms Morris pointed out, let us look at the things that we need to function. We are relying less and less on landlines, so if family and friends want to reach us at home, it is about relying on the internet, if you do not want to burn through your data. Good internet lets us stay connected to the people we love.

More and more of us are working from home, and this has been brilliant for accessibility. Women more often need to work flexible hours because the social presumption is that they are the primary caregivers. Many of my constituents in Tuggeranong have taken advantage of working from home due to the unreliable transport and long commutes. From a personal perspective, anyone with sensory issues or accessibility requirements that are not well served by office work rely on a strong internet connection to work from home.

As we move away from paper-based approaches, the dominant assumption is that you

will make like Mr Adam Bandt MP and "Google it, mate"—do all of your banking, lectures and study, electoral enrolments, and bookings for appointments online. It is convenient, but the flipside is that access to good internet has well and truly become an issue of equity in our community, so this is a good prompt to act.

This is a great opportunity for the ACT Labor government to back in Tuggeranong as a matter of fairness and, in doing so, challenge the notion that Tuggeranong is left behind. I look forward to speedy internet across all of Tuggeranong.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.33): I rise today to speak in support of the motion brought forward by my fellow Labor member for Brindabella, Mr Werner-Gibbings, and I am glad to see support across the chamber for this motion. This motion touches on a really important issue that the region of Tuggeranong, as well as the ACT and Australia as a whole, is facing right now—it being the right to access the internet in a digital age. But full disclosure: I live in the Lanyon Valley, which, in my opinion, is the best part of Tuggeranong and Canberra. We have access to full NBN fibre to the premise just because of our age, and we were lucky enough to get upgraded under the Albanese government recently.

It has never been more important to be an active participant in this digital age. When any one of us leaves this building and enters the wider community, we can see the impact this new era and interconnectedness has. Whether it is the number of people who use their phones now to shop online or check their test results from the doctor online—you can game, you can stream, you can study and you can work—everyday life is intrinsically tied to internet access. It is with this in mind that we can understand how crucial the NBN and good internet access truly is for our community. Regardless of location, it is enabling faster, more reliable internet for Australians, allowing access to a digital economy that encompasses local businesses, education, government services and everything in between.

Internet speed issues can be exacerbated by living in a spread-out landmass. In Tuggeranong, being a valley with backyard power poles and issues, we all know someone—we may have even experienced this ourselves—who has been streaming when the video keeps on buffering or when a crucial online meeting connection drops out. This happens quite a lot in many suburbs of Tuggeranong.

I was in school when the NBN was first announced. It was to bypass the copper network with a combination of fibre to the premises and satellite technologies that should have by now covered more than 90 per cent of Australians. But we continue to see the effects of a botched rollout that sees a mix of fibre to the premises in some places and the multi-mix technology with the previous old copper in other places.

It was wonderful to see the investment from the federal Albanese Labor government, showing them to be proactive in ensuring digital equity for Australians by fighting for and now implementing an inclusive and accessible NBN rollout, creating thousands of jobs and fostering innovation throughout Australia. This federal government is the first in a long time that has shown that it cares for Canberrans—making sure that fibre-to-the-premises connections will be across Tuggeranong and across Canberra. Ensuring that we are connected to the world provides immense benefit to our community, and it is wonderful to see that investment.

Mr Werner-Gibbings's motion today details the efforts of the Albanese Labor government in ensuring that our electorate of Brindabella has more equitable access to essential services and making truly digital connectivity a reality for the people of Tuggeranong. Our neighbours to the north in Gungahlin have had fibre to the premises available for over a decade now, but down in the south we have had subpar services.

Just touching on Tuggeranong, as a long-term resident of Tuggeranong, like Mr Werner-Gibbings and Miss Nuttall, I am proud to live and raise my family in Tuggeranong, and I am proud to be an active advocate for my community and to fight for my community alongside my fellow members for Tuggeranong. As I mentioned earlier, having fibre to the premises in Lanyon makes me a bit special amongst Tuggeranong residents. I know my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings thinks it a bit unfair that I have fibre to the premise and he does not—because I do not have as many experiences of dropouts when working from home or watching TV as he might. I thank the Albanese Labor government for that investment when the schedule was put up to rollout fibre across Canberra. I do not want to see a change in government once again lead to division in our community and have people left behind.

As fibre-to-the-premise NBN is provided to suburbs like Calwell, Fadden, Kambah, Monash, Wanniassa and many other Tuggeranong suburbs by the end of this year, residents in these neighbourhoods will finally have better access to a range of services, such as telehealth, online banking and, of course, everyone's favourite, streaming. It will provide better ability to connect with friends and family. It will provide better connections for businesses in these suburbs to be able to reach wider markets, which helps a small business. It will help to make Tuggeranong more attractive for new residents and businesses, and provide these businesses with faster internet speeds.

While doorknocking last year in suburbs like Chisholm and Richardson, access to the NBN and high-quality internet was a common theme, particularly for people running a small business from home or working from home. I am just going to touch on the point of working from home first. Fibre to the premise further supports being able to work from home. Unlike recent attacks and then flip-flopping from the federal Liberal Party, the federal and ACT Labor governments are dedicated to supporting hardworking Australians who work from home. These arrangements allow them to be an asset in their workplace and industry while giving, predominantly women, the flexibility to raise their families and balance work and life in a way that works for them and their families. Fibre-to-the-premise NBN and its faster internet speeds continue to make working from home more viable and efficient and is beneficial to our workforce, giving residents across Tuggeranong, Canberra and the rest of Australia the ability to work without all the added difficulties that would arise if working from home was not an option.

We know those opposite claim to be supporters of small business. But so many small businesses operate in our suburbs. Whether they are tradies, or hairdressers operating from home, or a butcher, a cafe, a florist or so many other wonderful small businesses operating at our local shops, these businesses would benefit significantly from access to proper fibre-to-the-premises NBN.

While I enjoy my fibre-to-the-premise connection in Lanyon, as I said, it is unfair that not everyone in Tuggeranong and not everyone in Canberra has access to this and that people are suffering from not being able to access equitable services and having dropout of services. I fully support Mr Werner-Gibbings calling on the ACT government to ensure there is nothing standing in NBN Co's way. It was wonderful to hear an update from the Chief Minister on what the ACT government has been doing to make sure that NBN Co can continue with their rollout, assuming there are no nefarious changes from the federal government this year, so that the residents of Tuggeranong and all of us can have access to the best internet possible by the end of this year. I thank my colleague for bringing this motion.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.41), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate this afternoon and for their recognition of the importance of reliable and high-speed internet connectivity for the residents and businesses of Tuggeranong and Canberra. Many thanks to the Chief Minister. Also, thank you to Gay Brodtmann, who was a member for Canberra, and Dave Smith, who is the current member for Bean, who have been very strong advocates on this issue in the federal parliament since 2013.

I also note Miss Nuttall and Ms Tough's contributions and Ms Morris's contribution as well—grudging contribution. All I would say about that is that I know the Tuggeranong underpasses that my kids walk through on their way to school are not as she describes. I also note how many opportunities she has had already this term to move a Tuggeranong- or Brindabella-centric motion and all we get is recycled policies about how Canberra is on fire—policies which have been rejected at multiple elections by Canberra's voters.

The digital age demands that we provide our communities with the infrastructure they need to thrive. Access to high-speed, reliable internet is not just a convenience; it is a necessity for the people who rely on it every day. It will become even more of a necessity. The commitment made by NBN Co last year to deliver internet speeds of one gigabyte per second to the Tuggeranong suburbs of Bonython, Calwell, Fadden, Gordon, Kambah, Monash and Wanniassa by the end of 2025 was a significant step forward. However, as I noted, there is a long way to go—and less of 2025 left than I can believe—to deliver this commitment.

The ACT government has a crucial role to play in this process. By actively engaging with the NBN Co, facilitating necessary support and collaboration and ensuring there is no unnecessary red tape, we can help ensure the timely completion of the fibre-to-the-premises rollout, not only in Tuggeranong but in the whole of the ACT. I was pleased very much to hear the Chief Minister outline the steps he is taking to work with NBN Co and the federal government to support the rollout. The establishment of the Industry Steering Group, which the NBN Co sits on, is a terrific first step. It is collaboration like this and collaboration between federal Labor and territory Labor governments that is essential to achieving this goal to build Canberra's future.

The Albanese Labor government's significant investment in upgrading our national broadband infrastructure is testament to how two Labor governments can work together to deliver for people in the ACT—two Labor governments working together to ensure that the residents of Tuggeranong receive the high-speed, reliable internet

that they need and they deserve. For the NBN Co, transparent communication, regular updates and high standards of quality and reliability all play a part in ensuring the success of this rollout. The residents of Tuggeranong deserve nothing less.

The motion I move today is a call to action for all of us. It is a call to ensure that the residents of Tuggeranong have access to the high-speed internet they need and deserve. It is a call to work together across all levels of government to achieve this important goal. I am glad that members of the Assembly will support this motion and we can commit to working together to ensure the successful rollout of the FTTP in Tuggeranong. In a global environment that is becoming more digitally dependant every year, Tuggeranong should not be left on read.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Paper
Motion to take note of paper

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

> That the papers presented under standing order 211 during the presentation of papers in the routine of business today be noted.

Legislative Assembly—non-executive members—reporting requirements

Debate resumed.

MR SPEAKER: On Mr Barr's motion, the question is that Mr Emerson's proposed amendment to Ms Castley's proposed amendment be agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.46): I move the following amendment to Mr Emerson's proposed amendment to Ms Castley's proposed amendment:

> Omit "After paragraph (3), add", substitute: "Omit all text after 'That this Assembly', insert:
>
> (1) notes that:
>
> (a) information about non-executive entitlements are published both as disallowable instruments and in the Annual Reports of the Office of the Legislative Assembly, which is appropriate;
>
> (b) information about executive staffing entitlements are not published in the same form or to the same standard, which undermines transparency and accountability;
>
> (2) further notes that:
>
> (a) the Assembly has called for the Integrity Commissioner to undertake an inquiry into lobbying and for the Government to ensure appropriate funding be provided for this work; and
>
> (b) the Government has failed to provide the Assembly with any assurance that the funding has been or will be provided in this year's Budget;

(3) directs the Chief Minister to:

(a) publish information on executive staff expenditure, in a format consistent with the Assembly's reporting of non-executive staff expenditure, in all future Annual Reports of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate;

(b) make a statement in the Assembly immediately after this motion, and if appropriate funding for the lobbying inquiry will be provided in this year's Budget; and

(c) if no decision has been made, the Chief Minister's statement must include the day (or days) when the decision will be made and, once such a decision has been made, the Chief Minister must provide the Speaker with a statement outlining the decision and the funding to be provided, which the Speaker must make available to Members;

(4) requests the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders to undertake an inquiry into the issues surrounding transparency arrangements for Members, such as:

(a) the publication, each quarter, of information on Members' externally sponsored and Assembly related and funded travel;

(b) the publication, each quarter, of Members' diaries setting out all reportable meetings, events and functions attended that relate to their responsibilities as Members taking into consideration the potential for:

(i) retrospective commencement from the start of the 11th Assembly;

(ii) the preclusion of personal and family matters; electorate or party political matters; media interviews or recordings; any scheduled meeting or event that the Member did not actually attend; or any information which might disclose personal details about an individual, affect a court case, or disclose information about security, public safety, or law enforcement;

(iii) appropriate protections for whistleblowers, privacy, or sensitive information; and

(iv) implementing any findings and recommendations arising from any Integrity Commissioner's inquiry into lobbying;

(c) the publication of Members' staffing expenditure; and

(d) any other relevant matters; and

(5) calls on the Speaker to table a breakdown of non-executive staffing expenditure for the current and last four financial years, including staffing expenditure per non-executive office (including his own), staffing expenditure per pledged resourcing arrangement, and any other staffing expenditure within 28 calendar days.".

For the benefit of members, I will outline what my amendment does, given the end result is a bit of a stitch-up of different clauses from different parts of this debate. Due to the way in which Mr Emerson's amendment is phrased, the "omit paragraph (3)" and substitute "omit (1), (2) and (3)" at the start of my amendment was crafted based on the very best advice from the Office of the Legislative Assembly over lunchtime.

The intent is basically to wipe the slate entirely clean, because it was cleaner to do it in that way. That removes the original motion from Mr Barr, Ms Castley's

amendment and Mr Emerson's amendment. With that clean slate, I have then added paragraphs (1), (2) and (3) from Ms Castley's motion.

I note that the Chief Minister earlier today had already responded to some of the elements within the calls regarding paragraph (3). I ask members to please be aware that it is a negotiated solution; let us make this work.

I have also revised paragraph (4), requesting the integrity committee to examine the questions raised in paragraphs (1) and (2) of Mr Barr's original motion. I anticipate the question on the travel reporting to be quite administratively straightforward. The question of non-executive members' diaries is a more complex one and occurs in the context of what is, hopefully, the shortly to be announced lobbying inquiry.

Finally, Mr Barr's original paragraph (3) is reincarnated in my amendment as paragraph (5). I note that all of that information in paragraph (5) is already publicly available, but it will not take OLA too long to photocopy some pages and table those tomorrow.

I would now like to talk to the amendment circulated by Mr Barr, seeking an interim report from the committee by September. I stress the word "interim" in that call, given that it may be difficult and challenging, if not impossible, for the committee to provide a final report, given the outstanding nature of the Integrity Commissioner's inquiry into lobbying. Therefore, it is important to manage the expectations of members.

I foresee no problems with the committee examining the question of travel. I foresee that the question of diaries may not be resolved by the time that report is due back; hence the interim nature, because it is occurring in the context of that lobbying inquiry, which, hopefully, will be announced. That may yield some very important findings and recommendations that the committee may like to further consider, and it will give context in terms of what actions may or may not be required in order to ensure the transparency of arrangements for members here today.

I endorse my amendment to the chamber; hopefully, I will have members' support.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Braddock's amendment to Mr Emerson's proposed amendment to Ms Castley's proposed amendment to Mr Barr's motion be agreed to.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.49): I move:

> After paragraph (4)(d), insert:
>
> "(e) provide an interim report by the last sitting day in September 2025;".

My amendment to Mr Braddock's proposed amendment, as he has indicated, adds a new paragraph (4)(e) to the motion, requesting that the committee provide an interim report by the last sitting day in September 2025. I believe that amendment is relatively straightforward.

In order to close the circle in relation to other matters, earlier in the debate I provided a response regarding paragraphs (3)(b) and (c) of Ms Castley's original amendment. I will seek the Assembly's understanding that I have already done that. If there is a requirement for me to do it again, after the passing of the motion, I will do so. Just to be clear, perhaps I should do it now, whilst I am on my feet.

In relation to the amendment and the three elements that are directing me to do things, let me deal with each in turn. Paragraph (3)(a) is in relation to publishing information on executive staff expenditure in a format that is consistent with the Assembly's reporting of non-executive staff expenditure for future annual reports. I said this morning that we will certainly look at that. I have looked at the Assembly reporting table. Mr Rattenbury and Ms Castley have been having a conversation; now that they have finished, I note that this will be important to their relevant considerations. My response to paragraph (3)(a), in relation to the publishing in annual reports, is that it cannot be consistent with the Assembly's table because the executive does not pledge, does not roll over, and does not have unused allocations or allocations per se in the same way, but I will interpret that to mean you are looking for line item by ministerial office of expenditure on staffing in that financial year.

If that is agreed and understood, because we do not do pledges, we do not do rollovers and we do not have an unused allocation, I can report against the intent of what is contained in the Legislative Assembly's annual report, which provides, by member's name, how much has been spent. Can I get some nods around the room on that? That is understood? Okay; that is relatively straightforward.

In relation to subparagraph (b), about the lobbying inquiry, I outlined that this morning. The process there is that the Integrity Commissioner will make a budget submission through the Speaker. The Speaker will bring that, together with any other budget submissions from the Office of the Legislative Assembly, to an Expenditure Review Committee meeting on a date that will be agreed between the ERC and the Speaker. That will take place in the next few months.

The ERC will make a recommendation to cabinet. Cabinet will then make a final decision on all ERC recommendations. That will take place in June, prior to the budget, which will be delivered on Tuesday, 24 June. That is the date on which information will become public. With the final date, the government may, as is its practice, release some information ahead of budget day in regard to the content of the budget. In relation to paragraph (3)(c), the day on which the decision will be made is yet to be determined, but it will be at a cabinet meeting before 24 June.

The day on which the decision will be announced will be, at the latest, Tuesday, 24 June, and the government is yet to make a decision because we are yet to receive the Integrity Commission's budget bid and we are yet to consider it. I hope that addresses paragraphs (3)(a), (b) and (c) to the satisfaction of the Assembly.

In relation to the work of the standing committee, if members are agreeable to having an interim report, I think that is an elegant solution to be able to address the straightforward issues that I have called for in this motion. It does, of course, leave time for the committee to consider any further information that the Integrity Commissioner may bring forward, should the Integrity Commission undertake its

review; noting, of course, that it is ultimately a matter for the Integrity Commission. The Assembly can ask, the government could fund, but the Integrity Commission itself must make the determination and the timeframes in relation to any review of lobbying.

I also reiterate that this is an issue that I will pursue directly with the Integrity Commission by way of my submission or the government's submission to that review. I will personally raise it with the Integrity Commissioner as it being an area that is a massive loophole in our current transparency and integrity requirements in this place.

Everyone should understand that this issue will continue to be raised and pursued until it is enacted. This is not going away, and it is my hope that the Assembly will be mature enough to move quickly to adopt the recommendations of any Integrity Commission review. This is entirely consistent with Latimer House principles. Members' integrity and members' reporting are explicitly referenced in the Latimer House principles, alongside the executive.

Members of parliament are not excluded from that; they are part of it, and this is important. I know there is a lot of community and media interest in this regard. If these matters are not progressed, I suspect a flood of FOIs demanding access to information that the public should have, with respect to meeting with lobbyists in particular.

With that, I commend my amendment to Mr Braddock's amendment, and the amended motion. In the immortal words of Keith Richards and Mick Jagger, you can't always get what you want, Mr Speaker, but if you try some time, you get what you need, and we are making some progress on this today. I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.57): Let me start by thanking Mr Braddock for giving up so much of his lunch hour to work with us collaboratively to try to get things sorted out on this—because things were getting pretty messy, frankly. It is my understanding that Mr Braddock's amendment—now potentially amended by the Chief Minister's amendment—would wipe out, in effect, all of the things that came before it, and so we will have something much neater and tidier than we were looking at before lunch.

But I think it is worth reflecting for a moment on exactly where the Chief Minister's original motion today came from. It was very clear that it was a continuation of the tantrum that the Chief Minister started when we would not give up our work to try to find out where the money was going and where the staffing allocations were in regard to his office. It was very clear that what seemed to come across as a threat has now carried across into this motion today. This is not some hyper-reasonable thing that has been on the backburner for a long time; this is a direct response to this Assembly's demand that the executive provide transparency for the community. It is a direct response to an Assembly that is now ready to hold the executive to account.

The big concern now for us as we look at this—and for me especially; I am really concerned—is that what it looks like this Chief Minister is willing to do is make sure that he now has visibility of every meeting that every member has, so that every time

someone comes to a member of the opposition with concerns about the government, they know. It seems clear that, with respect to the concerns we have raised in this place before about public servants who are already afraid to speak to their local representatives because of fear of reprisal from the government, he wants to make sure that is exactly how those public servants feel, and that businesses already afraid to speak to their local representative for fear of being added to a black ban—

Dr Paterson: Why are you afraid of transparency, Mr Cocks?

Ms Castley: Not afraid; just worried for people who want to have a say.

Dr Paterson: Clearly, very afraid.

MR COCKS: Very clearly, the people in our community are afraid of what this government would be willing to do to them if they had the temerity to actually speak to someone who disagrees with the government. People genuinely feel afraid of what the government could do to them if they actually had the temerity to speak up against this government. They worry about whether they would be excluded from all future business with the government. They are worried about that. They are; they tell us. Maybe they do not tell you. Maybe they are afraid to. Maybe they are afraid with good reason.

It seems to me that this move is to shine a light inside the protection of anonymity for someone trying to advocate on their own behalf. We are not talking about paid lobbyists here. There are already provisions around a register of lobbyists. What the Chief Minister and the government seem to want to do is make sure that they know if anyone speaks to their local member on a legitimate concern about the way the government handles things—for example, about the way a procurement has operated or about the way their local street is being cared for or not being cared for. They want to know, and they want to know, you would have to imagine, so that they can react. That is a serious concern, and it goes to the heart of matters of integrity.

Mr Barr's amendment to **Mr Braddock's** proposed amendment to **Mr Emerson's** proposed amendment to **Ms Castley's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Braddock's amendment, as amended, to **Mr Emerson's** proposed amendment to **Ms Castley's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Emerson's amendment, as amended, to **Ms Castley's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Ms Castley's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.03): Mr Speaker—

Mr Pettersson: Having the last word!

MR BARR: Indeed. A rare opportunity for me to have the last word on something, Mr Speaker! I thank members for their willingness to find some compromise here.

I do need to take issue with some of Mr Cocks's characterisation of the reporting requirements around diary matters. It is quite explicit what is precluded. And as to the assumption that issues are brought to ministers by constituents, whistleblowers and others—that occurs as well. It is not as if the only avenue for someone to raise concern about a matter is to go to a member of the opposition or the crossbench. I acknowledge some do, and that is entirely appropriate. But if you were to take Mr Cocks's assertions, then the publishing of minister's diaries raises all of those risks as well; and yet somehow, for nearly a decade, we have managed to navigate our way through those things because there are appropriate protections in place in relation to what is published. And that clearly is covered in the detail of my motion around personal details of an individual; anything that affects a court case or disclosure of information about security, public safety or law enforcement; and matters that relate to identifying individuals.

I think we can put to bed that scare campaign. That is not the information that members would be required to publish. I also note that this is not a real-time disclosure; this does occur after the completion of a quarter, and some period after that, so the meetings are months-old by the time they are reported. But it does give an insight into who is seeking meetings and who is seeking to lobby. The reportable ones are very clear. And, yes, we do have a lobbyist register, but there is no requirement to report on that register that you are meeting with people, and we all know this happens.

I reiterate the point I made this morning; it is in fact a very powerful protection for members against nefarious lobbying. I have used it hundreds of times over the years to say, "If you want a meeting with me to seek to influence a government decision, you must make an appointment, and it will be published." Interestingly, hundreds and hundreds of people do not follow through with that, which tells me a lot about what they were seeking to influence on. As I mentioned this morning, that, combined with the existence of an Integrity Commission and combined with banning certain donors in the political process, has absolutely revolutionised integrity in our political system—massively. And members and ministers would no longer find themselves in the position of dealing with someone, or an entity or an organisation, that is seeking to unduly influence public policy decisions, or indeed individual decisions that might sit within their control.

Yes, ministers have many more of those decision-making points, as Minister Pettersson observed, but you all—every single member of this place—in a variety of different forms, whether that is through committee work, individual work as shadow ministers, or crossbench spokespeople, will find yourselves in these positions because matters will come before this place that you will be lobbied on. Former Minister Rattenbury, now Member Rattenbury, indicated as much in his contribution yesterday in relation to a bill that was before the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, in reporting on your private travel, you gave us a level of insight into your trips to Melbourne and Sydney, and you are free to do that! You did that in *Hansard*, so why would you have a problem with your official travel being reported? Already some of your official travel has been, and that is appropriate, and that is fine.

All I was seeking in that regard is that there be a standardised reporting timeframe. Things that have to be declared under the declaration of interest within 28 days have to be declared in that way, but other travel is reported only on a six-monthly basis at the moment. The world will not end if that is quarterly. That is all! The fact that there is all this gnashing and eye-rolling and all the personal attacks on me that we have seen today, tells me I have hit a raw nerve, haven't I? I make no apologies for that.

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: And here we go again! The muppet gallery cannot help themselves, Mr Speaker!

Mr Hanson: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, if you could be seated.

Mr Hanson: We are used to the Chief Minister's abuse, but I think you can call him to order. I think the words "muppet gallery" have probably been ruled out of order before.

MR BARR: I do withdraw. I withdraw that.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr has withdrawn that.

MR BARR: That is a very unfair reflection on good old Mr Statler and Waldorf, isn't it, Mr Speaker! I apologise.

Ms Castley: And again!

MR BARR: I apologise and withdraw.

Mr Hanson: I don't think you can do that, Mr Speaker. I think you have got to refer to members by their name.

MR SPEAKER: No; Mr Barr was referring to the actual *Muppet* characters!

Mr Hanson: Oh right! Accusing them!

MR BARR: You would understand if you watched the *Muppets*; you would know what I was referring to! I absolutely withdraw any imputation in that regard. I do note the interjections continue, Mr Speaker; but it is what it is.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: I rest my case!

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, are you—

MR BARR: I am endeavouring to conclude my remarks, but it seems impossible for those opposite to sit in silence even for 15 seconds, Mr Speaker. Having made those points, we have some progress today; this is a good thing. I look forward to the committee's interim report in September. We will, of course, announce decisions in relation to budget funding by the end of the budget process, which is publicly available on 24 June. I commend the amended motion to the Assembly.

Original question, as amended, agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: I think, also, that Mr Barr has well and truly fulfilled clause 3 here, regarding making a statement in the Assembly immediately after this motion! I think members would agree that that is the case.

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.11): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill is part of a suite of measures taken by the government that invest in our most disadvantaged and marginalised young people. It demonstrates the government's commitment to driving meaningful change for these young people and our community. I am really proud to be part of a government that is committed to raising the age of minimum criminal responsibility to 14 years old.

I will start my speech by rebutting Mr Cain and Ms Morris and saying that I found their characterisation of ACT police in their speeches quite offensive. ACT Policing is a highly professional police force that are appropriately trained to implement this reform.

Ms Morris, in her deliberately inflammatory language, completely neglects the point that ACT police do not want to be engaging with young people; they want to see young people get the therapeutic support that they need. It is absolutely devastating to see the media releases come out describing the serious incidents involving 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds. If these kids could have received the support they needed earlier, then perhaps they would not be on the trajectory they are now.

Data from the ABS shows the number of offenders who were aged between 10 and 17 has reduced significantly over the past 15 years: from 28.2 per cent in 2008-09, down to 13.5 per cent in 2023-24. Of this, the 12- and 13-year-old cohort represents a very small proportion. Fewer than 2½ per cent of all offenders around Australia were 12 or 13 years old. Of the 792 apprehensions by ACT Policing of people aged between 10 and 17, 168 of those were in the 12- and 13-year-old cohort.

The overwhelming evidence is that criminal justice responses do not result in better outcomes for young people who engage in harmful behaviours. Children and young people who do display harmful behaviours most often have vulnerabilities or complex circumstances in their lives. They have often experienced significant trauma, been

exposed to violence in the home and experienced homelessness or drug and alcohol misuse. By providing therapeutic supports, we can support these young people. We can reduce recidivism and improve community safety.

At points in my life, I have worked with particular organisations that support young people in exactly these situations. For three years I worked with Sudanese kids in Melbourne through the SAIL program in Dandenong. From 2013 to 2016, I worked as a volunteer for the Ted Noffs Foundation, as a mentor for young people who were experiencing homelessness and a whole raft of other complex trauma and life issues. The kids that I had the honour of working with were presented with life challenges at their young age that most of us could not even imagine. I now have teenage kids myself and am navigating the complex world with them. I have a deep sense of compassion for kids who have not had the support and opportunity that I have had and that my kids have had.

We are seeing the UK recently embrace the series *Adolescence*. It has raised significant social concerns on the complexity of the world that children and young people are facing these days. We have to be progressing and evolving as a society in how we understand, engage with and support young people, not reverting to the 1950s stance that the Canberra Liberals would like to see.

As other jurisdictions are progressing campaigns to criminalise and detain children and young people, I am very proud that here in the ACT we are focused on seeing young people receive the therapeutic support that they need. I am proud to be the minister representing ACT Policing and to be working with them through the implementation of this critical reform.

Police officers play an essential role in this reform, and the government recognises the positive role that the police can have in their engagement with young people. They are often one of the first to be called when a young person is engaging in harmful behaviour, and they can act as a vital link to divert children, young people and their families to available support systems and services. Police have an important role in this legislation as a key referrer to the Therapeutic Support Panel and as a key support to diversionary programs that engage young people in our community.

We give important and necessary powers to police in order to detect, prevent and solve crime. In many cases investigatory powers are enlivened by the police officers' suspicions, formed on reasonable grounds, that an offence is occurring. But for children and young people who cannot be charged or found guilty of an offence, we must consider the extent to which these powers should apply.

This bill addresses this issue by providing an effective and appropriate framework for the use of police powers with respect to children and young people under 14. The bill ensures that the exercise of police powers is age appropriate, and it balances the importance of limiting a young person's exposure to the criminal justice system with the need for police to use their powers as necessary to ensure the safety of the young person and the community.

There remain legitimate reasons why police need powers to stop, search and detain people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Two key reasons are the

safety of an individual young person and the safety of the wider community, and the bill provides for this.

The bill ensures that police can continue to investigate when a person under the age is incidental to the commission of the offence by an older person or an adult, which speaks to the issues that the Canberra Liberals have raised. This protects children from being drawn into the commission of a crime or utilised to hide evidence.

The bill also closely links the availability of police powers with the test used to determine if a person should be referred to the Therapeutic Support Panel. This should mean a smoother pathway out of the criminal justice system into options designed to support and rehabilitate young people.

The ACT government is also working closely with experts and service providers to enable earlier intervention and to provide more family-based supports. I want to provide some examples of just a few of the programs run by community organisations that do critical work for young people.

The Canberra Police Community Youth Club, the PCYC, provides a platform for ACT police to engage with young people in the community in a positive way. The recreational-based early intervention, crime prevention and reduction, and youth crime diversion programs run by the Canberra PCYC target young people exhibiting antisocial behaviour or disengagement from school, or who are engaging in lower-level crime.

The Project 180 program is an example of one program run by this organisation. Developed as part of the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT, the 180 program is a 20-week intensive support program targeted at young people aged between 13 and 17 years who are engaged in, or are at risk of engaging in, the youth justice system. The program provides education, trauma recovery, work experience, certificate courses, life skills and adventure-based healthy activities. The P180 program adopts individual and holistic approaches, assessing each participants' risk and protective factors, and works with the young person and their family to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors associated with offending behaviour.

The PCYC also runs the P2E program, a 20-week initiative aimed at supporting at-risk youth aged 10 to 25 who are disengaged or involved in the youth justice system. Participants are empowered to build resilience, to develop essential life skills and to pursue meaningful pathways towards education, employment and personal growth.

There is also the Project Solid Ground program, which allows PCYC to support young people experiencing violence or sexual abuse in the home. This provides a safe and stable environment, and offers trauma-informed care, emotional support and essential life skills to allow the participants to heal. This program is dedicated to fostering safety, wellbeing and hope for a brighter future. This program is also an intensive; I think it is a 20-week initiative, so these kids are not engaged in the school system. I commend the work of this organisation and others such as the Ted Noffs Foundation that are daily on the frontline supporting these kids.

Mr Speaker, this is a bill that takes seriously the challenges of balancing support for the most vulnerable with the need to ensure community safety. It supports ongoing police engagement with young people in a way that is balanced and appropriate. It further implements our commitment to a therapeutic response to children and young people who use harmful behaviour, in a way that will make meaningful change on an individual and community level now and into the future. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.21): The Greens support this bill. It will form part of the reforms that will see the minimum age of criminal responsibility raised from 12 to 14 on 1 July this year. Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility was one of the most impactful pieces of work that I led in the previous Assembly. Nothing could be more important than intervening appropriately in the lives of children when they are at critical junctures in their lives and being able to provide them with the therapeutic supports that can change their beliefs and behaviours.

This bill seeks to address stakeholders' concerns that the legislation should provide clearer guidance on the availability of police powers with regard to people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. It also provides a new framework for the use of those powers that expressly requires consideration of the age of the person suspected of committing the offence—specifically, the fact that a person under a specific age cannot be charged for an offence.

The bill aims to provide greater clarity that police powers will be available where police believe the use of powers is necessary for the safety of the community and/or the safety of an individual person. The Greens support measures that make clear to police what their powers are. The unfortunate reality is that, if police powers are misunderstood, misinterpreted or misapplied, this can be really damaging for individuals and can drive conflict and escalation. This is particularly the case when children and young people or people who are vulnerable in other ways come in contact with the police.

The law needs to be clear, not only so that police can readily ascertain what their powers are but also so that people know their rights and lawyers can help their clients if police have exercised their powers unlawfully. Vitally, this bill does not provide new powers to police officers. Instead, it clarifies how the current law can be applied and introduces new limits on the availability of those powers to persons under the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The most significant of these limitations is in circumstances where police may stop, search or detain a young person without a warrant, by providing a new seriousness threshold that a police officer must consider prior to using their powers when they are unable to form the belief, on reasonable grounds, that a person is at least 14 years old. The new threshold is based on section 501Q of the Children and Young People Act 2008. This seriousness threshold is in addition to existing statutory and common law limitations on the use of police powers and in addition to a police officer's obligations under section 40(b) of the Human Rights Act, as a public authority.

I look forward to the full realisation of the minimum age of criminal responsibility come July, of which this bill will provide a small but important part. When the age rises, we will see a reduction in the level of contact between the criminal justice

system and young people, which will ultimately reduce recidivism rates and result in greater engagement in diversionary strategies for young people.

This bill clarifies that, when police engage with young people under the minimum age of criminal responsibility, they do so under a clear framework that I envisage will benefit police, the young person and the community. We are pleased to offer our support for this bill today.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.24): I will speak briefly. I want to refute some of the nonsense that comes out of the police minister. She is posting videos on Facebook saying that somehow the Canberra Liberals are undermining the police because of what we are trying to do to give them more legislative power. Then today she said, "The Canberra Liberals are trying to take us back to the 1950s." The law that we are supporting is the existing law of the ACT in 2025. We are saying that we support the existing laws—the age of criminal responsibility being 12. That is not from the 1950s; that is in 2025. The change to the law has not yet occurred. I make the point that, if we are going to have a debate in here about the issues, that is fine, but to try to say that the Canberra Liberals' support for the current age of 12 somehow takes the law back to the 1950s is nonsense.

There is one party in here that is undermining the police. If you want to get into that debate, we are very happy to do that. Myth-making and spreading fear on your Facebook site—that somehow the Canberra Liberals, through wanting to give the police more powers, supporting existing laws and not wanting to increase the criminal age of responsibility to 14, are undermining the police and going back to the 1950s—makes a mockery of what you are saying. In fact, that undermines the good work of our police officers.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.26), in reply: I am pleased to close the debate. Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility recognises that children and young people under 14 years of age are unlikely to understand the seriousness of the criminal offence or meaningfully engage in the criminal justice process. It also recognises that engagement with the criminal justice system is often damaging for a child or young person. In many cases, it worsens the trauma and inequality that was driving the child's contact with the justice system in the first place and increases the likelihood of contact with the justice system through the rest of their lives.

Children and young people who engage in harmful, risky or violent behaviour often do so because of underlying complex needs that require an alternative, non-punitive response. Diversionary strategies, including referrals to the Therapeutic Support Panel which commenced operation last year, are key to improving safety and wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and the community.

The bill we are debating today does not provide police with new powers but clarifies how existing police powers can be exercised in relation to people under 14 years of age. These powers have the primary purpose of supporting the investigation of an offence through the collection of evidence to support a potential charge. Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility removes, in most circumstances, the end goal

of prosecution for an offence. However, we also fundamentally recognise that stop, search and detention powers also have a protective purpose. Police officers are first responders to matters of public safety. Police officers have a legitimate role in the prevention of crime and de-escalating situations before they reach the threshold of criminality. In placing age-appropriate limits on the exercise of those powers, the bill is balancing the importance of limiting a young person's exposure to the criminal justice system with the need to ensure police can continue to act to keep young people and the community safe.

This bill also meets our obligation as a human rights jurisdiction to ensure that police powers continue to be reasonable, proportionate and well-adapted to legitimate purposes. The bill requires police officers to turn their minds expressly to the age of a person before using their stop, search and detain powers.

Mr Cain, in his remarks earlier today, asked whether we have considered the question: how does the police officer know that someone is under the age of 14? We have considered this. The police officer does not have to be certain of a person's age. The bill recognises that it simply might not be possible for a police officer to determine the age of a person ahead of using a police power when responding to an urgent or serious situation. For this reason, the police officer only needs to form a belief on reasonable grounds that the person is at least 14 years old in order to use their existing powers. If the police officer cannot form a belief on reasonable grounds that the person is at least 14 years old, then a seriousness threshold must be met. That is, the police officer can only use their stop, search and detain powers if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that the child is at risk of engaging in or has engaged in harm to themselves or someone else, serious damage to property or the environment, cruelty to an animal, or any other serious or destructive behaviour, or if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that the exercise of the power is required to ensure the safety of the child.

The bill also includes provisions to ensure that, where police are investigating crimes committed by third parties, they can still use their existing stop, search and detain powers if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a person under 14 years of age is in possession of relevant material. This point is particularly important because it directly refutes the fearmongering that Mr Cain and Ms Morris were putting out. The bill has provisions that support ACT Policing where they are investigating crimes committed by a third party. So, regarding the idea of children being used as mules, there is an express provision set out in this legislation to assist police to do their job if that circumstance arises.

Search warrant powers are also refined through this bill. The responsibility of a warrant officer—not a police officer, as Mr Cain said—to consider the interests of a person under 14 years of age is now clearer, more precise and more express. The concept of the best interests of a child is already used extensively in territory law and is a consideration that is already required of an issuing officer. The amendment is making it more precise in these situations.

Also, new mechanisms are available through this bill to provide support to young people who may be affected by search warrants. By providing warrant officers with discretionary powers to notify the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner or the Public Advocate prior to the execution of a

warrant, we made clearer pathways for young people to be diverted out of the criminal justice system and into therapeutic support options. Notification to the commissioner or to the Public Advocate is also required where a person under 14 years of age is transported by the police to a safe location that is other than a parent or guardian.

These notice requirements are intended to provide an opportunity for the commissioner or the Public Advocate to provide additional support, as appropriate, to persons under 14 years of age, either where a search warrant has been executed or where they have been transported to an appropriate agency or person. The oversight that these bodies provide in such situations is about supporting the overarching policy goals of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

This bill represents a careful, nuanced and evidence-led approach to ensure better outcomes for young people without increasing the risks of harmful behaviour in our community. It also makes some minor technical amendments to legislation arising from increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility. An amendment to the existing provisions that prohibit the use of youth offence particulars in court proceedings will mean that there is consistency between conduct committed in the territory and conduct committed outside of the territory.

The bill corrects an error in the Spent Convictions Act 2000 and ensures that only the correct cohort of people are able to apply for a spent youth conviction. The bill also ensures consistency between territory and non-territory conduct in the information available when undertaking a Working with Vulnerable People background check. These two amendments to the Spent Convictions Act will provide greater clarity to our border communities who are presented with different ways that New South Wales and ACT laws apply to the same materials.

Finally, the bill amends the preventative action powers so that there is an alignment between the reasons to enter a premises with the powers available to a police officer when they enter.

This bill takes an evidence-based and human rights approach to a complex socio-legal issue and reflects our understanding that the criminal justice system is not the right environment for children and young people who engage in harmful conduct. This bill is part of a larger suite of measures, both operational and legislative, designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in the ACT and, in turn, the broader community.

I thank all who have contributed to the development of this bill. The views put to the government canvassed a range of perspectives that were thoughtful and insightful and helped to ensure that this bill secured the right policy settings. I recognise that the operationalisation of this for ACT Policing is something that is being worked through. I and Minister Paterson are very alive to that. It might appear contrary, but one of the reasons we are legislating this today is to give ACT Policing certainty and as much time as practically possible with that certainty regarding what is occurring on 1 July, as well as the time to engage, ask questions, consider scenarios and feel confident ahead of 1 July.

There were some claims by the opposition earlier about not having more time to

examine the issues in this bill or rushing it through. This was referred to the committee which the person making those comments chairs. That committee decided not to do an inquiry. I have no involvement with that. It is very odd to complain about the government operating within the rules of this place, when perhaps a mirror should be held up.

I sincerely thank our outstanding officials for leading the policy work, the drafting and the engagement with this amendment bill. I recognise that this is the last legislative piece of something that has been the subject of many hours of work over many years, with many ministers—including Minister Rattenbury, as he was then, and Minister Stephen-Smith—many directorates and many stakeholders. I particularly thank the Justice and Community Safety Directorate for working through the issues and for their human rights approach and consideration, and for guiding a new Attorney-General through this process as well. It has been so appreciated and I cannot thank them enough.

This last legislative piece of this major reform now provides the framework, but ultimately it will be the people who work within the framework to whom we will be indebted. It is because of them that I hope, for years to come, we will see very real improvements to people's lives, community safety, statistics and closing the gap, and, most of all, better outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

Question put:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14		Noes 7
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Chiaka Barry
Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury	Peter Cain
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Leanne Castley
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Ed Cocks
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Deborah Morris
Suzanne Orr		Mark Parton
Marisa Paterson		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Statements by members

VolunteeringACT—Volunteering Expo 2025

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.42): I rise to speak about the recent 2025 Volunteering Expo hosted by VolunteeringACT. This expo was held on Friday, 28 March at the University of Canberra refectory in my electorate of Ginninderra. It was wonderful to celebrate thriving volunteerism and community spirit in the ACT.

According to *The state of volunteering in the ACT 2024* report, 75 per cent of ACT residents contributed over 63 million hours of volunteering. What a remarkable achievement. This equates to approximately $14.1 billion of commercial, civic and individual benefits to the Canberra region. This goes to show how community minded, compassionate and caring Canberrans are.

I want to thank all Canberrans who contribute their time, money and energy towards volunteering, and I want to thank VolunteeringACT for having me at their wonderful, fun and interesting expo event.

World Autism Awareness Day

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.44): Today I would like to speak briefly on the celebration of World Autism Awareness Day, which fell on 2 April. Canberra is a diverse and welcoming city. World Autism Awareness Day is a perfect time to acknowledge that we must always continue to work hard to make sure that that stays true.

This Assembly is committed to a neurodiversity strategy, which I think is a step in the right direction. I hope this strategy will ensure that people with autism have all the necessary supports needed, no matter how minor or insignificant they are; everyone in Canberra should be given the opportunity to thrive.

More support for people with autism is especially important right now, considering the hateful rhetoric against them that is emerging in society. Folk in the disability community are very concerned about the Trumpian anti-DEI rhetoric. This directly leads to discrimination against people with a range of disabilities, particularly people with autism.

There is this nasty sentiment kicking around that people with autism cannot do things that they are absolutely capable of doing. We, as an Assembly and as a city, cannot give any credence to these ideas. Autistic people always have a fundamental place in Canberra. As an ADHD-er under the same neurodivergent umbrella, I will always back you. To all the people with autism here today, or who are watching or reading this speech, we stand with you. Canberra is a city that will always support you.

Youth—social media

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.45): Over recent evenings, I spent my time following the advice of my team and watching the new Netflix series *Adolescence*. I am sure many of you have heard of it or perhaps even watched it yourselves. It is timely and it feels crucial to bring it to the attention of politicians in this parliament. After all, we are the leaders of this community. Right now, leaders across our community, mums and dads, nurses, teachers, and even coalminers working far from

here, are already in the midst of discussing it.

It is on their minds because this show has resonated deeply with so many. What is striking is not its uniqueness or its sensationalism; instead, what makes it so impactful is how profoundly ordinary this story is. It is ordinary because our society, for far too long, has been built on a foundation of men's violence against women. It is ordinary because, more and more, we witness young men become targets of so-called influencers, who spread hate, misogyny and violence, all in service of their aggressive, ultraconservative, antisocial agendas.

I rise today not because I have all the answers, or to castigate. I rise to bring awareness. We as politicians must engage in this conversation, as the rest of the community already is. It is our duty to reflect the change our community demands, to lead with the courage to address these issues and to shape the future they want to see.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

> That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Legislation—Executive Records Bill—exposure draft

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.47) by leave: I present the following paper:

> Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025—Exposure draft—Andrew Braddock (prepared by Parliamentary Counsel's Office), together with an explanatory statement.

This draft bill constitutes my response to concerns that I previously raised regarding the length of time taken by the ACT government to respond to requests by members of the public for access to accessible executive records. The average processing time is currently just shy of a whole year. Something needs to be done about that.

I flagged my intentions in a media release published on Canberra Day earlier this year. At its heart, this bill imposes a statutory deadline of 30 working days for the ACT government to deal with said requests. This is to ensure that the ACT government is required to process requests in a timely fashion, in line with what the Canberra community would reasonably expect from their government. This timeframe also emulates the Freedom of Information Act timeframe, which this Assembly has already determined to be a reasonable timeframe for response by the ACT government to a Canberran's request for information.

My bill also gives the ACT Ombudsman a new role as an independent arbitrator under the act to approve directorate requests for extensions of time, such as in the case of voluminous requests—a practice that would emulate that which applies to the freedom of information process. The ACT Ombudsman would also have a role as an independent arbitrator in appeals, reviewing release restraint decisions. This removes

the current practice of having another officer within the same directorate checking their colleague's work when a request is made for information that has been denied. It has been demonstrated under the freedom of information process that the ACT government does not always get its release decisions right. Therefore, I judge it to be in Canberrans' best interests that such appeals are heard by an independent and external adjudicator, ensuring confidence and trust in the decision-making process.

My draft explanatory statement further articulates my approach, but I want to make this point: I want the release process to be reasonable and timely—actually timely. A researcher looking at old accessible documents should never have to request documents a year in advance. My consultation has so far included seeking the input of the ACT Ombudsman, the ACT Human Rights Commission, and the Centre for Public Integrity, but I have no intention of stopping there. I want to make sure I get this bill right.

In the interests of seeking support for this bill, I invite not just members of the Assembly but also members of the public and the Canberra community to comment and provide me with feedback on this exposure draft. I am happy for my office to provide briefings on the bill. It is my hope to formally introduce it at a future sitting, possibly during the June sitting week, with the objective of debating and passing it in time for Canberra Day 2026. Under current legislation, executive records are accessible after 10 years. It is not reasonable or timely that members of the public have to wait a further 11 months, on average, for the document to see the light of day.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.50): I would like to bring to the Assembly's attention a troubling issue that threatens the integrity of youth justice oversight in the ACT. Recent reports from ABC News reveal that the management of the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre has placed itself above scrutiny, refusing access to oversight bodies and shielding itself from accountability. This is unacceptable. The government must not allow it to continue.

The denial of access by Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, is a direct violation of the Children and Young People Act 2008. The law states that the commissioner may enter Bimberi at any reasonable time to fulfil her duties, yet she was turned away for failing to make an appointment. The legislation does not specify that she has to make an appointment. The law does not impose arbitrary time restrictions on oversight, yet Bimberi management insists that her visit must occur only between 4 pm and 5 pm. This is not acceptable. This is not a matter of operational convenience; it is an obstruction of justice. Oversight exists for a reason: to protect young people; not for those in power to manage at a whim.

Furthermore, we must ask why the Australian Federal Police are only now investigating the allegations of assault by a Bimberi staff member, months after the alleged incident. What caused this delay? Was the complaint suppressed? If oversight bodies must schedule visits, are police investigators also expected to make an appointment?

The public deserves answers. The ACT government must take immediate action to address these issues. If the Director-General of the Community Services Directorate was misinformed about her obligation, she must acknowledge the error and ensure that the commissioner, Ms Turnbull-Roberts, is granted unrestricted access. If the government does not intervene, legal action may be necessary to uphold the law. We must not allow our youth justice system to become a stronghold of secrecy. The wellbeing of vulnerable young people depends on transparency, accountability and the proper application of the law. I urge the government to act now.

Health—Interchange Health Co-operative

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.53): I do not have to inform this chamber that the GP health landscape in the Tuggeranong Valley has changed enormously because of the closure of the Interchange Health Co-operative. This 100 per cent bulk-billed general practice and allied health service called in administrators on Monday. This is a disaster for so many people. In the adjournment debate, I want to put on the record the concerns of some of the people who have been affected. In mentioning their names and their experiences, I highlight that we are talking about a lot of individuals in a lot of homes.

My office has been contacted by many. I reckon this one came through on Tuesday. It is from Fallon, who said, "My appointment for today was cancelled. I now have to find a doctor that doesn't know me to prescribe my pain medication that I will run out of in the next 48 hours. Not happy, especially when the lady on the phone this morning said she would get them to sort out my script and call me this afternoon, which has not happened. At least if they did that, I would have four weeks to find another doctor and have them at least meet me and get them my file to read."

Sarah from Isabella Plains said, "Yes; I've been a patient there the whole time they've been open and had really good care. Finding some place new is an extremely daunting prospect."

Lorelai said, "It's already nearly impossible to get a doctor appointment in Tuggeranong. They either don't take new patients or you have to plan when you get sick, two to three weeks in advance. Now it's going to be even worse."

Leigh said, "Mark, this will affect all of us in Tuggeranong. All the patients will now need to find new GPs from the few that we have. They will be putting more pressure on an already overloaded system. I have to book weeks in advance to see my GP as it is."

Kirsty said, "It will affect everyone who needs to see a doctor in the valley, because those 5,000 patients have to go somewhere."

Cara Ann said, "This is devastating. Vital health services will now be out of reach for so many young people, older people and those doing it tough in our community. When people have to decide between buying food and seeking health care, it's a very sad situation."

Hayley said, "Yes; I'm impacted. I'm only just finding out now after reading this.

There goes my mental health! Stress, anxiety, worry. Just great. Not what I need to hear just now."

Ron said, "I had to drive from Ainslie to Tuggeranong just to find a bulk-billing doctor who could help me with complicated medical conditions and medication, and now I cannot find a bulk-billing doctor on the north side of Canberra. I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm 66 and a disability pensioner. Where do I go?"

Sean said, "They're probably smashed by the ACT's payroll tax."

Bronwyn said, "I'm also pretty peeved off. It's taken me so long to find a doctor who's really lovely and I felt comfortable with and has tried to investigate things from multiple angles, and now I'm back to square one."

Maddi said, "It's not only devastating for patients but dangerous for some too. They look after not only a lot of chronically ill patients but also those struggling with mental health issues and addiction. Finding another doctor that is affordable and also experienced and approachable is near impossible."

These are the tip of the iceberg. The Assembly needs to understand how many individuals have been affected and the level of impact. It is extremely important that we put those voices on the record and point out that, although the whole Medicare bulk-billing issue is a federal one, it remains very clear that the ACT is the jurisdiction facing, by far, the most pain in this space. It certainly leads us to believe that much of the blame must also be focused on the ACT. The minister clinging to an absurd excuse that it is somehow Scott Morrison's fault is just ludicrous, and it will not wash with the people of the Valley.

Health—endometriosis and adenomyosis

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.57): I rise today not only as a member of this Assembly but as one of the many Australians living with endometriosis, and I stand in solidarity with those suffering from its lesser known sister condition, adenomyosis. While March is Endometriosis Awareness Month—and I thank Mr Rattenbury for his statement in the chamber yesterday recognising Endometriosis Awareness Month—April is Adenomyosis Awareness Month.

At various points in my endo journey, I have been suspected of having adenomyosis, based on scans and what could be seen in surgery, although it is likely that I do not suffer from this condition. Adenomyosis is a chronic, painful condition where the lining of the uterus grows into the muscle wall. It causes severe pelvic pain, heavy bleeding and fatigue and, like endo, it is often misunderstood, misdiagnosed or dismissed altogether.

For far too long, people suffering adenomyosis, endometriosis and a range of other pelvic pain conditions have been told their pain is "normal", that they are just exaggerating, and that they should just toughen up. This is not just a women's health issue, though. It is a public health issue, an equity issue, a workplace issue, and a social and community issue. For too long, we have just ignored it, and something needs to be done.

That is why I am proud to be part of an ACT Labor government that is recognising reproductive health as a core health priority. From increasing access to gynaecological care to investing in women's health hubs, ACT Labor is delivering tangible support for people living with endo, adeno and other pelvic pain conditions.

I am part of an ACT Labor government that is working to make sure that the Canberra Endometriosis Centre at the Canberra Hospital, the first of its kind in Australia, works with the federally funded public pelvic pain clinic in Civic to help all women suffering from pelvic pain, including those suffering from adenomyosis.

Federally, Labor is stepping up, too. The national endometriosis action plan expanded funding for pelvic pain research and Medicare-subsided MRIs have expanded treatment on the PBS, and these are all vital steps towards equity in health care. But there is still much more to do.

Awareness months like this month, for adenomyosis, and last month, for endometriosis, are reminders that we must keep listening, we must keep investing, and we must keep fighting for a health system that takes women's pain and women's health seriously, because no-one should be left to suffer alone.

Canberra—educational institutions

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.00): I rise today to speak about some recent engagements I have had with the educational institutions across my electorate of Ginninderra and Canberra more broadly. Ginninderra is very fortunate to have a number of outstanding schools, be they public, Catholic or independent. While there are many that could be improved, particularly with respect to their infrastructure, most Belconnen schools provide a high quality of education to our Belconnen children and students.

Belconnen is home to the University of Canberra, one of Australia's best tertiary institutions, and Canberra is home to the Australian National University, the Australian Catholic University, the University of New South Wales and Charles Sturt University, which is operating from the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

The ACT should be not only the nation's capital but an education capital. There is no doubt in my mind that this Assembly could be doing more to encourage better education and pastoral outcomes for ACT students, teachers and parents. Nonetheless, it is always a pleasure to engage with our city's schools and universities, especially those based in Belconnen.

Starting with my recent visit to the ANU on Wednesday, 12 February, I commemorated ANU Market Day by visiting the ANU Liberals Club stall along University Avenue. Of course, I visited many other stalls during that afternoon. I was very pleased to be able to engage with many young people about liberalism, life and politics in Canberra and, of course, the Canberra Liberals policies and agenda. I want especially to thank Sophie and Pearson for organising this great event.

On 14 February, it was my pleasure to attend the investiture of the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, the Hon Bill Shorten, held in the Ann

Harding Conference Centre at the UC campus in Bruce. It was a wonderful experience to be a part of, as the UC welcomed its new Vice-Chancellor. I thank Mr Shorten and the University of Canberra for their generous invitation and I extend my best wishes in furthering the University of Canberra's educational offerings.

On Tuesday, 25 February, I attended the opening mass of St Francis Xavier College in Florey. St Francis Xavier College is a Catholic college whose students, admirably, are often involved in community service. The mass celebrated the election of senior leaders of the college and provided students with the opportunity to reflect on the year ahead. Celebrated by Monsignor John Woods, it was a very special occasion, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have spoken with a number of the student leaders, school officials and parents after the event. My special thanks go to Monsignor John and college principal Ms Sandra Darley.

On Thursday, 27 February, I attended the commissioning of Radford College's seventh principal, Mr Christopher Bradbury. Radford College is one of Canberra's leading independent schools, and it is an exciting time in their school's history to be welcoming a new school principal. I was very pleased to be joined by former Leader of the Opposition and old Radford collegian Alistair Coe at the event, and to chat and spend some time with the CEO of Lifeline Canberra, Ms Carrie-Ann Leeson. I thank Mr Bradbury and the chair of the board, Vicki Williams, for their invitation.

On Thursday, 27 March, I joined my Liberal colleagues Mr Hanson, Ms Barry and Ms Morris in visiting and touring the University of New South Wales campus in Civic—the former CIT Reid site. Being my second tour of this campus, it was wonderful to see the progress and innovation that have taken place there since my last visit. The University of New South Wales Canberra City promises to be an incredible addition to our territory's tertiary education opportunities.

On the more social side of things, on Friday, 14 March, I was entrusted with the cashbox at the barbecue stall for St John the Apostle Primary School's fete at Florey, a trust that I take very seriously. I hope I was of service to them during that afternoon.

On Saturday, 29 March, St Thomas Aquinas Primary School in Charnwood held their school fete, which was another great event, and it was well attended by the school community and residents from west Belconnen. I helped with the popcorn stall on that occasion.

As a former schoolie who has worked both as a classroom teacher and as a principal over a 20-year period, I am very appreciative of the value and importance of our educational offerings in Belconnen.

Education—neurodivergent children

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.05): Every child in the ACT deserves access to a quality, inclusive and accessible education. Sadly, that is not the case for one of my constituents, Jessica, and her son Lincoln. The other week we met for a coffee. She speaks so highly of Lincoln. He is a loving and caring brother and son, and he loves to play and explore the world around him. But he has unfairly faced systemic discrimination by his early education centre. Jess has let me share some of her

experience in the chamber today.

Lincoln has level 3 autism. Despite being a vibrant and capable child, his childcare centre advised Jess that they may no longer be able to accommodate him due to his additional needs, citing a lack of resources and support staff, and threatening to withdraw him completely. This experience has left Jess feeling heartbroken, isolated and frustrated, not just as a parent but as a member of a system that is failing neurodivergent children.

She and Lincoln have been turned away from centres and, outrageously, they have been labelled a financial deficit. It is really distressing that our society is viewing children as dollar figures—children who should have access to education and community connection to grow, play and learn. We must do better.

In response, Jess launched a petition calling for increased government support, funding and accountability in early childhood education to ensure that no child is ever excluded because of disability or difference. Her petition gathered 185 signatures, and it has since been presented to the relevant minister for consideration.

Jess's story is not unique, but her willingness to speak out gives a voice to many families who feel silenced. Her advocacy is a powerful call to action for systemic change in how we include and support neurodivergent children in the earliest and most formative years of their lives. Jess is asking that neurodivergent children like Lincoln are never again made to feel that they do not belong. She is asking that no child should be turned away because of who they are. No parent should be forced to fight for the most basic right—the right of their child to be included.

Disability only exists in our community because of the barriers that we as a society put up. Once we embrace the unique ways in which our minds and bodies work, we can break down the systemic and societal barriers that exclude people from aspects of our community. I commend Jess for her resilience and her tenacity to change the system so that every child, not just in the ACT but nationally, has access to education that genuinely supports them. Thank you, Jess.

Housing—affordability

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.07): Yesterday, I spoke about the housing crisis in my own words and today I want to use the words of a handful of the many people who responded to my call for personal testimonies. I will keep them anonymous, but I do have the contact details for all of them. Ms W told me:

> My own personal experiences have really educated me in just how central to mental health, mental wellbeing, health, stability and community participation secure housing is.

Mr C wrote:

> In terms of housing, the youth of today do not have any of the great advantages we had in the 1970s. We need to recognise that a roof over your head is not just accommodation but a stability factor in someone's life. I see people at times trying to sleep in a tunnel in winter or in an alleyway at the local shops. This

> should not happen in a wealthy city like Canberra.

Mr B said:

> At the end of second-year uni, I needed to find share housing. I was exhausted and depressed. My friends and I must have tried 50 or so homes. Many people around me have also struggled to find housing, and my two closest friends are completely burnt out and depressed as they struggle to find accommodation.

BC used this vivid imagery:

> I feel like I'm drowning. I don't know if you've ever drowned, but you spend what feels like an eternity treading water first, feeling your energy sapping and knowing you don't have long before the unrelenting rise of the water sucks you under. People should never have to feel that way when thinking about a place to live, especially not in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

ER described watching a parent's struggle:

> I could see the writing on the wall in 2018 that my mother was at risk of homelessness. For me, this was unacceptable. My mother and I had lived in precarious housing for my entire childhood, and I was not about to let that be her whole life experience. Due to luck, I was able to secure a well-paying job that meant I could finally address my mother's housing insecurity forever, but so many people are not as lucky as me.

AM said:

> We find ourselves often skipping needed medical appointments to ensure we can afford groceries and rent.

CS's situation is far from unique:

> I don't own a car and rely on public transport. I pay child support and don't own any other assets except for my super, which I can't access before my retirement. Despite the fact that I have no assets and no prospects of saving a deposit, I do not qualify for any government housing initiatives, just because I had owned a house with my ex between 2007 and 2009. In short, I am not poor enough to qualify for any government home buying initiatives and I am not rich enough to save a deposit.

Finally, WL gave a pensioner's perspective. Again, this respondent is far from alone. They said:

> The housing crisis came as a shock to me. Over the past three years, my mortgage payments went from $800 per month to almost $3,000. That kind of increase is impossible for a pensioner to cover. I was forced to sell my unit or have the finance company sell it from under me. I am now in a rental, paying $620 per week. With the housing allowance, I can cover the rent but not food, medications or any personal requirements. My life has gone from comfortable to critical. I am reliant on handouts from family and friends to survive. We pensioners need help, and quickly.

To conclude, as I said yesterday, housing is a human right. We need to treat it as one. Many of the levers that need to be used to solve this crisis are federal ones that we cannot control here at a territory level. However, adding the right to housing to our Human Rights Act is something we can do and something we should do.

International Asexuality Day

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.11): 6 April was International Asexuality Day, to celebrate all people on the asexual or ace spectrum. This spectrum includes a wide range of people who may experience no, little or limited sexual attraction. People who fall under this umbrella may or may not engage in all sorts of platonic, romantic and, yes, in some cases, sexual relationships.

Asexuality is often confused with A-romanticism, which is the lack of romantic attraction. There is, of course, some crossover; and, as with many queer communities, there is a strong bond of solidarity between these groups, but these are distinct identities and communities. Many A-romantic people experience sexual attraction and engage in sexual relationships, and many asexual folk experience romantic attraction and engage in romantic relationships.

In the ACT context specifically, I want to give a massive shout-out to the ACT Aces and the Ace and Aro Collective AU. Last term, I had the pleasure of meeting with the lovely Kate and Jenny of ACT Aces and hear about the amazing work that the organisation does for the community, and the challenges that the community faces.

Often, in poor faith, some will and have questioned the need for groups like ACT Aces and Ace and Aro Collective AU, the need for an International Asexuality Day or even the need to give a speech like this in this place. One notable celebrity, who I will not name—but they are the one you are thinking of—even accused the community of creating a fake "oppression day", which, ironically, proves the need for this day.

According to a 2020 UK study by the UK-based Trevor Project, asexual young people are even more likely to experience depression and anxiety than other queer people of their age or group, which is already over-represented when it comes to these mental health problems.

Another study from Kings College, London, found that up to one-third of people believed that it was a mental illness that could just be cured, with many more repeating stereotypes like, "Ace folk just haven't meant the right person." My goodness; please do not say these things to ace folk. With these kinds of public views, with many believing that asexuality is either not real or like a disease, it is not hard to see why this community needs support.

I have spoken before in this place about how some seem to view some queer identities as threats or somehow undermining other people's lives. I think that sometimes our society finds it easy to view sexuality, gender and romantic attraction as binary, or at least un-nuanced topics. But this does not affect others who do experience sexual attraction and engage in sexual relationships. Frankly, it is generally none of anyone's business.

Just as I have always striven to stand with the queer community, no matter what their gender, or which gender they experience attraction towards, I pledge also to stand with members of the queer community on the ace spectrum.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.11 pm.