



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

25 June 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 8 July 2025**.

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Wednesday, 25 June 2025

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.02): 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.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Gungahlin town centre—secure bike storage—petition 14-25

By Mr Braddock, from 155 residents:

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

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

Investment in active transport is one of the cheapest and most effective health and environmental interventions a government can make. Recent planning for active travel routes in the Gungahlin town centre have attempted to address issues primarily involving route safety and accessibility.

Recently during the Gungahlin Town Centre East community engagement process the need for a centralised secure bike storage facility has been clearly identified. There is a growing number of residents of Gungahlin that are embracing alternative modes of transportation to and from outlying suburbs, to and from school and into the Gungahlin town centre. Whilst there are a number of bicycle racks around the town centre, fear of theft and unsheltered storage are barriers to people taking up active transport. Often given the increased cost associated with electrified personal transportation devices in general security in the unattended storage of the device is a key barrier in the uptake and usage of this emerging mode of transportation for users of the public transportation network.

The Gungahlin Town Centre should be a priority for a modern secure digital storage system given its rapidly growing population (from 87,843 in 2021 to a projected 148,799 in 2060) predominantly within 5km of the town centre. Distance research has shown people can comfortably traverse on a bicycle or electric scooter. Gungahlin also has both a bus interchange, a light rail terminus and a park and ride located in the town centre. This provides a unique opportunity to

encourage multimodal active travel to address arterial road congestion, public health and emissions reductions objectives. Secure digital bicycle storage will allow users a modern alternative solution to travel the notorious “last mile” from their homes and then leave their bicycles or scooters securely locked up in a purpose-built facility in the centre of Gungahlin as they shop or travel further afield on the Light Rail or Bus network.

Such an amenity will also help increase the visibility of bicycles and scooters in our community and can have a powerful impact in normalising behaviour, encouraging more people to ride over time. This will also help alleviate pressure on congested roads and parking within the Gungahlin town centre. Such an amenity has been identified as a short-term priority initiative in the ACT Government’s Gungahlin Transport Plan and as a proposed upgrade in the Gungahlin Active Travel Feasibility study.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to install sheltered, digital secure, bike/scooter-storage conveniently located in the Gungahlin Town Centre near the bus and light rail stops.

Charles Conder Primary School—parking—petitions 19-25 and 36-25

By Ms Tough, from 591 and 150 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the critical parking challenges at Charles Conder Primary School.

Since 2013, enrolments at Charles Conder Primary School have nearly doubled from 275 to 535 students in 2025. While parking infrastructure remains unchanged, this has led to daily congestion and heightened safety risks for students during drop-off and pick-up times. The lack of designated parking near the oval further exacerbates the problem, creating additional difficulties for staff, visitors, and families attending school events.

Inadequate parking not only causes frustration but also results in heightened traffic challenges, unsafe conditions, and significant erosion of surrounding land. Although we have approached the Education Directorate on multiple occasions, we have had no success in expanding our current parking spaces. We seek your support to advocate for the construction of the car park extension, to support a safer, more accessible school environment and helping strengthen the connection between Charles Conder Primary School, its families, and the broader community.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to:

- Prioritise funding for the development and expansion of parking infrastructure at Charles Conder Primary School.
- Ensure designated parking spaces are established for the oval area to accommodate the school’s growing needs.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were

referred to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25

By Mr Braddock, from 264 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that: The Molonglo Valley is Canberra's fastest-growing district, with a forecast final population of 70,000 residents. The recent three-week closure of Coppins Crossing has exacerbated existing transport pressures already faced by Molonglo Valley residents.

Residents are facing significant congestion along John Gorton Drive and the Cotter Road, leading to increased commuting times and dangerous rat-running through suburban streets. Buses are competing with cars in these congested roads. This leads to disruptions in public transport journeys, as it limits the speed and reliability of bus services servicing the Molonglo Valley. This congestion will worsen as the district develops. The benefits of the recent bus frequency improvements, as delivered in the latest timetable changes, cannot be fully realised so long as the buses continue to get stuck in the very traffic they are intended to relieve.

Dedicated bus lanes are necessary to ensure public transport is a reliable, genuine option for Molonglo Valley's current and future residents to get to and from work, school and appointments.

Your petitioners, therefore, request that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to:

- Deliver full-length bus lanes from the John Gorton Drive/Steve Irwin Avenue/Fred Daly Avenue intersection in Coombs and Wright to the Cotter Road/Kirkpatrick Street/Dargie Street intersection at North Weston, and
- Ensure that the future extension of Bindubi Street to Whitlam is delivered with full-length bus lanes from day one, to avoid a repeat of the congestion issues that are hampering the Molonglo Valley's existing bus routes.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25 Gungahlin town centre—secure bike storage—petition 14-25

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.04): Today I present two petitions that are in the spirit of giving Canberrans genuine transport choices, from Molonglo to Gungahlin.

Firstly, why does it take an hour to travel from the city, here in Canberra, to places like Weston, Coombs and Denman Prospect? During peak hour, traffic becomes far too congested, leaving cars and buses lining up along Cotter Road and John Gorton Drive. Commuters trying to get to work, school, university and the shops have to plan hours in advance if they plan to catch the bus.

There is a simple answer to this: we need dedicated bus lanes, additional to the lanes that already exist. This would stop buses getting caught in the traffic, decreasing commuters' time spent sitting on a bus, plus free up capacity to be reinvested back into the bus network. The faster buses can complete their routes, the sooner they can commence on their next route. At a time when we want to decrease carbon emissions from transport, this is a simple and direct way in which the government can encourage the uptake of public transport.

There is a reason people from these areas choose not to take the bus to work: it takes forever to get to the destination. A dedicated bus lane will allow buses, like the R7 and R10, to run through their routes in a timeline that is appropriate to travel the 14 kilometres.

Molonglo Valley is a growing area, with a final forecast population of 70,000 residents. In fact, the Molonglo Valley is the fastest growing district in Canberra. We should not be just increasing the frequency of bus transport in this area; we need to expand this area's infrastructure to meet the needs of this population, both current and future.

Molonglo Valley needs those additional bus lanes now, and it needs them going forward. The government has already recognised the value of dedicated bus corridors, such as the Belconnen Transitway. I call on the government to seriously consider this petition and to implement its requested actions so that it does not take 60 minutes to travel 14 kilometres from the city to the Molonglo Valley. I look forward to seeing the government's response to this petition and implore it to construct the dedicated bus lanes.

Moving to a district closer to my home. With a growing population living within five kilometres of Gungahlin town centre, residents deserve a genuine choice when it comes to transport. In Gungahlin, we are lucky to have light rail; however, it is the last-mile connections that tend to be the issue. If you live just too far from the light rail to walk or bus easily, you may opt to get in your car instead. Cycling is a great option here, where you can cycle for a quick five to 10 minutes to connect up with other public transport services, whether it be light rail to the city or the R8 going to Belconnen. But people are not doing so because they fear what will happen to their bikes if they leave them there all day. Providing secure, digital storage for bicycles and e-scooters is a modern solution to encourage more people onto public transport, providing them with peace of mind.

I would like to thank everyone who has signed these two petitions for drawing these issues to the attention of the Assembly.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25
Gungahlin town centre—secure bike storage—petition 14-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.07): I would like to make a comment about the Molonglo bus lanes. I support the petition asking for full length bus lanes along John Gorton Drive and Cotter Road, and for the future Bindubi Street extension. Reliable, frequent public transport is essential to ensure people living in the rapidly growing Molonglo Valley have choices about how they travel, and it will help to reduce pressure on the area's at-capacity roads.

There are already bus priority lanes in place at almost all the traffic lights along the John Gorton Drive and Cotter Road route. It should therefore be a relatively simple task to extend these bus lanes along the rest of the route.

I would also like to support bike storage in town centres. Well-located, secure bike storage allows people to access rapid routes without having to wait for infrequent local buses, thereby shortening commute times and making public transport a more attractive option. They can also support people visiting and working in town centres.

The current system for gaining access to bike cages is slow and cumbersome. It still uses the old MyWay cards, and it can take two to three weeks for access to be configured. The government has yet to release any information about how or when the bike cage network will be integrated with the new MyWay+ system. There needs to be a seamless, online sign-up process that provides same-day access to people wishing to access bike cages.

Charles Conder Primary School—parking—petitions 19-25 and 36-25

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.08): I rise to speak on the petition I sponsored on behalf of the Charles Conder Primary School, the P&C Association, the parents, friends and the wider community members, regarding insufficient parking around the school and neighbouring corridor at Charles Conder that causes significant safety risks and mounting frustration for the community.

Charles Conder Primary School is a school in my home suburb of Conder, servicing the suburbs of Conder and Banks, conveniently located on the street that borders the two suburbs. I know that is very far south for a lot of people, but I think the nearly doubling of enrolments, from 275 to 535, from 2013 to now, shows just how popular the Lanyon Valley is, and many people agree with me that it is definitely the best place to live.

With this large increase in enrolments, however, the infrastructure supporting the traffic and parking around the school has not adapted to accommodate the growing student body and the influx of vehicles. It has led to increased daily congestion and heightened safety risks for students during drop-off and pick-up times.

Compounding this issue, the oval next to the school does not have designated parking, which can create additional difficulties for staff, visitors and families attending school events when the oval is in use. Inadequate parking is not only causing frustration but results in heightened traffic challenges and some unsafe conditions. It has also caused

significant erosion of the surrounding land, where parents jump the kerb to park on the grass, which is now really dirt, between the trees next to the car park off Tom Roberts Avenue. This damage and erosion can even be seen now from Google Maps.

I want to thank Sam, the primary petitioner, and Lisa as well, who are here in the gallery today. I first became aware of the issue of parking last year, standing at Lanyon Marketplace, when Sam approached me for a chat. While I live not that far from the school, it is not on a street that I would usually drive down, and when I do drive that way, it is not usually in school hours. However, I can say that I have spent many an election day standing at Charles Conder Primary School, and they do an awesome barbecue—but more on that later.

Sam told me about the issues faced by parents every morning and afternoon at the school and how there are many near misses around the school because of the cars parked on Abrahams Crescent and the pretty tight corner that is already there, blocking one lane of traffic. And I know from doorknocking the residents on that street that they also complained about how, particularly, the afternoon pick-up makes it really difficult to access their houses.

Earlier this year, Sam and some other parents, including Lisa and Andrea, reached out to ask if I would sponsor a petition, and just in time for the federal election barbecue, we got that petition up and running. At that barbecue, the petition was advertised, and I had many conversations about the parking and the petitions with members of the community while they stood in line to vote or while they enjoyed their democracy sausage. They told me about anxieties of car lines, children walking through traffic unsupervised, and staff overwhelmed by efforts to balance traffic management and teacher duties. These added pressures are unnecessary and unsustainable.

I commend Sam and the wider community for their determination and persistence towards creating worthwhile solutions. The petition launched in April this year, and it has amassed nearly 750 signatures, which is no small feat in this place. I told Sam she needed 500 to be considered by a committee, so she set her goal, and she has beaten it. That is nearly 750 advocates for the community. That is parents, teachers and neighbours coming together. Thank you, Sam and everyone else involved in sharing the petition and garnering support. Not only was there a hard copy and a QR code at the election day barbecue, but there were signs on fences at the school and a paper copy at the school to sign. It went along to a Bunnings sausage sizzle. Sam called all the members for Brindabella to ask for their support and to ask their offices to sign, and I know they did sign, so thank you. I could barely open Facebook without seeing it shared by someone in some of the different pages and different groups and different community pages. I think it has been wonderful community advocacy, and well done in getting it seen by so many people and signed by so many people.

I am calling upon the government to consider the petition and what we can do for Charles Conder Primary School and the wider community. I know it is going to a committee now that we have reached over 500. I hope this petition is considered by government and the committee to see what we can do for the Charles Conder Primary School, the oval and the people around it to improve the safety for children, teachers and parents, and to increase access and usability for community facilities. I commend the petition.

Molonglo Valley—roads—bus lanes—petition 22-25

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.13): I want to take this opportunity to speak briefly once again on the congestion problems that the Molonglo Valley faces and to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this petition, even though it does not sit within his electorate, because the traffic problems that people in Molonglo face impact the entire area surrounding it as well. So many people have to face these congestion problems every day, sitting in their cars, because the road system is currently inadequate to handle the traffic, and the bus system is unable to alleviate the problem either.

The government tells us that they are working on the extra roads that are necessary, and I am glad to hear that. That is why this is genuinely such an opportune time for the government to consider fully the entire scope of what it is going to take to alleviate the congestion problems; not just building the new roads, not separately looking at public transport, but considering the holistic perspective of what it is going to take to get all the people who live in the Molonglo Valley to the places they need to be, when they need to be there, without sitting in their cars constantly at traffic lights, sitting behind other people and getting increasingly stressed.

The problems in traffic are expanding beyond the main roads, the arterial roads, and people are trying to dodge what is going on along John Gorton Drive, and now we are getting congestion through every other road in Molonglo Valley. The situation is not good enough. It is well overdue for the government to actually deliver the roads that Molonglo Valley needs. I highly endorse taking an integrated holistic approach that includes bus lanes and every public transport option the government is proposing to deliver, and to tell us when it is going to get there.

**Charles Conder Primary School—parking—petitions 19-25 and 36-25
Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25
Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25**

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.15): I rise to make some brief remarks about three of this week's petitions. Regarding the parking in and around Charles Conder Primary School, I thank those who joined me in signing this petition as well, and particularly my colleague Caitlin Tough, who sponsored it, and the parents and carers association of Charles Conder Primary School. Their advocacy and dedication in promoting this petition across Tuggeranong has been outstanding.

Sam and I did some work over the weekend comparing Tuggeranong primary schools' enrolment numbers and the available parking spaces. We now have the numbers to make the case. For parking availability, Charles Conder Primary and Monash Primary are by far the most underserviced primary schools in the electorate. Equally problematic is that there is no designated parking near Conder 101 and Conder 102 ovals adjacent to the school. These ovals are frequently used for school events and weekend sports.

Perhaps happily, here is a rare opportunity for the ACT government to address two issues identified by the Conder community with one relatively low-cost investment. Turning the existing informal car park, which is next to the ovals and the school car park, into a basic gravel car park would provide significant benefits for the community.

Regarding your petition, Mr Speaker, about the ACT's tree removal guidelines, as we know, when we walk up any of the 20-odd hills in and around Tuggeranong to feel the serenity, we can barely see the suburbs for the trees. Trees are vital to Tuggeranong's environment, our streetscapes and our climate resilience. However, the more ubiquitous something is, the more engagement we have with it, and not all of those engagements can be positive. That is why I welcome this petition, because this term of the Assembly is a good term to take a closer look at the rules and regulations.

Like you, Mr Speaker, the concern I have heard most regularly from residents in Tuggeranong since my first campaign in 2016 is about a problematic tree in their front or backyard. There are people in Tuggeranong who fear certain trees in certain places that are too big or too frail. They fear branches that might fall hard, heavy and without warning. They fear roots that destroy driveways, footpaths and drain lines. Even a perceived danger should be taken seriously and mitigated, if at all possible, because perception of a danger can be just as damaging to someone's mental health as its realisation might be to their physical safety.

The tree canopy contribution agreement already in the legislation is a promising example of how we construct a balance between preservation and practical solutions for residents who feel they cannot safely maintain a tree on their property. Allowing residents to have trees managed or removed if they make the contribution to planting new trees in Tuggeranong, means more people can fully enjoy their properties and that there are more trees in Tuggeranong. It is an ideal win-win.

Finally, a few words about the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area petition we discussed yesterday. The petition called for the off-leash exercise area to remain an off-leash exercise area. It will, which is a win for Tuggeranong. I first started working on this issue when it was raised with me last year. I have been annoying the minister since then. My colleague Caitlin Tough has been a tremendous advocate for the dog park's users, on the site, on the radio and in this Assembly. Nearly 1,200 Canberrans signed the petition. They made it clear that this space matters.

The government has listened to their concerns, as well as expert advice, and has formally confirmed that the area will remain an off-leash facility. This is a huge relief for Tuggeranong. The final arrangements balance community access with safety considerations along the Bicentennial National Trail, as well as conservation of the Murrumbidgee River corridor's inherent environmentally sensitive areas. I thank every resident who signed the petition and advocated for this outcome, and I also applaud Minister Cheyne for her engagement and work on this important community issue.

Charles Conder Primary School—parking—petitions 19-25 and 36-25

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.19): I rise today to speak in support of the petition that Ms Tough is sponsoring on critical parking needs at Charles Conder Primary. I had the pleasure of speaking with Samantha, the principal petitioner, last week, and she shed some excellent light on the situation. I have got to say, she has done a brilliant job of rallying the community and wrangling her local members. It has been a masterclass in good community engagement.

To be honest, I knew the situation was bad, but I had not realised quite how congested and unsafe the area had become until Samantha painted me the full picture. Especially, I understand, at the top end, near the junior school, school pick-up in particular has become a huge risk point for the community. We are now in a situation where parents are doing laps waiting to pick up their young people, which is particularly challenging for students in grades K to 2, who are less confident finding a place to meet their parents.

I have heard that, in the mornings, one of the local buses cannot even always get on site and off-board students until a bit past 9 am, so you have students having to hurry late most mornings. At congested times for school pick-up and drop-off, parents and carers have cited a few near misses, as Ms Tough has raised. We are all acutely aware of road safety and how important it is to be proactive rather than reactive.

In many ways, it is not a surprise that parking has become congested, given that, as Ms Tough and as petitioners pointed out, enrolments have nearly doubled at the school in the past 10 years. It is certainly the sign of a thriving school, and that is what I have heard from the parents and carers at Charles Conder. But we do need to make sure that the infrastructure that was probably purpose-built for a smaller school community still meets modern standards, especially when it comes to safety. The Charles Conder Primary community have called for an expansion to their car park. I think this is a pretty reasonable request, especially when the current situation incentivises people to park where they are not supposed to.

The Greens have been proponents of active travel, so I do want to do a plug for excellent community initiatives like the bike-bus, where students ride on a set route to school while chaperoned by volunteers from the school community. More frequent accessible buses would also make public transport a more viable alternative for students to travel safely, whether that is supervised or on their own as they get older. But, to be honest, if we have reached that critical point of congestion, there might just be an economy of scale that we are not achieving yet, so it does make sense to extend the car park now to ease traffic pressure in the area. I reckon that will make the area safer and easier to navigate, hopefully encouraging more people to use active travel to get to school.

I am wondering if the government might also consider supplementary traffic safety measures around the primary school, monitoring the area to see whether there might be unsafe crossings or the need for clearer marking of high traffic areas. The big thing in all of this will be working with the school community, the students, the parents, the carers and the educators who use the school every day. As I wrote to Minister Steel last month, I urge the government to consider Ms Tough's and the Charles Conder Primary community's petition.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Global cities index—Canberra ranking

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.22): I have lived in Canberra for nearly 50 years. I have seen this city grow, and I am proud of how successive ACT governments have worked to ensure that Canberra is a city where everyone can reach their full potential.

Year after year, governments have invested in our community and our economy to meet the housing, health, education, transport and recreation needs of both present and coming generations—those who live in our city now and those who will live here in the future. We have done so whilst ensuring that Canberra remains one of the most livable places in the world.

Having said that, and with a nod to a similar OECD recognition in 2014, I am pleased to see that Canberra, yet again, has been named the number one city in the world, this time for quality of life, according to the 2025 Oxford Economics Global Cities Index. This is one position higher than our position in 2024, which was second in the world. This global recognition demonstrates years of sustained growth and investment. It is recognition that places our city not just on the national stage but on the international one, as a leading example of what it means to put the wellbeing of a community first.

This is not accidental; it is the result of years of deliberate, values-based policy and decision-making. It is the outcome of sustained, practical investment in what matters—people, place and purpose. It is, above all, though, a reflection of our community.

Oxford Economics assessed more than 1,000 cities worldwide across five key dimensions: economics, human capital, quality of life, environment and governance. To come out on top in any category, a city must be more than just functional. It must be equitable, inclusive and sustainable. Canberra, yet again, has proven to be all of the above.

In fact, Canberra was ranked the highest-ranked Australian city in four of the six quality of life indicators, including income equality, income per person, housing expenditure and life expectancy. We also ranked second for our recreation and cultural sites, behind only Sydney.

This result is largely driven by our high incomes, combined with our low degree of income inequality, thanks to the higher availability of stable and high-paying public sector employment in our city. We have also been recognised for our excellent healthcare facilities and ranked very well in terms of life expectancy. It is true that we have fewer recreation and cultural sites than Sydney or Melbourne; they are 10 times bigger than us. But we scored particularly well in terms of sites per resident.

Our government's approach to policymaking, for many years now, has been underpinned by a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to live well. It is why, in 2020, after extensive community consultation, we introduced the territory's Wellbeing Framework, a nation-leading and internationally recognised model that places wellbeing at the centre of government decision-making. The framework includes 12 domains covering health, education, environment, housing, safety, social connection and more, each reflecting what our community have told us matters most in their lives.

The framework is not just a theoretical tool; it actively informs decision-making. It influences how budgets are constructed, and it shapes how we deliver services across every area of ACT government responsibility. It recognises that Canberra is more than just an economy or indeed more than just a national capital. It is an inclusive, vibrant and caring community, where we aim for everyone to share in the benefits of a good life, both now and into the future.

When we invest in affordable housing, when we invest in expanding access to health care, when we commit to major infrastructure projects, and when we support early childhood development, we are advancing wellbeing, and we are supporting quality of life for Canberrans.

The international recognition that we have received is indeed a moment to celebrate. It tells us that the decisions we have made over the past decade, and indeed over this century, to commit to wellbeing and to invest in building a clean, sustainable, connected city with high-quality public services and a strong social conscience continue to lead to positive quality of life outcomes. I think that it confirms what Canberrans already know—that this is a great place to live. But we also know there will always be more to do.

Much has already been said, and will certainly be said over the coming weeks, about the focus areas of the territory budget, but the government remains conscious that, whilst many in our city enjoy a high standard of living, pressures are real and growing for many in the community.

We understand that having a secure job and housing, with the ability to meet your family's needs, and being able to plan for the future with confidence are some of the basics for a good life. That is why the government is getting on with the job of delivering what it promised—to focus on equity and inclusion, and to ensure support is directed where it is needed most. We are making deliberate, targeted investments in services and supports that make a real difference in people's lives.

With this focus, we are helping low income households to manage day-to-day costs, while continuing to invest in vital services and infrastructure that all Canberrans utilise and that build our city's future. The Wellbeing Framework helps us with this ambition. It highlights where we are doing well and where development is needed. It demands that we ask tough questions, that we collect robust data and that we remain transparent about our progress.

In closing these remarks this morning, I want to acknowledge those in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate who have worked over a number of years to embed the Wellbeing Framework across government. I also thank our partners in the community sector, academia and business who continue to contribute ideas and collaborate with us in the implementation of our wellbeing goals, all with an ultimate objective of building a better Canberra. Most of all, thanks go to the people of Canberra. It is their inclusive and caring community values that contribute greatly to our city's shared success.

Recognition as the best city in the world for quality of life is a positive affirmation of both our collective values and the direction and targeted decisions that government and this chamber have taken over the course of this century. Both the commonwealth and ACT governments remain committed to continuing this success and getting on with the job of supporting more employment growth, more economic growth and increased community wellbeing in our city.

Our focus will continue to be on delivering the commitments we took to the election to

build Canberra's future, to create local jobs and to strengthen our economy. The reason we focus on that is that they are major contributing factors to overall community wellbeing. Our ultimate aim is to ensure Canberra remains one of the most livable cities in the world.

I present the following paper:

Canberra ranked number one on the Quality of Life Index—Ministerial statement,
25 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public schools—climate change measures

Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.31): We all know that the ACT government is the nation-leading jurisdiction when it comes to our approach to climate change. The ACT is committed to net zero emissions by 2045, which includes a transition away from fossil fuel gas. The ACT is a global leader in reducing emissions, having already reached the target of 100 per cent renewable electricity in the ACT.

The ACT government's commitment to addressing climate change is widespread and flows through into the operations of our public schools. Sustainable design is integrated into new schools, major projects and upgrades to support and contribute to reaching the ACT government's 2045 net zero greenhouse gas emissions target.

All new schools and major modernisation projects are designed with energy efficiency in mind and, where possible, are transitioned to fully electric facilities. Let me give an example. Construction is underway on the modernisation of Garran Primary School. This project includes integrated sustainability features such as solar panels, double glazing, air permeability barriers to provide air tightness, LED lighting, and a fully electric heating and cooling system.

There is also work being done to move away from using natural gas. The Electrification of Government Gas Assets Program—known as the EoGGA program—is a whole-of-government initiative to eliminate emissions from natural gas by replacing all gas infrastructure with electric alternatives. The Education Directorate works closely with Infrastructure Canberra to replace gas assets, including major heating and cooling systems in ACT public schools, through this program.

In the last financial year, the directorate completed engineering investigations for gas to electric heating and cooling system conversions at 24 schools, commenced conversions at two schools, and removed natural gas use at four schools. This work will be expanded through the government's commitment to establish a \$30 million

dedicated heating and cooling fund for upgrades at ACT public schools.

All ACT public schools have solar panels, with around 17 per cent of electricity consumption being self-generated by solar power, and we are working on a pilot project to install a battery at an ACT public school as part of the Big Canberra Battery project.

Through asset renewal investment, we are delivering sustainability initiatives, such as adding shade structures, external learning environments and roof replacements, which substantially enhance thermal insulation. We are also expanding the tree canopy coverage at ACT public school sites, as part of the ACT government's Shade our Play program. Over 1,317 new trees have been planted at our schools since June 2024. Very importantly for our future, climate change and environmental issues are also taught in our ACT public schools through the Australian curriculum.

In early April, the ACT government's Schools Climate Action Conference was held, which is a free, one-day event for ACT school students in years 7 to 12 that aims to help students to develop leadership skills and learn about issues relating to climate change. Students from across Canberra attended this event. This event is just one further indication that the ACT government understands that climate change is an important issue for young people.

While I have the opportunity, I would also like to add that ACT public school students and school communities are leading the way on other environmental issues. I want to highlight a few examples. Canberra High School has a student-led Indigenous garden, which stands as a beacon of environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Students have cultivated a space at that school that not only promotes biodiversity but fosters an understanding of traditional plant use and sustainable gardening practices.

All schools recycle, but I particularly want to mention Evatt Primary School. They have a program to sort their waste into different categories, with students taking an active role in the organisation of it. They also collect recyclable containers and reinvest the funds obtained through the ACT government's Container Deposit Scheme back into other sustainability initiatives.

In the context of all of this, the ACT government will also be reviewing and updating the ACT Education corporate sponsorship policy that applies to ACT public schools and the directorate more broadly. That work will take place this year to ensure that there is increased clarity and guidance around corporate sponsorship arrangements, following public consultation that considers prohibiting sponsorship categories, such as activities that promote fossil fuel products or companies. The review process will include engagement and consultation with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that all views on these matters are considered. I understand this is a matter of importance to the Canberra community, and I encourage everyone with an interest to provide their thoughts to that consultation process.

The ACT government is fully committed to tackling climate change, and the ACT public school system is making great strides in playing its part.

I present the following paper:

Addressing climate change in ACT public schools—Ministerial statement,
25 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.37): I would like to thank Minister Berry for her statement. Unsurprisingly, the Greens strongly support the work that government is doing to help schools adapt to the changing reality of climate change and to minimise the part that schools have in worsening it.

In particular, I would like to speak to the school sponsorship policy reforms. I acknowledge that there was a planned review, but I am glad that the government has adopted our framing of this review as a chance to clean up polluters using schools to improve their image. The government speaks of how often ACT public schools are fully funded and, if that is true and schools do not need external funding, we should make sure sponsorships are watched extremely closely.

This ministerial statement highlights a number of projects that are very promising, but there is room for more ambitious action and more long-term planning. We know that infrastructure issues plague Canberra public schools, and I firmly believe that the planning for this issue will give us an opportunity to better adapt schools to climate change, particularly in the space of heating and cooling, and I am pleased to see funding for that in the upcoming budget.

ACT schools are in an unacceptable place. We need the government to ensure that heating and cooling is consistent and of an appropriate quality in all schools. Schools needing to crank the AC or heating due to the crumbling infrastructure are not good for anyone, including the climate. We are at a point where students are individually petitioning for heating and cooling to be fixed in their schools, such as in Canberra high. That is a bit of a sad state of affairs.

The government agreed to use environmentally sustainable materials in schools, in their response to the future of school infrastructure inquiry. This is promising and a great step forward, but we can do more. We need to take every opportunity available to make sure schools are environmentally sustainable and prepared for the climate change that federal Labor is actively making worse.

Young people spend so much of their life in schools. With climate anxiety inescapable for almost every young person that I know, we need schools to be better supported. We need them to be safe. As our climate changes, we need them to educate students about the future, without being compromised by the money of companies destroying the world. Schools are where the leaders of the future are growing, and the people now, and we need them to be environments where fighting climate change is a top priority.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Revenue Office—activities Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.40): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT Revenue Office's Home Buyer Concession Scheme and broader compliance activities.

This is an issue in which I have taken a strong interest since I became the Minister for Finance. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that substantial work is underway to improve the management of compliance activity, objections and complaints to the Revenue Office.

The Home Buyer Concession is an important part of the ACT government's broader tax reform program. It is a vehicle for targeted reductions in stamp duty, a distortionary tax that the ACT Labor government is working to reduce and eventually eliminate over time. We are doing this in a way that makes it easier for first homebuyers, and some groups of returning homebuyers, who require additional assistance to compete in the property market or move to a more appropriate home. The scheme is now accessed by around 3,000 Canberrans each year.

A key feature of the scheme is that the concession is available at the time of purchasing a new home. This means a new homebuyer does not have to borrow extra money to pay the conveyance duty and then apply for the concession retrospectively, meaning they would need to wait for more than a year for the eligibility criteria to be met and the concession to be repaid.

Up-front eligibility for the scheme is a key attribute of the concession, and it helps homebuyers at the time they need it most. Like many tax offsets and deductions, the Home Buyer Concession is self-assessed, meaning applicants need to determine their eligibility when applying. The government strongly encourages all applicants to get legal advice on their eligibility before applying. Whether or not there can be some kind of up-front assessment against income-related criteria is a matter that warrants further consideration, and I am sure the current Legislative Assembly inquiry will look at this.

Nevertheless, a robust compliance program will continue to be critical to deterring and identifying people who may inappropriately claim such a high-value concession. A recent case in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal demonstrated why the tax law imposes penalties, why the commissioner can pursue debt recovery during internal review and why the commissioner has broad recovery powers.

This concession is valuable. It can be worth up to \$35,000 per applicant. In that context, it is important for the Revenue Office to ensure that the concession is going only to those people who are genuinely eligible. Compliance is an important part of ensuring the integrity of our tax system and demonstrating fairness to all other Canberra taxpayers. Reassessments account for a small proportion of the total number of eligible claims and assistance provided—around one per cent of all applications for residential duty concessions and exemptions.

The ACT is not unique in the circumstances or policy settings around its tax and compliance systems. In fact, the settings across jurisdictional revenue offices seem to be more harmonised than most other cross-jurisdictional regulatory schemes. Across all

jurisdictions, including the commonwealth, penalties and interest can be varied or remitted in different circumstances, which are set out in legislation. It is also worth noting that these settings apply across all of the ACT's tax lines, including payroll tax, rates and land tax, not just the Home Buyer Concession Scheme.

Of course, whenever the Revenue Office engages with people through the compliance and investigation process, it should do so in a way that is constructive and supportive, particularly for more vulnerable people. Like other members in this place, I have been concerned to hear about the distress experienced by some Canberrans as a result of their engagement with the Revenue Office. It is important to acknowledge that regulators do not know what might be going on in someone's life when they first make contact to seek compliance information. In addition, there is the potential for such contact, by its very nature, to be intimidating.

Last month, the ACT Ombudsman issued a report into the ACT Revenue Office's collection of historic land tax debts. I met with the Ombudsman to discuss this report, and he has agreed to continue to work with the Revenue Office to improve the way it engages with individual taxpayers when undertaking reassessment, objection and compliance processes.

These were matters that were already under active consideration by the Revenue Office. Improvements have already been made to their processes and systems to make it easier for taxpayers to comply with their obligations. Taxpayers engaging in the review process can now choose to make a voluntary disclosure before an investigation formally commences, leading potentially to lower penalties and interest. The Revenue Office's correspondence is being updated to communicate in a way that is more accessible and clear about the information or action being sought and the support available. Additional information is also being made available on the website.

Where a reassessment is issued, the default due date for payment is now eight weeks from issue, rather than four weeks. This provides more time for applicants to secure alternative sources of financing, such as by going to a bank, that attracts a lower interest rate and enables a longer repayment period than a Revenue Office payment plan. The Revenue Office is also considering options for providing longer repayment terms where alternative finance cannot be obtained.

We are aware that some of the recent issues have related to poor advice or processes by legal representatives acting on behalf of some homebuyers. The revenue commissioner has met with and written to the ACT Law Society to reinforce the importance of providing accurate professional advice to their conveyancing clients on homebuyer concession eligibility.

Over the coming months, the Revenue Office will continue its work to improve its compliance program and implement the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report. While there has been a recent uptick in compliance activity, this is returning to longer term trends, after many of the staff in the Revenue Office were supporting community assistance initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course, more reassessments being issued means there are also more objections being raised. To ensure that objections can be considered in a timely way, resources are now

being redirected to improve the turnaround times for objections. I recognise that delays in finalising objections have been a significant cause of concern and distress for individuals and families who have sometimes been awaiting outcomes for many weeks or even months.

The 2025-26 budget includes funding for the Revenue Office to improve its systems and processes, including to support improved customer engagement, reduced processing times for internal reviews, and improved taxpayer education and guidance materials.

While the Revenue Office's compliance program has been a focus of late, I want to bring to members' attention the important, but lesser known, work that the office does in providing community assistance. The staff in the Revenue Office administer a wide range of concession schemes that are designed to support the most vulnerable Canberrans. This includes programs like the Energy Bill Relief Fund, which provides \$800 off energy bills for eligible lower income earners. Yesterday, ACT Labor delivered on its commitment to make the increase to that rebate to \$800 permanent.

Revenue Office staff also administer the Taxi Subsidy Scheme, which provides financial assistance to ACT residents with a disability or significant mobility restriction that prevents them from driving or using public and community transport. This scheme is vital in ensuring people with a disability or mobility restrictions can stay connected with their community and access the services they need.

In addition to the assistance provided to support people to buy a home, the office also provides rates assistance to home owners, including pensioners, people aged 65 years and over, people with a severe disability, and those experiencing financial hardship.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the dedicated service of the revenue commissioner, Mr Kim Salisbury, who will be retiring in August. Kim has been with the Revenue Office since 2012 and has worked in a variety of different roles across the Australian and ACT public service. I want to thank Kim for the constructive way he has engaged with me and my office since I became the portfolio minister, and for the ongoing work he is leading on continuous improvement in the way his team can best support the Canberra community into the future.

I note that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration has agreed to the Assembly's request to undertake an inquiry into the Home Buyer Concession Scheme, and I look forward to engaging constructively with the committee and updating members further on the reform work that is now well underway in the ACT Revenue Office.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all members of the Revenue Office, and particularly those I met with yesterday evening after the budget, who have been working hard to ensure that they are in a position to provide information to taxpayers about the outcomes of the 2025-26 budget, including all of those on the phone lines.

I present the following paper:

Update on the ACT Revenue Office activities—Ministerial statement, 25 June

2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Community organisations—funding security—update Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.49): I rise to share with you, Mr Speaker, and those gathered here today the direction the government will be taking to progress community services policy and funding reform during this term of government. The ACT government remains committed to a sustainable, vibrant and diverse community sector in the ACT. The ACT government values the important social cohesion, advocacy and service delivery functions the sector provides.

I begin by thanking members of the Assembly who have recently expressed their strong interest in matters related to the community arts sector. Today, I am responding to a number of matters raised during Assembly debates in May 2025. I will outline the government's position on population indexation and explain how government intends to reduce our siloing of service provision and how we will continue to implement the response to the *Counting the costs* report. I will also take this opportunity to outline our plan for broader community services reform.

ACT Labor took a series of commitments about community services to the 2024 election, and in government we will deliver them. They are, however, components of a wider policy reform agenda that: aims to improve the evidence base and decision-making about the types of services that are delivered and to whom; achieves better integration of service delivery and a reduction in service gaps so that Canberrans can access the high-quality services they need easily; and strengthens the relationship between the government and the non-government sector.

The ACT community service system is complex. It is funded by the federal government, the ACT government and other non-government sources. It includes a network of services delivered by the ACT government, non-government organisations and, in some cases, for-profit businesses and hybrid social enterprises. Each of these components plays an important role in the ecosystem of supports available for Canberrans.

The ACT government is seeking to reform its community services policy because we have clearly heard concerns raised by service providers, service users and the wider community. In 2021, my colleague Minister Stephen-Smith held this portfolio and identified five goals for reform. These were: respond better to community need; reduce pressure on hospitals and crisis services; improve equity in health and life outcomes for priority populations; improve integration; and improve sector sustainability. These remain the right goals. Progress has been made on some of them, but, as with all

ambitious reform agendas, there is more to do.

As Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, I recognise that reform is not about government directing the non-government community sector to improve. Rather, it is about how we do better across all parts of the system and particularly how we, as government, do better in our role as stewards responsible for policies and priorities. Deliverers do this through the work of our frontline staff and funders of health and community services.

The ACT government is committed to meaningful reform that is grounded in a clear understanding of community needs, service obligations and responsibilities across the health and community services system. We need robust data and evidence to understand population trends and risk factors, like social determinants of health that contribute to unmet needs. This is complex work that takes time and effort to allow both government and service providers to make better decisions about priorities now and into the future.

The ACT Labor government has made five commitments that impact the whole of the community services sector. Firstly, government will establish a new unit within the public service for the community sector. This is part of the machinery of government changes currently underway and will form part of the new Health and Community Services Directorate. The unit will lead, coordinate and drive community services reform and it will build capacity to undertake needs analysis and build the informed evidence government needs to underpin its future decisions about community services.

Secondly, government committed to updating the Social Compact. The Social Compact is a consensus statement on the relationship between government and the community sector, and its review will be collaborative. Government committed to doing this within 18 months of forming government—that is, early 2026—and I look forward to commencing this work with the sector soon.

Thirdly, government committed to reviewing and improving the commissioning framework for human services. Commissioning is a complex and challenging undertaking, and there is still some way to go before this approach enables a more integrated service system that better responds to complex and intersecting needs. As I came into the portfolio, I have heard the frank feedback from many community sector leaders on their varied experience of commissioning processes to date. I believe it is possible for us to take that experience to adapt and improve our commissioning approach to deliver an integrated health and community services system.

Fourthly, government committed to progressing the work of the Sector Sustainability Program, which is part of our response to the *Counting the costs* report. It is important that we build on the good work and the learnings that have already been achieved.

And, finally, government committed to determining, within six months, whether it would be appropriate to apply a population adjustment alongside indexation for community services funding. I am pleased to inform the Assembly, through you, Mr Speaker, that the government has now met its commitment.

Based on expert advice, the government has determined that applying a population adjustment alongside indexation is one way to amend community sector contracts to

adjust for population and increased service demand, but it is not necessarily the most appropriate tool available to government to achieve this objective. There are a number of risks for unintended consequences. Committing to a year-on-year increase for current funding arrangements based on population changes means government would lose flexibility to direct funding towards emerging community priorities, especially as change in the overall population may not reliably predict change in the needs of priority group cohorts. For these reasons, the ACT government will not be applying a population adjustment alongside the existing approach to indexation but will be delivering policy, process and practice reform across all of its levers to better respond to both the increasing and challenging demand for services. The report commissioned by ACT government is available on the Community Services Directorate website.

My colleagues and I remain vitally aware that the community sector is experiencing significant pressure from several interconnected factors, including an increase in demand for services; the increasing complexity of many people's needs; and the not-for-profit starvation cycle, which has been recognised in the *Counting the costs* report and government response. Together, these pressures are complex. They will not be solved by just increasing funding to deliver services alone, but government does need to financially support the community sector in this difficult landscape. That is why, in this year's budget, the government has committed \$10 million over two years to a funding boost for NGOs that have ongoing funding arrangements with the ACT government.

The new Health and Community Services Directorate is finalising its process to provide funding to eligible organisations, which are those that hold multi-year funding agreements that are indexed using the community sector indexation rate. They will receive the boost based on a consideration of total ACT government funding, regardless of which directorate they have funding agreements with. The funding is not tied to additional service provision but addresses the pressure points organisations experience—as identified through the Sector Sustainability Project—in human resources, information technology, safeguarding, premises, business development and fundraising. This fixed term funding boost will be applied annually for two years, over which time broader reform work will occur to guide future decision-making. This funding boost is in addition to the government's ongoing commitment to index NGO service contracts. This year, the community sector indexation rate is 3.35 per cent.

I would like to finish by returning to the reform work ahead of us. I approach this work with the intention that it is possible, together, to make further headway on some of the historically intractable problems, and to continue to review and adjust to meeting changing community needs. Reform is never easy and it is never quick, and there is no silver bullet. Community services reform requires a considered and integrated approach to clear policy settings, selecting fit-for-purpose processes and applying effective practices. Some of the reform work is government's responsibility; some is led by the sector itself. Most importantly, it occurs at the point of interaction.

I will work in consultation with stakeholders in the coming months to shape a new framework for identifying community needs and priorities to provide a new and clearer way of defining ACT government funding priorities, goals and outcomes; work that is currently being delivered; emerging areas of need; and how to flexibly respond to demand and achieve best outcomes. This framework will align and draw from

information gathered through previous and ongoing policy planning and commissioning activities, to guide processes across a range of government commitments that are currently underway.

I will finish by thanking the NGO sector and its leaders, for both the vital work that their organisations do and for being willing to come on this journey with us. I recognise that we will be talking again about issues that have been raised with us before. We have not always solved them in the past and we might not get it done quickly, but their persistence, engagement and patience will help us all progress reform and build the sustainability of our community services in the ACT together for the benefit of Canberrans who need our support most.

I present the following paper:

Community sector funding and reform—Ministerial statement, 25 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.59): I rise today to welcome the minister's statement. It goes to an issue that the Assembly considered recently, and the minister's response certainly goes to a number of the key points that were raised in that debate.

The minister outlined five commitments that the government has made. I welcome them. A couple of them are particularly important. Firstly, she referenced establishing a unit within the public service for the community sector. I particularly welcome this commitment. It goes to item 7(c) in the supply and confidence agreement between the Greens and the Labor Party. This was an issue we had flagged at the election as a way of making sure that the government was holistically thinking about how to support the community sector. An issue we see is that organisations have their funding agreements with parts of government. Things can, by a function of complexity, end up in a bit of a siloed approach. I think that having a considered approach across government about how to engage the community sector will help to address some of the system-wide issues that the minister has touched on today. We particularly welcome that commitment.

Also, the review of commissioning is a timely commitment. Many of us in this place will have had feedback about the commissioning process. It is necessary to look at it, because key feedback I have heard from the sector is that they are putting a lot of resources and a lot of effort into the commissioning process, but they are not seeing the benefits at the other side. They are sinking significant contributions into those discussions, but an increase in resources has not flowed as a result of that. I think they are a little frustrated by that. There is certainly room for improvement in the commissioning process and perhaps a question about whether it is the right approach. Perhaps there is a different way to think about it. I certainly welcome the five commitments the government has made.

We then get to the question of funding for the community sector. I want to first start by acknowledging the work that ACTCOSS did to drive this discussion. The work that

they produced was quite important in helping to highlight that, while the government has been making a series of CPI adjustments over the years, and that has been important and a logical thing to do, it highlighted the fact that you have not seen a commensurate population-level adjustment. The population of the ACT has grown dramatically. I was looking at the population graph in the budget papers yesterday and thought about how much it has grown in my time in the Assembly. This has become a much bigger city in a relatively short time. Many organisations are now talking about the fact that they have not seen a population-level adjustment to their funding.

Off the back of that ACTCOSS work, there has also been a debate about whether population is the right parameter or the right metric from which to measure the necessity of funding increases. Broadly, there is an acceptance that it is a blunt instrument and it is perhaps not the most nuanced way. The important part of the ACTCOSS work is that it highlighted this point of pressure and it is now driving a discussion about what is the right way. In her statement, the minister has been clear that the government is not going to accept population-level adjustment as a simplistic measure, and that is probably right. This issue cannot be put to one side, because the point of the population-level adjustment is to reflect the increase in pressure. In her statement, the minister said:

My colleagues and I remain vitally aware that the community sector is experiencing significant pressure from several interconnected factors, including an increase in demand for services; the increasing complexity of many people's needs; and the not-for-profit starvation cycle, which has been recognised in the *Counting the costs* report and government response.

I think that is right. That is where population-level adjustment does not reflect all the key factors. I welcome the minister's recognition of those interwoven pressures on the community sector. I also acknowledge the minister's personal commitment to addressing these issues. But that is not enough. It is about funding and it is about incredible pressure on the community sector.

We have just seen the budget delivered. A great cliché is that budgets are about choices. I think the Treasurer used those exact words yesterday. What we have seen in the ACT budget is a \$10 million commitment over two years as a recognition of the pressure the community sector is under. That is a valuable contribution. It is a downpayment on the incredible pressure the community sector is under. It recognises that and it reflects the minister's understanding of those pressures.

This is about choices. In a \$9 billion budget, a mere \$10 million for the community sector over two years does not cut it. This is over two years, so it is \$5 million a year. The press statement that came out with the budget said that this will support 150 organisations. We quickly did the maths on that in my office. It comes to around \$33,000 an organisation, on average. Of course, not everyone will get exactly that amount. The statement indicated that groups will get different amounts, but it gives you a sense of the scale.

We have heard a lot from the government about how much costs have grown in the health sector. Well, the costs have grown in the community sector as well, so this does not cut it. It helps. It will ease a bit of pressure. But we need to see a serious commitment over the next couple of years to actually increase funding for the community sector in a way that reflects the value of the services they deliver to our community, because they

deliver incredibly valuable services.

We have all met them. You can think about what some of the organisations are. I have met some new ones recently that I had not come across before. They deliver services that are the glue that keeps this city ticking. I have possibly just mixed my metaphors in a nasty way, but you know what I mean! They provide the services that are so often hidden. They are not seen but help people keep their lives on track; deliver food to those who do not have enough; deliver health and support services for people with a range of chronic and difficult conditions; deliver transport to help people get around; and provide services that counteract isolation. These are vital community services. We are short-changing the community sector. In doing that, there is a real risk of unintended consequences and underinvesting in ways that will cost much more later on.

I could talk about this all morning. I do not intend to. I am conscious that there is a busy program. But the challenge remains for the government. Budgets are about choices. The budget did not choose to adequately invest in the community sector, and this is an issue we will continue to pursue in the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.07): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, providing an update on the committee's inquiry into the procurement and delivery of MyWay+.

On 4 December 2024, the Assembly resolved to request that the committee inquire into and report on the procurement and delivery of MyWay+ and that, should the committee agree to inquire, we report by the last sitting day of June 2025. The inquiry commenced on 9 December 2024. Submissions closed on 28 February 2025 and 109 submissions have been published. Public hearings were held on 26 and 27 March and 1 May, and in-camera hearings were held on 13 March 2025 and 1 May 2025. A further public hearing is scheduled for 3 July 2025.

The committee has received a considerable volume of evidence, including reports of significant usability issues experienced by MyWay+ users, concerns relating to accessibility and cybersecurity and many other matters. In addition, the committee is also considering procurement and contractual processes, risk management and decisions relating to delivery timeframes.

The committee is of the view that, in order to properly discharge its responsibility to report against the terms of reference and to do justice to the Assembly's referral, tabling a report by the last sitting day of June would not be possible. The committee intends to continue analysing the evidence received and will consider further information presented at the upcoming hearing. As such, I advise the Assembly that the committee has determined that we will not be reporting by the last sitting day of June. A report will be presented to the Assembly in due course.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.08): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders relating to recommendations from the 2024 strategic review of the ACT Auditor-General conducted by Mr Mike Blake AM, dated 8 April 2024.

The strategic review made two recommendations for the Auditor-General which involved consideration for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Tenth Assembly. The responsibility for the strategic review of the ACT Auditor-General now falls under the resolution of establishment of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders in the Eleventh Assembly.

Recommendation 1 was that the Auditor-General explore with the former public accounts committee whether the issue of directions under section 35 of the Auditor-General Act 1996 should be refined to allow directors-general to brief ministers on the findings and conclusions in performance audit reports immediately prior to a report being tabled in the Assembly. The Auditor-General has advised the integrity committee that such directions are rarely issued to members of the ACT public service and, in any case, are usually issued only in the late stages of an audit when a draft report is circulated. A performance audit typically takes many months, during which there are many opportunities for officials to brief a minister before such a direction would be issued. The integrity committee is of the view that there is no requirement to change the issue of directions under section 35 of the act and that ministers may be briefed by officials at many points during an audit before a direction would be issued.

Recommendation 3 referred to the former public accounts committee and concerned processes for handling operational complaints against the Auditor-General. The committee notes that there is provision under the act for the committee to conduct an inquiry should substantial and serious issues related to the conduct of the Auditor-General be raised. The committee considers that complaints of an operational nature against the Auditor-General could also be referred to the committee to determine whether an inquiry would be appropriate or whether referral to the Commissioner for Standards would be warranted. The committee therefore considers that, as appropriate measures are already in place, no further action is required in relation to these recommendations of the strategic review of the Auditor-General.

I seek leave to table correspondence from the Auditor-General to the committee regarding these matters.

Leave granted.

MR COCKS: I present the following paper:

Recommendations from the 2024 strategic review of the ACT Auditor-General—
Response—Letter to the Chair, Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission

and Statutory Office Holder from the ACT Auditor-General, dated 26 May 2025.

Planning (Molonglo Town Centre) Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.11): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Planning (Molonglo Town Centre) Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. This bill makes amendments to schedule 6 of the Planning Act 2023 to classify the Molonglo commercial centre as a town centre under the Planning Act. The commercial centre in the Molonglo Valley district was initially envisaged as a large group centre, which reflected the original planning for the Molonglo Valley as a home for around 55,000 residents. Following planning work undertaken to develop a district strategy for the Molonglo Valley, we now expect the population to grow to more than 70,000 people by 2050. These projections warranted the reclassification of the Molonglo group centre to a town centre, to reflect the scale and status of the district.

Following advocacy to the federal government in my role as planning minister, the National Capital Plan Amendment 99 was approved in September 2024, recognising the main commercial centre of the Molonglo Valley as a town centre in the National Capital Plan. The Territory Plan was also then amended on 27 September 2024 to reflect this change. This bill is consequential to these changes and seeks to formalise Molonglo as a town centre in the Planning Act to reflect how it is already considered under both the National Capital Plan and the Territory Plan and ensure that the Molonglo town centre has the same status under planning law as every other town centre in the ACT.

The consequential amendments in this bill include the Molonglo town centre in the definition of a town centre for the purposes of schedule 6 of the Planning Act 2023. The effect of this is that a development other than a significant development requiring an environmental impact statement or subdivision design application on land in the Molonglo town centre will be exempt from third-party review in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, as is already the case with every other town centre in the territory, the Kingston Foreshore and the University of Canberra.

The bill also includes a map showing the footprint of the Molonglo town centre, in line with the other maps in part 6.3 of the act. It is important that we progress these amendments now, ahead of development commencing in the Molonglo town centre, to ensure future development in the Molonglo town centre is not held up at the planning stage.

This bill will also assist in limiting anticompetitive appeals to development in the town centre, consistent with the revitalised National Competition Policy, which was signed by all states and territories in late 2024. I note that only ACAT review rights will be

exempt and the extensive public notification, referral and consideration requirements for development applications under the act will still apply. The National Capital Design Review Panel will also play a role in providing independent review and advice on delivering high-quality development in the Molonglo town centre that meets the needs of the community and making sure that development integrates well with the surrounding environment.

The proposed amendment, as with the existing exempt matters, also does not affect any rights people might have under the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1989. While this amendment is being progressed as a standalone bill, it is considered a minor and technical amendment since the legislature has already made the general policy decision that review rights will be limited in town centres or other defined areas.

The ACT government is committed to delivering more homes and the services needed for the growing population of the Molonglo Valley. Following changes to the National Capital Plan and the Territory Plan, the proposed consequential amendments in this bill will not only facilitate the delivery of these important services and housing but also the infrastructure needed for the Molonglo Valley by ensuring that development in the Molonglo town centre is not impeded at the planning stage by being treated differently than Canberra's other town centres.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Statute Law Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.17): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Statute Law Amendment Bill 2025 makes statute law revision amendments to ACT legislation under guidelines for the technical amendments program approved by the government. They are minor and uncontroversial amendments. They are generally insufficiently important to justify the presentation of separate legislation in each case, while also being generally inappropriate to make as editorial amendments in the process of republishing legislation under the Legislation Act 2001.

Statute law amendment bills serve the important purpose of improving the overall quality of the ACT statute book so that our laws are kept up to date and are easier to find, read and understand. A well-maintained statute book greatly enhances access to ACT legislation and is a practical measure to give effect to the principle that members of the community have a right to know the laws that affect them.

The Parliamentary Counsel's Office has identified a significant number of possible improvements, resulting in a large bill, with detailed explanatory notes. I do not propose to go through each of them. However, for members' benefit, I will outline the schedule of changes, including some things like schedule 1 which might look a little unusual.

Schedule 1 of statute law amendment bills provides for minor, non-controversial amendments initiated by government directorates and agencies. This bill does not contain such amendments, but the schedule 1 heading has been retained to preserve the usual numbering.

Schedule 2 of the bill is reserved for minor, non-controversial amendments of the Legislation Act 2001 and the associated Legislation Regulation 2003, initiated by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. Schedule 2 contains amendments to several items that are defined in the Legislation Act, dictionary, part 1.

These amendments are important because our Legislation Act is crucial in interpreting other legislation. For instance, amendments are made through this bill to the current definitions of enrolled nurse, midwife, and nurse, to align with the amendments made to those terms in Queensland's Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2017. Further, a new definition of Commonwealth Criminal Code is inserted into the Legislation Act, dictionary, part 1, to standardise references to the Commonwealth Criminal Code across the ACT statute book.

Schedule 3 of the bill includes amendments of acts and regulations that have been reviewed as part of an ongoing program of updating and improving the language and form of legislation. These amendments are explained in the explanatory notes and are routine technical matters, such as correcting minor errors, including typographical errors and outdated cross-references; updating language in line with current legislative drafting practice; adding and updating definitions and notes; and omitting redundant provisions, definitions, examples and notes.

In particular, consistent with the recognition of gender-diverse people, the use of personal pronouns in the masculine or feminine is no longer appropriate drafting practice in the ACT. As a result, there are multiple amendments in schedule 3 which update the statute book with gender-neutral language—that is, language that avoids a bias towards a particular sex or social gender. Instances of “he or she”, “his or her”, “him or her” and “himself or herself” are replaced with “they”, “their”, “them”, “themselves”, “themselves”, or the noun that is the subject of the sentence.

Schedule 3 of the bill also contains amendments to update the name of a commonwealth tribunal in several acts. Members would be aware that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal of the commonwealth was established under the commonwealth's Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975, but that act has been repealed and replaced by the Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024, which has established that new tribunal.

Finally, schedule 4 of the bill omits standard notes that are no longer used in current legislative drafting practice across the ACT statute book. The notes to be omitted were identified by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office during a recent review of the use of

standard notes. As the ACT's statute book has matured over time, we can now reduce the amount of notes to improve the readability of ACT legislation.

The notes to be omitted include standard notes about disallowable and notifiable instruments; examples; the power to make, amend or repeal instruments; internal review and reviewable decision notices; approved forms; fees; and regulations. The omission of these notes will not have any impact on the operation of ACT legislation because, under the Legislation Act, section 127, notes are explanatory, and they are not part of an act or statutory instrument.

The bill, while minor and technical in nature, is another important building block in the ongoing development of a modern and accessible ACT statute book that is at the forefront in Australia.

With such a significant amount of changes, commencement dates will be crucial here. I draw members' attention to the clause regarding commencement. Schedules 1 and 2 and schedule 3, parts 3.1 to 3.50, other than 3.16, of the bill commence 10 days after the act is notified. The remainder of schedule 3, other than part 3.101, and the amendments in schedule 4 will be staggered to commence 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 days after the act's notification date.

Given the number of amendments in the bill across many pieces of legislation, this commencement will enable the Parliamentary Counsel's Office to have up-to-date republications of the affected legislation ready for the Legislation Register on the day on which the amendments commence, which I think we would all agree is a good thing. The commencement of amendments in schedule 3, part 3.16 and part 3.101, are dependent on the commencement of other pieces of legislation, so they will commence on the commencement of the other relevant legislation. To limit the number of republications required, if a law is amended in both schedules 3 and 4, the schedule 4 amendments will commence at the same time as the related schedule 3 amendments.

I commend the Parliamentary Counsel Office for their expertise and their application of it generally and particularly in this instance. This bill is a fine example of that expertise in practice, ensuring that our statute book remains modern and accessible. I have found myself reading more legislation than I have ever read, probably, in my life, this year. I have to say that, when comparing our legislation and its accessibility with the drafting practices of some other jurisdictions, we absolutely are the best. The Parliamentary Counsel's Office does an absolutely outstanding job.

With respect to the Legislation Register, how easy it is to navigate compared to the registers in other jurisdictions means that it is just a work of art. For something that does not get as much attention as it deserves, I want to put it out there that the Parliamentary Counsel's Office punch way above their weight. That has certainly been demonstrated with the actual weight of the bill that I have just presented. I certainly commend them and the bill to the chamber.

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

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.27): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present this bill to the Assembly. It is a bill that makes amendments across 12 pieces of legislation to improve their operation. It is an omnibus bill which makes minor and technical amendments to laws falling primarily within my portfolio as Attorney-General, and ones that will enhance services for Canberrans and contribute to a better regulatory framework for the ACT government and the community.

Since July 2024, the Human Rights Commission has had a new function of handling complaints about government agencies under information privacy laws. The Human Rights Commission's new role presents an opportunity to apply its existing expertise in conciliation to reach fair and informal outcomes in privacy complaints. However, the Information Privacy Act does not currently contain an explicit power for complaints to be conciliated.

This bill proposes to amend the Information Privacy Act to allow the Information Privacy Commissioner to refer privacy complaints to conciliation in a manner similar to the Human Rights Commission's other jurisdictions. The Human Rights Commission is held in high regard within the community for their ability to conciliate complaints with an informal and flexible approach, and I am confident that this amendment will improve the handling of information privacy complaints.

The bill will also improve the operation of the drug and alcohol sentencing list, known as the DASL. The DASL was established in the Supreme Court on 3 December 2019 and has provided an alternative approach to rehabilitating offenders whose crime is related to drug or alcohol dependency. Similar court programs are available in every state across Australia and are extremely successful. The DASL plays a key role in the Canberra community in improving the health and wellbeing of offenders and supporting rehabilitation and reintegration, which in turn reduces criminal offending.

The bill inserts new provisions within the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005 to permit the Magistrates Court to hear and make temporary orders for offenders who have been arrested for a breach of a drug and alcohol treatment order when the Supreme Court is not sitting. This amendment will better protect offenders and the community by enabling the courts to respond to breaches quickly, in order to deter problematic behaviour.

This bill will also make minor changes to discrimination law to update the definition of irrelevant criminal record. Currently, there is an unintended misalignment between this definition and the Spent Convictions Act 2000. At present the definition in the

Discrimination Act treats spent convictions as irrelevant criminal convictions in all circumstances. However, under the Spent Convictions Act, in some circumstances, such as employment involving children, it may be appropriate for someone's spent conviction to be considered.

This issue was brought to the government's attention through an ACAT case, where the tribunal noted that a simple amendment is needed to resolve the potential inconsistency between the two legislative regimes. The amendment in this bill will clarify that a person may be required to disclose information about a spent conviction under section 19 of the Spent Convictions Act 2000 without this automatically constituting unlawful discrimination.

This new definition will continue to ensure that any unfavourable treatment or disadvantage relating to a spent conviction that is actually irrelevant may still amount to unlawful discrimination. This preserves the policy intent and the protective function of the Discrimination Act.

This bill, additionally, will amend the Guardianship and Management of Property Act 1991 to enable members of the community to provide information to ACAT by statutory declaration as well as oath. This is a modern approach and one that allows people to choose whether to make formal statements on non-religious or religious grounds.

This bill will also amend laws in relation to residential tenancies and unit-titled properties to modernise ACT legislation and provide better support and safeguards for tenants and landlords. In particular, this bill will amend posting termination clauses under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to make the rules work better for tenants and landlords alike.

The government became aware that the posting termination clauses merit improvements following an ACAT decision and discussions with stakeholders, including the Real Estate Institute of the ACT. I also recognise that opposition member Mr Cain has had similar conversations and has brought forward his own bill, which is not yet scheduled for debate. I would draw members' attention to our clauses in this bill that effectively address the issue as well, and which go further to address some other issues that have been identified.

In particular, our bill will broaden the scope of the posting clause by allowing either the tenant or the lessor to rely on it when their domestic partner is the person being posted. This change is fair, and it helps to keep families together.

This bill proposes other minor amendments to ensure that the posting termination clause operates consistently with other termination clauses under the act. The bill will enable tenants that receive an eight-week notice under the posting termination clause to vacate at an earlier date without penalty, and to confirm that the tenancy ends when a tenant vacates in accordance with a notice.

This bill also seeks to amend the standard residential tenancy terms to introduce clearer requirements around condition reports for lessors. Members of the community have informed the government that currently it is unclear whether electronic copies of

condition reports are permitted or whether hard copies are required. This amendment will make it clear that lessors may provide tenants with a single electronic copy of the condition report where the tenant agrees to receive a condition report in electronic form.

To further improve efficiencies, the bill also removes duplicative provisions from the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003. These amendments follow from the government's introduction of reforms relating to swimming pool safety barriers last year. This bill will now ensure that there is no duplication in the requirement to disclose information relating to swimming pools on the common property of a unit's plan when a unit is being sold. I thank the ACT Law Society, whose members drew the need for this fix to the government's attention. It is eminently sensible.

Finally, in late 2024, the federal parliament passed the Aged Care Act 2024, which was anticipated to commence on 1 July but will now commence on 1 November 2025. Our bill will make changes to eight pieces of legislation, updating references to the newly passed federal act. That will ensure that our ACT legislation is up to date. I discussed the importance of this in some detail with respect to the previous bill.

While these are minor amendments, they are necessary ones—ones that demonstrate our responsiveness regarding issues raised with us and improve the operation of legislation through greater clarity.

I thank all stakeholders who have engaged with us in preparing this bill and, particularly, the Parliamentary Counsel's Office and all of the officials in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate who have been working on these very sensible reforms.

I am very pleased to present this bill. While it is minor in nature, some of the things in here have really been annoying a lot of people. I think that it will make life easier for Canberrans as a whole. I am grateful for the work that they have put into preparing such an excellent bill, and I commend it to the Assembly.

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

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 9 April 2025, on motion by **Mr Pettersson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.35): The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this bill. It is, in our view, composed of fairly modest, largely uncontroversial amendments. We support improvements to legislation. We support efforts to clarify, streamline or fix elements that are not functioning as intended. But I want to be very clear that we still have deep concerns with the broader legislative framework within which these adjustments sit.

It is not just us; both workers and businesses in the community, especially our local small businesses, have raised deep concerns that the legislative framework makes it harder to succeed in Canberra, without really fixing the underlying problems.

We do hold significant reservations about the cumulative direction of workplace regulation in the ACT. Over successive bills and policy reforms, we have seen, over time, a shift towards increasing regulatory complexity, unclear compliance expectations and a level of intervention that, too often, assumes bad intent rather than encouraging good practice.

I have welcomed before some ministers' statements around intending to fix this sort of issue. The Canberra Liberals will always seek to make sure that regulations are working as intended. But the system, as it is right now, is not delivering balance or trust.

Workplace laws should protect people from harm. They should ensure that people are treated fairly, and they should provide clear rules that allow employers and employees to succeed together. They should support productive workplaces, not stifle them. They should work both with businesses and workers, not work against them, and not pit one against the other.

This government seems to have a habit of layering regulation on top of regulation, while failing to step back and ask whether the system as a whole is actually working. The more convoluted that system becomes, the harder it is for small businesses—those without dedicated legal teams or HR departments—to navigate.

That matters, because small businesses are not just, as the saying goes, the engine room of our local economy. They are employers. They are people. They are people who are taking risks, creating opportunities, creating jobs and delivering value to their community. They need a system that respects their efforts and understands their constraints.

While we are prepared to support this bill today, we do so with a level of caution, and with a clear message about our concerns with the broader legislative framework, because those concerns do remain. We will continue to scrutinise how the system evolves. We will continue to advocate for balance and fairness, and we will continue to stand up for those who have to navigate this system.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.39): Much of this bill is straightforward; most of it simply supports the efficient operation of workplace laws, and it is entirely welcomed. The significant element to draw attention to is the listing of silicosis as a 100 per cent compensable disease. This has been a very long time coming. Madam Assistant Speaker, the issues of silica dust from engineered stone have become very well recognised and, if you will pardon the pun, well ventilated in this Assembly. It is correct that this debilitating disease be listed for full compensation as a permanent injury under the Workers Compensation Act.

No matter what you might think of the administration of the CFMEU, you have to acknowledge that, with their campaign to get a ban on the manufacture and import of this engineered stone, they did right by their members and by society at large. This result today is a credit to them and their campaign, and it deserves to be recognised. The Greens will be supporting this bill.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.40): I rise to speak in support of the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Workplace safety, proper pay and access to a decent

safety net of entitlements are of core importance to me. When people turn up to work, they should be safe, paid correctly and be able to access their entitlements.

In saying that, I am also the daughter and granddaughter of small business owners, so looking after people at work and people that run businesses is something that is of core importance to me, and it is something that I have represented and worked for both in my capacity as a member of the Assembly, in my short time here, and in my professional career prior to that. The intersection of these issues within the bill therefore has my full support, and I commend the ACT government for its commitment to ensuring that its laws are relevant, up to date and fit for purpose.

The bill addresses important workplace health and safety issues by extending compensation to workers with silicosis caused by breathing in silica dust. It is a necessary legislative change to ensure that affected workers in the ACT receive fair financial support in a more streamlined process. I am really glad that it has received support across the chamber.

My first job after graduating from uni was as a legal assistant in a plaintiff law firm, where helping people with their workers compensation claims was one of the main things that I did every day. People might be under the impression that workers compensation is very simple. You get injured; insurance pays for wages and medical costs; everything is fine, and it is done.

In reality, it is a much more complicated process, and the people going through it, the injured workers and their families, are often at their most vulnerable, wondering how they are going to pay their bills, and whether the medical treatment is going to be paid for and accessible on time. They need support, so changes like this for silicosis are so important in making the process easier and simpler for some.

By extending lump sum statutory non-economic loss payments under the workers comp scheme to workers suffering from work-related silicosis, we can strengthen protections for those affected. Most of these workers are in construction, engineering and agriculture industries. It is my hope that the government's attention to silicosis through measures like this will increase awareness more broadly in our community, educating those who are unknowingly affected, and ensure that workers, present and retired, receive appropriate support and care.

We all know in this chamber about asbestos and the risk that that exposure creates. Many of us even know people who have suffered and died from asbestosis, or know people who have hanging over their head the possibility of one day being diagnosed with asbestosis. In time, exposure to silicon and silicosis will receive that same attention, and we will take care of the individuals who suffer from it, and their families.

Vital legislative changes like these are supplemented by the specialised guidance of ministerial advisory bodies. This bill ensures the longevity of these bodies and their capacity to inform future governments. Advisory bodies play an important role in protecting workers' rights and entitlements by guiding ministers in governments with expert advice that is founded in balanced and informed perspectives. Improving the administrative and bureaucratic functions of our ministerial advisory bodies ensures that the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council, the Labour Hire Licensing Advisory

Committee and the Work Health and Safety Council, who make up the cornerstone of representative advice being provided to our government, can do so with the greatest efficiency and effectiveness.

I applaud the future-focused nature of the bill and its aim of strengthening workers' entitlements and supporting businesses to accommodate this change. By amending the portable long service leave scheme, the bill affords businesses, where appropriate and necessary, flexibility in quarterly reporting, and expanding to capture new industries, with a diverse set of employers joining the scheme from 1 July next year.

Portable long service leave schemes assist many in our community who work in industries where staying with the one employer is not that common, but staying in the industry is. Portable long service leave schemes have existed across the country for decades in industries like the black coal mining industry and construction, and they are an accepted and normal part of how those industries operate.

In the ACT, our portable long service leave schemes in security and the community sector have now existed for over a decade. Next year, it will be expanded further to many parts of the services industry. Workplace health and safety legislation and our employers' capacity to support this are of high importance to me and my community. When we come into work each day, we should expect a healthy, safe and supportive working environment.

I support this bill with the knowledge that, with these amendments, we are one step closer to ensuring this is the case for all.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.45): I rise on behalf of the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations to close the debate on the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The ACT government remains committed to fair working conditions, the right to safety at work, and, when workers do get injured, their right to dignity and support. This bill is in keeping with these commitments. It ensures that our workplace laws are responsive to a changing employment environment. In doing so, the bill upholds the rights and dignity of workers and provides for a sound regulatory environment. It also ensures the good governance of ministerial advisory bodies.

The first amendment I will speak to is this bill's most important. It amends the Workers Compensation Act to improve access to compensation for non-economic loss when a person has work-related silicosis. As members would be aware and as others have talked about, respirable crystallised silica or silica dust is a significant hazard to workers' health when inhaled. It can lead to a range of respiratory diseases, including silicosis, which is an irreversible and permanent disease. It was for this reason that the ACT led the way in strengthening silica safety rules and banned engineered stone slabs, panels and benchtops that, when cut, create this deadly dust. Sadly, however, we know that, for many, the damage has already been done.

Currently, an injured worker diagnosed with silicosis making a workers compensation claim can receive statutory compensation only for economic loss. This means they can receive compensation for the loss of their earnings and payment for medical treatment

and rehabilitation support, but it also means they cannot access statutory permanent impairment benefits. This is the compensation that recognises the profound impact of a permanent injury. It is compensation for a life forever changed. Instead, they are forced down a stressful and time-consuming common law path to receive this compensation. By adding silicosis to the list of injuries eligible for permanent impairment benefits, we are providing a faster and more accessible alternative path. This delivers on the ACT Labor government's belief that, when you have been injured through work, you deserve dignity and support.

The ACT government also believes in providing a sound regulatory environment for employers. The bill also amends the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act to provide greater flexibility around quarterly reporting for employers. This change is to reflect circumstances where an employer's individual practices do not neatly fit a standard quarter. The amendment provides these businesses with a way to meet their obligations that is responsive to their business needs, without changing workers' entitlements to portable long service leave. The bill also provides greater clarity to the timing of levy changes made by the authority's governing board while retaining the position that the board may not raise the levy by more than 40 basis points in a 12-month period. These changes will assist in the smooth and effective running of our portable long service leave scheme.

Further, this bill improves the governance of ministerial advisory bodies within the industrial relations portfolio. The ACT government remains committed to genuine consultation and collaboration on industrial relations matters, and advisory bodies are important in realising this commitment. Changes are made to the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council, the Labour Hire Licensing Committee and the Work Health and Safety Council. These technical amendments ensure that the governance of these bodies remains effective. It will see the registrar of the Secure Local Jobs Code Advisory Council and existing ex-officio member assume the role of chair. The registrar is well-placed to assume this role. As a non-voting member, their focus will be on the sound governance of the council and supporting it to fulfill its role. Similarly, the bill will see the Labour Hire Licensing Commissioner assume the chair role for the Labour Hire Licensing Advisory Committee for the same reasons.

Finally, this bill clarifies membership arrangements for our Work Health and Safety Council. The council has maximum term limits to balance experience and renewal. Presently, however, time spent as an acting member of the council counts towards this maximum term limit. This is despite the fact that active members only attend sporadically when full members are away. This amendment prevents time spent as an acting member from becoming an unintended impediment to full membership. In doing so, the council can continue to benefit from the expertise and insights on workplace safety from these individuals.

The ACT government is committed to workplace laws that are fair, uphold the rights and dignity of workers and provide a sound and effective regulatory environment, including for employers. This is something that we look to do in all our workplace law changes, big and small, and this bill advances the important technical amendments to deliver on our commitment.

In closing, on Mr Pettersson's behalf, I thank the scrutiny committee for its review of

this bill and members for their consideration of the bill, their engagement in debate and their support today. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 9 April 2025, on motion by **Dr Paterson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.50): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill. It makes two sensible changes to the Gambling and Racing Control Act 1999. First, it allows complainants to be informed about the status of investigations into the complaints they have made; and, second, it expands the ability of the commission to advise ministers about the operation of relevant legislation.

This bill also makes temporary changes to the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund, pausing the collection of revenue and new payments out of the fund while the clubs inquiry is underway. These are appropriate, commonsense changes. I note that the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation decided an inquiry into the changes is not necessary, so we are happy for this bill to pass through the Assembly today.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.51): On behalf of the ACT Greens, I rise today to indicate our support for the passage of this bill. The bill has two main features. The first is to address the sharing of information in relation to an ongoing investigation, and the second relates to a pause in the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund. I will touch on each of these in turn.

The necessity of reform in relation to information sharing during an investigation became evident from the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Ray Kasurinen, who died by suicide when he was deeply in debt following extensive gambling losses at the Hellenic Club. A complaint was made to the Gambling and Racing Commission, but the law, as it stood at that time, meant that the complainants could receive no information about the progress of the investigation. As I found out at the time, it also meant that the relevant minister could not be, and was not, briefed on the investigation.

Considerable secrecy provisions in the act meant that the GRC, the Gambling and Racing Commission, believed that they were unable to share this information. While it is important that investigations are not compromised by inappropriate sharing of information, it is also not in the public interest and not fair for such processes to take place shrouded in so much secrecy. I met with Mr Kasurinen's family after this situation came to light and agreed that reform was needed. As the minister at the time, I directed

the commission and JACS to prepare reforms. I am pleased that Minister Paterson has brought them forward at an early point in this term and that the reforms can now be delivered.

As the explanatory statement outlines, 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. This is an important reform and the Greens support it.

The second key element of the bill is to pause payments into the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund, or DSSF as it is commonly known, for two years while the inquiry takes place into the future of clubs in the ACT. In and of itself, this is fine and we will support it. The fund was set up by Minister Ramsay during his tenure in the portfolio and came from earlier recommendations in the Stevens review. Over recent years, the fund has been accessed by venues across the city to assist with projects that seek to diversify their sources of revenue. My reflection would be that the fund has been particularly beneficial for smaller venues that do not necessarily have access to capital to fund new projects and have benefited from these payments.

In her speech, the minister stated that the bill would insert new section 163(3) to prohibit the director-general from making a payment out of the DSSF for any applications made during the two-year pause. While the minister did not refer to it, I was pleased to note from reading the explanatory statement that applications made before the two-year period commences are still able to be considered by the DSSF advisory board after the two-year period commences. This is important for two reasons. The first is that, obviously, a reasonable amount of effort goes into preparing such an application. For venues that have already invested that effort, it is important that, after having put all their effort into the application in good faith, they do not then find themselves blocked from completing that process.

The second reason for the ability to still consider applications that were already submitted is that I understand there was no consultation with the clubs on this change, so there was no opportunity to prepare for this change. It is concerning to hear that, and I would welcome the minister taking the opportunity in her closing speech to outline what consultation was undertaken on this bill. Who did the minister or the agency speak to when developing the bill, and were they actually given an opportunity to help shape the bill? I would also welcome the minister being clear about how much money remains in the DSSF. What is the current balance and how is the government intending to spend that money?

On the subject of consultation, I received a letter from ClubsACT on Monday seeking some amendments to the information-sharing elements of the legislation. I would welcome the minister outlining whether she has received those representations as well. If so, what was her reaction to those requests, and, given that they do not seem to have been incorporated into the bill, why were those requests not accommodated? I have not

had a chance to fully assess their relative merits, so I would welcome insights from the minister as to the analysis that she and/or the directorate undertook on those representations.

In conclusion, the Greens will be supporting this bill today. We particularly support the improvements to information sharing relating to investigations, which recent events have shown are very necessary reforms. I would welcome the minister taking the opportunity to answer some of the outstanding questions this bill raises, which are: who was consulted in the development of this bill, and what opportunity did they have to input; how much money remains in the DSSF, and what does the government intend to do with it; and did the minister receive representations from ClubsACT about the information-sharing elements of the bill, and what reaction and analysis did she have on those requests?

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.57): I support this bill, particularly the sharing of information during investigations, in light of the tragic circumstances outlined by Mr Rattenbury. I also support clubs diversifying their income away from gambling revenue. However, I am concerned about the lack of assessment of the financial sustainability of each club and the need for funding from the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund, particularly for large clubs that are in a strong financial position and are able to develop their blocks.

I am also concerned about the lack of any direct link between income diversification initiatives, including payments from the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund, and the surrendering of poker machine licences. I believe that support for clubs to diversify their income must be linked to reductions in the number of poker machine licences and must include an assessment of the wider financial sustainability of clubs seeking such support. I am not convinced that the government's plan to reduce poker machine numbers across Canberra over a 20-year timeframe is rapid enough to achieve a meaningful reduction in gambling harm in the community. I look forward to the independent inquiry into the future of the ACT club sector examining these issues in detail.

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) (11.58), in reply: I am pleased to close the debate of the Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I thank all members and parties for their support of the changes to the bill. The bill proposes a range of measures to implement initiatives that will improve information sharing in government and for complainants involved in ACT Gambling and Racing Commission investigations. The amendments will also support the upcoming independent inquiry into the future of the ACT clubs industry.

The bill contains three amendments. The first amendment will give complainants access to status updates in relation to an investigation of a complaint that they have made to the commission. The second amendment will support the development of gaming policy through expanded information-sharing provisions. And the third and final amendment will pause payments into and out of the Diversification and Sustainability Support Fund while the independent inquiry takes place.

The first two amendments stem from the tragic story of Mr Ray Kasurinen, who took his own life in March 2020 as a result of harm caused by gambling. The Gambling and Racing Commission commenced an investigation that took a number of years to complete. During the investigation, the commission was prohibited, by legislation, from providing updates to the complainant in relation to the investigation. The current settings in the Gambling and Racing Control Act allow the commission to inform only the complainant about the results of the investigation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Kasurinen's family—in particular, Vanessa and David Chambers. Their advocacy and their words have not been in vain. As minister, I will continue to work to ensure a situation like Mr Kasurinen's never happens again. While I accept that there is more work to be done, I hope that this bill will show that the ACT government is committed to ensuring that there is transparency for complainants in such investigations.

I will speak to other members' concerns. I will have a chat with Mr Rattenbury and follow up on some of the questions that he raised in his speech. In response to Ms Carrick's questions, the inquiry into club transition will look at some of these issues: how we can better support clubs to diversify, and the impacts of diversification on the larger clubs in comparison to smaller clubs. We will continue to do this important work.

I close today by thanking the Assembly for their support in passing this bill.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.01 to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.02): Mr Speaker, just very quickly to reiterate the same ministerial acting arrangements for Minister Pettersson's absence today. That will be the case tomorrow, so I will not do this again tomorrow.

Questions without notice

Seniors—taxation

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. I have heard from retired Canberrans who have been struggling with the cost of living crisis for years and learned yesterday that they would be stung with higher rates, a new health levy, a higher emergency services levy, higher vehicle registration fees and much more. Chief Minister, why have you made life harder for struggling seniors in our community?

MR BARR: Well, I have not. What the government is intending to do is invest very

significantly in health care, of which the greatest consumers of health care in this city are seniors.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, why are seniors bearing the brunt of your budget mismanagement?

MR BARR: Firstly, there is not budget mismanagement, and secondly, they are not.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, why were you not upfront about your plans to tax seniors so much more at last year's election?

MR BARR: We were very upfront at last year's election about both the long-term fiscal challenges and that we would adopt an approach of continuing to invest in public services. The Liberal party has a different philosophical position. That is well understood. You are for smaller government. You are for cuts and for—

Mr Hanson: Point of order on relevance. The question was not about whether they had outlined plans for services that were going to grow. The question was about whether he had been upfront about his plans to tax seniors so much more, and I would ask him to be directly relevant. He said that he did say that at the last election. Could he please be clear where he announced his plans to tax seniors much more?

MR SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister is being relevant to the question. I do not know if you have more to add?

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We were clear during the election campaign both that we were not going to be promising the world—we were not going to be promising things that we would not deliver or could not deliver—and that we would look to bring the budget back to balance. That is exactly what the government is doing.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

Budget—taxation

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the cost of your tax increases on all Canberrans means that it will cost the average household at least an extra \$5,500. Treasurer, what do you suggest that Canberrans cut from their household budget for your tax hikes?

MR STEEL: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. I refer her to the revenue chapter of the budget. It outlines a range of cameos, because the impact of the budget will be different on different Canberrans. It depends largely on their circumstances. There is more information in there, but we have been very clear that we are asking the community to help contribute to the large investment that we are making in the public healthcare system.

We are a party that invests in public health care—and free public health care, which helps to take pressure and cost-of-living pressure off households. It is critical that we invest in that. The community expects us to, and we have rejected the cuts that were proposed by the Liberal Party to the public service and public services.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, with all of your new taxes and with you increasing existing taxes by around 12 per cent, how will this make it easier for Canberrans struggling to pay their household grocery and fuel bills?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We stepped in during the pandemic, during natural disasters and during the inflationary period that followed to support the community, households, businesses and the economy. But the ACT government has also been facing inflationary pressure, so now is the time to undertake and adjust our fiscal strategy to put the budget on a more sustainable footing. With interest rates coming down, inflation coming down and the commonwealth providing tax cuts, we are now asking the community to make a contribution, particularly through the \$250 health levy. That will partially offset the very significant increase that we are making to support critical services that Canberrans expect us to deliver.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR STEEL: The alternative choice in the budget was to make massive cuts to the health system. That would not reflect the values of Canberrans, and that was rejected at the election last month.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, with payroll tax increases making it more expensive for businesses to operate in the ACT, what do you say to those businesses—and their staff—with staff that will be forced to let staff go, because it is simply too expensive to keep them?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I do not necessarily agree with the premise of the question. We are broadening the base of payroll tax because the ACT has had the highest payroll tax-free threshold in the country, at \$2 million, for years and years. So we are reducing that slightly, down to \$1.75 million, but, at the same time, reducing the rate of payroll tax paid by businesses with a payroll under \$20 million.

So how much extra businesses will contribute will really depend on the business. But we are asking businesses to help contribute to the task of making sure that we can continue to deliver critical healthcare services to the community—and not cuts.

Budget—deficit

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. What is your government's plan to consolidate the territory's debt, given this budget forecasts it will increase by 40 per cent over the forwards, and that interest costs will rise from \$500 million to more than \$1 billion?

MR BARR: We are focused on investing in the infrastructure that our community needs. We recognise that the cost of borrowing will continue to decline over the coming period as interest rates are reduced to a more neutral level. But we also recognise that we need to make investments now, and that, just as households make investments—for example, in taking out a mortgage for a home; they often contribute 30 or 40 per cent

of their income towards their mortgage—the government, which never retires but continues on, can and should make intergenerational investments in order to support the infrastructure that a growing community needs. The ACT's debt levels are comparable to—in fact, less than—many other Australian states. We have now had the full round of state and territory budgets this year and we do see that the ACT's approach is consistent with other jurisdictions and, in many instances, is in fact in a better position than other states and territories.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, given that the growth in debt and interest is unsustainable, why doesn't the government have a plan to get this under control for Canberrans?

MR BARR: The government's plan is to fully fund our superannuation liability in the early 2030s. That then frees up more than half a billion dollars a year to be applied to debt reduction in the future. We also have a plan for an operating cash surplus that is outlined in the Treasurer's budget. It is a combination of an operating cash surplus fully funding the superannuation liability and continued land release, which does generate revenue, provides a pathway both for debt stabilisation and, in the long term, reduction in debt.

Another factor that those opposite perhaps need to grasp is the time value of money. Inflation erodes debt value over time.

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, will the \$1 billion annual interest bill affect service delivery?

MR BARR: No. What we are focusing on is investing in infrastructure that improves the efficiency of our city and improves the capacity to deliver services. In fact, the programs and projects that we are investing in will grow our economy and will support a larger Canberra. The larger our city gets, the diseconomies of scale will reduce over time, and it is important that we make investments now. I note that on every morning that this place sits we have petitions calling the government to invest in infrastructure—to spend money.

Ms Castley: I have a point of order on relevance: we asked the Chief Minister about service delivery.

MR SPEAKER: I think he is being relevant to the question; I am sorry, Ms Castley.

MR BARR: The point is that this place regularly calls on the government to fund services and infrastructure. If we want to deliver them now or in the near term then that will require some borrowing. But when we are borrowing for assets that will last 50 to 100 years, we can either wait, save up for 50 years and then pay for it, or we can borrow money now and deliver those pieces of infrastructure that both grow our economy and improve the liveability of our city. The analogy that Ms Castley might relate to—given that she raised it this morning on the radio—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR BARR: is that it is a bit like saying that until you have saved up the total cost of

buying a house or a car you cannot buy it. That is the logical conclusion of the point that she is making.

Mr Hanson: You are making shit up.

MR BARR: That is surely unparliamentary.

Mr Hanson: I withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: Can we not have any more of that here? Thank you.

ACT public service—recruitment

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. This morning, the revenue minister told ABC radio that, in reference to the public service, “We are not asking people to do more with less.” But the budget papers include a \$282 million initiative called “whole-of-government expenditure reform”. Treasurer, does this initiative mean that agencies will be asked to do more with less?

MR STEEL: No, it is reducing the rate of growth in employee expenses and non-employee expenses. The public service will still grow. Those areas of government will still grow, and there are carve-outs specifically, as well, for schools, because we will provide schooling to every child, every student, as the city grows. We will also need to provide health care on demand, as necessary. That is the decision that we have made. But there are things that we can do to prioritise existing resources to engage in genuine workload reduction, and we will be working closely with unions on that. We will be working through the machinery of government changes that we made and that will start from 1 July, which bring agencies together to work more efficiently on areas of priority for the government and the community.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, did the revenue minister mislead the ABC when she claimed that the government was not asking agencies “to do more with less”?

MR STEEL: No, and she should be referred to by her proper title—finance minister.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, how many roles will be affected by this initiative?

MR STEEL: This is not about cutting FTE. That was rejected by the public at the federal election, comprehensively—75 to 25. There will be no deep cuts to the public service. The public service will continue to grow, but we will be making sure that the level of growth in employee expenses is lower than what was forecast in previous budgets.

Budget—public housing

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. Minister, in 1989, 12.2 per cent of all housing stock in the ACT was government owned. By the start of this term, that figure dropped to 5.9 per cent. Labor’s election commitments will see that drop to 5.7 per cent by 2030. There are currently more than 3,000 people on the ACT’s public housing waitlist. How many public homes will be

built through the budget?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I note his time in the housing portfolio during the initial Growing and Renewing program, before I took over the housing portfolio. He is right to point out that the Housing ACT numbers have lowered over the years. They have lowered across different governments. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of community housing properties that have been provided over the years, with significant growth and priority placed on community housing, which is able to provide both social and affordable rentals. It is about making sure that all housing types are available for both government housing and community housing providers, and also, more recently, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers. In the government, we have committed to build 5,000 homes for public housing, community housing and affordable housing between now and 2030. We are absolutely committed to seeing that number increase. We are continuing our Growing and Renewing program, which will see an increase of 400 homes by 2026-27, and we are looking at expanding on that even more.

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the history lesson, but the minister did not answer my question: how many public homes will be built through the budget?

MR SPEAKER: You would be right. It goes to relevance. I do not know whether Ms Berry has anything more to add. I do not reckon she does, so let's go with a supplementary, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: It was in yesterday's budget papers, but there you go!

Mr Hanson: That's a preamble, Mr Speaker?

MR RATTENBURY: That was just a free comment.

Minister, how many of the public homes you have announced—and you might be able to fill us in with this answer—will be run by community housing providers? And will these homes be rented at 25 per cent of a person's income?

MS BERRY: Actually, 150 homes will be built through the Growing and Renewing program, to answer Mr Rattenbury's first question. On the number of homes that will be run by community housing providers and whether rent will be set at 25 per cent of income, I might not have that information, but I will see what is available. Community housing providers rent their homes at their rates, whether it is for affordable or social housing. I will see if that information is available and will provide it if it is.

MR SPEAKER: That has been taken on notice, as far as I am concerned.

MS CLAY: Minister, by 2030, under Labor's public housing plan, how many people will remain on the public housing waitlist?

MS BERRY: That is a hypothetical question, Mr Speaker. I could not possibly know.

MR SPEAKER: I think she is correct, Ms Clay. It is pretty tough to answer that one.

Budget—economy

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, what does the 2025-26 budget tell us about the state of the local ACT economy?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The 2025-26 ACT budget is strong and continues to grow above the rest of the country. This will mean that the ACT has had 28 years of consecutive growth. The territory has a tight labour market. Employment grows faster than population. Importantly, the economy shows that real wages are growing, inflation has come down and unemployment remains low—and the lowest of all states and territories.

And as inflation comes down and interest rates continue to come down, the government expects more private investment across many areas of the economy. This will support continued economic growth after many years of significant public investment made by the ACT government and the federal government.

Mr Speaker, the ACT continues to have the highest rate of business growth in the country on a net basis, with far more new businesses opening each year than those that are closing.

Our economy is strong, supported by a more diversified economy, and the investments our government is making to support the growing city will ensure that this is the case in the future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, what initiatives in the budget will support economic growth and are investing in Canberra's future?

MR STEEL: The budget continues to support our growing economy through investments in jobs and infrastructure. The budget confirms a strong, well-designed infrastructure investment program of \$8.1 billion over the next five years, including the public trading enterprises. This includes progressing on several pieces of generational infrastructure, like progressing the next steps for the new north side hospital and the new Canberra Theatre redevelopment. It builds on key projects under construction like light rail stage 2A, the new bridge over the Molonglo River, and major road projects on the Monaro Highway as well. It includes working with the Australian government on a new Canberra aquatic centre at Commonwealth Park, and planning and designing for a new convention centre.

Importantly, the budget delivers significant investment to support the delivery of more housing—including affordable and community housing—and to deliver the reforms that will deliver a more productive and adaptive construction industry.

Mr Speaker, the budget also continues to invest in our growing visitor economy, our arts and creative sector, and in innovation and economic diversification as we progress on our ambitions to support more well-paying jobs in the territory's economy.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, why is it so important that we invest in local infrastructure?

MR STEEL: Investing in infrastructure drives economic growth and sets up our city for the future, particularly as our population grows. That is why the government has a robust pipeline of infrastructure: from those big city-shaping projects that bring more jobs to Canberra, supporting further economic development, to the local infrastructure projects across our city in each region, including local shopping centre upgrades, playground and school upgrades, and more. Each of these projects support investment and renewal in every part of Canberra. These are projects that create jobs, support business, and renew the aging parts of our city. We will not be cancelling. We will be getting on with them. Canberra will grow to 500,000 in the next couple of years, and 700,000 by 2050. So we need to invest now in the growing needs of our community by making generational investments in infrastructure like light rail and the new hospital. The alternative of cutting these major projects, and indeed local projects, would see fewer jobs, less economic growth, and less investment in the future of our great city.

Budget—taxation

MS CLAY: My question is for the Treasurer. Minister, yesterday you said that Labor's 2025-26 budget was based on Labor values. A message from the Australian Labor Party president on the website says:

... the heart and soul of the Labor Party is the shared ethical principle of economic justice...

The ACT Greens put forward a tax proposal which would see big corporations pay more in tax and generate over \$100 million in revenue for the ACT each year. This type of tax ensures those at the big end of town who can afford to pay more do, but instead, you decreased payroll tax for big business, increased the number of small local businesses who will have to pay and announced a \$250 health levy on every-day Canberrans that will generate only \$50 million in revenue.

Did the Treasury do any modelling of the Greens' big corporations tax proposal and its impact on revenue generation?

MR STEEL: No. It was five seconds to midnight before the budget was about to be finalised and going to print when you raised that particular issue. We had already met with you across our own-source revenue lines to make sure we had a sustainable revenue base to be able to support continued critical services in our hospitals and health system. We had looked at payroll tax and I reject the premise of the question because big business will be paying tax on a greater share of wages than they were previously. We had already made the decision in previous budgets to add a surcharge that will be paid by businesses for payroll with a national payroll of over \$100 million. That will be applied over the next year. There is a delayed implementation for the further payroll tax changes that we have announced in the budget to allow business time to adapt, plan and budget for the increase to payroll tax, which will come in in 2026-27.

MS CLAY: Treasurer, has the government carried out modelling to understand the impact of the \$250 health levy on each household income quintile?

MR STEEL: We certainly took this into account when considering the budget. It is one of the reasons why we have increased the utilities concession for electricity, gas and

water. This is the main mechanism that the ACT government has used to provide cost-of-living relief to low-income households. We have now permanently increased that to \$800 and it builds on the extended eligibility as well. This will support over 40,000 low income households—those with a Services Australia health care card—with cost of living. It is just one of the cost-of-living measures we have made in the budget in a targeted way to make sure that those who are doing it tough are supported. At the same time, we are also making sure we deliver things like free public health care.

MR RATTENBURY: Treasurer, will this \$250 levy be charged to ACT Housing, concession card holders, health care card holders and low-income earners?

MR STEEL: It will be paid by rateable properties. Some people will not necessarily be a lessee of a property, so they may not be paying the levy directly. We know that many families and households need support, and that is why we have made the targeted cost of living measures that we have in the budget, as well as making substantial investment in affordable housing. We know that one of the biggest costs for the household budget is housing costs, whether you are renting or paying a mortgage. That is why we have also taken into account the macroeconomic settings across Australia and here in the territory.

We are making these decisions. We are seeing inflation coming down generally and in the ACT. We are seeing interest rates coming down, which is helping to take pressure off households. The commonwealth government will be making further tax cuts, which will support households as well. But we need to fund the critical healthcare services that the same Canberrans are relying on. That is why we are asking the community to contribute to that task, because when you show up at an emergency department, you expect to be treated. The alternative choice that we had in the budget was to cut back on health care, and that would be out of step with the values of Canberrans.

Budget—health

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the budget outlook suggests the new \$250 health tax is a direct result of the declining Commonwealth Contribution Rate for public hospitals, which is expected to fall further in the next financial year. Furthermore, the Minister for Health was on the radio this morning saying that the \$250 levy would not be enough to keep the health system afloat. What specific actions have you undertaken since being appointed as Treasurer to push back on the commonwealth's retreat from hospital funding, and why should ACT households bear the cost of this shortfall?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I reject the premise of the question. That is not what the finance minister said. Effectively, what she said on radio this morning was that the health levy will raise just over \$200 million over the forward estimates, but the increasing demand and growth in the healthcare system is costing the budget about \$717 million. So the levy is not going to fully offset the cost of this significant pressure that we are experiencing and that every other state and territory is experiencing around the country.

All those states and territories have been advocating to the commonwealth for a new five-year national health agreement, to make sure that there is a better Commonwealth

Contribution Rate to our public hospital systems that are experiencing this pressure.

At national cabinet level, there has been agreement to a 45 per cent Commonwealth Contribution Rate. At the moment, because of the growth in demand in the system, and the methodology under the current NHR arrangements, which has a 6.5 per cent cap, the level of growth has been above that cap. Therefore, the commonwealth contribution has dropped. This is a key area of negotiation that we will be continuing to engage with the commonwealth on.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, there is a point of order. Can we stop the clock there.

Mr Cocks: The point of order is on relevance, and I have waited until a fair way through the answer. The question was very specifically on the Treasurer's personal actions in this respect, not on what is being done, overall, in other jurisdictions.

MR SPEAKER: I think he is having a genuine crack at answering the question, and I think he has more to add.

MR STEEL: I am happy to add the specific instances in which I have engaged in advocacy on behalf on the territory for a better health funding deal from the commonwealth. One is through the Council on Federal Financial Relations, where all sat around the table with the states and territories and engaged with the commonwealth on the question of the NHR Agreement. The Chief Minister has done that at the national cabinet level and has continued to advocate directly with our colleagues. Cabinet members sat down with the federal finance minister over the last week or so, and we raised this issue and the need to start negotiations quickly on a new NHR deal, given the budget situation in the territory.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, given that the health minister has claimed—and you have confirmed—that the levy will not be enough to deal with the funding shortfall for health, can Canberrans expect it to be increased in the future?

MR STEEL: That is not what we are proposing in the budget. We are proposing a temporary levy that will be paid over the next four years, whilst we negotiate with the commonwealth on a National Health Reform Agreement.

We needed to take action now to make sure that we put the budget on a sustainable path, because of the expenses and costs that are being incurred in our healthcare system. We are asking the community to contribute to that task. It was a difficult decision that we have made in this budget, but it has also been coupled with targeted cost-of-living measures to support low-income households.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, why, decades after Labor promised to end the blame games, is there still a fight over health funding between the ACT and federal Labor governments?

MR STEEL: To be fair to the commonwealth government, they have been grappling—and we have been grappling—with a decade of neglect to primary health care in this country that has put additional pressure on acute health and hospital systems. That is not going to change overnight. It is not going to change over one term of a federal Labor

government, but it is something that they are tackling—through bulk-billing incentives, by strengthening Medicare—and we have put in place, through this budget, complementary measures to support GPs, particularly around the workforce and with some of the payroll tax incentives as well. A big focus on primary health care is needed, but it is not going to turn things around in the acute healthcare system overnight.

We have seen, particularly over the past year, that the level of growth has been unexpected. We have always had pressure in the healthcare system, but the level of growth has been unexpected. Every other state and territory is grappling with the same task. Have a look at their budgets. Have a look at yesterday's Queensland budget—a very similar level of investment is being made to support the growth and costs in the healthcare system. We have made a somewhat similar choice: to not take austerity measures and to not make the deep cuts that were proposed by the Liberal Party at the federal election.

Environment—wood heaters and wood stoves

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for the environment. Minister, yet again the onset of Canberra's freezing winter means some huge spikes from wood heater pollutants, meaning poor air quality for our community. Last budget included funding for a regulatory impact statement to progress the government's planning to reach its commitment to phase-out wood heaters by 2045. Has this regulatory impact statement been completed?

MS ORR: I am not aware of its being completed, but I will take the question on notice and make sure that that is the most up-to-date advice.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will the government release a draft wood heater phase-out plan?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my first question. We certainly will not be releasing a plan without having done the consideration beforehand.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will the government commence prioritising a phase-out of the heaters this year, given that there was no funding on progress of this work in yesterday's budget?

MS ORR: I think that would be akin to asking me to announce new policy in question time, which I will not be doing.

Gambling—inquiry into the future of ACT clubs industry

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, who, other than ClubsACT, had input into the terms of reference for the inquiry into the clubs industry?

DR PATERSON: The terms of reference were developed from an Assembly resolution in the last term of government. ClubsACT and the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance were both advised and asked for feedback on the terms of reference for the inquiry.

MR EMERSON: Minister, why didn't the government consult members of the Assembly on the exact terms of reference, given the obvious multi-partisan interest in this issue?

DR PATERSON: There was a motion in the last Assembly which asked the government to conduct an inquiry and to list the terms of reference. We took that and developed the terms of reference as quickly as we could so that we could get on with the inquiry.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, what specific evidence regarding gambling harm reduction was used to inform the terms of reference for the inquiry?

DR PATERSON: The inquiry is not based around gambling harm. The inquiry is around the transition of the clubs sector. It is premised on the reduction in machines to 1,000 by 2045. The inquiry is a really unique and specific look at how we will create a sustainable clubs sector in the ACT through the reduction in gaming machines.

Roads—speed limits

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for road safety. The Centre for Automotive Safety Research released a report, *Vehicle speeds through school zones in the Australian Capital Territory*, that stated that reducing everyone's speed was crucial and that 30 kilometres per hour was the tipping point. Dr James Thompson, an author, stated that, if you are a pedestrian hit by a vehicle at 30 kilometres per hour or greater, you are at a very high risk of being seriously or fatally injured, but, if you are hit at under 30 kilometres per hour, you have a pretty good chance of surviving.

Minister, why does the government continue to have 40-kilometre-per-hour speed limits in school zones when academic research demonstrates the danger this presents to Canberra's children?

MS CHEYNE: That is not quite one of my named ministries, but I am responsible for road safety. I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I would note, and I think this is reflected in the research as well—certainly in the commentary that has come out since it was published—that a speed limit is just one method of keeping people, especially vulnerable people, including children, safe. We have a 40-kilometre-per-hour speed limit on streets in designated school zones, and that applies from 8 am until 4 pm. That ensures that there is a low-speed environment over the eight-hour period and not just set at a defined time. We also have the benefit of a well-designed road hierarchy. Most schools are not located on or near major roads. Of course, we also have enforcement that occurs, particularly with our mobile speed vans, as well as our parking inspectors. Often one of the major risks in crossing a road is visibility. That is particularly a concern when there is low visibility due to cars being parked illegally.

In terms of the recommendations regarding 30 kilometres an hour, we are certainly happy to look at that. I would expect that would occur as we work towards the next Road Safety Action Plan, which is due for updating. I think that work is beginning at the start of next year.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will the budget's announced additional revenue allocated

to the Road Safety Fund Grants program fund further work to make ACT school zones safer?

MS CHEYNE: I cannot answer that because the grants are determined by the Road Safety Advisory Board. They consider the applications that are received by them. The terms the Road Safety Advisory Board is looking for or focusing on are publicly available.

MS CLAY: Minister, are you waiting for serious incidents to occur before you consider further road safety measures like reducing the school speed limit to 30 kilometres per hour, as was the case when you announced the pedestrian crossing following a serious accident in front of St Edmund's College?

MS CHEYNE: No, and that is insulting. What occurred at Canberra Avenue, as everybody knows, was not due to the arterial road speed limit; it was due to an incredibly reckless incident where someone was driving at extremely high speeds. However, it did renew broader calls about the mid-block crossing, the investment that the government had already made into footpaths in that area, and whether some further measures could be employed to assist students to cross the road safely. A study had been undertaken that suggested that the Hume Circle improvements perhaps needed to occur at the same time, but, following the incident and the renewed representations from families and children, we were able to look at that again and determine that we can go ahead with that pedestrian crossing, subject to NCA approvals.

Budget—housing

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, how does the 2025-26 budget deliver on our government's commitment to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. The importance of having a home cannot be understated. I said that yesterday. It provides the foundations for so many aspects of a person's life. Our government believes that there is a moral and economic imperative to supply a pipeline of homes to ensure that all Canberrans can afford housing in our city, whether it is to buy or rent. And it is why the 2025-26 territory budget is investing more than \$145 million towards enabling 30,000 new homes over the next five years: delivering on our government's commitment and our share—greater than our share, in fact—of Australia's housing target under the National Housing Accord.

And this budget invests in measures which tackle housing supply from all sides. We are releasing land to support 26,000 new homes across both new and existing suburbs over the next five years—complemented by land releases for commercial, community and industrial use across our districts to provide the services and important opportunities that our growing population will need.

We are also delivering on the next stages of planning reforms to enable thousands of more new homes in well-located areas around shopping centres, for example, public transport corridors providing people with a more diverse range of housing options

within our existing urban footprint, consistent with the planning strategy.

Starting with missing middle housing reforms currently out for public exhibition and comment, further reforms have been funded in the budget to unlock more housing choice in the places that people want to live.

Hand-in-hand with providing these opportunities, the government recognises that building a home has many steps and we are committed to supporting private-sector development through changes to renovating and building regulations; improving the planning assessment processes; and investing in supporting infrastructure. We have got a bill before the Assembly about that at the moment, related to territory priority projects and I encourage the Assembly to support it. But we expect— *(Time expired.)*

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what steps is the government taking to support more affordable and community homes?

MR STEEL: Thank you, minister. Our investment in housing through the territory budget is to make it easier for all Canberrans to find the home they need—whether they are buying their first home, raising a family, aging in place, or in need of supported housing.

Alongside increasing housing supply, the ACT government is delivering on our commitment to provide 5000 additional public, community and affordable homes by the end of 2030. The budget includes direct investment in new social and affordable homes to provide for a more equitable and livable city. We will deliver 85 new public housing dwellings through the community housing providers, under the Housing Australia Future Fund. We are also continuing investment in the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program to expand Canberra's public housing portfolio and, of course, a commitment which Ms Berry is leading to support 1000 new homes over the next five years.

We will also continue to dedicate at least 15 per cent of suitable land releases each year to public, community and affordable housing. And in the next year we have exceeded that target by dedicating 20 per cent of land release for that purpose, which will enable 58 new public dwellings, 239 new community dwellings, and 55 new affordable dwellings.

The ACT government is also supporting the delivery of build-to-rent projects with an affordable rental component. We are releasing land in Gungahlin and Molonglo in coming years for these projects.

Furthermore, the budget provides \$20 million in additional funding for the Affordable Housing Project Fund, increasing the total to \$100 million. This fund provides targeted land tax exemptions to landlords who rent their properties at a discount, to market affordable rent to eligible tenants through community housing providers. This additional investment means that the property cap has been increased—quadrupled, in fact—to 1000 properties, enabling even more property owners and tenants to benefit from the scheme.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, how is the government preparing for a future

skilled workforce to support this goal?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question and his interest in skills. In the budget, we are investing heavily in skills because it is critical to supporting the delivery of more homes. The investment in the development of our future construction workforce will be supported as part of a \$138.1 million investment over four years towards education and skills. To support the future workforce, we are increasing training subsidies to 90 per cent of the efficient price for key construction trades, including carpentry, plumbing, tiling, bricklaying and other key areas.

We will also be implementing the Try-a-Trade program, doubling the number of public high schools that are participating in the program to support more young women and other students to enter the construction industry.

And for our new apprentices, we will be providing a \$250 cost-of-living payment. And in their first year we will give them another \$250 to support them in paying for the tools that they need for their apprenticeship. This builds on the federal government's investment of \$10,000 in completion incentives for housing construction apprentices.

We have been making investments in this budget which complement the commonwealth, and will deliver the skills we need to deliver on our housing commitments.

Budget—land release

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Treasurer. It is about the mismatch between the government's housing plans and population projections.

The government's Housing Supply and Land Release Program 2025-26 to 2029-30 sets out the proposed residential releases and projected population increases in each district over the next five years. According to this document, Woden and Weston Creek have a combined population of over 65,000 as at June last year and we will have well over 70,000 people within five years. Why does the government forecast population growth in Weston Creek of only 123 people over the next five years when it is proposing 800 new multi-unit dwellings? Similarly, why does Woden's population increase by only 1,197 people over the next five years when 3,420 multi-unit dwellings are proposed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. She makes a good point. The population projections that are made by the territory are in the process at the moment of being updated. I am looking forward to making further announcements about that. Yes, they will be affected by policy settings relating to planning, particularly to enable more homes through zoning reform. So we will be providing updates. I have established a new form of the old Indicative Land Release Program which looks at broader housing supply issues, not just land release, but also the other levers that support housing supply. So that will include a wider ranging view of housing in the territory and what we need to do to support more housing in the territory as our population grows to 700,000 by 2050.

So I will be making some further announcements about updated population projections,

but what we have set out in the HSLRP is what we plan to release in the next five years in the territory, which is 26,000. We expect 3,420 dwellings in the Woden Valley alone, and indeed then in other districts as well. Molonglo will see the largest growth in the territory as a growing greenfields area, but we will see growth in all parts of the territory.

MS CARRICK: Treasurer, why did you reduce the size of Woden's 50-metre pool when your policy is to undertake densification? The Woden strategy includes over 20,000 new dwellings and your response to my motion about the Phillip pool stated:

Numerous planning studies, undertaken by specialist aquatic/leisure consultants, detail indoor 50 metre pools are generally only feasible and/or financially viable where there is a dedicated population catchment of 70,000 to 100,000 people.

MR STEEL: As the Chief Minister mentioned yesterday, we are continuing to invest in the needs of the territory, including the Woden Valley District as it relates to community and recreational facilities as this area grows. We have, of course, commitments there around building a new community centre, which will be important for the community and provide some recreational benefit as well. We have invested in the past in infrastructure like Phillip oval upgrades. We have just invested in the new pavilion at the Phillip district oval. We will continue to invest in needs. We are doing some work on needs assessment and of course, the government has committed to undertake further planning reforms noted in the HSLRP around the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. This does not only look for more housing opportunities along the key transport corridor in the Woden Valley and in the Inner South but looking at the opportunities for other facilities as well that support the liveability of those homes into the future. So that is a piece of work that is only just getting underway at the moment. I look forward to further engaging with the community and Ms Carrick on that matter.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, how can you have confidence in decisions based on outdated population forecasts? Will your updated population forecasts fully incorporate the government's urban intensification policy?

MR STEEL: Yes, it will obviously reflect the planning strategy, which has long set out, since 2018, that 70 per cent of new dwellings are expected to be delivered in the existing urban footprint and then sets out a range of actions which include transport oriented development, which include more housing close to services and amenities and also exploring more low rise medium density housing as well. We are getting on with the planning reforms to deliver on the actions in the planning strategy and the population forecast will help us to plan for a range of other facilities as well. Those population figures will be in part be driven by the planning reforms as well, so there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Our Treasury continues to update the methodology of the population projections, which will provide us with, I think a much clearer picture when I announce those in the future.

Economy—credit rating

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, the budget outlook outlines a negative cash operating balance for both the current financial year and the upcoming one. Ratings agencies have previously warned that continued cash operating deficits would likely result in a further credit downgrade. That would mean higher borrowing costs, less flexibility to fund essential services and long-term damage to the territory's fiscal credibility.

Treasurer, given the territory is running operating deficits and cannot fund the day-to-day costs of government from its own revenue, are Labor's election commitments now at risk, or will you guarantee that every promise made will be delivered this term?

MR STEEL: No, and, as the Chief Minister said earlier, the budget is showing that we will be returning to operating cash surpluses over the forward estimates—in fact, from 2026-27. This will enable us to be in a strong financial position to continue to deliver the services that Canberrans expect and to continue to invest in infrastructure.

I have been very clear in my budget speech that we have adjusted our fiscal strategy in this budget. That fiscal strategy is outlined in the budget, and it charts a course to make sure that we have sound public finances. That has included making difficult decisions about sustainable revenue and also taking further steps to make sure that the growth in employee expenses comes down.

I pointed out a similarity earlier with the Queensland government. Now I will point out a difference. The difference is that we have taken action to address the financial sustainability of the budget in the ACT, whilst also investing in the critical services in our health and hospital systems. The Queensland government did not do that; they just funded the additional expenditure in their public healthcare systems, and they have deficits over the forward estimates. They are not returning to surplus over the forward estimates. We are, and we are returning to a cash surplus as well. That puts us in a stronger financial position. So when the credit agencies meet with us, which they will following each budget, we will certainly be putting the case to them that we have adjusted our fiscal strategy to address the sustainability of the budget.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, have you or the government received any recent communication or warnings from credit rating agencies or your own directorate in light of the projected deficits?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the previous question taken on notice, which I have responded to, in relation to the credit ratings agencies. They have made public commentary, and I believe they will be making public commentary—potentially today—on the budgets released yesterday, including ours. So that will be there for the member to have a look at, if he wishes to see that.

I am not going to comment for the agencies themselves, but what I would point members to is the fiscal strategy outlined on page 31 of the budget outlook. It outlines the adjusted fiscal strategy that we have made in this budget, which has included difficult decisions to put the budget on a sustainable footing.

MS MORRIS: Treasurer, how can Canberrans trust this government to manage the territory's finances responsibly, when the government has failed to deliver a balanced

budget?

MR STEEL: Because we will not slash and burn the public service or the public services that they deliver. That was roundly and comprehensively rejected at the federal election in May. We have taken a responsible approach of continuing to deliver those services, whilst at the same time making difficult decisions—responsible decisions—about expenditure growth in the public service and also in relation to revenue measures.

We are also continuing to deliver on the commitments that we made to the community. We are not going to break that trust; we are going to deliver on the election commitments that we made to the community last year, despite the changed fiscal circumstances and pressures that we are facing.

We are also going to work with the federal Labor government to address the challenges that we have. That is a very different proposition to what we would have had if the opposition—the coalition, the Liberal Party—had come into power at the federal election and we had had 15 per cent of our workforce cut.

Budget—central reserve fund

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, earlier this year your government pushed through the creation of a \$20 million central reserve fund—a new slush fund in addition to the existing \$80 million Treasurer’s advance. Not only was the Treasurer’s advance used twice since then, but, according to the budget papers, nearly the entire central reserve has also been spent. Yet, there is no clear public breakdown of where that money went. Treasurer, what exactly was the \$19.9 million from the central reserve fund spent on?

MR STEEL: I am happy to take the member’s question on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, why was the public not informed at the time the central reserve fund was drawn down, and will you commit to releasing the spending details of all discretionary funds?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. He will have the opportunity, of course, to ask questions in the estimates hearings. There will be opportunities to ask about specific items—this was not a specific question—and expenditure in the budget through the estimates process. There will be that opportunity, but I will come back to the Assembly on the first question.

MR HANSON: Treasurer, is the growing use of the Treasurer’s advance and now the central reserve, a sign that your government has lost control of the budget process?

MR STEEL: No, and I reject the premise of the question. The Treasurer’s advance has always been used as a contingency for unexpected or emergency expenditure that needs to be made between budgets. It is there as a responsible element of financial management, under the Financial Management Act to make sure that we can continue to deliver services and pay public servants. You would be criticising me if we did not do that. We use it sparingly because it is there only for unexpected expenses, and we try to make sure that we budget appropriately.

We forecast that budgeting as best we can, but sometimes there are differences that need to be managed throughout the year. That is the purpose of the contingency that has been there for that purpose for years and decades.

Budget—taxation

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, federal Labor promised a \$268 tax cut for Australians earning over \$45,000 from 2026–27, but here in the ACT your government is taking that back, and more. This budget hits Canberrans with over 20 new or increased taxes, charges and levies, including a \$250 health tax. Over the forward estimates, your total tax take rises by more than \$1 billion, over \$5,500 per household. At the same time debt servicing is ballooning. How can you justify making Canberrans' cost of living worse by hitting households with dozens of new taxes and taking more than you give?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. Policy decisions in the 2025-26 budget are estimated to raise \$722 million, including \$521.3 million in new tax measures and initiatives incorporating fees and charges. That is in the revenue chapter of the budget.

We have made difficult decisions in this budget to make sure that we can continue the critical services that Canberrans rely on, and that has meant that we also have to reflect the inflation that the government has experienced in the cost of delivering services. We have had to adjust a range of fees and charges accordingly, to make sure that we can continue to deliver the services that Canberrans expect. But we are doing so in an environment where inflation is coming down generally, where interest rates are coming down, and where there are tax cuts being made by the federal government. So now is the time to adjust our fiscal strategy.

The alternative, it seems, coming from the opposition is that we should not have taken that approach. We either should have made deep cuts and had austerity measures in the public service or an alternative—

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order. Stop the clock, please. Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: The Treasurer has moved into debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I think he probably has. I think that is a fair call.

Mr Steel: On the point of order, I am talking about the considerations that we had to make in order to make decisions on the budget, which is about choice. I think you said that as well. I am explaining the choices that we have. I think it is reasonable.

MR SPEAKER: He is explaining why he has gone to it, and I think he has some latitude to mention it. He did not base his entire answer on it. I think he had a good go at answering the question early, and had a little whack on the way through at the end.

MR STEEL: I will finish my answer, if I can.

MR SPEAKER: Restart the clock.

MR STEEL: The other alternative, of course, is to run the budget into massive deficit. We have not done that. We have put it on a sustainable footing, with surpluses from 2027-28 and in 2028-29.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, have you got a supplementary!

MR COCKS: Treasurer, do you deny that these increases completely wipe out the benefit of the federal tax cut for most ACT residents, and that families are going backwards under this government?

MR STEEL: Our consideration was about the full economic context, including the macroeconomic context, with monetary policy easing, with inflation coming down, with interest rates coming down, and with pressure being taken off households in that respect. It is also about acknowledging that some households are still under pressure and there is a need to provide further concessions for those, as well as maintaining the range of other concessions that we have, such as the concessions on rates, which are already the highest in the country.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, how much longer can your government keep taxing more, borrowing more and delivering less, without putting the territory's fiscal future at serious risk?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. We are delivering more services. Whilst we are managing the growth in demand, in costs in our healthcare system, we are delivering 70,000 elective surgeries, delivering on our commitments to support thousands of Canberrans with chronic illness. We are delivering better services and more infrastructure. The alternative that the opposition has been putting forward is to cancel those infrastructure projects and slash the services. That would not be in line with the values of Canberrans.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Elective surgery—waiting lists

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In keeping with the theme of delivering more services, I rise to respond to a question that Ms Castley asked me yesterday about why the percentage of Canberrans whose elective surgery is overdue has increased since October 2024. As it was the last time Ms Castley asked me this question and I took it on notice, the answer is that although the percentage has slightly increased from 28 per cent to 29 per cent, in fact the number of people overdue and waiting for surgery has decreased. That is because the number of people on our elective surgery waiting list has also decreased.

The number of people on our elective surgery waiting list has decreased by 956, and

the number of people overdue, ready for care, has decreased by 227—a decrease of almost 1,000 people waiting for elective surgery from October 2024 to June 2025. In relation to category 1 people waiting for elective surgery, there has been a decrease of almost 100 people ready for care and waiting for elective surgery, and a significant decrease in the overdue number, from 129 to 89.

Ms Castley is always accusing the government of fudging figures, but Ms Castley has these numbers in front of her; she knows what the real numbers are, and she has consistently misrepresented those percentages. I am happy to say that we are getting through more elective surgery and reducing the number of people overdue and ready for care.

Budget—central reserve fund

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time, Mr Cocks asked me about the central reserve. I want to provide some further information to the Assembly, in answer to the question. It has not been expended and the funding has not been extended. The central reserve funding has been returned to the budget. Effectively, it will no longer exist, and we will use Treasurer's advance as a contingency in the future.

Budget—taxation

MR STEEL: In relation to the question that was asked of me, I think by Ms Clay, regarding payroll tax, in the 2023-24 budget the ACT government introduced a payroll tax surcharge for large businesses. The surcharge was an additional 0.25 per cent on ACT wages above the payroll tax threshold for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$50 million, and 0.5 per cent on ACT wages above the payroll tax threshold for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$100 million, from 1 July 2025.

In the 2024-25 budget, the government further adjusted these settings, announcing it would bring forward the introduction of the payroll tax surcharge for large national and multinational businesses operating in the ACT by one year to 2024-25, and increase the surcharge in 2025-26, which will result in a 0.25 percentage point surcharge for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$50 million, a 0.5 percentage point surcharge for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$100 million, a 0.5 percentage point surcharge for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$50 million, and a one percentage point surcharge for businesses with Australia-wide wages above \$100 million, from 2025-26 onwards.

In neither of these initiatives did the budget announce a total payroll tax rate; only the surcharge rate was in the budget. The government has announced a reform of payroll tax, broadening the base, in the 2025-26 budget, and reducing the rate, as well as introducing a new step at \$20 million in wages. The same surcharges previously announced apply.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Yhurwun Bullan program

DR PATERSON: I want to provide some additional information to clarify a response to a question asked by Mr Emerson yesterday in relation to a property which houses Yhurwun Bullan. Yhurwun Bullan has been auspiced by Yerrabi Yurwang since July

2024. The government's contract with Yhurwun Bullan provides \$961,000 in funding to deliver the women's outreach program from July 2024 to June 2026. The government has also committed an additional \$1.9 million to fund this program to continue for a further three years.

Yhurwun Bullan operates from a property which was made available to them via a headlease with Yerrabi Yurwang from 21 January 2025. On 23 June, a client of Yhurwun Bullan wrote to Minister Berry, Minister Orr and Mr Emerson regarding maintenance and safety concerns at the property. Separately, Yerrabi Yurwang, as head tenant, recently raised concerns about a malfunction of a hot-water service at the property, and this was rectified by Housing ACT. Housing ACT will continue to liaise with Yerrabi Yurwang in relation to repairs and maintenance of the property, in line with the headlease arrangement.

Papers

Dr Paterson presented the following paper:

Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Revised explanatory statement, dated June 2025.

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

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—

ACT Annual Impact Statement 2024-25, undated.

Annual Impact Statement 2024-25 and National Agreement on Closing the Gap—ACT Annual Report 2024—Tabling statement, undated.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap—Jurisdiction report—ACT Annual Report 2024, dated June 2025.

Civil Law (Wrongs) (Organisational Child Abuse Liability) Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.09): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise to introduce the Civil Law (Wrongs) (Organisational Child Abuse Liability) Amendment Bill 2025. This bill amends the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 by extending an organisation's vicarious liability for abuse to cases where the child abuse is done by someone who is either an employee, in the normal sense of the term, or someone who is functionally equivalent to an employee in all relevant ways. It addresses the High Court's decision in *Bird v DP* from last year, which held that, essentially, Catholic priests are employed not by the church but by God—despite receiving, among other things, JobKeeper and superannuation entitlements—and therefore victims cannot sue

for vicarious liability.

The decision means institutions can avoid taking responsibility for crimes perpetrated by people associated with their organisation or in positions akin to employment but who are not technically employed. For instance, this means that priests are not considered employees, so churches are not liable for their abuse. It also includes organisations like sporting codes, scouts and girl guides, where volunteers and others are under the control and protection of the organisation. The bill I am introducing today will remedy this so that children who are abused by people carrying out a role in the organisation, or activities for the benefit of the organisation, can access justice.

I start by acknowledging the support for the bill in the public gallery today. Josh, a survivor of child abuse perpetrated by his cricket coach in the ACT, is here, supported by his sister. Joe Stroud and Claire Leaney are here from the In Good Faith Foundation and National Survivors Day.

I must thank legal practitioners, including solicitors and barristers in the ACT, New South Wales and Victoria, and paralegals too, like Matt. I thank James Masur for sending a copy of his book, his willingness to connect us to his extensive network, and inspiring us with his commitment to fighting the good fight.

To Ali Pettit and to Hassan Ehsan, who is here in the gallery today, I say thank you for reviewing drafts of the bill and for your feedback. I thank Peter Karp for providing us with the first iteration of the bill and reviewing every version since. Please also pass on my appreciation to your client, who tried to come to Canberra; I am grateful for his effort and wish him the best for his future. I thank all of you for sharing your experiences of practising in this field and your clients' stories of the injustices they continue to face. I hope this legislation has the impact that we all want.

I thank Distinguished Professor Ben Mathews and Dr Judy Courtin for considering and supporting this bill. I thank Harri James, from Your Reference Ain't Relevant. Your advocacy continues to create change. The same applies to Michael Bradley and the Grace Tame Foundation. There are others, including esteemed academics, who were very gracious with their time. I must also acknowledge the private members' bills that were introduced in Victoria and New South Wales.

I am grateful to the people from around Australia, and particularly the survivors, who reached out once news of this bill became public. I cannot imagine what it takes to live through and disclose what you have been through. Thank you for supporting this bill and taking the time to tell me about your experiences. I hope the rest of your journeys through the legal system and life more broadly go well.

I would like to start with this powerful statement about the bill from Josh, who has given me permission to share it. He said:

To be abused as a child by a trusted cricket coach—someone in a position of authority, someone you were taught to respect and look up to—is a betrayal that cuts to the core. The trauma inflicted is lifelong. It alters the course of a young person's life in ways that words can scarcely capture.

But what makes that trauma even more devastating is when the very institution

responsible for safeguarding children not only fails to act—but knowingly turns a blind eye.

In this case, the institution in question was aware of concerns prior to employing the coach. Staff members made jokes about his inappropriate and “hands-on” behaviour with players. These were not isolated incidents, nor were they unknown. And yet, he was still given access to children. Still allowed to operate in a position of trust. Still protected—while children were not.

That is not negligence. That is institutional failure. And it must have consequences.

This bill is not just necessary—it is urgent. It ensures that institutions are held to account for the people they employ, engage, or allow to volunteer under their name. It sends a clear message: the safety of children is not optional. It is a legal and moral obligation.

Let this Assembly be on the right side of history. Let us say, without hesitation, that we will no longer tolerate cultures of silence, denial, or inaction. That children will be protected. And that institutions will finally be held accountable when they fail to do so.

I thank Josh for those strong words, for sharing them with me and for being courageous enough to allow me to bring them to the Assembly. It is a sentiment that I fully support, and I am sure members of this place do as well.

This bill is about ensuring victims have access to justice for the crimes committed against them as children, and it is about ensuring institutions make amends for the harms caused on their watch. Powerful and wealthy institutions like the Catholic Church cannot continue to arm themselves to the hilt with lawyers and worm their way out of compensating the children who were abused in their organisations. The High Court has said it is up to states and territories to legislate, so I am bringing this bill forward to make this happen.

Firstly, why is this bill needed? The bill is a legislative response to the High Court judgement in *Bird v DP* delivered on 13 November 2024. The plaintiff, DP, alleged that, in 1971, he was sexually abused on two occasions at his family home by Father Coffey, who was an assistant parish priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat. At first instance the diocese was found vicariously liable for the assaults, despite the court finding that Coffey was not an employee of the diocese. The High Court then unanimously overturned the appellate court’s ruling and found that vicarious liability could not exist in the absence of an employer-employee relationship.

By deciding that vicarious liability in Australia is limited to employer-employee relationships, our court took a different approach to the UK and Canada, where courts have been more willing to extend vicarious liability to relationships “akin to employment”. This decision was despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that survivors have a vehicle to establish institutional liability for wrongs committed against them as children.

Given the High Court seems to have ruled out expansion of vicarious liability through common law, this bill is required to ensure survivors who were abused by people associated with organisations or in positions akin to employment are able to access

justice. It is necessary because, without it, institutions that have had children abused in their care can avoid responsibility for the actions of those they effectively employed. Without this bill there is an unjust asymmetry between, for example, a child abused by a teacher in a classroom in a religious school and a child abused in the same school but by the priest in the sacristy instead.

The devastating lifelong impact of abuse in childhood and the multigenerational harm it causes cannot be overstated, and nor can the willingness of large institutions to use every loophole to evade responsibility for it. The purpose of the bill is to ensure that the organisations who harboured individuals who were akin to employees or associated with the organisation when they abused children can be held vicariously liable for the abuse. It is intended to provide clarity around those who fall into these categories, operate to broaden the common law doctrine of vicarious liability to apply to relationships which are not strictly between an employer and employee, and create equity between survivors.

Let me step briefly through the bill. It amends the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act by adding a new part—liability of organisations. It covers all forms of child abuse, which includes physical and sexual abuse. It covers historical child abuse, civil proceedings started after the commencement of the amending act and proceedings that have not yet finished at the time of the commencement of the amending act. Importantly, the act is intended to operate retrospectively.

It defines “employee of an organisation” to include an individual who is akin to an employee of the organisation. A person is akin to an employee of an organisation if the individual carries out activities that are part of the ordinary activities carried out by the organisation and for the benefit of the organisation. An individual associated with an organisation includes an office holder, officer, owner, volunteer or contractor of the organisation. It also includes an individual who is associated with the organisation, if the organisation is a religious organisation—a religious leader, such as a priest or a minister, or other members of the personnel of the organisation, whether or not the individual is ordained.

Importantly, the bill also gives the court the power to set aside unjust child abuse settlement agreements that were entered into before this bill commences. This inclusion is intended to ensure that survivors who were abused as children before the new vicarious liability legislation came into force and entered into unjust settlements are able to apply to the court to have those settlements set aside. This will mean they then have the capacity to seek a fair settlement. This will create parity between different cohorts of survivors and ensure that survivors who were abused as children before the commencement of the act and entered unjust settlements are able to access justice.

Critics of the bill might worry that the bill will have implications, including on insurance. The modern approach to the imposition of vicarious liability on institutions for abuse committed by people working on their behalf began in 1999 with decisions out of Canada. In those cases, the court held that vicarious liability can be imposed if the risk of wrongdoing is sufficiently connected to the power and authority that are given to the assailant by his or her employer’s enterprise.

It has been assumed, at least since the first Canadian decision in 1999, that the “common

law doctrine” of vicarious liability would expand to include “akin to employment”. The insurers would have factored this risk in Australian policy since at least then. The “it might have insurance implications” argument is deeply offensive to both institutions and survivors. For instance, would the church have done things differently if it knew it would be vicariously liable for clergy abuse, but did not because it thought it was not? The same applies to those organisations other than religious institutions, but it was the lawyers of the Catholic Church who pioneered the defences designed to stop victims being compensated. The child abuse royal commission found that it had a far higher proportion of victims who reported it than any other church or body.

The bill does raise human rights issues. Child abuse violates children’s most basic rights, including the right to protection of family and children, set out in section 11 of the Human Rights Act 2004. The bill recognises that children are especially vulnerable to abuse and need to be afforded the strongest possible protection, particularly by those entrusted with their care. The bill supports the right of protection of children under the Human Rights Act.

In conclusion, time is of the essence. Lawyers have clients who are suicidal because of the limbo that the High Court’s decision has put them in. As Dr Judy Courtin, advocate and principal lawyer of Judy Courtin Legal, told me:

The urgency of legislation to reverse the High Court decision in *Bird v DP* cannot be understated. We are talking about the management of the suicide risk of extremely vulnerable people, victim-survivors of hideous child sex crimes. The suicide risk amongst victim-survivors is imminent, not remote.

Plaintiff lawyers are advising their clients not to settle, given the Victorian Attorney-General’s announcement last week that she would introduce a bill there in the coming months. Their matters are on hold. Additionally, anyone who settles before the introduction of the legislation will need to consider applying to have those decisions set aside. This will create an impost on our already extended courts and judiciary. People are suffering in a period of limbo and uncertainty, exacerbating harm.

We can reduce this suffering by passing this bill. There is no need to wait. This bill has been vetted by practitioners, academics and survivors, and those survivors need this to take effect as soon as we practically can. As Ali Pettit, senior associate, told me:

Time certainly is of the essence as this is impacting real people in real time. It is easy to think that another six or 12 months or so is fast, but the reality is that when someone’s livelihood and life is dependent on it, it is a very long time. Survivors of institutional abuse are real people who have been let down time after time by institutions, authority and system.

There is limited justice available and no time machine, so it is our job to ensure that access to justice is not delayed. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for survivors of institutional abuse to come forward and disclose what happened when they were a child, and to have justice delayed is justice denied. I hope that members of this government will appreciate the gravity and importance of this and ensure that there is no further delay.

I am conscious that attorneys-general have discussed this issue, and that they want a

nationally consistent approach. We know, however, that once one jurisdiction enacts law reform, it makes it easier for the next. Let us not be influenced by the “national harmony” argument. The ACT’s post royal commission reforms have been a paradigm example of the non-homogenous nature of the law reform efforts in this space. All of the states and territories have always had divergent civil law jurisdictions—differences which have arisen as a by-product of a federated constitution.

The ACT, of course—and we know it well in this place—is often a leader in law reform. Think of how we raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility and our drug decriminalisation work. Once again, we can lead the nation, noting we are the only significant common law country to not hold that “akin to employment” should give the same right as employment. Calling pay a stipend or using a volunteer should not see an organisation evade responsibility for its abuse of those most in need of protection—our children.

Again, I express my gratitude to those who advised on this bill and to those present in the gallery for its introduction today. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Crime—attacks on women

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent violent attacks against women while exercising in the ACT;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) the ACT aspires to be, and should be, a place where women feel safe at all times;
 - (b) there has been a concerning increase in misogynistic online content, including from male influencers on social media, that is cultivating a toxic attitude toward women among young boys and men;
 - (c) reported rates of family, domestic and sexual violence in the ACT continue to increase; and
 - (d) services like Menslink play a vital role in fostering the development of positive masculinity, delivering early intervention behaviour change programs, and supporting boys and young men through counselling, mentoring and education;
- (3) further notes that:
 - (a) many women report feeling unsafe exercising at night, which is exacerbated by poor lighting and damaged footpaths;
 - (b) the ACT Government has developed Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines which, according to the Second Action Plan of the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016-2026*, is part of “building a community where women and girls are safe and supported to participate”, acknowledging that “safety at home and in public spaces is essential to full and equal participation of women and girls in our community”; and

- (c) the second year reporting on the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* Third Action Plan indicates that a pilot implementation of the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines Framework and Implementation Toolkit was expected to be completed by May 2025;
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to take practical measures to improve safety for women, including:
 - (a) ensuring organisations like Menslink are funded sufficiently to maximise the reach and impact of their work;
 - (b) providing better lighting and footpaths, especially in popular exercise locations; and
 - (c) advocating to, and collaborating with, the National Capital Authority to address lighting issues and ensure women feel safe exercising in Commonwealth-owned areas like the Lake Burley Griffin perimeter; and
- (5) further calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) roll out the implementation of its Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines across the entirety of the ACT; and
 - (b) table a detailed implementation plan and timeline for the rollout, along with an update on other matters arising from this motion, in the first sitting week of 2026.

I rise to move this motion because here, in 2025, in a city that is patting itself on the back for offering the highest quality of life in the world, half of our community often report not feeling safe, and that is because of men's violence against women. Too many women and girls in Canberra do not feel safe exercising alone, and especially in the dark.

A series of recent violent attacks against women while they were exercising in public has left our community reeling. Women are feeling vulnerable, angry and let down. They are being told to stay vigilant, which of course they are already doing. It is a message that is embedded in women and girls since childhood, and they are tired of hearing it. They just want to feel safe in their community.

A recent online poll that I conducted asking women for their views received some 200 responses, and an overwhelming 93 per cent said they did not feel safe exercising at night. Sadly, the particularly shocking recent attacks are not isolated incidents. The countless personal messages that I have received from women in our community paint a damning picture. Here are some of them: "Got followed home on Lonsdale Street while running, had to take shelter in Vinnies." "Hate having to run on Northbourne Avenue at night because quiet areas are not safe." "Got chased through Bruce Ridge by two men in a car and on foot." "I've stopped walking around Mount Taylor, because I am scared." "None of the women I regularly run with feel safe running at night. Just not an option." "A guy jumped out at me at Lake Tuggers." "Since these two recent attacks, I no longer feel safe running on the trails alone." "I was stalked by 2 men in a ute at Griffith walking back from Kingston. Ducked into a nursing home when the ute stopped and one of the men got out." This one is perhaps the most universal message: "Women are always vigilant! We just want to feel safe in our communities."

These experiences are an indictment of our community. They reflect a bigger problem—a culture in which violence against women remains disturbingly common,

both behind closed doors and in public spaces. It is not enough for us to condemn these acts in words alone. We need to act in practical, tangible and sustained ways to build a community where women feel safe, not just sometimes, not just in certain places, but always.

That is why today I call on every member of this Assembly to come together and condemn these violent attacks in the strongest possible terms, and to call on the government to take meaningful, practical steps to address both the consequences and the causes of gendered violence in our community. Safety for women in public spaces does not begin and end with politicians making speeches and offering sympathy, and it certainly is not achieved through continuing with business as usual. It demands that we confront the underlying attitudes and behaviours that allow violence and intimidation to persist.

One of the most alarming trends that we are witnessing is the surge of misogynistic content online, fuelled by so-called male influencers on social media whose conception of masculinity could barely be any more unsophisticated, immature and disgusting. Their toxic rhetoric is cultivating dangerous attitudes towards women among our boys and young men. These are weak men trying to teach boys how to be strong men, and they could not be more misguided.

I have spoken to parents, teachers, youth workers and community leaders who are seeing this play out firsthand. Boys as young as 11 or 12 are parroting harmful, degrading views about women that they have absorbed online. Young men are being drawn into propaganda that encourages entitlement, disrespect and a deeply misinformed conception of their masculinity.

This is not some fringe issue; it is happening here in Canberra. It is happening in our schools, on our streets and in homes. If we fail to address it now, we will set up our younger generations, girls and boys alike, for lasting harm. That is why services like Menslink are so critical. The work they do with boys to foster positive, respectful masculinity is vital, through mentoring, counselling and early intervention programs that challenge harmful attitudes, teach boys to manage their emotions and build relationships grounded in respect and care.

On the other side of this crisis are the organisations like the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, offering vital, life-changing support to those who have suffered unimaginable trauma, helping them to reclaim their lives on their own terms, while showing a desperate eagerness to work upstream on education and prevention. They have seen on the front line what this cultural issue means for women in our community. They know that the increased pressure on crisis services downstream is unsustainable and is a sign that we are completely off course as a culture.

We cannot expect these essential services to shoulder this burden without appropriate resourcing. This motion calls on the ACT government to ensure that such organisations that are working hard to shift attitudes and behaviours are funded sufficiently to maximise their reach and impact.

Safety in public spaces is not only about behaviour; it is about the environments we create. For the vast majority of women who report feeling unsafe exercising at night,

this fear is exacerbated by poor lighting and neglected footpaths. It is especially acute at this time of year. By 5 pm, it is getting dark. Many Canberrans work standard office hours, and the only time available to exercise is early in the morning or in the evening.

It is unacceptable that poor lighting forces women to choose between their personal safety and their health and wellbeing. Well-lit footpaths, exercise tracks, parks and public areas deter violence and antisocial behaviour. They provide reassurance to those walking home after dark, and they send a clear message about who our city is built for and what we prioritise. These are things that the government can do, and should do, in offering a meaningful, practical response to the terrible recent attacks we have seen in our community.

The ACT government has begun this work through the development of gender-sensitive urban design guidelines, which acknowledge that lighting, visibility and maintenance of public spaces are essential for the full and equal participation of women and girls in our community. They also state that better lighting of public spaces and pathways ranked the highest as a way of improving the safety of urban spaces and lighting was mentioned the most frequently as a critical factor in determining people's perception of safety after dark.

We have seen these guidelines piloted in a few select areas of the ACT with positive results. This work must go further, so this motion calls for the rollout of these guidelines across the entire territory as a clear, practical program of works, with a timeline and implementation plan to be tabled in this Assembly in the first sitting week of 2026.

But it cannot stop there. Many Canberrans exercise in spaces managed by the National Capital Authority, especially around Lake Burley Griffin, one of our city's most popular and iconic exercise spaces. The lake perimeter should be a safe, accessible and welcoming place for every member of our community, regardless of the time of day, and where safety in numbers, particularly in the colder months, is supported by fantastic lighting. Yet we continue to hear from women, community organisations and running groups that areas around the lake remain poorly lit and neglected, in some cases simply because of broken lights that are yet to be repaired. Because of this many people avoid these areas altogether after sunset. This is not good enough.

I am calling on the ACT government to proactively and positively engage with the National Capital Authority—not just to raise these issues in letters, as many of us perhaps have already done, but to work in genuine partnership, to advocate for and to co-design solutions, and to prioritise lighting and safety infrastructure in these public spaces that are core to our city. It should not matter whether a footpath is managed by a territory agency or by the commonwealth; people using it are members of our community, and they deserve to be safe.

I want to be absolutely clear: the response to gendered violence is not for women to stay vigilant. It is not up to the women to prevent violence against them; it is men who need to change. As a father of a young boy, a neighbour, a friend and a member of this community, I feel a responsibility to be part of this conversation. I am acutely aware of the responsibility I have to raise my son to be respectful, kind and empathetic, to show him how to deal with anger, rejection and conflict, to teach him that misogyny has no place here—not in our homes, our schools, our sporting clubs, our private conversations

or online spaces—and that everyone is entitled to dignity, autonomy and safety.

Our boys are watching us. They are learning from what we excuse, what we laugh at and what we ignore. Unless we actively teach them to do better, and show them how to be better, some will grow up believing that the attitudes and behaviours they see online or on the sidelines are acceptable. We owe it to every woman and girl in this city, and every boy and young man too, to build a culture where positive masculinity replaces toxic masculinity, where respect is normal and violence is unthinkable.

This motion is about women's safety, but it is also about the kind of community we want to build, and the values we want to uphold. I hope to see all members of this Assembly support the motion, with meaningful action taken on the back of it, not because it is easy, convenient or a continuation of business as usual, but because recent events are a stark and devastating reminder that it is necessary. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

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) (3.37): Thank you. I thank Mr Emerson for bringing our attention to these issues. As Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, I can say that the ACT government takes violence against women and girls—whether they are cis, trans, non-binary or gender diverse—very seriously. I condemn the public attacks on women in recent months in the strongest possible terms. Unfortunately, there have been two incidents this year where women have been randomly attacked by unknown men while running in nature reserves, and one incident reported to have occurred in the Lake Burley Griffin area.

These incidents are incredibly traumatic for the women involved and have caused significant concern across the ACT community and within ACT Policing. I have to say, while I welcome an opportunity to shine a light on the issue that deeply harms our community—that is gender-based violence—I feel quite a sense of frustration with this motion. If addressing women's safety was simply about fixing streetlights and footpaths, we would not be in the situation that we are today, with women being killed, attacked and abused around Australia.

How we design and construct our urban spaces of course presents the overall opportunity to improve perceptions of safety, and I will go into detail about the extensive work the ACT government has done to achieve this. However, on a daily basis, there are brutal and insidious attacks of violence carried out in ACT homes, carried out against our children. That makes calls for improved lighting of footpaths seem significantly disjointed from the evidence of where and how the harm is occurring.

Where the hard conversations need to happen in this chamber, in workplaces and in the community more broadly are around the attitudes, the beliefs, the behaviours of men towards women. This is not just children online and overseas influencers. This is behaviours of men in our community.

The horrific fact remains that women and girls are most likely to experience domestic, family or sexual violence in their own homes and at the hands of someone they know

or someone they trusted. Women and girls have the right to be—and to feel—safe and respected at all times. And this includes behind the closed door of their homes; while in the school playground; at university during O-Week; at work in the staff meeting; while running on our bush trails; or socialising in our bars; or whilst heading home on public transport. We need to engage deeply with women to understand how to improve their sense of safety and their ability to participate in community life.

We welcome Minister Gallagher's *Safe Everywhere and Always Canberra Community Survey*, which is currently open. We will continue to work closely with Minister Gallagher's office to understand the results of this survey and identify actions which can be progressed by the ACT government.

At the same time, we are progressing work across government to tackle misogynistic attitudes, promote gender equity, and improve safety. This work is complex and far reaching, and there are no quick fixes. I am committed to leading this tough conversation across government and encouraging this discussion in the community.

To speak to Mr Emerson's motion: we are progressing the important improvements to our physical environment through urban design to promote safety and full participation of women and girls in public spaces. Under the Third Action Plan of the ACT Women's Plan, the ACT government has completed the piloting and implementation of the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines, which take the form of a framework and implementation toolkit which has been finalised for use in all relevant upcoming design works.

The framework provides designers with essential principles, practices and strategies for creating inclusive public spaces. The toolkit offers a range of strategies to ensure our public spaces can be gender sensitive. Gender sensitive urban design recognises that people experience public spaces differently, as well as other forms of discrimination or inequality. It is the interaction between these factors that influences the perceptions of safety and belonging, as well as external influences such as: a place's reputation or collective experiences; spatial features such as lighting or the presence of CCTV; the number and types of people using the space; planting and greenery; traffic; visual cues such as art; and urban design qualities such as comfort, security, activity, image and cleanliness.

The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines now form part of ACT government standards, codes and guidelines to support development works associated with public infrastructure. Good examples of where they have impactfully been implemented include Haig Park and the recently upgraded Evatt Shops.

The government is also continuing to improve public lighting by assessing and delivering improvements through a variety of programs. These include shopping precinct upgrades, bus stop accessibility improvements, active travel projects and road upgrades, to name a few. We have made investments through the 2025-26 budget to improve safety for all Canberrans using the bus network. Extra transit officers will be deployed throughout the bus network as a deterrent to antisocial behaviour and to assist drivers and transport officers. Finally, the budget also invests in public facilities that support women's participation—including shop upgrades, playgrounds, changerooms, and facilitating active travel.

We know that gender-based violence is a complex and multi-faceted problem, with no single solution. In addition to this preventative infrastructure work, the ACT government is addressing gender-based violence through investment in primary prevention initiatives as well as early intervention and perpetrator intervention programs, including programs tailored to the needs of different communities.

To reduce gender-based violence, we must focus on prevention and attitudinal change. The government is supporting the implementation of respectful relationships education in schools, and training on inclusive approaches in early childhood settings. We are also advancing community education and awareness; raising activities in relation to affirmative consent and coercive control, to ensure Canberrans understand what is and is not acceptable behaviour within family and intimate-partner relationships. These campaigns are complementary to federal campaigns that have also been running.

We are supporting a significant diversity of services, who deliver mentoring and counselling programs to young people, to empower them to engage respectfully with others and reach their full potential.

In this year's budget, the ACT government is also continuing to support the Canberra PCYC to build upon the success of the Solid Ground program. Solid Ground is contributing to reducing the prevalence and impact of domestic, family and sexual violence, and the impact and harm of violence on children and young people. The program supports young people aged 11 to 18 years, who are affected by domestic, family and sexual violence or who are at risk of using domestic, family and sexual violence.

Finally, we are concentrating our efforts on engaging with men and boys who use violence, to change their behaviour. Since 2016, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service Room4Change program has provided residential accommodation, behaviour change programs and case management for men who use violence—and their families.

EveryMan's violence prevention programs provide support to men who use violence, to take responsibility for their behaviour and to change. This includes Working With the Man—a specialist behaviour change program for men who have been violent towards women.

Multicultural Hub Canberra is founded to deliver the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Men's Non-Violence Behaviour program. The program works with men from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, considering their cultural context, to change and address the violent behaviours through individual support and counselling.

The Yeddung Mura (Good Pathways) Aboriginal corporation is also currently funded to deliver the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Aboriginal Support Program, which delivers trauma-informed community education, healing camps and yarning circles, and a diversion centre which provides short-term accommodation and access to a case worker for their clients who use violence or are at risk of using violence.

Yeddung Mura has also launched a new, culturally responsive perpetrator intervention program, Caring Dads, which has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

communities from an internationally recognised model. There will be more detailed information on this program, which is funded through the commonwealth's Innovative Perpetrator Response national partnership agreement.

Safety is not a privilege, but a fundamental human right grounded in dignity, equality, and freedom from violence. Senator Pocock has recently leveraged some significant media attention criticising ACT police for calling on women to remain vigilant. I feel that I need to correct the record. That was not actually what was said. The officer called for all Canberrans to remain vigilant. And the sad part about what was said is that the truth of the matter is that women do have to remain vigilant—and, most horribly, many have to remain vigilant in their own homes.

To empower women and girls and gender diverse people to live full and equal lives we must address the deep-seated attitudes and beliefs which drive gendered violence, and work across the full spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing—engaging all parts of our community to increase safety and wellbeing for the whole community.

The ACT government will continue to advance an ambitious, whole-of-government approach to this work. Throughout this term, I proudly look forward to leading this to create a community where every person can live free from violence and be empowered to participate fully in all the opportunities our city offers.

Our amendments to this motion ensure we reflect the government's commitment to increasing safety for all women, girls and gender diverse people, in public and private spaces across our city—not just women who exercise, and not just in popular exercise locations, but in homes, schools, offices, town centres, sporting facilities and any other place women and girls might choose to be, which I would say is everywhere.

I do not know where the circulation of amendments has got, but I feel quite upset about how some of the processes have been undertaken in terms of amendments to this motion, and to our amendments. I hope there is a single agreed amendment to my amendments, that we will be supporting.

I just want to say to Mr Emerson how problematic it has been that it felt like you stole our amendments and were going to take credit for them as your own. This was highly problematic to all the women in my office, the women in the Greens offices and me in terms of how you have gone about this process. And in terms of integrity, in terms of how we engage with each other, it feels very deeply problematic and troubling that this has happened. I hope this has been resolved and this does not occur in the moving of Mr Emerson's amendments, but we will see.

I move:

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

“(1) condemns in the strongest possible terms all forms of gender-based violence;

(2) notes that:

(a) the ACT aspires to be, and should be, a place where women feel safe at all times;

- (b) there has been a concerning increase in misogynistic online content, including from male influencers on social media, that is cultivating a toxic attitude toward women among young boys and men;
 - (c) reported rates of family, domestic and sexual violence in the ACT continue to increase; and
 - (d) to address the drivers of gender-based violence and affect meaningful change, programs must exist across the full spectrum from primary prevention and early intervention initiatives which foster the development of positive masculinity and empower women and girls, through to response initiatives such as perpetrator intervention programs and support for victim survivors;
- (3) further notes:
- (a) many women report feeling unsafe at night;
 - (b) women are most likely to experience violence in their home, and the perpetrator is usually a man known to them, most often a current or former partner;
 - (c) the ACT Government has developed Gender Sensitive Urban Design (GSUD) Guidelines as required by the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026*, with the aim of “building a community where women and girls are safe and supported to participate”, acknowledging that “safety at home and in public spaces is essential to full and equal participation of women and girls in our community”;
 - (d) the implementation of the GSUD Framework and Implementation Toolkit commenced on 25 July 2023. Since then, they have been used in upgrades of 5 shopping precincts across the ACT; and
 - (e) the 2025-2026 ACT Budget makes a significant investment in the safety and inclusion of girls and women in the ACT including:
 - (i) \$20.7 million for the City Precinct Renewal Program which will revitalise the area into a vibrant, inclusive space in line with the GSUD guidelines;
 - (ii) \$6.3 million has also been provided to upgrade sportsground facilities, including pavilion and court upgrades, lighting, toilets, parking and cricket nets, as well as female friendly change room upgrades at 15 locations;
 - (iii) 38.2 million for the Active Travel Infrastructure Program to improve the safety and perceived safety of Active Travel facilities, including lighting and pathways;
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to continue to improve safety for women by:
- (a) ensuring organisations that work to prevent and respond to gender-based violence are funded sufficiently to maximise the reach and impact of their work;
 - (b) progress improvements to active travel infrastructure guided by GSUD guidelines, including improved lighting and footpaths; and
 - (c) continue to implement primary prevention initiatives such as Respectful Relationship Education in schools and community education in relation to affirmative consent; and
- (5) further calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue to roll out the implementation of its GSUD Guidelines across the ACT; and
- (b) table a detailed implementation plan and timeline for the rollout, along with an update on other matters arising from this motion, in the first sitting week of 2026.”.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.49): I too rise to support the motion. I thank Mr Emerson, for bringing this very important issue to the Assembly’s attention, and I thank my colleagues for their contributions the Assembly, including the minister.

The timing of this motion is very important. As we have heard, it comes after hundreds joined solidarity walks in support of women attacked while running on Canberra’s trails. The Canberra Liberals share the spirit of this motion and absolutely condemn violence in all its forms. I agree with the minister that this is an opportunity to do something more broadly around violence against women, but I also agree with Mr Emerson that in the short-term there are specific responses that we can put in place to ensure that women feel safe, especially whilst running.

Violence against women—including sexual violence, rape, controlling behaviour, coercive control and sexual abuse—is a cancer in our society that we must come together as a society to stamp out. As we have seen from the budget, there is also an economic cost on us as a community and as a society. It is not acceptable in our community or in our workplace and it is not acceptable in our families either.

We need to let perpetrators know that violence and violent attitudes are completely unacceptable in our society and that we stand appalled that some societies still consider violence appropriate. I acknowledge the work that has been done to address the attitudes of gender violence, the work of Menslink and Fearless Women, working with young people in our schools to condemn violence. We clearly need to do more for these programs.

I also acknowledge that some work is being done on infrastructure to improve the perception of safety in our community. Also, we clearly need to do more. I think this motion should be a line in the sand; for us to commit ourselves as a community to do more to stamp out gender-based violence; and to come together as a community to lend our voice to this issue that continues to erode our society.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.52): My colleague Miss Nuttall will be the core respondent on behalf of the Greens on this motion. So in the interest of giving her a little extra time to land some of the amendments and associated negotiations, I will in fact get up first. I do not wish to steal her thunder or duplicate the work of an effective advocate for women, which is to simply say I will 100 per cent support her comments.

I also readily acknowledge my place of privilege that I have from being able to move through such spaces with relative safety. I do wish to make some short comments on the urban design elements referred to in Mr Emerson’s motion, being the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines and specifically lighting; design features designed and intended to make public spaces safer and more inclusive. It is crucial that we think about these guidelines, not just in the bits and pieces such as sets of local shops, but in the context of how we move around and interact with the public places in our cities.

It is no coincidence that many of the recommendations in the guidelines align with designing our public spaces for better walkability, public transport connections and active travel use. These include wider, better footpaths and dedicated cycle paths, mixed-use commercial and residential spaces, car free zones with lively commercial frontages, lower speed limits on roads, public amenities and more vegetation. By creating a welcoming design like this, people feel more inclined to spend time in these public spaces. Rather than get in our cars and drive from point A to point B, we are encouraged to walk, cycle or ride. Designing them for a range of mobility needs, such as wheelchairs and prams make them more inclusive for more people and at the same time also improve passive surveillance, perceptions of safety and actual safety.

As members well know, I have a deep interest in the lighting of our urban areas to make them welcoming and safe for everyone in our community. It is important to state this does not simply involve floodlighting public spaces, as that may not necessarily work and in fact can be counterproductive. Harsh overpowered floodlighting can create hard shadows, glare and contrast, which may in fact make an area feel less safe and less welcoming. Light an area like a prison yard and people will start to behave like it is one. Instead, we need to identify problem areas with a dark spot study to understand which areas create concern for our community.

Incidentally, I highly value the Canberra Safety Map produced by the Women's Centre for Health Matters. This interactive map allowed members of the public to identify areas where they felt unsafe in our urban areas and the reasons why. I am extremely disappointed this valuable information resource is no longer publicly available due to the inability to obtain ongoing ACT government funding for this exercise.

After we have identified the problem areas, then we need to have good quality lighting design that makes those places feel welcoming, with good visibility and coverage. Implementing Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines and quality lighting would be best achieved by ensuring women are well represented among the workforce making these design decisions. But in speaking at length of improvements we can make to our urban environments to improve women's safety it is important to recognise that urban environment improvements will achieve nothing unless we also address the behaviour of men who attack women.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.56): I am also going to put the same rider on that Mr Braddock just did. Miss Nuttall is leading our response, but as she is still working on the amendments I am going to continue to give her some space.

As members have touched on, and I join them in saying, that I am so appalled at the recent assaults experienced by women in the south of Canberra when they are out exercising. I am really sorry that it happened to those women. I am angry that it happened to them and I am sad that we live in a world where it does. Particularly as a runner with a lot of female running buddies, I am especially appalled by these incidents. It was good to see such shows of support from locals who ran, walked and reclaimed those tracks afterwards. Yes, we should fix the environmental factors and improve the feeling of safety for some, and it may provide some level of real safety, but the fact remains that until women are actually safe, then they will not feel safe. I think it is really important for men to stand up and speak to what is predominantly a men's issue, so I

commend Mr Emerson for that.

As colleagues have spoken about today, and I know Miss Nuttall will point out, it would be remiss of us not to talk about the underlying problem. Violence against women is a national crisis. Seventy-seven per cent of homicides in the last 15 years involved a man killing a current or former partner. As Jess Hill has said:

We talk a lot about the danger of dark alleys, but the truth is that in every country around the world the home is the most dangerous place for a woman.

Mr Emerson's original motion is a great example of how that kind of danger is easier for men to talk about. It feels better to think about violence against women as being some kind of bogey man, a stranger choosing a victim by random in the night. It is unpalatable and it is uncomfortable to think about the men you know, the men you choose to spend time with and to call your friends and family, choosing to use violence behind closed doors, but that is the reality of it. It is the reality that men, all of us, need to contemplate and act on.

Women are more likely to be assaulted in their home, no matter the lighting, than out exercising. We have seen—in the USA particularly, but a similar trend here—that increasing numbers of young men are being drawn into what has been labelled a manosphere, a place where really dangerous views about women and society are formed and shared, and a place where misogyny, disrespect and hatred breed. Because, at its core, that is where this violence starts. There needs to be more work done to understand this space and what leads young men there.

We need to divert young boys and men from this dangerous path in order to see the cultural change that will, over time, create the genuine safety that women should have in our community. The sad reality is that they do not have that right now, and that is why we also need to ensure support and crisis services are appropriately resourced to help women when they do experience violence. Wouldn't it be great to live in a world where we do not need those services, a world where men did not commit acts of violence and women were genuinely safe?

Now, funding for Everyman is good because men's behaviour change programs are part of the solution. In fact, part of the Greens' "ending gendered violence" election commitment in 2024 was providing dedicated funding for the delivery of men's behaviour change programs for primary prevention, intervention and education services tailored for boys and men, with women and children's advocacy and support operating alongside. Which brings me to the rest of the solution to the scourge of men's violence; things like fully funding frontline victim survivor support services like the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. Money for women's organisations at the pointy end of crisis responses and money for refuges like Beryl and those run by Toora. We need more affordable, safe housing options so women and kids do not have to live with violence. We should include early intervention education in primary and secondary school curricula. We must support first responders to build the right skills to respond to domestic and family violence so they know what to do if they see it, what it can look like, how to respond and how to see patterns of abusive behaviour.

If we want to make a real impact to minimise the impact of men's violence on women,

we have to provide more funding to community legal centres like Legal Aid, Women's Legal Centre and Canberra Community Law. We need more funding for organisations like CARE Financial so women have financial literacy and help with their debts. We know financial abuse can be so destructive and a source of significant control. So when we talk about women's safety, I think it is really important that we think about that broad spectrum of issues. Yes, these issues that have happened recently are appalling and do generate a strong degree of coverage, but as I have touched on in my remarks, they are far from the whole story; the whole story is that women are in danger in so many more places. The points that Dr Paterson was making before are good ones in that regard.

In this context, I want to particularly acknowledge the women in my and Miss Nuttall's office who have led to the Greens response today. I wanted to make some remarks because I think it is important that men participate in these debates and that men, particularly those of us in positions of leadership, be very clear about what we consider to be acceptable standards and the sort of behaviour change we expect to see in our community, but I want to particularly acknowledge the work that was done in my party in preparing our response to this motion today.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.02): I rise in support of Minister Paterson's amendments. I want to start by thanking Mr Emerson for bringing the motion. But women's safety is more than just for women who exercise. All women should feel safe. Full stop. Period. We know the most dangerous place for a woman to be, the place a woman is most likely to be exposed to violence, is in her home.

I know it is quite traumatic and distressing when attacks happen randomly, and as someone who lives near Tuggeranong Hill, that attack on Tuggeranong Hill earlier this year rattled me. I can see Tuggeranong Hill from my house. I know how close that is to me and I know the feeling that women all around got knowing that someone could be lurking there. I am sure the women of Mulligans Flat and nearby would have that same feeling.

I also want to start by acknowledging Miss Nuttall for the adjournment speech you gave in the last sitting week calling on men to just stop killing us. Stop killing women. This is a broader issue. I thank Minister Paterson for the work she is doing in the prevention of family violence space and the women's safety space, particularly with all the measures outlined in yesterday's budget. I think it is a really good step forward.

On women's safety, I want to put some statistics on the table. The YWCA Canberra is currently running its "Our lives: Women in the ACT" survey. It has been open for a while now, and they have had about 1,500 responses so far, which is a good response rate. Of those respondents, 18 per cent of the women who responded, that is more than 200 women, said they had experienced domestic, family or sexual violence in the last 12 months. Let us think about that. Eighteen per cent of the women that responded to this survey have experienced family, domestic or sexual violence in the last 12 months.

Now, women's safety in public places more generally, not just in the home: 54 per cent felt very unsafe or somewhat unsafe in a public place after dark in Canberra in the last 12 months. These are not just women exercising. They are women walking to their car after work, catching a bus, picking up groceries, going out for dinner. Really, they are

just women existing as human beings in our society.

Interestingly, the YWCA Canberra survey has found that women in Tuggeranong have reported higher rates of feeling very unsafe or somewhat unsafe in public spaces after dark, and I am interested in talking to the YWCA Canberra about why this is the case. I have heard issues with lighting around Lake Tuggeranong from a few constituents. I suspect what has happened at Tuggeranong Hill also feeds into this feeling, given it has happened quite recently and this survey is currently open, but it is something I do want to investigate further: why does Tuggeranong have a higher rate?

So while I appreciate the focus of this motion started on women exercising, I think this is a really good moment to think more broadly about women existing in public and women existing in public after dark and feeling unsafe. Because it makes me really angry that women cannot just exist as people in our society. From the moment I was old enough to go out of my house alone, I have been cautioned. I have been cautioned by women older than me of ways to modify my behaviour to be safer, as if it is my responsibility to be safe and as if anything happens to me that is my fault because I did not do the steps that all women have to do to stay safe.

From when I was barely a teenager, I recall catcalling while walking down the street. I can remember walking down the street in my school uniform with my younger brother. My younger brother probably was not as visible from the street. This car of teenage boys slowed down to catcall and jeer at us and my poor younger brother was just horrified, not understanding what was going on. Then me having to say to him, “It is not okay, what just happened, but I am used to it.” And, you know, him realising this is not okay behaviour. This is not something that—he did not feel safe, just with the car approaching, let alone when they wound down the window and started catcalling me and yelling at me.

So things like being leered at, being followed when walking down the street, even though you know that person is not going to harm you, but that feeling of someone being close by enough that they could harm me if they chose to and there would be nothing I could do about it.

I have had friends who have been sexually assaulted by people they know, by people they thought were friends, by people we all thought were our friends, who did this to someone. I have had friends who have been randomly attacked on the street by strangers. In both situations the trauma that brings is awful. It is sickening to hear that from a friend when that happens to them. I am sick of thinking about this in daily life. Sick of thinking about where do you park when you go out for dinner? How do you just live your normal life knowing that when it is dark, you just feel unsafe because it is how we have been raised? It is just how we feel in society.

I was reflecting, there are ways I do my job here in the Assembly that are different to how men in the Assembly do their job. I do not like to doorknock alone. I will walk up to a house fine alone, as long as I know there is someone else with me in a nearby part of that neighbourhood because I have approached houses before and some of the people have not been the friendliest. Not necessarily politically not aligned with me, but just generally I do not feel safe talking to that person at their door.

During the campaign, my friends and I would share our location with each other as we doorknocked and we would check on each other and if someone had not moved for a while, you would try and call them or go back and check. Sometimes it was just they were having the best conversation ever, and we did get some volunteers out of that and had some great ideas. But sometimes there was someone you just could not—there was one particular house, I could not extract myself from that conversation at that front door and feel safe about it. I have a very privileged position in this Assembly, in this job, but even I have had my moments going, “I am not sure I can safely extract myself from this situation.”

So summing all that up and getting all that out, we really need men to step up: to stop telling us what the problem is but to just get on and change their behaviour; to change the behaviour of other men around them; to see that behaviour changed; to call out the misogynistic behaviour online; to call it out when their friends say it; to raise better sons and boys; to talk to our friends. You know, it is one thing for us to all talk about it but we need to see action. That is why I commend Minister Paterson’s amendments.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.09): I commend the spirit of Mr Emerson’s motion today, and I think he draws out a really important point: it should not be on women to fix a problem that overwhelmingly we did not cause and are the victim of. Ms Tough just spoke to that really well, as well.

Gender-based violence, violence against women, is on the balance of probabilities perpetrated by men, and that means we should be tackling men’s behaviour. For this reason, men’s behaviour change programs are one crucial part of eliminating gender-based violence.

There are a few organisations in the ACT that I would like to get on the record. Of course, Menslink certainly provides support to men to help, through schools and workplaces, and provides counselling and long-term mentoring. However, there are many more, and I would like to tell you about some of those. It is a non-exhaustive list. Minister Paterson has spoken to a few of those already.

EveryMan runs two violence prevention programs which work with men and others who have issues with violence and abusive behaviour, as well as supporting people who have experienced violence.

Yeddung Mura runs the Your Journey, Our Support program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men navigating the justice system and rebuilding their lives, through services including domestic violence intervention and yarning circles blended with a cognitive behavioural therapy.

DVCS’s Room4Change program supports men who want to stop their use of violent and controlling behaviours—and does so from a feminist organisation, positioned well within an ecosystem of domestic family and sexual violence services.

Multicultural Hub Canberra runs the CALD Men’s Non-Violence Behaviour program, specifically geared towards men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and it does so within a strong cultural context, to create change and address these types of behaviours. This program actually works in conjunction with their domestic and

family violence support service for multicultural women, and children and young people, to ensure the partners of men accessing the non-violence behaviour program have a safety plan in place and are supported through the process. It is really valuable to have these programs connected so that women who have experienced violence are supported and safe during that behaviour change process.

These are all programs extremely worthy of funding. I am acutely aware that I am being slightly hypocritical here, because for every program I get on the record here there are more that I have inevitably missed. This, I think, speaks to the challenge of listing specific programs for funding, rather than talking about how it takes an ecosystem of connected services to support folks and to provide culturally safe, inclusive support at every intersection—from people from a culturally and linguistically background, to people with a disability, LGBTQI+ folks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—and all of it should be funded properly.

Before I proceed any further into the conversation, I have seen some really impactful perspectives for queer, trans and gender diverse folks regarding gender-based violence. I would like to be very explicit in my contribution to this motion: gender-based violence includes violence experienced by trans and gender diverse people.

In the largest study of Australian LGBTQI+ people's health and wellbeing, almost four in 10 non-binary participants, three in 10 trans men, and one in five trans women reported experiencing physical violence from a family member. And according to the ABS, 60.7 per cent of the surveyed LGBTIQ community had experienced violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Similarly, women with disability are twice as likely to report an incident of sexual violence across their lifetime than women without disability, at 33 per cent versus 16 per cent.

I think this should signal to us that—whether it is programs that address men's violence behaviour, or services that support women, or anyone who has experienced gender-based violence—we should fund and uplift a breadth of services that are culturally appropriate and tailored to the people they support.

There is another point I would like to be very clear on and that I am glad Minister Paterson has added in her amendments, which is: the grim reality is that our culture is at a place where one in three men admit to having used some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. More than one in three! In the same vein, it is so important that we recognise that women are statistically most likely to experience violence in their home at the hands of a male partner, current or ex. Our funding should reflect this.

So, a focus on violence in public places is good because violent attacks women have experienced in public are horrific. They are genuinely horrific. I am deeply sorry for the women who have survived those assaults. And if we are addressing gender-based violence, we must acknowledge that the programs that support and change men's behaviour—and, very crucially, programs that support women and anyone who has experienced the consequences of men's violent behaviour—should also retain a strong focus on the prevention of gender-based violence in the home, where it is most prevalent.

I am also mindful, as I say this, that I understand the domestic, family and sexual

violence strategy is in the process of being pulled together. I know this sector is extremely eager to see it completed and funded. I believe Mr Emerson's motion will be most effective in conjunction with that strategy.

But the ACT statistics we have are pretty alarming. In conversations with Women's Health Matters, they drew our attention to statistics from ACT Policing. Just last month there were 382 family violence related incidents reported to ACT Policing and 35 sexual assaults. Between January and May 2025, there were 1,896 family violence incidents reported to ACT Policing, and 234 sexual assaults—more than one per day. And this would not be the full picture, because people who have experienced gender-based violence will often hesitate to report family violence and sexual assault to the police.

What I believe was missing from the motion, as written, was more funding for women's services—in fact, any services that support victims of gender-based violence. In our efforts to put the onus back on men's behaviour, what we risk missing is often the women's services providing support to women who have experienced gender-based violence. And that goes for crisis support, funded by frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services, or the support organisations who assist women with health and housing, and legal, financial and family support.

I have spoken to a number of women's organisations for whom gender-based violence has had to become their primary focus, because it truly is a crisis. The demand has gotten to the point that even if there are other services they have that support women within their remit, in practice, an overwhelming proportion of their resources goes towards supporting women who have experienced violence, at the expense of their other services. I would make the same decision in their shoes, right? You put your energy towards the most acute, time critical and life-saving cause first. That does not mean they should have to. Often, even if these organisations concentrate the majority of resources towards their services supporting female victims of violence, it is not enough to support every person who has experienced gender-based violence in the ACT when they need it.

I am specifically naming women's services, but I acknowledge that ultimately, when we are funding a response to gender violence, it is unhelpful to silo ourselves where we could prioritise funding an integrated sector. We need the full array of services, because different services work for different people. And this is a sentiment that I have heard really strongly from organisations that support women experiencing gender-based violence, whether that is their main drive or not. And I am really grateful for the Multicultural Hub, Women's Legal Centre, DVCS, Women with Disabilities ACT, YWCA and Women's Health Matters for their feedback at such short notice.

There was a general consensus that we as a parliament, when we talk about gender-based violence, need to take a holistic approach that both funds the full range of evidence-based services as a matter of principle, but also supports connectivity within that sector. I am really grateful that in negotiations with Minister Paterson's office they have addressed my concerns and the concerns I had from the sector. And I was grateful for the opportunity to contribute to their amendments. Of course, the Greens will be supporting them.

I do want to get on the record that I was a bit wary about the way Mr Emerson's initial amendments became a rewrite of Dr Paterson's. I do have a bit of a personal stake in this, of course, because some of the suggested wording had come from us originally, and we resolved to do it in the one amendment, in the interests of a smooth debate. The Labor amendments, I think, fundamentally expand the calls of the motion and in some ways correct for the fact that the original motion—while very well intentioned—was not actually getting to the heart of gender-based violence and how to support those that are the victims of it.

To be a blunt for a second: a lot of women put a lot of work into making sure this motion got to the heart of the issue. I think that it would have been problematic, if we had passed Mr Emerson's rewrite, that the work of those women would have been on paper attributable to him. But I think we have avoided that now.

I was genuinely a bit torn about how to minimise the injustice, because Mr Emerson's amendment is slightly more specific about lighting and goes to advocacy to the NCA about women's safety around the Lake Burley Griffin perimeter, which I think could be useful. But I think we have found a way through. And I am really grateful to both him and Minister Paterson for being willing to negotiate right down to the wire.

As I am speaking, I realise I am down to the wire. So I will conclude by saying I am very grateful to Minister Paterson and her team, Mr Emerson and his team, for my team and Mr Rattenbury's team, for their patience for taking negotiations on these amendments, ultimately in good faith, even when they went down the wire. We are all going to sleep well tonight.

I commend Mr Emerson and everyone in this chamber for ultimately taking this in their stride, for prioritising women's safety and for insisting men take responsibility.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.19): I stand to support the motion. Women and girls in the ACT have the right to feel safe in their homes and workplaces and where they choose to socialise and exercise. Sadly, for the world's most liveable city, this is not the case for many, including in the Woden town centre, where the population is increasing rapidly. I note the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Implementation Toolkit includes active frontages to encourage interactive ground-floor tenancies along main pedestrian thoroughfares to increase passive surveillance and improve perceptions of safety.

Many people tell me they do not feel safe in the heart of Woden. I have been raising this issue for years. There are no active fronts in Woden Town Square and the new youth foyer in the heart of Woden has a blank wall. I raised the issue with the CIT construction company at the CIT reference group and was told it was a no-brainer to activate the area, but it did not happen. We got a blank wall and a new road through the heart of Woden. I was told that people driving through the heart of Woden would provide passive surveillance, not people going to the area to meet friends and have fun. A road was preferred by the government.

For 10 years, I have been asking for better planning so we can have active streets and people feel safe, with no engagement from the government to date. We can leverage the new CIT, but we do not. Minister, please let us plan for active areas, get rid of the blank

walls in the middle of Woden, and encourage restaurants, cafes and bars so people are everywhere and feel safe in their home neighbourhood.

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) (4.21): I was not going to speak, but I have reflected through this debate and I have some things to say. I certainly appreciate the intent of Mr Emerson to, as he said, participate in the conversation about women's safety with this motion. We were all incredibly disturbed by the Tuggeranong Hill incident earlier this year, let alone what happened at Little Mulligans just recently. I, like other members in this place, participated in that walk the following Monday to signal my support and show that women can reclaim public spaces. I will go to this point more soon, but I would note that that attack in particular was in broad daylight and on paths that are regularly used. I appreciate that there might not be too many people exercising in that area on a Monday morning, but I think it is important to reflect on this when we are talking about safety and perceptions of safety.

I do like men talking about women's issues. I welcome it. I would like to see more of it on women's rights, sexual health, abortion and women's safety—please do talk about it—but I echo the concerns of some of my female colleagues regarding the way that this motion, in its original form, came about. What has happened since seems to have been, at least on the face of it, clumsy and has really missed the point. I note my surprise in the first instance, when I learned this motion was coming from Mr Emerson. My immediate thought went to: why wasn't it a co-sponsored motion with a woman in this place? I do not care who with, but I think that would have been immediately a lot more powerful and perhaps would have considered some of the issues that Minister Paterson's amendment has achieved.

I am also concerned about the way that amendments have been negotiated, from what I understand has happened. I appreciate Mr Emerson has a right of reply. I look forward to hearing it. It seems to suggest that Mr Emerson took work that women in other offices had done and that Minister Paterson had done—and she has a busy day today, I have to stress—and then claimed it as his own, in the circulation of it, while also walking back from what was agreed. That is unusual, to say the least, so I look forward to hearing about what has happened.

Good footpaths and adequate lighting are absolutely important. There is no denying that, and, as the minister responsible for that, I have a real focus on it. In yesterday's budget, millions of dollars were committed to improving footpaths, particularly in our older suburbs, as well as lighting and improving the lighting infill program. Women feeling safe anywhere is a priority for us. We have done a lot in this space previously, with Minister Berry, and now Minister Paterson is investing in it and working with organisations like Women's Health Matters—which you referenced yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker—and YWCA Canberra.

I am absolutely perplexed as to why the ACT government needs to co-design and partner with the NCA to deliver lights in its spaces. The NCA is big enough and ugly enough to do its own lighting, without needing to have the ACT government hold its hand. If there are areas that any member is familiar with, then I would encourage them to contact the NCA. I am sure they would be very open to hearing about where

improvements can occur.

It remains that the most unsafe place for women to be is in their own home with men that they know. Even a crude glance at homicides in Australia since 1989 shows that the number of domestic incidents is by far the highest, followed by the number of incidents committed by acquaintances. There is not a single year in the dataset where homicides committed by strangers were more prevalent than domestic incidents or more prevalent than incidents committed by acquaintances. Every year, the number of incidents committed by strangers are a fraction of those committed by people we know. That is at the heart of Minister Paterson's amendments today. This is really the area that we need to invest in across all of our prevention services, support services and justice system.

I thought about whether I would say this and decided I will. With that in mind, I come to this as a person who has been sexually assaulted in public, in broad daylight. It was in my early 20s and it was not in Canberra, I am pleased to say. I have never spoken about it. It was incredibly demoralising. I did not speak about it because it was committed by a stranger and, like what Ms Tough was alluding to before, there would have been plenty of comments about how I got myself into the situation. That is extraordinarily unfair. It has meant that I have some unresolved trauma from it, because I felt too ashamed to talk to anybody at the time. In fact, I pushed it out of my memory. It was only in 2021, when we started talking a lot in this place about women's safety and sexual assaults, that it, together with another pretty horrible memory, came swimming back into my vision. Now, unfortunately, I think about it often.

As to why I am saying this today—and I do not want to make it about me—I am trying to demonstrate that women are unsafe everywhere. It does not matter about the lighting, footpaths or whether you are in your home or somewhere else. In all these places, women's lives are at risk. We are at risk of assault and we are at risk of some pretty horrible incidents. Again, I appreciate very much the intent of this motion, but, if Mr Emerson had partnered with women who have lived experiences and a whole lot of evidence, and have done a whole lot of work in this space too, it would certainly have been a better product and we would not be in the mess that we are in with all the amendments, which I note have been circulated and put entirely by women in this place, with the exception of what Mr Emerson circulated originally.

Women's safety is everyone's issue, so I am glad to hear men in this place speaking about it, but the focus on one area does not tell the whole story. I trust that, as Mr Emerson continues to engage in this conversation, these experiences are also at the forefront of any other motion he wishes to negotiate in this space.

I commend Minister Paterson's amendments.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.31): I seek leave to move two amendments together that have been circulated in my name to Dr Paterson's amendment to my motion.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

1. Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:
“(a) many women report feeling unsafe at night, which is exacerbated by poor lighting and damaged footpaths;”.
2. After paragraph (4)(c), insert:
“(d) advocating to and collaborating with the National Capital Authority to address lighting issues and ensure women feel safe exercising in Commonwealth-owned areas like the Lake Burley Griffin perimeter;”.

First, I acknowledge Ms Cheyne in sharing her experience. It was pretty significant and I am sure that, as she mentioned, it was not on the radar when she woke up this morning. I greatly appreciate her sharing that story. It was terrible to hear, and I am sure everyone in the chamber and listening in our offices feels the same way.

I will respond to some of the things that have been said. How the debate has unfolded is a bit unfortunate. Quite clearly, the original intent of the motion was not to provide a comprehensive response to the gendered violence epidemic. The first line of the motion was:

condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent violent attacks against women while exercising in the ACT ...

It was intended to be a motion that focused on the gaps that we are in a position to address related to the incidents. Of course it would be insulting to think that lighting is the solution to this crisis. I can understand the feeling of insult, especially in a budget that has delivered a wide range of commitments which I support regarding family, domestic and sexual violence.

The amendment that Dr Paterson prepared, I believe in conversation with Miss Nuttall, expanded the scope of the motion, which I do not have an issue with in principle, but it does change the debate. It changes what we were here to debate today on the basis of the initial motion, which again is not an issue. The intent of the motion was to respond directly to concerns that I have had raised by women in our community, including women in my office who prepared the motion, about specific incidents and, importantly, what we can do to address them.

If I had moved a motion that just talked about lighting without mentioning the need for men to change their behaviour, that would have been an error. That is what I chose not to do. I chose to expand the scope of the original thinking around the motion and talk about education, because this seems to be where there are gaps. Women in our community tell me that they want to see more focus on how we change behaviour earlier in the process among boys, young men and older men, which is why that is also included in the original motion.

When I saw the amendment, it had expanded the scope, but it had actually removed the practical points that the motion was intended to focus on. It removed concerns around lighting and footpaths and removed commitments to roll out gender-sensitive urban design guidelines across the entire ACT and work with the NCA. I am not saying that we need to hold their hand, but, as I have people contacting me about this issue, it is relevant to Canberrans, so I am representing that here in the chamber—to take practical steps to improve lighting, which those guidelines themselves indicate is the top priority

when it comes to improving women's feeling of safety in public. That was the intent of what I was aiming to get at here. I do not have an issue with having broadened it, but to broaden the motion to encompass the entire crisis that we are facing and then claim that I am pigheaded about the nature of that crisis or ignorant or naive feels a little unfair. If I had brought a motion talking about gendered violence in general the day after the budget in which many commitments were made, I think that would also have been unhelpful.

This was about targeted and practical measures that we can take and that the government can and should be implementing to respond to specific recent incidents that have been experienced by women while exercising. They are based on exactly what I have heard from women in our community, not in isolation and not what I have dreamt up on my own as a man.

My amendments reinsert the two clear messages that have come from women in our community, and they have been prepared by women in my office who are frustrated with how this has unfolded. They mention the NCA and the importance of safety around Lake Burley Griffin's perimeter as a potential location that people could choose as a safe place to exercise at night—so that is where we will go—and acknowledge the role of poor lighting and damaged footpaths in women's safety at night.

The process is clumsy. Ms Cheyne said as much. I think my office was the last office to be made aware of the amendments that were being prepared. I would have loved to have had a conversation about concerns around the motion and to have been involved earlier in those discussions. When my office saw the amendments, we quickly rewrote them to add back the important points that had been removed. It was not an attempt to claim someone else's work as our own. It was budget week laziness and it was just thrown together, to be honest.

I am glad that Miss Nuttall recommended that I do it differently. I am glad that is what we have done and that the *Hansard* can show who was responsible for what. I would love to have those conversations earlier in the future and be able to engage productively before we come into the chamber. I understand that I have created some chaos with all the amendments that have been moved, but I have been trying to please everyone, including the people who came to me asking if I could provide a male voice, which has been absent, in the specifics that I have included in the original motion.

To anyone who is feeling offended or upset by how we have gone about this—the negotiations and the motion that I introduced—I encourage them to please read the original motion in the context of understanding that there is a much broader response. There is a lot of work going on to provide a response in many of the areas that I feel were not addressed and to attempt to address the gap.

I thank all members for their heartfelt contributions. Ms Tough really got to the nub of what I was trying to get at with this motion. I thank you for your contributions. Again, it is good to have broadened the response. I reiterate my earlier remark, which is that we need to do more than speak about this issue. For that reason, I prepared a motion that intends to do exactly that: prompt action and prompt change, rather than reiterate what we are already doing, which, as we all know, is not working in many instances or is not working yet. That is enough from me.

Mr Emerson's amendment to **Dr Paterson's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Dr Paterson's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

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

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.39): I acknowledge the debate that has occurred on this very important issue, and I commend everybody for being part of this debate. I also acknowledge Ms Cheyne for sharing her experience. It is really difficult for a person who has experienced any kind of violence to stand up and share their experience, so I commend her for doing that.

I seek leave to move an amendment.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: I move:

Add:

“(4)(f) ensure adequate community police presence at high-risk locations as a deterrent and to provide immediate responses to prevent incidents escalating;”.

My amendment seeks to recognise something that has been missing in this debate; that is, community policing. It seeks to highlight, as we have heard in this chamber, the need for a holistic approach to women's safety. We have all heard that women's safety is a really important issue. We have heard that it is mostly women who feel unsafe in their homes.

I will speak very briefly about the academic research and evidence as to why community policing is really important and why it forms an important part of a response to violence against women. The Australian Institute of Criminology notes that community policing is about police engagement with the community through restructuring police organisations and altering the daily activities of operational police officers. The institute also notes that positive impacts of community policing help to reduce the problem and prioritise the issues to be addressed. It improves local physical and social environments and increases a positive community attitude towards policing. Central to the philosophy of community policing is the emphasis on effective working partnerships with the community. Clearly, the response to violence against women is serious enough to require a whole-of-system response.

I would like to speak about some of the sentiments that I have picked up in this chamber when we talk about a proper policing response. The reason why we talk about being a developed society is that we have the appropriate institutions to manage issues. Policing is one of those institutions and it is an important part of our whole response to violence against women.

We know that, for example, in the multicultural community, violence against women

is highlighted; it is more prevalent. We also know that a woman experiencing violence in her home, especially a woman who is from the multicultural community, needs a response. Policing forms a general deterrence. Community policing is important and forms a general deterrence. When I picked up the phone, for example, when I was being thrown around into side tables and beds and stomped on, and said, “I’m going to call the police if you don’t stop,” that served as a deterrent. It was enough for me to stop experiencing that violence. It is important that our response to violence against women also includes proper community policing.

We also know that, again, in the multicultural community, policing serves as a symbol of authority. Men are very likely to respond positively to a police officer, for example, turning up to a home and saying, “You need to stop using violence; you need to stop engaging in violence,” whether it is physical, emotional or any kind of violence. Community policing is really important, and it is really unfair if we leave that response out of the conversation.

I have heard, many times in the conversation, that the policing response risks racially profiling—that those from multicultural communities are more likely to be arrested and racially profiled. While that is probably true, it does not remove the fact that, if a woman is feeling unsafe, she needs a response immediately. That response sometimes can only involve picking up the phone and calling the police. It is really important that we are not unfavourably discouraging community policing, because it informs part of our response, if we are really serious about having a holistic approach to violence against women.

Thank you again, Mr Emerson, and everybody who has engaged in this conversation. It has been a very emotional conversation, and I understand all of the emotions that have informed this motion. I hope that we have a way forward, and that this is an issue on which we will continue to advocate.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Barry’s amendment to the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.46): I want to thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward this very important matter to the chamber today. I want to thank and acknowledge my colleague Ms Barry for the work that she has done and continues to do to support women, and for the very important amendment that she has circulated as part of this debate. I know Ms Barry has sat down with so many women; she has heard their stories, she has cried with them, and she has done everything that she can to help them to navigate their situation and help return to them a sense of dignity and self-empowerment. I say to her: thank you for the work that you have done in that space.

As Ms Barry believes, as I believe, and as, I think, everyone in this chamber believes, all women and young girls do have the right to be safe in their homes and in their community. Thank you, Ms Barry, for your personal contribution, and thank you, Ms Cheyne and Ms Tough, for sharing your stories today. I know that it is not easy to do so in a public forum.

I grew up in a community where women knew that you did not walk alone at night. In fact, even walking alone during the daytime had its risks. I remember my sister and

I going for a jog on the beach in South Africa, as we often did, and being chased by a group of men. Luckily for us, we were fast runners, and we had greater endurance than they did. We were able to outrun them, and they eventually tired of their pursuit.

On another occasion, in another country, I will never forget being chased, right up to the front door of my apartment, and managing to lock the door moments before the person in pursuit got there. Compared to some countries that I have lived in and visited, I have always felt that Australia was one of the safer places in the world to live in, and I was grateful for that. Even so, even then, we still have some way to go here.

I do not want Canberra to become a place where women collectively know, “You don’t walk that street alone at night; it’s just too dangerous.” I do not want Canberra to become that place where it is common knowledge that women don’t go there. There is so much that the government can do to help improve the perceptions of safety and actual safety for women. I do not think that we should overlook some of the simpler solutions like lighting, as well as some of the deeper, complex and much more difficult solutions that we need to implement.

I know, from a lot of young women that I have spoken to, that they do feel unsafe when they walk in dark streets and there is no lighting. In the winter months, by 5 o’clock it is dark, so if they are finishing work, or winding up school or sports activities, they do not feel safe, perhaps, catching public transport and walking from the bus stop to their home in a dark street.

Actually, it is not just women that I have heard that from. I have also heard that from men. In dark, derelict, neglected areas, they feel unsafe as well. I think that those simple, practical solutions can go some way to improving perceptions of safety.

Briefly, on Ms Barry’s amendment, I have long argued, as everyone knows, for a stronger police presence in Canberra. Despite our growing population, we do have the smallest police force per capita. We are asking our police to operate in a very complex and challenging operational environment. It seems that we are often asking them to do more for less. I recall being told about two young women in Canberra who sought refuge in a hotel after they were chased by a group of men. This was not very long ago. This was in the city, probably a couple of months ago. When they called the police, because the perpetrators had already left, the police did not come out, because they have to allocate their time according to the highest risk. That is a really sad situation, I think, when women call for a response and they cannot get it.

Thank you, Ms Barry, for bringing forward the amendment today to ensure that we do have an adequate community policing presence, because police do have an important role to play in community safety, as a deterrent and in responding to incidents when they occur.

In conclusion, I know how deeply personal and sensitive this issue is for so many women in this chamber, as we have heard, and more broadly across Australia and Canberra. I also know that it is a deeply personal issue for men who have witnessed women they love get hurt. I do not think some of the comments that have been made about Mr Emerson’s motives and his motion today are entirely fair. We often say that we want men to take responsibility and that we want them to step up. I think that is

what Mr Emerson has tried to do today. I think that is something that should be welcomed, because that helps to shine a light on the very issues that we all agree need to be addressed.

Ms Barry's amendment negatived.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Policing—facilities

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) following reports of gas leaks, flooding, raw sewage contamination, and toxic lead dust contamination across multiple ACT Policing sites, an Order for the Production of Documents on the strategic management of Canberra's police facilities was passed by this Assembly;
- (b) these documents revealed that all police sites owned by the ACT Government have either exceeded the end of their life or are approaching the end of their life and, at times, the aged and defective infrastructure have presented "life and safety risks" to police members and undermined work health and safety legislative requirements;
- (c) according to a June 2024 Strategic Asset Management Plan by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, "The owned facilities have deteriorated over time, due to systemic under investment that has not kept pace with the demanding operational requirements placed upon the asset portfolio. The current level of capital funding does not enable the timely renewal of assets which have exceeded end of life"; and
- (d) the ACT Policing 20-year Master Accommodation Plan in 2022 concluded that the City Police Station had reached end of life across all areas; Gungahlin Police Station had reached end of life across all areas except structure; Belconnen Police Station had reached end of life for internal finishes and was approaching end of life for engineering services; Woden Police Station had reached end of life for building fabric, engineering services and internal finishes; and Tuggeranong Police Station was approaching end of life for structure; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) publicly acknowledge that its failure to properly maintain and improve police infrastructure has compromised the safety of police officers, undermined the Government's health and safety legislative requirements, and impeded the operational capability of police to keep Canberrans safe;
- (b) publicly commit to addressing the systemic under-investment in police infrastructure across the Territory;
- (c) accelerate the delivery of a new Winchester and City Police Station; and
- (d) restore police stations in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong.

The offices that we members are privileged to work in here at the Assembly are very well maintained. But what if, instead of being maintained, our place of work was beset by flooding and raw sewage contamination? What if the building was contaminated by toxic lead dust and there were reports of gas leaks? What if the building's poor condition was presenting life and safety risks to its employees? Working in a building like that would be considered unacceptable for members of the Legislative Assembly and staff. And it should be considered unacceptable for any employee, especially in facilities owned by the government.

Sadly, in Canberra, the dedicated staff in ACT Policing are working in poorly maintained facilities, beset by these and many other issues—all because the government is allergic to investing in our police and our community safety. All of our police precincts need serious investment, but those opposite have failed to do what is needed to treat our police with respect, to keep our police fully operational and to keep our community safe.

We had a rare insight into the mind of the police minister in response to a question without notice that I asked yesterday. Her response could explain why, for years, successive Labor governments have failed to adequately invest in police accommodation. Based on this response, it must be because they have convinced themselves, bizarrely, that police stations do not have a role in community safety.

When I asked the minister whether the Winchester and City police stations were adequately equipped to keep the community safe, the police minister said:

... the police stations are not there to keep the community safe. The police stations are there as an operational workplace for ACT police ...

Let us hear that again. Canberra's police minister said:

... police stations are not there to keep the community safe.

With respect, Minister, police stations do play a significantly important role in keeping the community safe. Let us be very clear about what we are talking about here. Our substandard police facilities create an unsafe workplace for ACT Policing, which necessarily undermines their operational capacity and makes our community less safe than it should be.

Less than 500 metres from where we are right now, the City Police Station, Canberra's largest and most active police station, is slowly crumbling, due to a lack of foresight, investment and planning from this government, leaving it functionally obsolete. Not only is the station's operation currently impeded by the construction of light rail stage 2; the building itself is not in a fit state to serve our community effectively. It is not just the city station. Across Canberra, our police facilities are not what they should be. Every single government-owned site has either exceeded or is nearing its end of life.

My motion today calls on the government to be honest with the Canberra public, and acknowledge that it has failed to properly maintain and improve police infrastructure. This continual failure over the past two decades has compromised the safety of our courageous police officers and impeded the capability of the police to keep Canberra

safe.

As well as the city station's evident issues, the other government-owned facilities around the territory are also in need of investment. Despite being the newest ACT government-owned station, I am sorry to say that the Belconnen station has a gender issue. Female facilities are significantly smaller than male facilities, which flies in the face of the government's commitment to gender equality, and the station needs an internal refit. Tuggeranong Police Station was named by ACT police officers as the most functional station in the ACT, yet it was still rated "poor" in the 2018 CHC assessment of police sites. How can the most functional station in Canberra still be in a poor condition? A full refurbishment has been recommended.

The Woden Police Station has reached end of life and has significant structural issues, leading to it being rated "poor" in the 2018 assessment. It is not fit to serve the growing Woden area, let alone expand to cover the Molonglo Valley catchment. A new station has been recommended for Molonglo.

The Gungahlin Police Station is not fit for purpose, because it is at capacity and has reached end of life in all but structure. It is experiencing operational issues and at times has resorted to using a mobile van parked in front of the building. Sharing the building with emergency services also creates additional operational risks for our police service.

The Winchester Police Centre is the ACT Policing headquarters, yet it lacks the appropriate facilities for staff and victims of crime. It is a former technical college and it was never designed to be a police centre. It faces significant functionality issues. It has suffered water leakage issues, it is not fit for purpose and it was rated in "poor" condition in the 2018 assessment.

To put it simply, our police stations are not up to standard. The two facilities most at risk are undoubtedly the Winchester Police Centre and the City Police Station. Winchester is the main operations centre for ACT Policing. The city station is the territory's busiest police station, and it is beyond alarming that both sites, as well as the others across the city, have been allowed to fall into such a state of disrepair.

The government contracted JLL Australia to put together a 20-year plan for ACT Policing. JLL recommended that, by the first half of 2024, ACT Policing should have moved from the Winchester location to a new headquarters. Regarding the city site, JLL recommended that police should also be operating out of a new City police station by 2024, potentially co-located with the new headquarters.

As we all know 2024 has passed us by, and we do not have a co-located, new headquarters and city station. Today, we have the welcome news that the government is calling for expressions of interest to replace the City Police Station and Winchester centre. Given the urgent need for these facilities, it is to be hoped that the government will make this a priority. It is also to be hoped that the government will not ignore the other pressing requirements for police facility upgrades elsewhere in Canberra.

I have spoken to many members of the police force who have been calling for better facilities for some time. The opposition leader and I have written to the police minister requesting visits to stations across the territory to assess the full scope of the decay of

our police stations across the territory that they have outlined to me. Unfortunately, while we have not yet been granted those visits, I hope that we will be soon. If the minister is going to allow police workplace conditions to deteriorate to the levels being reported, it is essential for me, as shadow minister, to visit these facilities and to see for myself the extent to which they have deteriorated due to government neglect.

While awaiting access to police facilities, I requested the production of documentation related to the strategic management of police facilities, to get some clarity on the extent of the problem. These documents did not paint a very pretty picture at all. They revealed that the shortcomings in police facilities have been evident for years and years under this Labor government. They showed that most ACT Policing facilities past their expiry date in 2018. In the seven years since, the government have responded with a patchwork of repairs that did little to stem the decay of police facilities, and they did not provide a clear plan for the future.

These piecemeal investments since 2018 are indicative of a government that is not serious about supporting our police officers. Where was the critical investment before most ACT police facilities reached expiry? And where have they been in the years since? Labor's timeline does not match up to the urgent realities that our police are facing.

ACT police already face challenges that officers in other states do not have to deal with. Our territory's lack of restricting OMCGs has turned Canberra into a bikie haven, leaving our police powerless to act in the interests of the community. The ACT's drug decriminalisation laws—which ACT Policing have opposed—have also stretched our police forces. They need better resources to meet these additional challenges, not worse.

Until this week, all we heard from the government regarding the city and Winchester sites was a statement from the police minister to the *Canberra Times* that a business case would be presented at the end of the year. The announcement today of concrete action on these facilities is proof of the importance of public access to documents such as the JLL report that we obtained through the order for the production of documents.

My motion calls on the ACT government to get serious about public safety and supporting our police. I am calling on the government to commit publicly to the people of the ACT that it will address the systemic underinvestment in police infrastructure across the territory. This can be achieved by accelerating the delivery of the Winchester and City police stations, which will keep Canberrans safe, as well as significant investment in police stations in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong.

Canberrans are safer when they are protected by a police force equipped with everything they need to confront the challenges of our modern world. I call on the government to ensure that, as soon as possible, our police are given the facilities they need to ensure our safety. By doing this, the government will also be holding up its end of the agreement with the commonwealth regarding policing in Canberra.

Policing in Canberra is uniquely different to other states. Our community police officers in ACT Policing are provided by the Australian Federal Police, who are under the direction of the commonwealth government. Under the ACT Policing arrangement, while the commonwealth provides a high-quality community policing service, the ACT

government is required to provide appropriate facilities and associated infrastructure for the AFP to deliver policing services.

It should be evident to everyone in the chamber that offices that are contaminated by sewage and are well past the end of their life are not the appropriate facilities that the agreement sets out. The ACT government has failed in its commitment to the commonwealth to provide suitable facilities for its officers and other staff. It has failed in its commitment to all the dedicated staff at ACT Policing, and it has failed the people of Canberra. The announcement today that the government is finally acting on two facilities that were known to be substandard is welcome news. Let us hope that it will now also act on the other substandard facilities that have been identified by the reports made public earlier this year.

Keeping our community safe is what ACT police officers do every single day. The very least that we can do to repay their efforts is to urgently invest in these facilities that allow them to do their job. The government has a duty—to the commonwealth, to the members of our police force and to the people of Canberra—to deliver first-class police facilities across the territory. I urge them to take this duty seriously and expedite the replacement of City Police Station and Winchester Police Centre, as well as attending to our police stations in Tuggeranong, Belconnen, Woden and Gungahlin. Contrary to the police minister's belief, community safety depends on the government's swift action. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

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) (5.08): There is a lot that is wrong with what Ms Morris has just said, and I would like to put the record straight: there was one sewage leak in one office at city police station. This is not systemic throughout ACT police facilities. I also must play the semantics game that Ms Morris continues to push! Without police officers, police stations do not keep our community safe. It is the officers who work tirelessly, day in and day out in those stations and out and about in cars and in the community, that work to keep us safe.

The government is deeply appreciative of the work that ACT Policing does. The commitment and dedication our police demonstrate in protecting our community helps make the territory a much safer place to live. On behalf of the government and the people of Canberra, I want to thank ACT police for their service and continuous commitment to answering the call of duty 24 hours a day, every day of the year. And the government is strongly committed to providing support that police need to serve the community. Our police services must be equipped with modern and high-quality equipment and infrastructure to support our community and protect public safety.

This is in contrast to the Canberra Liberals who, time and again in this place and in the media, slam our police and undermine the hard work and service they provide. The shadow minister continuously pushes the rhetoric that our city is a war zone, despite Canberra being the safest city in the country. Given the current situation in other parts of the world, using this rhetoric is deeply insulting to members of our community who have many friends or family in regions of the world that are in conflict.

And it cannot go unmentioned that at the Canberra Liberals' recent conference, the

Canberra Liberals were actively considering legislating gel blasters and fireworks. This would be a move that would create significantly more work for ACT police, a move that would put police and the community at significant risk and a clear demonstration of how disconnected from reality the Canberra Liberals are. The MO of the Canberra Liberals is clear: push fear onto the community for their own political gain.

But here are the facts about the safety of our city. In the last reporting period, offences reported to police were down 7.3 per cent. In the previous 10 years, offences were down 16.9 per cent. The evidence is clear that the crime rate is reducing. What is challenging, though, is the complexity of crime that police are having to engage with. Again, the Canberra Liberals do not engage with this. They have no solutions to support police. Instead, they take the easy road and do what they can to manufacture fear and dissatisfaction with police services.

What does not sit well for the Canberra Liberals is year-on-year significant investment from the ACT government. The renewal of policing infrastructure is a key priority. As the population grows beyond more than half a million people over the next decade, a well-considered plan is needed to ensure police facilities meet their growing demands. That is why we are conducting extensive due diligence work for a new headquarters and city police station, a review of Woden station and a new police facility for the Molonglo region.

I was proud to announce this afternoon the approach to market for an expression of interest for third parties to provide property options and solutions to replace city police station and police headquarters. It is envisaged that these new facilities will be both located in the city precinct to ensure strong, functional links to the ACT courts, the ACT government building and the Australian Federal Police. Contrary to what Ms Morris said, this has been long, ongoing work, so this is not something that has happened overnight in response to her motion.

This project has allowed for the comprehensive development of user requirements and market analysis along with high-level concept designs, because police facilities are complex facilities. They need to serve the needs of the users, which are quite unique in terms of security and technology requirements, as well as the uniqueness of the watch house facilities. Over \$3.8 million has been allocated so far to plan this new infrastructure, and I look forward to the market generating some fantastic potential solutions.

We are unwavering in our commitment to ensuring thorough due diligence on these critical facilities. The government is investing \$2.5 million over two years to undertake industry consultation to inform investment timeframes for all identified infrastructure needs in the Molonglo Valley, including a new police station to support community safety and wellbeing. This will include a detailed analysis of police accommodation in the Woden patrol zone and the Molonglo Valley. The new Molonglo Valley police station will provide increased police presence in the growing Molonglo district.

Police accommodation is also being addressed in Gungahlin, with the existing Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Centre now occupied by only three rather than five services. The departure of the Rural Fire Service and state Emergency Services to new accommodation in Mitchell has allowed for a temporary reconfiguration of the site

to allow for more room for ACT police. Work is continuing to relocate the two other emergency service tenants, ACT Fire and Rescue and ACT Ambulance, to the new station area.

The government will undertake early civil construction works to prepare the Casey precinct for future development that enables community use and the delivery of new health and emergency and sports facilities. This will include earthworks, demolition, landscaping and utility connections on the site. This will cost approximately \$11 million, which has been allocated in this budget. This is a significant investment that puts in place progress to see the entire Gungahlin site operational for ACT Policing.

In addition to the range of new builds and significant refurbishments being planned, there is also ongoing commitment to improve existing police infrastructure. Policing facilities continue to be upgraded to improve staff rooms, heating and air conditioning, security options and accessibility standards. The development of the Strategic Asset Management Plan last year for ACT police has given greater visibility to the condition of infrastructure assets at policing sites and aims to decrease the likelihood of unforeseen infrastructure failure. It will continue to inform future capital works to ensure the existing infrastructure is supporting ACT Policing's operations.

Between 2018-19 to 2023-24, \$23.8 million was funded to allow for asset replacements in all ACT police stations. This included replacing HVAC systems, workplaces for staff, and fire and hydraulic systems, among other critical systems in operation in these stations. The initial Delivering Better Facilities project also provided more than \$9 million in upgrades across the police property portfolio. In addition to these works, there was \$2.2 million for upgrades for the city station watch house. These works were to ensure the safety of people in custody; to improve office space; and to replace medical, electrical and firefighting equipment. There has also been a new electrical, heating, ventilation and cooling system recently installed at the Woden station at a cost of approximately \$2.5 million. In the 2024-25 budget, \$3.1 million was provided as part of the upgrading Emergency Services infrastructure initiative to address damage caused by ageing infrastructure that resulted in water damage at city police station.

Not only has the government invested heavily in infrastructure asset renewal and upgrades at police stations, it has also invested in the planning of new facilities that will transform the police accommodation landscape. In 2023, the ACT government replaced the old traffic operations centre in Belconnen. A total investment of \$7.17 million was made for the new road policing operations site. This is a 6,000 square metre building, providing a state-of-the-art facility to support all road policing operations. This helps maintain effective response times in emergencies and gives ACT police a really central site for immediate access to major roads across Canberra.

The ACT government is also committed to improving the pay and conditions for ACT police officers. In the 2023-24 budget an initial investment of \$107 million was made for an additional 126 police officers over a five-year period. This was the largest single investment ever made by the ACT government in our police force. Ahead of the 2024 ACT election, ACT Labor committed to increase this commitment to 150 police officers over the same period of time. Between July of last year and March of this year, 47 recruits have graduated and joined ACT Policing. This is in addition to the 80 in the 2023-24 financial year, and in May I attended another AFP graduation where a further

24 officers joined ACT Policing. The 2025-26 budget also provides \$112.9 million to improve the pay and conditions of ACT police members, in line with the recently negotiated ACT Policing Enterprise Agreement. This will ensure ACT police officers are paid properly and have strong workplace conditions.

We expect so much from our police, and they continue to deliver. We are planning for the future, ensuring the pace of growth in the ACT is matched with upgrades to existing infrastructure and giving careful consideration to the location of new policing facilities. As I have outlined, an enormous amount of work is being done to support police, with new, modern facilities and the necessary upgrades. The ACT government investment in ACT Policing infrastructure, now and into the future, will help them to keep doing the remarkable work they do each day.

In closing, I would like to thank all members of ACT police for their dedication to our community. We would not be the safe, peaceful city we are without them.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.20): I do want to make a few remarks in this debate this afternoon. The ACT Greens know that police play an important role in community safety in this territory. We and the entire community are grateful that they deal with the matters they do deal with, a wide range of difficult issues, many of which most Canberrans would be appalled at—some of the things police have to go and respond to.

As Canberra grows, it is necessary for police operations to expand to cover new areas of the city. I think these are obvious and given statements. However, we also need to be mindful of the fact that, whilst we do need to deliver enough resources for police to do their jobs, as we have been reflecting on over the budget in the past few days, there are also always tough choices, and we need to have enough money for other approaches to justice and safety as well.

I note in Dr Paterson's amendment that she talks about ACT Policing representing the third largest injection in the 2025-26 budget, only behind health and education. This underlines the fact that resource allocations are questions of choice; they are questions of prioritisation, and if we spend more on one thing, there is usually less for others.

Certainly, as we have made clear over recent years, the Greens want to see enough resources made available to also take a restorative approach to justice and to prioritise strengthening community so that people can have their needs met in community, not in custody. We believe in investing in housing, health care, education and social services that support people to live well where they are, so that they have a good quality of life and do not come to police attention. We are conscious that disadvantage, in its many forms, is a significant driver of criminal activity. We recognise the need for police to be available and resourced well enough to attend to those incidents, but we must not lose sight of the need to invest in other elements of the justice spectrum as well.

We certainly support community-based programs and services that provide people with the right help earlier and in the community, so we do want to make the point in this discussion about resources. While we would rather that money be spent on addressing the underlying social determinants that lead to harmful behaviours and crime, we also note that there needs to be adequate resourcing for police in a number of ways—for

their facilities, their training, their capability and their adequate numbers as the city grows.

These are all reasonably obvious points, but it is worth reflecting on in this discussion. It is a nuanced conversation; even, “What is the right number of police?” is a point of debate, and we have seen the various versions of that in Canberra over the past couple of years.

Having made those few remarks, I can indicate that we will be supporting Dr Paterson’s amendment. We believe it represents an accurate reflection of the state of play in the ACT. I note, however, that Ms Morris also intends to move a subsequent amendment that brings back information that was released through the order of the production of documents. We will also support that amendment on the basis that we believe it simply reintroduces a number of factual points of which I have not seen the facts disputed. People might express it differently, but the fundamental points are from the documentation, and I think they are fair to reflect them in the motion. That is the basis on which we intend to approach this motion today.

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) (5.24): I move:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government reaffirms its commitment to supporting its police force for the service they provide to our community. Funding for ACT Policing represents the third largest injection in the 2025-2026 Budget, only behind health and education;
- (b) an order for the production of documents on the strategic management of Canberra’s police facilities was passed by this Assembly;

(2) further notes:

- (a) in the 2024-2025 Budget, the ACT Government invested \$3.5 million to continuing to progress work on a new City Police Station and Headquarters. The 2025-2026 Budget allocates an additional \$1.1 million to fund design work and replacing infrastructure at City and Winchester;
- (b) the 2025-2026 Budget invests \$2.5 million for planning and analysis for future police accommodation in the Woden Patrol Zone and the Molonglo police station;
- (c) the 2025-2026 Budget also includes \$112.9 million to increase wages and support for ACT Policing staff members. This is in addition to the \$107 million allocated in 2023-2024 Budget to recruit and train 126 new ACT police officers. At the 2024 Election, the ACT Government committed to increase this to 150 new police officers; and
- (d) \$6.45 million was allocated to implement a sexual assault advocate pilot in line with Recommendation 2 of the Sexual Assault (Police) Review. This will be an additional fourth team in the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT) within ACT Policing; and

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) reaffirm its commitment to keep Canberrans safe by maintaining and improving police infrastructure, upholding work health and safety requirements, and supporting the operational capability of police to keep Canberrans safe;
 - (b) continue work on delivering a new Headquarters and City Police Station; and
 - (c) support all ACT Policing members and maintain infrastructure as required at Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong police stations.”.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.24): I am very pleased to speak in support of Ms Morris’s motion. I would like to commend her not just on this motion but on how active she has been in this portfolio, which is such an important one in the ACT. It is disappointing that we are here again talking about unsatisfactory resourcing and funding and facilities for police, because I have been hearing this since 2008, when I first became, back in those days, the shadow police minister. It seems that we come in here and highlight the issues, the government denies it and promises that there is lots of funding, and then we hear from the police or the police association that it is simply not true, and the evidence plays out. It seems that this broken record continues, which is very disappointing.

Ms Morris is right to talk about the state of facilities of our hardworking police officers and how unsatisfactory it is. Issues like raw sewage, stench, run-down facilities. This has been an ongoing issue for police in this territory for years, and for years we have been calling, as an opposition, for increased support. But there has always been the denial that there have ever been any problems. The minister was talking about the Molonglo station. Well, as you would remember, Mr Speaker, Mrs Jones and myself and Mr Cocks have been calling for that Molonglo station for years and years. The government said it was not necessary. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming. And, still, where is it? We are going to have to wait years it would seem.

This has been going on for many, many years, but it really was highlighted in the 2013-14 budget—so it is over 10 years ago under this mob, Mr Speaker—when the government ripped \$15 million out of the budget, which back then was a lot of money. They did not give police what they needed and, in fact, ripped money out of the police budget. At that point there were headlines, “Job fears as police cop \$15 million cut”; “\$15.36 million is being stripped from the ACT Policing budget over the next four years.”

The government has been accused of hiding the cuts in Tuesday’s budget—
which they did—

which was sold as providing a “Safe and Secure Canberra” and bringing “more Police and Firefighters.”

And you had these weasel words where the minister on one side at that time said, “Oh, we’re doing this and we’re doing that, and we are providing more.” When you dig into the detail, the truth was the opposite.

The police association said and warned that the cuts, while having a minimal impact at first, would begin to bite in future years. And these are those future years. Here we are in this place, as the police association said, paying the price in the community—in community safety and, in particular, our police. They cut the budget, they tried to hide it, and here we are. And they have continued to underfund police for years. In 2013, the AFPA chief executive, Dennis Gellatly, said:

ACT Policing could not be expected to provide the same level of policing services to Canberra. “Canberra is a growing city that requires increasing policing services, not less” ... the compounding effect of the savings would hurt ACT Policing.

In 2021, the AFPA, again, in their budget submission said:

The Association has been continuously drawing government’s attention to under-resourcing—both for staff and infrastructure—for a number of years.

In an interview, the president, on 6 September 2021 said, “I would argue ACT Policing have been under-resourced for some time.” The Chief Police Officer stated that “there not just needed to be a conversation about numbers, but also about equipment and resources”. He directly stated:

“The city Police Station was built in 1966; we need to ensure we have fit-for-purpose infrastructure ...”

So here we find ourselves in a position where under-resourcing from this government has led to the problem that we have here. This has not happened by accident; it is the deliberate actions of the Labor Party government.

If you go to the *Report on government services*, the Productivity Commission data, it shows that resourcing has not been maintained. I will give you an example. In 2022, that *RoGS* data showed that Canberra had the lowest number of police per capita in Australia and the lowest funding per person for police in Australia. Again, the police themselves said, “The ACT government, or the government, spends the least amount on police officers in Australia.” That was the AFPA.

The 2012-13 annual report for ACT Police, when you look at that document, showed that there were 708 sworn officers and 216 unsworn, for a total of 924. And then a decade later, even though there had been a 70,000-person growth in Canberra, you had fewer police officers and unsworn had gone up by only a very small amount. So you went from 708 sworn officers to 691 sworn officers; a decrease in police in our growing city over a decade. That is fewer police than you had 10 years ago. But the government had promised in budget after budget, “Oh, there’s more police. We’re delivering more.” But the reality is that that was not true. And the Chief Police Officer confirmed this when he said that the population of the territory has risen 19 per cent in the past 10 years, while police numbers have fallen by 0.7 per cent in raw terms. So we have actually gone backwards. As I said, this has gone on for years. The Chief Police Officer in 2023 said, “It’s almost as old as me”. He was an old fellow, too!

Whether it is facilities, resources or frontline officers, the fact is that this government has systemically underfunded this sector, and they consistently deny that that is

happening. We heard again from the minister these denials, these promises. And then you speak to police on the ground, you speak to the association, you look at the *RoGS* data, you look at the annual reports data, and that will tell you the truth. It is just breathtaking, the denial by this government. I remember the former Minister Gentleman was barefaced. And the minister today, saying that it is just a small sewage leak, “Don’t worry about it. It’s only a small sewage leak.” Imagine if there were sewage leaks in this place. It would be fixed straightaway, wouldn’t it! It is just not okay. It is not okay. As the AFPA president said:

... the station on London Circuit in Civic has been at the “same level of derelict for 20 years”, with a fix from the ACT Government still several years away at best.

“It’s getting to the point that the watch house is not human-rights compliant,”

We hear them bang on about human rights, don’t we? We hear them banging on all the time about human rights. The report goes on:

Some staff had to be permanently relocated to the AFP headquarters in Barton in early 2024 after being told it was no longer safe to work there, and twice in the past few months, urine and faeces have been detected trickling into the below-ground watch house from burst pipes.

I thought it was just one office! I thought the minister just said, “Oh, it was just in one office.” Right? But there were a couple of occasions trickling into the below ground watch house from burst pipes—charming! The AFPA president continues:

“And if I go in and shut down that watch house, there is no other accommodation for criminals in the ACT.

“The contingency plan in Belconnen isn’t human-rights compliant ...

The president of the AFPA said, “It is not good enough,” and it is hard to disagree.

This is a problem across the ACT, but if I look just in my electorate, the Woden police station was built in 2005. It is 20 years old. It has got multiple structural issues. Certain components are reaching the end of life, and that is a station that services Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo, and often they are called elsewhere. It is at capacity and unable to expand or reconfigure, and the master plan recommends redeveloping the site to achieve fit-for-purpose accommodation in Woden.

And where is the Molonglo station? Where is that? We have called for that repeatedly. I commend Mrs Jones for all the work she has done, and Mr Cocks as well, in calling for that repeatedly, when being told it was not needed; and then, finally, this government gets dragged to make it happen.

Mr Speaker, I commend Ms Morris for what she is doing here, but I would highlight that you would be naive to believe the utterances from the minister, because you then have to think, “Well, she is going to magically fix it because she is different from all the ministers before in this government, who have promised.” I remember, I think it was in the 2009-10 budget, they promised 69 more police officers, but then when you looked at the *RoGS* data, there were fewer police officers. Where has that money gone?

Where are those police officers that have been promised?

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.34): I rise to speak in support of Canberra's police. Infrastructure reaching the end of its life, without plans for renewal, is a common theme in the ACT. We need to invest both in police stations and police numbers. I would like to highlight the access issues at the Woden police station, with police finding it difficult to get in and out of the station due to significant increases in development, particularly the new interchange. Hopefully, better planning will address these issues.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.35): I, too, rise, as one of the members responsible for Ginninderra electorate, to speak in support of Ms Morris's motion. I thank Ms Morris for her tireless advocacy in this space and put on the record a comment that I recall someone made when I was doorknocking just before the election. I happened to doorknock a police officer's house, and I spoke to him about some of the concerns, and he said to me:

Who looks after us? We go in and we do a very difficult job, but no one is speaking for us. Who is going to look after us?

Thank you, Ms Morris, and I hope people who are listening and watching—and if there are any police officers there—understand that we are battling for you.

Ginninderra is host to Belconnen police station and the Winchester centre, which is the headquarters of ACT Policing. The Belconnen police station, which was opened in March 2012, has reached end of life for internal finishes and is approaching end of life for engineering services. The Winchester centre has a significant number of operational issues, as has been highlighted, and both facilities are considered unfit for purpose.

Having our police working in substandard facilities has significant consequences. There is a real risk that underfunding maintenance could result in the ACT not meeting its primary duty of care under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. Well-designed and well-maintained police facilities contribute significantly to the quality of policing outcomes. Providing quality facilities reflects the importance the community places on its law enforcement services and has a direct impact on the morale of police officers. Providing quality facilities supports the victims of crime and inspires confidence that their concerns will be treated seriously. Providing quality facilities helps the safe management of individuals in detention.

I acknowledge that there is a plan to relocate the Winchester police to the city and that the budget would provide \$3.7 million of critical infrastructure upgrades. But, yet again, as Mr Hanson has gone through, this is too little, too late. I also acknowledge that the police minister indicates that minimal rectification works are appropriate as this meets the minimum work health and safety requirements. I think it is quite disgraceful that Labor only aspires to meet minimum safety standards anywhere, let alone in policing.

Let me reiterate again, our police force forms an important part of our role in maintaining our institutions as a developed society. When you look across the world, for example, in Third World countries, where you have very rundown police services and really inactive police services, you see the consequences of it. Our police force is important in contributing to what makes us a developed society, and it is high time we

stop ignoring its concerns. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (5.39), by leave: I move the following amendments to Dr Paterson's proposed amendment together:

1. In paragraph (1), insert after "notes that":
 - “(a) following reports of gas leaks, flooding, raw sewage contamination, and toxic lead dust contamination across multiple ACT Policing sites, an order for the production of documents on the strategic management of Canberra's police facilities was passed by this Assembly;
 - (b) these documents revealed that all police sites owned by the ACT Government have either exceeded the end of their life or are approaching the end of their life and, at times, the aged and defective infrastructure have presented “life and safety risks” to police members and undermined work health and safety legislative requirements;
 - (c) according to a June 2024 Strategic Asset Management Plan by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, “The owned facilities have deteriorated over time, due to systemic under investment that has not kept pace with the demanding operational requirements placed upon the asset portfolio. The current level of capital funding does not enable the timely renewal of assets which have exceed end of life”; and
 - (d) the ACT Policing 20 Year Master Accommodation Plan in 2022 concluded that the City Police Station had reached end of life across all areas; Gungahlin Police Station had reached end of life across all areas except structure; Belconnen Police Station had reached end of life for internal finishes and was approaching end of life for engineering services; Woden Police Station had reached end of life for building fabric, engineering services and internal finishes; and Tuggeranong Police Station was approaching end of life for structure;”.
2. Omit paragraph (1)(b).

I understand why the police minister moved her amendment. She has omitted a significant section of my motion which points to the record of this government, and it is not a very flattering record. In fact, it is quite a damning one. It is one that has been highlighted and pointed out to us by the government's own documents, government documents, which only came to light thanks to this Assembly, through the passage of our order for the production of documents. I understand why the police minister did not want this important piece of history to be included in the final outcome of this motion, because it points to the government's appalling record on our police.

I thank Mr Rattenbury and the Greens for their engagement on this motion and for acknowledging that this is just a matter of fact. This is not an opinion or a political position; it just points to the very longstanding record that this government has created. I thank Mr Rattenbury for his engagement on and contribution to this debate. I also thank Mr Hanson, Ms Barry and Ms Carrick for their contributions. I thank Minister Paterson for her contribution, too, even though she is not here. I will make a couple of comments on her contribution, which will comprise my closing remarks in this debate.

Everything that I said in my opening speech about police facilities is what has been put

to me through official government documentation. Also, and perhaps even more importantly, it has been put to me through the men and women who serve on our front line, who are in our community responding to what they see as a very important duty—and it is an important duty—to keep our community safe. These men and women, largely, are demoralised and extremely tired of the conditions in which they have been forced to work by this government.

They courageously put their lives on the line for every single one of us in this room. Often, they feel that they do not have the backing of the government, as Ms Barry shared so beautifully in her story of her encounter while doorknocking when she spoke to a police officer. I think it is so sad that the police minister would throw those officers under the bus in an attempt to deflect criticism of her government, and try to lay that criticism and blame at the feet of police. I think it is so sad that she did that.

She said that raw sewage contamination was not a systemic issue because it was confined only to one room. If that one room were the police minister's office or the Chief Minister's office, the issue would be treated very differently. The issue of adequate, safe, fit-for-purpose police facilities is an important issue, not just for the wellbeing of our officers but for community safety.

We have just had a very long, emotional and heartfelt debate, in the debate before this one, about how important it is that women are safe in the community. You cannot dissociate the role of police and policing in achieving that outcome, in keeping the community safe. I know you tried; you tried very hard to remove police from that scenario, but you cannot. For the sake of community safety, police do need safe and fit-for-purpose worksites, so that they can get on with their job.

Ms Morris's amendments to **Dr Paterson's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Dr Paterson's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

MR SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 211A, I propose the question:

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

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—Annual Impact Statement 2024-25

National Agreement on Closing the Gap—ACT Annual Report 2024

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.45): I rise today to outline two significant reports that have been tabled, the 2024-25 ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement annual impact statement and the 2024

ACT annual report on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The 2024-25 annual impact statement, under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, represents the collaborative efforts of government, community and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—which I will call the Elected Body from now on—to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT. I also note that a refreshed agreement dashboard is now live on the ACT government website.

As we progress from phase 2 to phase 3 of the ACT agreement, greater emphasis will be placed on aligning the work of both the ACT agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The annual report on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap provides an indication of the territory's progress in relation to priority reform areas, sector-strengthening plans and our jurisdictional implementation plan. It forms a critical component of reporting requirements under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

In the spirit of both agreements, and under priority reform 1, the ACT is continuing to support the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in government decision-making, including through existing partnership arrangements with the Elected Body, the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, and through our relationship with the independent United Ngunnawal Elders Council. I also acknowledge the work of the ACT Reconciliation Council that helps to advise and inform how we move forward together in the spirit of reconciliation.

While there are positives to note in both reports, it would be disingenuous to say that everything is progressing as well as it could. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of the national agreement was released last week and, like the Productivity Commission review, has raised concerns that governments at all levels have not yet fully grasped the level of change required to deliver on our commitments under Closing the Gap.

The ACT government will engage through the Joint Council on Closing the Gap on the responses to both reviews. As we work through the next phase of our own efforts, it is important to note that the national trend will not always reflect the ACT experience, and making this distinction will be important to ensure the things that are showing progress for us are not discontinued, out of a belief based on the national trend that they are not working.

To elevate and drive the next phase of the ACT's work on Closing the Gap, I am pleased to advise the Assembly today that the ACT government has established a select policy subcommittee of cabinet on Closing the Gap. The committee will be established initially for 12 months, with all ministers being members, and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and senior public servants having standing invites.

The Closing the Gap subcommittee will provide a forum for all voices to come together to share in informing the government response to its commitments under Closing the Gap. In the first instance the Closing the Gap subcommittee will focus on delivery of a government Aboriginal community-controlled organisations transition and support

strategy, in line with priority reform 2; an ACT government transformation strategy, in line with priority reform 3; and progressing data development in line with priority reform 4. These areas of focus will also deliver against the outstanding Productivity Commission essential actions.

The Closing the Gap subcommittee will also inform whole-of-government work on other matters relevant to Closing the Gap, including youth justice and strengthening our work in this area.

Over the next 12 months, I will also be working with the Elected Body to respond to the independent review of the Elected Body, ensuring that our independent mechanism is fit for purpose and can best support the next phase of our journey in walking together to Close the Gap here in the ACT.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Roads—Drake-Brockman Drive upgrade

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.49): I rise to speak briefly about the growing concern in the community around the long-planned upgrade of Drake-Brockman Drive in Holt and Higgins. Residents who have lived in this area for decades feel frustrated as the delivery of this important road upgrade drags on.

Drake-Brockman Drive has become a congested arterial corridor since the development of Ginninderry, so the upgrades are undeniably necessary as the population and congestion in the area grow. The delivery delays regarding this enabling infrastructure have been very disappointing. The project is supposedly completing its detailed design phase this month, and I hope those responsible will genuinely listen to community feedback, especially those concerned about the more than 500 mature and remnant native trees that are set to be removed, destroying critical habitat for native birds like the superb parrot and the little eagle.

I have no doubt that if this road was in the inner north, this project would have been delivered years ago. Nonetheless it is in west Belconnen, an area that is so often neglected by this ACT Labor government that it should not be a surprise to anyone that this is dragging on. But I will always speak up and advocate for west Belconnen in this place and shine a light on the community's infrastructure needs.

Artificial intelligence—regulation

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.51): I recently met with a constituent in Charnwood who is working for PauseAI Australia, an organisation that is looking at the need for AI regulation. Everybody is talking about AI these days. We have all seen stories about questions to ChatGPT that yield obviously incorrect responses. Anyone who cares about reducing carbon emissions is concerned about the vast amounts of energy needed to power all of those data centres.

Teachers are telling us that some students are producing AI-generated essays that they do not even read through before handing in. Students are telling us that some teachers

are using AI to create test questions, and that sometimes the AI-generated answers to those questions are wrong. Artists are trying to work out whether AI is a new tool or whether it is the end of their practice. Scientists and engineers working in the field of AI want us to consider that this new technology has the potential to replace people in the workplace altogether, or worse.

There is a lot going on in the field of AI, and it can sound like the sort of early alarmism we often see around new technology. But we also understand that government has a responsibility to see this stuff as it is coming through, to engage in robust risk assessments, to listen to experts and to take action before we get consequences of the inaction.

I am not convinced that we have a great track record in regulating technology. It would be great to see a bit more action federally, and at the local level we also need to look closely at the implications of this new technology for Canberrans—for jobs, for creativity, for general wellbeing and for the environment.

Iran–Israel war

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.52): Today I want to voice my support, thoughts and good wishes to Canberrans who are worried sick about family, friends and loved ones in Iran and the wider region. How many times do we have to deal with this? The renowned historian Timothy Snyder issued five reminders about war. He said:

1. Many things reported with confidence in the first hours and days will turn out not to be true.
2. Whatever they say, the people who start wars are often thinking chiefly about domestic politics.
3. The rationale given for a war will change over time, such that actual success or failure in achieving a named objective is less relevant than one might think.
4. Wars are unpredictable.
5. Wars are easy to start and hard to stop.

Whilst we have, fortunately, seen a ceasefire in the last two days, I pray that it holds, despite the breaches we are seeing. In the meantime, I want to give voice to those who do not support the actions of Israel and the United States, and who do not want to see retaliatory action. Meanwhile Canberrans are doing the most human thing of all—simply caring about their loved ones. The Greens will always advocate for peace, diplomacy and an end to the violent rhetoric that supports violent action.

Community events—WLEID

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.54): I had the immense privilege of attending the 2025 culturally and linguistically diverse women’s event run by WLEID—Women Lead for Empowerment and Intercultural Diversity. It is the second year that this conference has been run and it marks the official launch of WLEID.

If members in this place have yet to connect with WLEID, I would suggest they do so because the leadership and talent in the room last Saturday was incredible. Organised by WLEID's brilliant founder Philippa Kimburi and facilitated by MARSS's fantastic CEO Sonia Di Mezza, we heard from so many passionate speakers who are absolute leaders in their field, across senior executive service in the APS, leadership coaching, fashion design, fitness, the community sector and more.

As one of the women attending pointed out at the time, one of the things that this conference did so well was to create a profound feeling of safety, where people were able to be vulnerable. This went for speakers and panel members, and for the audience as well. I have never seen a group so willing to uplift each other so quickly—no questions asked. I think that is an incredible place to learn, develop and connect with other people.

If you are a woman from a CALD background listening in today, if you know women who might be interested in this kind of program, or if members here are keen to get involved, sponsor and support the program, please check them out. Give them a follow on Instagram, arrange a time to chat, and take a moment to browse their page to see the excellent work that they are doing. I think leadership across all sectors in Canberra will be all the better for the brilliant women from WLEID.

Playgrounds—accessibility

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.55): I rise to recognise a young constituent of mine, Audrey, from Theodore. Audrey does scouts and was going for her environment badge. In doing so, she designed a playground in Theodore, near her home, to meet the needs of all age groups in the community who go to this playground or who live nearby. We are talking about her younger brother, who cannot really get around all that well by himself, through to the teenagers that sometimes hang out on the swings there.

Audrey looked at the site. She did a design and drew up what it could look like—the things it would have, the different types of swings, paths for bikes, and just how it could be accessible and usable for everyone. She then took me on a site visit to show me how those plans would actually work in practice on the site in Theodore. We then looked at another playground in Theodore nearby as well, and the things that could be done there to improve the community, and for the different age groups.

This week, Audrey presented her plan at scouts, and I am really proud of her. Her mum has sent me a photo of her giving her presentation with her designs. I hope that Audrey has a bright future in advocating for and looking out for her community. I look forward to working with Minister Cheyne on what we could be doing to implement Audrey's dreams in the future. I commend Audrey for her work, and I look forward to working with her in the future.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Housing—affordability

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.57): My speech tonight has been written by a work experience student in my office who joins me with her mother in the crowd tonight. I only hope that I can give the speech justice. I speak with her words:

“Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Saima Maller, and I am proud to share this speech I have written as part of my work experience with Andrew Braddock and the ACT Greens. Here in one of Australia’s most prosperous territories, a quiet crisis is unfolding—one that strikes at the heart of fairness and opportunity. Too many Canberrans are being locked out of safe, sustainable and affordable homes, deepening the divide between the privileged and the vulnerable.

Housing is more than just a shelter. It is the foundation for health, education, employment and community connection. When people have secure, affordable homes, they thrive. But when housing becomes unattainable, as it is increasingly in the ACT, people are pushed to the margins.

Rising housing costs are not just a financial issue; they are a social one. They lead to economic and social exclusion, which in turn disproportionately affects low-income families, First Nations peoples, single parent families and people with disabilities. This is not just unfair; it is unsustainable. Too often, discussions about housing and sustainability happen in isolation. But the truth is that affordable and sustainable housing must go hand-in-hand if we are serious about reducing inequality. Sustainability is not just about solar panels or energy ratings. It is about creating homes that are built to last, are energy efficient and help reduce the cost of living. For low-income households, a well-insulated, energy efficient home means lower power bills, fewer health risks and more money left for food, education and other essential services.

Affordable and sustainable housing is not just good policy; it is smart economics. It reduces demand for health and social services, lowers emissions and builds resilient communities. Here in the ACT, we have already seen successful models include green social housing projects, energy efficient apartments and eco-village designs that combine affordability with environmental stewardship.

As a student, I would love to see more investment in community housing—but also real efforts to involve young people, renters and those with lived experience in shaping housing policy. We could strengthen our youth-led advisory panels or hold consultations in universities to make sure that the next generation of renters and homeowners are heard.

We need to listen to Canberra’s most vulnerable communities, such as, but not limited to, low-income families, First Nations peoples and people with disabilities. That is why the ACT Greens pushed to protect housing as a human right matter. Right now, homes are treated as profit-making assets, not basic human needs. While our fellow Canberrans struggle to find secure housing, investors and banks continue to profit. This is a failure of priorities. The Human Rights Housing Amendment Act 2024 starts to shift that. It recognises that housing is a right and not

a luxury, which in turn holds the government accountable for making it real.

As mentioned, we need action. We need cross-sector partnerships, long-term funding models, bold partnerships, and a planning system that puts our people before profit. Investing in affordable, sustainable housing creates jobs in construction, design and renewable energy. It boosts local economies. It cuts long-term government spending on healthcare, homelessness and emergency support. In short, it is a win for the people, a win for the planet, and a win for the future of our ACT.

Let us not wait for this crisis to deepen. Let us act now in courage, compassion and a clear commitment to building a fairer, greener Canberra, where everyone has a place to call their home. Thank you.”

I would also like to say thank you to Saima for your work in my office, and thank you for this lovely speech.

Sports and recreation—Medtildas Community organisations—Brindabella Trefoil Guild

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.01): For the Assembly’s benefit, I am rising to note two recent fantastic Tuggeranong events which were supported by the ACT government.

Last Saturday, the Medtildas came to Kambah. Yes, that is a pun. Tuggeranong hosted the Medtildas at Kambah Oval 101, not the Matildas. The Medtildas are Australia’s national women’s medical football team: dual-threat doctors, medical students and healthcare professionals who share a passion and a talent for football.

Their visit underlined the growing visibility of women in both medicine and football. It reinforced the importance of role models who break barriers in multiple fields. That is because the Medtildas mission goes beyond sport. They also advocate for mental health awareness, work-life balance in medicine, and the importance of physical activity in professional life. They are also committed to community outreach. They use football as a platform to inspire and connect with the public.

With that ethos, supported by some funding from the ACT government, they were able to hold an open training camp in Kambah last Sunday. Members of the public were able to join them and join in, as the Medtildas ran through drills and tactics prior to their departure to Dublin next week. There, they will represent Australia in the world medical football championships; an event which promotes health, wellbeing and camaraderie among medical professionals.

I want to give a big, appreciative tip-of-the-hat to Medtildas coach, Michaela, as well as her sister and Medtildas manager, Elwyn. These tremendous ladies run a very tight ship. They are a credit to their family. And if the team does not win glory, under their stewardship, I will be very surprised.

Good luck and goodbye Medtildas. Thank you for letting Tuggeranong participate in your journey.

The other fabulous event took place in Wanniasa Guide Hall on Saturday, 7 June.

Before I go any further, Mr Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear to President Christine, Vice President Lyn, Deb and the lovely women of the Brindabella Trefoil Guild that, despite their peer pressure gifts of yarn and knitting needles, I will not be learning to knit a beanie over the next 12 months. Even if I wanted to be seduced by the soothing click of knit one, purl one, it is a skill far beyond me. But that is okay, because many members of Tuggeranong's community can knit and have a stand-up community spirit. That is why the Brindabella Trefoil Guild was able to bring such warmth and enthusiasm to their annual Beanie Big Good Turn—an event that united knitters from across Canberra in a shared mission to knit hundreds of woollen beanies to donate to those who are doing it tough in Canberra this winter.

The guild is a group of women with ties to the Girl Guides movement, and it has long been committed to community service. This year they aim to surpass their 2024 record of 650 beanies knitted and donated. From 9.30 am to 2.30 pm, the hall was buzzing. Participants brought their own four-millimetre needles, while the Guild, with some support from the ACT government, was able to provide yards of wool, patterns, encouragement, morning tea and a hearty soup-and-bun lunch.

The event also welcomed donations from pre-knitted beanies and wool, with many attendees bringing their own bags of yarn to share around. The guild's call for help was met with overwhelming generosity from the Canberra community, including support from the Canberra Knitters Group.

Did they beat their record? You bet they did. I was there as they set an extraordinary standard for themselves to beat in 2026, by gifting over 1,000 hand knitted beanies in three massive bags to representatives from Vinnies Night Patrol, St John's Care and Winnunga Nimmityjah.

Guild president, Christine Brill, and vice president, Lyn Hanley, led the knitting—supported by a diverse group of volunteers ranging in age from 20s to 90s. Christine said: "This is our biggest community commitment. It is about more than knitting. It is about connection, compassion and giving back."

The guild will be accepting beanies for donation throughout August. And if this past week's freeze is anything to go by, they will be needed. Every beanie knitted or given to the Beanie Big Good Turn offers more than warmth. It is a tangible reminder that kindness and community are always in fashion.

Belconnen electorate—budget expenditure

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.06): I rise today to speak on behalf of the people of Belconnen—families, business owners, students and seniors—who, once again, have been met with a budget filled with recycled promises and delayed delivery. The ACT government's latest budget for Belconnen might sound impressive in a press release, but it leaves far too many residents disappointed and overlooked. I think we all know who is really going to pay for these upgrades to city services and parks.

While the government speaks of upgrades and new facilities, so much of what has been promised is long overdue. As an example, let's take Lake Ginninderra, one of Belconnen's most cherished public spaces. We are told that upgrades to the shared path

will take three years to complete—three years for something that should have been prioritised long ago. People use that path every day for their health, their commute and their family. Why is basic infrastructure always so slow to arrive in Belconnen?

At Margaret Timpson Park, we are told that we are getting a new playground and picnic tables; but let's be honest: this is a bare minimum. The heart of the Belconnen town centre deserves better. Based on the strong feedback from our community, we should be expanding greenspace and creating more open and accessible areas for the wellbeing of all residents.

There is a new water play space coming to Emu Bank and an all-abilities playground for Florey, but what about the rest of Belconnen? How are decisions made about which suburbs or shopping centres receive a benefit? Transparency should be in order. What about the rest of Belconnen? What about equitable investment across all our suburbs, not just the ones that make good headlines? The same goes for sport and recreation. We are told there will be improvements at the Charnwood netball courts, the skate park and female-friendly changerooms, but we have actually heard these announcements before. Where is the delivery and the urgency? Our young people, our athletes and our community volunteers need support now, not years down the track.

On health care, finally a medical imaging service will be delivered at the Belconnen Community Health Centre. This is not bold progress; this is catching up to a need that has been ignored for far too long. Our community deserves access to timely and local health services, not long waits and long drives. Our schools in Fraser and Melba are receiving upgrades but with little clarity and no clear timeframe. Our students and teachers deserve certainty, not vagueness.

It seems that the ACT Labor government is more concerned about a handful of fast-food restaurants in prime real estate than proper service delivery across all of Belconnen. It goes to show how out of whack this government's priorities are when it comes to Belconnen. After all, Belconnen is one of the fastest-growing regions in the ACT, but the budget, yet again, fails to match the pace of that growth. It is a patchwork of political convenience, not a genuine plan for community wellbeing.

The residents of Belconnen are not asking for much. They want real progress, not pre-election band-aids. They want to be heard, respected and supported with infrastructure and services that reflect the vibrant and hard-working community that they are. I will continue to advocate for a Belconnen that is livable, inclusive, well-connected and well-serviced, and not left behind.

LGBTIQA+ affairs—Pride Month

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.10): This month is Pride Month, which is a time that is, of course, incredibly important for the LGBTIQA+ communities in Canberra and around the world. It is a month that means different things to different sections of these communities. Over the past few years particularly, many have had complicated feelings about the way we mark this time that is a celebration and, first and foremost, a protest.

The date 28 June marks the anniversary of the origins of Pride Month—that is,

Stonewall. It is best known as the Stonewall riots, but to describe this as merely a riot leaves out the context of the violence that the queer community were facing. This was a story of peaceful existence being forced into peaceful resistance, and it was met with horrific violence by the state. In 1969, the Stonewall Inn was one of the small but steady number of gay bars in New York City that could exist only with strict safeguards to avoid attacks by the city's police department.

The way of life for the queer community at the time was one of only living as their true selves and meeting their community when shrouded in secrecy. In the early morning of 28 June, New York police officers attempted to violently raid the Stonewall Inn, physically stopping anyone from leaving. Horrifically, some police officers demanded those they believed may be trans women to comply with invasive strip searches, while other police officers sexually harassed many women, and still others began violently assaulting drag artists at the venue.

Patrons fought back, not out of a desire to turn to violence but out of necessity to resist the violence that they were being subjected to. Police quickly escalated the situation by calling in more officers, and members of the queer community came out in solidarity for the next week with those attacked in Stonewall. It is particularly important to remember that one of the most prominent groups to come out in solidarity with those under attack were the black trans women of New York. I bring this up not simply as a history lesson or because I want to discuss the horrific violence faced by my community but to emphasise that the origins of Pride is resistance in the face of oppression. Stonewall would go on to shine a light on how much of a struggle was needed for queer liberation and ultimately helped to build the whole movement.

But progress was not, and indeed never is, linear. It is tempting to think that 1969 is distant enough that the brutality of Stonewall is not relevant today, but there are very real reasons for many in the queer community still having a deep distrust of the police and some government institutions more broadly. To give just one example, in 2019 a queer bookshop in Melbourne was mistakenly raided by police in a violent manner that left a prominent member of the local queer community with serious life-changing injuries. Similarly, the idea of strip searching women to prove their gender may sound unimaginable, but it is common that there are public demands for trans or intersex women, or indeed any women who do not fit a certain image of femininity, to undergo these invasive checks.

There are many places around the world where LGBTQIA+ folk still face the very direct discrimination and violence faced in 1969 in New York. Even in places like Canberra, where we think we have learnt from the violent past, we cannot rest on our laurels. Absolutely, now is a time when we all must show our solidarity with the trans community.

With all that in mind, it is incredibly encouraging to see symbolic symbols of Pride Month in the form of a rainbow on the logo of a business, a government agency or other organisation, but this must come with an understanding of the struggle of queer liberation and that Pride is real and tangible support for our communities. If a business puts up a rainbow on their logo in June, do they also offer gender-affirming care leave to their employees? If a government puts up a rainbow flag, does that government also actively give full, legal and practical equality to their queer citizens? In some cases,

they may do this, but, absolutely, there are also cases where a simple rainbow flag seems to be a bit of pink-washing—only taking symbolic action and not going the extra mile that makes a material difference to queer folk.

All that being said, it is deeply distressing that, over the past couple of years, many corporations and others do not even feel the need to take a symbolic stance, seemingly emboldened by the rise of the bigoted far right around the world. What this makes clear is that we all need to continue to support the fight for queer liberation.

To any queer folk around Canberra watching or listening, please know that I, the Greens and so many others in progressive politics and throughout our society will always support this movement and have your back. Solidarity with queer folk, now and always.

Transport Canberra—bus services

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.14): Today I am delighted to give a speech written by Quon from Melba Copland Secondary School. Quon has joined us on work experience and has written about something very close to their heart: their experience of the bus in their local area. The following are Quon's words.

"I would like to address the state of the bus service and their routes in northern suburbs of Belconnen. Many of these routes are outdated and do not serve their communities efficiently or effectively. There is a lack of direct bus connections between suburbs such as Dunlop, Charnwood and Melba. This gap in service makes it extremely difficult for residents, especially those without access to a car, to travel between these areas for essential activities such as shopping or going to school.

Firstly, there is a lack of bus connection between many of the northern Belco suburbs, as there is no direct bus service connecting the suburbs of Dunlop, Charnwood and Melba and many other surrounding suburbs, which, by extension, makes it prohibitively difficult for people to get between these suburbs by bus. This leaves out many who do not have access to a car or are unable to drive. It means they cannot quickly get to and from places within these suburbs and to places such as the shops and school. This causes many to spend more time taking a bus to the nearest hub to transfer to a bus that covers where they are going, and that can be inefficient and frustrating, especially when the route feels unnecessarily long or indirect. It could be fixed by creating a new bus route that runs through these suburbs, allowing people to get around easier and with less stress and planning needed.

Secondly, the 40 and 42 bus routes are confusing and they are overstretched. The area they cover is too large and the line is confusing in parts where the route overlaps with itself. There are also two bus lines using the same route in different directions, and that makes the route really confusing. It can make it difficult for people to figure out which way is the best way to get to where they want to go. A solution to this problem would be to split the route into two separate bus routes again and edit the routes heavily so there can be two routes that can service their respective communities much more efficiently.

Finally, the frequency of the buses, especially on non-rapid lines, is inadequate to promote frequent use of public transport over less efficient private transport, like cars

and taxis. Buses in Canberra on weekdays come every 30 minutes, with rapid buses coming every 10 or 20 minutes, and buses are more frequent during rush hours. This is a good system, providing enough buses to service suburban communities to get to their workplaces and school on time. However, on the weekends, the bus timetable becomes half as frequent, with Sunday being almost void of public transportation. This makes getting anywhere on the weekends with public transportation extremely difficult. This disproportionately affects people who cannot access private transportation, because of their age, disabilities or economic conditions, particularly if they rely on public transport to do anything on the weekends. This issue is by far the most difficult to address as it involves significant investment in new buses, along with training and infrastructure to support a more frequent bus schedule. However, I believe this would be worth it as it would improve the community's access to transport all round.

In conclusion, the bus network in northern Belconnen is inefficient and frustrating with the lack of connection between suburbs, along with the continuing problems of the existing routes of 40 and 42 being confusing and disorganised, and I urge the ACT government to invest in public transportation to allow better connectivity between these communities. It will come with many other benefits, such as reducing traffic on roads and encouraging walking, along with reducing vehicle emissions.”

I note that Quon has been in our office for three days and I could not be more delighted to read out a speech that resonates very closely with a lot of things we have been calling on for a long time, so I thank Quon for that. Quon's assignment tomorrow will be to read the budget and work out exactly how frequent our new bus service on Sundays will be under the new funded initiatives! We are very pleased to have Quon working for us this week.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.16 pm.